Advance Agent

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A TOWER MYSTERY

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BOOKS BY

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Troubled Star
Rain before Seven
Advance Agent

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By John August

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Chapter One

At New Orleans a man whose passport said that he was Arthur H. Field got off the plane from Mexico City, went through the customs, and, after wiring for a reservation to Detroit, took the seat he had reserved in the St. Louis plane. At St. Louis, during the wait between planes, he heard the loud speaker calling his name. He turned and an attendant said, "Mr. Field? Long-distance call, sir." He followed the attendant to a small office. When he closed the door, two men who had been standing behind it placed themselves on either side of him. One of them said, "It won't be necessary for you to go to Detroit."

And in New York, at a bar on lower Tenth Avenue, an oiler from a Portuguese freighter, which had docked a few hours before, sipped his beer and watched the clock. It was exactly nine when a stevedore opened conversation with him, and they had finished a beer together when the oiler wiped his lips with a green-silk handkerchief. The stevedore said, "Looks like that might have come from Polly's in Caracas." He took the handkerchief and idly loosened a knot which had been tied in one corner of it. They decided to go to another place. The oiler produced a ten-dollar bill, but the stevedore pushed it aside and slid some change across the bar. On the sidewalk, he said, "Bills like that are hot. Gold certificates—called in years ago. If you got any more, take 'em to a bank. Say you got them in South America—they still turn up there." They went down a side street past dark warehouses. The oiler reached under his blouse, brought out a long manila envelope, and handed it to the stevedore. At the next corner they separated.

And in Eastern Ontario dusk found a freight train laboring through hilly country. Lights went on in two ancient passenger coaches just ahead of the caboose, and a Canadian sergeant of infantry watched two privates distribute

beef sandwiches and paper cups of coffee to the German prisoners of war who filled them. The prisoners had been quiet for an hour, but supper made them cheerful and they began to sing again. The sergeant stood in the door of the second car, watching them distastefully. He didn't like the prisoners, didn't like singing, didn't like the train, didn't like this job. Well, by six tomorrow morning they would reach the concentration camp in the north woods where he was to deliver them, and he wouldn't have to hear any more singing. Maybe he could get a couple of hours in Montreal, coming back.

The Jerries had sung *Ach! du lieber Augustin* some fifty times this afternoon. Now they were singing *Krambambuli*, which the sergeant didn't like any better. He had an idea that the blasted flying lieutenant halfway down the car knew that it annoyed him. But the flying lieutenant was asleep. The rest of them sang hoarsely, pounding the rhythm with their feet: "*Trink' ich mein Glas, Krambambuli . . .*" When his own foot began to pound, the sergeant went into the other car.

The small man in prison work clothes beside the flying lieutenant muttered under cover of the song, "*Der Schweinehund Sergeant ist fort*."

The lieutenant opened his eyes and joined in: "*Krambim-bam-bambuli, Krambambuli!*," prodding the two in the opposite seat to make them sing also. They looked scared. The sentinel at the far end of the car was yawning —he couldn't see the nearer one, but neither could be as tired as the lieutenant. The chorus began again, "*Krambambuli, das ist der Titel. Des Trankes der sich bei uns bewährt . . .*" The lieutenant said softly but commandingly, "*Nun, wenn die beiden uns nicht ansehen*." He had instructed the little man to watch one sentinel and the big man opposite to watch the other, and all of them were scared—they assumed they would be blamed and punished. "*Achtung!*" he muttered warningly. The sentinel he could see yawned and turned to gaze into the darkness outside the car. The lieutenant tensed his leg muscles.

"*Jetzt*," the little man grunted. The lieutenant started to stand up but immediately lolled back, singing, for the big man said, a little loudly, "*Nein, ein Moment*," and his seatmate said, "*Augenblick*." The lieutenant saw dark woods sliding by as the train slowed to a grade, the chorus was roaring "*Krambambuli!*" and the little man's "*Also Jetzt*" was almost a wail, and the two others said, "*Gut*," together.

The lieutenant stood up. He threw the window up, thrust head and shoulders through it, kicked and wriggled, and dropped into the dark.

Beyond the ditch woods sloped upward and he ran toward them—heavily, for his head spun, his knees were crippled, and his left wrist was a fiery pain. He clung to a tree, panting, and watched the lighted cars swing out of sight round a curve. They hadn't stopped yet! He found the north star, took a bearing on the crest of a hill, and started southward through the woods. His knees were usable.

He thought it must be about half-past nine when he came up a tarred road toward a cluster of lights which a road sign told him meant a town called Glen Nevis. He took to the woods again, circled to the railroad, and walked warily up the track, his senses taut as a bent spring. He dodged behind a section house, heard two men inside it speaking French, wondered with swift dismay if this could be Quebec after all, assured himself that it must be Ontario. To avoid an electric light he went up an alley behind some buildings. Suddenly a fire whistle wailed near by, and he dived into some woods back of a garage—but it was really a fire for, lying there, he heard automobiles drive up, a series of shouted orders, finally a truck rumbling down the road with its siren going. Someone at the front door of the garage said, "One-one, that's down at the four corners." The weeds made as good a place as any to do some necessary thinking in, and he had had this much luck, that his knees were not sprained nor his wrist broken. A clock struck ten, the big front door of the garage rolled down, and the light went out. Someone went whistling down the road, and in another minute the lieutenant had the rear window open and was inside the garage. Five minutes later he was out again. He was wearing a mechanic's brown grease suit, his cheeks and hands were daubed with oil, his uniform was rolled up under his arm, and he had three dollars and fifty cents in Canadian money and a road map. He had won the first round!

He thrust the uniform into an empty freight car at the crossing and walked up the single street of Glen Nevis. A milk truck lumbered by and he hailed it, but it did not stop. Some men came out of a soda fountain and then were suddenly running toward a lighted corner, where soldiers were getting out of an automobile and two Royal Canadian policemen were talking to them. The lieutenant kept on walking toward them and heard excited questions and confused answers. A sergeant ordered the soldiers back into the automobile and it went east, up the road. The policemen mounted their motorcycles and took off down the southern fork.

"What's up, Mac?" a latecomer asked a man who was turning away.

"They think maybe a Jerry went through town. A prisoner. They were taking him to camp and he got out a window."

They glanced without curiosity at the lieutenant, who said, "He won't get very far," and went on.

A bus labeled GORDON was parked at the curb, ready for its last trip. He took a seat, two other passengers got in, and it lumbered off. Almost at once the driver was shaking him awake, saying that this was Gordon, the end of the trip, and Gordon could not be far from Glen Nevis for the fare was only twenty cents. It was a small place and had been shut up for the night. A sign said Rooms at a dingy second floor, but all rooming houses would be searched. He found a road sign which said CORNWALL 22 MILES and walked southwestward. The fields were dark, the stars dim, the barking of farm dogs melancholy. He thought that this would be a pleasant walk for a man who wasn't risking his liberty on it. And a man who was less sleepy. A car passed. Five minutes later the lights of another one found him, it slowed down and while his skin crawled and he cast a swift glance at the roadside, the driver said, "Want a lift?" He said, "No, thanks—just going to the next house." He didn't like the pounding of his heart—above all he must be calm. At the next patch of woods he left the road, hoping there would be no dogs —and for that matter, no cows. A hundred yards in, he lay down behind some underbrush. He heard a truck going by, his wrists throbbed, and he fell asleep.

He woke at dawn cold to the very bones, his clothes sodden with dew. Today would settle it—and at dawn, without breakfast, the hours ahead looked ominous with the chance of disaster. He muttered, "You've been lucky so far—keep going," and could at last examine himself. His legs were bruised widely, his forearms were pitted with gravel, his knees stiff, his bad wrist swollen. He found Gordon on his road map; if it was twenty-two miles from Cornwall, then he must be seventeen or eighteen. But the St. Lawrence looked very wide at Cornwall. To the westward it narrowed, but the farther west he went, the more time he would consume. He thought hard, measuring distances with a fingernail. He would try to get to a place called Prescott. What if he found a welcoming committee? He shrugged. Think fast and trust your luck.

He got coffee, doughnuts and cigarettes at a roadside stand, at half-past seven. Half an hour later a surly French habitant gave him a lift in a market truck for some miles. Then for an hour no one wanted to pick him up and the August sun got hotter. He turned west on a road that led off the Cornwall highway and had walked for another half hour when a dairy truck slowed down to his thumb. A young man was driving it, an exceedingly genial young man, who proved to be named Robert Grout. Robert Grout aired his

ideas about dairying, about the war, about the planes that circled over a military field, about the army trucks that passed, about the girls in the town of Iroquois, whither he was taking the cream. The lieutenant listened studying the countryside. They were on the main east-and-west highway now, within a hundred yards of the St. Lawrence. The river was unbelievably blue under the sun—and it was the most beautiful river in the world. For across the rapid blue water was the United States.

Robert Grout peered searchingly at a squad of soldiers. "Keep a lookout for uniforms," he said. "A German prisoner dived off a train yesterday. They had it on the radio."

So? "I heard it," the lieutenant said. "They'll get the beggar."

Robert Grout agreed: the roads, he said, were crawling with patrols. . . . They came to Iroquois just at noon. The lieutenant wandered down to the river. First there was a ship canal; it and the bridge across it were guarded. Beyond it, however, the river was attractively narrow. His map showed breaks in the canal west of town, places where presumably the ship channel was the river itself. He would try there. But it was absolutely clear that he must have a boat.

He chose a crowded lunch counter and ordered sandwiches and coffee. He wondered if the strain were getting him, for he felt uneasy and, for no reason, wanted to bolt. No one at the counter was looking at him. Still, he finished as rapidly as possible. The girl at the desk gave him change from one of the dollar bills. As he left, he looked back at her and there was something in her eyes. He crossed; slowly he turned and gazed at the lunchroom. The girl came out and looked up and down the street. Well, this was either a flurry of nerves or an emergency—in either case, bad. Action was called for.

A bicycle was leaning against the curb. The lieutenant bestrode it and pedaled round the first corner, down the street, out to the highway. He was headed east again and would certainly not go back through town. It was an English bicycle, high, heavy and cumbersome, but he was grateful in a moment for it had a lower gear for the hills. He bent over and sprinted.

About four miles finished him; he could not stand the pace. The road was empty in both directions. He got off, hid the bicycle in a ditch by a culvert, and walked eastward, giddy and spent. The sun was intolerable, he had had too little food and sleep and too much watchfulness, his eyes swam and his legs trembled. A truck disregarded his thumb. Another one, a

succession of cars, two more trucks. A girl driving a roadster honked him out of the way. Then an ancient Model-T stopped.

"I'm goin' as far as Cornwall," the whiskered driver said. "If that's any help to you, get in."

And in the town of Windham, Berkshire County, Massachusetts . . .

It had been an eventful summer for Abigail Heath Armstrong, the most eventful, most troubled time since she had come back here, a widow, five years ago. She had been swept out of her quiet way of life into turbulent emotions, she had put away inconspicuousness to touch the edge of notoriety, and the peace of mind she had known for five years had gone down before a dilemma that was nearing crisis. Was she in love with Lynn Scovil? Was she going to marry him? Were her emotions fighting a losing battle with her good sense? In the summer of 1941 was it possible to know herself?

Five years ago Gerald Armstrong had died of alcoholism after running through his estate, and Gail had used his insurance—all that was left—to buy an old white house back from the common in the town where she was born. She had started a bookstore whose principal patrons were the girls of Martha Case College for Women, two or three miles out from Windham. A couple of years later she had added a sweater-and-lingerie shop, and both enterprises had prospered moderately. Everything was moderate with Gail Armstrong now, and the hope was that, in the little Berkshire town, everything would be moderate for the rest of her life.

But that expectation had left out of account the war, and Lynn Scovil, and Lynn Scovil's daughter. Six months ago it had become clear that he was falling in love with her. There had been exhilaration in that, for he was a national figure, his face familiar in rotogravures and on movie screens, his voice challenging on the radio—a firebrand, a rebel, and a friend of rebels—fanatically admired by many, denounced and hated by hundreds of thousands. Before long it was clear that she might easily fall in love with him, and with that possibility her quiet ended and turmoil began. How could she know? The emotions that centered on him were too complex. There was the glamour of his public life, the crowds that hailed him, the vigor of his causes and the vehemence of his life. And there was the far greater appeal to Gail Armstrong that she could be a private strength to a man who swam against the current, was envied by the weak and small, was neither dismayed

nor turned aside by the fury of his enemies. Gail hated many of his causes, and was terrified by some of them, but clearly she could not hate him.

For instance, a mass meeting in Springfield, ten days ago. Gail sat in a box—by turns appalled, spellbound, apprehensive and proud—while the big audience roared and swirled to his oratory, broke into frenzies of applause, or hissed and booed so violently that you expected them to swarm over the footlights after him. It took great courage to stand before any audience, this summer, and make such a speech: to denounce the war and argue for peace and isolation. Some years ago he had been called a red; now the term isolationist did the same duty; and both words carried a curse. Gail watched and listened, her fists doubled, her pulses hammering, her whole body tense—and was chilled by the fear that he might be mobbed, and warmed by the knowledge that he made love to her and wanted to marry her, that her five years' drouth might end in his arms. Dark and athletic, his eyes flashing, his voice dynamic, he stood there defying the boos, disdaining the applause, working his way toward a tremendous climax. Before he finished, there were disturbances in the audience, even fist fights, and at the end the police had to escort him to his car and clear a path for it through a yelling crowd that seemed on the point of stoning it.

Gail joined him at an appointed rendezvous; he sent his chauffeur back to Windham by train and drove her home. He was exultant, borne up on a gale of excitement, his voice vibrant. But Gail was—caught in the dilemma that the summer had made habitual. She was exalted and she was scared; she responded to his magnetism and something withheld her from surrendering to it. That heroic figure behind the footlights defying the world roused her admiration, her loyalty, her protectiveness. And something in his love of those same footlights, some preening pride in notoriety, repelled her. He talked in a great flood of words, oratory running on even in the car—and she was withdrawn, critical, cold. But he stopped the car and swept her into his arms—and doubt left her, her lips clung to his, her pulses drummed, and she was near surrender. Nearer than he knew—nearer, a last atom of caution insisted on telling her, than she must let him know.

She was wary. "Why, yes, Lynn," she said, with forced calm. "It's known that you're expert at making love. All the newspapers have said so. You've proved it to me before now. But it's easy to make love to a woman who has lived alone for five years."

He was also expert in knowing Gail Armstrong. He knew when gentleness was best and he knew when urgency would stir her more. So now

he let his exultation fade into a calm, grave confidence. "If that's all," he said quietly, "what's wrong with your pulse at this moment?"

"You've made many pulses flutter. It's not so simple!"

"It's as simple as stretching out your hand."

That was a skillful phrase. But it reminded her that skillful phrases were his profession, and when he reached for her again, she moved away. So an equally skillful mockery touched his voice. "It's true you've lived alone too long, Gail. You're spinsterish—you're as scared of your emotions as a young girl."

She would take that taunt to bed with her tonight, for it echoed her own doubts and self-derision. But she said, "Or maybe I just shrink from your career, Lynn. You're spectacular as a martyr and women have the feeblest defense against martyrs. But most of what you said tonight I hate with all my heart."

Instantly he was making a speech, a fine, exalted speech but still a formal oration. "What have you and I got to do with the war? We should find refuge from it in each other. We should be a high peak above it—a distant island which it cannot touch. That's what I want from you, Gail—security of soul, the war shut out, the quiet of us two alone and all the world forgotten."

Words! Still, they echoed her hope—and her dilemma. She was eager to believe him, she instinctively rejected him, she scorned his rhetoric, she remembered the ardor of his lips, she resented what he stood for, she longed to protect him. It had been that way all spring and all summer—and slowly her resistance was ebbing away. She divined how it would end—and struggled to postpone the end.

She should have heard the talk in another automobile, in which his daughter Constance was driving home from that mass meeting with Bill Jay, the New York newspaperman who had come to Windham to recuperate from pneumonia . . . It was Connie Scovil, in fact, who had precipitated the turbulence of this summer. Till a little before Christmas Gail had known Connie only as a freshman at Martha Case College, one of many who liked to spend late afternoons or evenings in the bookshop, talking with Gail, with one another, with members of the faculty who also used the shop as a kind of club. Then one day Connie had appeared there, flying a high color in her cheeks, and said, "I've got to have a job. You've got to give me one." She had quarreled with her father—the climax of many quarrels—and would no longer accept support from him. Years ago her mother had divorced him; when she died, Connie had gone back to live with him; now she would live

with him no more. She would have a scholarship at Martha Case next year and Gail could give her a job. So Gail had hired her, and when summer came Connie had come to live in the bookshop, still rebellious, still refusing to lead the life of a rich man's daughter. It was that rebellion that had led to the intimacy between Gail and Lynn Scovil. Before that she had had only the slightest acquaintance with him—he had merely been one of the rich men who owned the big estates near Windham. Now he was a man trying hard, if ineffectively, to understand his daughter, and she was the woman who had taken her in—and presently Gail Armstrong had been swept out of the peaceful shallows into the full turbulence . . .

So now, driving back from the Springfield mass meeting, Connie was tense and scornful. "Why don't they clap him into jail? How long is America going to sit back and let guys like him make speeches like that? Why don't they do something?"

Bill just grinned—she had never been able to make him see that her father was dangerous. "He ain't important, Toots. Just a ham actor that missed his destiny. He'd wow Broadway. Still better, he'd make a swell tenor. Give him an orchestra and a Pagliacci suit and he'd lay them in the aisles. He'd be happier too—more mash notes and fewer Bronx cheers in his press notices."

Connie pounded her fist on the cushion. "That's what you think—and it's a terrible mistake! He's as dangerous as possible. All those red, pink and pale-rose societies he used to run with! Weren't they dangerous? Wasn't he dangerous as a Fellow Traveler? Isn't he dangerous now, sowing confusion and disorder? I tell you—"

"No," Bill said, "to be dangerous he'd have to be bright—and he isn't bright, Connie. Your pa is just a dumb cluck with a voice like a bull fiddle. Just a beautiful ham with a beautiful voice. He's just in the spotlight business. Let him sing his song—he won't hurt anyone."

"And," she wailed, taking another tack, "it's fifty to one Gail will fall for that voice and marry him. I can't take it!"

"You don't issue the marriage licenses in Berkshire County or write canned balm for lonely hearts," he pointed out. "If Gail wants to marry into the headlines, just thank God you've got a damned pretty stepmother."

For a moment Connie almost hated him. It was bad enough for him not to take her father seriously. But it was far worse that she hadn't been able to make him take her seriously . . .

Gail had been amusedly watching that one-sided romance ever since Bill Jay arrived in Windham. She had known him casually in New York, he liked to loaf at the bookshop, and Connie had been assailing him with every weapon in her formidable armament, flaunting and flinging herself at him, tempting, taunting, inviting and scorning him. Bill showed no sign of weakening under the assault. He treated Connie with amiable impersonality, swam and played tennis with her, let her divert his convalescence, and infuriated her by remaining completely uninflammable.

It was chiefly in Bill Jay's presence that Connie dared to discuss openly the problem of Gail and Lynn Scovil which was, Gail well knew, disturbing her almost as much as it disturbed Gail. "When an act of God widows a woman out of the parasitic class," Connie would say, stretched prone on a rug or a counter, her blond curls falling over her forehead, "well, wouldn't you think she'd try to stay out of it? But no! Here's a guy who loves the poor on a hundred thousand a year, who never did a day's honest work—and this brown-eyed limp-brain is thinking of marrying him!"

Bill grinned at Gail. "You're a parasite, see? They pick up words like that at college. It's pretty easy not to be a parasite. Just start wearing slacks."

"All right!" Connie said explosively. "She's not a parasite—she sells books and corsets. Put it this way. She's twenty-eight and universally admired. She's got a figure like one of her own corset ads. Men love to drown in her eyes. She gives off that high-voltage come-hither that is exactly what us unfortunates haven't got at all. She could marry anybody. So she picks a man who would be a traitor if he had just a little more nerve."

Gail's prompt anger rose to that word, which she had heard plenty of others apply to Lynn Scovil. "It's not treason to think more calmly than you do, Connie," she said. "Be tiresome if you will, but don't be a fool."

"Don't take my word for it!" Connie took a book from the shelves and flourished it at Gail.

It was Bill Jay's book. A year ago he had done a series of articles for the *New York Globe* on subversive movements. Now, as *The Enemy within Our Gates*, they had been reprinted as a book, and Gail knew by heart the chapter which was the one note of comedy in it. For Bill Jay had treated all other topics with deadly seriousness, but when he came to Lynn Scovil he had called the chapter "Christopher Robin and Winnie the Red," and had treated Lynn as a character of farce. Lynn Scovil, Bill said, was anybody's fellow traveler who could make the headlines, a setup and a fall-guy, a rich man who loved Russia on space rates and would love any other Utopia that could

get publicity, a sucker who would pay big money for any new letterhead and any chance to make a speech in public. Bill Jay could not number him among the national dangers; rather, he was one of the national sideshows and should be exhibited between the living skeleton and the tattooed lady . . . It was viciously unfair journalism, but beneath the caricature was just enough truth to sharpen Gail's conflict.

She was angry at Connie for appealing to the book now, but Bill Jay moved to relieve her. "Toots," he said, "if I bought a skirt for you, would you stop wearing pants?"

Connie forsook treason to take up a theme much nearer her heart. "Are you beginning to think of me as fragile and feminine? Giving me presents would be going pretty far, Bill. It would commit you."

"Just to improving Windham. Like planting flowers."

"I must be getting somewhere at last." Connie pulled her gray-flannel slacks tight over hips that were conspicuously without a flaw.

But Bill just grinned. "The left one falls two full inches lower than the right, like a step. A skirt would cover up deformities like that. Only your best friends would know how knock-kneed you are."

"Don't you think that's compromising, Gail? When they start talking about your legs, I mean. Bill is an extremely moral reporter—he must have marriage in mind. It's the mating instinct."

"It's the instinct that makes a man paint the back porch."

"That's right, struggle hard—you're going down for the third time, the second time, anyway. Skirts!—Bill, that's either very, very personal or else it's downright lewd . . . He takes things so hard," she explained to Gail. "The poor lamb keeps trying to get a commission somewhere. No dice—he's twenty pounds underweight. So he keeps trying to enlist. But he's still underweight. Naturally he turns to me and the softer emotions. Isn't he sweet?"

It was an outrageous foray against Bill's deepest humiliation—Gail knew how intensely he wanted to get into the army. He scowled and Connie was delighted. "Somebody has to be the civilization that gets saved," she pointed out. "Preserve America's family life and you save America. Go on, Bill, be patriotic—in the right light we look like a family."

"No sale. Ask the boss if you can play a set of tennis."

"Gail loves to give our romance a helping hand. . . . If you get mad when I beat you, it will be a dead giveaway."

"Put on one of Gail's skirts."

"No, I'm shy about showing my legs. I'll wear some shorts."

Connie went upstairs—the lower floor of the old house was occupied by the two stores and a kitchen. Alone with Bill, Gail came back to Connie's slur. She yielded to an impulse. "Bill, what do you really think about Lynn?"

Bill Jay was tall and skinny, narrow-faced, homely, hard to read. "Peace, it's wonderful," he said flippantly. "And doesn't a peace offensive bring together the damnedest bedfellows? There's serious money in it for some, power for others, and great, big headlines for orators. I can't prescribe for your heart, Gail. I'm quite sure he's incapable of doing anything dangerous. But I don't know how much longer this country can afford to let rich clowns enjoy their fun."

It was a hard, cold judgment to offset Connie's—the clown or the traitor. And there were other elements in Gail's indecision and Connie's anxiety. At bedtime, in schoolgirl pajamas, Connie would wander into Gail's room and talk too hopefully and a little desperately—talk round and round the subject till she dared walk straight up to it. "It's swell to live with you," she said, "it's swell to have you around, but I'm damned if I want you for a stepmother—much as anyone would appreciate the Follies shape that shows through that nightshirt." She doubled her tanned fists. "Gail, it's all wrong, he isn't up to you—you mustn't—it's a mistake you simply must not make."

Gail faced her coldly, but her own conflict was riotous within. "Why is it all wrong?"

Connie turned hard too. "His ego is just short of screwy—and you're screwy too, if you don't admit it. He stands for everything you hate—how can you be in love with him? Well, say we don't mention that. All right, then —" she paused before taking the hurdle—"still, how can you bear to be the successor of . . . Oh, nuts, who do I think I am? The pastor of the First Church?" Barefooted and half-heartbroken, she stalked away to her own room.

"How can you bear to be the successor of . . .?" Gail had no trouble finishing the question Connie had broken off. How can you bear to be the successor of Mathilde Winkler? Connie's mother had divorced Lynn Scovil, but all the rotogravure sections that printed Mathilde Winkler's picture and all the gossip columns that chronicled her activities knew that Mathilde had

not even married him. Mathilde Winkler belonged to the strange and dying world of the international rich, that other world which Lynn moved in as naturally as he moved among the radicals who hated it. The curious group without meaning or place or even nationality, who had only Palm Beach left now, and Nassau, and Long Island, and Fifty-second Street.

Blond, cosmopolitan, beautiful, Mathilde was indeed part of Gail's uncertainty. Before this summer she would have been just as incredulous as Connie that she could calmly contemplate succeeding such a woman.

So one night, a week or so after the Springfield mass meeting, Lynn himself finished the question that Connie had left unfinished. As if the time had come to force the issue. As if her hoped-for summer of forgetfulness and companionship must be finally disposed of. As if he would no longer be put off with subterfuges but would force her to make up her mind.

"Be honest, Gail," he said, when, as usual, they had advanced, retreated and evaded till she was half-angry and half-frustrated. "If you weren't in love with me, you wouldn't have to deny it to yourself so frantically. What is it that holds you back? Is it Mathilde?"

Nothing was so simple as that, and how could she possibly know? She had as many doubts of herself as of him. Maybe her unhappy marriage had made her afraid of any marriage. Maybe he was right in calling her spinsterish—maybe she was timorous, virginal, cold. But certainly she was no prude!

"I'm not a child, Lynn. Nor a schoolgirl. Nor a . . . nun."

"I haven't so much as seen her all year. We haven't—she hasn't meant anything to me for a long time. You know that. You know you've made me forget there is such a woman."

No doubt she wanted to believe that—but it did not come near the real conflict. Not hoping to say it better now than many times before, she said, "I'd marry you, Lynn. Or I'd—not marry you, I'd simply live with you. Only . . ."

"Only what?"

"I've known you a little for years. I've known you better for six or eight months. And the rockbottom truth is that I don't know anything about you. I don't trust you and a good part of you scares me."

She roused in him the bewildering and compelling energy she had often seen before. "What you mean is that I have thousands of enemies!" She saw

all too clearly that he was proud of the thousands. "You're too honest to let them sway your mind," he swept on. "None of them can show that anything I've done is illegal—unpatriotic—call it what you will. I don't have to answer to them, Gail—and you don't have to, either. My guilt is that I've kept my head in a world gone mad. My crime is that I've stayed sane while America has betrayed its heritage. My job is to fight a battle already lost. Well, they must take me for what I am—and so must you. This is a time when a man must be a man, Gail."

No. It was false, it was windy rhetoric, and it repelled her. One of Connie's barbed questions came into her mind: "Can you take it when he gets himself mixed up with God?" Gail said coldly, "I'm not a public meeting, Lynn."

He saw his mistake and his voice grew quiet and grave. "I say these things badly, Gail—how can I think clearly this near to you? And what has any of it got to do with you and me?"

"Oh, a great deal," she said unhappily. "We were talking about whether I'm in love with you or just hypnotized by shiny words. Whether I'm afraid to marry you or just don't want to. When do we ever talk about anything else?"

Still more quietly he said, "I don't advise you to—if your blood is cold. Scorn, injustice, public contempt—no woman of cold wisdom would choose them for a marriage portion. No woman whose blood is cold would take such a risk." His handsome, dark face had a melancholy smile. "But if a woman were warm and loyal, they could be shut out and ignored. If sharing meant more to her than the applause of fools."

She was no more able now than before to decide whether the deep response she felt was a response to oratory or to the courage of a man with whom she was in love. How much simpler if she could remain a tranquil widow selling books! But every month she had grown less tranquil, had come nearer surrender. "If we could forget the war!" she said passionately. "You always say it should be just you and I. It never is! The war always comes in between."

"It will always come back. And if you married me, you would be marrying great trouble, my dear," he said. "No careful woman, no woman who is shrewd and calculating, would consider it." He paused for a long while. Finally, "We're telling the truth tonight. And the truth is—you would be marrying a man who might have to write to you once a month for twenty years from a Federal penitentiary."

"What do you mean?"

Aloofly, "No one has ever proved anything I've done illegal. It will be easier now. I'm telling you what must not be repeated, Gail. That mass meeting in Springfield will have more important successors. On September first—on Labor Day—those of us who have kept our heads will hold peace meetings in many places. We'll go on holding them. To preach peace may be a crime now. Be sure they'll do their best to get me. I think their best won't be enough—but it may be. If it is . . ." He shrugged.

Part of her mind protested that this was merely theatrical, that he was in love with spotlighted martyrdom, that the fire in his eyes was only play-acting. But it was only a small part of her mind—and he had summoned up the terrible symbols, the angry crowd, the thrown missiles, the terrible dark row of cells. He was talking about final things—terrible, urgent things, things that had broken through to touch her. Quite suddenly she had begun to tremble with the realization that her defenses were down at last. The war could not be shut out beyond the Berkshire Hills, no more delay was possible, and she must make her choice.

He whispered, "I'm a very lonely man, Gail."

Blindly, she put out a hand. He had loosed the arrow that must pierce any defense. Loneliness was what had always dramatized him to her—the one lone figure against the world and the wolf pack. And now the lonely fighter and the lonely cell. She could not bear for him to be alone. "What is it that you want, Lynn?" she said.

She knew that he knew she had surrendered, and she saw the triumph in his eyes—and no matter. "Three weeks of letting the world go hang!" he said. "Let's seize our hour before it's gone. Let's take what we can before the war snatches everything from us."

Yes, the small calm part of her mind asserted, it would be a war marriage. Her second marriage would be different from anything that could have been foretold. Calmness flickered out . . . There was no choice. When it came to the point, there never was a choice. Widowhood was behind her and her own lonely years—and don't forget Connie's shocked eyes, don't forget all the doubts and fears and ugly facts she had gone over till she was dizzy with them. Don't forget—but she had forgotten. They didn't exist any more. She said, with a long sigh, "Things shouldn't come out this way, Lynn! You shouldn't stampede me—we should be deliberate, we should know what we're doing—"

He silenced her: "Will you always be deliberate, Gail? Look—on Friday I'm to give this vast party for the orchestra." He sniffed fastidiously. "The summer patriots being gracious to the arts! Well, if my friends could come to my house and find you there! If they could meet not Gail Armstrong but Gail Scovil. The rest of August will be ours—quiet, peace, the war obliterated. After that we can run our chances. But neither of us will ever be alone again."

While it was still possible to question anything, she wondered if this also might not be only the power of a skillful orator to drown out her sense in pretty words. "Friday," she said, "so soon as that, Lynn?"

"Sooner! You're going to that ball at Manchester on Wednesday—everyone will be there—the same crowd, the same emptiness . . . We can quietly leave the dance and be married, there in Vermont. Then on Friday you will welcome our guests to our house."

He had everything planned; he had counted on her. Well, why not? He had been right to count on her; she had made her choice; no other choice was possible. So much for Connie's fears and Bill Jay's ridicule—so much for her own virginal foreboding! Tenderness overwhelmed her and she walked into his arms. "I'll marry you at Manchester," she said, and there were no more conflict, no more questions; she was altogether happy.

Or . . . was she?

The lieutenant came out of the movie at Cornwall toward six o'clock and bought a newspaper. In a little park he hunted through it till he found a short item. A German prisoner of war, it said, had contrived to escape from a train that was taking a detachment to a concentration camp. The escape had occurred near Glen Nevis and it was assumed that the prisoner would try to reach the United States. Military patrols were looking for him, all the authorities had been notified, and a description of him had been broadcast. He was identified as Senior Lieutenant (Oberleutnant, they meant) Friedrich Römer.

Oberleutnant Römer would have liked a copy of that description. But he felt exhilarated and renewed. Up to now he had been in flight—he had felt like an animal on the run. But now he was a man taking the offensive after a long retreat . . . The United States, which it was assumed he would try to reach, was something like a half mile away. An old song came into his mind—"There's one more river to cross." He felt confident, sure of his luck—he

was going to finish the job! The odds had been enormously long, but they were a good deal shorter now. *Achtung!, Römer, und vorwärts!* There was also an old poem: "Let us then be up and doing."

Since his experience had been against restaurants, he bought crackers, cheese and cakes at a grocery store and went back to his park for his supper. His appetite was keen—he was going to finish the job! He began to make a survey of the town and in a few minutes had found an international bridge. How very simple, he thought, whistling a chorus which he abruptly broke off, realizing that it was "*Krambambuli*." As simple as possible! All he had to do was swing onto a truck that was going across that bridge. That would have been perfect except that there were sentries at this end of the bridge, a patrol marching across it, and unquestionably Canadian and American customs officers and American patrols as well. Superman, he thought enviously, Superman would clear them all with one leap.

It was also a railroad bridge, and Oberleutnant Römer stood where tracks crossed a Cornwall street and could have swung aboard a freight train that bumped past—except that there were soldiers on top of the cars and on the platform of the caboose. Still, here was an idea: he made for the freight yards. There were guards where the tracks came through the fence and it was a ten-foot fence surmounted by barbed wire. He followed it all around the yards and the other gaps were guarded, and there were plenty of floodlights that would be switched on at night. "Get out of here!" a guard yelled, brandishing a club. The lieutenant waved at him and got out. Report on railroad: not a chance.

Yes, he reflected, it would be no problem at all for Superman. Clearly, he would have to have a boat; it was impossible to exaggerate his loathing of boats. A quarter of a mile above the bridge he got down to the riverside. He could see the backyards of a pulp mill and a chemical factory. Several gas boats were moored a few yards out from shore—a most attractive idea, but one could not invade the United States at night with an outboard motor. Still, the owners must have a rowboat, a skiff, a canoe—there must be some way of getting to them. He went closer.

"Hey!"

A man came running toward him. The lieutenant had a sudden vivid realization of how beautiful this calm evening sky would seem if he ended up in jail.

It was a little man, furiously angry, shockingly profane, an automatic pistol in a holster at his belt. He stopped ten feet away. And, the lieutenant

mused, even if he had come closer there would have been nothing whatever to do. "What in hell are you doing here?" the little man roared.

"Looking for a plank."

"Looking for a plank!" The little man discharged a star shell of sparkling oaths. "A plank! You know damned well nobody can come down here without an employee's badge. Have you got a badge? No, you want a plank —so you'll ignore regulations. Serve you right if I took a shot at you."

"I see your point," the lieutenant said. "I'd go so far as to say you're right."

"Damn right I'm right. You get out of here. Go back where you belong before I get mad. Get going!"

The lieutenant got going—and he loved the peppery little man as a friend and brother. When he was out of sight, he leaned against a tree and laughed till he was weak. But he was more confident than ever—clearly luck was on the side of the offensive. Clearly also, he would do better outside of town—and so he sought the highway again and headed west. A Royal Canadian policeman was standing beside his parked motorcycle, watching the traffic, and the lieutenant was moved to engage him in conversation—just for luck. The policeman had a consuming interest in the local baseball team. Since the lieutenant had read an account of yesterday's game in his newspaper, he could make amiable comments. It was so friendly a conversation that the lieutenant reproached himself for withholding information.

Still, let us be up and doing—he nodded and moved on. Headlights came on and in the gathering dusk he could not see the river clearly. When the highway curved away from it he grew anxious and turned down the first dirt road that led off toward the left. It ended at a point of land that jutted into the river, where in a little cove boys and young men were swimming. He stretched out at the edge of a fringe of trees, smoked a cigarette, and watched them in the growing darkness. There was a little dock and a rowboat was moored to it. So this was the place! Suddenly his breath caught, his knees shook, and he was weak with the need to rush down and get that boat. He clasped his arms round his knees. Careful! Remember Superman.

Downriver he could see the lights of Cornwall, but the whole length of the American shore was black. That meant a stretch of forest, and a forest would be bad going after dark. The lieutenant chuckled—he had reached a point where he could be fastidious about the avenues of escape! A small

freighter moved upstream with a great clanking of machinery, and ten minutes later there was another one. They would be carrying lumber or pulpwood or oil. Another boat made a strong impression on him, a swift patrol launch which swept by, passing a searchlight along the bank.

It was discourteous to find fault with the Dominion of Canada which had treated him so hospitably, but it did seem a leisurely place—they swam late. Little by little the shouting and the splashing diminished, by twos and threes the boys came in and dressed and wandered off, but it must have been nine-thirty or later when they were all gone. It was completely dark, altogether silent except for the swish of the current, and he made himself wait for many minutes in the deep shadow before he went down to the boat.

He stood up, cursing—shocked and alarmed. There were no oars! But there had to be oars! They must be hidden under the little dock—and what if they weren't? He stretched out on the planking and groped underneath. There they were, neatly stowed on the cross pieces, but his swift satisfaction perished, for someone was coming down the sandy beach! He rolled off the edge, ducked between the two piles, and stood up to his waist in water, his head almost touching the under side of the dock. Slow steps reached the dock; there was a giggle, and a kind of scuffle. Two pairs of legs dangled over the edge, not a yard from his face. His feet settled in the mud, he leaned against a pile, and the invasion of the United States was halted by the most appallingly vapid conversation he had ever heard. In Canada love scenes were inconclusive and even more leisurely than swimming. They had the most limited ideas, expressed in the most saccharine language, and the girl was not going to let herself be kissed more than once or twice. The lieutenant hated them and his legs grew stiff and his teeth chattered. It would have been pleasant to yell and scare them stiff.

They went at last, with more giggles and scuffling. He flexed his leaden arms and legs, moved out to the edge of the dock and watched their dim figures disappear in the darkness. He pulled out the oars, cast off the rope, climbed into the boat, and rowed out into the current. Next stop, the United States!

The stars were partly overcast. The river was lighter than the sky and the current strong. His left wrist was sore but rowing warmed him up. And relief broke over him in a great wave. He had done it! In something like twenty-seven hours, from train to boat, he had beaten the odds, shown his heels to the British Empire and held his luck. If the rowboat had had a deck he would have danced on it. He rowed steadily and comfortably, his satisfaction growing.

It was a wide river. A half hour must have passed when the current slacked off, he saw the deeper blackness of trees over his shoulder, the boat grounded on sand, and he could step out. End of the voyage—this was the United States. At that moment the beam of a searchlight, no doubt from the patrol boat he had seen, passed down the bank. He stood transfixed, but no Canadian patrol could touch him now. He thumbed his nose at the beam; it swept over him and on down the river. He could not see the north star—and did not care. Away from the river would be south, and it didn't matter in the least where he came out. He shoved the boat into the current. It slid away downstream.

The bridge was to the east—at his left—and he had better give it a wide miss. Slanting to the right, he went into the woods, moving with the greatest caution, straining to see in the impenetrable blackness. Underbrush caught at him, gouging his cheeks and forearms. A root tripped him and he went down heavily. He waded through a swamp up to his waist. There were intervals of tall grass where the going was only less difficult, and beyond them was always some farther clump of brush. Till at last he saw an opening beyond the trees. He came into it—and there was a rocky beach and, beyond it, a flowing river.

He had not reached the American shore. He had landed on an island.

His overcharged nerves exploded a sudden fury. He ran down the edge of the woods with some crazed notion of getting the boat he had abandoned. He stopped short, struggling for self-control, realizing that the boat was gone for good. And the short run had done the final damage. Someone yelled "Halt" from the trees. The lieutenant dashed into the river, fell forward, and began to swim. There was a long jet of flame against the night—someone was shooting from the edge of the woods; the island was patrolled—and the current had him by the throat.

A sand bar rose black against the water. He let down his feet and stood up. He stripped off the canvas grease suit, fought to untie his shoelaces, tied the shoes around his neck, and dived in. Voices were yelling on the island. Several guns were shooting—but not in his direction.

The river rolled a great wall against him and there were ominous flecks of white. Alone in an immensity of water, he became a machine of thrusting arms and legs and his consciousness diminished to a mere point. He could see nothing but dim water, feel nothing but the drive of his muscles, hear nothing but a pounding that was not the river but his heart. His strength ebbed; he buried his head deeper and struggled on. His arms were lead, then

wood, then nothing. He could hardly turn his head to breathe and lassitude began to spread over him. He foundered, he shook his mind awake, grew drowsier. Keep going! A crazy thought struck him: how preposterous to be licked by a river after he had licked the Dominion of Canada. Keep going! Suddenly he had the clearest picture of himself asleep. His mouth opened in a yawn; he swallowed water, gagging. Just let your feet drop and go to sleep! No, don't argue foolishly; stick to a good idea and keep going. The damned shoes were going to pull his head under. Well, why not? What was the point?

He began to thrash aimlessly. Simply stop swimming. Simply go to sleep. He rolled over and water covered his head and he struck something solid. He raised an arm and his fingers gripped something, slid off, caught a root. He rolled into a shallow and lay face down, strangling. He stood up and fell again. He heard a loud voice say, "Superman would never go to sleep. Keep going." He thought, why, that's me talking—and talking like a fool. He stood up, fell, crawled, pulled himself up on a driftwood-littered bank, and fainted.

Then it was still dark and he was putting on his sodden shoes. He had shoes, he had underdrawers, and he must keep going . . .

Then it was nine o'clock the next morning, when Oberleutnant Römer rode into the town of Malone, New York, on a dairy truck that had brought him the last ten miles. He had walked all night and he had committed two more burglaries. He had got another suit of canvas overalls from a filling station and, finding no money in its cash drawer, he had smashed a window in the crossroads lunch counter across from it and emptied the till of seven dollars. Then he had run in blind panic down the road till he could run no farther. A fair criticism would be that his nerves had not been too good since the time he left that island. Still, there was some reason for that sudden panic—the burglary had not been planned for, was extremely risky, and might still cause some trouble. But the proprietor of the filling station was going to be puzzled when he found a pair of water-soaked shorts on his floor.

He needed more tranquil nerves—he was going to need as much nerve as possible from now on. Most of all he needed sleep. But the town of Malone was too near his burglaries, and there remained one vital job that must be done at once. He went into the cheapest-looking store he could find and bought overalls, a work shirt, underwear, a pair of socks, a cheap razor, and a canvas hat. His battered shoes would have to do. In the washroom of the railroad station he shaved and put on the clothes. There were a small square of mirror. Children would not love the face that looked out of it at

him, he thought, and it would be no help in thumbing rides. His eyes were rimmed and sunken; his cheeks had no color; there were creases and wrinkles he had not had day before yesterday.

He dropped his stolen clothes in a trash barrel outside the station. How to get better clothes, how to get money, remained to be worked out. Those burglaries bothered him—he had not planned them and much could go wrong because of them. Well, what do you do when you enter a country with only a pair of drawers? You take a chance.

He had had to take a chance. So, though Malone, New York, was the most beautiful town he had ever seen in all his life, though it sparkled with freedom and success against the odds, he had better get out of it fast. Too near the border, too near the scene of the crime, and too far from his destination. He had another journey to begin.

He found the telegraph office—then decided not to go in. He changed his remaining dollar bill and found a telephone booth in a drug store. There he phoned a telegram. It was addressed to the Interoceanic Forwarding Company, on Vesey Street, New York. It read:—

> WE ARE ABLE TO RESUME SHIPMENT OF THE INTERRUPTED CONSIGNMENT OF JULY TWENTY-SIXTH. PLEASE NOTIFY YOUR DETROIT OFFICE TO EXPECT DELIVERY WITHIN FOUR DAYS. SOME FINANCIAL ADJUSTMENT WILL BE NECESSARY AND WE WILL INFORM YOU PRESENTLY WHERE PAYMENT MAY BE MADE. HOPE FOR CONTACT WITH NEW ORLEANS REPRESENTATIVE.
>
> PHILIP GARFIELD. FOR TRANSOCEANIC SERVICE

He came out of the drugstore—and the thing was done. Or started . . . And at once he knew that, no matter how necessary it might be to get out of this town, he was not going till he had had some sleep. Had he not earned some sleep? Without overvaluing the job he had done so far, he could confidently say that he had. There must be a park. There was a park. He stretched out on the grass.

So that was done—or rather, that much was done. Yes. The slighter hazards of his undertaking were now behind him. So the real dangers could now begin. He went to sleep.

Chapter Two

Lieutenant Römer made one mistake—and men on ventures like his are not permitted mistakes. It turned him from his goal, upset the careful plan he had worked out, and projected him into a series of accidents for which he had made no allowance. His mistake came from overeagerness; he was pressing too hard.

A little past noon he woke in the park, woke with his mind polarized in a single thought: he had to get to Detroit. From now on he must live on the edge of the longest chance, against the odds. The odds said that, with the best luck and the most intelligent effort, he would fail in any event, but it was certain that he would fail unless he moved fast. Time was inexorable, and minute by minute it was running out.

His impulse was to wire again to the Interoceanic Forwarding Company, asking for money. If they had interpreted his first telegram and accepted him, it would come today. But his unpremeditated burglary weighed on him: an inquisitive policeman could wreck everything. He would be safer with more distance behind him. Better to start west. He would find out where he could get a plane to Detroit. When he knew that, he would, at the first convenient place, wire the Company to send him money there. Yes, he decided, start west, find the nearest airport, and wire for funds. He started out.

Three hours later he had made ten miles. This was the day when no one was picking up hitchhikers. A river of cars and trucks flowed by him and none slowed to his thumb. He plodded on toward green foothills in a waste of sun, his ruined shoes inflamed his feet, and his mind was tense with the wastage of time. If he were traveling by plane he might still arrive too late, and here he was slogging like an infantryman, with Detroit hundreds of miles away. The word Detroit was like a boil in his mind.

Then Mr. George Stout picked him up. Mr. George Stout, driving a brilliant-green convertible coupé, proved to be a genial man who loved to talk, whose talk could not easily be dammed. He was going to Rochester, on his way home from a selling trip. He sold hardware, and he was eager to explain the hardware business. When that was finished, it was his pleasure to learn all about his companion. The lieutenant answered idly at first but had to invent a plausible biography, for Mr. Stout probed and probed, an

interested and neighborly man who liked to know things. As the miles fell behind and they approached the mountains, the lieutenant began to enjoy the game.

It was less enjoyable when Mr. Stout came back to the hardware business. For it now appeared that Mr. Stout had spent several days showing his line in Southern Ontario. He was eloquent about the difficulties of selling hardware to foreigners in wartime. He had spent last night and this morning in Cornwall. The lieutenant roused to alertness, wondering if Mr. Stout were probing again. There was too much talk about Cornwall—had the ass seen him in the movie or on the street? It was highly unlikely, and yet it was possible. There was a chance. And it was a bad risk to run.

In the sunniest way, Mr. Stout began to talk about a German prisoner who had escaped. The papers were full of the story, he said, the radio had given it a big play, and you never knew what could happen—they said he had headed for the United States . . . Detroit was hundreds of miles away. And no, the lieutenant decided, he could not run the risk.

They were well into the mountains now, on a curving road that ran through woods. "Is your tire going flat?" the lieutenant asked.

When they got out to look, the tires were all right. And as Mr. Stout stood on the edge of the road, the lieutenant hit him on the point of the jaw and knocked him out. He bundled him into some underbrush, tied his hands behind him with his necktie, stripped off his belt and tied his feet together, secured a handkerchief over his mouth with another one, and took off his shoes and threw them in the bushes. He hurried to the car and drove away at full speed . . . Within a hundred yards he knew that he had made a paralyzing and irrevocable mistake. There were dangers enough at Detroit, but they were nebulous and in the future. Whereas, of his own stupidity, he had created an immediate danger that might well bring him and his job to disaster.

Well—he had to accept the mistake and do what he could. He drove hard for half an hour, then stopped by another clump of bushes. He went through Mr. Stout's suitcase and found flannel trousers and a jacket. He put them on, and a white shirt and a tie. The suitcase and Mr. Stout's sample cases he hid in the brush with his own clothes, and with a miscellany from the dash compartment. He sprinkled swamp water over the license plates and threw dust on them. He raised the convertible's top. In a small portfolio he had found three ten-dollar bills, and they were the one satisfaction he had as he drove on.

He must turn east at the first chance—he could get out of the state sooner and for a while at least the pursuit would go west. The first chance came at a crossroads called Saranac Junction, and he turned his back on Detroit. He was moving away from his objective but that was at least better than being arrested . . . He cursed himself for a bungler and a fool, a man who could neither plan intelligently nor act on the plans he made. But there was no point in damning himself—there was point only in going on.

Every crossroads, every village and summer camp, every motorcycle might mean catastrophe. There was a radio in the car but, after listening to it for a while, he realized that police calls would go out on short wave. He did not even begin to hope till dusk came on. He had emerged from the mountains and started southward down the valley of Lake Champlain. His military history told him that this was the route by which Indians, Frenchmen and Britishers had invaded the United States. And now Oberleutnant Römer—and maybe some cops.

At last there were signs directing him to the Champlain Bridge, and it seemed a fair guess that he would be much safer in Vermont. It proved to be a toll bridge. The attendant gave him back some change, then, as he put the car in gear, shouted, "Hey! Wait!" Ah, yes, the license plates had been recognized—but it would have been canny to station a policeman there. He stepped on the accelerator.

When another hour had passed he began to believe that he was safe. In the Vermont night even a bright-green car was black and New York license plates could not be read. His mind ranged ahead, trying to work out some plan to fit his changed circumstances. He need not abandon the car yet. Where was the first big town? Perhaps drive all the way to Massachusetts? Send a wire, wait for funds, take a plane to Detroit—and do some strenuous hoping.

But he had forgotten about gasoline and after a while noticed that the tank was almost empty. A green car would not be black in a service station's neon lights! But there was no help for it and presently he pulled up at a row of pumps and had the tank filled. He hurried away—and there was no telling. If the license number had been phoned ahead of him from the bridge, then it was probably being phoned ahead of him again.

He had gone ten miles farther when he saw a single headlight coming toward him. He slowed down a little, for to be arrested for speeding would be as disastrous as any other arrest. There was another single headlight, just

behind the first one. He passed them. In his mirror, first one and then the other turned and came down the road behind him.

Here it was—the clutch, the crisis. If he got through it there would be many others; if he didn't, everything would end here. All because he had made a mistake. He pressed the accelerator to the floor. Ahead, he saw the lights of a town.

"I can get tired of beer," Constance Scovil said lugubriously. "One low dive is just like the next low dive, and I've never learned to love juke boxes. Just what's the idea? Did you once find romance in a roadside stand? Is it the morals or the night life of Berkshire County that fascinates you?"

"Well," Bill Jay said with a cheerfulness which Connie found altogether odious, "I could take you home."

"No, you don't!" She gagged a little and said, "I'll have another beer."

"Not here. We'll see if we can discover some other place."

Either Bill Jay was screwy, which was a disloyal thought, or else he had an idea. For a week now he had spent the evenings driving her aimlessly about the highways and stopping for beers in hideous little joints like this. Places with bars and booths and souvenir stands and tiny dance floors. They went in and had a beer and Bill chatted genially, but never about her, and then they went out and learned some more about roads and visited Chuck's Bide-a-Wee or the Berkshire Nite Club. Of course some people thought beer was fattening and maybe Bill's idea was to round out her outlines a little. No, that was a personal thought and so far as Bill was concerned she was just a listening ear in the front seat, not in the least an ear you'd write a poem to. All she had wasn't enough, and it must just be that he liked beer.

So tonight they went to Ma's Barbecue Lunch and had a beer and listened to a tune, and then to Jimmy's Place, and listened to a tune and had a beer, and then to Trailside Tavern, which was a little better but still nothing to rouse Lucius Beebe's interest. "At least you could dance with me," she said. Bill said, "The women I dance with wear skirts." Connie snickered and stretched out a foot, "I enameled my toenails for you—that's feminine." So they bickered about that, and this place was like fifty others, except that when she pushed her beer away and said, "There's a little love of a barbecue five miles farther on," Bill said, "Don't be in a hurry—drink your beer." She said, "If I do, I'll throw up." He said, "Wait a minute."

So she saw that he was interested in something, almost on guard. He went on talking about nothing but presently, lowering his voice, he said, "What do you make of the specimen in the second booth?" She looked across the dingy dance floor and the man in the second booth was a specimen, all right. He looked as if he ate babies raw. Brass Knuckles Gehogan from Hell's Kitchen—crooked mouth, flat cheeks, a suit like a comic-strip gambler's. You wanted to drop a rock on him and run.

"He'd make a nice part for Humphrey Bogart."

"Don't stare," Bill said. "We aren't collecting them."

The idea seemed to be to sit here sipping beer and meditate about things. She sipped and thought Bill's hair would be something nice to run your hands through. And nothing happened. Except that ten minutes later a handsome young man in whipcords came in and looked round and sat down by Humphrey Bogart. They talked for a minute or two and went out.

Bill laid a half dollar on the table and stood up. When they were in his car again she knew that they were through with Windham's night life for a while. He was silent and drove slowly, not going anywhere in particular.

After a while Connie said, "Of course I'm just a sophomore at Martha Case Seminary for Pretty Girls. But I could understand your simpler thoughts."

Bill seemed to reach a decision. Anyway, slowing down still more, he began to talk to her as if she were an adult and a friend, which didn't happen often. "Windham is a summer resort from the 1890's," he said. "It's so peaceful that when a king bird chases a crow, that's worth a banner headline. I'm not used to not working, Connie; I keep trying to find spot news for the *New York Globe*."

As if she didn't know! The poor darling hated being a convalescent. "You could always make the society page with a big story," she said hopefully.

He grinned. "That's the old college try . . . A very peaceful town—and the world's at war. Ever add up what we're surrounded by, Connie? Springfield, Holyoke, Chicopee, Greenfield, Pittsfield, Troy, Albany—a thousand factories working three shifts for the war. And your *Globe* representative notices odd things. Little strikes that don't make sense. Fights in places like the Trailside Tavern. Queer kinds of night life a Martha Case girl wouldn't know about . . . Lots of money being made, Toots. Where there's money, you ought to find buzzards. I've found some."

"Some buzzards?"

He nodded. "A couple of weeks ago here was Miles Hanrahan eating the Windham Inn's two-fifty dinner. He hasn't been five miles from Broadway since Tunney knocked out Dempsey in Philadelphia. Who is Miles Hanrahan? Big-shot lawyer who keeps racketeers out of jail. So a few days later Hymie Schmalz got out of a car and went into the drugstore for cigarettes. Hymie Schmalz in Windham is like a bishop at a dog track. He's in the number racket in Jersey City. Now here's this torpedo we just saw. I can't remember his name—but I will. I saw him out in Chicago—held for a material witness in a truck war. Why do you run into one of those babies in Windham?"

Connie was nowhere near as spellbound as Bill seemed to be. But if Bill was interested, that was all she needed to know. "Well, I can help write your headline. Did you recognize the neat number he went away with? That was Carl Booker."

"Who is Carl Booker?"

"He runs Camp Ryegate and the Ryegate Inn. You know—out in the hills!"

She had made an impression! Bill said quickly, "I thought that was a kind of Sunday-school place."

Connie laughed. "It is pretty moral—in the summertime. Recreation camp for the earnest middle class. Epworth League conventions with speeches about world affairs and no canoeing after ten P.M. Youth hostel and girls with uglier knees than you pretend mine are. But in the winter it's café society. Carl has the fastest ski run in these parts—out on Taylor Mountain. He's pretty spectacular on skis. He could walk through the Martha Case Outing Club and take his pick. When he shows a girl a Christiania she gets so weak she's willing."

Bill was bothered. He said it didn't make sense, which was a complaint he had about lots of things, including Connie. He got silent again and they drove under the remote stars, through woods that had a cool smell of lateness in them. Connie was glad Gail had gone to this house party in Vermont—there'd be no lifted eyebrows when she got in. Yes, and no cause for lifted eyebrows, either. After a while Bill held his watch to the dash light and drove off the road, stopped under some trees, and switched out the headlights. "Oh, good," Connie murmured, "we're going to neck and no one could possibly hear me scream." But he was just going to listen to a news broadcast—he was always listening to them. At noon he'd been excited

about some story of a German aviator escaping in Canada. He felt so damned out of it! He took this sickness as a personal failure.

The war news was ghastly—the sort of thing you dreamed of shutting away forever. Then a summary of Washington items. Then Bill sat forward, fairly straining his ears. The announcer was describing some arrests for industrial sabotage in Detroit. He named them and it had been a big roundup, and Bill was fairly quivering . . . That was the end of the broadcast.

Bill's voice was angry in the darkness. "I predicted that six months ago! Only I said they'd pin it on von Weitbrecht. So they make a cleaning on some Detroit small fry and they don't take von Weitbrecht in. Haven't they tied him up with it? Or has he gone underground? Or what? . . . Oh, damn!"

The *damn* was a groan. Connie said, "You feel like an old fire horse turned out to grass, don't you?" She laid her hand on his and, most unexpectedly, he grabbed it and squeezed it hard. "Hey," she said, "don't make such passionate love to me, Bill, it goes to my head." Really it went to her eyes, which stung.

"This is important stuff, Connie, it's a big job long overdue—and I'm out of it," he said morosely. "I'm the guy who knows about it, I've been beating the gong for two years—and here I am nosing around back roads because a cheap thug goes through Windham . . . Look, I think the U.S. is turning on the heat. Yesterday they grabbed a guy named Schwimmer in San Francisco—they ought to have grabbed him long ago. Last week they cleaned out a nest I knew about in Philadelphia. We're getting tough with those babies—at last and thank God. And here I am sitting on my tail in the convalescent ward. Sure I feel rotten! Nobody's any use these days except men. So here we've got Bill Jay, fully two sevenths of a man."

"There are those of us who value the two sevenths pretty highly," she said, but Bill just grunted with concentrated self-loathing.

They sat in the darkness and her mind fell away into gloom. Poor Bill! preyed on by his uselessness in the war. So, bang, here was the war again, blackness and fear and horror. The world was going to pieces. But there were friends, people you liked, people you felt tender about! Her thoughts went off on a tangent, and presently she said, angrily, "You get lots of fun from kidding me about no skirts! You know damn well I've got to save money for college. You know damn well I won't take it from my father."

He was an understanding person. He touched her hand again, as a kind of tip to the check girl, maybe. "Your father's all right," he said. "Don't get a mad on because he has a taste for headlines."

"I don't want any part of him," she insisted. "Yes, and if Gail loses her grip and marries him—well, won't everything be so lovely that I'll wish I was dead?"

"People get married," he said. "Take it and like it." But he was being human tonight, and so he tipped her another kind deed. He looked at his watch and said, "I'll show you something else I've found."

He drove back to Windham and through it and beyond, on and on. Finally he turned up a dirt road and circled by so many others that Connie got lost. He parked in some bushes at last and they got out and he led her through some woods. He took her arm, steering her over broken ground and under branches. "You'll admit *Vogue* wouldn't recommend a skirt for this kind of midnight stroll," she said. Now they climbed a little slope in the open. They came to the black edge of something and Bill stretched out prone and said, "We're here—lie down." She lay down in grass that was wet with dew, wondering what the next act of this vaudeville would be. "This used to be part of Highway 11," Bill said. "But they cut out this curve and ran the road straight through the woods a quarter of a mile away." Sure enough, she could make out the faint gray of macadam ten feet below them—they were on the edge of a cut. She recognized the place now, the hills and roads coming clear in her mind.

"All my petticoats would have been drenched," she pointed out. "Are we waiting for the Veiled Phantom? Or does midnight bring a rendezvous?"

"We keep quiet," Bill said. "Very quiet indeed. We're waiting for some folks who aren't playing marbles. They wouldn't enjoy having an audience. One sneeze and you'll be ever so sorry."

That was ominous. But her shoulder and hip were touching his and that was very pleasant, though if she had had forethought she would have linked arms with him . . . The night was absolutely silent, fathomlessly dark, secret and mysterious. Take what the good fairies give you, she thought: anyway, here we are, and he likes me, he really does. He wouldn't show me these things if he didn't. Bill darling! She wanted to touch his cheek but he would call that forward if not flirtatious. Oh, a grand night! It seemed hours and hours.

She stiffened and went cold. Down at the west end of the road below them, something was coming through the dark. It was a big truck—a truck and trailer. Just crawling, with the powerful engine a deep hum, and no lights. It stopped not fifty feet away and just stayed there. Connie began to shiver—violently. Bill's arm came over her shoulders. The truck stayed

there motionless in the dark, its very silence terrifying her. Maybe it was only a few minutes but it seemed hours later when a car with no lights was coming down the road from the other end. It too stopped. Two men got out of it and approached the truck. Connie dug her fingers into Bill's other wrist. There was a soft mutter of conversation at the truck. Finally, one of two men in the truck's cab got out, and one of those who had come from the car got in the cab. Another spurt of talk, then the truck slithered away with the slightest sound. The two men walked back to the car and it too went away. No lights at all. So the world was empty again and here they were on the edge of nothing.

Connie shook and shook. She sat up and Bill did too, and she shrank into his arms. "I'm scared," she whispered. "Tell me what it's all about."

"It would be fun to know. I blundered onto it. It happens every night. That's an interstate truck, from the west, running on schedule. So it pulls off the highway and stops here and it gets met. I've seen sacks and boxes transferred. Sometimes they just talk. Sometimes a man gets off the truck or gets on it."

"Where nobody would ever see!" It was pleasant leaning against his shoulder but he would soon think she had gone too far. She moved away but went on shaking. "*Globe* man on sick leave! You'll get a story, won't you?"

"That's a very interesting truck company," Bill said. "Suppose some of Miles Hanrahan's clients run it. Suppose it's a neat way to travel if the cops are interested in you. For instance, suppose that torpedo we saw at the Trailside Tavern is hot in, say, Albany. This would be an inconspicuous way to New York. There could be some news in the setup if that was our pal who got on the truck."

It was very dark here and very damp and very cold. And isolated! Exploring midnight roads with Bill Jay was more than just too much beer. "Well," she said, "if you like your mysteries spiced up, I can help out. That car that met the truck—it could easily have come down the back hill road from Camp Ryegate."

"Oh!" Bill said. Slowly, "That's an item too. Epworth League camp, huh? Maybe I'd better pay a visit."

Connie shivered some more. He would, he unquestionably would.

In a single stunning moment impulse had become panic and Gail Armstrong was going down a corridor of the Taconic Lodge in flight. Her mind rocked with the knowledge that she could not understand what was happening. The single moment had proved her hysterical and afraid, or it had waked her to sanity just in time, or it had been an instinctive effort to give her time to think more clearly about the most important step in her life. More time?—that was probably hysterical in itself. Probably there would be no more problem of Lynn Scovil. A schoolgirl might dream that such a flight as this would make him more desirous, but more likely she was striking a blow at his pride which he could not possibly forgive. Well, no matter now, after that moment. This was to have been her wedding night and now it wasn't going to be. Here the movies would insert a subtitle: THE UNWED BRIDE.

It had come as an unheralded, instantaneous thought: I'm not going through with this. One moment, dancing with him, she had been eager and acquiescent, altogether a bride in the languor of the flag-draped ballroom. Her long doubts were over, his whispering was triumphant in the music, and his hand under her breast was an intimacy long desired. And the next moment she had felt such a revulsion that the wonder was he had not dropped his arms and turned away. The handsome, imperious, bridegroom's face so near to hers was suddenly a stranger's face. I don't know him at all, her shocked thought ran, and I'm marrying him in half an hour! The denial followed swiftly: I know him much too well and I don't like most of what I know! So the familiar conflict was clearly posed again, under the urgency of the irrevocable step that was just half an hour away—the warmth of championing him against a hostile world and the cold doubts of him she could not drive from her heart. A vertigo seized her—the irresistible thought, "I've got to have more time!" and a jeer at herself, "This is just any spinster's dread of marriage." The music stopped, some earnest committeewoman drew Lynn aside, and Gail walked to the doorway, trembling and almost sick. Reaching the doorway, she went through it. Then her feet decided for her. She walked down the corridor. She almost ran.

Reaching her room, she stared in her mirror at the image of a woman who either was terrified or had achieved common sense just in time. Except for its coral sash the white-jersey evening dress was a bride's dress. It had been intended as one; she wore a bride's fragilities beneath it; she was decked and perfumed like a bride. There was a hastily chosen trousseau in the two bags that were waiting. They had been packed for an elopement; so they were conveniently packed for flight. The mirrored face showed derision and a sudden reckless humor. *The Honeymoon Halted*, she thought, or *The*

Bride Who Saved Herself. She took a sports coat from the closet, picked up her bags, and went out.

A prowling bellboy seized the bags, and Gail said, "Take me down some back way, a fire escape if there's no other." It proved ridiculously easy to abandon an elopement half an hour before the ceremony. Her coupé was in the Lodge's parking lot; the bellboy stowed the bags in the compartment, and she drove away. She became aware that her heart was pounding and her whole body tense.

Immeasurable relief broke over her; she was invigorated and glad, buoyed up by an overwhelming sense of deliverance. She thought wonderingly, I could sing an aria! . . . That ought to be conclusive. But was it? Did it mean anything except that she had grown timid in widowhood and was afraid of her own emotions?

The Lodge road led down to Manchester, Vermont, and she turned southward on the main highway. Windham being some eighty miles away, she stopped for gas just beyond the town's little business district. She was returning her change to the little white evening bag when for the first time she wondered whether Lynn might follow her. Oh, very likely! He would overwhelm her with reproach and pleading, or he would shrivel her in one of his white rages. She hardened with a determination not to face him tonight.

It was that thought, the thought that he might follow her, that changed her destiny, and Lynn Scovil's, and a good many others'.

She was just driving out of the filling station. At the corner a traffic light turned green and a big truck snorted into motion. A man came running down the side of the road and Gail stopped, braking hard. The man leaped into the truck from behind and, when the truck had turned the corner into the highway, swung over the side and off again, crossed a strip of grass, and stood behind a big elm. The truck roared on, gathering speed. Thirty seconds later a motorcycle sped down the road. Fifty feet from Gail's halted car, the man was looking at that truck and motorcycle. He was looking at them with intense concentration, but the astonishing thing was the expression of lively pleasure on his face. He had certainly been running from that policeman but he was certainly enjoying the chase.

Gail did not think at all. She was in flight from Lynn Scovil and this vivid tableau had linked her with someone else in flight. She drove close to the big elm, opened the door, and said, "I'll drive you past the policeman." Promptly the man got in and closed the door. She drove off down the road.

Her pulses were racing again and there was a further contagion in the young man's excitement. And he was not only excited—she had an impression that he was on the verge of laughter, might be as ready as she had been to sing an aria, and thought of his flight as both an escape and a sporting event. He was staring at the road ahead. She accelerated toward the rear lights of the truck. As it came into her headlight beam the motorcycle caught up with it and the policeman was waving it toward the side of the road. It slowed, moving over. She swept by and the road ahead was empty.

"Goal!" her passenger said. "You think fast and half the stolen jewels are yours. At least half, mademoiselle."

"You must be a true American," Gail said, "your French accent is quite as bad as mine."

"What I was praying for was Superman's cloak, but what heaven sent was the squire's daughter. Is it your habit to pick up fugitives from justice?"

"Is it the habit of fugitives to question the rescuer's motives? And I'm not sure that 'pick up' is a tactful phrase."

"Eliza on her ice cake forgets to be tactful—she is too absorbed in the bloodhounds," he said. "Have you noticed the halo that is just above your head? It's extraordinarily becoming—straight from Saks' Fifth Avenue. So if you'll stop the car, I'll make a dignified exit and stop embarrassing you."

They were far past the truck and moving fast. But she had thought of something else. "If the man at the gas station was watching—" she suggested. "When the bloodhounds find that Eliza isn't in the truck, won't they go back to that traffic light?"

He flashed a glance at her. "That's not only quick thinking, it's a marked talent for crime. Then, as a suggestion—shouldn't we leave this road?"

She turned eastward at the next fork, deciding that she could find back roads that would take her home, and becoming very serious about this drive. It had become a simple necessity to insure this stranger's escape—and she wondered why. Why was it necessary? Why wasn't she afraid of him? Well, why had she fled from Taconic Lodge? She could ask questions, tonight, about the erratic behavior of Gail Armstrong but she couldn't answer them. She had run away from Lynn Scovil. She was going to help this man run away. No further reason was needed. Take it and be damned.

She glanced at him in the dimness, getting an impression that he was not so young as she had thought. A year or two older than she? Say thirty . . . "The shoes give me away, don't they?" he said. "I should at least have the

costume of a gentleman swindler but I'm made up as a cheap thug. Unfortunately I've been . . . too occupied. I could make any number of explanations. Which would quiet your conscience most easily?"

"I don't remember asking for an explanation."

"You're kind," he said quietly and gravely. "Kinder than you can know. But a conscience goes with every halo and yours will soon begin asking questions. Tell it that you've done a great service to a man in trouble."

She had a complete assurance that, whatever trouble he might be in, it involved no dishonor. How, she wondered, did she know that? She didn't—and no matter . . . She drove on in silence, accepting the incredible, and her passenger also lay back in the seat relaxed and silent. The flow of night air past the open windows was hypnotic, and there was peace in the long thrust of her headlights down the darkness. But her mind fell away from the present and she was back at the Taconic Lodge at the moment when that irresistible revulsion struck her. At this moment! She was fleeing with a stranger on her wedding night!

She began to tremble. Her hands shook on the wheel. The car veered toward the shoulder of the road, the rear wheels slid in sand. Instantly the stranger seized the wheel, fighting for control with strong forearms. Disaster hung suspended for a moment, the car came back on the road, and she got it stopped.

She put her hands over her eyes. "That didn't have anything to do with you," she said. "Things have happened to me too tonight, and I got to thinking about them. It's not your fault."

"Would you rather I drove?" he asked, as naturally as a friend. Then, remembering the circumstances, "You have only my word for it that I haven't cut a throat for some weeks. I don't advise you to take my word."

"I'm not afraid of you—take the wheel." She got out and, as she did so, thought of something else. "This dress—"

"You were at a dance."

"I ran away from a dance. It's possible that someone may be following me who would be quite as awkward to meet as a policeman." Decisively, "I don't intend to be recognized. Maybe for the sake of both of us I'd better change the dress."

He helped her get a bag from the compartment. She said, "There's no dressing room," and he said, "Only the wide world," and got back into the

car. Let it now be suggested to anyone who knew Gail Armstrong that she could change her clothes in the open air, on a back road, between walls of trees! The incredible night had had strangely assorted flavors, and the headlights of any car that might chance to pass would have given it another one.

He drove skillfully. After a while, he said, "One doesn't talk about either gratitude or sportsmanship. Do you mind my saying you're a—a gentleman?"

She had got over her tremors, had recovered both recklessness and zest, would accept the incredible in its own terms, would play the cards as they might chance to fall. "As one fugitive to another, thanks," she said. "But I've done nothing much. When you've started something it would be silly not to do the best you can . . . And I've come to see one thing about escape —it makes you hungry. I'm famished."

He said, eloquently, "I think I had some lunch at noon."

These roads were not lined with restaurants like those near Windham and it was very late. But she directed him to a more traveled road and at last they found one. He pulled up in the neon blaze. "Thinking as a fugitive," he said, "we'd better make it a picnic. And—" he glanced at her feet—"my shoes are disreputable but those slippers are downright conspicuous."

She saw him in the light—tall, athletic, light-haired, his face both resolute and frank, his carriage almost military. Gail laughed—when she picked up a man, she picked up an attractive man.

He brought back a paper bag which gave off a delicious aroma of hamburger sandwiches. Driving on, they topped the rise of a long hill which fell below them in a straight line. On the level again, he backed the car into an opening between trees and turned off the lights. . . . Nothing had ever been more satisfying than those sandwiches, and to share a meal was to share companionship. Gail felt curiously at peace and curiously friendly. It was far from sensible to be thinking of him as an old friend, and it was even less sensible to be disregarding the intricate unpleasantness she must face tomorrow when Lynn Scovil would come storming into the bookshop. But sensible or not, reckless or mad, that was the way things stood. She liked the man she had saved from the police. Miles from Manchester, on her wedding night, she was enjoying the adventure of the escaping bride and the handsome stranger.

He groped at the cowl. "No radio? It doesn't matter—too late for news." He turned toward her. "The cop was chasing me for stealing an automobile.

I could plead that it wasn't so much stealing as appropriating one in an emergency. Still, there's no shadow of doubt—I've been stealing cars."

"Well," Gail said, "I was running from a man I was due to marry in half an hour."

"Poor devil!"

"You may not know his luck."

"He is a fool—for he let you succeed. Since he did, you would certainly have been marrying beneath you."

It was not the most congenial topic. "Where are you going?" she asked. "Where is your emergency?"

"West of here. I think I need an airport. Is there one at—well, where are you going?"

"Windham. It's perhaps thirty miles from here. Probably you can get a plane at Pittsfield; certainly you can at Springfield."

"Except," he said angrily, "that I have contrived to get the police after me. I may have to hide for a day. Are telegraph offices open at this hour?"

"Not at Windham. And," she said firmly, "it's a late hour even for fugitives. I may not appear to be a conventional person but we'd better be going home."

He started the engine but switched it off again at once. Gail saw it at the same time—a single headlight coming over the crest of the long hill and starting down the slope. "A car thief gets sensitive about cops," he said regretfully. "That is any cop peacefully riding his beat, or it's any farm boy going home after calling on his girl. Still . . ." Tension came back to the coupé and Gail found that her feet were braced against the floor. They must not get him now! The single light came on with abominable slowness. It slowed still more as it drew even with them but passed by, and she released her breath in a long sigh. But the motorcycle swung in a circle and came back.

"Sorry," the stranger said, "this appears to be necessary." His arm went round her, he pulled her head to his shoulder and leaned over her, cheek against her hair. A flashlight shone in the coupé and Gail took her cue. She flung her arms round him, pressing against his shoulder, and gasped, "George, I'm scared!" He sat up and said furiously, "What the hell is the idea?"

"Just us cops," a bored voice answered. "Always spoiling somebody's fun. Get going, George. Go neck on the front porch."

He started the car and drove out on the road. Gail leaned through the window and called back, "You like a little fun yourself, don't you?" with an excellent impromptu stridency. The cop waved to her and followed them for half a mile, then spurted ahead and disappeared.

In a moment the car stopped again.

"Did you," he inquired, "did you experience a certain . . ."

"Frustration?"

"Well, incompleteness." She could not have stopped him if she had wanted to but clearly she didn't want to. This time she was kissed, with immediate conviction. In amazement and disbelief she saw her hand go out and touch his cheek and move on to his hair. It was altogether implausible that she was competently cooperating in a second kiss, but the evidence was conclusive. That, however, was quite enough, even for an escaping bride. She moved away.

He said with profound conviction, "He is the unluckiest man in the world. And the greatest fool to let you get away."

There was a slight unsteadiness in his voice and Gail was not surprised to find a similar one in hers. "If you hadn't, I should have had no great respect for either of us . . . Still, this is a good place to let the drama go no farther. There will not only be consciences tomorrow, there'll be perplexities. So here is where we drive decorously on to Windham."

Nevertheless there was a good deal to think about while the car slid on through the dark. She had answered that kiss with astonishing fervency. She decided that he had reaped an emotion which another man had sown, that a bride in flight had nevertheless felt something of a bride's readiness. A new light had been abruptly turned on Abigail Armstrong, a woman who could not possibly pick up a stranger, still less let a stranger make love to her. It was incredible and incredibly true, and the stark fact was she had enjoyed it. Unquestionably she was going to think badly of herself by morning, but at this moment she thought very well of herself indeed. . . . But it was exceedingly fortunate that she was not going to see him again.

"I'm thinking of those perplexities of tomorrow," he said, after a long while. "My training in crime is defective—I have to make it up as I go along. An accomplished criminal would probably go into hiding for at least

twenty-four hours. This town—Windham, is it? Where would a competent criminal find concealment?"

She felt a certain apprehension, then knew at once that he would not presume upon tonight's adventure. "There's Windham Inn," she said. "Full of dowagers and the dull rich. There are a couple of less pretentious inns. Oh, a variety of summer places, tourist camps, everything for the vacation."

"A competent criminal would probably pick a place some distance from the police station. Out in the country somewhere."

"There's Milford Farm—a kind of Provincetown place, they call themselves artists. There's the Berkshire Club—horses till six, liquor till midnight. There's Camp Ryegate—dull, unimaginably respectable, and a trifle religious."

He pondered. "There are these unfortunate shoes. I think the extremely respectable place."

"Camp Ryegate. We pass it a few miles before we get to Windham."

"Yes," he said quickly, "I must not ride into town with you."

No, he would not presume. . . . Her exhilaration began to fade, melancholy coming over her, a foretaste of tomorrow's remorse. Well, improbable things happened, and presently they were over, and then you paid for them. Unquestionably by tomorrow she would be paying heavily for tonight. Tomorrow she might even finish paying for it. Oh, she decided wearily, there's no need to start now; it will be bad enough tomorrow; go home and go to sleep.

There were only a few miles left and these ended. A small lighted sign showed in some firs. "That's Camp Ryegate," she said. He stopped the car. "The road leads off here—it's about a mile and I'm afraid you'd better walk it."

He got out and she took his place behind the wheel. It was terribly late—two o'clock, perhaps three or even later. She got out and stood beside him, the two of them in the deep dark of the firs. They were caught in a silent reluctance. Neither of them was willing to have it end.

"There'll be somebody at the office," she said aimlessly.

"We won't see each other again," he said harshly. Fortunately that was true and unfortunately she was sorry. "If there were more time—if the world made sense . . ." He paused. "You can't know what you've done for me—it's . . . a good deal." He paused again, "Oh, damn all that! It is something to

drive and eat and talk with you—to be running from a policeman and meet you."

She was caught in another sharp conflict—fear that he would, fear that he would not. He took her hand. "You're very lovely, my dear," he said. "Very lovely and very sweet." He kissed her fingers, and walked away up the road to Camp Ryegate.

Gail got in the car and drove away. The evening had ended and she would now begin paying for it. She remembered that she had told Connie, whose father she had not married after all, that she would be gone for two days. She stopped the car for she wasn't seeing the road clearly. But she could not tell whether these were the tears of a widow who had saved herself, or of a frustrated bride, or of a woman who had wanted to be kissed a second time and had not been.

Chapter Three

At Camp Ryegate, Lieutenant Römer had done everything that was, for the moment, possible—he had wired to the Forwarding Company asking for money and he had kept reasonably patient. If the money came before evening, he could be in Detroit tomorrow morning. If it did not come, he must rely on his wits. The trouble with his wits was that they had landed him on the shore of a Massachusetts pond, hundreds of miles from where he ought to be. Possibly the police were still after him; certainly he had lost another twenty-four hours, which was worse. He had been given a job to do; it was assumed that he might fail but it was not assumed that he would fail because of his own stupidity. Very possibly he had already done just that. No, his wits had so far proved unreliable. They had better improve fast.

He spent some time wandering about Camp Ryegate, where, it was essential to remember, he was registered as John Page. It had not been designed for people of his profession. Sited on a hill at one end of Ryegate Pond was the Ryegate Inn, which appeared to be a swankier place under the same management. The camp itself was some thirty cabins in a pine grove back from the shore, and a dance hall, recreation halls, a cafeteria, the usual tennis courts, the usual canoes and speedboats. There were noisy children, their mothers in denim trousers, adolescent boys and girls in shorts. Shrill cries came from the tennis courts but were smothered by the shouts of swimmers and the barrage of outboard motors on the pond. His delightful companion had done the place complete justice: no one would look for a criminal here.

Back at the office, he found that no telegram had come, and stood trying to master his impatience by studying the skiing photographs that hung on the walls. A moment later he regretted that he had ever worn a ski. For a man came out of the private office and instantly the lieutenant's mission was in danger of becoming finally impossible. This was a man about his own age, with the body of a trained athlete and a handsome, stolid face—and the lieutenant's memory which was trained for such emergencies, identified him as a *skimeister* at Arlberg in the Austrian Tirol nine years ago.

"Mr. Page?" The lieutenant nodded. "I am the proprietor of Camp Ryegate. The name is Booker." Yes, but it had been Bucher at Arlberg. Mr. Booker was a refugee. "Kindly come outside."

This was his first taste of the total vigilance that he must maintain from now to the end—or as near the end as he might be permitted to get. Also there was no convenient way out of Camp Ryegate . . . Mr. Booker led him past the kitchens and workshops to where a couple of workmen were stowing shovels and axes in a light truck. Here he stopped and said, "We will take a little ride, Mr. Page."

The lieutenant looked at him coolly. "I'm not sure I'm in the mood."

"This morning the state police inquired at all camps for an escaping automobile thief, Mr. Page. There is no baggage in your cabin."

That suggested that the proprietor was thinking of his camp's flagrant respectability. The lieutenant experimented with a calculated anger. "I paid for the cabin," he said insolently. "Be so good as to stay out of it."

Mr. Booker scowled. "Guests at Camp Ryegate must have baggage. I did not mention you to the police but they have a telephone." His face contorted with a sudden and violent rage. "Damnation! Come with me or I will turn you in."

The threat did not impress Lieutenant Römer, who was prepared to encounter threats from now on. Nor did the harsh and even cruel anger that had rearranged that handsome face interest him much. But his wary attention had caught a fleeting expression of uneasiness, which was an odd emotion for *Skimeister* Booker to be feeling in the circumstances and had better be followed up. "All right," he assented, "we'll take a ride. If I don't enjoy it, Mr. Booker—we'll come back."

The proprietor accepted the arrogance and they rode with their feet dangling over the end of the truck. The likelihood was that Mr. Booker intended to escort an undesirable guest out the back way, to maintain the moral purity of his camp. But Mr. Booker kept looking at him with a steadfast dislike, which corresponded to the lieutenant's private emotions about him. "Have I seen you somewhere before?" Mr. Booker asked abruptly.

Oh, by no means! Not with the entire job hanging on that identification. "I think not," he said stonily. "I would remember your manners."

Not caring for each other, they rode for some five miles of steep back roads, and came out in a clearing where there were various shacks, a smooth hillside sloping up, and the poles of what was obviously a ski tow. Several men were working here, and the lieutenant recognized the place as the last descent of a ski run which he could see curving in from above. The bare scar

twisted through the trees for half a mile, and he could imagine it sloping up beyond out of sight. Yes, it began at the summit of a small mountain, where there were a couple of cabins and a cleared runway leading to the first drop.

They got off; the truck bumped on to the far end of the clearing. Mr. Booker gestured toward a wooden bench, and they sat down.

"You sent a telegram by the office telephone, Mr. Page . . . Please do nothing hasty," Booker said, and the lieutenant's eyes must have flashed. "It was to the Interoceanic Forwarding Company of New York and it was signed Philip Garfield. It asked that money be wired to Philip Garfield in your care at my camp, Mr. Page. Also it said that a shipment had been delayed again."

Having only that earlier flash of uneasiness to act on, the lieutenant acted on it. He stood up; he spoke softly. "My friend, it may be your habit to pry into the affairs of your guests, but I do not permit it. I like it so very little that I should be happy if you would try to stop me when I leave. Which is right now." He had been altogether right—for though Mr. Booker was now very angry indeed, that same uneasiness showed more strongly in his face. He followed up quickly, putting a taunt into his voice, "If you want to start something, why not now?"

Mr. Booker's face blazed with a desire to start something. But Mr. Booker's hands, the lieutenant carefully noted, were pressed against the seams of his trousers—like a soldier's. "Who sent you to my camp?" he muttered.

"Say *sir* to me!"

It took Mr. Booker at least thirty seconds, but he said "sir" and the lieutenant had a changed and much clearer idea about him. "No one sent me here," he said. "Telegrams I send are no affair of yours. Do not be fool enough to say anything more. Now take me back to camp. And stay out of my cabin."

The man would have liked to punch his face—and, what was more important, he was not surprised at being bullied. "I do not care if you are Philip Garfield or John Page or John Doe," he said sullenly. "But you sent a wire to that Company." He looked hard and spoke a sentence in rapid German. When the lieutenant gave no sign of understanding, he repeated it in English. "There is a man near here whom you must see."

"Must?" the lieutenant said gently.

"You appear at my camp. You wire the Company. So you must see him."

His idea about Mr. Booker went on expanding and it was clear that Mr. Booker, without feeling any affection, also had an idea about him. This was altogether unexpected; it might add another delay to a sum already catastrophic, but it certainly had to be followed up and investigated. He had no choice.

Booker muttered, "I know what I must do." He scowled defiantly. "You will see him or you are an automobile thief."

The lieutenant relaxed into amiability—and into German. "I have a few hours—till late afternoon. I will see your man if you can be quick about it."

Mr. Booker also relaxed but still could not be amiable. "It will take arranging by telephone. You had better stay right here till I come back for you."

He shouted for the truck and was driven back toward camp. The lieutenant stretched out on pine needles in cool shade. This also was an accident that hinged on his original mistake; he had blundered into it, and it was another unpredictable risk. Well, he had no choice, and there were now so many risks that one more was hardly noticeable. And there was also the distinct indication that it might help him on his way to Detroit.

Connie had spent an active two hours sweeping and dusting the bookshop when Gail came down to breakfast—in a yellow nightgown that was a grievance in itself. And also in a dour mood that would not respond to Connie's cheerful chatter. She was obviously not going to say anything about the house party she had decided to come home from; it was a fair and hopeful guess that there had been a quarrel. Gail went upstairs to get dressed, and Connie went back to being a wage earner.

So here was Mr. Lynn Scovil coming into the bookshop at ten A.M., which indicated that it was Mr. Scovil with whom Gail had quarreled. Well, three hosannas and a Thank God. Wary and defensive at sight of her father, Connie recognized one of his rages as soon as he asked for Gail. If you touched a finger to him he would sizzle, and who cared if the strain on his arteries was ominous? Any rage he might feel at Gail was so much velvet. Some beautiful morning, Gail would tumble to him.

He tried to be pleasant to Connie, asking amiably stupid questions about the bookshop and Martha Case College. Nobody could work harder than he at being a good guy, and nobody ever did it with a colder calculation. He

probably thought he was being benignant when he said, "I suppose I'll never understand it but parents can't insist on understanding any more. I'd be happy to give you anything you want but if you have to get it for yourself, go ahead. I'm there if you need me, and the latchstring's out for you to pull any time you feel like it."

He was an extremely handsome man and his talk could charm rabbits out of this year's hats. "Just adolescent cussedness," she said. "You can see it in any movie. Let the idiot run her head into that stone wall."

Gail came down and there was a tableau, antagonism and something that looked like fright in Gail's suddenly flushed face, a ten-thousand-volt anger in her father's. Connie quivered with satisfaction, for this must have been a high-pressure quarrel. She got out of the bookshop fast. Maybe they'd break it up right here. No, she gloomily decided, the form sheet showed that he would make one of those orations and Gail would dissolve in penitent and acquiescent tears.

She went into the sweater shop and begun to unpack some cartons of fall stock. Pretty soon Bill Jay strolled in and, as always, the sight of her seemed to hand him a hearty laugh. "You won't admire the Martha Case girl this fall," she said. "What are we showing? Men's jackets, men's sweaters, men's shirts, men's ties and scarves, men's raincoats. I told you I was out in front of the new mode."

"Yeah, in candid slacks—and unconvinced that a girl's best friend is her girdle."

"You Peeping Tom!" she said witheringly. "Maybe I ought to fix it so you could see Gail through the yellow chiffon she had on a while ago." She stared at his clothes. "So what are you made up as? A scoutmaster?"

"I'm going for a bird walk. I want to borrow Gail's binoculars."

Last night came flooding into her mind. That dark scene was improbable by daylight but she could still twitch with the scare it had given her. "You're going to go poking into Camp Ryegate."

Bill nodded. "I never saw the Y.M.C.A. mixed up with the underworld before. Makes an interesting mixture."

"I'm going with you . . . Oh, yes I am! If I can take beer by the barrel, I can go on bird walks. Besides, you'll look a lot more convincing as a nature lover if you've got a sweetie with you."

That must have made sense, for he said, "Can you leave your job?"

"We sold a book ten days ago—somebody was caught between trains. We won't sell one of those girdles you leer at till college opens." She went upstairs for brogues. There was a rumble of voices through the closed bookshop door when she came down, and as she went out with Bill she said, "Gail used her mad money and came home last night. She and my distinguished father are bombing each other about it now. If it would make her drive all the way from Manchester after midnight, it was a good, healthy scrap. You spit, I'll wish, and we'll both pray."

"Maybe your license to run other people's lives has expired?"

"Well," she said, "if I can't get a job running yours."

They drove to Camp Ryegate and wandered among the cabins, tennis courts, and docks. It was as mild a place as you could find anywhere. Just some people enjoying an inexpensive vacation. A lot of women who would look better in stylish stouts, and Connie took care to point out that the world contained girls more angular than she. Just ordinary people having a good time. "What did you expect?" she asked. "Al Capone hijacking the United States mail? You'll be lucky if you can sneak up on a life guard kissing a stenographer."

"I didn't write that script about the truck," Bill pointed out. "What's the rest of the setup here?"

"There's the Inn—twelve dollars a day. There's the ski run. There's some shacks on top of Taylor Mountain—call them a youth hostel."

He said they'd take a look at all of it, so they drove toward the ski run, parked the car, and started overland by a little trail. Bill got winded easily and she was careful to stop often and look at nature, tie a brogue, or just lean against a tree and gabble like a college girl. If they should walk in the woods all day, she wouldn't protest, and even a girl who wasn't crazy about him would keep him from overdoing. But it was hot work and he was exhausted when they came out above the bottom slope of the ski run. He sprawled in the shade of a big pine and panted. Sweat was running down his forehead and she knew he hated his weakness. She sprawled beside him and pretended to be worn out.

"It's all right, Toots," he said, grinning wanly. "Just be the American outdoor girl. I know I'm a crock."

"No more Toots, please, and if you think it's shameful to get winded after you've had pneumonia, don't be a fool. What attracts me is your

character." His grin flickered with what she could almost interpret as affection. "You have nice impulses," he said.

"Investigate and you'll find that even those that make you laugh are nice."

But that one daring leap into personalities was all he was going to venture. He turned over on his stomach and looked out at the steep slope and the clearing at the bottom, where some small dots were moving about at the end of the ski tow. "What happens here?" he asked.

"The best of us—the Scovils and Bookers—start out on Taylor Mountain. You break your ankle anywhere on the course. Between the top and here are about five places where you're scheduled to break your leg. This is where you wish you had taken more lessons or led a better life and take off for glory. Nature sees to it that you reach the bottom and what you break here, if anything, is the pelvis. If you don't, there's the tow to the summit again."

"Sounds legal enough, if tinged with idiocy." He got out the binoculars and began to study the scene below him. Little circles of light under his eyes fascinated her and she was extremely content with today. He was so homely that he was enchanting, and you could trust Constance Scovil, Martha Case College '43, to know what she wanted. "Couple of people digging a post-hole," he reported. "Probably no dragnet out for them. Couple of others piling brush—no Tommy guns in sight. Guy smoking in the shade of a truck—no previous convictions, I guess. Your pal Booker is talking to somebody. Not Lefty the Gyp—looks more like a movie actor. Hell, sweetheart, we aren't getting anywhere for the *New York Globe*."

"I told you the most you could expect was somebody getting crazed by a can of beer and jumping off the dock."

He put the binoculars back in the case and turned over on a hip and elbow, obviously dissatisfied. "Tell me about Booker."

"He's mine host. He runs this place like a chronometer. And they don't make better skiers. He's what two cocktails make you dream you might get to be."

"That makes time with college girls?"

"Darling," she said earnestly, "if it make you jealous, he just bowls me over."

"If I find you falling for an athlete, I'll warm the seat of those slacks."

Connie was dazzled, for that really looked as if his better nature was beginning to assert itself. But with Bill Jay it was one step at a time and a long wait between steps. Still, here was a summer day and a pleasant hillside and no one but her to talk to when he wanted to talk. Connie listened to the birds and looked at Bill. She watched the workmen below them and looked at Bill. She pulled up her short socks and looked at Bill. No getting round it, she was skinny. If she had had a shape like Gail's there would be less of this frank companionship, Bill would grin less and look closer. Or—Mathilde Winkler. Her father's—well, say it, her father's mistress—came into her mind and she was hot with resentment for Gail's sake. But you could say this about Mathilde, when men looked at her it was without frank companionship. Wrap her in an over-stuffed mattress, Connie thought, and she'd still look as if she were doing a strip tease. And if I did a strip tease it would just look like corrective exercises for the deformed.

"O.K.," Bill said, "and the clean-cut athletic innkeeper went to Trailside Tavern to meet a racketeer. And it's a good guess that the same inspirer of college girls met that truck and helped the racketeer on his way."

"Nuts," Connie said. "It was movie stuff last night. Today it's just what-the-hell. You don't know that anything happened and my bet is nothing did."

But Bill was dead-serious. "Maybe . . . Connie, get it through your blond head—whoever those babies were, there's a wide streak of the rattlesnake in them. I was a fool to take you there. Front-page stuff aside, that wasn't bright. Whoever our pals were, they wouldn't have waited to say *Pardon me* before taking a shot at us."

That depressed her and she resented his casting a shadow on a very satisfactory hour. "That's just your depraved mind writing headlines."

"I'm a pretty good newspaperman. I get around. You're a college girl—you're a rich man's daughter—"

"Is that my fault?"

"The point is, you wouldn't meet those eggs socially. You don't know what goes on. Somebody ought to tell you there are hard guys in the world—people whose business is violence. There really is the underworld—an organized network of very hard-boiled people who would be distinctly out of place at Martha Case College."

"Sure, I read the *Globe*. What about it?"

"What about it? Why do they make appointments in Windham?"

That was his point—it had been his point last night—and no doubt it ought to make her shiver, but it only made her wish that he'd take an interest in important things. But this was his morning hour for self-reproach. He rolled over on his stomach again and wouldn't look at her.

"I'm a newspaperman. And here I am stuck in a summer resort and a spike through my lungs when I climb a hill. Am I on the job when a swell story breaks about an escaped aviator? Washington at last gets tough with the people I know most about—am I helping out? No, here I am on a hillside telling you how good I am. The world's at war and it hasn't got any use for cripples, Connie. I ought to be carrying a gun, or learning to fly a plane, or at least running a truck. Am I? No, I'm—" witheringly—"getting my strength back—sitting on my tail—watching other people do the jobs. The hell with all crocks! They ought to be drowned."

"Oh, don't!" she cried. "You great ass, you're all wrong!" She shut her eyes hard but felt a tear on one cheek.

That tear must have scared him badly for he patted the cheek. He said, "You're all right, Connie," and she said, unsteadily, "Remember you said so." He came out of the mood and smiled a little. "Furthermore," he said deliberately, "I lie in the teeth when I say you don't look nice in slacks." He got out the binoculars and this time scanned the hills above them. He put the glasses away. "Excuse the self-pity," he said, "but you get the idea—I'm fed up with doing nothing. So anyway when I fall over something I can look into it. This is just a thug in a place where you wouldn't expect one—I'm stubborn enough to see what I can find out. I won't find anything but it's something to do. Come on, we'll finish the job. Let's take a look at Taylor Mountain."

"Can you make it?" Instantly she knew that was a mistake.

"Yes," he said furiously, "I can make it."

O.K. They took to the trail, slowly but probably not slowly enough, though now he didn't pretend but kept stopping for breath. Little white spots showed on his cheekbones and she felt sorry for him but had learned her lesson. . . . They came out on a shoulder several hundred feet higher, rested, and started up toward the next one. It was a delightful trail, their shoulders kept touching, and Connie was willing to climb all day. It reached another flat place where the ski tow was in sight again, and Bill leaned against a tree, panting. And a man came out from behind a pile of cordwood and said, "Private property. Get out."

"We're just on the trail of some birds," Connie said, and Bill said, "Take it easy, Mac."

She wouldn't have been so familiar. Offhand she would have said that this was a Boris Karloff part. He had a cauliflower ear and he looked unfinished or even in the crude state, and he looked threatening. He said, "This is private property. Go peddle your papers."

"Wait a minute." Bill came forward from the tree. "We aren't running off with your wildflowers. We're just taking a walk on this trail."

"Yeah. It ain't your trail, buddy. Get off it. Fast."

"Oh? Some good reason why we shouldn't walk it?"

The man looked tougher still. He took a handkerchief out of his pocket and, wiping his forehead, took a step forward. Then in a half frozen second the handkerchief was fluttering to the ground and his fist flashed out and caught Bill on the jaw. Bill went down on the gravelly trail and the man was standing over him, and Connie leaped forward to kneel by him, with a terrible conviction that the man was going to kick him, and she blazed up at him. "Get away from him! If you touch him, I'll kill you."

The tableau sorted itself out. Bill sat up groggily, leaning against her. "Don't argue, Toots," he said. "We do exactly what we're told."

He got to his feet and she was probably going to be sick but she wasn't. They started down the trail, and the man followed them for a few yards, still looking tough, and yelled, "Don't come back." The ghastly violence still nauseated her, and it was hard to tell whether Bill was leaning on her arm or she on his. Trees hid them and they kept on. Till Bill stopped and sat down on a boulder. There was a big red splotch at the corner of his jaw. Also his eyes were hard and hot, and the white spots on his cheekbones didn't mean weariness now. She grabbed his arm and demanded, "Are you hurt?"

"I felt it." He was breathing hard, and swearing. "Nice if I'd had a baseball bat. What a crock! Sorry, Connie. I'm a normal male and if anybody gets knocked down in front of a pretty girl, I want to be on the sending end. In Hollywood they fix it so the tough guy gets it. Take my word for it, I'm embarrassed." He swore some more and his eyes were still hot. "Maybe you get the point, now. Here and there a person runs into a hard guy."

"I get it." She was still shaken. "I thought he was going to kick you."

"In the ribs. Or the stomach." He cupped his hands round her cheeks. "You're all right—you'll do to take along." He dropped his hands—the oaf! "I never liked being pushed around. I like it still less when you're the audience. . . . Would a passerby be interested in why you meet a guy like that in a place like this? Have you started wondering what there is on his trail he doesn't want looked at? The *Globe* is sending me to find out."

The crisis planned for was to have begun at Detroit. The crisis actually arrived at had begun in Windham. Give a child a book to read in a strange language, take the handkerchief off a blindfolded man's eyes in a dark room—and you would have something very much like Lieutenant Römer at Pinnacle Manor, the Berkshire estate of Mr. Lynn Scovil. Or, he reflected, set a man down on a high wire above Niagara—he would have to walk or plunge.

Mr. Lynn Scovil, however, was as bewildered as he and was moving as warily. The first step was to decide about Scovil. By now he clearly understood Booker. That sullen and suspicious man was merely one of the many listeners assigned by the *Nachrichtendienst*—the general staff's organization in foreign countries—and required to hold themselves ready for such jobs as they might be able to do. He probably knew nothing more than the name of the New York headquarters—the Forwarding Company. A small cog, a stupid and unimportant man. But he had reported to Mr. Lynn Scovil—so where did Scovil fit, how much did he know and how much authority did he have? The lieutenant had seen his name in newspaper stories that had nothing to do with the *Nachrichtendienst*; he was obviously a rich man and a man of ability; he was striving hard to understand the situation and probe the lieutenant's business—and that was all, the rest would have to be picked up along the way.

The lieutenant saw that much, knew that Booker had acted because of his telegram, and believed that the best policy was to keep the initiative in his own hands. So, after they had spent half an hour talking amiable commonplaces—while eying each other like prizefighters before the bell—he took the initiative.

"Mr. Scovil, my liberty is in your hands," he said. Vigilant to catch the slightest clue he noted a fact which might be important: that Scovil liked holding someone's liberty in his hands. For there was a flash of satisfaction in his wary eyes and the faintest possible suggestion of a smile on his lips. "The truth is, I am a German aviator," he went on. "Three days ago I

escaped from a train that was taking me to a prison camp in Ontario. I have managed to get this far."

Scovil nodded, his face attentive and impenetrable. "That was Monday night? You probably know that the newspapers have been full of you ever since—and the radio. The Canadians are annoyed and the Americans are chiefly amused. Your name would be—von Römer?"

"Römer. Senior Lieutenant Friedrich Römer."

So he had taken his first step on the high wire. . . . They were on the terrace of a millionaire's estate and in midafternoon of a brilliant summer day; what would happen now? What happened was that Scovil became a gallant gentleman who could admire gallantry, a sportsman who could praise courage even in an enemy.

"Don't be apprehensive," he said. "You will come to no harm through me, Lieutenant. You have done a brave thing against tremendous odds."

The lieutenant's respect for him increased. Mr. Scovil was covered; since anyone could admire a brave thing done against the odds, he had given away nothing—and it was still the lieutenant's move. Or was it? Scovil began to ask questions about the escape. They rose and strolled over the wide lawns while the lieutenant sketched an outline of his story, Scovil making appropriately amused comments, and nothing was advanced—they were still sportsmen.

There were statuary and stone benches walled round with arborvitæ. Scovil sat down, took a cigar from a silver case, lighted it, and gazed inscrutably at the lieutenant. "I shall be happy to entertain you here. I'm not clear what your legal status is. You were probably safe from the Canadians as soon as you crossed the line—in any event, you can't be surrendered to them." He met the lieutenant's eyes, and the initiative had passed to Mr. Scovil. "Up to a few weeks ago you would have reported to a German consul. Probably the embassy now?"

The lieutenant smiled. "I think that's the law. But I've had three days to think it over. The chargé must report me under bond to the American authorities, who will eventually order me deported. Since I can be deported only by way of Japan and Siberia, that practically means something like a detention camp."

Scovil's face showed a polite regret—as if it were too bad that such a brave enterprise must end so ignominiously—but, as one man to another, nothing could be done about it. "I'm sorry. However, I think that is the law."

He took another step along his high wire. “Truly . . . I should like a few days. I’ve thought I should first like to go to Detroit. You could serve me handsomely by helping me to get there.”

At last something showed in Scovil’s face but he could not make out what it was. “Detroit?”

“Was not the consul’s name there von Weitbrecht?”

“No,” Scovil said, “the consul at Detroit was not named von Weitbrecht.”

So they ceased to be sportsmen admiring each other and reverted to the status of prizefighters before the bell. “You sent a wire to the Interoceanic Forwarding Company at New York,” Scovil said. “Why?”

“Excuse me—it was on business. Moreover,” the lieutenant gave his voice an edge, “that wire landed me at your house, Mr. Scovil. By way of Booker. And I cannot like the man—he is stupid and his temper makes him unsafe.”

The bell had rung for the first round. “I happen to be acquainted with the Forwarding Company,” Scovil said. “I can’t imagine what business an escaped prisoner of war could have with them. I can’t understand, either, why you should want to go to Detroit. I think I must insist on your notifying the chargé.”

The lieutenant stood up. “Good afternoon, Mr. Scovil. This has been a pleasant hour but there is no longer anything in it for either of us.”

“As you remarked, I hold your liberty in my hands.”

It was more than a gleam of satisfaction; Scovil’s face was actually avid. The lieutenant took a step forward—and a step in space, over the Niagara gorge. “It works two ways,” he said gently. Then he abandoned gentleness. “You aren’t what you seem to be, Mr. Scovil, and I am not a fool. By what authority do you interfere with me? What concern of yours are my telegrams? What have you to do with the Company? And if you have anything to do with it, how do you presume to question me?”

“There are holes in your story,” Scovil said harshly. “An escaped prisoner of war is safe the moment he reports to his embassy. You aren’t interested—you want to go to Detroit. It is you who are pretending to be something you are not, Lieutenant Römer. My job is to find out what you are.”

"Your job is to render assistance when called on and ask no questions," the lieutenant said, very coldly.

"You will find that I have a little more importance than that." The lieutenant kept observing that curious avidity—the key to Mr. Scovil was his ego, but how could it be used? "Already I can save you from disaster. Detroit! They would pick you up the moment you got there."

"What has happened at Detroit?" More hung on the answer to that question than even the lieutenant could guess—job, mission, success or failure, the future.

"I am not permitted to know." Scovil was sarcastic. "As you say, so far I can take orders but must not understand them. I wonder if anyone knows what has happened. But—a good many have been taken, so many that it is an embarrassment."

"Von Weitbrecht?"

"No. He is not even implicated. But you couldn't possibly get in touch with him. And—you are doubtless very ingenious, Lieutenant, but if you tried to, the FBI or the secret service would grab you at once."

So here was where he began to make payment for his one mistake. The long series of accidents had brought him up against a stone wall. Von Weitbrecht had gone underground, the one indispensable, the kingpin. That was the one thing which meant failure, which must not happen, and it had happened. Or had it? "He is not even implicated." What did that mean? Did Scovil know what it meant? Obviously no. Well, whatever it meant, the situation was disastrous and no plans were good.

"You see, I am important to you," Scovil said, with that odd insistence. The man had to assert his importance—had to make it clear that the lieutenant was altogether in his hands. "You are fumbling in the dark." A good deal blinder fumbling than Scovil could know. "You can't even communicate with the Company except in ambiguous telegrams. You blundered upon me—do you think you can go on blundering? I can put you in touch with the Company. You can get instructions through me—and whoever you need to see. You have been very lucky for three days, Lieutenant—but is it safe to rely on luck? What are you to do now? We had better be allies."

So at Windham, Massachusetts, hundreds of miles from Detroit, the most exquisitely calculated plans had been blown to bits. It was as if the middle arch of a bridge had been destroyed; no instructions, no

arrangements, were worth anything at all. At least there would have been co-operation at Detroit—here he must go it alone and blind, over the gorge.

"I will stay twenty-four hours," he said. "You must get someone here from the Company by tomorrow. My telegrams must have told them that I am the one they expected on July twenty-sixth. Tell them I am staying with you and they must send someone who knows everything. Also I must have the papers that were sent in. Also complete information about von Weitbrecht."

Scovil nodded but was obstinate. "I must know who you are."

"I will talk to your superiors," the lieutenant said brusquely. But that was the wrong tone—he must be wary of the man's ego. He became affable. "My dear fellow, I'm under orders—please don't press me. What you have told me changes everything. I'm completely in the dark. But you have done me a memorable service."

Scovil ate it up—and if he liked flattery, be sure he would get plenty of it. "You are certainly no aviator," he said.

The lieutenant smiled. "The British made me one. They had no intention of letting our people know they had me. . . . I was sent in on the clipper from Lisbon as a Swiss banker, with all my papers in order. But the British took me off at Bermuda and flew me to Halifax. It will have to be determined," he said grimly, "where that leak was. Well, they put a flyer's uniform on me, named me Oberleutnant Römer—I suppose there is, or was, such a man—and sent me off to a prison camp. I got away. The terrible question is whether I got away in time."

Much better! He had thus made Scovil an insider and Scovil loved it. So they were again the most amiable companions in the world. "There is to be a big party at my house tomorrow night." Scovil smiled. "For the praiseworthy purpose of supporting a symphony orchestra. That makes it convenient for you to be my house guest. Whatever messenger they send will be another guest—and I think I know who it will be."

"I must have decent clothes at once—I stole these. I must have some money. And some kind of story to explain me."

"Of course!" Scovil was now eager to do anything, a country gentleman offering hospitality. They started back across the lawn to the house, a great stone Tudor place with stables and outbuildings beyond. "You will get a good night's sleep," he said. Then, "I must say your English is remarkable."

He smiled. "The *Grossgeneralstab* picks its men. My father spent ten years in Colorado as a mining engineer. I graduated from a Denver high school and—well, till the time comes, let's say from a California college as well."

"That might be very awkward," Scovil said quickly.

He smiled again. "There is a certain amount of awkwardness in our job. But Massachusetts is a long way from California."

He began to think better of himself. He had handled the first emergency. He had Scovil in a useful state of mind, and Scovil was not likely to be dangerous except as a pompous man hungry for importance. He wondered why and how such a man had been drawn into the network—money, social position, excellent contacts, no doubt—then he stopped wondering. For a while there was nothing he could do; the ball had passed to other hands until tomorrow, and he might as well relax. Worry about Detroit and the severed ends of his mission would get him nowhere. For tonight he would take his ease at Scovil's house. Imprisonment, flight, drowning, rifle fire, a paralyzing mistake, news of an unpredictable and perhaps fatal development—well, he could use a little ease.

As they approached the house a car came up the drive, swung round the circle, and stopped. At sight of it Scovil halted on the grass and said, "Good God! Quick—what American name can you use?"

His aliases glimmered in his mind: Friedrich Römer, Philip Garfield—"I am registered as John Page," he said.

A woman got out of the car and, waving, started toward them, a tall, dark-haired woman in a gray dress. And his release from tension and his hope of ease had been premature. For he knew that woman and had driven that car. In the afternoon light she was even prettier than she had seemed on that romantic drive down back roads, tall, high-breasted, her body exquisite in motion, her face clear and sweet. It might not be Lynn Scovil who held his liberty in his hands, it might be this woman . . . who stopped abruptly, looked straight at him, and turned pink with an emotion that clearly was not embarrassment but anger.

A temporary providence, however, led Scovil to interpret her anger as directed at him—and the lieutenant realized that his host must protect himself as well. Scovil stepped forward and said, "I did not expect you so soon, my dear. This is John Page, who has come for our party." He put his arm around her waist. "Mrs. Armstrong, John, my fiancée."

His fiancée stepped negligently out of that arm but stood beside him. She did not see his discomfort for her eyes, scorn clearing them of anger, were fixed on—on her guest. "Mr. Page." The three syllables were clear ice. She swept some of the same disdain over Scovil. "I don't remember hearing about him. I thought you would be alone."

The lieutenant was working hard to interpret the emotions that showed in Scovil's face. There was the sharp anxiety of this immediate meeting; there was also an anger which could be believed in, for Scovil would anger easily; and there was some queer doubt and questioning of Mrs. Armstrong. Scovil was not master of the situation and in a moment he abandoned it altogether. "I'll have something to drink brought out," he said, and literally fled into the house—but not before an urgent command showed in his face, a glance at his friend John Page which meant, "You handle this."

Clearly Mrs. Armstrong was glad to have him go. She stood straight and contemptuous, her eyes level. "A guest, Mr. . . . Page? In those clothes?"

"They look worse with every passing day," he said. "We must do something about them."

"You found it not so urgent to take a plane?"

Damnation! Had the romantic satisfactions of last night's drive betrayed him into another imprudence? He could not remember mentioning Detroit, but if he had there might be hell to pay. Certainly Mrs. Armstrong knew nothing of Scovil's function but for the moment it would have been less awkward if she had known.

He said, "I found Lynn's name in the telephone book at Camp Ryegate."

"I see . . ." skeptically. She sat on the stone steps, relaxing not the slightest bit of her scrutiny. "Your old friend Lynn! How relieved you must have been to find an old and probably dear friend in a town you had never heard of before. At a time, too, when you needed a friend. Have you told him that you're a—what was your own phrase—a fugitive from justice? Have you told him you're a car thief?"

"No. You may, Mrs. Armstrong."

"Oh, no, you'll tell him—I'll see to it that you do. He is an impulsive man, Mr. Page—he is very easily taken advantage of. I don't like your riding into town ahead of the police and then victimizing him. . . . I'm interested in you. Just what kind of impostor are you?"

"You were less solicitous about him last night," he observed.

This time her flush was darker—and it was embarrassment, not anger. "Yes," she said, "I made a first-rate fool of myself."

"You will make a fool of yourself now," he said quickly, "if you let your imagination run wild. You're quite right, Mrs. Armstrong. I knew nothing about Windham last night, and I didn't know that Lynn Scovil was here. And yes, I have not told him that I came into town fleeing the police."

"Why not? How can you accept—"

Sunnily, "For the reason that I haven't yet had time to tell him. . . . But you have had time to get your poise back, Mrs. Armstrong. So remember that it was the fiancé who told you we're old friends, not the scoundrel. There is no reason why I shouldn't tell him the circumstances in which I got to Windham. Why can't we tell him together?" He looked into dark eyes which, however scornful, were as attractive as he remembered them. He smiled impudently. "Shall we tell him—all the circumstances?"

The dark eyes hardened still more, wavered a little, and then, turning away, softened to a smile. "On the whole," she said, without antagonism at last, even with a hint of laughter, "that might be carrying conscientiousness too far." Pinkness invaded her cheeks again and she was really smiling. "No. There's no need to bore him with too many details. You can skip some."

Unquestionably she was one more element of danger in an equilibrium already so precarious that there was little hope it could be maintained. But her smile had some safety in it and maybe he could prolong the safety if he could maintain the smile. . . . A house man in a white jacket came through the door, carrying a tray of drinks, and a moment later Lynn Scovil appeared.

Mrs. Armstrong turned toward her fiancé's old friend, swiftly. "I don't believe anything about you," she whispered. "You're an impostor and an adventurer and doubtless a scoundrel too. Probably the truth about you would curdle my blood. But I seem to like you, Mr. Page." She was openly laughing now, as she added, "Considering how I've behaved with you, it's just as well I do."

Chapter Four

Gail Armstrong seemed unable to give her emotions the right timing. She had gone to Lynn's house yesterday prepared to make peace, repentant of her indecisions, and convinced that everything was clear and simple at last. She was not going to have doubts any more and she understood just why she had been behaving so idiotically. As for deserting him at the dance—why, just such a drama had been needed to make her sure that she did not want to desert him. As for an outrageous flirtation with a stranger—why, just such an experience had been needed to convince her that no man but Lynn could really attract her. Calm second thoughts had made everything clear and she had gone to his house in a mood of penitence and surrender, prepared to accept his terms, behave sensibly thereafter, and marry him at any time. The presence of the ambiguous John Page had frustrated that intention—but she was in the same mood on Friday morning when Lynn came to the bookshop.

Again her willingness was frustrated. The scenario called for him to be eager and impatient, but he was preoccupied, too concerned about something else even to observe her compliance. It showed in the quick movements of his hands, the brightness of his eyes, the unflattering fact that he hardly noticed her. Annoyed and resentful, Gail attributed his excitement to the mysterious Page and resumed the dislike of him she had conceived yesterday. Humor came to her aid—did she insist on a big scene, probably to violins? There would be time enough tonight.

Tonight, it developed, was what was on his mind. Something had come up that would occupy him for a little while. He wouldn't come for her before dinner; there wouldn't, in fact, be any dinner. He would come at nine. Anxiously, would that be all right?

"Of course," she said. And the more so if he would ask for more.

He swept her into his arms and kissed her—with, a critic might have said, insufficient ardor. But he whispered, "Tonight was to have been different. Make it not too different! It can still be our announcement." She pressed against him but he wasn't noticing. "I've got to go. I'll come for you at nine."

Both nettled and amused, she followed him into the hall. He called, "Constance!" Connie answered from the sweater shop and came out into the hall, Bill Jay following her—these days he was all but taking his meals here. Connie put on antagonism at sight of her father.

"I expect you to come to the dance tonight," Lynn said.

"Well . . ." Connie said uncertainly. Then, "Why should I?"

Lynn's sharp, "Because my house is yours too," only hardened Connie's chin, but Gail said, "Of course you will, Connie."

Connie glared at her as if she had betrayed a confidence but said, "All right. Only—ask Bill too."

Lynn looked indifferently at Bill Jay, said, "By all means. Of course. I'll see all of you tonight, then," and went away.

Connie snorted. "That's pretty noble. Considering that he has never forgotten a single unkind word anyone ever wrote about him."

"The press don't count," Bill said. "He just thinks of me as the paid agent of a corrupt sensationalism."

They went back to the bookshop and Connie sprawled on a bench. "Anyway, you'll meet the Social Register tonight. Got a cummerbund, Sahib?"

"Sure—by Brooks Brothers. Got an evening dress, Toots?"

Connie shot off the bench to stand six inches from him, raging. "That's enough Toots! Sure, I'm just a Martha Case College girl, and that's a laugh in any man's life. Sure, I'm as bloodless as a figure on your radiator cap. You can call the cigarette girl Toots, but I won't take it any—"

Bill caught her wrist behind her back and looked over her head at Gail. "Too many movies about the tiger woman, maybe? How do we treat it?"

"I don't know, Bill," she said, amused. "I'm from your generation and we hadn't read much about the war between the sexes." Connie was straining away from him, her blond curls tumbled. "She's being primitive. I'd say you haven't got a chance."

"Primitive!" Connie gasped. "Who's subduing his woman by brute force?"

Bill let her go and Connie looked deeply gratified. This flagrant, athletic love-making seemed charming and appropriate to Gail—better than the

obscure contradictions that passed for love-making between herself and Lynn.

"O.K., you're an Eagle Scout now," Bill said. "No more Toots."

"I should hope not—after all those midnights on the trail." She beamed at Gail. "See how he's softening up? Get down a bet on me."

"About that evening dress," he said. "It's a simple fact I don't know how you look in skirts. Why not try a couple of yards of witchery for once?"

Connie went defensive again. "I've told you why. Pants are cheap, so I wear pants. The great man can make me go to his dance like a good daughter, but he doesn't get a chance to keep me."

"We don't stock evening dresses," Gail said. "She'll have to see what she can do with one of mine."

"Oh, I don't know." Connie headed off at a tangent. "I take theory of design at Martha Case College." She looked round the shop, eying rugs and hangings. She got up, stood on a chair, and took down one of the curtains—a strip of dark-blue chintz with white gazelles printed on it. She was wearing a trivial play suit. She unfastened it, stepped out of it, stood for a moment in still more trivial brassière and briefs, and began to drape the curtain round herself. "A pin!" She demanded. "Fold it in here, Gail." She kicked out a train behind her, and said, "The gazelles make an exotic note. Well, is this witchery?"

"Primitive was the word I used," Gail said.

"You strip pretty good," Bill said.

There was no predicting Connie's emotions. She had been entirely unself-conscious but his remark made her look appalled, her eyes grew ashamed, and a painful red stain came into her cheeks. "Oh! Strip! . . . I suppose you've never seen me in a bathing suit?" She ran out of the room, the chintz fluttering.

"Good Lord!" Bill said. "You never know, do you?" He picked up the play suit, and called upstairs, "Hey! You forgot your pants." Connie's hostile voice floated down: "Please ask that reporter to go to hell."

Gail was amused—and rather troubled. "She's pretty much mid-April, Bill. I hope you realize it's only five per cent a joke. She's crazy about you."

"She's got too much sense. I'm just a novelty from How-the-poor-live." He frowned. "If you punch a guy's jaw for a woman, you're honor bound to

fall in love with her. What's the formula when you're the guy that gets punched?"

"Who punched your jaw? I didn't know she had another guy in town."

"It was no beau. Just something that's going on."

He looked serious and probably would have explained, but Connie made an entrance. She had dressed hastily but completely—silk afternoon dress, high-heeled slippers, hat, gloves. She said pugnaciously, "All right, you long to see the feminine flutter of a skirt—you look and I'll flutter. Help yourself to witchery. Even—" she slapped her hip—"that girdle. I can be so feminine you'll yell for help."

"Stockings too!" Gail said. "No, Bill, you haven't got a chance."

It was all carefree and delightful, a lighthearted moment among good friends who had nothing to trouble them. Gail was to look back on it with disbelief, marveling that they could have been so lighthearted about anything.

As evening came on, a warm, desirous impatience possessed her—the same nuptial mood in which she had started for Manchester. But tonight it would last; she knew what she wanted. She would not wear that white dress—it had been a bad omen. She dressed with the eagerness of a girl, a girl as young as Connie. And Connie kept wandering in to envy and admire. "I don't see how you've stayed a widow for five years." And, "You'd have a nice career in musicals—it's those well-drawn legs that make us tennis wenches so hopeless." And, "I can't approve the cause, but it certainly lights you up all over." Dressed, Gail took an honest pleasure in the soft eyes that looked back at her from the mirror—this picture of a tall woman, in beige chiffon, with fluctuating color in her cheeks. She clasped an antique necklace of topazes round her throat and went downstairs—to wait for Lynn.

So the telephone rang and Lynn was saying, "I'm sorry, my dear, I can't come for you. You won't mind? Come with Constance."

There was nothing to do but agree, and he rang off. It was absurd to feel let down, and she told herself that her annoyance was unreasonable. But again there was this doubtful omen—ardor unsatisfied, anticlimax, emotions badly timed. Driving to Pinnacle Manor with Connie and Bill, she found their idle bickering no longer amusing but strident and out of key.

In the big library upstairs Lynn Scovil narrowly watched Mathilde Winkler and the man who called himself John Page. Both of them had tried to exclude him from this interview and he had been obliged to make a curt demand. He had had to point out that he was now indispensable—that circumstances had brought him closer to the heart of their business than there had been any intention of letting him get. The fact was that not only the safety of these two but the success or failure of vast enterprises lay in the hollow of his hand. A sense of power pleasantly stimulated his nerves, and he would take care to remind them that he must now be granted equality with them. Equality or even more. . . . He expected no trouble with Mathilde—he held over her the whip of an old emotion, an old relation which she would be glad to resume. But what about Page? Scovil had to admire his casehardened composure, the competence with which he had mastered an unexpected situation. The man's escape showed his courage; his behavior since showed that he was an ingenious tactician. He was formidable! Well, he would the more easily see the need of an ally.

They were listening to a news broadcast from Berlin. Scovil knew, resentfully, that they heard something in it which he could not hear—that instructions for various centers in America were somehow coded in the sequence and phraseology of the news. He had not been admitted to that code; he did not even know whether these two knew all of it—but he knew that they knew more than he. Well, from now on they would not shut him out.

Page was wholly absorbed but retained his appearance of assured composure. But Mathilde had relaxed none of the tension she had been showing ever since her arrival. She was concentrated on the voice coming from the radio as if life itself depended on it . . . As it did.

The broadcast ended. In the quiet that followed you could hear a dance tune coming up from the terrace. Finally, Page said, "You understood it, *Gräfin*?"

He spoke in German and Scovil said curtly, "Speak English."

Mathilde said, "Enough of it." She had a surface control but Scovil could sense her inner agitation. Was she afraid of Page? If so, that was further evidence of Page's importance. But Scovil could take care of him.

"So Field was taken," Page said, and Mathilde answered, "He got to New Orleans and took a plane to St. Louis, where he had a reservation for Detroit. He never got to Detroit. He must have been taken at St. Louis."

"Too bad." There was no emotion in Page's voice. "But they have heard nothing about me and they are inquiring. They have been inquiring all the time I was in arrest? Can you let them know I have got here?"

She nodded. "From New York. It would be better, of course, to have von Weitbrecht—"

"Yes. Everything hinges on von Weitbrecht. You will arrange for me to go to Detroit tomorrow, *Gräfin*."

It was a command, cold and colorless. And it gave Scovil the greatest satisfaction. For that was his ace. It was the power which circumstance had given him. Page could know nothing whatever about von Weitbrecht, and even Mathilde could not know what had happened. Everything hinged not on von Weitbrecht but upon Lynn Scovil.

"Have New York tell them what has happened to me," Page directed. "Report that I was taken at Bermuda, escaped, and have got through. Report Erich Köchlin on his way to Detroit. You have some papers for me, *Gräfin*?"

"I don't use my title in America, Herr Köchlin." He bowed: "*Fräulein*, then."

She gave him a manila envelope. He ripped it open and began to study its contents, going through them without haste. Some pages he put in his pocket, some he left on the desk. Scovil saw that Mathilde's full attention was concentrated on him. There was no sound till he had finished, when he folded his hands on the desk, and sat looking at Mathilde. When he spoke it was as if he were presiding at a court martial. "Not all of them are here. What have you to say about that, *Fräulein*?"

Only one who knew Mathilde as well as Scovil did would have perceived that she relaxed a little. She was just perceptibly more confident and animated in the big leather chair—her North German fairness resplendent in her evening gown, her body smoothing to its natural and subtle lines. Scovil became more intent, suddenly understanding that Mathilde had not been altogether frank, that something had been withheld as a check on Köchlin's identity.

"You see, Herr Köchlin, I was told to give you the envelope—not what was in it. I don't know anything about it. That's between you and the Company."

"I am not rebuking you, *Fräulein*." Köchlin's courtesy had a sharp edge. "Please telephone the Company tonight to send the rest at once. Tell them —" He stood up and into his face came an impersonal condemnation so

complete that it jarred even Scovil's complacency. His voice was quiet but it seemed to give off venom. "I was captured—Field was captured—what is going on, *Fräulein* Winkler? Do you suppose they do not wonder about that at home? Do you think I have not been wondering? Now some of my papers are taken from an envelope it was your duty to hold for me. What is going on in your organization? Who is tampering, where is the leak, which of you is a traitor?"

Mathilde had gone white and Scovil could see her quivering under her dress. "But we knew nothing about you! We were told you were coming. Then you were two weeks late. Two telegrams! Then Lynn's phone call. You might be—"

"You took it on yourselves to withhold some of my instructions?"

"There must be some check on you," she said, with none of the defiance Scovil would have expected. Köchlin said, "I am going to Detroit tomorrow, and those papers must be here before I go, *Fräulein*, if any of you in New York are in love with comfort." Mathilde nodded, her eyes submissive, and Scovil felt his scalp prickle. For this man was truly formidable! Not only had he at once detected the ruse practised on him but in thirty seconds he had cowed Mathilde Winkler, whom no one had ever cowed.

"You have told us nothing, Herr Köchlin," Mathilde said. "Nothing has been told us from the beginning. Only that you were on your way."

"I am not to confide in messengers or—" his cold-blue eyes went to Scovil with a disdain for which Scovil was determined to require payment —"or in casual station keepers on an underground railway." He sat down again, aloof, his voice edged with contempt. "I will tell you this, *Fräulein*. I am to advise von Weitbrecht in the matter of September first. But also it looks as if I must do Field's job. That was—" the barbed voice slowed—"to see if something could be done to repair the intolerable stupidities your people have been committing, *Fräulein*. The succession of preposterous failures. The wrecked plans, the bungled efforts, the wasted money, the stupid ineptness—whatever it is that is endangering our war here."

Her breasts rose in the bodice of her black-chiffon gown, and her face was frightened. "You do not understand! Is it supposed in Germany that the Americans are all fools? Dreadful things have been happening—"

"Yes? That is what I propose to hear about."

"We have lost so many!" Her fine hands locked in her lap. "Without warning or trace! The wonder is we have been able to keep going. And now,

within the last week—" The small hands were suddenly thrust out. "You are not the only one who has been in danger, Herr Köchlin. In a week, San Francisco, Paterson, Philadelphia, Detroit—"

Instantly, "What about Detroit?"

"I don't know," Mathilde said slowly, "I don't think anyone at the Company knows. On Tuesday and Wednesday, a great many were taken there—perhaps enough to end all usefulness. Little word has come in—"

"Von Weitbrecht?"

She shook her head. "No. There was word from him on Monday that he was leaving for a while. That was very fortunate, for on Tuesday the raid came. But nothing has been heard from him. Unless—" she turned to Scovil —"nothing today?"

Köchlin came out of his chair. "I must know about this man! Why should he know anything about von Weitbrecht? Why should he hear from him?"

Mathilde said urgently, "So much has happened, so much has been disorganized, we have had to use what was at hand. There is a truck line—a summer camp near by keeps in touch with it. Among other things, it carries dispatches. We have had to use Lynn in relation to it."

"You don't have to plead for me, Mathilde." Scovil stood up, feeling the full strength of his position, even hoping that Köchlin would protest. "You will find, Herr Köchlin, that I am not without usefulness. I explained to you yesterday about Booker and his camp. You are perhaps a little given to hasty judgments? You will find that we can attend to your needs—provided you appreciate the difficulties."

That was the right note, an assurance of co-operation in which, nevertheless, Köchlin would detect a warning that he must respect the judgment of his allies. The cold eyes studied him and he tranquilly gave back stare for stare. Köchlin smiled. "I think I appreciate you, Mr. Scovil."

Scovil saw that the man must hide his discomfiture under an accent of mockery. But it was an acknowledgment, even something of a surrender. A feeling of mastery surged in him. They would disregard him no longer—he would be consulted, even deferred to. His stake had grown enormously. And he had taken Köchlin's measure.

"You had better not be seen off my grounds," he said smoothly but with a plain warning to Köchlin. The inscrutable eyes met his, then turned away.

He went on, "We will break this up now and be seen having a pleasant time at a dance. I have been away from my guests too long. It will be well for both of you to show yourselves."

He felt very well indeed. A stimulating half hour!

Yes, he reflected, as they went downstairs, the more stimulating in that neither Mathilde nor Köchlin had thought to go back and repeat that question. Neither had asked him again if he had heard from von Weitbrecht.

It was a curious evening for Bill Jay. Scovil's big house was packed with summer notables—the plush and flush, he thought: the Berkshire gentry, a good many whose faces were familiar to any reporter; musicians, country squires, a Congressman, minor attachés from Washington, Boston bankers. There was dancing on a wide veranda and the terrace beyond it. There were vast quantities of food that might have come from Park Avenue. There was more champagne than, in the summer of 1941, you would have thought it possible to find. The champagne was the most vivid reminder of Scovil's wealth.

"Costs you something to wear a free woman's pants, doesn't it?" he said to Connie. He waved his hand in a gesture that took in house, grounds, guests and champagne. "Makes a setup for the movies, rich girl."

"Aw, I was having a good time." Her forehead wrinkled. "There you go, always a girl's best comforter." She took his arm and led him toward the sidelines. "You can have it! He can have it—fat dowagers, big names, people that get talked about, and money to burn. It means a lot to him. That's why I never took him seriously as Moscow's white hope. He'd be more natural as the *Gauleiter* of Berkshire County. Name in the papers, everybody saluting, and a swell uniform."

But Bill couldn't take Scovil seriously in any capacity . . . He had been seen for a moment when they arrived, had wandered about with Gail on his arm, and now wasn't visible.

"And when you think that out there—" Connie nodded vaguely at the dark—"there's a war. It burns me up to realize that and then realize that here I am dancing with a bunch of rich stiffs. Don't dare tell me I belong with them."

"You won't win it by feeling blue. Washington says every girl is entitled to ten minutes of moderate pleasure. I'll hold a watch for you."

They wandered through various opulent rooms, made remarks about the company, went back to the veranda and danced some more. She fell in with his mood, her eyes were gay again, and they both realized that dancing was distinctly worth while. "Where did your legs get all this education?" she asked. "I've always thought of the newspaper business as pretty stern."

"College man, I was—Class of 1897. Yes, and you certainly make good in skirts. That outfit is a very pleasing vista."

It was green and voluminous with her young shoulders graceful above it and silver slippers below. She said, "I'll remember that—the question is, will you?" Blue eyes shining, she threw back her head to smile at him—and it struck Bill Jay with sudden and memorable force that he had been as mistaken as possible to think of her as just an amusing adolescent. Men had been shot for smaller mistakes! "Hey," she said, "to get that look in your eyes I'd wear hoops. Watch it, Bill, you nearly saw me that time." He tightened his arm round her waist and the casual dance music had been strangely enlivened, had become something that must be prolonged.

It was prolonged through several dances. They weren't usually so quiet but being quiet seemed appropriate now, and both of them were thoroughly aware of his arm around her. After a while they stopped and went into the house, aimlessly, and looked at each other in bright light. A long, surprised look. Something had changed.

Bill was thinking hard, and not clearly, about this development. Then he came to—was suddenly and sharply aware of the big drawing room with its variegated costumes, its rustle of talk, its air of wealth and pride in an agonized world. What had startled him was two men talking together at one end of the room. One of them was Lynn Scovil—handsome, magnetic, a figure for the rotogravures. Scovil was familiar enough—but the other man! He stood there talking casually with Scovil, taller than Scovil, rather striking in a dinner jacket, blond and erect, even military.

Bill's mind focused. He had seen that man. Binoculars had brought that face close to his—yesterday, toward noon—from the ski run. He had been talking to Carl Booker.

Bill turned to Connie, a question on his lips, but he didn't ask for it. For Connie was crumpling before his eyes. She had been gay, pliant, warm—and now, as he watched, she grew tense, her eyes went hard, her cheeks turned white and then slowly carmine. "Oh, my God!" she whispered. "Has Gail seen her?"

He followed her gaze to a striking blonde in a black dress, whom his reporter's memory identified as Mathilde Winkler. What did he know about her? Not much. Only that she belonged to the arrogantly rich who were such excellent copy for the newspaper business, that she was even more habituated than Scovil to the rotogravure sections. No, he knew one thing more—that from time to time her name had been linked with Scovil's. He understood Connie's agitation. Connie knew. So now Bill knew.

"Steady!" he said, taking her arm.

"How could he! How did he dare!" Her voice was painful and her shocked eyes met his. "I feel sick. I can't stay here. Let's get out." He looked about uncertainly but she shook his arm. "I mean it. Bill. Let's go—now."

That distress had to be heeded. "All right," he said, "come on." They went out through the drawing room, across the terrace, down to Gail's car. Inside it, she hid her face against his arm for a moment, then sat up. "Sorry. I'm all right. I mean I will be. But it will kill Gail." She struck a fist against the cushion. "I'm running out on her. She'll just have to take it." She contrived a small laugh that touched him deeply. "Anyway, that proves it. Champagne isn't my drink. Let's go somewhere and find a beer."

He drove away, and for the moment Connie would have to struggle with it alone. For here was something to be figured out. He touched his chin and the soreness assured him that he had indeed been knocked down yesterday by a thug in the employ of Camp Ryegate. He was seeing other thugs who were out of place in Windham, trucks stopping in darkness off the highway, Carl Booker, the proprietor of Camp Ryegate, meeting a racketeer in a roadside tavern. It was a set of very odd glimpses, very odd indeed for the town of Windham, glimpses of the sinister network of the underworld. Windham had no underworld.

Yes. And some odd, unexplained bypath leading out from it to a millionaire's estate—unexplained but badly needing explanation. For this handsome man in Scovil's drawing room had been at Camp Ryegate, in conversation with Carl Booker. And Carl Booker met racketeers in taverns and it was quite possible that Carl Booker helped them get away when they were hot, by means of trucks parked off the road at midnight. The unidentified stranger was a link between Carl Booker and Lynn Scovil. Could he also be a link between Lynn Scovil and the underworld?

Erich Köchlin waited till Mathilde Winkler moved away from a group she had been with, then fell into step with her and took her outside the house. "I must know more about Scovil," he said.

She stirred uncomfortably, the chiffon dress sibilant at her knees, and it was clear that she was afraid of him. So much the better; he might find that state of mind useful. "What about it?" she asked.

"I'm surprised that such a man has been allowed to know so much."

"Use has been found for men like him step by step, beginning with the peace movements," she said earnestly. "He has a large following. He is an excellent agitator. He is in contact with a great many important people and organizations."

"I know the type. The rich men who know how valuable peace is and can tell others. He was your personal convert, *Fräulein*?"

"What if he was?" For the first time there was opposition in her voice. "We do what we can. In the end it has got me—exactly nothing."

He nodded, adding that flare of bitterness to Abigail Armstrong's admission on Wednesday night and to Scovil's calling her his fiancée. He had the story in full. "I wonder," he went on. "The man has a monstrous ego—he loves the limelight—it would be very dangerous if he were given authority."

She said urgently, "You must not be prejudiced. He is a brilliant man—he is very valuable. He likes to posture, yes, he knows his own worth, he is—" her voice was tired—"too readily absorbed in a pretty figure. But you are wrong if you suspect his loyalty."

She was pleading with him, a man she was afraid of, on behalf of a lover, or a former lover. "Of course I suspect him," he said, "it is my duty to suspect you too, *Gräfin*. You see, the shocking failures over here—they are very suggestive."

"Must it all be our fault? Can't you allow for the Americans—"

"Easily. They might be buying betrayal from one of us. Perhaps from you? That is a distressing thought—so, perhaps from Scovil?"

She was disturbed and moved nearer to lay a soft hand on his arm. "He does not know enough! I tell you he is—I know—he would not—"

"You mean that so long as there is perfume on your ear lobes he can be relied on. I don't doubt it. It isn't his loyalty I suspect. I suggest instead that

his intelligence may not be trustworthy. Both of us must be careful what we confide to a fool."

She was standing so close to him that the perfume he had mentioned was in his nostrils and he wondered whether she would try to use on him the weapons that had certainly done the Company much service. She said, "He is not a fool. Make sure not to be one yourself, Herr Köchlin," and went away. He watched her cross into the light, wrought and decked for the pleasure of any eye. Unquestionably she had a cold and effective intelligence, but he wondered if the methodical Company might not also list her on a file card under a special heading: Seduction. Well, he had made it likely that, through fear of him, she would be wary of Scovil for a while. He intended to widen and deepen that distrust.

Suddenly he relaxed, exhaling a long sigh of relief. Up to now things had gone well; yesterday and today had done something to repair his blunders; and for the moment he was dealing the cards.

He went back to the house. Strangers spoke pleasantly to him, he watched pretty women dancing, he heard fragments of trivial conversation. Such a scene was incredible! An evening of pleasure without strain, men who were under no pressure, women whose gaiety was unforced, music and laughter and a darkness that had no menace in it—it was from a world that was going down forever. He turned into another room and Abigail Armstrong was coming out of it. Behind her he saw Scovil's angry face and her own cheeks were flying a high anger. He turned his back on Scovil and caught up with her. The anger in her eyes made a dark flash—and he had seen no emotion that was not becoming to her. It was to be said of Scovil that he attached to himself the most unbelievably pretty women.

"I advise a slower pace, Mrs. Armstrong," he said. "We should enter the drawing room, not explode into it."

He had intercepted her rage at Scovil—whose cause he was willing to guess—and she wanted nothing whatever to do with him but did walk more slowly. Laughter and talk eddied round them in the drawing room and he took two glasses of champagne from a waiter's tray and held one out to her. She accepted it, her cheeks brilliant, her eyes more brilliant—tall and slender, a woman electrically alive. In competition with her Mathilde Winkler's blatancies would be worthless.

"Drink it," he said equably. "Champagne is the right wine for any mood."

She held the glass to her lips, sipped, looked at him, and her eyes changed. "Good!" he said. "There was an even chance you would throw it in the fireplace."

"Much more than an even chance." She began to relax, if not to smile. "You take the long chances, don't you, Mr. Page? . . . In borrowed clothes."

"Must we always make a point of my clothes? They will do to dance in."

He took her to the terrace and an unreal quality had got into an evening that so far had been all too real. Again he was immersed in the unpredictable. For no one could have foretold that, on his mission, surrounded by such hazards, on his way to a violent ending, he would be dancing with any woman and especially with Gail Armstrong. At first she was constrained, a tension from her angry scene with Scovil lasting on, but darkness and music wrought on her till she was tranquil in his arms. They did not talk, they stayed at the far end of the terrace where the music was distant and subdued, and regret awoke in Erich Köchlin. Regret that the vileness of the *Nachrichtendienst* could tarnish such loveliness—and that there could be no help for it in him, that he could do nothing whatever about it. Regret that, having met her for a fortunate moment on his way, he must leave loveliness behind—and this also was fixed forever, he could do nothing about it.

The music stopped and he got more champagne. They drank it, still unwilling to talk, and when the music began again they danced, still at the far end of the terrace. Champagne or music or just recovery from shock, she was dancing more eagerly. Scovil stood in the door. Köchlin smiled at him, tightened his arm, and Scovil went away. Whether or not she had seen him, she responded to the pressure of Köchlin's arm. The music had a slow, sweet melancholy.

Without thinking, he murmured, "*Verweile doch, du bist so schön*."

Gail Armstrong said, "Your German is much better than your French. But that is Faust's prayer to the passing moment—'Linger awhile, you are so fair.' . . . You say charming things, Mr. Page."

"It's a charming moment, Mrs. Armstrong."

She walked out of his arms but put a hand under one of them and led him off the terrace to the wide lawn. Shadows enclosed them, the music dimmed behind them, and he wished that the moment could linger for a while. But "The dew," he said. "You'll ruin your slippers."

"They don't matter. . . . You're an extraordinary person. You have a feeling for things, or else you're dangerously skillful with women. That was very deft first aid. I'm all right now."

He was aware of the pressure of her fingers. They went on across the dark lawn which, for his taste, could not be too wide. He did not know where they were going and she seemed not to, either, for when they came out through shrubbery to a parking place beside the garage, she exclaimed in surprise, stopping short. Then she said, "We might as well find my car—I turned it over to a chauffeur." But they couldn't find it and she decided, "Probably Connie and Bill have gone home. Well, Lynn has more cars than you would readily believe." She found one, an enormous coupé, and they got in.

Sitting beside her, he saw keys in the lock and was recalled to his job. The job could wait!—it had nothing to do with warm darkness and distant music and a beautiful woman. "You stumble into my most intimate moments," she said quietly. "I was running away from him, the other night. I was running toward him tonight. And then, with no warning, with the giddiest and most girlish ideas rioting in my mind, to meet that—"

"That international tart."

"I don't need to spell it out for you, do I? Well, it was a bad shock. You made the promptest and most soothing entrance, Mr. Page."

"Like the Red Cross." He found himself deeply concerned, saying with the greatest earnestness, "There can be no question of competition. She's obvious, blatant, futile. You need only—"

"You see, I was confident enough to believe just that. But—there she was." Her voice broke; she bent over, her hair dark against her dress, and sobbed. He touched her arm. She sobbed again, then straightened up. "One is not supposed to cry—especially one must not be seen crying. The part calls for me to be proudly indifferent. Any movie would make it a drawing-room farce, where they say the gayest things."

"Hush!" he said. "He isn't worth a joke, still less a sob."

"You had certainly better say so." She lay back in the corner, swinging her legs up under her in the seat, and said thoughtfully, "I wonder how it is that I can say these things to you. It isn't sensible; it isn't even decent. You are the most ambiguous person—and I flirt with you, I tell you my heartthrobs, I act as if I had known you for years and years, as if we were old friends. You had better not be the adventurer you seem to be."

A good deal worse than an adventurer. The word struck through the illusion to the tremendousness that separated them, unspoken and unspeakable. At the end of the seat her face was a light blur in the darkness, there was the lightness of her dress, of her uncovered knees. And there was a blackness much deeper than the dark. He was suddenly tired, rebellious, disgusted with the job he had to do.

"Say we get along well under the stars," he said lightly. "Or say it was a persuasive music on the terrace. Or—we've drunk two glasses of champagne."

"Starlight—music—champagne. They hardly seem adequate."

There was a willful provocation in her voice, and he understood that a strong reaction against Lynn Scovil had become an invitation to him. He said, unsteadily, "What perfume do you wear?"

"It's apple blossom. Why?"

"It's a damned sight more unsettling than another one I've smelled tonight."

"Yes?" She was expectant in the darkness, and he felt himself blushing with humiliation, wondering if it would be possible to respect himself again. At last she said, serenely but with an overtone of scorn in her voice, "I'm certainly not going back to the party. You can drive me home."

There was relief in that. But he found himself driving slowly, pointedly aware of another night when the road had flowed toward them in the headlights. She sat close to him, her shoulder touching his sometimes, talking quietly. "You haven't seen my house. I'm the widow of Windham. I sell books and skirts and underwear to college girls." And, "It must be the saleswoman in me that makes those remarks about your clothes—I apologize." And, "Are you thinking that we drive together in the most outrageous circumstances?"

"It was how far on Wednesday? Eighty miles?" he said. "I wish we had that much ahead of us tonight."

"Well," she remarked, "there's no reason to hurry."

But they came to town too soon and she directed him to a white house set back among elms. She called "Connie!" going in, switched on a light, and said, "Lynn has probably told you that Connie is his daughter. She quarreled with him and came to live with me." But the girl was not there and

they went into a big room lined with bookshelves and furnished with deep chairs.

"This is where I lead the drab life of toil Lynn wants to save me from," she said. "Skirts and underwear across the hall. Are my eyes red? Do I look like a woman who has had a mortal insult?"

"I think I'm not a dependable witness on how you look."

"Then I'd better assume there are visible damages."

She went upstairs, leaving him alone in the bookshop badly confused with images of dark eyes and dark hair, smooth arms, a bewildering dress, more bewildering smile and voice. He looked round the room—and came to himself. For here was a telephone. A telephone which neither Scovil nor Mathilde nor any servant of Scovil's was watching. There was some risk—no, no risk. He picked up the telephone, softly asked for the telegraph company, waited impatiently, and, getting it, spoke an address and swiftly composed a message.

He hung up as soon as possible, and turned round swiftly. No one was there, no one had heard, the thing was done! Satisfaction flamed in him. This was the finest room in the world.

She was coming downstairs. She was humming—and when she came through the door the finest room in the world was suddenly compelling, overwhelming, amazing. There had been too much starlight or something else, there was too intolerable an irony. He said, "What is it you're singing?" She stopped short, a warm pink coming into her cheeks.

"It was 'Faust,'" he said, not at all clearly. "It was 'Linger, O moment, thou art so fair.'"

Her eyes met his. "And," she said, no more clearly, "your sense of propriety was much too conventional back there. Your host's house and his fiancée . . ."

So when he spoke again, his lips were against her hair. "I'm going away tomorrow. I won't see you again." She raised her face and he kissed her.

They stood away from each other. "That's twice," he said with the most labored slowness. "There had better not be a third time. If there should be—all hell would be brought down on us."

She nodded. She wasn't pink now but pale. "Yes, there had better be no third time. . . . That needn't keep us from remembering the other two." She sat down, making a careful modesty of her skirt, running a restorative hand

through her hair, her dark eyes very grave. “Still, we can believe, now, that we really are old friends. We can talk like old friends till it’s time for you to go back.”

He smiled, “Or till Scovil comes for us. Be sure he’ll come for one of us. For you. Or for me.”

Her eyes were darker still. “If he comes for me, it will be too late.”

In Washington, at four A.M., in a room in the United States Army building, a telegram that had been relayed through two addresses, which were carefully designed to suggest nothing about the army, was delivered to a sleepy sergeant. The sergeant took it to a lieutenant in the next room. The lieutenant opened it and read it, then telephoned to a major and kept the phone ringing till a protesting voice answered. He read the wire to the major, who said, “All right,” hung up, and then put through a call to a brigadier general. He got the general after some time, and said, “I’ve heard from Garrett. He got through. He says he’s got in touch with something and will go to Detroit tomorrow. He’s not in Detroit. He’s in Massachusetts.”

“Massachusetts!” The general swore heartily, piously, even desperately. He went on swearing. The major listened with heartfelt admiration.

Chapter Five

It was Köchlin's disappearance from the party that impelled Lynn Scovil to lead from strength. When Scovil protested such recklessness, Köchlin had said blandly, "I rather expected you to come for me—Mrs. Armstrong asked me to take her home." Scovil curbed his anger but early on Saturday morning he went to Mathilde's room and got her to agree that they must tell Köchlin the truth—the truth so far as Mathilde knew it. So at breakfast they listened noncommittally to his directions about getting him to a plane for Detroit. A few minutes later, on the sunny terrace, Scovil began the contest of wills which would make Köchlin a good deal more amenable.

"I'm afraid you'll have to change your plans," he said. "Last night a truck brought word that von Weitbrecht disappeared from Detroit on Monday. He has not yet let anyone know where he is. You could not possibly get in touch with him. There is nothing for you to do but stay here till he is located."

Köchlin's cold rage terrified Mathilde but Scovil was easy in the knowledge that he held higher cards. Köchlin accepted von Weitbrecht's disappearance trustingly enough but began to issue peremptory orders. He made Mathilde get the Importing Company on the telephone—which was reckless, since Scovil was to communicate with it only by way of Springfield or Camp Ryegate. But headquarters could tell him nothing about von Weitbrecht, was in fact ready to believe he had been captured. Then, in a controlled but venomous passion, Köchlin set about arranging duties for Scovil and Mathilde. They would set in motion every means they had of getting information. They would bring him at once everything they had that bore on von Weitbrecht. He seemed to think of them as little more than messengers and file clerks.

"It's unfortunate that you disrupted everything by arriving too late," Scovil said presently, with a pointed courtesy intended to show Köchlin that he was not afraid and would not be subordinate. "And you can hardly blame us because von Weitbrecht has had the wisdom to go underground. You see, your only chance to make contact with him is through us. It would be sensible to co-operate with us pleasantly, instead of threatening us."

"I merely tell you to find him for me," Köchlin said coldly. "If you don't, it will not be I who makes the threats."

Scovil nodded. “I know what is to be done. And take care not to repeat your mistake of last night. Be so good as to stay on this estate.”

Köchlin’s eyes glinted. “Be so good as to understand that my actions don’t come within your authority. You are not even to be curious about them.”

Scovil negligently exposed his ace for a moment. “You are certainly free to start for Detroit at any time. How will you find von Weitbrecht?”

He drove Mathilde away in an automobile, first telephoning to Booker. Before they were off the grounds she was reprimanding him. “Are you mad, Lynn? You must not risk antagonizing him. We must keep his support at any cost. He can destroy us.” She shuddered. “I hate all Prussians! He is as cold as ice. He has no humanity. He is—oh, he has no blood in him, he is as deadly as a snake.”

“I’ve never seen you terrified before. And it’s absurd.”

“But—” Her white hands were flung out. “We are half-crippled, Lynn. We are on the verge of complete failure. We must not fight one another.”

“He is certainly right in one way,” Scovil said contemptuously. “There are a lot of fools in the organization. There have been bad mistakes. There will certainly be worse ones if fools are continued in power.” Then, peremptorily, “The time has come when I must know why Köchlin was sent over. What does he want of von Weitbrecht? What is this matter of September first?”

He did not have to argue; she accepted that necessity as part of the emergency. “I’m not allowed to know everything. He was sent in to inspect and ratify von Weitbrecht’s plans. For all I know, to take his place, too.”

“Surely I’ve been told everything that bears on the peace offensive.”

“It isn’t that. . . . Our first efforts to make labor trouble were a grotesque failure. You’ve heard Köchlin—that’s what they think of them overseas. Von Weitbrecht has worked out plans that cannot be allowed to fail. On September first the labor offensive will begin. It’s Labor Day. All over the country. Everything that can be done.”

Thus simply he became an insider—from now on there would be no shaking him off. But he must learn the whole plan. Strikes in the most valuable places; riots, doubtless, probably formidable sabotage—and all keyed in with his own job, the drive for peace. They meant business at last.

"That is why Tuesday was so terrible," Mathilde added. "Only von Weitbrecht can do the job. He is responsible for everything. Success or failure."

"Then," Scovil said calmly, "you will have to make him tell us." Mathilde stared at him in bewilderment, and he said, "But of course! He has been here since Tuesday night—he came on a truck. Booker has been hiding him." Mathilde turned white and instantly said, "You must take him to Köchlin at once! You have been insane to keep them apart so long. You may have ruined everything."

"What if von Weitbrecht will not see him?" he asked quietly. He would show her his ace but determined not to let her know its full strength. "Von Weitbrecht may not be one of the fools but he is a dangerous coward. The Detroit raid has reduced him to panic. He is in a state of collapse—pure jelly. He refuses to see Köchlin—he is even more terrified of him than you are. And I must say it would be fatal to bring them together while von Weitbrecht is still—unstrung." Deliberately he played on her fear. "If Köchlin found the kingpin so helpless, he would make mincemeat of us all. . . . And that's the dilemma I have been in ever since Köchlin arrived."

Mathilde's previous alarm had been insignificant compared with this. She was frozen with terror and despair, her face was pinched and white, she said nothing at all while he drove by back roads to the clearing at the bottom of Booker's ski tow. Booker had brought von Weitbrecht to the log cabin there. Properly disciplined, Booker withdrew and they were alone with a key man in conspiracy who might have been formidable once but was only a wreck now.

Von Weitbrecht's hands still trembled uncontrollably, his voice was still a croak, his cheeks were sunken and the dueling scar stood out black. At sight of Mathilde he broke into rapid German, hysterically defending himself and describing the dangers he had barely escaped. . . . Scovil had heard it all before, but permitted it to go on till Mathilde could see in full the disgusting spectacle of a man whose nerve had been broken. Mathilde repeatedly insisted that he must see Köchlin—she commanded, she pleaded, she advised. But she only made von Weitbrecht more agitated—he was practically sobbing—and Scovil broke in.

"You certainly need more time to recover from the shocks you have had," he said. Von Weitbrecht nodded gratefully. "But unfortunately we have a Prussian to deal with. And your personal—illness—cannot be permitted to interfere with things. Pieces must be picked up, the organization must be

patched, there are orders to be given, the arrangements must go forward. You will have to act through me."

There was a scared protest in Mathilde's face and von Weitbrecht exploded, "But you are totally ignorant—you know nothing."

"Exactly—you will simply have to use me as an instrument, we will have to be a team. You will teach me while I act for you."

Mathilde said "No!" in pure horror and von Weitbrecht was so shocked that he recovered some authority. "It is preposterous! I can talk only to Köchlin."

"So you refuse to talk to him—and time is running out. Think, man! Who can save you? You are counted on to succeed this time, a vast plan pivots on you—and you are resting on a mountaintop while the efforts of everyone come to nothing. You must act—and you can't. You can act only through me."

He had to shout them down repeatedly. He would emerge from this as the man who had mastered an emergency, and from now on the very highest would have to reckon with him. But he could make no headway against von Weitbrecht's terror. Mathilde said, "Don't be a reckless fool, Lynn." Von Weitbrecht kept saying, "Only a day or two more—I will be all right." Scovil steadily pointed out the fatal passage of time and Köchlin's cyclonic impatience. Von Weitbrecht only grew more hysterical, till at last he was actually screaming.

"There is only to hold Köchlin off a day or two! When I am healthy—when I can think clearly enough to meet him!" Actually, tears slid out on his cheeks. His voice got wild. "Don't press me too hard. If I cannot obey my orders—anyway I can avoid betraying them!" Suddenly an automatic pistol appeared in his hands. Mathilde gasped and there was no other sound. But von Weitbrecht intended far otherwise than they thought. "You can go on pressing me to violate my orders. Or you can bring Köchlin here. I will not be alive—I will kill myself—"

"Stop crying," Scovil said, disgusted. "Go back to your mountain view and get hold of yourself. We'll see you again—and try to look more like a man."

He was furious not to have achieved his purpose and determined to keep forcing the pressure till he could. Mathilde followed him outside. "You see the nerve of our superiors," he said. "And you see why we can't let Köchlin see him."

"It would be fatal." Her voice was husky with despair. "Lynn, this is beyond belief terrible. I see no way out. We are lost—we are destroyed."

"Not if a man takes charge."

She was fighting a dozen different fears, and quite clearly he had not convinced her. But if her persuasion and authority were added to his, von Weitbrecht would accept him. He thought comfortably that there was a way of convincing Mathilde.

Booker came up—he had been with some workmen across the clearing. "Take him back to the cabin," Scovil said, "and do your best to pump some nerve into him." Booker nodded but his face showed the mark of labored thinking.

"This Erich Köchlin," Booker said, "you still believe his story?"

Scovil said sharply, "Don't begin that again, Carl."

But Booker was dogged. "I tell you, I have seen him somewhere before. I do not believe in him. He is an American."

Scovil swore. "Is nobody going to keep his head? Must everybody go stark crazy because a few fools have been arrested? You have been scared into seeing ghosts."

Booker was always sullen under reproof and his face grew brutal. "Who will be the fool if he turns out to be an American? You have swallowed the bait whole. Is it by chance he comes straight to my camp? Is it by chance he comes two days after von Weitbrecht gets here? I tell you, he is from the FBI."

"He would give his soul to know where von Weitbrecht is. It was not even chance that brought him to the camp—it was a suggestion by Mrs. Armstrong. As a matter of fact, it was luck—our luck—our very good luck."

"There is nothing suspicious about him, Carl," Mathilde said. "We had received the most detailed instructions long before he came. When he got here, he knew every detail. Headquarters tested him and he detected the test at once."

"Maybe." The cruelty in his eyes got plainer. "And still, if he is all right, still he comes to do—what? To spy on us. Who spies on us? For what reason? Are we not trusted to do our business as we are ordered to? Who would be set to report on us? Suppose he belongs to the Gestapo?"

There was a release of tension—Mathilde laughed spontaneously, even with enjoyment. But her laughter made Booker fierce. "If there is a chance I am right, can we take the chance? All right, he is an American—so we will be in jail tomorrow, next day, next week. All right, he is of the Gestapo—so he will report we have bungled and they will cast us off—maybe abandon us to the Americans. . . . Let me get rid of him! He can go for a ride with me tonight. Or I will take him for a friendly stroll in the woods. There is no other way to be safe."

You had to handle inferior men the way Köchlin did—brutally. "We will do the thinking and you will do as we tell you," Scovil said. He went on abusing him while Booker's face got more violent and rebellious—but in the end Booker submitted. . . . Scovil drove away with Mathilde, his mind racing. Cowards and fools on the one hand, the implacable obstacle of Köchlin on the other—he would have to force the issue. But unquestionably the situation was shaping to his advantage.

"It is permitted to approach the Embassy only through New York," Mathilde said. "Of course, I must let New York know at once about von Weitbrecht."

"No," he said. "You must let no one know. You must leave him to me."

He stopped the car and slid an arm round her shoulders. She responded to the caress instantly and warmly. That was the way to convince Mathilde. And the expression of doubt, even of inattention, in her eyes would not last long.

"We call them broomstick skirts," Connie stubbornly repeated. "They are the exact opposite of pants—yards and yards billowing like the Floradora girls." She held out yards and yards in each hand. "I put it on so that you can just know I wear it."

"Coming back to the handsome stranger," Bill Jay insisted.

"If you hadn't forced your unwelcome attentions on me all evening, I might have got to dance with him. Under the spell of my loveliness he would have confessed everything." She didn't like the new phase of Bill Jay—the tireless newspaperman going into everything, thinking fast and furiously, and inventing crazy ideas. The whole evening had been a bad taste in the mind and she didn't want to remember any part of it. Till at last she

said, “If you want to know, you don’t cross-examine me or the post mistress —you ask Gail.”

That was supposed to stop him but apparently the tireless newspaperman was pure gall and presently they were in the bookshop, where Gail was doing accounts—or pretending to in a pinkly abstracted daze—and Bill was forthrightly asking her what she knew about Mr. John Page. Connie noted with much interest, and at a guess Bill didn’t see, that Gail was on her guard at once. With a haughty lack of interest, Gail didn’t know much about him; he was a friend of Lynn’s; she had danced with him and he had brought her home. (Oh? Oh! Interesting, my dear Watson!) Bill went on asking questions —who was he? Where was he from? What was his business?—and paid no attention to the signs of Gail’s rising indignation. In fact he presently had her showing signs of apprehension instead, and he hit the jack pot when he remarked that he’d seen Mr. Page at Camp Ryegate, which he was coming to think of as a hangout of low characters.

If Bill didn’t know, Connie certainly knew, that Gail’s prompt blush and confused eyes meant something very personal indeed. But she wasn’t prepared for any such revelation as followed, when, after being first haughty and then defiant, Gail said, “Well, I took him to Camp Ryegate.” Bill said, “Oh?” with extreme politeness, though Connie thought of a number of other things to say. Finally Gail said, looking as if she had been caught in public sin, “I picked him up.”

That certainly had impact, and Gail was an exceedingly embarrassed young woman, and her laughter was far from convincing. “He went West this morning,” she said, “so you might as well know. Wednesday night at Manchester there was another one of those quarrels that Lynn and I substitute for a love affair. I left the dance and came home. On the way, I picked up John Page.” Slowly and stubbornly, “Yes, I picked him up. I didn’t know he knew Lynn. But if he was at Camp Ryegate, it was because I took him there. It sounds crazy? All right, it was crazy.”

Bill had no sympathy to spare for embarrassment. “I won’t try to run your morals. But if this goes on, someday you’ll make a pick-up in the criminal classes.”

Connie said hotly, “Anybody Gail picks up is practically in holy orders. She doesn’t spend her time necking the way we do, I wish to God.”

But she knew by the speed with which Bill got out of there that he had suddenly had an idea, probably crackbrained but certainly hot. Five minutes later he telephoned her. “Get a hot dog or a piece of steak to fry and we’ll go

picnicking tonight. I'm off to Springfield for the afternoon." So she had the extraordinary behavior of Gail to deal with, who was vexed and alarmed and extremely inquisitive. She wasn't going to say anything—"You ask Bill. It's his guessing game. I don't try to understand the newspaper business, I'm fully occupied trying to marry into it." And it stood out that Bill's reference to the criminal classes kept bothering Gail, and she only made Gail mad when she said, "This is Bill's story—I don't even take notes." But if she ever made it her story, she could tell right now that, Wednesday night or last night—gosh, maybe both!—there had been more between Gail and the handsome stranger than Gail was telling anyone.

She tried to turn the questions away by talking about her father but didn't have enough courage to mention Mathilde Winkler. She only made Gail angrier and finally Gail put an end to the bickering by going away. Connie watched her drive off in the coupé, and hoped she was going to Pinnacle Manor, and hoped she would come back with a blond scalp sewed to her leggings, but knew she wouldn't . . . Oh, a happy afternoon for everyone. And it turned muggy and breathless before Bill got back, and Connie had worked up a sizable grouch about everything, including Bill.

They picked up buns, hamburger, a ghastly cake, and some cans of beer and, sure enough, they were going to have a picnic—off in the hills. About all that she could say in favor of it was that the hills were cooler than town. Bill had a boy scout's regard for the rules and poured dirt over the fire as soon as they had finished eating, so that twilight and the mosquitoes arrived together. She curled her bare legs under the skirt. Slacks would have been a lot better and, as feminine allure, the skirt was wasted. The big oaf sat twenty-five feet away from her and made a remark about once in fifteen minutes, usually in monosyllable and always with no reference whatever to her. Well, dear, some people like to look at the stars. She looked at the stars. She also looked at the romantic darkness of the hills. Who said romantic? Hour by hour a picnic with the tireless newspaperman got duller.

She was filling a paper cup with beer when a sudden revulsion hit her and she poured the whole can out on the ground. "The beer period of this romance is over," she announced. "From now on you undermine my virtue with raspberry pop or not at all." She threw the can into the underbrush and wanted to throw Bill after it. "It would be Gail's reputation you get concerned about! Never a thought about my good name blasted by late hours in the woods with only mosquitoes looking on."

"Speaking of your father," he said suddenly, "is it your idea he would have any dealings with Public Enemy, well, say Number Ten or maybe

Number Five?"

Surprised, Connie rolled over on her stomach in the dark, propping her chin in her hands. "Your story is he'd do anything for a headline but nobody should take him seriously. My story—" she thought for a moment—"my story is he ought to be taken with the greatest seriousness. He wants to be God—he really does, Bill. But he'd compromise on being Commissar or *Gauleiter* or anything that sounded big."

When he lit a cigarette she saw that his face was curiously intent. "This John Page," he said irrelevantly. "I said movie actor, but does it strike you that German war poster would come even closer? Nordic and military. Remember the headlines about the brave Nazi flyer escaping from Canada? Meet Mr. John Page."

At last the evening was getting to be fun! She sat up, shrieking with laughter. "Boy! When you go back to work for the *Globe*, you take your plot book with you. Alexander Dumas Jay, pinch-hitting for the guy who draws Superman. Now I won't worry about your keeping me in the style I'm accustomed to. When the phone rings, that's Hollywood calling. And can Hollywood pick them!"

"All right," he said wearily. "I went to Springfield. I read all the papers. I found out some things. So I got the *Globe* office on the phone and learned some more. Then I phoned some upcountry correspondents. Hollywood wrote the script, all right, but there it is."

"No. Hollywood would have married him to Gail on the way south."

"Oberleutnant Friedrich Römer. He unloaded off a train at Glen Nevis, Ontario, Monday night. Among places he could have got to on Tuesday is Cornwall, Ontario, and by the quaintest coincidence there is a local rumor that the border patrol failed to hit someone they shot at Tuesday night. So maybe it was the guy they missed who burglarized a place north of Malone, New York, that same night. Also our correspondent says the New York state cops were looking for a stolen car all day Wednesday and it crossed the Champlain Bridge that evening. Telephone call to Rutland by our man Jay establishes the fact that the aforesaid car was found abandoned two miles north of Manchester, Vermont. That night Mrs. Armstrong made her Camp Ryegate pick-up at Manchester."

She hugged her knees in ecstasy. "So Gail's hero was the dastard who stole the car, who was the thug who did a burglary at—honestly, is there a town called Malone?—so the script says he must be the man who didn't get hit, so clearly he's the one who crossed from Cornwall, and therefore he

surely is the one who got off the train, and it works out that Gail gets pink when you talk about aviation! This year's Oscar is yours and no competition. But, talented as you may be, and our hats are off to you, you're nothing at all compared to Mr. Page. What a man all this makes him!"

"Who is it that isn't taking what seriously enough?" he asked.

He certainly was. He kept asking questions. If Page was a Nazi, who knew he was? Why had he headed toward Windham? Why had he wanted to go to Camp Ryegate? And the more Bill built up his fairy story, the more earnestly he believed it.

"You certainly grow a big crop from one lone fact. Gail made a pick-up —that's our fact. But it's a fact in morals, not war. Look, stupid, if the lamb is a Nazi, he's wanted. Just stroll up to Frank Murray and tell him."

Frank Murray was chief of Windham's four policemen.

Bill said, "When I think hard, I decide that anybody interested in a Nazi would buy Frank Murray."

"Close-up: the corrupt constabulary. Well, telephone the FBI."

"I think I'll do just that, Toots. I mean, Miss Scovil."

"Just call me darling. And tramp, tramp! Here come the marines."

"Who do the marines find involved?" he said, with intense exasperation. "Mrs. Abigail Heath Armstrong for one. And you, darling Constance darling."

Connie got up, standing on one foot to scratch a shin. "I wonder why DeMille insisted on mosquitoes. I see, Bill, I get it now. The Camp Ryegate Mystery hinges on honest jealousy. Well, I was boasting—Carl Booker has never made a single pass at me. You've got the field all to yourself—no competition, no hurry, and all summer long to win my heart. Take it up with Edgar Hoover by letter."

There was a very promising moment for Bill had been laughed at too much, and he suddenly grabbed her shoulders. "Get it into that yellow head," he said harshly, "that there are unpleasant persons and they don't send cards before daring to come into the life of the millionaire's little girl. I showed you a thug getting into a truck—have I got to throw you under the wheels? Did I sneak upstate and leave a stolen car at Manchester to hand you a laugh at my droll notions? Did Hollywood plant this guy at a ski tow? Did I convey him to Pinnacle Manor for fun?"

He still had her shoulders and her face was close to his, attractively close she would have said. But Bill just dropped her. "Damn!" she said, "you write swell scenes but you certainly don't act them out." She picked up the haversack. "Let's go home and fool the mosquitoes. After all this creative activity, you must be pretty tired."

He was looking off across the hills. In the faint light of a late moon you could see Taylor Mountain. "I could have been wrong," he said regretfully. "Last night, driving back, I thought I saw a light in that cabin on top of the mountain. I've been watching all this evening and there hasn't been one."

"You don't leave your women a single illusion, do you? I thought maybe you thought it was nice to be with me. What would the light in the cabin be for? If DeMille wants this guy picked up by an airplane, there's a beacon on Greylock."

Far off in time and space there had once been the orderly, habitual existence of a man named James Garrett, a metallurgist, a technician in the production of alloys. James Garrett had an office in Toledo, a shack and a gas boat on Georgian Bay; he saw his friends at clubs, played games keenly, went dancing with pretty girls. In August, 1941, in the Berkshire Hills, the life of James Garrett was inconceivable.

More than a year ago James Garrett had gone to Washington, put his training at the service of the Government, and been commissioned a captain in the Ordnance Corps. But he had worked for Ordnance only a few months. His two degrees from German technical institutes and his six years in Germany had found a wider usefulness. G2 had begun to consult him about German metallurgical processes, and had gone on to find other uses for him, and for six months he had worked for G2 exclusively.

When the British took Erich Köchlin from the Bermuda Clipper, they had notified G2, and G2 had seen a faint but stimulating chance to fill some vital gaps in its knowledge—and Garrett had been projected into a service for which he had no training and was not ready to believe he had a gift. It had taken him four frantic days in Washington to master the information assembled for him; it was to have taken him only two days in Halifax to collate with it what the Canadians had learned from their captured spy. But it had taken him five days. So the delicately poised timetable was three days out of kilter when, dressed in a flyer's uniform, he had been put on the train,

with arrangements made for the newspapers to play up his escape, the moment it should be sure he had been able to escape plausibly.

But, he thought, alone in his bedroom at Scovil's house, but, by God!, he had not won through water and gunfire and pursuit in order to go wrong because his schedule and G2's had gone wrong. His job had been desperate and all but hopeless to begin with—it was only a little more so now that something, which he would find out about sometime if he lived, had precipitated that Detroit raid earlier than had been planned. It was still up to him to get von Weitbrecht. If the disappearance of the kingpin was awkward for James Garrett, remember it was awkward also for G2 and for others who had done their best to incriminate him—the secret service, the FBI. And the chapter of accidents that had brought Captain Garrett of Ordnance out hundreds of miles from his assignment, late, baffled, impotent, and more than a little absurd—that chapter of accidents had also put him in the best position of all to close in on the lost kingpin. He could get to von Weitbrecht. If he could ride the whirlwind, walk his tightrope above the gorge, and stay alive. The job was more important now than ever before.

Meanwhile he had learned much that would astonish and delight G2 about the Importing Company, Mathilde, the truck line, and the peace offensive. He had a phenomenal memory but needed to see things in order to memorize them. So he had spent the afternoon writing notes and photographing them on his mind. Now he tore them up, burned them in the fireplace, and ground the charred bits to powder with his heel. He could reproduce them entire when he got through—if he got through! He grinned at the telephone. Ten minutes of his conversation would make glad many hearts in Washington. Too bad that it was altogether impossible.

But all this, however valuable, was a side issue. He would pick up what he could but it had nothing to do with his job. He had to make contact with von Weitbrecht.

He resumed the reflexes of a German officer and went downstairs. Directing the house man to bring him a highball on the terrace, he was willing to admire the impersonation. The cold, ruthless, inhumanly competent Erich Köchlin was excellent theater. He was wondering what business in the town of Windham he could invent when Scovil, who had been away all afternoon, joined him. Scovil had a most distinguished appearance and, if Garrett could trust his knowledge of conspirators, Scovil was getting to be more of a menace to Köchlin than to Garrett.

"You tried to telephone to Mrs. Armstrong this afternoon?" Scovil said.

He nodded. "Unfortunately, she wasn't home."

"It's best for you to be absolutely inconspicuous. For our sake as well as yours. Naturally, I don't undertake to tell you what you should do—"

"Naturally," Garrett said, getting to his feet. All along his instinct had been to make a show of dominating Scovil. "I will respect your position as a fiancé. But it will be useful to remember that I give the orders."

That was the kind of arrogant slap Scovil expected, and Garrett saw his eyes harden with the affront and with a desire to retaliate. Scovil said, "Remember, I know this town and you don't. You are a stranger here—and conspicuous. You can still be identified as an escaped prisoner. Or even as a thief."

"Also," Garrett said, with the same aloof contempt, "direct your servants not to watch me or my phone calls. I might begin to wonder if you were putting obstacles in my way." Mathilde Winkler came out on the terrace. She was fresh from hot water and the cosmetic table, she was exotically dressed, and she had better control of herself, though her eyes were not altogether free of anxiety. "I was telling our host," Garrett said, "that I'm borrowing a car for an hour or so. I should enjoy your company, *Gräfin*. But perhaps the two of you had better use the time discussing whether you are employing every means of reaching von Weitbrecht."

He let his shoulders swagger a little, crossing the terrace. This was purely disciplinary. There was no reason why he should leave, and Scovil was quite right to point out the risk, but it was essential to assert his authority . . . Before he got to Windham, he saw a car in the rear-mirror which seemed to be following him. He experimented and, yes, it was following him. So besides having his phone calls listened to, Scovil was having him shadowed.

He enjoyed spending the Importing Company's money for shoes and shirts and slacks, handkerchiefs and underwear and neckties. And through a store window he got a fortunate glimpse of the flat back of a skull and close-clipped hair at a soda fountain across the street. It was Carl Booker—so Scovil had telephoned him to do the shadowing . . . Garrett whistled with quiet satisfaction. He put his packages in Scovil's car and played with the idea of going into the soda fountain and buying Booker a drink. It would make good remembering when he visited Booker in jail.

"You missed your plane, Mr. Page?"

It was a well-remembered voice but, when he turned, he could not like the expression on Gail Armstrong's face. Bareheaded, short-sleeved, in a white dress, she stood in the late-afternoon shadow that filled the sidewalk, backlighted by the brilliant sunlight slanting across the street. Her eyes were an accusation.

"Whenever we meet there has been some change of plans I could not possibly foresee. I telephoned to tell you I couldn't keep my promise to go away, but you weren't home."

Her white dress had big palm trees printed on it in green. And repentant second thoughts had assailed her since last evening—or something unguessed had happened. "I hardly took it as a promise—but I relied on it," she said. "There's no way of leaving Windham by plane, Mr. Page. So I wish you would take a train. Or a bus. Or . . . someone's car."

"It isn't stolen—it's borrowed from your fiancé," he said lightly. He nodded at the packages on the seat. "And these are shoes and shirts—my own at last. If I'm wearing my own clothes, perhaps you'll have dinner with me?"

That was an outrageous, very likely dangerous, neglect of duty. But, he argued swiftly, had not Scovil reminded him that he must be inconspicuous, and did that not require him to act normally, and what was more normal than asking a woman to dinner? But she said, "Thanks, no. I wouldn't enjoy it. I'd be anxious lest the police break in on us." So something had happened—and she turned away and the white dress moved down the sidewalk. He watched her easy grace, remembering dance music, and she turned back again. A moment before, her face had been disdainful; now it was grave and honest.

"I'm lying," she said. "You've been kind to me. I'm not likely to forget how glad I was to have you make love to me last night." She evoked the memory of her lips eagerly answering his. Her dark eyes grew misty. "I've never been afraid of you till now—now I am afraid. When I remember kissing you it's impossible that there should be this mystery about you. All this—ugliness—suspiciousness—I don't know what. I have hard enough problems, Mr. Page—I'm confused enough. Please go away from Windham."

He also had more than enough problems and could not possibly admit that she had become another one. And he could not afford to acknowledge the shame she roused in him. But also he could not help saying, "I will have

to go away. At any moment. I don't know when. But before I go, I'm coming to see you, Gail."

"I can't stop you. I don't even want to. But you know how to be kind, and if you want to go on being kind to me, you won't come, John."

She turned away again, without saying good-by. What stung him, as he watched that white dress move down the perspective of blue shadow, was the knowledge that she had called him "John" in good faith and that the name was false . . . A car that was certainly Booker's followed him to within a mile or so of Pinnacle Manor, then turned off the road. Scovil would now learn that he had been talking to Gail Armstrong. So much the better. It was revolting to use her in the dreadful game. But she was another leverage on Scovil and every leverage was valuable.

The three of them dined tranquilly, Scovil content to let the situation rest for the time, Mathilde apparently glad of an hour free from strain. He must constantly remember that these people had the minds of conspirators. The game they played was deadly, their daily lives were conducted in the shadow of immediate catastrophe—but also they enjoyed superfluous and unnecessary secrecy, their habits were set in little deceptions, in a sacred ritual of mystification.

Scovil drove off after dinner, probably to prod the truck line into more furious activity about von Weitbrecht. Garrett wanted to explore further in the information at Mathilde's command, but she had only small talk for a few minutes and then went to her room. He spent a couple of hours speculating about what he had learned, turning over odd items in his mind, fitting them together and making guesses about them. G2 would know much about the Importing Company but probably did not suspect Mathilde's connection with it, and certainly knew nothing about Scovil that would incriminate him. Especially the peace offensive. All that would be pure gold when he could get it to Washington . . . Always provided that he lived to report.

Mathilde joined him in the library for the keyed broadcast from Berlin. He had to be totally alert, for the truth was that he had only the slightest knowledge of the codes. The scene was suddenly vivid—the luxurious room, the fake German, the real one, and the calm, unbelievable acceptance of all this while the voice went on conveying news, propaganda, and the most realistic instructions to the most desperately dangerous people in America. How much more of this could they make in Washington, when they played back the record they were making of it? . . . Mathilde went away

when the broadcast ended and, as a test, Garrett went out to the garage. A chauffeur told him politely that Mr. Scovil's instructions were not to let any cars be used tonight. So that was established. Certainly he must force the issue tomorrow and bring Scovil to heel.

It was very late when he found that several of the papers which Mathilde had brought to him from New York had been taken. That must have happened while he was at Windham. It made no difference, since they were all photographed on his memory and were quite useless, besides, till he should see von Weitbrecht. But they had been taken and he must know why. The time to force the issue was right now.

Scovil or Mathilde? He considered, then went to Mathilde's room, in the other wing of the big house. He opened the door, closed it noiselessly, switched on the light and stood amused, for Mathilde was not here and he had no trouble guessing where she was.

Methodically he went through the drawers of the writing table and the various chests, through the closet, through her expensive luggage. The papers were not there—only a ridiculous quantity of clothes, the trappings and accessories and unguents and perfumes of a rich woman—and in one bag, a small automatic pistol. He put it in his pocket—then restored it to the bag. Unquestionably his need of one was urgent and might become desperate at any moment. The unstable structure of deception, bluff, and arrogance which rested on the small point of his ability to master circumstance as it arose—the whole impersonation—might be destroyed by anyone's chance word, any small development from outside, any infinitesimal false step of his, or any sudden perception of his associates. If that happened, associates would instantly be enemies whose survival would depend on killing him. His sole duty would be to save himself with what he had learned, and he would have to shoot his way out—or as far as he could get. But he could not take Mathilde's pistol.

He was not startled when he heard the doorknob turn. Mathilde gasped and closed the door behind her, her face turning an angry red. Garrett smiled, for in any movie the blonde who would play Mathilde's part would be wearing just this negligee, just this white sheath that clung to thighs and breast. The costuming was exact. . . . She crossed to a blue-and-gilt chaise longue, sat down, stared at him with concentrated contempt, and said, "Has it come to searching my room, Herr Köchlin?"

He became Herr Köchlin. "I counted on your being away longer, *Gräfin*. So you are not yet able to erase the image of the fiancée? Accept my

sympathy."

She whispered, "Good God! Is no Prussian ever a gentleman?" So he crossed at once and stood above her. "There is no time for courtesies. Moreover, *Gräfin*, things have gone far enough. Some of the von Weitbrecht papers were taken from my room this afternoon—you will give them back to me. Servants listen to my telephone calls and deny me the use of automobiles—that will end now, at once. Booker followed me to town—if he or anyone else is permitted to spy on me again, I will break you, all three of you, Booker and Scovil and you, like a burned match."

He let his fingers make the gesture . . . And terror had come back to her violet eyes—she was desperately afraid of Erich Köchlin. "I know nothing about the telephone or the automobiles," she said. "That must be Lynn. I did not know about Booker—I don't think Lynn told him to follow you."

"Booker is not a man who has ideas of his own. And my papers, *Fräulein*?"

She nodded. "I took them. Lynn told me to."

He maintained the Prussian touch. "I should send you back to his room to get them. Don't bother—I will get them in the morning. And from now on, both of you will understand that I will permit no interference whatever."

"Why are you two fighting each other?" Hostility went out of her. "We must not. I am frightened, Erich." He sardonically noted the impact of another alias. "The odds have become ghastly. There is no hope we can do—anything at all of what we were to do. At best a month or so, perhaps only a week or so, perhaps at any moment. At this moment they may be closing in on us."

"You need a dime's worth of common courage, *Fräulein*." Before the sneer was finished, he determined to take a different tack. He let the rasp go out of his voice. "You are right—it is a hard job for a woman." Warmly, "You walk in darkness, and every step is a step toward the abyss. You are young and lovely—no one can blame you for remembering that. It is sad that youth and loveliness must perish if the need comes. You can only remember whose need, *Fräulein*, and what cause you serve."

She lay back in the blue cushions and put her hands over her eyes. A mule slid off one foot and her shoulders quivered. She looked desolate when she sat up.

"You are right in saying there are enough perils without adding to them," he said. He held her gaze. "Our most serious danger, right now, is not from

outside. You must realize that it is Lynn Scovil."

She still met his gaze. "I'm beginning to be afraid you're right. He is like a drunken man. There is some need to make himself great."

"I'm glad that your emotions haven't blunted your judgment." Or rather, that jealousy and resentment were working for him. "He must be controlled at once or he will sink us. What is in his mind?"

She shrugged. "Some mad idea that he must be picked to take von Weitbrecht's place."

Herr Köchlin sneered. "No wonder I am an awkwardness to him. A public orator can direct an organization? I will have to cure him." He turned peremptory. "Let me know instantly every step he takes—everything he says and does."

With the familiar anxiety in her eyes there began to mingle indecision and a kind of shrewd speculation. She was concealing a good deal from him, doubtless, but she had begun to yield. "I don't want to spy on him, Herr Köchlin," she said, and he answered, "If your life is indifferent to you, I still order you to do your job." She nodded slowly, then relaxed in the blue cushions again and another quiver passed across her body. She said, very calmly, "You are formidable enough in yourself, Herr Köchlin. You are—extremely adequate. You will handle Lynn with no difficulty, I'm quite sure."

That was more than an admission; it was nine tenths of a surrender. The highly competent mind of the Countess Mathilde had now decided that Erich Köchlin was master of the situation. He would have no further difficulty with her. She crossed her knees, and if not design then appropriate accident let the affectionate negligee slip away from the greater part of a white thigh. He wondered if all Mathilde's loyalties were bound together.

He smiled. "I am not a rival, *Fräulein*." Nevertheless she did not restore the negligee's decorum but smiled and said softly, "Still, if he should enter now, we would appear—ambiguous." Her eyes were calculating and shrewd again, then she stood up. Stood up so close to him that the heavy perfume he had noticed at the dance was in his nostrils again. "What is it you want?" she asked.

"What I've said—you must tell me at once everything he does, every notion he develops." He thought swiftly. "Yes, and full details of everything he has ever done for us—what part he played—whom he has worked with—

what is laid out for him to do. Get everything. What you cannot get, write out for me."

Incredulously, "On paper?"

"It will not remain on paper very long."

"You want to be in a position to destroy him," she said slowly.

"I am already." He sought for her eyes again and said, "You have already decided that I am master here. No doubt Scovil can be controlled tactfully. If not . . ."

Her shoulders moved. "Yes, you wouldn't hesitate a moment. You would treat me the same way."

There was acceptance and submission in the violet eyes—and admiration. . . . But not, he decided, back in his own room, not yet frankness. Quite clearly she was concealing something. It might be something of the greatest importance. And also—such were the absurdities of the job—it might be something of no importance at all. Well, he was confident that she would not conceal it much longer . . . The day had come out far better than he had been entitled to hope. He had turned frustration into the promise of success; he had secured the most valuable pressures and weapons. He was doing fine.

Chapter Six

Time was when Sunday at the bookshop had been fun—pajamas and New York papers and feminine chatter till noon, and a pleasant idleness all day. But not today. Connie did her best but Gail seemed to have no conversation and no ears. It looked like a brown study or a deep-blue grouch. Was it long thoughts about Mr. Lynn Scovil, the fiancé who kept on not making good, or longer ones about Mr. John Page, the mysterious but distinctly prepossessing pick-up? Well, neither one of them seemed likely to break in on it in person—and where was Mr. William Jay, our New York correspondent, whose custom was to spend his idle hours here? Mr. Jay was absent. Our Miss Scovil had to cultivate the pleasures of solitude.

At midafternoon Connie got out from stock a little violet-and-white-checked-gingham suit that had caught her eye when it arrived, and tried it on. Bull's-eye! If you could imagine anyone's having Constance Scovil in mind when designing a dress, this proved to be the dress. It was demure—demure with a really wicked gleam in the eye. Posed at a mirror, she candidly admitted that the vista had a certain charm. You could point out emaciation and angularity, yes, but the face was not bad and there were curved areas which the little suit took due thought of. Encouraged, she did her hair carefully, put on two-thread stockings and high heels, and in fact gave herself the works. She sought out Gail, who was pretending to do accounts.

"This cost us eight dollars," Connie said. "Deduct eight dollars from my honorarium. Does investment in skirts really have an effect on the male heart?"

Gail looked up long enough to say, "If you wear it without a blouse, that way, don't walk past the pool hall."

Connie made out a charge slip and deposited it in the cash register. It was thus that she happened to pick up the revolver she had seen there every day for months—for some reason she found it amusing today. She could tell that it was loaded because she could see the tips of bullets, and that was her total knowledge of firearms. She aimed it at the bust of Shakespeare. "When the night marauder comes aprowling do you know what to do? If we had to defend our honor, could we?"

Gail looked up, her eyes far away. "What? That's a pistol—it belonged to my husband. You're supposed to shoot it."

Connie stared at her, said, "I see," laid it down, and went out to the side porch to marvel at the feminine heart. And now the idea was for Bill Jay to come striding up and get all enmeshed in the demureness of the gingham suit. But he didn't come for more than two hours, by which time Connie had worked up a grouch of her own, and he didn't see the demureness at all, for he had a grouch that made hers seem like a passing whim . . . They were going for a drive, it turned out, but his conversation consisted of some grunts sparingly salted with monosyllables. Connie chatted girlishly, tried companionable silence, produced some deep thoughts. Score: home team, zero. So she got mad again.

"I'd get farther with a bus driver. Is there any reason why I shouldn't use my mad money and leave you to your thoughts?"

Bill said, "Lay off. . . . I phoned the Boston FBI this morning and they had a man in Worcester for the day—heard the Shadow was there, maybe. I've been to Worcester. He said he had work to do and had I thought of writing radio continuity?"

"He meant Hollywood, and I got there before he did. So that's settled." And thank God!

Bill drove off the valley road, down a lane that ended by the creek. He got out and Connie followed, and he stood looking at the water. It was pleasant here, cool, no sound of cars, blue and gray shadows, the sweet murmur of the stream. Poor Bill! His shoulders were dejected; his drama had leaked out at the seams.

Connie was touched. "I'm sorry he wouldn't play ball. Tell me about it."

They sat on a rustic bench and Bill looked angry, sheepish and obstinate. "Very superior young man—Harvard man, doubtless. He said a thug, even a thug with a record, had a legal right to buy a beer. He said if there was one at Camp Ryegate, maybe he just liked to fish. As for midnight at the crossroads, if in fact I was sober, hadn't I ever heard about changing a tire? Did I know that truck lines employed inspectors, who stopped trucks to check up on them? And the U.S. Government kept pretty busy these days, though always glad to talk to the press."

"What did he say about your escaped aviator inspiration?"

Bill looked at her sullenly. "I didn't mention it."

Incredulously, “What! But that’s your banner head—the rest is just filler. Why leave out the leading man? Why didn’t you tell him?”

He threw her a queer, half-desperate glance, and got up and walked down to the creek. He picked up a handful of stones and started skipping them, one by one. Connie watch him in bewilderment; the last one skipped eight times and maybe that was a triumph, but just why? But, when he turned back toward the bench, for no reason she felt an odd kind of haste in her pulse.

It *was* desperation in his eyes. He stood opposite her, positively glaring. “That’s a damned pretty dress,” he said accusingly.

Still bewildered, she stood up and spread out the skirt. “Your orders. You said pants were out, so pants are out. A wistful hope went with this suit.”

He was scowling at her. “You’re a damned pretty girl,” he growled. Then he snorted. “Pretty! My God, you’re beautiful.”

She didn’t know what was happening but exactly at this moment the haste in her pulse became turbulence. “Does that make you see spots?” she asked. Then, “Trying to outguess me with flattery, are you?” Then, getting better control, “Someday you’ll call me beautiful in front of a third party and you’ll find yourself trapped into a shotgun marriage.”

He was beating one palm with the other fist. “Shut up!” he said furiously. “Have you always got to be making wisecracks?”

Not a bit of this made sense, and there was a roaring in her ears, and she needed a lot more self-control. “Look here!” she said. Her breath lasted just two words. She took a deeper breath. “Are you trying to see if you can make me bawl?”

His voice was agonized. “I’m crazy about you!”

How many times had Constance Scovil, Martha Case College ’43, mooning by herself, tried to imagine him saying just that? With no warning, spoken as if he hated her like the devil, here it was. It could be a hallucination. Her own voice sounded frightened: “I thought I heard you say that!” He said, “I’m crazy about you—you’re wonderful—I’m always thinking about you.” The trees by the water were all confused and Bill was just a blurred outline, and she said, with a gasp, “Why don’t you do something about it?” And Bill looked helpless and said, “Do something?”

Power of motion was gone from her legs—but not altogether. She said, “Like this,” and contrived to take a couple of steps. And those were his arms

round her and Bill Jay was kissing her at last. She couldn't believe it yet and then the great wave broke over her and it was true. She pressed against him and there was nobody else in the world and no place but this little circle of trees. After an æon or two he started to drop his arms, maybe to look at her, but she whispered, "No, you don't," and held him tighter. He whispered, "Connie, there are tears on your cheek," and she said, "You know what to do about them." He said desperately, "You really mean this—you really like me?" She could only say "Darling!" and really sob.

They sat on a bench and her head was on his shoulder and he had both hands and kept saying idiotic things. He actually thought that she had just now made up her mind—she had to keep telling him that he hadn't had a chance from the beginning. He said, "It won't turn out to be just a summer crush—you'll really marry me?" She said, "In this dress!" and the best of all was laughing together. And talking in whispers, even though there was nobody else alive. "I kept on throwing myself at you and that was always me sprawling on the ground where you let me bump—you've lost a lot of time you didn't need to lose." And Bill turning her face up, as if she hadn't had the same idea, and whispering, "Lost time can be made up."

Later on, blue dusk had made the trees indistinct and the brook murmurous and a great calm had settled on them. Infinitely long ago they had started out for a drive, grouchy, with no notion of a thunderclap to come, and now they were going to be married, they were two people in love, and it simply wasn't the same world. What had the world been like before the thunderclap?

"Let's see," she said dreamily, still holding his arm round her with both hands. "Where were we when you made that inflammable remark? You called me pretty—so look what happened. I know! You were going to tell me why you left out the scarlet thread in your movie script. Why did you?"

Her fiancée muttered something and his arm tightened round her. And then she knew. When you're in love, when someone is in love with you, you don't have to be told.

She sat up. She saw things in the clearest light, and only half the world was glory now. "I see it," she said quietly. "You were in love with me. I guess that's how you found out you were. If you're right about him, my father is involved."

Bill said, "That's right. I'm in love with you."

"That means you're absolutely convinced it's true." A ghastly thought constricted her throat. "Bill, did you—is this—oh, Bill, it wouldn't just be

that you feel sorry for me?"

"I'm crazy about you. You don't have to be told."

No, not when you're in love. She took his arm away from her waist. "Let's get it said. You think my father is mixed up in something. You really do."

Clearly and slowly, "Making peace speeches for headlines is one thing. Harboring an enemy is something else. That's a Heinie; that's the aviator who was in the news. And there are queer smells. Somehow I can't like rich people who have no particular country. Maybe it was just thugs at Booker's camp, but the Heinie was there too, so maybe it wasn't just thugs. It comes under the jobs I've done, darling; I'm supposed to understand the kind of setup this can maybe be."

But it meant . . . yes, there were her own long fears, and bit by bit you could assemble the most damning suspicions. *But it was treason!* Against the United States. She was cold and sick, trying to imagine the terrible unknowns.

"You don't know anything," she said, "you just suspect."

He nodded. "That's exactly true. But anyone who suspects—well, I ought to try."

Connie stood up and went down to the creek. That was what Bill had done just before the thunderclap. It was nearly dark now. She stood looking at the water, not seeing it. She turned back. Bill got up from the bench.

"If you're right, they would be pretty bad people, wouldn't they? I mean, it could be dangerous?"

"Escaped prisoners, enemy agents—they don't come any tougher."

"That's what scares me, not what you think," she said softly. "Maybe you get it now, darling: I'm crazy about you, we're in love." She would not let her voice break. "I can't stand it if you—look, everything we've been up to now has been without each other, but now we're going to get married . . . You don't need to consider me, Bill. Not about my father, I mean. Anything that might happen to him—well, it would be things happening to you I'd have to live through, not him . . . Do whatever you want. Whatever you think is right. But I've got to be near enough to keep touching you."

He took her hands. He said, "I'm crazy about you." She said, "Then kiss me." In a world grown treacherous with the unknown it was more than ever glorious to be kissed. By Bill.

"That's settled and we're settled," she whispered. "So—oh, darling, take me to dinner. We've never had an engagement dinner up to now. Tomorrow you can be the boy detective all day long, but tonight we're in love."

"Where shall we go?"

She laughed and tears were stinging her eyes. "Do you suppose we could find some little place where they sell beer?"

Garrett said, "You seem to feel a strain, *Fräulein*."

Mathilde nodded. "It was bad enough before I came here—the shock of those raids. One would think that your success in getting here would make up for that. But there is too much tension, Erich, too much delay, too many cross-purposes."

With an almost humorous detachment, he speculated about Mathilde Winkler. She might be nervous but she was resolute. She looked fragile and seductive, and she might shudder if she had to shoot someone with that automatic in her bag, she might faint after she had shot him, but she would shoot. And, whatever amusements she liked in her leisure hours, her mind was cold and clear and sharp. Beside her, Scovil's rhetorical intoxication was mere stupidity.

"I had not expected to stay here so long," she said. "Certainly I did not expect to have to keep you and Lynn from each other's throats."

"I think he is quite mad, and you have reason to be apprehensive. Maybe, *Fräulein*, you had better tell me what you are holding back."

No doubt about the coldness of her mind. "What do you mean, Erich?"

"I don't know, Mathilde. I do know you are withholding something."

"In the face of that?" She glanced at a little packet of papers.

She had obeyed his instructions of last night completely and he now had material enough to send Scovil to Leavenworth a dozen times over—and far more detail about the coming peace offensive than G2 could possibly have. It was invaluable—and it was still irrelevant. Von Weitbrecht had not been reached.

"Yes, in the face of that." She stood his scrutiny; he could not read her thoughts. "Well, you will decide for yourself—I trust, not too late. There are forty-eight hours left."

"What does that mean?"

"Just this." He assumed the steel of the *Nachrichtendienst*. "You are quite right. Time has been lost, our situation is desperate, and Scovil is—too visionary. We make no progress toward von Weitbrecht." He had, in fact, decided that more was known about von Weitbrecht than had been told him. "I will wait twenty-four hours more for him to report to me—till this time tomorrow evening. If he comes, we will begin there. If he doesn't, *Fräulein*, I can wait no longer."

"What can you do without him?"

"Why," he said, calmly, "you will summon everyone at the Forwarding Company who knows anything about our plans, and everyone else who can get here by car or plane before Tuesday noon. We will have a little meeting, determine who is to blame for mistakes and accidents, and then work out the best way of repairing them and preparing to do the job without von Weitbrecht."

Mathilde was appalled. "You would call a general rendezvous? Here? Erich, nothing could possibly be more dangerous."

"Yes, it is unfortunate. It is also unfortunate that von Weitbrecht has failed us. Those are my orders—and do not mention them to Scovil."

If his guess about von Weitbrecht was right, she would have to tell Scovil at her first opportunity. . . . He was taking the offensive, bringing on action, precipitating an unknown climax. To lose more time would be to lose everything.

Mathilde was watching him narrowly, and he saw a slight quiver in her fingers. "In any event," he said, "neither of us will be here after Tuesday night. . . . Is it dinner time? I will miss Scovil's cook. Your job has drawbacks, *Gräfin*, but you have not been eating in Germany these past two years."

"I think Booker is downstairs," she said. "Maybe he has brought news of von Weitbrecht. Or—" more slowly. "You know, he suspects you of being an American."

Undoubtedly. He had never left out of consideration that sullen, suspicious face. He took Mathilde's arm and said airily, "If I am not too critical, when you choose helpers like Booker, could you not look more closely for intelligence?"

Scovil, in good humor but his eyes glittery, was filling three cocktail glasses. Booker got to his feet when they came in—and looked surly. An ugly brute, a true squarehead. So typical a Nazi that he seemed a caricature.

Garrett called the house man: "Bring another cocktail glass." He nodded to Scovil. "Don't stand on caste—Booker would like a drink." He gave one of the filled glasses to Booker, and said, "Now as for my being an American, just what . . ."

Booker nearly dropped the glass. His low forehead creased; his eyes were first startled and then vindictive. Garrett glanced at Scovil, who was clearly embarrassed by his subordinate's stupidity. "Why not?" Garrett said. "It is not bright to hold a suspicion past its proper time. But Booker was certainly right to suspect me." He turned to Booker. "Drink your cocktail! Tell me what is on your mind."

The thug was no menace when embarrassed. His swart face got darker, and he muttered, "I thought I had seen you somewhere."

"Where?" Booker moved his massive shoulders and had no answer. Garrett waited, then said, "You are a *Skimeister*? Were you ever in the Sierra Nevadas?" Booker shook his head. "You could have seen me there ten years ago. Where did you practise your trade in Germany?"

"In Austria. Arlberg."

Garrett said carelessly, "Perhaps you have seen me, then. I first went to Arlberg in 1932. I've been back many times."

"1932!" Booker growled. "That year were many Americans."

That year, in fact, there was even a team composed of Americans studying at German technical institutes. It had done surprisingly well. And a member of it named James Garrett had placed several times and scored one first.

"I believe there were some Germans too," he said, and turned to Scovil. "We can use men who remember a face nine years. But Booker means something else." He stepped nearer Booker. "The truth is, you think I am from the Gestapo."

He had made the shot at random, merely to embarrass Booker more, but at once saw that it had got home. Instantly he followed it up. "You do not like having the Gestapo near. It would be comfortable to get rid of it—and what better way than framing me as an American spy?" He made the most of the inch or so by which he out-topped Booker, stood close, spoke with

controlled harshness. “I may well be from the Gestapo. So do not get above yourself. Be exceedingly careful what you do, even what you think. You have only to obey orders. Obey them. I will do with you what I see fit.”

Discipline was a handy thing. The reflexes of Carl Booker—Karl Bucher of Arlberg—were trained to obedience and he would never again suspect Garrett of being an American.

“Now, leave us.” Booker made an about-face and strode away, but Garrett halted him. “Wait!” With the greatest suavity: “You are at the disposal of all three of us, *Fräulein* Winkler, Mr. Scovil, and me. Understand, however, that I command. If anyone’s orders should conflict with mine, you will obey mine.”

Feeling well satisfied with himself, though his palms were a little moist, he bowed to the others when the door closed behind Booker. “It’s just as well that we should all understand that.”

He intended that to rowel Scovil’s pride a little more, but Scovil showed no resentment. Instead, he said, “Word from von Weitbrecht reached the camp this afternoon.”

A tonic exhilaration struck Garrett—and wariness at once followed it. Had Mathilde been able to whisper his ultimatum to Scovil while he was bullying Booker? Or had Scovil’s crazy notions or crazy schemes developed in this way—had he been right in suspecting Scovil of knowing more about von Weitbrecht? Or was this just what it seemed to be, the system working, von Weitbrecht finally making contact by the means at hand and Scovil honestly reporting?

“Yes?” he said imperturbably.

He scrutinized the dark, officious face for a motive—deception, policy, canniness, but nothing was legible. “By wire. We reported your arrival and he will doubtless come to the camp. He should come sometime tomorrow, or by tomorrow night’s truck, or at the latest, Tuesday.”

If there was any clue, would it be a trace of surprise or possibly doubt in Mathilde’s eyes? Well, he would stand pat. “He would find it convenient to report to me tomorrow. I will not wait past Tuesday.”

After dinner, Scovil went away. The breeze had fallen and the still night was humid. Garrett was afraid of this pause, for when tension was released one risked getting careless. But tonight he was buoyed up and confident, exulting in his progress toward the goal. The improbable, the all but impossible, was coming true. The long chance had been worth taking. He

had converted accident into good fortune, failure into success, and the all but forbidden end was coming near.

Mathilde crossed from her chair in deep shadow to sit beside him on the steps leading down from the terrace, and took his arm. "You are thoughtful, Erich."

"I do not enjoy inaction, Mathilde."

"Heaven knows you have had action enough for most men." She was whispering, and her hand made a small, premonitory pressure on his arm.

"Where does Scovil go in the evenings?"

"He must be a postmaster when the truck that brings the courier comes." She edged nearer; her hip and thigh, through thin silk, touched his. A vague amusement colored her words: "He would not tell me if he meant to pause at the brunette's."

He stood up. "You will forgive me if I leave you for an hour or so?" She rose in a single sinuous movement that brought her hair very near his face, and softly breathed "Erich!" He said, "I have hard thinking to do. I think much too irrelevantly when I am by your side, *Gräfin*. I will drive for a while."

"You can't mean to miss the broadcast?"

"Or do you think, like Booker, that I will get in touch with the Americans if you are not watching me?" Her hand made a gesture of denial which allowed it to brush gently across his. "I promise I will not betray you to the enemy tonight, Mathilde. But it is sound sense, it is a very needful sanity, for us not to be alone together. There is too much likelihood of forgetting my errand."

Done with a spade! But it succeeded and, with a sigh, she let him go. No one at the garage objected when he took a car but, a mile or so past Scovil's gates, there were again persistent headlights in the mirror. Mathilde had not had time to summon Booker, and probably Scovil had not ventured to disobey his orders. So Booker was doing this on his own. Either he had not been convinced at cocktail time or he had been convinced much too thoroughly. Suppose Booker had turned feral? Easy enough to drive up beside this car and dispose forever of a Gestapo agent with a single shot. And no report yet made to Washington! There must be guns at Scovil's, many of them. At any cost, by any expedient, he must lay hands on one tomorrow.

But it was a different disquiet that shook him when he drew up at the bookshop. All the many follies of this impulse, all the private and official disasters that might turn on it, were quite clear in his mind as he sat for a moment before going in. He understood them perfectly, and he had no will to prevent them. Between dark and dark, for a half hour seized from necessity, a man must be himself.

Gail answered his ring, a white figure coming down the shadows of the hall. She stood in the open door and was neither angry nor glad. "I admitted I couldn't stop you," she said. "But I hoped you would do what I asked."

He stepped past her into the hall, went into the bookshop that was so like a library, and stood looking at her. "Still," he said, "you put on a charming dress to welcome disappointment in."

The full force of his folly was apparent, for, grave and troubled, darkly beautiful, dressed for his eyes in complete white that was broken only by three blue buttons in a line between her breasts, she stormed his senses with the sudden, overwhelming realization of how much was denied him. Rebellion rose in him in a great tide; he was struggling not to take her in his arms. . . . She looked back at him, without coloring, without turning her eyes away. She gestured toward a deep chair, and sat down across the room from him.

"That's true," she said. "I called myself a fool but I wanted to look my best so that you would be glad of me. Day by day I've come to be more afraid of you, and tonight I could hardly bear waiting for you. It must not be, John."

The shameful alias heightened his rebellion. "Too many things must not be. I must not remember your eyes smiling, or driving with you late at night, or how it is to kiss your mouth. What is there to do? I do remember."

Her gaze fell; she looked down at her crossed ankles. So he could let his eyes fill with her hair, her shoulders, her knees, the tenderness of her lips. She looked up again.

"When are you going to tell me the truth about yourself?"

Yes, that was how the knife had to twist. Never. And already he was paying high for his folly in coming here. Only a desperate levity could serve him: "God knows what the truth about any man is, my dear, when any woman asks that question."

She ignored it. "There is something desperate about you, John." Her breast rose in a long sigh. "Oh, I don't mean what you think! It's nothing to

me that you called yourself a thief, or that you did not seem to know Lynn Scovil when you came to the town he lives in. I forgot all that when . . . when something happened to us. But there is some terrible alertness in you. As if you were in the midst of deadly enemies. Or, God help me, as if the shadow of death were on you. You are like a steel spring bent too far. You seem to be always looking past my shoulder, watching for your mortal enemy. It obsesses me—it terrifies me—I've got to know what it means."

More of the inexorable price set on folly. In an honest man's life this disclosure would have been sheer ecstasy. Since that moment on Wednesday evening when he had first touched his cheek to her hair—remember he had been trying to fool a policeman!—there had been something electrical between Gail Armstrong and himself. Some spark that flashed when they met and carried across the gulf that separated them. Now it had enabled her to pierce the impersonation that had completely deceived everyone else. She was as innocent of the evil world he labored in as she was ignorant of his history—but she had come, in the heart's knowledge, to the edge of his secret.

The trap closed on him and what lie could help him out? He smiled. "That's a fairly romantic description for a drab metallurgist to fit." For a single moment his tone brought a dimple to the corner of her mouth. It vanished when he said, "I hadn't suspected you of a gift for melodrama." She shook her head and her eyes reproached him. He got out of his chair, went to a window, stood looking out. The unpredictable and the incredible swirled in his mind. Washington—Detroit—Scovil's little nest of snakes—the antlike creatures of von Weitbrecht scurrying in darkness. He wondered if the dogged Booker were parked round the corner, nursing his fears, or if he were stretched prone beneath this very window, hoping to hear something. And, behind him, looking at him, Gail was a greater danger than these.

He turned back—and had to pass a desk with a cash register. And good God! there was a revolver on it, a loaded revolver. But he had decided that there was only one way to answer Gail—to divert her from the unanswered question. "And you trouble me, Gail," he said. "There is Scovil—you must not marry him."

She had the dignity of complete defenselessness and complete honesty. "It can't make any difference to . . . what we're saying. But I won't, John. I couldn't. Not possibly. Not now."

So that much of the price was relaxed, and whatever else might come from this hour, one vileness was removed from her. But he had been swept out into a current far stronger than the St. Lawrence he had fought against. There was the curve of her lips, and for one moment in the midst of war a man might be himself.

She stood up, shrinking back. "Don't touch me, John!" she whispered.

He stopped short. "My name is not John," he said hoarsely. "I won't touch you if you tell me not to. What do you say?"

She gave him the dismayed tenderness of her eyes. She said, syllable by slow syllable, "I can't care what your name is."

His moment was fulfilled in the touch of her lips . . . If there were no war, if he were an honest man, if he had no job to do. She raised her face again. "You said all hell would be brought down on us if there were a third time," she said. "This is the third time. It isn't hell yet." He said, against her cheek, "It will be. Nothing can come of this, Gail."

"Then I'm right. You'll tell me what it is . . . now."

Her image had been in his eyes through the deadliest of days. Trust, loyalty and surrender were in her kiss. She stood in his arms, and in ten seconds he must find some final harshness that would alienate her forever and some despicable lie that would scar her forever.

Voices and footsteps on the porch. Gail stood away from him—and no one could look at her cheeks or her eyes, or doubtless his either, without knowing that a love scene had been interrupted. But the two who came into the bookshop were hilariously excited, too concerned with themselves to observe anything. There was a girl with blond curls and a lively face, and close behind her a young man whom Garrett noticed only vaguely. The girl came into the room practically at a gallop and crossed its whole length to seize Gail's hand.

"Gail!" the girl said breathlessly. "Gail, you've got to listen! Richmond has fallen—Martha Case College in the stretch—all of a sudden he just crumpled and it's true, it happened, we're engaged. . . . Oh!" She had seen Garrett. Her voice broke off, gaiety went out of her face, she looked first startled and then apprehensive.

Women had their own discipline. Gail was poised and graceful, as if no emotion had been interrupted. "This is Constance Scovil," she said casually, "Lynn's daughter. And Mr. Jay, Bill Jay. John . . . I mean, Mr. Page."

Garrett bowed to Scovil's daughter and turned to Jay, holding out his hand, aware now of a homely face, a tall, spare frame—and, unexpectedly, eyes that were hard and hostile. The young man did not take his hand but said, "I saw you at Pinnacle Manor, the night of the dance."

Garrett's full alertness roused to the unmistakable antagonism of Jay's manner. He said easily, "Yes, I'm staying there."

"Yeah." It was unmistakable hostility that was written on Bill Jay's face. He had no clue to it. A glance at Connie showed that she was tense. Jay said explosively, "I've seen you somewhere else, too. Camp Ryegate." He hesitated for a moment, then plunged. "How much longer do you think you can get away with it?"

He heard Connie gasp and glanced at Gail's rigid face. The dice had fallen wrong and an emergency was here. He smiled tranquilly at Jay, who burst out, "Your name is Römer. You're a damned Nazi prisoner of war."

So it was a total emergency—and in a quarter where it could not have been expected or prepared for. There was no possibility of flight. The thing had to be handled here. Handled here, handled now, and handled right.

Connie had said "Bill!" in a frightened whisper, and Jay was leaning forward from his toes. The tableau held. Garrett broke it by sitting down and saying conversationally to Gail, "Is your friend connected with the theater?"

Gail too sat down, not gracefully. Connie said thinly, "Those were the beans spilling, Bill—the whole jar." Bill Jay nodded and seemed about to paw the ground. "I'm going through with it."

"Yes?" Garrett said. "What is it you're going through with, Mr. Jay?"

"Sorry, Gail." Jay threw her an apologetic glance. "I don't like being pushed around. I was pushed around right after I saw you at Camp Ryegate. You were with Booker. At the halfway house, the cabin at the bottom of the ski tow."

Never deny what could be established! He nodded. "That would be Thursday. A little before noon."

"I'm a newspaperman—I've formed a habit of looking into things. I was looking into the Taylor Mountain ski run. I got my jaw socked."

Garrett said thoughtfully, "I can understand that."

"Yeah. But who does it tie you up with? Just thugs, I thought at first. Thugs seem to like Camp Ryegate. There's a truck that comes by every night

toward midnight, and gets met. Somebody hangs out at the cabin on top of Taylor Mountain—people who mustn't be seen, I get knocked down when I start in that direction."

Mr. Bill Jay was certainly a newspaperman! He had located the line of communication. More than that, he had learned something which Garrett had not been able to—someone was in hiding at the top of the ski run. Mr. Jay was a good man, much too good a man. He must be stopped.

Jay rushed on. "The hell with that! When I saw you at Scovil's, after seeing you with Booker—well, I got on the job. You'll find this is a funny country, brother—we get out the news. Who unloaded from a car of prisoners in Ontario? Who got shot at on the bank of the St. Lawrence opposite Cornwall? Who broke into a lunch counter north of Malone? Who stole an automobile up above Saranac Junction and drove it into Vermont and abandoned it just north of Manchester?"

His mind flashed to that revolver at the cash register. No. This crisis could not be eased by shooting. Could it be eased by anything? "I don't know," he said evenly to this best of all newspapermen. "Is there some idea that I did?" It was his luck that both Jay and Connie kept their attention fixed on him. They might have seen Gail's face. He saw it.

Jay launched his final accusation. "Who did Gail pick up at Manchester, just about the time that car was abandoned there?"

Gail made no sound. Garrett said, "Gail picked me up at Manchester—though it's an ungraceful phrase. That was late Wednesday night." Only he knew what her eyes meant when he turned to her. He made his cast. "Was there some suggestion that I had abandoned a car there, Gail?"

It was the most despicable act he had been called upon to perform in a despicable trade. Her eyes died but she said calmly, "None whatever. And no suggestion that you had stolen a car or that the police were after you. Bill, this is unforgivable. You're making some grotesque mistake."

He felt bitter and intolerable exultation. He had counted on her, betraying her, and he had been right to count on her. He roused himself to the advantage. Jay shouted, "I know what I'm talking about!" Garrett said scornfully, "I admire your talent for fantasy and headlines—but watch out that it doesn't get you into trouble." But, unexpectedly, it was Constance Scovil who took charge.

"Wait, Bill!" Her thin, pale face had an intentness as deadly as Gail's. "We can be wrong. Maybe you could be seeing things backwards—from

some bad angle. Look at him! If you're right, he's got nerves made of steel. Nobody has nerves like that. No escaped aviator looks down his nose at you—why isn't he through the window and out into the night? Something is very screwy—it could be us. Mr.—Mr. Page, will you please tell us who you are?"

He said, "No, not on compulsion, Miss Scovil." But Gail said, "Yes, tell us . . . who you are." How could they miss the desperation in her plea?

Between Gail and Connie he had won time enough to know what to do with Jay. He knew, now, in full. He said, "Libel is a precious privilege of the newspaper business, Mr. Jay. But it has two edges. Why haven't you taken your melodrama to the police? If you've found an enemy of your country, you certainly ought to."

"I'm going to. Is there any reason why I shouldn't?"

"Not if you're prepared to pay the price of being wrong." He let a brusque anger be seen in him, and stood up. "But before you do, inquire about me at the California Institute of Technology."

He turned to Gail. "The young man is a fool and I should treat him as one. But I can't let him embarrass you." He went to stand a couple of feet from Jay. "You'll find my picture in Caltech's annual for the class of 1931. I am a metallurgist. I have offices in Toledo—a telegram will check that. I am an old friend of Miss Scovil's father. There is no reason why I should account for myself to you. I'd enjoy your going to the police before verifying all this. But if the newspaperman's technique permits verification, see me tomorrow at Pinnacle Manor."

"What if I don't—" the angry young man began, but Garrett cut him short. "Do whatever your delusions require—but get out of here now and let me make amends to Mrs. Armstrong." He turned to Connie, "When you came in, you were making an announcement. I can't say that I congratulate you. But maybe it gives you an interest in keeping him from being too big a fool?"

"Nobody can call Bill a fool to me," the girl said slowly. "But Bill could make a mistake. I think he's wrong about you. What I believed about you when I came in doesn't seem to make sense. I guess this is a good place to retire and sort out our ideas and see where some second thoughts bring us out. Come on, Bill. This time, let's make it bright."

Bill was clearly in no mood to leave. But the combination of the girl's change of heart and, Garrett acknowledged, his own admirable play acting in

the grip of the emergency was just strong enough. Jay growled, "I'll damn well see you tomorrow," and the two went out.

No, not tomorrow. Tomorrow would be altogether another day.

Gail sat in the deep red chair, motionless, without animation, hands clasped in her lap, her eyes cast down. Nothing about her moved, not her fingers, not the tips of her white pumps. When she spoke at last her voice was drained of all life. "You have to go now. You must not wait till tomorrow. He is not safe."

The one thing he must do was the one thing he could not do. "I don't ask you to believe anything, Gail."

"Yes. And we won't even pretend we don't know why I protected you. You needn't be afraid. But you must not lose a moment now."

Precisely. He must not lose a moment now. Nor was there anything he could say—even if he were permitted to say anything. He stood saying nothing.

Gail put her hands over her eyes. "You still haven't told even me your name . . . Römer . . . Well, I didn't tell him that I saw the police. . . . It would have been better if just one of our moments had had no lies. Our . . . love scenes." Her voice broke. "Do you have to stay to see me in tears?"

He saw her shoulders begin to shake under the heavy white silk. He turned and went out. An enemy of America in the eyes of the woman who had answered his kiss twenty minutes ago. A Nazi to the woman he had fallen in love with. . . . As he passed the cash register, he picked up the loaded revolver and put it in his pocket.

Before he reached the porch he had made over all his plans. Today he had resolved to do everything that might precipitate the ending within forty-eight hours. Now he had no such ample time as forty-eight hours. The ending was under way, however unprepared. It had been begun by Bill Jay, who was much too good as a newspaperman but, fortunately, was a little naive, a trifle too impetuous. And if it was the personal disaster of James Garrett that he had come to the bookshop tonight, it was not the disaster of G2—it was the most incredible luck.

But what if Jay was not sufficiently delayed by his fiancée's doubts or by the first-rate performance of G2's leading man? What if he had gone straight from the bookshop to the local constabulary or the State police? No. Probably it was just strong enough to hold Jay off till tomorrow. At least, Garrett must assume it was.

He ducked down the side of the house and went out at a rear gate, kept to shadows at the corner, and peered down four streets. A car was unobtrusively parked in the gloom of an elm. It was empty when he reached it but he found Booker behind the elm, snarling when he called him by name.

"Never mind—it's a good thing you're here. Do you know a man named Jay? Bill Jay, a newspaper reporter. Some of your gang apparently beat him up."

"I know him."

"It was distinctly a mistake to beat him up. . . . He will be coming back here before long, with a girl. She is Scovil's daughter—she must not be alarmed. Can you follow him when he leaves here—and take him quietly? With complete quiet?"

Booker nodded. "Yes, but—"

"Silence! I will hold you responsible. Take him to your camp and keep him there—"

"If there is anything, it is best to—"

"If you harm him in the least I will choke you with my own hands. He is not to be touched—only held there till I decide what to do with him. Do what I tell you." He turned away, then came back. "Say nothing of this to Scovil or *Fräulein* Winkler."

So Erich Köchlin was of the greatest service to James Garrett, and Bill Jay was taken care of. There remained the unpredictable results that might come from the emotions of two women. The lightning that had actually struck had come from a direction about which no predictions could be ventured. Well, he would see. The finale had begun.

Chapter Seven

Connie woke for a moment just at dawn. She thought sleepily that it might be three or four hours since he had kissed her good night and said, "See you in the morning," and went to sleep again. When she woke again it was full daylight. Seven-fifteen and a hot morning. No leaf moved, the lawn was white with dew, and there would be thunder showers. And everything was true: they were going to be married.

Gail's door was open and her bed empty. Connie stood in a cold shower and now she could remember other things, trivial things. He would go to Springfield. No, they would both go. He would get off some wires to California Tech. Maybe Caltech wouldn't answer. So maybe there would be an alumni directory at the Springfield library. He would also telephone to his paper. The *New York Globe* could find out anything. He would wire or telephone to M.I.T., to Harvard, to the Boston libraries. Bill Jay was going to get Mr. John Page cold, or Herr Oberleutnant Römer, as the case might be. Before the day was over he was going to confront him at Pinnacle Manor with a handful of hard facts. . . . Connie smiled. Who was a darling? And could an engaged girl take war, plots, mistakes in identity, or hot weather seriously?

A day like this called for the fewest possible clothes. By habit she got out a play suit, but no, Bill said skirts, so she put on a sleeveless dress. She thought that the mouth which smiled at her in the mirror had a new tenderness. No wonder! She went downstairs.

"Gail!" Sight of those pale cheeks and tormented eyes stopped her short. Her knees shook and the dark forebodings, the intensity of Bill's belief, came flooding back. "You believe it!" she said.

"I do not!" Gail said instantly. "Bill Jay was outrageous. He talked like a fool." There was no bottom to the pain in her eyes but she was cold and convinced. "Can't you make him see that talking like that is dangerous and silly, too? Can you sit here at breakfast and imagine the faintest truth in that nightmare?"

Comfort came back. In the daylight the whole thing, however tangled and mysterious, looked like a series of silly misinterpretations. John Page's amused and questioning nonchalance in itself proved that Bill was wrong.

So much the better! "Bill added two and two and got a Sunday supplement. If that guy is a Nazi, I'm a stylish stout."

Why, Gail had actually been afraid that she believed it! But Connie had no interest in Gail's emotions. She poured out a cup of coffee and must be grinning from ear to ear. "Do I get twenty-one guns, or don't I? I told all and you never said a word. It turns out that Bill is in love with me. That's an engagement ring I'll be getting pretty soon. Ask me how I feel about it."

Gail did not break out in lights. "I'm glad. I'm glad you can be—happy." She looked away. She put some marmalade on a piece of toast. She looked up again. "Is he going to—to do what Mr. Page suggested?"

"Check up on him? Sure—Bill's a stern, determined mind." Connie set down her cup. "Look here, your cue is to congratulate us both on getting me steered safe into matrimony at the first try. We can't keep on jittering because a guy you know has aroused Bill's yen for headlines. You think Bill has made a silly mistake. So do I. Let's stop shuddering." She met those ambiguous eyes. "Speaking as a candid friend, one woman to another, you look like the wrath of God. Sure, Bill and I are going to Springfield and see what we can find out about Caltech. We'll find out that your guy is just what he said he was. So my job is going to be to console poor Bill for making an ass of himself. Now forget it. Anybody would think you were in love with this guy Page."

Gail said, "I don't want any breakfast," and went away—fast.

Well! No wonder she was upset when in walked the *New York Globe* and said he was a Nazi! But as for Constance Scovil, the only thing wrong with her was impatience. She busied herself about the shops. She wasn't going to be a working girl much longer. Or a Martha Case College girl. Bill Jay was her higher education. By the time college opened she would have settled down in the young married set. When? Say two weeks from now. Say next week. Well, how about Wednesday?

Nine o'clock and the oaf hadn't phoned yet to ask anxiously if it was true. She picked up the phone and called the boarding house where he had a room for the summer. Just tell him Wednesday and add that he'd better get over here right now, for it's a long time between kisses. She heard his landlady calling, "Mr. Jay! Mr. Jay—telephone!" She called some more and then reported, "I guess he ain't in."

Connie hung up, swearing. The first duty of a newly appointed fiancé was to call up and say "Hey, I'm in love with you." Instead of which, beyond any doubt, he had broken a whole double handful of promises. He

had gone tearing off to Springfield at about the time she had waked up first. Well, Connie, you're the newspaperman's bride. You never will have a chance when there's a good story on the fire. Better get reconciled to it right now. The darling! She went back to work.

At Pinnacle Manor, Carl Booker was hopelessly bewildered. He no longer had any doubts of Herr Köchlin, and, moreover, no matter how dangerous and costly Herr Köchlin's intentions, he had no choice but to obey orders. But nothing was clear to him and surely it was also his duty to point out dangers.

"He has friends. There is his landlady. I think he is still working for his newspaper. Already many must be wondering why they have not seen him —"

Köchlin had led him to an enclosure of arborvitæ on the far side of the lawn. It was very hot and still; there would be a storm before night. But nothing could diminish Köchlin's fierce, badly contained energy. He swung toward Booker. "Let me take the risks. You can assure yourself I know there are some. When have you a truck going West?"

"We say twelve-thirty. Sometime between midnight and one o'clock it comes past."

"Put him on the truck." Good! Köchlin was showing sense, after all. Get him well out of the state, and then take care of him. "Where will it be by dawn? No—that would be only a hundred-odd miles into New York. You must keep him on the truck till tomorrow night. It should get to, say, Lake Erie. In some deserted place simply turn him loose."

"Turn him loose!" Booker shouted. "*Lieb' Gott!* We kidnap a man so we can turn him loose? You do not understand, Herr Köchlin. When you had me secure him, you made it necessary for him to be disposed of. In ten minutes, at the first telephone—"

"We will not be here. Neither you nor I nor *Fräulein* Winkler."

Booker stared at him, stunned. Köchlin coldly returned the stare. "How big is your staff at the camp?"

"Counting the Inn, twenty in all."

"How many of them are—of us?"

"Four. The agent for the trucks. Two workmen. The man who is taking care—" Careful! He had still been given no permission to mention von Weitbrecht. "The fourth is a guard."

"What are your instructions in case it is necessary to disappear?"

"Warn the truck company. Notify the Forwarding Company. Destroy everything that bears on us and turn the camp over to my assistant, who does not know what it is. The four are to scatter. I would go to Buffalo, where—"

"Be prepared to go with *Fräulein* Winkler and me to New York."

Resentful anger rocked him. He was being ordered to abandon his property forever—and the whole thing could be averted by a simple disposal, hundreds of miles from here, of the newspaper reporter. "I must know—"

"*Achtung!*" Köchlin's command silenced him; his hands went to his sides and his shoulders squared. "Nothing is permitted you except obedience. Instant and unquestioning obedience. Do you think I will pause to consult your convenience?"

"I am not complaining, Herr Köchlin. But I do not understand—"

"You are not required to." But Köchlin moderated his harshness a little. "This much should be plain to you. Our time was short enough, but when we had to take the reporter we forfeited whatever time remained. None of this would have been necessary if you had not all bungled von Weitbrecht. Now I have to act. But if von Weitbrecht gets in tonight, there is still a chance to save your setup here."

"Clearly," he said, "it is necessary for you to see von Weitbrecht—"

Instantly Köchlin demanded, "What do you know about von Weitbrecht?"

With a great effort, "Only what Scovil has told me."

"Scovil!" Köchlin made the name a sneer. "Nine tenths of our troubles are his fault."

"You would leave him here?"

"He is a great man—no doubt he can cover his tracks. If he can't, we will all be gone anyway. None of us will be here day after tomorrow. You understand your orders? Put the reporter on tonight's truck. Release him tomorrow night."

Köchlin dismissed him and went back to the house. All very well to order men about so arrogantly! But Booker went round to the garage and sent a chauffeur to the house to ask Miss Winkler if she would see him. She did not come for ten minutes and, when she came, he could see that she also was disturbed.

"I must understand what is happening, *Fräulein* Winkler."

Her shoulders lifted in humorous despair. "Others would be glad of a little understanding, Carl. Last night he had me prepare the Forwarding Company to send the managers here. Now he tells me to cancel the summons, on the ground it is too late. He is moving to get everything into his hands at once—"

"But, *Fräulein*, why must it be now? And what will become—"

"While he was waiting, he was a charming gentleman without a care. But since he has gone into action—I confess, Carl, I feel very small, helpless and cold. He would not hesitate a second to send me to my death. In theory one is prepared for that. When the moment comes—" she shivered, then smiled. "At least the very strength of his ruthlessness gives one confidence."

Booker doubled his fists. "But what has happened?"

Her face hardened. "Enough, but not yet the worst. For days I have been trying to prevent a break between him and Lynn. Lying to each a little, soothing the ego of each, trying to soften here and appease there. It must not happen!"

"I am beginning to see that Scovil has done us no good!"

"He has delusions of grandeur! Not once has Erich been wrong about anything, and from the first he has warned me against Lynn's ego. He wants too much! But God help us, Carl, if there is a break."

"Why should we wait on Scovil's promise? Why do we not tell Köchlin that von Weitbrecht is here?"

"It may come to that," she said slowly. She put her hands over her eyes and shuddered. "The danger is that Lynn would try to force von Weitbrecht into alliance with him and defy Erich. And it is certain that Erich's rage would be—oh, most dangerous to us. No, once we concealed him, there was nothing to do but go on."

"I would agree to handle Scovil!"

"No—not yet. He is now saying von Weitbrecht will arrive tonight. I trust Erich to handle him. I trust myself, too."

"Von Weitbrecht has got his damned nerve back. He is willing to meet Köchlin. I say—let us take him to him."

"Wait a few hours. Let Lynn talk to him again." She shrugged again, despondently this time. "Whatever happens, I cannot think any of us will ever be comfortable again. But give Lynn a chance to act sensibly. If he doesn't, we will."

Very certainly! It was a time for acting sensibly. He would, himself, act more sensibly than the orders permitted. Beginning with this weak notion of letting the reporter Jay go free tomorrow night. The prisoner, it could be reported, made the serious error of trying to escape prematurely.

Garrett could only watch time slide by, calculate the hazards, and wish with a wry humor for three minutes at an unwatched telephone. At any moment Gail Armstrong might spring the trap which she knew was in her hands. At any moment Scovil's daughter might bring the house down round them all. By this time someone surely, if not the two women, must have decided that the reporter was missing. How long before a search for him would begin? He kept the radio in Scovil's study going, for if anyone reported him missing to the police, they would at once broadcast an inquiry. Possibly that would serve Garrett handsomely. More likely, with von Weitbrecht only a few hours away, it would overturn the whole precarious structure.

It narrowed down to the chance that von Weitbrecht could get here before everything exploded. And, finally, he could only wait while the slow hours passed. He could go to town and phone Washington. Perhaps Washington would put the nearest FBI unit—Boston, no doubt—at his service. More likely Washington would command him, as always, to go it alone. And to appear in Windham might explode the dynamite there. And to leave Scovil's might explode the dynamite here. Just wait, hope and swear.

He sat by Mathilde while she transmitted to the Forwarding Company his orders canceling the rendezvous. She was a trained, effective servant. She spoke guardedly, economically, to the point. "They are relieved," she said. "They say it is unwise to telephone—you should use the truck line to communicate. They say it would have been unwise to send anyone here. And you are not to come there—arrange a meeting place."

"Tell them we are coming nevertheless, both of us. Alone tomorrow, or with von Weitbrecht the day after. Those are orders."

She transmitted them in an emotionless voice and listened to what was said. She drew a sharp breath at one point, and presently hung up. She looked at him and shrugged. "They believe that at least a hundred of our people must have been captured in the last week."

"What does it matter how many small fry are taken? They missed von Weitbrecht. No one of importance has even been endangered."

"For the time being," she said.

Her eyes were fatalistic, and she was more right than she knew. If, groping through the darkness and pitfalls, he missed von Weitbrecht in the finale, he would at least take Mathilde to New York, in ten minutes get enough to deliver the Forwarding Company into the hands of G2, and so close the venture not at a total loss. If he got to von Weitbrecht before the curtain fell, he must contrive to take Mathilde too. Scovil, Booker, the truck line, and all his other leads could be mopped up at leisure and did not concern him, anyway.

"Keep your bags packed and your lips rouged, Mathilde. We may go to New York tonight," he said.

She was studying him closely. "I am ready, Erich. But how has anything changed since yesterday? Since Thursday, for that matter?"

"Just that. Time has been lost. Von Weitbrecht, even, is much less valuable than time. He has failed us, and whoever fails us must be abandoned."

"You said you would give him till tonight."

"Yes. Meanwhile I am arranging to do without him and get his job done."

"Meanwhile, if you go and he comes late and meets Lynn?"

"I will take care of that. . . . By telephone."

It was just before dinner time when Scovil came home, from some errand carefully not disclosed, and touched a match to the powder fuse. Garrett had frequently called Scovil mad—and now it seemed possible that the word was exact, that the egoist's hold on reality had slipped. Excitement was blazing in him when he burst into Garrett's room, his eyes were

vertiginous, and there was an additional anger which, it proved, had been caused by Mathilde's phone call.

"You know I have forbidden it," he said, just short of shouting. "Don't you realize that the telephone company keeps a record of all toll calls? Orders from above—and my orders—are to communicate only through Springfield or Camp Ryegate. The truck line is for that purpose! Suppose something should happen to headquarters? Every call ever made there will be traced. Suppose their lines are tapped? There could be a raid on its way to this house at this moment."

"If one comes after this evening," Garrett said coldly, "you will be free to deal with it as you see fit—alone."

"That is why there will be no more phone calls from this house. And just why alone, Herr Köchlin?"

Garrett studied the pose of haughty grandeur. He said, aloofly, "You were never of any value to me except as a means of reaching von Weitbrecht. You have failed."

The harsh eyes flamed. "I have talked to von Weitbrecht."

"Where?"

"By telephone. He obeys instructions, Herr Köchlin. He telephoned to the camp."

"Where is he?"

But the door opened and Mathilde came in. Even in the urgency of her fears, she had not failed to dress for dinner with the greatest formality. She said at once, however, with one glance at them, "Stop it! Both of you have been acting like boys!"

Garrett said, "Scovil has been in touch with von Weitbrecht. Now where is he?"

"He will arrive tonight."

"Here?"

"No."

"At the camp?"

"No." The flushed face had become defiant. "We will work that out together, you and I. But alone. Please leave us alone, Mathilde."

"Stay here, Mathilde," he said. "Enough of this—"

"Be still, Erich!" She walked close to Scovil and stood studying him. Garrett wondered what she made of the performance he was putting on. The show might be merely egotism, it might be rebellion, and there was always the possibility that, among the other hazards of tonight, there might be a maniac to deal with. Whatever she made of him, she said quietly, "This is no time to be a fool, Lynn," and went out.

"Well?" Garrett said.

"He is driving here by car. I have given him a meeting place and will be there when he comes."

"You fool! He must come here."

"No, Herr Köchlin, I am not a fool." In other circumstances the blend of vanity and adolescent hauteur in that flushed face might have been amusing. But at this moment nothing on earth could be amusing. "It would be your folly to concentrate our forces. The more so since you have opened both my house and the camp to suspicion. He will be within reach this evening. Perhaps you can see him before midnight."

"Perhaps? Just what is in your mind?"

Scovil took the center of his stage. He began coolly enough, "You don't seem to realize how precariously you are placed, Herr Köchlin. In the eyes of all newspaper readers, you are an escaped prisoner of war. If anyone were to report you, you would be a prisoner of the American army. If, for instance, you were so obstinate that I had to defend my position by reporting you. You would be so much more comfortable as a prisoner of war than as a spy that you would think it wise not to retaliate by suggesting that I was anything but a patriotic American acting for the benefit of his country. And also, you are here because you have a job to do."

That was all cool and controlled—but in an instant Scovil was out of hand. "The day you came you remarked that I held you in the hollow of my hand. I have had you there all along. Do you know where von Weitbrecht is? No one knows except me. Can you reach him through anyone but me? No, Herr Köchlin, you were sent on a mission but you need me to complete it. I have only to step to the telephone to make you a grotesque failure. Von Weitbrecht will be at hand this evening, but we will do some talking before you see him." Scovil paused a moment, then said, "Think it over, Köchlin," and went out.

Well, there it was. And midnight some five hours away.

In the early part of the afternoon it was, "You'd think he would telephone. He must be finding out that John Page is the Duke of California with a long record in either crime or good works." Gail had had to listen to Connie much too much and that name—that alias—pounded a nerve that had already meant too much pain. By late afternoon it was, "I'm beginning not to like this a lot. Maybe it's just the good reporter chasing down his lead but it's definitely giving me nightmares." It certainly was. Connie could not sit still, telephoned to the boarding house three times, and was obviously suffering from acute lovesickness. The ailment had one usefulness, it prevented Connie from noticing that anyone else in this house was troubled by problems of loyalty and the heart.

At dinner Connie suddenly shoved her salad away and stood up. "Maybe it's just that there's a storm coming. Maybe I'm a damned interfering woman. But he hasn't telephoned."

She went out. Gail had twenty minutes of frantic ideas and then Connie was back—and desperate. "He didn't go home last night. Gail, I'm terrified."

"He probably went straight to Springfield," Gail said wearily. She didn't care what Bill Jay had done.

"Oh, sure. So I'd be an awful fool if I went and asked the State cops how come. I'm going to be an awful fool."

Gail's indifference vanished at once and she saw the girl's frightened face for the first time. She said swiftly, "You would be a fool. And you'd make Bill very mad indeed. Connie, get hold of yourself! What could have happened?"

"I'll tell you! Your boy friend could be just exactly what Bill said. So he could go right out of this house and tell his pretty friend with the cauliflower ear that we saw on the trail to get rid of Bill."

Since last night the world had got so dark with fear and baseness that that seemed a reasonable possibility. But also there was—a certainty. The man who called himself John Page was an enemy but he was honorable—oh, he was incapable. . . . Her mind fell away into dread. To what dark and hopeless flight was he committed? Against the odds, against decency, let him be swift!

"You may be in love," she said, "but it's still possible to be intelligent. Behave yourself, Connie!"

"Sure, I talked that way too, and now look at us! Aren't we ever going to realize that these things happen?" Connie slumped down on the bed—they were in Gail's room—and sobbed. "I know, it isn't possible, I've lost my good sense. But I'm scared stiff. He would have telephoned! Gail, what can I do?"

Gail smoothed the thin, young shoulder. "You can stop being a child. You can do your hair and take an aspirin. Or a drink. You can lie here and wait for the telephone. When it rings, for heaven's sake don't tell Bill how you've been acting."

She went downstairs, closed the bookshop door behind her, and picked up the telephone. She got Lynn Scovil finally and made him understand that this was she calling. How completely it had faded out! The now inconceivable fact that she had thought herself in love with him belonged to another era, ages ago.

"Is John Page there?"

"No."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know."

"When did he go?"

"Excuse me, I'm extremely busy. Some other time." He hung up.

He had made his start! It could not last but he had had a brave moment of freedom. Maybe she had helped him to get it . . . Nothing was more futile than tears.

The storm broke in a violence of thunder, gusts of wind that shook the house, and torrents of rain. For half an hour the fury kept up, then it stopped and a steady rain set in. And in another hour or so Connie dropped the book she had been trying to read and stood up.

"I don't believe a word of it. Something has happened. I'm going to take one more chance. I'll go see my esteemed father and then I'll see the State police."

"Your father? What possible—"

"He knows what has happened!" Connie said hysterically. "What kind of man has spies living at his house? I've been telling you all year. Yes, and why isn't Bill safe here right now with his arms round me and getting married tomorrow? Because he was in love with me—he didn't want to get my father shown up because maybe I'd feel bad! Maybe you want to marry him but I hope someone shoots him."

She went out with a sob, a flurry of skirt, and rapid heels. She was back in a moment, frantic. "It's raining. It would be. Where's a raincoat? Where are some handkerchiefs?" She tumbled things on the floor of the closet, yanked out a drawer of her dresser, and went out. The heels clattered downstairs.

After a dinner during which Lynn's silent arrogance and Erich's silent wariness were played off against each other, Mathilde Winkler got a few minutes alone with Lynn in the drawing room. She emerged having accomplished nothing, with a heavy fear that Lynn was bringing them all down together. Then Erich was closeted with him and her nerves tautened still more unbearably. She went upstairs but could find neither ease nor distraction . . .

She came out into the hall and exclaimed, "Lynn! What are you doing?"

He was fitting a clip into an automatic pistol. "I am going on an errand," he said, his voice harsh and high. "Someone may need persuasion."

She flung herself on him. "Are we not sufficiently under the threat of death? Have you gone mad?"

The time when the pressure of her body had been a conclusive argument was over. He shoved her away so violently that her bare shoulder struck the wall. "You've made your choice, Booker, you, all of you. From now on I will go my way—"

"With the rope round our necks!" she breathed. She was responsible for this—her weakness, her foolishness. "Lynn! There is no safety for any of us except in Erich Köchlin."

"Then take your chances with him," Lynn shouted.

Erich came upstairs, moving warily, totally alert, totally on guard. "Stand aside, Mathilde," he said.

She saw Scovil exhibit his gun, heard him say, "You know my terms," heard Erich say, with the bark of an officer on the parade ground, "Drop that gun!"—and, turning swiftly, flung herself on Erich, crowding him to the wall. She screamed "Stop!" but was whispering to Erich, "Let him go! It is all right!" Movement meant Scovil slipping past them and Erich flung her back but she leaped and clasped him round the waist. He twisted and her arms slipped to his knees and the two of them went down on the floor. She kept whispering, "Let him go! It will be all right, I tell you! Let him go, Erich!"

"At least it is too late!"

He had got to his feet. His anger terrified her but once more she wound her arms round him. "He would have killed you! It is all right, Erich, he is better gone."

"He is going to von Weitbrecht. And you have prevented me from stopping him." She felt his terrible coldness replacing anger. "We will now have an accounting, Mathilde. He has gone to meet von Weitbrecht. Where?"

"I think I can tell you."

"I'm sure you can." His hand squeezed her shoulder so viciously that she nearly cried out. She said, "Not in the hall, Erich!" He muttered but followed her into her bedroom. She closed the door and stood facing him, actually at bay. "What happened?" she asked.

"That is for you to tell me. He demanded that I agree to put him in von Weitbrecht's place. Or he would join von Weitbrecht and force him to defy me."

Gauleiter Scovil! He was a complete fool—or else a madman. She abandoned him altogether. There was only one question: could she repair the damage? No, there was another question: could she make amends to Erich Köchlin?

"I ordered him to take me to von Weitbrecht. He ran out. When I caught up with him he was whispering to you. You kept me from stopping him, Mathilde—"

"I did not understand—"

"No? Where is this place he is to meet von Weitbrecht?"

She was desperately trying to think out what Lynn might have planned. "I don't know what he means. It may be he has moved him." She threw

Lynn to the winds and waters. “I can tell you where he was yesterday—where he has been since Wednesday. Booker has been hiding him at the camp.”

Incredulity flashed in his face, then his dreadful anger. “He has been here? While time slipped through my fingers?” He had both her shoulders again. “You have been keeping me from him?” She thought that his hands would move to her throat. She screamed, but one of those hard hands came across her mouth to shut off the sound. She struggled free and fell onto the chaise longue. “You don’t understand! At first we dared not. The raid he had escaped frightened him into complete collapse. He would not see you. Once he threatened to kill himself if we took you there. I knew he could do nothing for you in such a state. Then—”

“By that time you had agreed to Scovil’s game.”

“You must not think so!” She got out of the chaise longue. “I have been trying to play him just enough to protect you.” She clasped his arm. “The man is mad with ambition, and with hate of you. Mad with—jealousy—too.” She put an arm round his neck. “At any moment he could have betrayed you. I knew you could master him in the end if I could get enough time for you. Truly, Erich, I have not let you know everything, but it has been to prevent the break that would ruin us all.”

He disengaged her arms. “I do not aspire to replace him, Mathilde.” Her nerves told her, however, that the crest of danger had passed. She sat down, shaking but beginning to get control of herself. Erich’s cold eyes held her. “So the man I was commanded to find has been at Booker’s camp. The man I was captured for and risked death for, escaping. The man it was the sole duty of you and all your organization to bring to me.” He had another thought. “Booker! He also was part of this rebellion.”

“Lynn was his immediate superior. Besides, he suspected you. Till today. Today he has been quarreling with Lynn.”

“And now Scovil is on his way to von Weitbrecht.”

“It will take him more than an hour. They have been keeping him on top of that mountain, where the cabins are. He has to be sent for. Oh, more than two hours.”

“Come on.”

“Yes.” Scovil was armed—von Weitbrecht too. Well, Köchlin would master any situation. She stood up but her knees buckled and she sat down again. “You have frightened me,” she said. “I am not really so weak.”

"No." A satirical smile touched his lips momentarily. "Merely frail. You would endanger your duty for a kiss from Scovil. You throw him to the wolves because I frighten you. Well, let me know when your knees recover."

She stood up. "I am all right." What had ailed her was, after all, fear of his authority, not of him nor of the harm that had been done. His contempt had somehow restored her calm and, the truth was, her admiration as well. Erich Köchlin was a dangerous man—a man so dangerous that, with him on her side, she could not be alarmed about anything. "Come on," she said. Then, "But it is raining. Go get a raincoat."

She got one from a closet. But shoes!—she was wearing satin slippers. She stooped for a pair of brogues—and was tying the second one when she remembered the broadcast. Oh, good God! No, there was time enough—it could be done! She ran out into the hall.

"Erich! We have forgotten the broadcast."

He was putting on a raincoat of Lynn's in the hall downstairs. He looked up angrily—and at that moment the front door opened and a girl burst in. It was Lynn's daughter—and another shock traveled along Mathilde's nerves. In less than ten minutes the broadcast—she must be got rid of. Mathilde hurried downstairs.

The girl's transparent slicker was dripping water on the floor. Her face was strained and frightened. "Where is my father?" she said frantically.

Erich had become a quiet, urbane gentleman. "He isn't here, Miss Scovil." He turned to Mathilde. "Do you know where Lynn is, Mathilde? This is Miss Scovil. Miss Winkler."

"Do you think I don't know her?" The girl's eyes burned at her. "Where is he? I've got to see him."

"He hasn't been here this evening," Mathilde said calmly. And Erich nodded: "I'm sorry, Miss Scovil. I've no idea—"

The girl was terribly agitated—her hands shaking, her face pale and worn, her voice choked. "Has Bill Jay been here?"

"Bill Jay?" Erich looked puzzled. "Oh, the young man! That's true, he was to call on me today. I'm sorry. He hasn't."

If possible, Constance Scovil looked still more desperate. "What have you done with him?" she demanded. She would be in hysterics in a moment—and what could all this mean? Mathilde stepped forward.

But Erich was saying, "Done with him, Miss Scovil? I? I promise you, I have no idea of making trouble. He was rude but I don't resent it."

"What have you done with him?" Her voice rose—the servants would be coming. "I haven't heard from him all day. He didn't go home last night. Tell me where he is or I'll—"

Mathilde said, "What is that about, Erich?" But he had taken the girl's arm. "You are frightened about something, Miss Scovil. There has been no sign of Mr. Jay here. I know nothing about him. I'm sure your father does not, either. Now, suppose you tell me—"

"I know what to do!" Constance Scovil burst into tears and fled through the front door. Erich made a gesture to Mathilde and followed her.

How did Erich know Constance Scovil? What had he to do with a man named Jay? Who was Jay? Why had Lynn's daughter come here to ask her father and Erich about him? Mathilde revolved the questions swiftly, seeing no meaning in them but scenting another danger. But the broadcast! In three minutes!

Erich came back. "Remember that my name is John! She was too excited to notice your slip. Don't repeat it. . . . I think I have soothed her for the moment. But she is on the brink of my identity and there is no time left. Come on!"

"But the broadcast!"

"Damn the broadcast! We are going to the camp."

"You must hear it!"

"Have I time to listen to a radio program? With the truth in my hands at last, and Scovil gone mad, and the police just a telephone call away, why should I listen to a broadcast?"

Because he had sat beside her last night, after coming back from wherever he had been—from, she suddenly realized, a meeting with a man named Jay, and Lynn's daughter, and, oh, very surely, Gail Armstrong—because he had sat by her and listened while the broadcast told him there would be a message for him tonight.

She stared at him in disbelief, bewildered, a shapeless alarm rising to her nerves. "But . . ." It was unthinkable, he was commanded to obey. It took priority over everything. He simply could not ignore it. "Erich!"

"Are you coming with me?"

"Not till the broadcast is over. Erich, it is only half an hour—"

"Damnation!"

He stood raging at her. Then his face cleared of impatience. He nodded. "Come on, then."

At this hour, on alternate nights, there were news summaries and the homely, homespun monologues of one who was identified as Hiram Briggs, an Indiana farmer and a patriotic American who undertook to explain the New Order to his countrymen. Mathilde tuned in just in time to hear his immensely rural twang (Berlin supposed that Indiana farmers talked like the Yankees in "The Old Homestead") announce that tonight he was going to take up some letters which had been written to him by folks back home . . . Letters from America—Mathilde translated that to mean instructions for America. She kept her eyes fixed on her watch, for the keyed sentences were on the half minutes. He began reading part of a letter which accused "President Rosenfelt" of playing the game of the British-Jewish bankers who were determined on enslaving the world.

Hiram Briggs finished reading the excerpt. "Now," he said, in his cozy, country-schoolteacher voice, "that is from one of the common people whom Lincoln loved. Lincoln said you can't fool them and the English can't fool them now. They know the English have always been America's enemies." The second hand on Mathilde's watch touched the half minute. "This week I have received letters from plain folks all the way from New York to Detroit . . ."

New York to Detroit. Received. They were acknowledging receipt of the Importing Company's short-wave report that Erich had arrived. She looked up at Erich. He was tensely staring out of the window, impatiently repressing his desire to get out of here, scorning the message.

The half minute approached again. "One of my friends brings up the dirty, Jew-inspired lie that the Reich has hostile intentions toward Brazil . . ."

Brazil meant Natal. Natal meant the Italian airline. Or: *Send a report*.

At the next half minute, "If my friends in the Middle West could see me here they would know how important their letters are to all of us in Germany who have the interests of America at heart." Mathilde murmured, "They are getting impatient, Erich." Erich was sitting on the edge of his chair, straining toward the door.

". . . a letter from a friend in the great city of Detroit. I lived in Detroit once. I loved its vigor, its vitality, its magnificent energy. Always [the hand touched the half minute] there was something important happening in Detroit." That was hardly coded. New York had reported the raids and something about Detroit was to follow. Von Weitbrecht . . . Erich was scowling at the door. He did not even have his watch out.

At the next half minute, "But those who expect to profit from the lies told about the friends of Germany in the Middle West will have to change their plans." Change their plans. "Erich!" Mathilde said. "Pay attention!"

Erich looked at her angrily. He stood up. The second hand touched the next half minute: "I have decided to postpone until a week from tonight . . ."

Erich switched off the radio, halfway through the keyed order to postpone for a week—whatever was to follow. "Do you want von Weitbrecht to get away from us?" he demanded.

It was as if a flash of lightning had illuminated everything. Mathilde saw, knew, understood. He did not know the code. Never in her life had she had to make so great an effort as she made now in order to stand up casually, carelessly, with no hint of excitement. To stand up without haste or alarm, and to say easily, "Go get a car and bring it to the door. I'll meet you there."

He went out. . . . Till tonight he had found it easy enough to fake it. Night by night he had been able to sit here and listen, look knowing, say nothing, be curt and assured. That was because there had been no message for him before tonight. He had not realized last night that there was to be one. He had not recognized it tonight.

On cat's feet she went to the door, stole to the stairway, looked over. She saw him go through the front door. She fled back to the library. New York! Von Weitbrecht! Lynn was out of reach!

And there had been those patient hours of getting from her everything she knew. He knew—he knew everything. Everything except what he was surely after, the plans for concerted action which von Weitbrecht had developed.

She phoned the camp. A voice answered. "Get me Booker." He was not in the office. "Get him at once. It is life or death."

Fear crawled along her muscles but her mind was cold and deadly. If she could get Booker! If she could not get him, it was up to her. Her arms quivered, her stomach contracted, her knees shook. She stopped shaking. All right!

She heard a car come round the drive. She was about to hang up. But Booker answered.

She whispered into the phone. “Carl! You were right. He is an American. I am alone with him. Come at once. Tell him Scovil has sent you to bring him to von Weitbrecht. I will tell him Scovil has phoned saying you are on the way. Take him away. You know what to do.”

Booker said only, “Can you hold him?”

“I can hold him.”

She put the phone back. She went to her bedroom. There was something she had to get.

Chapter Eight

Garrett waited in a sedan outside the lighted veranda, his fingers impatient on the wheel. What was delaying Mathilde? He could find the camp without her but could not afford the time to go to camp—he must go straight to the back road he had traveled with Booker. Somewhere there, doubtless at the bottom of the ski tow, the trail up the mountain must begin. It looked as if he and Mathilde must climb that mountain by night and in a rainstorm. Or could they intercept Scovil? Or would it be wisest, after all, to go to camp and pick up Booker? Or had Scovil already got to Booker?

Scovil had a gun. Garrett had in his pocket the revolver he had taken from the bookshop and there was an automatic in Mathilde's bag. He had better send her back to get it. . . . Why didn't she come? He drove round the circle to head back toward the gate. The door opened and Mathilde came running down the steps and out on the lawn, apparently thinking that he had started without her. She was screaming, "Erich!"

He stopped and she came up to the window, breathing hard. "Lynn phoned. He is with von Weitbrecht. He is sending Booker to take us to them."

Scovil sending Booker to take him to von Weitbrecht? "Where did he phone from?"

"I don't know. Probably the camp. He must have gone there."

How long since Scovil had rushed downstairs while he and Mathilde rolled on the floor? The broadcast was to have lasted half an hour, but could only have been half-finished when he shut it off. Fifteen minutes of broadcast, and possibly five minutes talking with Scovil's daughter. About twenty-five minutes all told. That was time enough for Scovil to get to camp, but certainly far from enough for him to reach von Weitbrecht on his mountain. Or had he previously arranged to have von Weitbrecht come down from the mountain?

He did not know where Scovil had been this afternoon—anything could have happened. It was quite possible that Scovil had talked Booker into joining his rebellion. Now Booker was supposed to be on his way here. No!

He opened the far door. "Get in, Mathilde."

"I told Lynn we would come with Booker."

"Get in!"

She came round to the door but stood there. "Erich! Booker is coming to take us to von Weitbrecht. This is what you have been waiting for."

Yes, the crux of the matter was that Booker was on his way. The entire margin permitted him to work in was the time before Booker could arrive. He got out and stood beside her in the rain. "Something smells very fishy, Mathilde. I think that Booker has enlisted with Scovil. Get in the car!"

She did not move. She started to say something but his impatience boiled over. "Do what I tell you!" He seized her arm.

At that touch Mathilde stiffened and stepped swiftly back. A premonition flashed along his nerves. He thrust a shoulder at her breast and his fist had started for her jaw when she fired. Pain leaped along his arm and his eyes were blinded but the fist got home. She went down on the lawn and he threw himself across her. She was knocked out. He picked her up and bundled her headlong into the car.

He drove away from Scovil's at full speed, swerved up the first road fork, and stopped. She was still unconscious—maybe she had hit her head as she went down. He flexed his left arm. It seemed to be on fire and the hand was clumsy—getting Mathilde out of the car was a hard job. Handkerchiefs. He had two; he folded them across her mouth and bound them in place with his necktie. Oh, yes, his raincoat! He stripped it off and managed to tie her elbows with the sleeves.

Booker! Also, the servants would have heard that shot. Among a thousand things he did not know was which of the servants, if in fact any of them, were part of the machine. But Mathilde had penetrated his impersonation. Unquestionably she had told Scovil on the phone. But had it been Scovil? It could have been Booker.

The blood that dripped from his wrist must be coming from his shoulder. There was not much of it; it was unimportant. He had to hobble her. But how? He ripped off the greater part of her white skirt, rolled it spirally, and tied it round her knees.

Could you kill a woman by hitting her on the jaw? Probably not—and too bad. His left arm was not much use, when he picked her up—the same arm he had hurt getting off the train. He got her inside, half on and half off the front seat. He accelerated down the slippery road.

He was, at last, doing what he had been sent to do. How much time? Just as much as it would take Booker to get from wherever he was to Scovil's. Five minutes, one minute, half an hour—he had that much lead. He did not know how to find the road that led to the trail up the mountain. He could not take Mathilde with him. And, on the wheel, his left hand was getting numb.

There was supposed to be a lieutenant of State police at the Cottersville barracks but he wasn't on duty. The sergeant who was in charge felt his responsibilities keenly and was a droll fellow besides. Connie had reached the ultimate granite of despair. She had gone over everything; she had pleaded with him, she had had hysterics, and now she was just stubborn. She would keep repeating it all till they did something. The other one, the trooper, seemed a little less incredulous than the sergeant.

"We're the helpfulest people," the sergeant said. "Once I sent four men to a barn outside of Lee where fiends were murdering somebody, and when they got there what was it? It was a dear little baby screech owl hollering for its mamma. Or take Lyman here, once he delivered a lady two pounds of cat meat sixty miles in forty-two—"

"Please shut up!" Connie begged him. "Are you going to do anything?"

"Do anything about what?"

She covered her eyes. "What have I been telling you for hours?"

"Sister," he said, in the kindest way, as if giving her permission to wheel her doll along the sidewalk, "you told me just one thing, that your guy stood you up. It shows he's got bum taste but it could happen to any girl. The rest of it—well, sister, sometimes we get a day off, I been to the movies quite a lot—"

She was beyond desperation, she was just going to make him do it. "Bill and I lay there above that piece of abandoned road and saw that truck—"

"You know, George," the trooper said, "there is that piece of old road. I know what she means. Seven miles northwest of Windham."

"Yeah. She seen a truck there. She seen a car, too. Could of been anything from a road inspector taking his cut up to *Tom Swift among the Hijackers*. Did you ever go back and see it some more, sister?"

"No. And we were walking up the Taylor Mountain trail, and here was a thug and he knocked Bill down—"

The trooper said, “Well, there’s this, George. That piece of road is about a quarter of a mile from where the back road comes down from Camp Ryegate.”

The sergeant gave him a glance that would have withered foliage at forty rods. “Yeah, Lyman, I noticed she’s a blonde. Camp Ryegate! You was swimming there yourself last Thursday. Booker’s a nice guy and he always plays ball with us. There’s the phone. Maybe you want to call Booker up and ask him if he’s seen a newspaper guy that belongs to sister. Tell him sister thinks he’s a kidnapper.”

“What does somebody have to do to get you started?” Connie asked.

“Lyman, he only needs a blonde. Look, babe. Tell me somebody stole your car while you was away, necking. Tell me you heard a shot, even if it was only a backfire. Tell me anything I can make sense of. I got six of the boys asleep upstairs right now, and here’s Lyman who’s always rarin’ to pick up any Jack the Ripper any blonde says she seen. But don’t come in here on a rainy night and say there’s a Nazi wanderin’ loose in Berkshire County, and the third reel of a spy film playin’ in my back yard, and headquarters of the underworld on top of Taylor Mountain—”

Connie slumped in her chair. It was that way. She had done her utmost and he didn’t believe her. She began to shake again, all over.

“What do you want us to do?”

That was Lyman. Connie sat up again, with no hope. “I thought you did things. If he’s missing, don’t you send out word? Don’t you put it on the radio? Don’t you start looking for him? If I tell you about Camp Ryegate, and this spy, and what happened on the trail—don’t you start investigating what I’ve said?”

“Tell you what,” the sergeant said. “If your boy friend don’t come home tonight—he will, but if he don’t—you tell the Windham cops.”

Lyman said, “About this road—I’d be willing to look into it—”

Connie breathed deep—if he would, at least that would be a start. The sergeant snorted. “Eleven-twenty. O.K., Lyman, your trick lasts till midnight and I’m willin’ to give it to you. But the rest comes out of your sleep.”

Lyman got a slicker from a closet. “If you haven’t been sniffing snow, if the boy friend is right about that truck coming regular—well, you drive me out there and we’ll see.”

She was already half out of the door. “What are we waiting for?” But the sergeant called her back, grinning. “Got a hatpin, sister? I never had no trouble with Lyman on a back road, but then I ain’t a blonde.”

Lyman settled beside her in Gail’s coupé. “Comical, ain’t he? Well, I don’t believe a word of it, either, and I never loved waitin’ in the rain, but I’m taking a chance you ain’t as cockeyed as you talk.”

“But just one of you!” she said hopelessly. “There must be dozens of them—there were four that night. I thought you’d turn out the whole force.”

Lyman—was it his first or his last name?—was affronted. “You don’t think they’ll show up with a tank?”

Bill said that the truck rendezvous was regular, some time after midnight. The Cottersville barracks were about ten miles from Windham and Lyman had said that piece of road was seven miles on the other side. Seventeen miles, eleven-twenty.

Bill darling! The road and the rain and the headlights blacked out for a moment but she fought the dizziness down. This was all improbable, a midnight drive through a deluge, nothing sure or even sensible, no hope that Bill would be there, that she could do anything for him—but she would not scream, she would make this policeman understand. She brushed a wet sleeve across her eyes, clamped her mouth shut, and kept going.

It was toward the middle of the afternoon when Bill Jay realized that he wasn’t going to get out of this alive. Up till then there had been the fool’s notion that they would let him go when they got the aviator away. But the simple, bedrock fact was that he had blundered into too important a setup, he had found out too much. He knew that when he saw von Weitbrecht come out into the cleared space, with the man who had the cauliflower ear.

Cauliflower Ear was the thug they had met on the trail. Bill was morally certain that it was Booker who had hit him on the head last night but he did not see Booker till later in the day . . . This place was a half basement under the log-cabin lodge at the bottom of the ski tow. The walls were thick concrete, the beams were big logs, the door was made of puncheons bolted together—everything was as solid as a penitentiary. There was nothing in it but drums of thick rope and heavier drums of steel cable, and it was safe to leave Bill Jay or anyone else here unbound. In each wall a two-foot steel ventilator was set in the concrete, and these let in a dim light and permitted

him, by standing on a cable drum, to see the clearing, the end of the trail, the back road curving in, and a wall of trees. That was what he had to look at while he figured out a hundred ways in which he could have avoided disaster if he had been intelligent.

Cauliflower Ear had brought him breakfast and lunch—cold coffee and sandwiches neatly wrapped in the Ryegate Inn's lace-paper napkins and thoughtfully garnished with olives and potato chips. Each time he had crouched by the door and leaped, and each time Cauliflower had silently slapped him down. The day wore on—no one was in sight anywhere, nothing moved and there was no sound, and it looked like a hot afternoon outside but the cellar was as delightfully cool as a grave. It must have been midafternoon when, from a side grating, he saw two figures come out of the trees at the far end of the clearing. One of them was soon recognizable as Cauliflower Ear. Then, as they approached, the other was, incredibly, Herr Gustave von Weitbrecht. Bill Jay had seen him in San Francisco and Detroit —and now Bill Jay, that great reporter, that blank cartridge, recognized him at sight.

So that was why the trail had been guarded. That was why an escaped Nazi had come to Windham. So the simple truth about Camp Ryegate and Mr. Carl Booker was clear and beautiful. Also, in much too simple words, here was why the great reporter was not going to see Connie again.

From an end grating he saw Cauliflower drive off down the road in a station wagon, and those occasional footsteps overhead would be Herr von Weitbrecht, finance officer of various Nazi organizations, manager of industrial sabotage and contriver of labor unrest, director of many single-minded, industrious men who were working to defeat the United States. Herr von Weitbrecht was taking his ease at a pleasant summer resort while the United States looked for him. What a witness for the prosecution Bill Jay could be! So he had all afternoon to remember how many chances he had had to use his head, and how many times he had not used it.

A half hour later a car came up the road and stopped a few rods from the lodge, and this was Mr. Lynn Scovil getting out of it. Mr. Lynn Scovil, the great peace lover, the prophet of defeat, the friend of Christian Fronters and Germany-Is-Our-Friend committees and any fool or rogue who would listen to him. Mr. Scovil was in a tearing hurry. He ran up the steps and there were voices coming through the floor. Bill shoved and sweated till he was able to pile one cable drum on another and, standing on it, bring his head to within a few inches of the ceiling. But the voices were deadened—he couldn't make

out a word. Mr. Lynn Scovil and Herr von Weitbrecht seemed to be quarreling but none of it came through the floor.

He was weak with impotent anger. You might respect this Lieutenant Römer, who after all was a soldier. You hated von Weitbrecht but hated him coldly, as an enemy of your country, to be disposed of as you would dispose of vermin. But you couldn't hate Scovil coldly. If Bill Jay, who wasn't going to see tomorrow morning, could have his wish, what would he take? Well, it would be good to hold Connie in his arms again. It would be good to get just five minutes at a telephone and arrange, before you died, to have von Weitbrecht and Booker and Römer gathered in. But best of all would be to get one minute, sixty small seconds, with your hands free and Scovil in front of you.

Connie would forget Bill Jay before long, she would marry someone else. But what she could never forget was a father who had preached peace and loved America at every microphone while he worked in secret places with Nazi agents . . . For God's sake, don't think of Connie!

Footsteps padded on the floor, and then that pretty pair were outside again. Fifty yards away, at Scovil's car, they were saying unintelligible but violent things to each other. Scovil's face was contorted and the handsome *saboteur* looked dangerous. Then Scovil flung out his hands in some climactic curse, got in the car, and drove away. Coming back, von Weitbrecht passed a few feet from Bill's grating.

It must have been about six o'clock when Scovil was back again. Von Weitbrecht leaped down the stairs to meet him at the road, the fight taking up just where it had left off. But another car came up and here was Carl Booker, sitting behind the wheel and watching. Booker looked as vigilant as a cougar and fully as dangerous. Suddenly he was out of the car, crossing the little space at an angle, and the other two had made a sudden tableau. There was a gun in von Weitbrecht's hand and Scovil looked as if a wire had pulled him up standing. They were going to begin shooting each other—and that was just fine. But they didn't. Scovil emitted an inarticulate sound, between a scream and a bellow, and got back into his car. He shouted something else and drove away, the big roadster skidding when it touched the gravel of the road. Booker laughed. It was not a sweet laugh.

Booker and von Weitbrecht walked back to the lodge. They stopped ten feet from the grating and were talking—but in German. Why hadn't the great reporter learned German? Because he was a blank cartridge, a triply

damned fool. He heard a name several times: Köchlin—but was Köchlin a man or a city or just what?

"*Köchlin muss bestimmt heut' abend hier kommen*," von Weitbrecht said.

"*Ja, heut' abend. Aber Scovil—*"

"*Wenn Sie nicht mit Scovil fertig werden können, werde ich . . .*"

Well, somebody named Köchlin was to come here tonight. Something was to happen tonight . . . Yeah. A lot of things were to happen tonight.

And tonight, it developed, the condemned man was not going to get the traditional hearty meal. Just after dark the storm broke in a half hour of fury, then settled down to a pounding rain. But no supper came . . . He realized that he was walking up and down in the thick, cold dark; sixteen steps and his hands touched one wall, turn, sixteen steps back, then the far wall. Like a man in a cell. Why not? Only this wasn't a cell, it was the death house. Stop it, Jay! Keep hold of your nerve! He stopped pacing, but not for long—he had to keep in motion. Yes, he'd understand the poor devils in the death house, after this. Would he? There wasn't going to be anything after this.

Time had no end, it simply went on flowing in the dark . . . A beam of light slanting across the grating halted his march. He glued himself to that grating. A car was coming up the road. It didn't come as far as before. It stopped outside the clearing, the lights swung; he guessed it was being backed into some bushes, then the lights went out. No one came to the lodge. No one moved. There was no sound. Had von Weitbrecht heard or seen that car? No way of telling, and no way of knowing who was in the car . . . He stayed there, his senses razor-sharp, his despair lost in a total watchfulness. Time went on flowing in the dark.

Far down the trail headlights glinted from the foliage—here, there, disappearing, coming closer. A car came out into the clearing, and the footsteps that would be von Weitbrecht's hurried across the floor and down the steps. The engine of the car had not been shut off, the headlights still made a long beam in the rain. The figure that came into the beam was von Weitbrecht. There was a loud oath and another figure came into the light but Bill could not identify it. They were gesticulating; von Weitbrecht was almost dancing. Then there was a third figure, also unidentifiable. From the hidden car maybe? They moved, and light and shadow and rain distorted them.

A spurt of orange flame cut across the darkness and one of the silhouetted figures fell sprawling. The car's lights were switched off and the

engine stopped. Bill strained his ears and eyes to make out more, but there was only the rain. After a while a dim figure came to the steps and someone was walking overhead again. Then the lights of the car that was hidden down the road went on and slid downhill among trees. It looked as if it was the driver of the second car who had got his.

Bill went back to pacing in the dark. Only now he had seen a murder. Patches of his skin twitched and sometimes the muscles of his thighs quivered. Out there in the rain was a dead man, a murdered man . . . Before long there would be another one.

Time and the rain went on. He was just a waiting dread. There were lights again and he pressed against his grating. Another car. Flashlights came across the clearing and along the wall. There was a shuffling at the door.

This was it. How sweet Connie's lips had been, how soft her arms, how promising her breast. Well, this was it. He crouched beside the door and flung himself headlong as it opened. There were two of them. They got him down. They tied his wrists and ankles. They shoved something thick into his mouth. They carried him out into the rain and shoved him head-first into a car. That would be Cauliflower's station wagon. It started off.

Gail woke to cold and darkness, unable to believe she had been asleep. It was unlikely that fear and loathing could be blotted out ever so briefly. But they had been, for now they were rushing back again. She had been asleep and had had no covers over her, for she was shivering with cold as well as fear. She switched on a light. Ten minutes to twelve. Then she could have slept only a few minutes. She got out of bed and, barefooted, went to Connie's room. It was dark and Connie was not there. No light downstairs. She turned on the hall lights and stood at the head of the stairs, afraid. She called "Connie!" and her voice echoed through emptiness. She ran downstairs and had to get all the rooms lighted—wall brackets, bridge lamps, everything. Panic swept over her and she didn't know why, except that she was alone.

She froze to stone. Something was moving on the porch, making a soft, slithering, formless noise. She could not move nor even scream. The door swung inward and a woman being carried by a man came through it. The well-remembered voice said, "Lock the door, Gail," and this was John Page and the woman was Mathilde Winkler. They went down in a heap on the hall

floor and Mathilde Winkler was writhing and thrashing, and John Page got his shoulder across her and held her down.

"Lock the door. Get a rope."

This was some scene in a trance, but his voice was concentrated excitement and concentrated command. Completely dazed, Gail shut and locked the door. She cried out now, for there was blood on John Page's cheek, on his coat, on his hands and wrists. Mathilde was straining on the floor, trying to roll, trying to get away—a bundle of violent, twisting effort. Gail now saw that there was blood on her face too, that her arms were pinioned, that her skirt had been torn off, that her knees were tied. As she stared, whatever held those knees was wrenched away and Mathilde began to kick wildly. But this was real!—the woman was being hurt, she was fighting. John Page sprawled across those thrashing legs and held them to the floor. He shouted, "Get a rope!"

His voice would have got obedience from a statue. Still trance-bound, Gail ran down cellar and got a piece of clothesline. John Page took it and drew Mathilde's straining ankles together and tied them. "Knife!" Gail rushed to the kitchen for a butcher knife. He cut the rope at the knot, ripped away the raincoat that had pinioned Mathilde's arms, and tied her wrists behind her back. While she struggled, something that had been tied round her mouth slipped away and she screamed—a meaningless cry of rage, like something heard in the woods at night. Page replaced the gag—it had been tied with his necktie. He got to his feet and stooped to lift Mathilde. Slow drops of blood fell from his left wrist. He was clumsy. He knelt again, slipped his right arm under Mathilde and stood up. She was trussed but still struggled on his shoulder.

"Some closet you can lock!" he said.

The words came thinly to Gail's paralyzed mind. She glanced upstairs and at once he was staggering up. She followed, pointing to the closet off Connie's room. Mathilde was making choked, rabid noises behind the gag. He shoved her in on the floor, closed the door, turned the key and put it in his pocket, and ran downstairs, shouting, "Come on, Gail."

In the downstairs hall, he said, "My hand is useless. You must drive the car for me." He said that at the height of urgency. But then he fastened an iron discipline on himself. The incredible, shattering excitement reached a lull. His eyes stopped blazing and they saw her for the first time. "You can't drive a car in a nightgown," he said accusingly. "Go get some clothes on. Hurry. You must help me and there is no time."

Reality was beginning to come through the nightmare but she still found no meaning in this scene. But she contrived to say, "You're hurt!"

He took his left hand in his right and looked at it. Gail too bent over it and several slow drops of blood fell on her nightgown. She saw that, besides the rain which had soaked it, his light jacket was stained with blood. "Yes," he said quietly, "we'd better tie it up." His eyes searched the house. "Move fast. But put on some clothes."

He rushed upstairs again and she heard him switching off the lights she had turned on. The nearest clothes were in the shop. She got a sweater and skirt, stripped off the nightgown, and at least was covered when he came in to turn out these lights too. He said "Hurry!" and went out. She turned on the lights long enough to see a pair of Connie's tennis sneakers under a counter, slid her feet into them, turned off the lights again, and went out to find bandages.

By the light of a single desk lamp in the bookshop John Page was taking off his jacket and his white shirt sleeve was bloody. He laid down a revolver on the desk—and at last her shocked mind remembered what he was. She stopped short and the rolls of gauze fell from her hand.

He looked up. "Don't be a fool," he said. "If you had any real doubts about me, you would have been screaming long since. Move fast!" He slipped the shirt off and, wadding it, wiped his arm free of blood to show an ugly, open-lipped, curving wound that ran almost from the elbow to the shoulder. Blood slowly ebbed back to the wound. "It's nothing," he said. "Tie it above and below and strap some gauze across it."

He sat down with the revolver near his right hand, pulled the telephone to him, stretched his left arm along the desk for her to work on. He called the toll operator, asked for a number in Washington, and sat waiting. Her mind whirling with surprise, dread, and stunned relief, she was aware of his total alertness. He sat motionless but he was electric, resolute, reaching out toward some fixed purpose. He had the whole of this room and this moment in his mind; at the same time he was already far away, making toward some consummation.

He said, "I can't help it—I've got to risk your life. I can't swing it alone. She made that certain when she winged me."

Gail stared. "She shot you? Mathilde Winkler?"

"She's a Nazi . . . My God, Gail, not iodine! It's not a cut finger."

She shook her head clear of dizziness. She laid gauze squares across the wound and began to bind them in place with a bandage. "I can't—will you tell me what—I don't understand . . ." She stopped and drew a long breath. "I was asleep. Please tell me what is happening. I thought you—"

He swore into the phone. "Good God, girl, it's only Washington I want, after all." After a while someone answered and he said, "Headquarters call." Another voice, and he repeated, "Headquarters call," and the wounded arm hardened with his impatience. He muttered, "All hell could explode in this room while we wait for telephone operators." She saw that he was afraid of something and her own shapeless fears returned. But he got through at last.

"Garrett speaking—Captain James Garrett." His eyes moved to hers for a moment. "I must have Major Spence at once . . . No, let it go, there isn't time. Get this down and get Spence on the job . . . This is James Garrett . . . Yes. I'm at Windham, Massachusetts."

He turned his head aside to whisper, "Well, you too, Gail." Then, to the phone, "The job has blown up in my face. Phone the Boston FBI to get here—and anyone you can reach who is nearer. They can fly to Pittsfield. How long will it take them? . . . Two hours and a half is three hours too long. I'll do what I can. I'll get the State police—if there's time. Phone them to take orders from me. Cottersville Barracks. Now write this down. A man named Lynn Scovil . . ." He spelled it out. "His house, called Pinnacle Manor, six miles out of Windham on the Greenfield road. That's the main thing. Get everyone. Get Scovil especially—at the moment, he's loose with a gun. Now, on the Vermont road, a place called Camp Ryegate, also the Ryegate Inn. If anything has happened—if I'm not on hand—take the whole place over, get everybody. Especially the proprietor, named Carl Booker."

He spelled that name too. Gail had stopped bandaging his arm to stare at his alert face. He was concentrated on the swiftest explanation—but her mind was again trancelike—dazed with the incredible unreality that was unfolding.

"Booker is after me too. He may get me. Now, send a man to the College Bookshop in Windham, just off the common, to the south. A woman named Mathilde Winkler—W-i-n-k-l-e-r—will be locked in a closet upstairs. If I don't pick up the FBI at Scovil's, I will at that bookshop. Maybe."

He paused with that word, then went on. "Spence is to telephone New York to pick up the Forwarding Company at once. It's possible that the Winkler woman has already phoned them. At any rate, don't wait any longer; pull everything in New York right now." He said something

incomprehensible about a truck line, and then Gail heard her own name. "If she makes contact with them, they are to do whatever she says—I will have instructed her. If she doesn't, they are to scour the countryside till they find her. Now, there remains von Weitbrecht."

He muttered to Gail, "Faster!" Then, to Washington, "I almost had von Weitbrecht when I was discovered. He isn't far off. I'm starting for him now . . . What?" He shouted, "Can you handle it from a desk in Washington? I'm starting to find him now. . . . What good would it do for you to take him? He would shut up. He must be made to spill his stuff. To me. He thinks I'm a Nazi . . . Oh, the hell with you."

He banged the phone down, stood up, put on the sodden jacket. "That's who I am, Gail." He put the revolver in his pocket, turned out the desk lamp, thus making the whole house dark, and took her hand. "Take me out the back door. Fast."

Leading him, she felt her way to the back door. He slid it open, looked out, then whispered, "Come on," and they were going down the shadow of the porch. His car was in the drive. "Start it—hurry!" She got behind the wheel. "Get away from this house. Then the Vermont road, the road we came in on."

When they had gone about a mile, he had her stop. "We had to get away from the house—Booker might have found me there at any moment," he said. "This is it, Gail. I don't know who is after me or how close. But from now on—well, you must understand there's a chance neither of us will come out of it. It's damned dangerous. I've got no right to call on you for help. You've got no right to refuse."

But by now her heart had slowed down, she was less excited than at any time since she had heard the first slurring noise on the porch. "I'm not refusing," she said. "Tell me what to do."

He didn't even say, "Good!" He said merely, "There's some back road from Camp Ryegate to a kind of lodge or shelter where the ski tow up Taylor Mountain begins."

"Yes. I know."

"Well, find it. I'm probably going up Taylor Mountain."

"Am I going with you?"

"Only to the ski tow. You'll wait for me there. Alone. And ready to drive like hell if anything happens. Get started."

She got started, her mind clear and her heart uplifted. She had caught something of his exalted concentration. The background of her thinking was a jumble of chaotic fragments that were beginning to fall into place—Lynn, Bill Jay's ideas, the fears and suspicions of many months, the mysteries of the last few days, above all the dark bewilderment of the John Page whose name had been Römer, the Nazi flyer who had come bleeding into her house and turned out to be Captain James Garrett of the United States Army. But the foreground was the headlights stabbing through the steady rain, and a silent, fixed attention to what James Garrett was saying.

"We're after a Nazi named von Weitbrecht. He's on Taylor Mountain—or else he isn't. If no one has reached him in the last hour, he thinks I am Erich Köchlin, sent from Germany to give his orders. My whole job has been to find him and pump him. If someone has reached him—well, there'll be nothing to do but play it as the cards fall . . . It would be nice to know how I tipped my hand to Mathilde Winkler. Let that go. Now, if I'm—if you have to finish it alone. There are some things you must tell my little playmates, when they find you."

She listened. An appalling summary of Lynn Scovil's purposes with the peace movement. A synopsis of Mathilde Winkler as an agent of the Forwarding Company. The truck line as the means of communication. A code on short-wave broadcasts from Berlin—"I didn't know it, and if G2 knew it I should have been drilled—but they can crack it." . . . Sickness, disgust and horror buffeted her but she fought them down. Then, very suddenly, she realized that he was telling her all this in the expectation that in a few minutes—before the two and a half hours he had calculated at the phone were over—he might be dead. He was giving her instructions as his representative. Ice closed over her and a slow shudder rippled down her arms. Stop that! If he could be unafraid, she could listen quietly.

He had a single moment of bitterness, when he finished. "But if I don't reach von Weitbrecht, the whole thing will just be farce. Just the grotesque failure of a man born to make mistakes when the pinch comes."

Gail said, "Here's where we turn off for the lodge. It's about two miles."

"Turn up the road and stop for a moment."

With the engine stopped and the lights out, the world was empty. Rain made a steady swishing and the darkness was impenetrable. The night was straight from a delirium. It could not possibly happen. Treason and death and the world turned upside down could not possibly be real.

He said nothing for a moment. Then, "I'll stand on the running board. Drive slowly. Tell me when we're near the lodge and we'll turn off the lights again." He sat motionless. Just rain and darkness. But behind them terror was gathering like the crest of a wave. "Damn my arm!" he said angrily. "Gail, where are your lips?"

But one arm came round her shoulders and her own arms were strong . . . Finally, his serene whisper, "So, my dear . . . Let's get started."

He stood on the right-hand running board, his injured arm clamped over the window ledge. She knew that the revolver was in his right hand. The headlights swayed up the narrow, twisting road, under the arched branches of trees. He would be drenched with rain. A wild laughter rose to her lips—that, in the shadow of death, she should think of his discomfort in the rain—but she suppressed it.

Up and round, swaying, the tires sliding in mud. Gail's breathing shortened and her hands grew tense and stiff on the wheel. This was a progress toward pure horror. Not terror—the amazing thing was that she no longer felt any fear—just horror, just the unspeakable. It was ahead of them, it had to be faced.

She whispered, "We're getting there." His voice was clear and without strain. "Turn off the lights." In the dark they crept forward. The rutted road was lighter than the trees and the rain. "Stop," he said. "I see the roof."

She stopped and the rain went on falling. James Garrett came to the window beside her. "I'm a fool clear through to the end—I have no flashlight . . . The trail begins straight across, at the far end?"

"Yes . . . Look, there is a car parked just ahead."

He vanished and time came to a full stop. Gail was mere sentience. Then his head was at the window again. "I recognized it," he said curtly. "Turn the car round and head it down the road. There can be no one here or we would have been—stopped—before now. You must simply wait, Gail. It will be dreadful but you must wait. If anything comes up the road—get past them and get home—get out somehow, anyhow. If I come back first, all right. If someone else comes down from the mountain before I do, you must use your head—"

She did not scream. She said, "Someone is coming!"

So even sentience ended, in a distillation of pure horror. Whoever it was came round the car that was parked ahead of them; Garrett leaped far from the window and, dimly, she saw his hand go up. "Scovil?" he said, softly.

"*Nein. Ist das Herr Köchlin?*"

"*Aber ja! Von Weitbrecht?*"

"*Ja. Heil Hitler!*"

"*Heil Hitler!*"

Gail's breath came back raggedly, at the unmistakable triumph, the overmastering triumph in Garrett's voice. At once he swung the rear door of the sedan open. "*Geschwind!*"

The two of them were in the rear seat. He leaned forward. "Get back to the main road as fast as possible. Take chances. Then drive up and down any highway but stay away from Windham till I tell you. Keep going—don't stop for anything. Wherever there is likely to be traffic."

She swung the car round and got it started downhill, the lights probing the rain again. In the ecstasy of deliverance, the release from that clotted horror, the knowledge that for a moment the incalculable risk had been surmounted, she found it still more difficult to think, to see clearly, even to breathe. Excitement had quadrupled, was beating a pulse in her ears, in her throat. And Garrett's voice had that pulsing triumph, like a trumpet of victory:—

"Now, Herr von Weitbrecht, you must be fast. You must tell me all you have planned, where it stands, what is under way, what remains to be done . . ."

Booker said, "You're sure it was a shot?"

"Yes." The house man nodded twice. "Right here, near the front door. But when I got here, there was no one. They are gone, Mr. Page, Miss Winkler . . ."

Booker turned and ran down the steps, back to his car. If it was a shot, Mathilde must have fired it. But it had failed—she had missed—the American knew he was recognized—the American was loose.

He could not know how much the American might have learned.

Back to camp? Not yet. There was one place where the American had been, where he had been twice. Where he had ordered the reporter grabbed. The bookshop . . .

Booker stopped his car a block away and crept up the back alley, crouching at the corner of the garage. The house was black. And the American might be inside, with a gun. He would have taken Mathilde Winkler's gun. Booker pulled out his own gun, got through a gap in the hedge, crept up the back steps. The doorknob turned in his hand. He took a step inside. Nothing. Step by step, pause by pause, his ears straining. No. If anyone were downstairs it would have happened by now.

On hands and knees he crept upstairs. A bedroom, empty. Another bedroom, empty. No one was in this house. He stood in the center of the room. Something was moving! On the floor. No. Behind a door. A soft, repeated, shuffling sound, as if someone were rolling on the floor.

He waited. The sound went on. "Mathilde!" he called.

Nothing. But the soft, rolling sound redoubled. He turned on a shaded lamp. It was behind the closet door. The door was locked. He strained at it.

He looked round. Screw driver. No, hammer and pliers. He ran downstairs, got a kitchen light on, found tools in a drawer. He went back upstairs and began to take the hinges off that closet door.

Chapter Nine

There was a clump of hazel at the side of the old road, opposite the cut where Connie and Bill had watched the meeting of truck and car less than a week ago. Lyman—she had learned that that was his first name, that he was Trooper Lyman Sharp—had parked the car, Gail's coupé, just back of that hazel. They were sitting on the sodden ground and the hazel probably kept off some of the rain but rivulets of drainage from the road flowed around them. Huddled in her slicker, Connie clasped her knees and shook. She seemed to have been shaking for hours. Would she ever be warm again?

"You scared or just cold?" Lyman inquired.

"Both. Shut up."

Did he think she was cast iron? How simple and hopeful the world had been when she had lain here beside Bill! That midnight meeting had scared her, but the terror was nothing compared to this weight of despair. That night, the principal question had been whether Bill was going to kiss her! What might they have done to him by now? She bent her wet forehead down to her wet sleeve and tried to shut out the terrible images of what they might have done, but she couldn't shut them out. And twenty-four hours ago he had kissed her good night, and had said, "See you in the morning."

"You better make good, sister," Lyman said gloomily, "or it will be me, not the State, that pays to have this uniform cleaned."

Her tortured nerves tried to explode in a laugh that would have meant hysterics but she managed to hold it back. But maybe that was the best thing to think of, a policeman's muddy uniform. Or how foul with mud she was. She was dry down to the waist but from there on she was water-soaked . . .

She dug her fingers into his arm. Headlights had turned into the road from the end that was nearer the camp. "They turned them off, before," she whispered.

"Takin' a chance on the rain. O.K., sister, just don't move."

Move? What with? Brilliant light passed across the clump of hazel and the falling rain showed clear. The beam slid on down the abandoned road, tires passed not ten feet from her eyes, and the darkness was redoubled. The

car went on, then stopped, hardly a hundred feet away. The lights went out. She couldn't see anything. She could just hear the rain swishing at the road.

Lyman was fumbling at his belt. He said cheerfully, "Just sit here. But if I yell for you, come ahellin'."

He slid through the hazel to the road and Connie diminished to pure fear. Something was turning and twisting and, dazedly, she realized that that was her stomach—and a light showed down the road and a shout came through the rain, "Come on, babe!" She was out on the road, stumbling, running.

It was a station wagon. The trooper was pointing a flashlight at two men who were standing by the radiator with their hands in the air. Her breath was coming in racking gasps, and Lyman said, "Hold this on them while I look for fleas." He gave her the flashlight, said "Keep it steady," and began to whistle a tuneless note between his teeth. One of them, under a slicker, was wearing a Camp Ryegate uniform—and Connie's stomach twisted again when she recognized the other one as the thug with a cauliflower ear they had seen on the trail. Lyman came up behind them. "I rolled a seven," he remarked, and took a revolver from the man she didn't recognize. "This is an Eagle Scout"—and he took an automatic from Cauliflower Ear. "That will do to ask questions about. Hold it steady, babe." He took his own gun in the other hand and got a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and clicked them round the wrists of the uniformed man. Connie managed half a scream but Lyman had seen Cauliflower Ear move too. He batted him over the head with the barrel of his revolver. The man's knees buckled and he went down in the mud.

Connie dropped the flashlight, fell on it, picked it up. Lyman got down on one knee beside the huddled figure and in the circle of light she saw that his face was angry. But he was still talking amiably. "We could use some rope. See if there's some in the car, sister."

She jerked forward on leaden legs, turned the flashlight into the station wagon, and screamed, "Bill!" The bound figure arched and rolled. "He's here," she cried weakly, "he's alive," and climbed into the station wagon. "Darling! It's all right! I've got a cop." She dropped the damn flashlight, and there was something tied over Bill's face, and she couldn't see and her hands wouldn't work. She clawed at that gag, and Trooper Lyman Sharp roared, "Get heavy on that rope!"

The thing came off. Bill grunted, "Do what you're told, Connie." But there wasn't any rope. Yes—there was one round his ankles and through tears she fumbled at that. Got it! She climbed over Bill, slid out of the car

and gave the rope to Lyman, and the flashlight jiggled in her hand. "Hold it, babe," Lyman said with the sweetest reasonableness, and Cauliflower Ear had a bloody head, but she held the flashlight somehow and Lyman got his wrists tied.

"Get your guy," he suggested and stood up. Connie leaped to the end gate of the station wagon, and poor Bill was trying to get out without any hands. She managed to prop the flashlight in the corner but she had begun to cry and her fingers kept slipping at the knots. Bill said, "Heads up, Connie," and the rope came free. Instantly Bill was over the end gate. She followed, sprawling in the road, but got up and hung on to him. He put an arm round her. She heard the queerest sound. It turned out to be Connie Scovil, crying.

"A truck will be here any minute," Bill was saying desperately.

Lyman said, "Yeah," thoughtfully, and "We better get back in the bushes . . ." The man with the handcuffs leaped for the side of the road. Lyman kicked his feet from under him, pulled him up by the collar, and hit him in the face. "Try that again and you'll come down sick," he said. "Sit down by your buddy and count sheep. . . . You two check so far," he informed Connie. "We're on schedule, so we'll pile back in the bushes and hold hands —"

Bill shouted, "There's a handful of spies loose—"

Lyman said, "I can hear you." He stopped for the flashlight, which had slipped from Connie's hand. "State property, babe, I'd have to pay for it . . . You two got your story pat, haven't you? Well—"

"Trooper," Bill broke in, "up on Taylor Mountain there's a man that the United States Secret Service is looking for. There's half a dozen others on the prod in Windham this minute; we've got to notify—"

"I come for a car and a truck. I only got the car," Lyman sighed. "Well, you take sister and her car and go notify. Stop at the first phone and call the barracks and tell them to send me a helper to hold my tools."

"Can you take that truck?"

"Sometimes I need a second bite," Lyman said modestly. "Phone first. Then go right on in to the barracks and tell the sergeant what's on your mind. And look, brother, you stay there till I get back. All I know about you is just what sister tells me."

Bill was just short of dancing with impatience. "That truck could turn in here any second. Look, I've got to have a gun—"

"Gun? What for?"

"These babies were wearing them, weren't they? You think it may not be lodge night for the others?"

Lyman said nothing. Bill's arm tightened round Connie and she clung harder. She became aware of the rain again and how black the night was. Lyman said, "Oh well, I'm a setup for blondes. Here." He handed Bill something in the dark, and it must have been a gun. Bill said, "Where's that car?" Lyman said, "Wait a minute. . . . Stop somewhere and buy sister a candy bar. She's got one coming to her."

Bill roared, "Where's that car?" and Connie contrived to say, "I'll show you." Even on his arm, she was staggering. Her mind went on and off like a light; she felt as if she were only partly on the ground, she seemed to be bumping off it into the air, like a child's balloon. Bill said, "This is Gail's car," in surprise, and left her to get into it herself. She managed to. He got behind the wheel, backed the coupé out into the road, and they were off with a skid.

They came out on the highway. Seven miles. Bill said, "It's not only the cops we've got to talk to. The FBI will listen to me now. I know what's up . . ."

Connie crumpled. The road in the headlights began to revolve, then there wasn't any light at all. Somebody was speaking from a long way off and it turned out to be Bill. He was saying, "Darling!" and she managed, at the far edge, not to faint after all. The car stopped, the headlights poking their long finger through the rain, and Bill had his arms round her. She flung her arms round his neck and hung on. Nothing else was important. Here they were and the world had lost danger and despair. She pressed against him, she couldn't get close enough, couldn't hold him tight enough. She was crying and laughing and in the dark she could see part of his face. "I'm scared," she said, "I'm no good, darling, I'm letting you down. I keep going to pieces—I'm no damn good." Bill said, "Yes, you're a frail wench—that's how you saved my life." A sob shook her and she clung. "I think there's time to kiss me," she murmured. He kissed her.

So she wasn't crying any more or even shivering. Her head was on his shoulder and their cheeks were together—let the rain fall, nothing bad could happen now. She had come back from the hopeless place.

"All right," she said, "let's go do what the professor said."

He got started. Also he began to speak. “We’ll telephone Cottersville, all right. But there are things to do and no time for talk. We’ll telephone everybody we think of, but it’s up to me. Remember von Weitbrecht?”

“I remember everything you ever said.”

“He was up on the mountain. That’s why I got knocked down on the trail. It turns out to be a lot wilder than my wildest guess—”

“My father—”

“He was in it, all right. And Römer. I figure out that the whole thing is Römer and von Weitbrecht getting together. Something big is going on. Big enough to take a lot of stopping. The first thing is, locate Römer. If I’m right he’s around here somewhere still, he hasn’t got away, that’s why I was grabbed—”

“He was at Pinnacle Manor tonight. I saw him. I went there before I went to the police. Mathilde Winkler was there too—”

“If I was bright, I’d have spotted her too. Well, we’ll try to get Pinnacle Manor looked into. Maybe we’d better—”

“I don’t know where my father is. I went there looking for him. He wasn’t there. At least, they said he wasn’t there.”

“He wasn’t there.” Bill’s voice softened with something grave and compassionate. The tone made her wonder. But Bill stopped the car long enough to gather her in his arms again and kiss her. So it wasn’t worth while to wonder about anything. The impossible had turned out to be possible, after all.

They had fatally lost time at the bookshop and they went on losing time. Mathilde knew that it must be Booker whose voice reached her through the door. She heard him working at the hinges and at last the door came off. He pulled her out on the bedroom floor, got her gag off, got the ropes off her. She gasped, “He is gone. Both of them,” and lay there. Booker lifted her to her feet but she toppled over on the bed.

“What has happened?” he kept demanding. “Why did you not shoot him? Where did he go?”

She managed to say, “I shot him.” She rolled over on her back. Her jaw hurt unbearably. There was an aching bruise on her breast. “But he hit me

and brought me here. They have gone. He will reach von Weitbrecht. Where is Lynn?"

Booker seemed stunned. "How long was this? How long ago?"

"Ten minutes. Hours. I can't tell. But he will have to go to the mountaintop to get von Weitbrecht. You can still stop him—"

"No. All afternoon von Weitbrecht has been at the lodge. If the American has been gone even fifteen minutes, he can already be there—" He stopped, then said, "Camp!" and ran out of the room. "I will telephone."

Mathilde's mind careened and almost slipped into the dark. She fought down the faintness. She must think—think now, think fast, and think right. Something could still be saved. She got off the bed and tottered, dizziness billowing in her. Stop it! She saw that her dress was torn—in fact, was almost torn away. A glance in the mirror dissipated her faintness and brought back intelligence. Her face was swollen out of shape and her hair was wild. There was blood—not her blood!—on her face and throat, and on the torn bodice of her white dress, and on her slip. She had only one shoe and her stockings were in shreds.

Booker must do what he could about the American. She must tell headquarters. And . . . she must get away. She took off the ruined dress and slip. She washed rapidly, sat at a dressing table to comb her hair and powder her cheeks, took a dress from the closet she had been locked in and put it on, found stockings in the bureau and brogues in the closet.

Downstairs she found Booker prowling in the bookshop, a pistol in his hand. "Neither Fritz nor Josef is at camp. That means they have gone to meet the truck. I could not talk to anyone I trust. But at least the police have not been—"

"The police will come here," she said, able at last to think coldly. "Two women live in this house. Neither is here. One of them went with him—"

"You hit him." Booker pointed to squares of gauze and a bloodstained shirt.

"In the arm, it seems," she said curtly. "This has finished us, Carl. He has had time to notify anyone he cared to. Watch all the doors." She sat down at the telephone and put in a call to New York.

She wasn't afraid. All that counted was to warn the Company. She could see Booker pacing in the hall, leaning forward on the balls of his feet. He

moved like an animal and there was a brutish quality in his face. “No one must come in while I am telephoning,” she called to him.

It took a long time to complete that call . . . How swift the overturn had been! For a few minutes she had held success in her hands. There had been needed only to kill him. She had failed. It meant a mortal wound to the system. Last week’s losses would be trifling compared to what would happen now.

“What is keeping you?” Booker shouted.

She could not share his desperation, for what mattered now? Two minutes, two hours, two days—with the end certain, the exact time mattered little. But the fragments of what could still be saved depended on this telephone in the house of the enemy . . . It was taking an abnormally long time. There was always someone to take calls at the Company, and at this late hour the circuits should be clear. New York operators murmured from time to time, silence succeeded them, finally a brisk voice said, “Interoceanic Forwarding Company.”

Mathilde put back the phone. “He got there first,” she said, for that was not the way phone calls were to be answered. They had held up the call long enough to put someone on the trail here.

“Come on, Carl,” she said.

He ran out. She followed, not knowing what to do. What now?

But Booker must make the attempt. She must set him to find—well, what was the American’s name? John Page, Friedrich Römer, Erich Köchlin—all false names. But they had done the job.

Booker took the road toward Camp Ryegate. “There is enough at camp to hang us all,” he said. He was hunched over the wheel, his gun on the seat between them. Poor simple soul! It didn’t need whatever might be at camp. They were lost.

But Lynn! Lynn had got away, he was free. He might even have got von Weitbrecht away before Köchlin got there. He had started out to do just that. The American might, even now, be kept from his goal.

“If von Weitbrecht is at the lodge, go there. Turn round, Carl, at once. We have still got a chance to save the most important thing.”

“No,” he growled, “the camp!”

"Lynn went to get von Weitbrecht more than half an hour before—before I found out about the American. Lynn may have—must have—got him away."

"I had just come from the lodge when you phoned me."

His voice went guttural with a harsh violence. Alarm woke in her. "Lynn had not been there? He didn't get to von Weitbrecht?"

"There is no point in going there," Booker said. "Scovil is dead."

"Dead?" she repeated stupidly, ice closing round her.

"What did you expect? Only today you told me he was not safe." Booker was bellowing. "Scovil threatened us both this afternoon—von Weitbrecht and me. Tonight he came back, flourishing a gun. He ordered von Weitbrecht to go with him. Well, we had made up our minds. I was waiting for him. I shot him."

Mathilde lay back, spent and without sensation. Of course that was what he had wanted to do, the American, to turn them against each other. He had succeeded. Lynn was dead. The last hope was dead too. But Lynn was dead.

Booker stopped the car. This was where the road led off the highway to Camp Ryegate and a neon sign burned red in the rain. He stared at it. Mathilde lay back in the seat, indifferent to anything. She shuddered at the thought of rain falling on Lynn's body. Suddenly the car shot off down the highway at full speed. "I don't dare go in," Booker said. "They may be already there. We must save ourselves."

She could afford no time for grief. Her mind came awake. "Where are you going?" He said, "Where is there to go? There is nothing we can do." She said quickly, "We can go to Lynn's and burn things. We can cover up."

"Yes. That will be safe for a while."

Oh, very far from safe! It was the irony of this total defeat that only she was able to estimate the resourcefulness and quickness of the American. She did not know his name but he was up to his job . . . Booker turned the car round and began the long drive to Lynn's. She sat nerveless, estimating expedients, calculating chances. The job now was to survive as long as possible.

Fifty yards short of the stone gateway, she made him stop. "I represent the Company, Carl," she said. "I will wait here. I will stop anyone who comes. Go through Lynn's desk and safe. Burn anything you recognize—no, burn everything. My bags are packed. Bring them here."

She saw him, in the headlights, turn through the gates. She waited for a moment, then got behind the wheel, swung the car round, and drove away. Perhaps the American would be waiting for Booker. So much the better. If only one of them were to be killed, on the whole she would rather have it Booker, who had killed Lynn. But maybe luck would be gracious, just once, to the woman who had failed in everything and would fail in the flight she was now beginning. Maybe luck would arrange to have them kill each other.

Gail made out a little of the talk in the seat behind her. Most of it was in German, all of it in whispers. It went on and on. It seemed as if she had been driving down rainy roads forever—but all excitement, pressure and apprehension were gone. A steady exhilaration had taken their place, that John Page, whose name was James Garrett, had done what he had been sent to do. Von Weitbrecht's gun was on the seat beside her. Garrett had explained to him that she, "*diese reizende Dame*," must be on guard while they talked and had passed it to her. She had murmured, "I don't know how to use it," and he had touched her shoulder and said, "The point is, he does." It was in harmony with this incredible night—this night out of nightmare or phantasy—and, like other parts of the night, showed the prompt ingenuity of James Garrett. And the most incredible part was that, in complete belief, an enemy of the United States was pouring out the secrets of his trade to an officer of the United States Army. Now, in this car.

At last he leaned over to say, "All right—go back to the bookshop." He was finished, then he had what he wanted. His voice was calm but had the same tone of triumph she had heard when he met von Weitbrecht.

She swung the car in a wide arch, and whispered, "How is your arm?"

"Hurts like hell."

His lips touched her ear and passed across her hair. She was more alive than she had ever been before—the rain was the rhythm of a love song and, while he sat beside an unsuspecting, outmaneuvered and defeated enemy, he had time left over to think of her.

Fifteen minutes later they reached Windham. She turned into the square and Garrett said, urgently, "Stop!" She stopped, and alarm had been brought back by his tone. He said, "*Hier ist etwas los!*" and then, to her, "We left no lights."

Yes, there were lights upstairs and down . . . He was out of the car and she was alone with the spy. She had enough German to say, "*Ducken sie sich!*" and von Weitbrecht flopped down on the floor of the car. She heard him breathing hard. She clutched the pistol and her alarm ranged ahead of James Garrett, who had not hesitated to investigate the unknown hazard of that house. Mathilde, she thought, or Booker! But it might be, it had to be, Connie. Her fingers gripped the cold steel of the gun and she strained to see what might be happening a hundred yards away. In this quiet town! No policeman walked his beat, no householder's window opened on the dark.

He was back. "Drive to Scovil's."

"Was it Connie?"

"I had forgotten Connie! No." He leaned close, whispering. "The door is down and Mathilde is gone. Booker got here. I can't let von Weitbrecht out of sight."

He spoke over the back of the seat, to the man who was lying on the floor, admonishing him not to be seen. He seemed to be staring through all the windows at once and she saw the gun in his good hand . . . How long had she been driving through the rain?

"Steady," he murmured. "This is just the final sprint."

"I'm all right."

"This one has been scared for a week—he will be no trouble. But Mathilde and Booker do not scare. And it would be convenient to know why we have not encountered Scovil."

She knew now the desperation which those three names signified. He was blindly hunting them in the dark, and in the same dark they must be recklessly hunting him. Was he doing the right thing? Should he not have got away from Windham now, with the information he had got from von Weitbrecht?

"If I were a neat workman I should have learned who was dangerous at the house," he said. "We'll have to leave it to the dice." His voice was tranquil and he held his wrist watch to the cowl light. "Too bad. Another half hour and we could hope that Washington would beat us to the house."

He was so obviously calm that she could not be afraid, but her muscles were tense and her senses were honed to a sharp edge. Time was extinguished again; there was only rainy road flowing into the headlights . . .

Till the stone gateposts at the entrance of Lynn's drive were silhouetted against shrubbery, and Garrett said, "Stop here."

He leaned over and spoke to von Weitbrecht on the floor, forbidding him to show himself, no matter what happened. "You'll have to take care of our two-cent Hitler," he whispered to Gail. Then he got out and stood on the running board, clamping the elbow of his wounded arm over the window sill. "Drive slowly . . . All right, roll the bones."

She let in the clutch. They rolled through the gate and took the curving, uphill drive. She could hear the soft murmur of the engine and the lights picked out trees, clumps of shrubbery, stretches of lawn. Then she could see the house—lights on the veranda, on two floors, at the stables. He said, "Wait," and she stopped. Nothing happened, and presently he said "O.K.," and they crept forward again. The drive divided where the circle in front of the veranda began, and he said "Stop," again. He was staring at the house and there was neither sound nor movement. The light from the veranda reached the grassy circle and diminished toward the wings. "Go on around," he said, and she put the car in motion. It came round the circle and she stopped it at the steps of the terrace, the headlights pointing down the drive.

"Well," he said, "someone had better check up."

He stepped off the running board. With his shoulders hunched as if he were facing a high wind, he stepped into the light. Nothing happened. He moved fast at an angle across the terrace and disappeared down the near wing. At once the fear she had not been feeling overwhelmed her. He had gone and she was alone with—with the two-cent Hitler. She grabbed for the pistol at her side, got the door open, and got out. She stood there while moment added itself to moment intolerably and nothing whatever happened. A guttural whisper, tense and terrified, came from the car, asking what was going on. She contrived to say, "Be quiet!" And still nothing happened. Except that she could not possibly stand any more.

The front door opened and Garrett came out on the veranda and the blood in her veins could move again. He crossed the steps and started down them. "All clear," he called, "not even a servant . . ." At that moment he reached the terrace and at that moment flame spurted from the arborvitæ at the far corner and the night was cleft open by the thunder of a shot.

Her mind registered everything in slow motion. Garrett dropped behind the granite balustrade and was shouting, "Lie down, Gail!" She saw his gun come round a curved stone pillar, and he fired in the direction of the shot. A

voice came out of the arborvitæ: "*Von Weitbrecht! Er ist Amerikaner!*" Again that flame bloomed in the arborvitæ.

Gail turned toward the car—too late. Powerful arms pinioned her. She managed to drop the pistol before von Weitbrecht could wrench it from her. She hung on to him, clawing and kicking. He tried to throw her off but she would not let go, and as she spun she saw Garrett stand up in the yellow light, fire into the dark, and step forward across that level space, from which another shot came as he started. Her head rocked and an elbow locked under her chin. There was a new glare from somewhere and she beat an unavailing fist against the strength that was overwhelming her. She heard a shout and the arm round her throat slackened. She saw von Weitbrecht slump down—incredibly—Bill Jay was here. He had smashed a gun down on von Weitbrecht's head. She was free and Bill leaped past her, raising his gun.

She had strength enough to turn to him. "He is an American!" she screamed. She knocked his arm upward and the gun went off in the air. "He is an army officer!" She hung on to Bill, crying "help him!" Then she slumped away—and Garrett fired again into the arborvitæ and the edge of it was shaken, and he turned back, shouting to Jay.

"Don't shoot, you fool! Gail, are you all right?"

Something was crawling on the grass, almost at her feet. It was von Weitbrecht, inching forward. Then Garrett came running back and flung himself on the German. Bill Jay hesitated, then followed him. Into this crazed scene came a flying figure in white from a car at the edge of the circle. It was Connie. Connie stopped short and faced around. There was a shrill sound—a siren. A motorcycle slithered across the grass, then another one. Behind them was the white car of the State police, half a dozen figures in uniform, and someone shouting "Garrett! Is Garrett here?" Figures were running to the veranda, to the cars, to this little group clotted in the light.

Garrett stood up. "I'm Garrett. There's no one in the house—but make sure. I've shot someone in the shrubbery."

Another siren screeched and more figures were coming on the run. Connie had reached Bill. It was probably Connie whose voice came crazily above the confusion: "This must be the marines."

Then they were all in the house, and Gail's mind rocked with motion and uproar. State troopers were sweeping through all the rooms, voices clashed, someone was at a telephone. People swirled round Garrett, who was giving orders. Chaos stopped short for a moment when a sergeant came back and

said, “No one anywhere in the house or on the grounds. The guy in the hedge isn’t dead.” Garrett ran out and then came back again.

“That is Booker—from Camp Ryegate. It leaves Winkler. And Scovil. . . . Lieutenant, you must get on to the camp. Get the roads out of town blocked. We want Scovil most of all.”

Bill Jay came out of the corner, where he had been trying hard to get Connie quieted. “Wait!” he said. “Has anybody been to the lodge? There’s a car there.” He took Garrett off to one side . . . Gail leaned over in her chair and quietly fainted.

It was two-fifteen when Garrett first thought to look at his watch—when Jay told him about the shooting at the lodge. Half an hour later a detachment of FBI men arrived. It was just three-thirty when Garrett came out of the library, all arrangements made. The FBI had taken von Weitbrecht away. The State police had sent Booker to a hospital. Scovil was unquestionably dead. Mathilde had got away—but not for long. A series of telegrams had been sent and he had talked to Major Spence in Washington, on the phone.

And the thing was done.

He went downstairs to the drawing room. Logs were burning in the fireplace—that would be Jay’s work—and the two women were sitting close to them. Jay had got food and whisky. They did not look altogether sunk.

But they looked—well, unbelievable. Jay’s jacket and trousers were ripped; his face was crisscrossed with scratches; there were rope burns on his wrists. Connie had washed the mud from her face and arms but her dress was stiff with it from the waist down; her stockings were in tatters; her hair was plastered tight against her head. Her sodden shoes were on the hearth and the tennis sneakers that Gail had worn were beside them. Gail’s hair too was drenched but the wetting had only made it curl wildly. It was unmistakably apparent that she had nothing on but the skirt and sweater she had snatched at the shop; her bare legs were scratched and muddy; her face was bruised. All three of them were pale, sunken-eyed, and desperately in need of sleep. But they were, at last, composed. . . . Garrett suddenly realized that he had on neither a shirt nor a coat. He tried to remember about that shirt. Oh yes, at the bookshop. There had been blood on it. And on Gail’s nightgown.

"I should order you all into a hospital," he said. "Or," thoughtfully, "at least give you a quartermaster's voucher for some clothes."

Gail turned from the fire. She was very pale but her eyes were clear. "What about your arm?" she asked. That brought it back to mind. It weighed a ton and it was burning from finger tips to elbow. He looked at the muddy bandage—which she had put on. His knees went weak. "That's right," he said unsteadily, "there was something about my arm."

He sat down more abruptly than he had meant to and his head swam. "Give him a drink," Gail said quickly. Jay filled a tumbler with whisky and held it out to him. He gulped half of it. Steadiness came back. "We're into the king row," he said. "This is the end of it. You won't be tossed into any more riots."

Jay said, "Can I take Connie home now? Can we go . . . sir?" He had a little trouble with the last word—still. "There's something—you understand —"

Connie stood up. The fire was bright behind her; she looked frail but—unconquered. "Why don't you say it? Is anything likely to scare me now, after tonight? I don't have to have anything prettied up for me. You mean my father. It's not only that they're looking for him. You mean—something has happened to him."

Jay hesitated but Garrett said, "We aren't sure yet. We think so."

"He's—dead?"

"That's what we think."

Her cheeks were the color of ash. She looked square at Bill Jay. "You aren't dead. Remember, I thought you were." A single tear rolled down her cheek. "Would I want him to be alive?" She walked over to Jay. "But don't ever leave me alone again. Not for one night, not even for the rest of tonight."

Jay stood with an arm round her waist. "Let me take her home."

Garrett stood up. "After I've thanked her." He touched the thin shoulder and shook her hand. He turned to Jay. "You get thanked too. I had to work fast—I had to have you grabbed, you were too bright. It worked out better than I deserve. Thanks. Your girl gets a good deal of a man."

Jay shook his hand. "Not very bright. I just had a phobia of being pushed around."

"It's a useful phobia."

"You're pretty useful," Jay said wryly. "Come on, Connie. You need sleep."

They went out. Gail yawned suddenly in the firelight. "Sleep! That was last month, wasn't it . . . Is it true that Lynn has been—killed?"

"We'll know pretty soon. They had Jay locked in the cellar of the lodge. Before they took him away—which must have been a few minutes before we got there—somebody was shot near the lodge. That was his car we saw there. Either Booker or von Weitbrecht could have done it. I don't know why."

So that while Gail and he were there, the body of Lynn Scovil had been somewhere near, dragged into the underbrush or hidden at the lodge. The man she had been engaged to, the man she had been fleeing from when she had stopped to pick up a fugitive from the police on a Vermont road. Garrett looked at her with a hard scrutiny. She met his gaze.

"He won't be telling any more Bunds that America needs a new leadership," she said. She could not possibly have spoken more coldly. Her eyes darkened with a momentary horror, then cleared. "Tell me what's happening now, James." The faintest premonition of laughter warmed her voice. "If I have a little trouble with your name, my dear, remember you've had difficulties with it too."

"It will settle down to Jim . . . Why, they're busy in New York gathering in the headquarters these people were directed from. They have taken over Camp Ryegate and are going through it to see what they can find. I've put them to work on the truck line. They'll pick up Mathilde somewhere, before long. A lot of people will be picked up after tonight. Scovil is dead—and you're right about that. No more crowds will be cheering that handsome face. The peace front has been broken—the fools, the little dupes, the smart boys, the busy people who are so co-operative with organizations like the Forwarding Company. But mainly—what I was sent to do was done by the time we got back to the bookshop with von Weitbrecht. That front is broken too. Even before I get to Washington, they'll be rounding up his helpers. It was a neatly fitted scheme—wide and deep and threatening. But we'll shake them down like apples from a tree. Into the basket."

"You're going straight to Washington."

"I'm ordered to report by noon. And I'm going back to my job . . . I told you the truth yesterday. A man's fiancée should know his trade—I'm a

metallurgist, I'm in the Ordnance Corps for the duration. I'm better at it than I've managed to be at Intelligence. I've had to make too much of this up along the way."

"For an amateur," she said, "you seem to improvise fairly well." There was more warmth in her eyes. "By noon! That doesn't leave you much time. Surely you'd better stop at a hospital somewhere."

"Not if your medicine cabinet runs to another bandage. But I'll take you home—if you'll drive me there again. Put on your shoes."

The current of silent accord between them was running free. She slid her bare feet into the sneakers. "They're Connie's . . . I'm all she has for parents now. She'll need kindness."

"Will she need anything more than Bill Jay?"

Gail yawned widely, with sudden forthrightness. "We'll all need sleep. I'd forgotten there was sleep in the world. You have the most astonishing knack for disturbing my nights."

In the hall he told an FBI man that he was going to Windham for an hour, and took her upstairs. The door of Mathilde's room was open. Her bags were in an orderly row on the floor. They had been packed when he instructed Mathilde to accompany him to New York, when he was still an agent of the Reich. A long time ago. "If you want dry clothes," he said, "this is Mathilde's baggage."

She shook her head. "Thanks, I'll wait. Besides, from the beginning I've been more concerned about your clothes. You need a shirt, my dear."

"I've got several and they aren't Scovil's." They went on to his room. "I bought them with Forwarding Company money. Just before you ordered me out of town."

He could get into one of them, though his arm was stiff and fiery, but found that he could not knot the tie. Her lips gentle, Gail said, "Let me." She tied his shoes too and helped him into his coat. Her eyes were expectant . . . But not in this house!

They went downstairs and out to the sedan. The rain had stopped but the shrubbery dripped heavily. Troopers were coming in. He waved to them and Gail drove away. The dark closed round them, except for the glow of the cowl light on her grave face.

A mile or so down the highway she pulled off the road and stopped. A faint gray had begun to show in the east and the outline of the window had

sharpened. He turned to her but she said, "No—wait!" took his hand, and lay back, musing. "So much of this has been in an automobile! And so much of it late at night. . . . Wait, my dear. I'm feeling very expectant, and I was that first night, too, from Manchester on. That was extremely forward of me—or farseeing. But this time it's morning. We've driven all night; we've spent the night together. What a wedding night, Jim! When I went to bed I thought I wouldn't see you again. Then when I woke up, there you were . . . bleeding." She choked on that word, snatched her hand away, and covered her face. "Your blood fell on me! . . . I've waited long enough."

She fled into his arms, her breast arching up, her face raised . . . After a while she had stopped sobbing and was alive in his arms.

The grayness grew, the window showed more plainly, and in a few minutes he would be able to see her plain. She turned her cheek away to whisper, "By noon! Then the latest you can leave Springfield is the nine-o'clock plane—"

"We were talking plane schedules that night," he said. "Have you any idea how lovely you looked? Almost as beautiful as now—"

"There was a highway patrolman, at the window. That was the moment when it all began. But—" she yawned again—"I had had more sleep the night before."

He said, "This is the continuation," and kissed her . . . Ever since he had reached Windham he seemed to have been calculating schedules. "Can you make that plane by nine o'clock?"

She sat up out of his embrace. "It would be disgraceful if I couldn't—after the speed we've held to. But there's a lot to do. You said fiancée—I'd rather spell it *bride*. We'll certainly have to stand up with Connie before you leave. We might as well save time—"

"Connie too? Today?"

"Wouldn't you?"

"Neither of you will have so much as a trousseau."

"All Connie has ever needed was a skirt. I have a skirt." She glanced at its wrinkled disorder. "All I need is a bath."

He went on calculating minutes. "G2 is staffed with stern men. If we get Connie launched, there may not be time for us. You may have to remain a widow till we get to Washington—"

Gail was laughing. A State trooper had shot past them on a motorcycle, had stopped down the road, and was turning round. He started back.

"Back to the beginning," she said. "He thinks we're necking. What a suspicious mind!" She started the engine, leaned over to kiss him, and murmured, "For that matter, I could skip the bath."

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Advance Agent* by John August]