

**JAMES, HOW
DARE YOU!**



By **E.V. TIMMS**

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By the same author

THE HILLS OF HATE
JAMES! DON'T BE A FOOL
THE CRIPPLE IN BLACK
WHITEHALL
ALICIA DEANE
CONFLICT
FAR CARAVAN
MAELSTROM
DARK INTERLUDE

JAMES! HOW DARE YOU!

By
E. V. TIMMS

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CHAPTER I

IN the finely appointed library of his Park Lane house, Peter Colburn, multi-millionaire rubber magnate, stumped to and fro. He was furious. His thick-set figure was bristling with anger. Under his bushy grey eyebrows his deep-set dark eyes were gleaming with wrath. His life-long friend, Sir Francis Martindale, millionaire ironmaster of Ironcastle, was also upset; but the tall, restrained Sir Francis, whose wealth of white hair enhanced his finely chiselled, aristocratic features, did not release the explosive forces of temperament and impatience as did his impulsive crony, Peter. Peter's stubby fingers were rapping on a newspaper as he glanced first at the screaming black type and then at Sir Francis.

"War!" he growled. "War, Francis. It's come; it's here. See for yourself. War! We're in it. Curse me, Francis . . ."

Sir Francis, deep in the comfortable depths of a chair, slowly crossed one leg over the other.

"Calm yourself, Peter," he said gently. "We're both too old for such excitement."

Peter hurled the paper from him.

"I *am* calm, Francis. I am always calm. We expected this war, but did we expect Elaine and James to make such crass fools of themselves? Did we? DID WE?"

"Don't shout, Peter."

"I'm not shouting, Francis," bellowed Peter. "Now don't sit there broadcasting advice. You know I detest advice. I'm perfectly cool, calm, and master of myself."

"Perfectly," murmured Sir Francis. "Where is James?"

Peter continued to stride to and fro.

"How do I know?" he retorted bitterly. "Making a fool of himself, I don't doubt. I tell you, Francis, that boy is congenitally weak. I thought marriage to Elaine would have knocked sense into him. Has it? HAS IT?"

"I can hear you, Peter."

"Well, *has* it? No, it hasn't. It has only knocked whatever darn sense he ever had right out of him."

"Really, Peter . . ."

Peter paused in his stride and wagged a heavy digit at Sir Francis.

“Don’t quibble, Francis. I know what I’m talking about. Marriage hasn’t improved either Elaine or Jimmy—I mean James.”

Sir Francis smiled. Whenever Peter was annoyed with his son he invariably referred to him as “James.”

“I admit,” he said thoughtfully, “things are somewhat strained between them.”

“Strained?” shouted Peter. “I like that. They have separated—he’s living in a bachelor flat somewhere; she’s doing the same. Strained? I don’t know what the world is coming to. And I don’t suppose it’s all James’s fault.”

Sir Francis pursed his lips.

“I don’t suppose it’s all my daughter’s fault, Peter.”

Peter glared at him.

“Now, Francis—you know you have utterly spoiled Elaine. You never were firm with her, as I was with James.”

Sir Francis wriggled uncomfortably.

“Come, come, Peter. You and I getting into an argument won’t help matters. We’re at war. Elaine and James have separated. It’s our duty to bring them together again.”

Peter snorted.

“I know that. James says it’s Elaine’s fault—she’s so wrapped up with these refugees — —”

Sir Francis coughed.

“Elaine says it’s James’s fault. She accuses him of being un-British, unpatriotic, and disloyal.”

“Disloyal? James? Curse me, Francis . . .”

Sir Francis held up a slender white hand.

“One moment, Peter. There is, after all, something in what she says. She’s dreadfully disappointed in James. At a time such as this, with every man either in uniform, or doing something worth while for England, James is content to associate himself with people who, to be charitable, are at least aliens. The International Club. The Sons of Freedom. The Progressive Thought Society. The . . .”

“What about Elaine?” snapped Peter. “She’s mucking about . . .”

“Don’t say ‘mucking about,’ Peter. It’s vulgar, and it jars on me.”

Peter began to wave his arms.

“I don’t care, Francis. Elaine is mucking about with these refugees. Also the Sisters of Liberty, and the Women Fascists of the World, or some such

twaddle. Isn't she?"

"H'm. I believe she has some interest in those matters."

"Bah! I can never pin you down, Francis; never get you to admit anything. You're like an eel. Always have been."

Sir Francis smiled.

"Must we quarrel?" he asked. "Surely it's enough that Elaine and James have differed."

"Differed!" grunted Peter. "I suppose if a bomb blew this house to blazes you'd say it was merely dented."

"Well, not exactly, Peter. But I don't believe in overstressing a situation or a thing. I think with tact this foolish impasse may be overcome. We must bring them together. You and I are working together for England—so must they."

Some of the dejection left Peter.

"Tact," he muttered thoughtfully. "Maybe you're right, Francis. Tact, eh? Yes, you *are* right. We'll have to be tactful. Of course, I hadn't intended being anything else. You know that."

"Of course, Peter, of course," murmured Sir Francis.

Peter selected a cigar, clipped it, lit it.

"If I hadn't been a tactful man I couldn't have handled James. Dammit, that cub still defies me at times."

"Indeed?"

"Now *don't* sit there laughing at me, Francis," Peter said irritably. "This isn't a laughing matter. The war itself is enough to handle, but with this added quarrel of James and Elaine . . . Where is Elaine? Isn't she coming here?"

"Yes. She promised she would come as soon as she could leave the meeting."

"What meeting?" growled Peter.

"The Daughters of Democracy, I believe."

"Daughters of Fatheads," snarled Peter. "Francis, we had the devil of a job to get them married; now we'll have a devil of a job to *keep* them married."

Sir Francis sighed.

"It begins to look like it," he said gloomily.

"You speak sternly to Elaine when she comes," said Peter. "I'll soon put James in his place."

Sir Francis smiled.

“I thought we were considering the use of tact?”

Peter dashed his cigar down.

“Blister me! . . . All right, all right. Only I apply my own tact in my own way, Francis; so don’t interfere. I’ll be tactful, but I *won’t* be misunderstood.”

Sir Francis nodded.

“I am sure of that, Peter.”

He stood up and came to where Peter was standing. His white hand rested itself on his friend’s shoulder.

“How long have we known each other, Peter?”

“Forty years, Francis.”

“We’ve overcome many difficulties; we’ll overcome this one.”

Peter thumped him violently on the back.

“Good old Francis. The finest gentleman in England. Always were, always will be. Curse me, do you remember that little actress we were both crazy about?”

Sir Francis looked thoughtful.

“Which one, Peter?” he murmured.

Peter’s eyes began to crinkle at the corners.

“The one we each used to send a hansom cab for,” he chuckled.

“Ah, yes,” said Sir Francis softly. “I nearly, very nearly, fell in love with her.”

“Blister me—you *did* fall in love with her. That night in her rooms. . .”

Sir Francis clutched at him.

“Discretion, Peter, discretion,” he implored. “Here’s Elaine.”

“Ha!” snorted Peter. “So I see.”

“Tact, Peter, tact,” murmured Sir Francis.

“Yes, yes,” growled Peter. “I won’t forget, Francis.”

Elaine walked into the library. Tall, exquisitely dressed, poised, and hauntingly beautiful, she was considered one of the most beautiful women of England. She sent cool, appraising glances at the two men.

“Plotting again?” she asked with a smile.

“Now, now, Elaine,” began Sir Francis.

“Leave this to me, Francis,” said Peter gruffly. “Sit down, my dear — —”

“Thank you, father Peter. I trust James isn’t here?”

She looked about her.

“James?” they echoed.

They seemed surprised at the suggestion.

Elaine seated herself. Her grey eyes were narrowed and thoughtful, her glorious auburn hair gleamed in a manner that almost softened the resolute Peter. But he steeled himself.

“Cigarette, my dear?” he growled.

“Thank you, father Peter.”

He lit it for her.

“Now what is it you wish to see me about?” she asked.

Sir Francis looked at Peter. Peter looked at Sir Francis. Then they both looked at Elaine with the unctuous manner of consultants at a bedside.

“Now, my dear,” said Peter, “I don’t want you to misunderstand me, but I think you’re being a silly little fool . . .”

“Peter!” gasped Sir Francis.

“Leave this to me, Francis,” said Peter firmly.

Elaine blew a thin stream of smoke towards him.

“I presume you are alluding to James?” she murmured.

Peter frowned at her.

“Of course I’m alluding to James.”

“And you think I’m being a silly little fool?”

Sir Francis looked worried. He knew Elaine.

“Peter—Peter . . .”

“Leave this to *me*, Francis,” snarled Peter. “If I were James, young woman, I’d put you across my knee and give you a damn good spanking.”

“Peter . . .”

Peter turned on Sir Francis.

“Don’t stand there shivering like a jelly, Francis. You’ve spoiled Elaine. She’s headstrong. She *will* have her own way. Naturally, the boy resents it . . .”

“The boy resents it,” echoed Elaine softly. “Did James tell you that?”

“Blister me, no! The cub never tells me anything. But I can see for myself where the trouble lies.”

Elaine shrugged.

“I am not aware of any trouble, father Peter,” she said coolly. “James has behaved abominably. I refuse to live with him—that’s all.”

“How has he behaved abominably?” rasped Peter.

“Peter—Peter . . .”

“Leave this to ME, Francis!”

Elaine’s lovely grey eyes were level and cold.

“Naturally, every woman likes to be proud of her husband,” she said quietly. “I am not proud of James—that’s all.”

“Curse me,” gasped Peter. “That’s all, is it? That’s all, eh, you minx? Why aren’t you proud of my son?”

Elaine hesitated, then:

“Because he’s either a fool . . . or a coward.”

Peter’s yell almost lifted the roof off.

“How *dare* you say that about Jimmy,” he thundered. “Jimmy—I mean James—is no coward.”

Elaine crossed one leg over the other and pointed a dainty foot at the irate Peter.

“Then he’s a fool,” she said calmly. “I won’t live with a fool. Any Englishman who spends his days and nights—especially his nights—in the company of frowsty foreigners and exotic female importations doesn’t put his slippers under my chaste cot. I hope that is clear?”

Sir Francis spoke gently.

“Elaine, my dear, both Peter and I feel that this matter must not be allowed to drift . . .”

Elaine’s lips thinned.

“If father Peter will persuade James to try to make a man of himself. If he can—if he can . . .”

She faltered and dabbed quickly at her eyes with her handkerchief.

“Oh, curse me,” groaned Peter. “She’s crying.”

Elaine threw the handkerchief down.

“I’m not,” she said icily. “I wouldn’t waste tears on James. I’m going to ask him to allow me to divorce him.”

The two old men stared, gasped, and sagged:

“What?”

Elaine stood up:

“James is a disgrace. That’s all,” she flung at them.

Peter Colburn was trembling with anger. Nothing in all the wide world was so dear to him as his only son. He had given Jimmy everything, had

idolized him, had almost apotheosized him. All his hopes, all his life, were centred in the dark-eyed, square-jawed, clean-cut fellow the world knew as Jimmy Colburn. Next to Jimmy he loved this glorious girl who was his son's wife, but not even from her would he take any slur on Jimmy's name or character.

"That's what he says *you* are, young woman," he stormed. "You talk about James and his mixing with queer people. What about your refugees? What about your silly Daughters of Democracy. What . . ."

"These things are international," retorted Elaine. "We are caring for the refugees, and at the same time working for Universal Peace."

Peter waved his arms frantically.

"Yet you condemn Jimmy for doing the same thing?" he yelled. "How dare you treat my son like that?"

"Peter, Peter," implored Sir Francis. "I fear you are not being helpful . . ."

"This isn't a matter for kid gloves, Francis," Peter snapped. "Look at her standing there—LOOK at her! Curse me, she hasn't got the brains of a blanchmange. How DARE she throw insults at Jimmy. Jimmy's friends are all right, otherwise they wouldn't be his friends."

"They ought to be interned, the lot of them," said Elaine.

A dry, deep voice from the doorway said:

"I don't agree."

They whirled to see Jimmy Colburn regarding them.

"James!" thundered Peter. "So there you are! Come in, you scoundrel . . ."

Smiling amiably Jimmy came to them. He nodded to Sir Francis, to his father, and bowed to Elaine.

"How are you, Sir Francis, how are you, father. But . . . do I know this woman?"

"James!" gasped his parent, "is that the way to refer to your wife?"

Jimmy bowed again to Elaine.

"One forgets," he murmured.

Elaine shrugged.

"I told you he was a fool," she said bitterly.

CHAPTER II

JOHN JAMES COLBURN, six feet of whipcord and steel, faultlessly dressed, often gave the impression that he was an easy-going fellow, content with the gifts of the gods, and willing to let it go at that. A second glance would show that his dark, smiling countenance, with its hawk's eyes and square, cleft chin, was drawn in lines of strength and determination. But it was his whimsical grin that baffled even his closest associates at times and gave rise to the impression that he was indifferent, blasé, and, while the best of good fellows, was not endowed with either the brains or the fighting spirit of his famous father.

Sir Francis came forward.

"We're very glad you are here, James," he said.

Jimmy's dark eyes looked searchingly into the grey eyes of his wife.

"Are we all glad?" he asked pointedly.

Elaine flushed a little. Whenever he was near her she felt irresistibly compelled to surrender will and person to him. She was completely in love with her smiling husband, and was aware he knew all about it. It was infuriating when a battle of principles was in progress. Before she could reply, however, Peter charged in with characteristic impetuosity.

"James," he said ominously, "this nonsense between you and Elaine must cease."

"Certainly sir," said Jimmy, his eyes still watching his beautiful wife.

"Well, . . ." gasped Peter, "what are you going to do about it?"

"Peter," said Sir Francis, "let us all sit down. I always find a problem is easier to solve if one sits down to tackle it."

"Yes, yes, yes, Francis," said the rubber magnate testily. "But I don't see there's anything to talk about."

"I do," said Elaine coldly.

"Elaine, dear . . ." began her father.

Peter wagged a finger at her.

"Now don't you be stubborn, Elaine," he said sternly. "Your father and I are very busy men. We haven't time, especially now we are at war, to waste on a stupid matrimonial fuss. My advice to you both is to kiss and be friends . . . Well? . . . WELL?"

Elaine looked away, walked to a table and selected a cigarette. Jimmy offered Sir Francis a cigar.

"God bless my soul," panted Peter. "Is everybody dumb?"

Elaine placed the cigarette between her lips. Her father lit it for her.

"Curse me," gasped Peter. "Have you all lost your tongues?"

Jimmy lit Sir Francis's cigar and then his own cigarette.

"You were saying?" he asked mildly.

Peter rocked on his heels.

"I was saying?" he snarled. "Blister me! Francis, what can you do with a fool like that—"

"Nothing," said Elaine coolly. "And unfortunately I had to marry him to find it out."

The smile on Jimmy's lips broadened. There was a quizzical gleam in his dark eyes.

"Is all this directed at me?" he asked gently.

"It is," said Elaine. "What are you staring at?"

Jimmy shrugged.

"Apologies, my dear, but I never can look at you without falling head over heels in love with you again, and again, and again. Never stops, you know . . ."

Elaine interrupted him bitterly.

"There he goes again. Whenever I wish to talk about this matter seriously, he just stares at me and tells me how lovely I am."

"What's wrong with that?" demanded Peter.

Elaine arched her brows.

"It's slightly beside the point, father Peter. In time it becomes exasperating, and when it is used for evasion and equivocation it is humiliating."

Sir Francis spoke quietly.

"Elaine, my dear, don't let us all pile on to James. Give him air, my dear."

Elaine laughed mirthlessly.

"Give him air? Watch me. I will . . ."

Peter squirmed.

"Now don't you be pert, and smart. I won't have it. James, what exactly is the trouble between you and Elaine?"

Jimmy looked surprised.

"Trouble, sir?" he asked.

Peter drew in a deep breath. Warned in time Jimmy said affably:

“Oh, that? Elaine has the war bug. I haven’t. Wants me to start swanking round in some sort of glittering uniform so that she can exhibit me to her friends. I refuse to be shown as war exhibit A of the Colburn-Martindale families. Sheer piffle.”

Elaine was hoisting storm signals. Her lovely face was pale, her eyes glittering angrily.

“That’s a deliberate twist,” she said hotly. “It’s merely an excuse for slacking. And to cap matters he spends most of his time with frowsy undesirables whose real ambition, were it known, is the downfall of England.”

Peter grunted.

“What have you to say to that, James?” he demanded.

Jimmy laughed.

“I still think she’s the most beautiful woman I have ever seen.”

Elaine groaned.

“He’s crazy.”

“I’m not.”

“You are . . .”

“I’m not . . .”

Peter exercised his lungs.

“James!”

“He’s a fool.”

“I’m not.”

“James!” bellowed Peter.

They took no notice of him.

“He’s a coward.”

“I’m not . . .”

“Oh, he’s impossible.”

“JAMES!”

Jimmy turned blandly to his father.

“One moment, sir, please. I’m defending myself.”

Peter threw up his arms.

“God send me a bottle of wine,” he gasped. “Will you two stop fighting?”

"I'm not fighting," said Elaine icily. "Do you think I'd fight with a slacker?"

"I'm not . . ."

"Francis—FRANCIS!"

"Elaine, dear . . ."

"He's a . . ."

"I'm not."

"Oh, you—you . . ."

Jimmy turned to his father and Sir Francis.

"Isn't she?" he demanded.

"What?" they panted.

"Just marvellous."

Peter tottered away and fell into a chair. Sir Francis wearily sat down. Jimmy beamed at them all. Elaine looked him up and down as though he were leprous.

"You . . . fool!" she said witheringly.

"I'm not . . ."

Elaine sighed. Jimmy grinned at her.

"But may I point out that my wife is mixed up with a queer bunch . . ."

"They're not queer," retorted Elaine.

"They're a screwy and dangerous assortment of hysterical nuts."

"What?" gasped Elaine.

"I said 'nuts,'" said Jimmy firmly.

"Francis," panted Peter, "what the devil are they talking about?"

Sir Francis shook his head.

"I don't know."

"Neither does Elaine," said Jimmy scornfully.

"I do," she hissed.

"You don't."

"I do."

Peter bounded out of his chair.

"Blister me, curse me, and kick me in the pants!" he yelled. "Stop this arguing."

"I wasn't arguing."

"You were. . ."

“I wasn’t.”

“JAMES!”

“He’s always arguing,” sneered Elaine.

Peter turned on her. Sir Francis put his head between his hands.

“So were you,” howled Peter.

“I wasn’t.”

“You were.”

“I wasn’t.”

Peter backed slowly away. He could scarcely breathe, and his eyes were glazed and baffled. Elaine turned on Jimmy.

“You to criticize my friends,” she said scathingly. “What about Major Guntha Winterbottom, your bosom pal?”

“What about him?” challenged Jimmy.

“Isn’t he a nut?” stormed Elaine. “Whenever he peers through that silly monocle of his I feel as if I could smack his silly head. Major Guntha Winterbottom. Haw, haw, haw! The dithering crooner from Poona. You couldn’t be close to an idiot like that if you had a mind larger than a split pea. But that describes it exactly.”

“Are you praising me or insulting me?”

Elaine turned away.

“Naturally, you wouldn’t know . . .”

Wilkins, who had served the Colburn family faithfully for more than forty years, came forward.

“A gentleman has called, sir,” he said to Jimmy.

“A Major Winterbottom.”

Jimmy gave a yell of delight.

“Good old Guns! Show him in here, Wilkins.”

“Very well, sir.”

Jimmy seemed to be immensely pleased.

“It’s old Guns. I told him to pick me up here.”

“It’s old Guns,” sneered Elaine. “You all know old Guns, of course. Well, you soon will. Here comes one entirely *without* a brain. If you both survive, you’re tough.”

“Ah!” said a fruity voice. “In here?”

“In there, sir,” said Wilkins.

“The nut of nuts,” said Elaine.

Major Winterbottom, tall, lean, grizzled, monocled, spatted, and clad in grey walked jauntily in to them, bowed to Elaine, to Sir Francis, and to Peter. Then adjusting his monocle he beamed at Jimmy.

“On the dot, old thing,” he said triumphantly.

“My . . . God!” said Peter.

“I told you,” said Elaine.

Jimmy grinned.

“Guntha—my father. Peter, meet Guns.”

Peter mumbled something under his breath. So did Sir Francis. So did Elaine.

“Charmed, charmed,” said the Major.

“You are from India, Major?” asked Sir Francis.

“From Poona, Sir Francis. I’m not in the jolly old army now, you know. Out-grown it as ’twere—haw, haw, haw!”

“I thought you said India,” growled Peter.

The Major bent forward slightly at the hips.

“Utterly, utterly, utterly, sir. And absolutely. Poona is India, by gad — —”

“Sit down,” grunted Peter.

Jimmy said quickly:

“We haven’t time, sir. Guns and I are off to a meeting.”

Peter scowled at his heir.

“Dammit all, James, we have to discuss certain matters.”

Sir Francis said resignedly:

“I fancy it is too late, Peter.”

The Major looked from one to another.

“Have I—ah, inadvertently as ’twere, walked into some domestic entanglements? Some matrimonial barbwire, so to speak?”

“You have not,” said Elaine distantly.

“Not at all,” said Sir Francis.

Peter moved uneasily.

“Blister me—we’ll never get them together again, Francis. James! Elaine! Major Winterbottom the fact is we were discussing certain family matters. Would you mind getting to the devil out of it?”

The Major looked interested.

“Not at all, sir, not at all. I know how devilish ticklish certain situations can be. Absolutely. I remember a particularly ticklish affair when I was

huntin' tigers in India . . .”

“Yes, yes,” said Peter impatiently. “Tigers can be ticklish, I suppose, but who the devil cares if they are?”

The monocle glittered as the Major removed it and carefully wiped it.

“Oh, absolutely, sir. Utterly, utterly, utterly. As I said,” he replaced the monocle, “I was shootin' tiger. I was in the howdah— —”

“The howdah?” grunted Peter.

“The howdah, sir.”

Peter looked perplexed but said nothing. The Major went on:

“My mahoot . . .”

“I beg your pardon?” said Peter.

“My mahoot, sir . . .”

“Curse me, yes! I heard you. But what is it? A tropical disease?”

The Major stared.

“By gad—haw, haw, haw! As I was saying, sir . . .”

“Your mahoot, Major?” murmured Sir Francis.

“Oh, badly mauled, Sir Francis. The tiger . . .”

“What damn tiger?” snapped Peter.

“The tiger that mauled the mahoot while I was in the howdah, sir.”

Peter rubbed his jaw.

“I don't quite—but never mind. Get on with it; get on with it.”

“Certainly, sir. Well, by gad, I shot it . . .”

“Shot what?” snarled Peter. “The tiger, the howdah, or the mahoot?”

“The elephant, sir.”

“What?” roared Peter.

“Absolutely. Bad luck, by gad. Elephants never forget. You see I had to shoot the bally elephant.”

“Why?” said Peter grimly. “And this is the first I've heard of any elephant.”

“The howdah was on the elephant, sir,” said the Major politely. “And the mahoot was on the howdah, and the tiger was on the mahoot, and the elephant was on me.”

Peter glanced round helplessly.

“God send me a bottle of wine,” he panted. “You must have fallen off the elephant?”

“Absolutely, sir. The Prince . . .”

Peter's eyebrows shot up.

"What Prince?" he rasped.

"Who owned the elephant, sir."

"Is he in this?"

"Absolutely."

"Did he shoot the tiger?"

"Not at all, Mr Colburn. The mahoot . . ."

"What mahoot?"

"The second mahoot. I thought I'd made it clear . . ."

"Yes, yes, YES! He shot the tiger?"

"Not at all. He shot the Prince . . ."

"Good God!" roared Peter. "Where are we? Where ARE we?"

The Major's expression was bland.

"Shootin' tiger in India, sir."

Jimmy's eyes were gleaming with sheer admiration, his voice was deep and earnest.

"You must hear Guntha relate some more of his unique experiences. His story of Afghanistan is simply a knock-out."

Peter waved a hand helplessly.

"Yes, yes, yes! Some other time," he panted.

"Delighted," murmured the Major.

"Nut," muttered Elaine.

The Major looked surprised. Jimmy grinned.

"We'll toddle along, sir," he said. "Guns and I are both speaking at the International Club."

"The treason club," sneered Elaine. "James, I wonder you can be so—so crazy."

Jimmy was stern.

"They are simple, honest folk, Elaine. They, and I, and Guntha, are striving for peace. I am not one of those who exploit the masses, whose blatant imperialism grinds the noses of the poor—what's the rest of it, Guntha?"

"Into the dirt, dear fellow, into the dirt."

"Into the dirt."

"Absolutely."

Peter began to swell with patriotic pride.

“You stop this humbug, James,” he said angrily. “I won’t have my son belching all this twaddle at any meeting of half-wits.”

Jimmy was haughty all at once.

“I do not belch, sir. Do I Guntha?”

The Major was emphatic.

“By gad, no, old thing! Speaking of belching . . .”

Peter glared at him.

“Will you kindly leave this to me and my son?”

The Major again bent forward from the hips.

“Very well, sir.”

Peter’s square-cut figure seemed to dominate the room.

“James,” he growled, “I think you’ve gone off your head. Have you no sense of your responsibilities as my son—and as Elaine’s husband?”

Jimmy looked bravely from one to the other.

“My first duty is to the cause of peace— —”

“Utterly, utterly, utterly. And absolutely, Jimmy . . .”

“Will you be quiet, sir?” snarled Peter.

“Certainly, sir.”

Sir Francis said gently:

“We are all working for peace, James. God knows none of us wants war.”

Jimmy nodded.

“Precisely, father Francis. That’s why Guntha and I are out to stop it.”

“He and Guntha aim to stop the war,” said Elaine sarcastically. “Give him a bucket of water, somebody. He thinks it’s as easy as that.”

“If everybody thought as we do— —” began Jimmy.

“Absolutely,” said the Major.

“There’d be no war.”

“By gad, no, Jimmy. That’s a marvellous bit for the meeting, old lad. Unwind it. Nice slice of deep thinking—haw, haw, haw. . . .”

“Curse me, CURSE me!” exploded Peter.

The Major stared.

“Certainly, sir. Curse you. Blast you. Be damned to you, sir. Will that do?—or shall I elaborate? I can curse in twenty-seven Indian dialects; also in Welsh. I can give you the curses of Tibet, Afghanistan, Baluchistan, Iran, Cochin China, Shanghai, Yokohama, Woolloomooloo and Piccadilly. If you

desire something more lurid I can give you stokehold, toehold, and the kaleidoscopic comments occasioned by the application of the Boston Crab. Absolutely. And utterly. Just let me know.”

Peter put his hand to his brow.

“He’s right,” said Jimmy proudly. “You should hear him.”

By a mighty effort Peter controlled himself. He ignored the Major.

“James,” he said with an air of finality. “I won’t have you going to this club. I forbid it. I’ll put a stop to it. If you had any children of your own they’d—they’d . . . Bah! If you had a son of your own you’d think differently.”

“Not at all, sir,” said Jimmy politely. “Having a son wouldn’t make me desire war.”

Peter regarded him furiously.

“Blister me—why haven’t you a son, anyway? You’ve been married long enough. . . .”

Jimmy turned to Elaine.

“Why haven’t I a son, Mrs Colburn?”

Elaine turned scarlet.

“James! How dare you!” she gasped.

“Confound you, James,” shouted Peter. “You’ve no right to talk like that.”

Jimmy looked astonished and a little hurt.

“You asked me; I asked Elaine. She ought to know . . .”

“Absolutely,” said the Major.

“Will YOU be quiet?” yelled Peter.

“Certainly, sir.”

Peter gave the impression he was on the verge of a breakdown.

“I give you one more chance, James,” he panted. “I’ve been an indulgent father. I’ve spoilt you—in fact made you the fool you are. But if you don’t stop getting round with these squareheads and dagos—I’ll disown you. You’ll be no son of mine. . . . Well? . . . WELL?”

Jimmy pointed to Elaine.

“What about her?” he asked coldly.

“Well, what about Elaine?” demanded Peter.

Jimmy grinned.

“Still the most beautiful woman in England, don’t you think?”

“Utterly, utterly, utterly. And absolutely,” said the Major.

Peter threw up his arms. Jimmy and the Major bowed to Elaine, nodded to Sir Francis, and then turned and walked arm in arm from the room. In silence Peter, Sir Francis and Elaine stared after them.

“A pair of nuts,” said Elaine bitterly. “And one of them is my husband.”

CHAPTER III

PETER COLBURN'S success in life was due more to his remarkable tenacity than to his native shrewdness. Once set upon a course he would go the full distance; once determined to do a thing he would do it. He was resolved now to save Jimmy from folly, or from something worse. Sir Francis, who had also achieved wealth and power, differed completely from his friend in both method and manner. Peter simply lowered his head and charged. Sir Francis sat back and considered, long and carefully, the various obstacles that had to be overcome. Where Peter used force, Sir Francis employed tact. He had been rather quiet during the scene with Jimmy and the Major, but nevertheless his keen mind had been busy. He said quietly:

"Peter, I am convinced that merely bullying James will do no good."

Peter bristled.

"I didn't bully the cub, Francis. I never bully any one. You know that."

"Yes, yes, Peter. I did not mean it. . . ."

"I stuck up for Elaine," said Peter harshly, "even though I was well aware that the fault is equally hers."

Elaine shrugged.

"Really, father Peter," she protested. "How is the fault equally mine?"

"Bah! Women these days don't know how to handle men."

"Indeed? If I had a man for a husband. . . ."

Peter frowned at her.

"Now don't you start hitting at James," he said gruffly. "He's a man all right."

"He's a nut," said Elaine contemptuously. "And I'm not going to argue about it any more. Good-night, father. Good-night, father Peter."

Sir Francis looked anxiously at her.

"Where are you going, Elaine?" he asked.

"To my digs. I've had a hard day with my refugees, and with this at the end of it."

"Young woman . . ." began Peter.

"Good-night," said Elaine firmly. "I've finished with James. I'm sorry, but there it is."

They watched her walk from the room.

"There," groaned Sir Francis, "you've done it now, Peter. There were tears in the child's eyes."

Peter bit savagely at a cigar.

"I? Blister me, Francis—don't blame me," he retorted. "No one could have been more tactful, or sympathetic, or persuasive than I was. Not once did I lose my temper, not even when that frightful fellow Winterbottom tried my patience to the utmost."

Sir Francis sighed and sank into a chair.

"These young people mean it, Peter," he said morosely. "Elaine is very bitter. James has hurt her pride. I know the girl."

"Huh!" grunted Peter. "And I know James. How a son of mine can be so stubborn I don't know — —"

Sir Francis merely looked at him. It was useless to tell Peter Colburn why John James Colburn could be so stubborn.

"We must do something, Peter. Their marriage will go on the rocks. . . ."

"Bah! In the old days when people married they stayed married. To-day, if they have an argument, the first thing they think of is divorce."

Sir Francis shook his head.

"There seems to be more intolerance," he muttered.

"There's too damned much freedom," growled Peter, "both for men and for women. I blame the women. They're all scrambling shamelessly to get on the auction block. It's the money in a man's pocket that counts to-day, not the man. If I had my way I'd gather these brazen hussies who publicize a string of husbands, these common harlots who rush to Reno, these glamorized wantons of film, foyer and salon, and publicly charge them with the destruction of the decencies of life."

"And the men?" murmured Sir Francis.

"Natural beasts, any way," grunted Peter. "Made that way. But watch a man. His behaviour is in direct ratio to the character of the woman he's with. If she's decent, he'll be decent. If she's a slut in a silk dress—he drops the veneer. We both know Elaine and Jimmy are fundamentally sound. We can build on that. But she's living now in rooms on her own; so is he. If the times weren't loose that wouldn't be possible. Yes; we'll have to do something."

"I was wondering . . ."

"Curse me—what were you wondering?"

"Don't be so impatient, Peter. If we could find something else for them to do, something that would be of help both to them and to the nation."

Peter lit his cigar.

"Yes; but what?" he demanded.

Sir Francis looked at him.

“Are you known at the War Office, by any chance?” he asked.

Peter grunted.

“Of course I’m known at the War Office, Francis. That’s a silly question.”

“I didn’t mean it to be so, Peter. Why not use your influence there and get James some kind of an appointment? Perhaps they’d even do something for Elaine.”

Peter brightened.

“Blister me—you’ve hit it, Francis. Now why didn’t I think of that? I have only to ’phone Westover and the thing’s done.”

“Westover?”

“Yes, yes. Big pot there during the last war.”

“Is he still there?”

Peter stared blankly.

“Eh? Where else would he be? I’ll ’phone immediately.”

“Splendid, Peter, splendid, old fellow,” chuckled Sir Francis. “I feel we’re on the right track at last.”

Peter stretched out an arm and lifted a receiver, asked gruffly to be put through to the War Office, and then sat back. Sir Francis smiled benignly. No use adopting dear old Peter’s methods. Tact. Craft. These things together could work miracles.

“Confound it,” muttered Peter. “Hello, hello, hello? Eh? That *is* the War Office? Then why didn’t you say so! Eh? Of course I want someone—General Westover. Yes, yes, yes, I know it’s late. Yes; I’ll wait.”

“Keep calm, Peter. They have thousands of calls, you know.”

“I know, Francis. I’m not an idiot, am I? Hello? Yes? Yes, yes, yes—General Westover. Yes, I’ll wait.”

He glared at Sir Francis.

“That’s twice I had to—hello? Yes, yes, YES! General Westover. Will I wait? Curse me, how long must I wait? You don’t know? Yes; I’ll wait.”

“It’s no use shouting at the ’phone, Peter.”

“I’m not shouting at the ’phone, Francis. I’m shouting at that fool—hello? What? Oh, my God—General Westover! What? This is Peter Colburn speaking—the Peter Colburn—WHAT? You’ve never heard of him? What the—Francis—who is that? Hello, hello, hello. . . .”

“Be calm, Peter, be calm.”

"I am calm," snarled Peter. "Hello? Get me General Westover. Will I wait? Curse me. . . ."

"Peter sit down, sit down."

"I'm sick of waiting," yelled Peter. "My God—he's cut me off."

"Well, it was either that or see an ear specialist in the morning."

"Now don't be stupid, Francis. I had myself well in hand. If those fools can't find one of their own generals they'll have a job finding Hitler."

Wilkins, warned by experience and the telephone fiasco, came into the room.

"My car, Wilkins," snapped Peter. "I'll drive it myself."

Sir Francis looked alarmed.

"But, Peter—the black-out. It may be dangerous for you to drive."

Peter thumped the desk with his fist.

"I'll drive, Francis. I know London blindfold. You can't fool me because a few lights have been turned out. I'm going to Elaine's, then to James's rooms. You're coming with me."

"Very well," sighed Sir Francis.

Wilkins, of course, had vanished. He knew his Peter Colburn.

"Never heard of me," snarled Peter. "Never HEARD of me! There's impudence for you, Francis. But I'll deal with that later."

"But, Peter . . ."

"Now, don't find excuses for those asses, Francis. It's time I took the whole matter in hand. I've been merely trifling with it. Tact has its place, but right now I'm at the wheel, and I'm going right through—or I'll bust something."

Sir Francis drooped noticeably. Peter, when his blood was up, was quite capable of driving through a brick wall, and then cursing the builders for their inferior work. And his blood seemed to be up at the moment. Wilkins came in.

"Your car, sir. Your hat, sir?"

"Don't want a hat," snapped Peter.

"Your gas mask, sir?"

"I refuse to have anything to do with that thing," said Peter. "If I've got to choke, it won't be in that."

"Your hat, Sir Francis."

Peter glared at the faithful Wilkins.

"He doesn't want a hat either. Clear out of it, Wilkins."

Wilkins bowed and walked away.

“Should have been a beadle, that fellow,” said Peter.

He stumped through the house to the pavement, Sir Francis trailing after him.

“Ah! There’s the car.”

“Now don’t get all bothered, Peter; and do remember London is different with all the lights out.”

“Don’t dither, Francis; don’t dither,” said Peter testily. “Get in the car.”

Sir Francis did so. Peter threw himself into the driver’s seat, kicked at the self-starter, roared the engine to life, jammed in the gear and clutch, and snapped at Sir Francis:

“Hold on. I want action.”

With a terrific leap the car started.

“Never heard of me,” snorted Peter. “They will.”

Sir Francis nodded.

“They will,” he agreed. “This way, I think.”

“Nonsense, Francis—I know where I’m going.”

A black shape loomed ahead.

“Peter—” yelled Sir Francis.

Peter jammed on the brakes, taking the wheel hard in his chest, Sir Francis bumping his head on the door.

“What fool is driving that car?” roared Peter.

“Fool yourself,” came back haughtily. “Why don’t you observe the regulations?”

“Why don’t I—God send me a bottle of wine,” gasped Peter.

“Peter, Peter, don’t make a scene, for heaven’s sake.”

“I’m NOT making a scene, Francis. It’s this idiot in front of me. . . .”

“Idiot yourself,” came bounding back. “I’ll report you for a breach of the act.”

“Here they come,” said Sir Francis apprehensively.

“Let ’em,” growled Peter. “I’ll have no nonsense with these people. . . .” All at once his voice changed to its well known roar. “James! So it’s you!”

Jimmy, accompanied by the Major, came to the car.

“Name please?” snapped Jimmy.

“James! How dare you! Stop this tomfoolery and get out of my way. I’m in a hurry— —”

"Name please?" said Jimmy firmly. "It's my duty to report you for a deliberate breach of the act. You're flouting A.R.P. and I can't have that. People like you should be dealt with."

"God bless my soul," wheezed Peter. "You threaten me, eh?"

Sir Francis smiled grimly. If James threatened to report the obstinate old ass he would. James was an obstinate young ass.

"Take the number of the car, Guntha," said Jimmy.

"Absolutely," said the Major.

"Don't you dare, you—you ramrod," hissed Peter.

"Name?" demanded Jimmy. "I can't stand here all night."

"Go to blazes—and look OUT!"

In went the gear; out came the clutch. The car shot forward convulsively, jerking Jimmy off his feet. Ruefully he picked himself up, grinned in the darkness at the chuckling Major, and then walked back to his car.

"I'll summon the old octopus," he said with a laugh. "And I'd give something to know what those two downy old birds are doing out so late."

The Major laughed heartily.

"I like him, although I ragged him so unmercifully. But you said to do that."

Laughing they got in the car.

"Are you still determined to see Elaine?" asked the Major. "Rather latish, isn't it?"

"Yes. But . . . after all, what can I do? I'll see Milne first."

The Major nodded.

"Precisely, Jimmy. After all, what can you say or do? Want me?"

"Yes."

The Major said thoughtfully:

"I don't think your pater, or Elaine, can quite make me out."

At that they both laughed again.

Peter drove on through the black streets, and Sir Francis knew his old friend was inwardly fuming at James's impertinence. Every now and then grunts and biting, half uttered ejaculations came from the rubber magnate. Sir Francis was content with silence. Presently they were held up again.

"Are you sure we are going in the right direction, Peter?"

"Of course I am, Francis. Don't keep asking silly questions. I'm not a child, am I?"

Sir Francis smiled to himself. The car went on. London, now at war, was a strange, almost a terrifying place; certainly a weird city at night. High in the heavens were the unseen balloons. A full, white light was a startling phenomenon. Sometimes a searchlight would stab the sky, and when it snapped out would leave momentarily a long black finger to point the stars or the clouds. Grim muzzles of guns slanted up. Grim gun crews crouched beside the monsters. Trenches in all the gardens. Palace guards in khaki. The roar of the traffic was somehow muted as though even mechanical things were existing in tense expectancy. Pigeons flocking in the streets. Roads with their white strips, footpaths edged with white. Sandbags piled on sandbags. Piccadilly forsaken by Eros. Flickering torches. Signs ‘pre-war prices here.’ Sometimes would come laughter, sometimes song, but most people seemed to be waiting, staring, wondering. Gas masks everywhere. A maniac once again had set the world ablaze, but Britain’s steel walls ringed the seven seas, crossed the frontiers of France, and touched the skies.

The car went on. People drifted by unseen. None knew who was abroad, none could see. But all knew there were no children, or very, very few. Strange is the forest where no bird sings, sombre was London with its children gone. Because of the madness of tragic Germany, so the pall that darkened England. Because of the mediocre mind of a hybrid Austrian, a man tormented by dreams that have tormented mediocre minds down through the ages, because of a megalomaniac’s vain ambition, so this war.

Peter drove on. Presently he said:

“I’m damn worried, Francis. Surely we can get James and Elaine to patch it up? I know he’s a pup—look at his idiotic impertinence just a few minutes ago. And I know she’s a silly little minx. But surely we can do something.”

“We can, Peter, I’m sure,” said Sir Francis confidently.

“Ha!” said Peter, “Ha! Well, leave everything to me, Francis. Here we are . . . I think.”

Sir Francis suddenly realized where they were. The magnificent million pound pile of the War Office, with its thousand rooms and miles of corridors, loomed across the street.

“But this is the War Office, Peter.”

“I know,” said Peter grimly. “Never heard of me, eh?”

“Good heavens, you can’t worry any one at this time of night.”

“Now don’t argue, Francis. Get out of the damn car and follow me.”

Sir Francis suddenly clutched Peter’s arm.

“Peter,” he hissed.

Startled, Peter paused in the act of getting out of the car:

“What is it?”

“Those two shadows that passed us. . . .”

“What about them?”

“I could have sworn they were James and the Major.”

Peter grunted.

“Don’t be silly, Francis. That cub won’t come within a mile of the War Office. He’s not damn well game, although I’d break any one else’s neck if he said it. Now follow me, Francis, and leave everything to me.”

“I could have sworn it was James,” muttered Sir Francis.

CHAPTER IV

PETER hurried along, Sir Francis clutching at him. Whitehall was filled with shadows.

“War fever,” grunted Peter. “Now don’t lose me, Francis—I know what you are.”

“I’m here; I’m here.”

Peter was surging ahead.

“Not so fast, Peter—it isn’t a matter of life and death.”

Peter turned.

“It is a matter of life and death,” he retorted. “What’s my life to me if James doesn’t prove himself a man? What’s your life to you if Elaine is miserable?”

Turning again he stepped out, and then recoiled after bumping heavily into something. Realizing it was partly his fault he apologized.

“Sorry, old man. . . .”

“It’s a lamp post,” said Sir Francis.

Peter then saw that it was.

“Curse me, I thought it was a man. Why will they leave things for people to fall over? Francis, the War Office is going too far—this black-out business, I mean. I’ll tell Westover what I think of it.”

Sir Francis nodded. General Westover, whoever he was, would undoubtedly hear things.

“In here,” grunted Peter. “Half London seems to be here. Never saw so many uniforms, so many people rushing about. . . .”

But he was stopped. A keen young fellow who was passing, a youngster with tabs and a toothbrush moustache, inquired curtly:

“You have business here, gentlemen?”

Peter stared at him.

“Would I be here if I hadn’t?” he retorted. “Hasn’t any one in this place got any brains?”

The subaltern’s face was impassive.

“We’re hoping for the best, sir. May I help you in any way?”

“I wish to see Westover,” said Peter.

The young man’s gaze sharpened.

“I’m Westover, sir,” he replied.

Peter looked at him.

“Blister me—I mean General Westover, young man.”

The subaltern smiled.

“My father, sir. He is not here now. You know him personally?”

“Bless my soul, yes, my boy,” said Peter heartily. His gruff manner had vanished. “Colburn is my name. My friend is Sir Francis Martindale. I knew your father many years ago.”

Westover clicked his heels.

“He has often spoken of you, sir. I know Jimmy well, as it happens.”

“Humph,” said Peter thoughtfully. “I’m glad. If you’re a friend of James the fact that he is not in uniform must be as mystifying to you as it is to me. Frankly, I want to find a job for him.”

The young officer stared.

“A job, sir?”

“Don’t I speak distinctly these days?” demanded Peter a little gruffly.

Westover drew in a deep breath.

“But . . . a job, sir?” he repeated mechanically.

Peter turned to Sir Francis.

“There you are Francis. Everybody thinks James is a fool. I suppose his idiocy is known even here. But I’ll persevere.”

A faint grin disturbed the toothbrush.

“Come this way, gentlemen. I’ll introduce you to Colonel Milne. He’ll advise you, Mr Colburn.”

They walked along.

“Thanks, my boy. I don’t want Jimmy to be out of everything.”

Westover’s face was a mask as he steered them through a maze of corridors.

“I can understand that, sir,” he replied. “Milne is the man to see about this—he’s my chief.”

“Huh! What’s his job?”

“Intelligence.”

“Ha!” said Peter hopefully. “He should know something.”

“He should, sir,” said the subaltern gravely. “Here is his room. If you will wait I’ll let him know you are here.”

“Go ahead,” grunted Peter. “Francis, we’re getting somewhere.”

They saw Westover approach a grizzled, steely-eyed man in mufti, but they could not hear what was said. In a moment Westover came to them.

“Please go in, gentlemen,” he said.

He did not go in with them. Clicking his heels he turned and hurried along the corridor. Colonel Milne advanced to meet them.

“Sir Francis Martindale and Mr Colburn?” he murmured.

“Colonel Milne, I understand?” said Peter.

“Come in, gentlemen. How may I be of service to you?”

He indicated two chairs and they sat down. Peter plunged right into it.

“No need to waste time or words, Colonel Milne. I want a job for my son, James.”

The colonel looked quickly down at the papers on his table. His face was impassive, inscrutable.

“Yes, Mr Colburn?”

Peter began to get red in the jowls. This was the devil of a task. Humiliating. Curse James.

“I—I want him to do something,” he said gruffly. Milne looked up.

“Does he know you are approaching us?” he asked quietly.

“No. I don’t know whether he’s lazy or gunshy. But he ought to be doing something. Every man ought to be doing something. You are. I am. So is Sir Francis.”

Milne looked from one to the other.

“Has he any particular qualifications, Mr Colburn?”

Peter waved a hand.

“He can do anything. If he could be put in some position of responsibility—say a squadron leader in the Air Force—he flies his own plane, you know. Marvellous stunter. Knocks spots off any Hun. Or perhaps a commander in the Navy—he sails his own yacht. Or something where he’d have to *do* something. . . .”

“But Peter . . .” began Sir Francis.

“Leave this to me, Francis.”

“Very well.”

Peter went on.

“He’s getting in with the wrong people. . . .”

Milne smiled briefly.

“Oh, we know all about that, Mr Colburn.”

Peter stared.

“You *know* that?”

Milne nodded.

“As a matter of fact his activities are well known to us.”

Peter’s complexion was turning from brick red to purple.

“I knew it!” he exploded. “The young fool will get himself run in yet.”

“Peter, calm yourself,” pleaded Sir Francis.

“Leave this to me, Francis,” panted Peter. “See what a mess that young fathead is getting us all into. I won’t have it—I *WON’T* have it.”

The colonel winced. Peter went on indignantly.

“Who’s been spying on my son? This place is becoming as bad as Germany. Are we getting a Gestapo here? It’s disgraceful, it’s outrageous! It’s not *BRITISH*, sir! After all, James is merely misguided. He’s not, he’s not—bah! I could break his neck. . . .”

Sir Francis spoke quietly.

“What can we do about it, Colonel?”

Milne thought for a moment, the two men watching him anxiously.

“There is someone keeping an eye on these undesirables.”

Peter almost choked.

“Colonel Milne,” he gasped. “Are you saying my son is an undesirable?”

“Peter. . . .”

“I *WON’T* be quiet, Francis.”

“Not at all, Mr Colburn,” said the colonel suavely. “I referred to—the Shadow.”

They stared at him.

“The Shadow?” they echoed.

“One of our cleverest men,” said Milne. “As the papers have been full of him he’s no longer a secret.”

“Who is he?” whispered Peter.

Milne smiled.

“Ah! Even the newspapers don’t know that. He is watching these people, and also keeping an eye on your son and his wife. . . .”

“Elaine?” murmured Sir Francis.

“Mrs Colburn. She is interested in refugees. Not all of these people are friends of ours, and certain ones are quite ruthless.”

Sir Francis was alarmed.

"Is she in any danger, Colonel Milne?" he asked.

"Not with the Shadow keeping guard over her. Of course it is all done quietly. She has no idea she is being protected, neither has your son."

"The Shadow," muttered Peter. "They say he does amazing things."

"He does, he and his equally mysterious aide, the Shade."

"The Shade?"

The colonel laughed.

"I'm giving nothing away, and it intrigues me as much as any one. The Shade is a woman, unknown even to the Shadow. And the identity of the Shadow is unknown to her. They help each other, often work together. Each has asked me who the other is; but of course there are secrets even within secrets."

"Couldn't Jimmy do something like that?" Peter asked somewhat wistfully.

The Colonel swallowed hard, and said:

"We'll have to think of something else . . . for him."

Peter began to smile.

"Then you'll do something for him?"

Milne looked thoughtful.

"I'll keep it in mind, Mr Colburn."

Peter beamed.

"Thank you, Colonel. He's at a loose end, that's all. Have a cigar. Have two cigars. If he were a major, or a brigadier, or something, it would steady him a bit. Damme, he's a Colburn. He has the stuff, Colonel."

Milne was smiling.

"As I said, I'll keep him in mind."

"Damn good of you, Colonel," said Peter gratefully. "Put your money on James—he's a winner."

"Oh, certainly," said the Colonel blandly. "Good night, gentlemen."

Taking the hint they rose and backed away as though from royalty.

"Good-night," they chorused.

Hurrying to the car they missed the conversation between Milne and his junior, Westover.

"Put your money on James Colburn, Westover. He's a winner. Have one of these cigars."

The youngster grinned.

“Who told you that, sir?” he asked.

The Colonel shrugged and picked up a pen.

“His father. Wants him to be like the Shadow.”

“Jimmy Colburn? Good God! You’ll pardon my mirth, sir.”

“I’ll join you,” said Milne. “Where is Jimmy?”

“Waiting until two very earnest millionaires have departed. Luckily I ran into him and the Major. A droll chap, the Major. . . .”

“A great team,” said Milne. “I think they are coming now.”

Jimmy and the Major entered the room. Milne sat back and grinned at them.

“You’ve had a visitor,” Jimmy fired at him.

Milne held up a cigar.

“Your father thinks you ought to be at least an admiral,” he retorted. “I half promised to find you a job. I rather thought he was in the mood to buy the entire Navy, or the Air Force, just to give you a chance to show us how good you are.”

Jimmy chuckled.

“Dear old Peter. Great scout.”

“Absolutely,” said the Major. “If he doesn’t shoot first I’ll tell him a few of my stories.”

Westover laughed.

“Then he’ll shoot, sir.”

The Major smiled.

“I should myself,” he said whimsically.

Jimmy drew an envelope from his pocket and tossed it on Milne’s desk.

“Diese Sache leidet keinen Aufschub.”

The air became electrical.

“So . . . you got it?” said the Colonel incredulously.

“Good God,” muttered young Westover. “You’re uncanny, sir.”

Jimmy and the Major exchanged glances.

“It is a letter from Gauleiter Grolman to a gentleman named von Hagen. Grolman is seeking information concerning our embarkation schedules, also munition plant locations.”

“We’ll oblige him,” said Milne gruffly.

Jimmy laughed.

“I have another visit to pay shortly. I promise you, Milne, we’ll have these fellows in the net within forty-eight hours.”

“You’ll have to work fast,” said Milne grimly.

“I’ll add another twenty-four hours for margin. Come on, Guns. We’ll be busy.”

“Absolutely,” said the Major.

CHAPTER V

JIMMY drove carefully.

“They think we’re uncanny, Guns. The credit is due as much to the Shade as to the Shadow.”

In the Stygian darkness the Major could be heard but not seen.

“I wonder who she is?” he muttered.

“So do I,” retorted Jimmy. “I wonder if she knows who I am?”

“Impossible,” said the Major. “Have you ever seen her face?”

“No. She invariably wears slacks, a pull-over, a scarf that veils her features, and a beret.”

The Major laughed.

“Almost an identical costume with your own.”

“Almost,” admitted Jimmy. “I was tempted to play a flashlight on her, but it would have been rotten sportsmanship. And it might have ruined everything.”

“Absolutely. Milne, of course, would know.”

“He’d know. Probably feeds her. Anyway, without her we’d be sunk at times.”

“At least partly submerged, old man,” said the Major.

Jimmy said grimly:

“I’m in a constant sweat of fear lest they get her. She’s obviously in with the Wilhelmstrasse crowd in some way, and is just as obviously double-crossing them.”

“A deadly and dangerous game,” said the Major quietly. “Does her voice give you a lead?”

“Sometimes I think it does. Sometimes I think it’s somehow familiar, but it’s only futile guessing.”

“Does her figure seem familiar?”

“Everything is always too blurred and dark. But whoever she is she’s clever, charming, evasive, and game. I first met her after that job we did at Tony’s. Tony, you remember, was getting vital information about our Mediterranean plans, and sending it on to Rome.”

“I remember Tony,” said the Major.

Jimmy went on:

“That Wop nearly got me. Like a fool I did not pull you in on that job, and I nearly paid for my mistake. The Shade got me out of it. That black car she drives came through the narrow lane full lick. ‘Get in,’ she hissed. I took a chance. I had to. Neither of us spoke. When we were in the clear she pulled up. ‘Get out,’ she whispered. I got out. She whispered again: ‘Behind you is a stone wall. Let your fingers touch it.’ I touched the stone, let my fingers play over the rough surface. There was a loose stone where the mortar had crumbled. I mentioned it. She said: ‘Search in that space every night—after midnight,’ and then she was gone.”

The Major chuckled.

“You haven’t seen her lately?”

“No. I’ll be at the stone wall later, but I must see Elaine first. She thinks I’m an unmitigated rotter.”

“And I’m nuts,” sighed the Major.

They both laughed.

“Can’t undecieve her, but I like to barge in occasionally. After all, Guns, I’m a married man. Here we are.”

The Major chuckled as the car stopped.

“Want me?” he asked.

To his surprise Jimmy said:

“Better come up. If any one else is there I may need you. In any case you infuriate Elaine even more than I do.”

“Utterly, utterly, utterly. And absolutely,” laughed the Major.

As they were admitted the booming of Peter’s voice came to them, then the quiet tones of Sir Francis, then the rich voice of Elaine. Jimmy’s eyes were bland, his manner affable, while the Major fairly oozed urbanity and aplomb.

“Jimmy!” yelled Peter. “I’m glad you’re here, my boy.”

“So am I,” said Sir Francis.

Jimmy looked at Elaine.

“And Madame?” he murmured.

Elaine shrugged.

“Why ask me?” she retorted.

She turned to a man standing near her.

“My husband,” she said shortly. “Karl, this is James Colburn. James, Mr Karl Werner.”

Werner was a tall man with prominent blue eyes, close-cropped fair hair, and a thin-lipped mouth. He had a snap and steel-spring movement about him that hinted at considerable muscular power. He bowed jerkily.

"I am delighted to know you, Mr Colburn."

Jimmy seemed slightly amused.

"Mutual, Mr Werner. I presume you are another of my wife's experiments."

Elaine stared coldly at Jimmy. Mr Werner spoke hurriedly.

"Ach! Mrs Colburn is an angel."

Jimmy's gaze was quizzical.

"My dear, Mr Werner has keen perception."

Elaine flushed a little, and then was furious with herself for doing so.

"He just escaped with his life."

"With whose wife?" asked Jimmy suavely.

"His life," said Elaine biting. Jimmy smiled.

"Oh, sorry. Wife and life are so much alike, don't you think?"

"Ach," said Mr Werner again. "Mrs Colburn is an angel. She has raised me from despair to Paradise. I live again. *Ja!* After the hell of Germany—ach, poor Germany—I live once more. And Mrs Colburn, so beautiful, so charming, she gives me the wish to live. She is angel."

"Indubitably. Utterly, utterly, utterly. And absolutely," said the Major.

"Mrs Colburn has interested herself in . . . such as yourself, Mr Werner," said Jimmy. "I think I ought to go to Germany and escape from there myself."

"Haw, haw, haw—oh, sorry."

Elaine looked cynically at her husband.

"There is no danger of your doing that, James," she said sarcastically. "So far as I can see there is no danger of your doing anything. . . ."

Peter moved uneasily.

"Jimmy," he said quickly, "I have a job for you."

They all stared at him.

"A job, sir?" said the startled Jimmy.

"Don't look so alarmed, dear," murmured Elaine. "It's probably quite innocuous."

Peter rubbed his hands. He was in great spirits.

“Yes, my boy. I knew as soon as I took the matter up personally the War Office would move.”

“The War Office?” interrupted Mr Werner.

They looked at him.

“I should not interrupt, but I have been appointed to the War Office as interpreter—thanks to the good efforts of Mrs Colburn.”

“By gad . . .” said the Major.

Elaine said coolly:

“Claire Beauchamp’s husband is in the War Office. He sent me to a Colonel Milne. . . .”

“God bless my soul,” said Peter, “that’s the man I saw. Didn’t you try to do anything for James?”

Elaine sneered.

“For James? Should I have done so? Isn’t he capable of doing anything for himself—or isn’t he?”

Peter was on the point of saying something rude, but checked himself in time. Mr Werner was looking slightly puzzled, as though trying to sum up the situation.

“Congratulations on your appointment, Mr Werner,” said Jimmy. “I don’t know much about these things, but you ought to be a useful man.”

Mr Werner smiled.

“Ach, I am in haste to serve England,” he said earnestly.

“Of course, my husband is equally in haste to serve England,” said Elaine.

Peter scowled at her.

“Blister me . . .” he began.

Jimmy drew himself up.

“I serve the cause of peace,” he said sternly. “Guntha and I will leave no stone unturned until we have torn up the hate that is dragging us all in the dirt. How’s that, Guntha?”

“Topping, old man,” said the Major. “A bit involved, as ’twere, but rather brilliant. Absolutely.”

Mr Werner looked surprised.

“But . . . you are not a pacifist?” he asked.

“He is,” said Elaine grimly.

Mr Werner’s manner froze slightly. He bowed stiffly to Jimmy.

"I am not in sympathy with you, sir," he said deliberately.

Peter was rising from his chair, but Sir Francis restrained him. The Major adjusted his monocle and stared at Mr Werner. Jimmy ignored him.

"Guntha and I are arranging a monster 'stop the war' meeting in Trafalgar Square," he told them enthusiastically.

"You're WHAT?" roared Peter.

"James—you wouldn't be so—so crazy," panted Elaine.

"Heavens!" said Sir Francis. "Really, my boy, that's going too far."

Mr Werner glanced sideways at Elaine. The expression of contempt on her face gave him his cue.

"Mr Colburn is perhaps in dread of Germany," he murmured.

"I'm in dread of the colossal sacrifices it will take to give that country another damned good hiding."

Mr Werner winced.

"I am a guest. I may not comment," he said coldly.

"Oh, go ahead," said Jimmy affably. "It's only by getting together we'll ever get anywhere."

"Absolutely."

"James. . . ."

"Our speakers will hammer home the brotherhood of man and the stupidity of the Hun."

Mr Werner was hard of eye and thin of lip.

"JAMES!"

"Guntha and I will prove the guilt of these Nazi assassins and demand they be arraigned before the whole world. We'll appeal to America, Africa, Asia, Australia, Assam, Assyria, and the Antarctic."

"Absolutely."

"We'll prove that these and other free peoples of the world regard with disapproval a fellow like Hitler posing as an eagle when he's only a cuckoo. . . ."

"James—JAMES—Curse me. . . ."

Jimmy was carried away with his own eloquence. Dramatically he flung out an arm, haughtily he threw back his head.

"We'll tell the world!"

"We will," said the Major.

"We'll inspire millions!"

“We will,” said the Major.

“We’ll use the most potent weapon of all—ridicule!”

“We will,” said the Major.

Jimmy turned to him.

“What else will we do, Guntha?”

The Major drew himself up proudly.

“Stop him,” yelled Peter. “If *he* starts. . . .”

“Fellow countrymen . . .” began the Major.

“God send me a bottle of wine,” gasped Peter. “He’s off.”

“It is my bally purpose to-night. . . .”

“Oh, hell!” groaned Peter.

Elaine was trembling with anger. That James should humiliate them all in this insufferable manner was beyond endurance. She turned quickly to Werner.

“You have some interesting photographs of Germany, I understand, Mr Werner?”

“At my rooms,” said Mr Werner.

“May I look at them?”

Peter, Sir Francis, Jimmy and the Major stared at her. Mr Werner bowed.

“Ach, I am honoured.”

Elaine gave Jimmy a bitter look.

“We’ll go at once,” she said.

Mr Werner bowed again.

“I am doubly honoured,” he murmured.

Peter’s mouth was loose and open. Sir Francis’s white hair was almost standing on end. Jimmy blinked amiably. The Major thoughtfully polished his monocle. Without a glance at any of them Elaine walked quickly from the room. Mr Werner shot a glance at Jimmy and then followed her. When the door closed Peter bounded out of his chair and threw up his arms.

“James!” he raved. “You’ll lose that girl! For heaven’s sake haven’t you any sense left?”

Jimmy seemed quite unaware that anything out of the ordinary had happened.

“What have I done, sir?” he asked innocently.

Peter tried to shake both fists at once.

“Sent her off to the rooms of a damned squarehead—simply because you haven’t the guts to be an Englishman. God, I’m ashamed of you.”

“But I didn’t send her. She went herself.”

“Absolutely,” said the Major.

Peter turned on him.

“Will you keep out of this?” he hissed. “If *you* had any intelligence you’d—you’d . . . Bah! What’s the use? What’s the USE?”

Jimmy grinned at the Major and said under his breath:

“Get them arguing, Guns. I must go.”

“Speaking of intelligence,” said the Major, “reminds me of my place at Wychford. . . .”

“Wychford—Wychford?” rasped Peter. “What about it?”

“Tell them, Guntha,” said Jimmy. “It’s frightfully important.”

“Oh, frightfully,” agreed the Major. “Have you heard of the witches of Wychford, sir?”

Peter and Sir Francis looked blankly at each other. Peter rose to the bait.

“The which—the what?” he growled.

“The witches of Wychford, sir.”

Peter was looking dangerous.

“Major Winterbottom, what the devil have the witches of Wychford got to do with this war?” he demanded.

“By gad, everything, sir. I suspect them of having started the war. There’s the White Witch, the Black Witch, the Grey Witch, the Old Witch, and the Young Witch. We have never yet been able to determine which is the worst witch of the witches of Wychford, sir.”

“Well,” barked Peter, “which *is* the worst witch of the witches of Wychford?”

“Which witch would you say was the worst witch of the witches of Wychford, sir?”

“Which witch would I say was the worst witch of the witches of Wychford?” repeated Peter. “How the devil would I know? Does it matter?”

“By gad, it matters,” said the Major emphatically. “If I knew which witch was the witch which was the worst witch of all the witches of Wychford. . . .”

“Just a moment—just a moment,” panted Peter.

“Which of the witches . . .” began Sir Francis.

“Leave this to me, Francis,” snapped Peter. “There’s a White Witch, a Black Witch, a Grey Witch, an Old Witch, a Young Witch . . .”

“And the Crippled Witch, sir. . . .”

“Dammit all . . .”

“But the witch which the Wychford witches . . .”

“The Crippled Witch?”

“Not at all, the Blind Witch, sir . . .”

“Curse me,” yelled Peter. “Which witch is—I mean which witch—which witch which witch—Blister me! Which witch . . .”

“Of the Wychford witches . . .”

“Will you be quiet, sir? I want to understand this.”

“Certainly, sir.”

“Now. Let me get this straightened out. You ask me which is the worst witch of Wychford?”

“Absolutely, sir.”

“There are the White Witch, the Black Witch, the Grey Witch, the Old Witch, the Young Witch, the Crippled Witch, and the Blind Witch.”

“Absolutely, sir. And the Dumb Witch and the Dirty Witch. . . .”

“God bless my soul,” gasped Peter. “Any more?”

“I don’t quite follow,” said Sir Francis.

“Bah! It’s simple. The witch which the witch—No. The witch which the witch . . . which the witch which—Dammit!”

“But, Peter. . . .”

“Leave this to ME, Francis! The witch which the witches of Wychford—I mean the worst witch which which which which. . . . Where was I? Ah, yes, it’s simple. The witch which any witch which—BLAST it!”

“But which witch is the witch. . . .”

“I’m TELLING you! The witch I think which is the worst witch is the witch which . . .”

Sir Francis gave a gasp.

“Peter! They’ve gone! James and the Major. . . .”

Peter whirled.

“Gone? Gone? GONE? I didn’t see those idiots go.”

“Neither did I, Peter.”

Peter stared grimly about him.

“I see it. Come along, Francis. It’s close to midnight, any way. But when I see that Major again I’ll let *him* know which witch is which. He’s a fool! Tigers, mahoots, howdahs, witches—He’s an idiot.”

“Don’t shout, Peter.”

CHAPTER VI

A CALM night. Big Ben striking two. In Soho, a dark figure slinking along narrow St. Anne's Court heard the far-off chimes. The man wore a dark cloth cap, jacket and pull-over, and black, canvas, rubber-soled shoes. No one, not even a foot away, could have identified Jimmy Colburn so startling and complete was the transformation from immaculate man-about-town to the furtive black form now known even as far as the Wilhelmstrasse as the Shadow.

The maze of streets and the warren of houses between Regent Street, Oxford Street, and Charing Cross Road were silent and dark. The fetid dance halls, the restaurants with their quasi-literary flavour mingling with the reek of foreign spices, were black and lifeless. Few were the chinks of light to hint at nocturnal gaiety, or the driving urge of the seekers of night life. Few were the prowlers, and Soho Square, where once the Duke of Monmouth strutted briefly, and where Sir Roger lived at the behest of Addison, was deserted. The stalls of Berwick Street were without whisper or echo. The restaurants of old Compton Street belied the locality's Latin-Quarter reputation. All were shut, no one moved within or without. The tables were given over to the rats, the streets to the cats. This foreign heart of London had had its dinner *à la carte*, had strewn its orange peel along the pavements, had discarded an old mistress, had accepted a new lover, had laughed, whispered, schemed, sung, wept. Now it slept, or seemed so to do. But Soho, ever the home of the refugee, the sanctuary of the outcast and the unwanted of other lands, invariably slept with one foreign eye open.

Jimmy Colburn knew this. He moved out of St. Anne's Court and on, silently and swiftly, until he came to an iron grille in the pavement. Almost above his head a dirty sign told the world, if it cared to read, that this mean crack between the houses was known as Rotten Apple Lane. Without hesitation he lifted the grille, dropped down through the hole, and quietly let the grille down into its place above him. He now stood in a damp recess. Before him was a door on which he knocked. It opened and he stepped through into a room without light.

"Shut it, Guns," he breathed.

The door closed. A switch clicked and lit a room furnished cheaply with table, couch, three chairs, wardrobe, washbasin, and threadbare carpet. On the table was a telephone. The Major offered a cigarette. Lighting one, Jimmy inhaled.

"Washout," he grunted.

“What happened?”

“They were waiting for me.”

The Major sat down.

“Phew!” he whistled softly. “Close as that?”

“Just spotted them. Another step, and I’d have had to shoot my way back. Three of them were dark blotches against the walls, a fourth was crouched near the safe. I don’t know what warned me. It was almost as though the Shade’s whisper said ‘Watch, watch, watch!’”

“Gad!” said the Major, “that *was* close.”

“Closest yet,” said Jimmy. “But I’m going back.”

“Dangerous, Jimmy. I don’t mean that in the personal sense as I know you’d only laugh. But I’m thinking . . .”

Jimmy nodded.

“I know. We risk letting Milne down by possible failure and discovery. But I must risk it, Guns. Look . . .”

From his pocket he took a small piece of paper.

“From the Shade?” murmured the Major.

“Yes. It says: ‘. . . the place is a five-storied, old-fashioned warehouse. No lifts. Used as a bond for continental imports, mostly leather articles. Also as a contact point between enemy agents and the Wilhelmstrasse. Safe is in room opposite landing on third floor. In safe is letter from Grolman to his opposite number in Berlin. Watch yourself. Watch, watch, watch!’”

“Clever girl, whoever she is,” muttered the Major. “How did you get in?”

Jimmy laughed.

“The keys Milne gave me.”

“The Shade’s writing—any clue to her in it?”

Jimmy shook his head.

“She doesn’t write—she prints.”

“That was in to-night’s post?”

“Yes. Picked it up after I left you at Elaine’s. Knowing you would come here and wait for me I went on with the job. It was too easy, Guns.”

“Meant to be. You don’t think . . .”

“No. The Shade’s no decoy. If she were, if she were putting it over us and Milne, she could have shot me herself quite easily.”

“Right. What now, Jimmy?”

"I'll need you in support, Guns."

The Major grinned.

"Count on me, old boy."

Jimmy laughed.

"I do. Witness Pete, Elaine and Sir Francis."

The Major chuckled.

"What do I do—to-night?" he asked.

Jimmy's smile broadened.

"When I'm in that building, you're going to set it on fire."

The Major stared.

"Gad!—on fire?"

"Synthetically."

"Ah. A smoke screen for your getaway, eh?"

"Just that."

The Major vigorously polished his monocle.

"Can do. We have the dope here. Routine orders, as 'twere?"

"When you see me go in, give me ten minutes. Then start the fireworks. When the smoke is pouring into the building break the alarm. I want as much noise and confusion as you can make below. The brigades will provide both."

"Can do. You'll leave the street door ajar?"

"Yes. I want to get our friends out of that room for a few minutes. A sniff of smoke in a building at night has a terrific psychological effect. Compare time."

They adjusted their watches.

"Give me five minutes start."

"Right."

"And see they don't nab you, Guns."

The Major beamed at him.

"Absolutely."

Jimmy put out his cigarette.

"Time, gentlemen. Out with that light, Guns."

The switch clicked, and Jimmy went into the recess, up and on to the pavement, and quickly along Rotten Apple Lane. A shadow moving within the shadows he went swiftly on. No alley cat could have moved more stealthily. Once he paused, shrank against a wall, listened, peered, chuckled

soundlessly, and then edged across a street. Straight as an arrow to its mark he went to the door of a five-storied building. The sour smell of leather was in his nostrils. From a pocket he took a bunch of keys and turned the lock. He made no sound. Soundlessly the door opened. He went in. The door remained ajar. Standing relaxed, and breathing easily, he listened. Under a cupped hand he looked at his watch. Guns, he knew, was coming down the street even now. Cautiously he began to mount the stairs, then he paused rigid and tense. As from an infinite distance someone above him had whispered:

“He will not come . . .”

Another said:

“Back into the room. We must wait— *Er wird bestimmt kommen.*”

Jimmy’s lips thinned. He would come for certain, eh?

“*Gewiss!*” he whispered soundlessly.

A faint sound of movement and he knew those who waited above for him had gone back into the room. Up he crept, ready for instant fight or flight. He came to the third floor landing. There was nothing to suggest that armed men were crouching in a black room beyond the closed door. His feet felt for the stairs again, and he padded up to the fourth floor landing. Here he again looked at his watch.

“Time,” he told himself. “Guns should be in action now.”

He waited. Then a pungent, acrid something entered his nostrils. He grinned, and drew the muffler up over mouth and nose. The chemical dope was already filling the dark building with its clouds of synthetic smoke. He must not cough, or sneeze, for to do either would attract to him a hissing stream of steel-jacketed lead.

Someone coughed on the floor below him, then followed a harsh comment:

“*Achtung! Feuer!* That is smoke, surely.”

“Smoke?” panted a second voice.

“The place is on fire,” rasped a third. “*Es brennt in diesem Hause.*”

“*Lieber Gott,*” choked a fourth. “Out of this—quick!”

Darker than the darkness round them four shadows moved to the stairs and raced down. From the street came the sudden clamour of voices, then the swelling roar of a fire engine. Jimmy heard the Major yelling like a madman. Down the stairs he leapt, chancing a spill to gain precious seconds. Without hesitation he went to the safe and briefly played a flashlight on it.

“The combination is . . . Ah! I remember.”

Snapping off the light he went to work. From below rose a furious altercation. He worked fast, the clicking of the tumblers sweet melody in his ears. He heard Guns arguing and obstructing everybody. The safe door swung open. Jimmy grinned and played the flash again.

"Thanks . . . to the Shade," he muttered.

Losing no time he scooped up handfuls of papers and thrust them into his pockets. Then closing the safe door he turned and ran to the landing. Harsh voices came up, footsteps thundered as they ascended. The way down was barred. Grimly he drew an automatic.

A hand touched his arm. Whirling he almost struck as a woman's voice said urgently:

"Quick—follow me— —"

His eyes swept the slender, blurred shadow beside him.

"You here?" he gasped.

She took his arm and ran beside him to the back of the building. A window was open.

"I came in that way—get through," she hissed. "There's a wide ledge. Walk along it to the escape. No one there yet."

"You first," he grunted.

Her dark form went through the window. He followed, closing the window after him. His feet felt the ledge, and he edged along it. A distance of twenty paces and he joined her on the iron escape. Without speaking they hurried down. In the black yard she took his hand again.

"This way."

Across the yard to a wicket gate, through it into a lane, then down the lane to a powerful black car which he recognized. They leapt for the seat, slammed the doors. The woman started the car and sent it hurtling forward, missing by inches kerb and corner post. Behind them voices shouted furiously.

"Someone . . . is annoyed," Jimmy murmured.

She did not speak. Turning he saw dimly that her face was again masked by the scarf.

"Thanks," he said softly. "I owe you a lot."

"Get it?" was all she said.

"Yes."

He strained his ears to identify if possible her voice, but it was low-pitched, husky, and strange to him.

"I knew you would," she whispered.

He half turned. She was dressed as before.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Who are you?" she retorted.

"The Shadow. And you?"

"The Shade," came softly. "Let it go at that."

He stared at the scarf, caught a glint from the eyes above it, but could not tell whether those eyes were blue or brown.

"How do you get all this information?" he asked.

"Secret. Where shall I drop you?"

He laughed softly.

"Something tells me you are a very charming person," he told her.

She laughed.

"Indeed?"

He shrugged.

"Drop me here."

The car stopped and he got out.

"Good work, Shadow," came softly.

"Good work, Shade," he replied. "Take care of yourself, and don't forget the lads we're up against—are no gentlemen."

"You'll give the papers to Milne?"

"Yes. Care to drop that scarf?"

She chuckled.

"Ah—now that *would* be dangerous. Watch the stone wall. *Auf Wiedersehen*."

"*Auf Wiedersehen*," he replied.

The car shot away. Jimmy turned and ran until he came to Rotten Apple Lane. Down through the grille he dropped and tapped on the door. It opened.

"The light, Guns."

The switch clicked, and the Major appraised him.

"You didn't come out of any front door, my lad," he challenged.

Jimmy laughed.

"No. The Shade planned the getaway."

The Major stared.

"Was she there?"

“Right beside me. Must have watched me go into the room and loot the safe. Here’s the result.”

“Gad! That *is* nerve.”

“Let’s look this stuff over,” said Jimmy.

He emptied his pockets. The Major began reading and sorting the papers. He picked one up.

“Phew! . . . Listen to this: ‘Instructions to Hans Grolman, east Gauleiter; Fritz Krause, south Gauleiter; Otto Kaufman, west Gauleiter; Hermann Schmidt, north Gauleiter . . .’”

“The nerve of them,” muttered Jimmy, “dividing old England up under local Gauleiters as if we were already in Hitler’s pocket. But read on.”

“‘It is imperative that British embarkation schedules reach me without delay. Immediately these are obtained communicate. V.H.’”

“Von Hagen,” said Jimmy. “Get that stuff to Milne right now, Guns—even if you have to drag him out of bed.”

“Milne never goes to bed,” said the Major dryly. “I’ll toddle along.”

Jimmy grinned and reached for the receiver. Calling a number, he waited. Presently Elaine’s sleepy voice answered.

“It’s your James here, darling.”

“You idiot,” was the retort. “Why wake me at this unearthly hour?”

“Just to remind you we are having breakfast with Peter. Did you see the pictures at Werner’s?”

Elaine said deliberately:

“Mr Werner is a charming man.”

Then she hung up. Jimmy replaced the receiver and smiled ruefully at the Major.

“Mr Werner, I am informed, is a charming man.”

The Major smiled.

“Utterly. It serves you right for waking a woman at three o’clock in the morning,” he retorted. “Gad, I’d rather pull the tail of a tiger. Absolutely.”

Jimmy laughed.

“You know more about tigers—and women—than I do, my innocent lad,” he fired back. “Toddle along. I’ll park here. See you at Peter’s for breakfast.”

The Major grinned.

“Breakfast? Gad, I must wear my tin hat.”

CHAPTER VII

THERE were grapefruit, ham and eggs, kidneys and bacon, toast and marmalade, coffee, and a mixture of moods for breakfast. Peter sat at the head of the table, his private telephone on a small table beside him. On his right sat Sir Francis, on his left Elaine. Next to Sir Francis was Jimmy, and the Major sat beside Elaine. A man-servant, under the eagle eye of butler Wilkins, gave deft service.

On the surface everyone was cheerful. Peter, with a late morning paper propped in front of him, alternately glared at the news and snatched at his telephone. Sir Francis, benign and kindly, listened to Peter's running commentary on the disgraceful way the country was being governed, and the degenerate methods of modern business. Jimmy was attentive to Elaine whose cool indifference to him added a further chill to a decidedly cold morning. The Major, beaming happily at all, contributed no small part to the small talk. It was observed, however, that Peter regarded the Major most suspiciously, as though expecting at any moment to see tigers leap out of the coffee pot and witches on broomsticks come flying down the table.

Jimmy pushed the toast towards Elaine.

"Toast, darling?" he murmured.

"No thank you."

"You're very lovely this morning . . ."

Peter glared at him.

"This is a breakfast table, James, not a boudoir."

Jimmy looked surprised.

"Even at that, sir, my wife is still very lovely this morning."

"Absolutely," said the Major.

Elaine shrugged. Peter knocked the top off an egg.

"I'm expecting a call from the War Office about you, James."

"The War Office, sir?" Jimmy murmured.

"I rang earlier. Nobody there but the caretakers who knew nothing about any war. I rang again, and some ass with a cold in the head said they'd ring back. Blatley, I think the fellow's name was."

The Major sat up.

"Blatley? Gad, old Blately! He caught a cold at school, and he's had it ever since. Haw, haw, haw . . ."

The telephone rang. Peter snatched up the receiver.

“Eh? Oh, it’s you, Phillips. Eh? No, sell. What? Curse it, I said SELL!”

Crack went the receiver.

“Absolutely,” said the Major. “Sell every time, I say. Sell everything, by gad.”

Peter ignored him and started on his egg. Jimmy grinned at Elaine.

“And how is dear Mr Werner’s little angel this morning, may I ask?”

Elaine regarded him steadily.

“Mr Werner, I found, could be most attractive,” she retorted. “It is refreshing to experience a man with old world courtesy.”

“Ah! He kissed your hand . . .”

Elaine nodded.

“He did. Most charmingly.”

“Ah! Then he wanted to kiss you . . .”

Elaine nodded.

“He did. Most charmingly.”

“Ah! He told you you were the most beautiful woman he had ever seen . . .”

Elaine nodded.

“He did. Most charmingly.”

Jimmy scowled.

“Ah! And he tried to take you in his arms . . .”

Elaine nodded.

“He did. Most charmingly.”

The telephone shrilled. Peter lifted the receiver.

“Yes, it’s me. That you again, Phillips? Dammit, I said SELL! What! You can’t hear me? Bless my soul. I said SELL! S-E-L-L—SELL! No, no. I’m not telling you to go to hell. I said . . . all right. Ring later.”

Crack went the receiver.

“Absolutely,” said the Major.

Peter lowered a spoonful of egg, but Sir Francis got in first.

“Any further news, Peter?” he asked.

Peter grunted.

“Front page is all about the Shadow.”

“The Shadow?” said everyone.

“By Gad—what’s the fellow done now, sir?” asked the Major.

“He was seen running with a companion from a building in Soho, about three o’clock this morning. Set the place on fire, or something.”

Elaine looked coldly at Jimmy.

“I admire that man — —”

Jimmy looked coldly at her.

“I don’t,” he said firmly.

“He’s a man,” said Elaine.

Jimmy winced.

“Next thing, I suppose,” he complained, “is you’ll be adopting this Shadow as one of your pets.”

Elaine smiled.

“He would be a remarkable pet.”

“Utterly, utterly, utterly. And absolutely,” said the Major.

Jimmy glared at him.

“Don’t encourage her, Guns,” he snapped. “She’ll be taking an interest in you next.”

The Major beamed.

“By, gad . . .” he began.

Elaine deflated him.

“I think not,” she said icily. “Such an interest would be most unpalatable. I do not care for nuts.”

The Major sagged. Jimmy looked at her sternly.

“Really, Elaine . . .”

“I do not wish to discuss Major Winterbottom.”

Jimmy sighed.

“You see, Guns? You stick to tigers, my lad. Elaine, will you have lunch with me?”

She shrugged.

“I would rather not. My friends all smile so sweetly, so pityingly, so understandingly at me. The women sneer, and the men frown when they see us together. I’ve had enough of it.”

Peter said gruffly:

“You’ll make a fool of yourself with those men yet — —”

“Absolutely,” said the Major. “I once knew a woman who made a frightful fool of herself. Oh, utterly.”

Elaine helped herself to marmalade.

“Indeed?” she murmured.

“By gad, yes. She fell in love with a man . . .”

“Astonishing,” murmured Elaine.

“Absolutely. That’s what we all thought. She was a very beautiful woman, very charming . . .”

“Would you mind . . .” began Peter.

“Don’t stop me, sir. Just getting into my stride. There was the woman, her husband, the third man, and the man-about-town. And she fell in love with him . . .”

“Who the devil did she fall in love with?” demanded Peter.

“I’m coming to that, sir, made a complete ass of herself, you know . . .”

Elaine was breathing quickly.

“The analogy suggests I’m making a complete ass of myself, Major Winterbottom.”

“Marmalade, sir?” said the Major to Peter.

“No!” shouted Peter. “I don’t *want* the marmalade.”

“Very well, sir. This woman *was* a chump—she was a *chump*!”

“Major Winterbottom,” panted Elaine, “we are not interested in your story.”

“What did she do?” growled Peter.

“What does it matter what she did?” asked Elaine hotly.

“Blister me!” yelled Peter. “I want to **KNOW**.”

“She fell in love with him, sir —”

“You said that before,” rasped Peter. “What man did she fall in love with?”

“I’m coming to that, sir . . .”

“Well, get on with it. Get **ON** with it.”

“There were the husband, the third man, and the man-about-town . . .”

“Yes, yes, yes,” snarled Peter. “But what did she do?”

Elaine interrupted them.

“It doesn’t matter what she did.”

“It does matter what she did,” retorted Peter. “What did she **DO**?”

“Made a fool of herself, sir . . .”

Peter banged the table with his fist.

“I know that—I **KNOW** that, Major Winterbottom. But **HOW** did she make a fool of herself?”

“She fell in love with him . . .”

“My God,” moaned Peter. “Will you tell us what man she fell in LOVE with?”

“I was about to point that out, sir. The father . . .”

“Whose father?”

“The father of the wronged husband.”

Peter glared at Elaine.

“Ha! So she wronged him, eh?”

Elaine glared back at him.

“Well, don’t look at me like that. I haven’t wronged *my* husband—yet.”

Jimmy looked relieved.

“I say—are you sure . . .”

“James!” roared his father. “That’s no way to talk to Elaine.”

“How dare you, James!” panted Elaine.

Jimmy protested:

“You said it yourself. I was hoping for the best . . .”

“James!” yelled Peter. “I won’t have you talk to Elaine like that.”

“Thank you, father Peter.”

“Continue, Major Winterbottom.”

“Certainly, sir. I knew them all personally, as ’twere. The husband was on the point of shooting himself . . .”

Jimmy scowled across at Elaine who stared coldly back at him.

“Why?” barked Peter.

“He had a gun, sir . . .”

“Oh, bless my soul,” panted Peter. “I don’t imagine he’d try to shoot himself with a pitchfork.”

“Marmalade, sir?”

“No!” shrilled Peter. “I don’t want the damn marmalade. I want to know how and why this woman made a fool of herself.”

“She fell in love with him . . .”

Peter stood up and waved a quivering finger at the Major.

“Did she make a fool of herself with the husband, the third man, or the man-about-town?”

“Well, after he shot himself he naturally didn’t say . . .”

Peter began to wave his arms.

“Peter . . .”

“Keep out of this, Francis. If I don’t get sense out of this idiot—I’ll pitch the marmalade at him. Now, sir! Who shot himself?”

“Dash it all, sir. That’s perfectly clear. The man she made a fool of herself over . . .”

Peter slowly sat down.

“It’s no use,” he panted. “It’s no USE! This idiot talks back to front.”

“I know the case,” said Jimmy morosely. “The husband shot himself, she went to the rooms of another man. But for Guns here I would have shot myself last night.”

There was dead silence. The imperturbable Guns went on carving a kidney. Elaine, pale and startled, looked at Jimmy. Peter and Sir Francis exchanged quick, significant glances.

“What have you to say to that, Elaine?” demanded Peter.

“He makes me laugh,” said Elaine scornfully. “I had hoped to be a proud woman if war came. On the contrary, I’m a humiliated one. I have a sap for a husband. Other women have men.”

“Now, now, my dear— —” said Sir Francis gently.

The telephone rang. Peter grabbed the receiver.

“Phillips, if you . . . Eh? It’s the War Office? Eh? A position for John James Colburn . . . Ah! Blister me—at last. What? WHAT? The only thing offering is a job as janitor? Did you say JANITOR? Confound you—who’s that speaking? Blatley . . .”

“Haw, haw, haw—topping fellow, Blatley.”

Peter crashed the receiver down.

“Janitor! Janitor!” fumed Peter. “That’s what they think of you, you cub.”

“Naturally,” murmured Elaine.

“Listen, you minx . . .”

Elaine stood up.

“I won’t listen. I won’t stay here. I wish I hadn’t come. I’m looking forward to have lunch with Karl . . .”

Jimmy stood up.

“That’s got to stop,” he said sternly. “I won’t have you getting about with Werner.”

“I can’t see *you* stopping me,” she retorted.

Peter stood up.

“James has every right to stop it,” he informed her.

Sir Francis stood up.

“Peter, Elaine has every right to have lunch with Mr Werner if she chooses to do so.”

“I differ, father Francis,” said Jimmy coldly.

The Major stood up.

“Marmalade, sir?”

“No! And again, and for the last time—NO!” . . .

Elaine threw her napkin on the table.

“I’d have lunch with any man, judge or janitor, so long as he is a man. But I won’t have lunch with *you*. What is more, I ask you now to allow me to divorce you.”

“Don’t want a divorce,” said Jimmy stiffly.

“I do.”

“I’ll shoot myself.”

“My God!” panted Peter. “Francis—you see?”

“You shoot yourself!” sneered Elaine. “You haven’t the pluck.”

Jimmy turned haughtily to the Major.

“Guntha, have you your automatic?”

The Major felt in his pocket.

“Certainly, Jimmy. But, really, old thing . . .”

“You may have it back,” said Jimmy coldly.

He handed it to Jimmy who faced the others dramatically.

“Rather than see my wife the plaything of other men . . .”

“Oh, you beast!” gasped Elaine.

Jimmy raised the automatic.

“James! ! !” everyone shrieked.

“I’ll add my brains to the kidneys on that dish,” snarled Jimmy. “I can’t live without her— —”

“James! ! !” shouted everyone.

“Jimmy! Jimmy!” choked Elaine. “All right, all right. I don’t want to see you blow out your silly brains. I—I won’t see Werner.”

“You won’t start divorce proceedings?”

“No,” Elaine whispered.

Jimmy gave the automatic back to the Major.

"Let that be a lesson to you all," he said sternly.

"Absolutely," said the Major.

Peter sat down. He was almost beyond speech.

"James, that was a terrible thing to do," he croaked.

Sir Francis sat down.

"James—really . . ." he gasped.

"A husband has to assert himself sometimes, father Francis," said Jimmy. "Anyway, the thing wasn't loaded."

"What?" everyone yelled.

"Not at all," said the Major.

Elaine was furious.

"Well of all the . . ."

Jimmy smiled at her.

"You promised, you know."

"James," thundered Peter. "How DARE you!"

Jimmy waved the remark aside.

"A trivial matter, sir . . ."

The telephone silenced them. Peter shakily lifted the receiver.

"What? . . . Eh? . . . Oh, James Colburn. One moment . . ."

He handed the receiver to Jimmy.

"Some woman with a voice like a creeping centipede wants to speak to you."

Elaine's eyes narrowed as she listened.

"Hello? Yes; Jimmy Colburn here . . . Oh, it's Inez! Well, of course. . . . It's Inez."

"Well, of course, it's Inez," echoed Elaine.

Jimmy went on:

"At my digs? Right! In about an hour—oh, marvellous! What's that? Ha, ha, ha! . . ."

"Ha, ha, ha," sneered Elaine.

"Very well, Inez. What? You're wearing the slashed skirt? Oh, I say . . ."

"Oh, I say," said Elaine nastily.

"If you like . . . Yes, lunch at the Ritz . . ."

"Lunch?" gasped Elaine. "At the Ritz."

“Ha, ha, ha! Wild horses couldn’t keep me away. Pick you up in an hour. Good girl . . . Ha, ha, ha!”

Everyone was very silent as he replaced the receiver.

“Great little girl, Inez,” he informed them. “Spanish, you know. Warm and quick as a flash of lightning. Had enough breakfast, Guns?”

“Quite, old thing.”

“Come along then. Cheerio, everybody. See you all in Switzerland.”

“Right on the bally Matterhorn,” added the Major.

No one offered any comment as they walked from the room.

CHAPTER VIII

PETER got up from the table.

“Well,” he growled. “I don’t approve of what James is doing. But you have only yourself to blame, my girl.”

Elaine stood up. Her lovely face was flushed and angry.

“That is most unfair, father Peter.”

“I agree with Elaine,” said Sir Francis.

Peter wagged a finger at her.

“Didn’t the boy ask you to have lunch with him? Didn’t he?”

“Yes, but . . .”

“And didn’t you refuse?”

Elaine sighed.

“Oh, it’s all so useless. Everything is changed. Jimmy is so different. He’s not the same man, and in the role of husband he certainly is not anything to brag about.”

Sir Francis spoke quietly.

“Do you still love James, my dear?”

They both looked anxiously at her. Her fine eyes were misty all at once.

“Of course I still love the idiot. . . . If only he would *do* something like other men!”

“We’re all idiots,” said Peter gruffly. “All of us. Are you going to James’s rooms?”

Elaine’s eyes gleamed through her tears.

“I certainly am. I’m his wife. I’ll have no Spanish lightning in split skirts flashing about in *my* husband’s rooms.”

Peter turned:

“Wilkins, the car!”

“I’ll come with you,” said Sir Francis.

“So will I,” said Peter grimly. “I’ve had enough of James’s tomfoolery. I’ll bring *that* lad to his senses.”

Elaine’s lips were thin as the three walked from the room.

“Great little girl, Inez,” she murmured. “Spanish, you know.”

“I don’t,” grunted Peter. “But I soon will.”

“Do you think he really would have shot himself?” asked Elaine tremulously.

Peter snorted.

"I'm beginning to remember that James is given to pulling my leg," he said sourly. "All our legs. I recall his damn tricks when your father and I were trying to get you married. He nearly sent us mad with his pranks."

"I concur," said Sir Francis. "James has an impish sense of humour, although I find it hard to see why he should attempt it in times like these."

"He's not joking," said Elaine with conviction. "He's dodging responsibility, and doesn't want to have anything to do with the war. He doesn't want to fight, and he doesn't care what he does or says to get out of it."

"I—I can't understand it," said Peter slowly. "James is my son . . . but, rather than know him for a coward, I'd willingly see him shoot himself."

"Don't," choked Elaine. "Don't. . . . Don't let's talk about it. If we could only get that Major Winterbottom away from him—*he's* the cause of Jimmy's distorted views. Oh, I *hate* that man."

"Detest the fellow myself," snarled Peter. "Tigers, howdahs, witches, women who wrong their husbands—bah! And the fool would keep asking me if I wanted marmalade. Marmalade! I *HATE* it. I'll deal with him."

They were silent in the car, but when it stopped outside James's rooms Peter said:

"Now leave this to me. What floor?"

"The fifth," said Elaine.

"How do you know?" asked Peter.

Elaine flushed.

"He—he told me," she said lamely.

"I believe you've been hanging round," accused Peter.

"Well, what if I have?" flashed Elaine. "I've a right to hang round, haven't I?"

Peter shrugged and pushed her into the lift.

"I suppose so," he grunted. "I dare say while you've been hanging round here he's been mooning at your door like a love-sick calf. When are you both going to get sense?"

"It's no use lecturing me," said Elaine as they stepped out of the lift. "I'm going to have it out with James this time, and if he's got a woman in his rooms—"

"Now, now, Elaine," said Sir Francis. "I agree with Peter there. James wouldn't let you down, my dear."

"I'll see he doesn't— —"

"You minx," snapped Peter. "Didn't you go off to that squarehead's rooms to see some pictures—or something?"

"That is what James thought," said Elaine coldly.

"You didn't go to Werner's rooms?" gasped Peter.

"Certainly not. What do you think I am?" said Elaine indignantly.

Peter was red in the face.

"Then why did you let Jimmy—I mean James—think you had?" he demanded.

"If James is content to think I would do such a thing. . . ."

Peter stopped and began to storm.

"You minx—you puss! You—you fathead, Elaine," he rasped. "If you go off with another man how can your husband but think. . . . Oh, dammit, I mean . . . Oh, DAMMIT!"

"Peter—don't shout," urged Sir Francis.

"They'll drive me mad—MAD!" yelled Peter. "Fooling each other, fooling us. BAH! Knock on the door."

Sir Francis knocked.

"Wait, wait!" panted Elaine. "This is the fourth floor."

"Bless my soul! Are you blind, Francis?"

"I? Really, Peter . . ."

"There's a lift—over there."

"It's an automatic. . . ."

"Get in it, get in it. Can't wait for the other."

They hurried into the automatic lift. Peter closed the door and pressed a button. The lift started, went up a few feet, and then stopped almost at the fifth floor. By looking up through the glass in the door they could see someone's legs walking along.

"It's stuck," grunted Peter. "I've tried all the buttons. Won't move."

"Now you've done it, Peter," said Sir Francis reprovingly.

"Me?" protested the amazed Peter. "Don't be a fool, Francis. I'm not responsible for the actions of a crazy lift."

"Or anything else that's crazy," said Elaine.

"Now don't you start hitting at Jimmy. I won't have it."

Sir Francis held up a hand.

"For goodness sake don't let us quarrel," he pleaded.

Peter glared at him.

“Francis, I never quarrel—you know that. I’ll try to call someone. Hello! Hello! HELLO! Blast it. Are you all deaf?”

Somewhere a door opened.

“Stop that infernal row,” said a voice. “Haven’t you any consideration for others?”

“JAMES!” roared Peter. “It’s us. We’re stuck in this lift. It’s US!”

“I must ask you again not to make so much noise—”

“JAMES!!!” they yelled.

“James,” shouted Peter. “It’s ME!”

“Indeed,” came coldly. “Who’s me?”

Peter breathed hard.

“Dammit, you cub. I’m your father.”

“What impudence,” came icily. “My father wouldn’t be idiot enough to get himself stuck in a lift—”

“God send me a bottle of wine—JAMES! I AM your father. I have Sir Francis with me, and Elaine.”

“In the lift?” came the disbelieving voice.

“In the . . . Now don’t be a fool, James. Where else would they be if they were with me?”

“Ah! But how do I know it’s you?”

“Isn’t he a fool?” said Elaine wearily. She raised her voice. “James, try to be intelligent, if only for a few minutes.”

“Who is that woman?” demanded Jimmy.

But another woman’s voice asked silkily:

“Who ees what woman, Jim-mee?”

“The Lightning Flash! She’s here all right,” panted Elaine.

Jimmy answered in an amused tone:

“Some stupid people stuck in the service lift. I suppose I ought to do something, Inez.”

“Never mind zem, Jim-mee,” said the silky voice.

The voice of Major Winterbottom inquired:

“A spot of bother, as ’twere?”

“Zome zilly fools stuck in ze lif’,” said Inez.

“Haw, haw, haw!”

Peter let out a roar that would have done credit to any jungle.

“JAMES! Do something—DO something—do SOMETHING!”

“Who ees zat man?” asked Inez. “He know you, Jim-mee?”

“Says he is my father.”

“Haw, haw, haw! I can’t imagine the old battle-axe doing that. Positively funny. Absolutely. I think I can see them. Gad—there’s a woman with them.”

“Says she is my wife.”

Inez’s voice became shrill all at once.

“Your wife, Jim-mee? No, no! You would not let ’er come ’ere?”

“Now calm down, Inez.”

Inez grew shriller.

“No. She ees *not* your wife. . . .”

Elaine spoke coolly:

“I am his wife.”

“No! I will not believe,” hissed Inez. “He promise never to let ’is wife come ’ere.”

“Indeed?” said Elaine coldly.

“You cad, James,” snarled Peter.

“I wouldn’t have believed it of James,” muttered Sir Francis.

“By gad, Jimmy—it *is* Mrs Colburn,” said the Major. “I recognize the hat.”

“Leave zem in ze lif’, Jim-mee,” said Inez viciously. “I will not spik to ’er. Oh, I am zo disappoint in you, Jim-mee.”

“Really, Inez. . . .”

But Inez was walking away.

“No! I am insult. I wait for you in ze rooms, Jim-mee. Si! I am so insult.”

“James,” said his father bitterly, “are you completely out of your mind? HAVE you a mind?”

“He hasn’t,” sighed Elaine.

“Better do something, old man,” suggested the Major. “Shall I get rid of Inez?”

“She won’t go.”

“Don’t bother,” said Elaine. “I’ll do that— —”

Jimmy’s voice was touched with hauteur.

“I’m not ashamed of Inez.”

Elaine almost choked.

“He’s not ashamed of her!”

Peter’s rasping voice sounded like the hissing of many snakes.

“James, if you don’t get us out of here, and get rid of that harlot. . . .”

“Jim-mee, Jim-mee . . .” came Inez’s voice.

“She’s coming back,” said Sir Francis.

“I hear her,” said Elaine.

Inez came to where Jimmy and the Major were standing.

“Jim-mee; I am zad; I am loathe; I am depress; I am mad, too. You promise me, Jim-mee . . .”

“Quietly, quietly, Inez,” said Jimmy hastily. “We’ll all get in a frightful tangle if we don’t keep our heads.”

“James,” said Peter ominously, “are you going to get us out of this lift?”

“Go ’way, you nasty man,” hissed Inez. “Go ’way all you nasty peeble.”

“Haw, haw, haw!”

“I could kill that crooner from Poona,” said Elaine.

“You!” shrilled Inez. “Zat woman! You never tak’ Jim-mee from me. Never. No! No, no, no! Oh you are cruel, Jim-mee. You are *my* Jim-mee. . . .”

“He is her Jim-mee,” said Elaine.

“Who *is* zat woman?”

“Get a grip on yourself, Inez. I just told you. She’s only my wife.”

“I’m only his wife!” said Elaine hoarsely.

“God send me a bottle of wine! . . .”

“Guns,” said Jimmy. “That sounds like Peter. Is it really *you*, sir?”

“My God, James . . .”

“It is him,” said Jimmy with conviction. “Press the red button that is on top of the others, sir. It puts the lift in operation. Somehow you must have touched the stop button.”

Peter did so, then touched button five. The lift came up to the floor, and the door opened. As they came from the lift there was a clashing of eyes and a setting of lips. Inez saw in Elaine a dangerous adversary. Such beauty as was the English girl’s was so unusual that even the exotic Inez stared in sullen appreciation. And Elaine saw at a glance that Inez had everything to snare a man. Dark beauty, eyes large and dark and provocative, lips red and arched, a skin of the texture of the magnolia, and a figure lissom and vital. Elaine was ice as she stared at Inez. Inez was fire. Peter was a bristling fury.

Sir Francis was a drooping, disillusioned man. Jimmy was Jimmy. And the Major was imperturbability itself.

Jimmy spoke quickly.

“Say something, Guns—quick, man.”

The Major grinned.

“‘Whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder,’” he babbled.

“Let’s go in,” sighed Jimmy.

CHAPTER IX

ELAINE said coldly:

“I wish to speak to you alone, James.”

Jimmy looked at the others.

“Guns, do the honours while Mrs Colburn talks to me, will you?”

The Major nodded.

“Certainly, old man.”

Jimmy smiled at Elaine.

“Alone? And together? Rather like old times, eh? This way, Mrs Colburn.”

They went into an adjoining room, Inez frowning after them. Elaine waited until the door was shut.

“You are the limit, James. And you’ve reached the limit.”

He looked surprised.

“Oh, come now, Elaine. You surely can’t be annoyed about Inez?”

“I’m not annoyed, I’m merely disgusted. Any one can see what she is.”

“Are you sure you are being fair?”

Elaine turned away slightly.

“Fair? If there was one man in the world I would have backed as a sportsman and a gentleman—it was you. I’m not a good tipster, it seems.”

Jimmy watched her.

“Perhaps,” he said quietly, “if I gave you my word. . . .”

“I’m sorry,” she retorted, “but it’s not enough. She is in your rooms, isn’t she?”

He nodded.

“Of course. I want her to be in my rooms.”

Elaine faced him.

“James!” she gasped.

“Wrong again. Why not give me the benefit of the doubt, my dear? I wonder . . . if I told you. . . . But that’s impossible.”

“Told me?” she echoed. “What can you say that is not a cheap excuse?”

He nodded again.

“It looks that way, I suppose.”

Elaine went to a window and stared out over London.

“James, I wouldn’t have believed it of you. . . .”

Someone began playing the piano in the adjoining room. They listened.

“Mendelssohn. Shadows,” muttered Jimmy. “Inez plays brilliantly, don’t you think?”

“She plays well—too well,” retorted Elaine. She turned to him. “I suppose it’s all come to an end. James, we’re through. I—I can’t stand any more.”

He did not move.

“You can’t mean that, Elaine.”

She nodded, her face turned from him, her eyes staring over the city.

“I do. Everything you do seems deliberately designed to humiliate and hurt me. I see no reason why I should go on allowing you to do this. You are not the man I married. You have altered.”

“Shadows,” muttered Jimmy. “I wonder . . .”

“You are not even listening to me,” she said bitterly.

“I am,” said Jimmy quietly. “I am also listening to—Shadows. And I am wondering. Now let’s talk it over, Elaine. Will you return to our house?”

She smiled bleakly.

“Of course. Will you give up these stupid people you’ve gone crazy about?”

“Crazy?” he echoed. “You should talk like that. The crowd you are running around with are a disgrace to the country. Will you give them up?”

“Surely it is charitable to help these people.”

“Surely it is more charitable to stop slaughter and misery?”

Elaine sighed.

“We have no common ground, James. I refuse to go on as your wife while such as—what is her name?”

“Inez de Fuente.”

“Such as Miss de Fuente is the companion of your solitude.”

“And haven’t you been the companion of other men?”

“Jimmy!” she protested.

“Werner—Hoffman—von Klatz before they grabbed him—Gratz also before they took *him*.”

“How do you know that?” asked Elaine sharply.

“My dear—every one knows it,” he retorted. “These men talk. They boast about a beautiful woman like yourself. And if what they say is

true. . . .”

Her eyes narrowed.

“Do you believe it is true?”

He smiled.

“Should I not? Yet you have made up your mind about Inez.”

She eyed him coldly.

“I have been seen with these men. I admit. My work helping these exiles. . . .”

He laughed softly.

“I know all that. If you encourage men of that type, why complain if such as Inez is seen with me. I am willing to believe your interest in those men was superficial, I ask you to believe the same of me.”

“Superficial? Inez? She’s crazy about you.”

A burst of laughter from the next room silenced her. Jimmy grinned.

“Guns again. Priceless fellow.”

“He’s a fool.”

Jimmy shrugged.

“I thought you were a better judge of men.”

She looked at him.

“So did I—once. Do you mind if I go now? It’s useless talking.”

“Don’t go, Elaine. I ask you not to do that.”

“And I ask you to tell that woman to go.”

He thought for a moment, then said quietly:

“I can’t do that.”

Her lips thinned.

“You mean you won’t do that. Well, it doesn’t matter much. I have asked you to choose—you prefer Inez.”

He smiled at her.

“Not for a moment, my dear,” he said gently. “Inez is nothing to me.”

“Then tell her to go—” panted Elaine. “Either she goes—or I go. You’re not establishing a harem, are you?”

He grinned.

“I’d be a pretty good judge, wouldn’t I?”

“Oh, you. . . . Oh, what’s the use!”

“My dear,” he said, “war is an unholy mess of madness. I’m doing what I can, in my own way, to help.”

Her fine eyes regarded him scornfully.

"I understand, James," she said quietly.

He knew she thought him a coward.

"There are reasons why I can't tell Inez to go," he went on. "I wish you would believe in me, Elaine."

She nodded slowly:

"Oh, I believe you. You are . . . what you are. Good-bye, James."

He took her by the arm.

"Elaine," he said, "won't you trust me?"

"No."

"Ah! I'm sorry. I never expected to hear you say that."

"Will you tell her to go?"

"I can't."

Elaine walked to the door and opened it.

"And I," she said over her shoulder, "never expected to hear you say that. Good-bye, James."

She went out of the room, Jimmy following. Guns was shooting in great style.

"Great fellow, Blatley, Mr Colburn. Great sportsman, great hunter, by gad. He and I were after a sloth of bear one day—Russia, you know . . ."

"You were what?" demanded Peter.

"Peter—here's Elaine."

"Yes, yes, yes, Francis. You were saying, Major . . ."

"A sloth of bear, sir. Haw, haw, haw! Our lives were saved by a gaggle of geese."

"Bless my soul—a *what* of geese?"

"A bally gaggle, sir. We were surrounded by the sloth, when we heard 'gaggle, gaggle, gaggle.' And old Blatley twigged our situation, shot his way through the tribesmen, and saved the guns. . . ."

"Guns? Gaggle? Tribesmen? I don't follow. . . ."

"Haw, haw, haw! Grand fellow, Blatley. Son of Blatley—Blatley, you know. That time in Africa, when we were trailed by a pride of lion. . . ."

Peter blinked.

"What is the man talking about?" he rasped.

"A pride of lion, sir," said the Major affably. "My headman came hissing: 'Simba, simba, simba'! I saw at a glance there was nothing we

could do. Blatley saw we hadn't a chance. The pride closed in, and in a few minutes it was all over."

"What was all over?"

"Haw, haw, haw!—my pride will not permit me to mention it, sir."

"Good God!" shouted Peter. "I've met some idiots in my time. . . ."

"I'm sure you have, sir. Ah! Mrs Colburn. Is the conference adjourned, as 'twere?"

"I am leaving you to be entertained by the Major, and by Miss de Fuente," said Elaine coolly.

With that she walked from the room.

"Elaine!" yelled Peter.

"Elaine!" called Sir Francis.

But no answer came back. Inez shrugged and flashed a smile at Jimmy.

"It ees too bad. I am ze ozzer woman. Jim-mee, I am so ver' sorree. She ees so beaut'ful, so charm. Yes?"

"Yes," said Jimmy curtly. "Why the discussion about Blatley?"

"I won't discuss Blatley," snarled Peter. "Come along, Francis. We must talk to Elaine."

Inez said quickly:

"No, no, no! Do not intrude. I know 'ow a women ees—yes. She t'ink I am ze poison."

Peter glared at her.

"What are you doing in my son's rooms?" he asked bluntly.

Inez opened her eyes innocently.

"Me? Oh, Papa Pee-ter. . . ."

"Bless my soul. . . ."

She smiled at him.

"Oh, yes. Jim-mee an' I are ze bes' friend—so I call you Papa Pee-ter. An' call you Papa Zir Fran-zis. Yes?"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"Will you be quiet, sir?" roared Peter.

"Certainly, sir," said the Major stiffly.

Peter stared coldly at Inez.

"Go on, young woman. I have yet to learn why you are hanging round my son."

The whimsical grin came back to Jimmy's lips, the quizzical gleam to his dark eyes.

"We are planning a nation-wide crusade in the interests of peace, sir," he said.

Peter snorted.

"You are, are you, you cub?"

Jimmy nodded.

"Guntha, Inez and I, sir."

Inez sidled up to Peter.

"Yes, Papa Pee-ter. Jim-mee, ze Guns, an' me—we are plan ze great crusad'. Zere will be no more war after zis one, Papa Pee-ter."

"And how will you stop any future wars, young woman?" demanded Peter.

Inez gave him a dazzling smile.

"It ees easy. We are go to tell all ze women ever'where to 'ave no more babies."

Peter staggered back a pace. Sir Francis gaped.

"You're what?" they said together.

"Just what she says, sir," said Jimmy.

"Absolutely," said the Major enthusiastically.

"Si. No more babies," said Inez. "Ze women of ze world can stop war—zey will stop war. Zere will be no more babies. No!"

"God bless my soul. . . . Are you three idiots completely crazy?"

"Not at all, sir," said Jimmy calmly. "I think it's a marvellous idea."

"Utterly, utterly, utterly. And absolutely!"

Peter turned to Sir Francis.

"Did you hear that, Francis?"

Sir Francis nodded:

"I did. I think they've gone mad."

Inez's expressive eyes began to gleam.

"No, no, Papa Zir Fran-zis. It ees you an' Papa Pee-ter who are ze mad. An' all ze silly women are ze mad. Once zey unnerstan'—zey can control ze world. Zey will zay to ze stupid men: 'No! No more babies. Keep away, zir.' We 'ave ze babies an' you shoot zem. You will shoot no more—we will not 'ave zem. Ze women will rule ze world."

"But," roared Peter, "there *must* be babies, you fat-headed woman."

Inez threw back her head.

“Why?” she challenged. “We do not zee why.”

Peter began to wave his arms.

“The world would come to an end.”

“Good. It ees a mad world. Ze women will zave it. Every generation zere is terrible war. Zere will be no nex’ generation. No. Mebbe zen ze men will get sense. No more babies.”

“No more babies,” echoed Jimmy solemnly.

“No more babies,” chanted the Major.

Peter shook a fist at the crusaders.

“You fools! You’ll be arrested! You’ll be the laughing stock of the world.”

“No, no, no, Papa Pee-ter! Already I ’ave got three women to promise zey will ’ave no more babies.”

Peter was gasping.

“Of all the preposterous, idiotic . . .”

“No, no, Papa Pee-ter,” said Inez earnestly. “I ’ave promise Jim-mee I will not ’ave a baby.”

Peter rocked on his heels.

“What’s that?” he snarled.

“James . . .” panted Sir Francis.

Jimmy nodded:

“It isn’t personal,” he said informatively. “She is speaking generally, you know.”

Inez glared at him.

“Jim-mee!” she said reprovingly. “I am not promiscuous. I would not ’ave ze baby by any ozzer man. But now Inez de Fuente will not ’ave one.”

Peter began to edge backward.

“Let’s get out of this, Francis,” he muttered.

“I concur, Peter, I concur,” said Sir Francis huskily. “For heaven’s sake let us find Elaine.”

Inez looked disappointed.

“No—do not go, Papa Pee-ter, Papa Zir Fran-zis. You will be convert. You will preach ze new crusad’ . . . Oh, Jim-mee, zey are go.”

Jimmy listened to the hurried footsteps of the departing Peter and Sir Francis.

“They are—they have,” he agreed. He looked intently at her. “Why did you play ‘Shadows’ a while ago?”

Inez seated herself and lit a cigarette.

“I will tell you at lunch, Jim-mee — —” she purred.

“H’m,” said Jimmy. “Guns and I will be interested. . . .”

Inez sat up straight.

“Oh, Jim-mee,” she protested. “Not ze Guns—not to lunch.”

“Definitely ze Guns,” said Jimmy firmly.

Inez pouted.

“I like ze Guns . . . but he ees about too much. Any way, I ’ad ze man send all my clo’es ’ere, Jim-mee. I am stay wiz you. . . .”

Jimmy’s eyebrows shot up.

“You’re what?” he jerked out.

Inez came to him and wrapped two shapely arms round his neck.

“I stay ’ere wiz you, Jim-mee,” she whispered. “I ’ave fall in lof wiz you. Yes. . . .”

Jimmy glanced at the Major.

“Guns, say something—and say it quick.”

“Haw, haw, haw! No more babies,” said the Major.

CHAPTER X

PETER, SIR FRANCIS and Elaine were at lunch in the Park Lane house. Wilkins, as usual, hovered in the background. Peter passed a newspaper to Elaine.

“Read that,” he grunted. “Disgraceful.”

A headline caught her eye. She read slowly:

“John James Colburn, famous aviator and racing car man, and son of the multi-millionaire, Peter Colburn, has startled England by announcing the ‘No More Babies League.’ Enthusiastic support for this world plan to stop future wars is evidently already widespread. Associated with Mr Colburn in this drastic corrective of war is Miss Inez de Fuente, who told this paper, with all the passion and conviction of her Spanish blood, that double beds throughout the world must be burnt, and that twin beds must be placed six feet farther apart. . . .”

Elaine put the paper aside.

“Well?” snapped Peter.

“He’s mad, quite mad.”

“I can’t understand it,” said Sir Francis.

The telephone rang. Peter lifted the receiver.

“What? Yes, this is Peter Colburn. Eh? My opinion of the No More Babies League? Now you listen to me. . . . What? Do I think the extra six feet between beds will do the trick? Curse me—I don’t! I mean I . . . I will NOT discuss this matter, sir!”

With that he replaced the receiver.

“No more babies,” he rasped. “Francis, we’ll be driven mad with this. . . .”

The telephone rang again. He eyed it angrily, then took up the receiver.

“Yes? . . . No! . . . YES! . . . Eh? . . . NO! I don’t know whether it’s a birth control society, and I DON’T know if they are issuing instructions. Good day, Madam.”

He slammed the receiver down.

“Impudence!” he snorted.

“Disconnect it,” said Elaine.

“I’m expecting an important call.”

“Let’s have lunch,” suggested Sir Francis. “Where did you go after leaving James’s room, Elaine?”

“To my solicitors.”

Peter picked up a spoon and wagged it at her.

“Are you up to some monkey business, young woman?” he asked.

“You should ask James that,” Elaine retorted. “I have given instructions for divorce.”

The spoon fell from Peter’s hand. Sir Francis sat back.

“You have, eh?” said Peter grimly. “On what grounds?”

“I’m leaving that to my solicitor. When I mentioned Miss de Fuente . . .”

“If he suggested adultery . . .”

“He euphemistically called it ‘misconduct,’” said Elaine.

“But, Elaine, that’s absurd,” said her father.

She shrugged.

“The responsibility for that lies with James. He can answer it in the proper place.”

“You puss! You dare to accuse my son of adultery. . . .”

“Misconduct,” corrected Elaine.

“Who’s your lawyer?” roared Peter. “I’ll fix him.”

Elaine regarded him coldly.

“Oh, no you won’t, father Peter. You fix James—and Miss de Fuente. I’ll probably expect a million as heart balm.”

“God send me a bottle of wine! . . . You calmly sit there guzzling my soup, and tell me you’re going to divorce my son and get a million out of him. Francis! She’s as mad as James.”

“She’s mad *at* James,” murmured Sir Francis.

“It’s her own fault,” bellowed Peter. “Instead of dithering round the fool solicitors why doesn’t she take that cub of a husband by the ear and lead him home? If I were a woman I’d give that Inez de—whatever it is—a kick in the . . . Blister me, I mean I’d show her who WAS James’s wife.”

Elaine ate calmly. Peter raved on:

“Why don’t you go to this meeting this afternoon—the paper say it’s the inaugural meeting. Why don’t you make that Inez piece look like a piece of cheese? Why don’t you influence James? Why the hell don’t you DO something?”

Elaine was unmoved. The telephone shrilled.

“Yes, Peter Colburn—NO!”

Slap! went the receiver. Peter, very red in the face turned to his lunch.

“Bless my soul,” he muttered. “This thing is likely to be serious.”

“Who was it?” asked Elaine.

The telephone rang again. Peter grabbed the receiver.

“Go to hell,” he roared.

Crash! went the receiver.

“That fool Winterbottom,” he grunted. “Can’t stand the fellow. . . .”

The telephone jangled imperatively. Grimly Peter lifted the receiver.

“Yes? Oh, it’s you again. . . . What? You don’t want to go to hell? Then what do you want? . . . Eh? . . . WHAT? . . . Bless my—wait a minute. . . .” He turned to Elaine: “Now you’ll have to do something, young woman.”

“Indeed?” murmured Elaine.

“The Inez woman has had her clothes moved to James’s rooms. Winterbottom thinks you ought to butt in.”

Elaine frowned.

“What impudence,” she said coldly. “Give me that receiver.”

“This is Mrs Colburn.”

A cheerful voice came back.

“Hello, hello, hello, as ’twere! Guns here. . . .”

“What’s that nonsense you told Mr Colburn?” Elaine asked icily.

“Just that, by gad. The alluring Inez is moving in. Thought I’d let you know—thought you ought to know. Jimmy seems as if someone has hit him on the head—dazed, dizzy, dithering, and dished. Haw, haw, haw. . . .”

“Thank you. Have her things arrived yet?”

“Oh, utterly, utterly, utterly. Better be on your toes, Mrs Colburn. Between ourselves I think she eats ’em up alive. Dashed near took a bite out of me—haw, haw, haw!”

“Thank you. It probably would have done you good. Good-bye.”

“Not at all—Eh? What’s that? Dash it all. . . .”

Elaine handed back the receiver.

“Decent of that ass, any way. I’m going to this meeting; then I’m going again to James’s rooms. I’m moving in there.”

Peter gave a yelp of delight.

“At last! Blister me—now we’ll see something. We’ll come with you, my dear.”

“Indeed, yes,” said Sir Francis. “What an awful woman. . . .”

“Phone your solicitors, my dear,” said Peter.

Elaine shook her head.

“Not yet, father Peter.”

“But you’re not going on with this business, are you?”

Elaine spoke coolly.

“It still depends—on James.”

Peter cleared his throat.

“I’ll have no further nonsense from that whelp. Leave everything to me, my dear; leave everything to me. What did you say, Francis?”

“Er . . . nothing,” muttered Sir Francis.

CHAPTER XI

THE spacious floor of Beppo's Neapolitan Cafe in Soho was packed with women. Here and there were a few fallow-faced men with earnest expressions and lank, greasy hair. On the walls above the seething sea of femininity were huge captions: NO MORE BABIES! WOMEN OF THE WORLD WILL SAVE THE WORLD! NO MORE FODDER FOR THE GUNS! And in a corner a plaintive slogan said coyly: "To Hell with Love!"

The improvised dais at the end opposite the stairs was draped with the flags of all nations except Germany, while a replica of the famous Piccadilly Eros, the god of love, stood on the table, singularly dejected, palpably sullen, and loaded with chains.

Jimmy Colburn was shaking hands with a number of women who surged round the dais. Major Winterbottom, seated at the presidential table, surveyed the scene through a steady monocle. Inez, exotic in a slashed creation of wine-coloured velvet, was speaking in three languages at once to a circle of rapt listeners. Grinning reporters were writing at a furious rate, while at the top of the stairs several policemen eyed the gathering dubiously.

Inez turned to the Major.

"Now, my Guns, we commence—yes? You are ze chair. Ze meet will now open."

"Absolutely," said the Major.

He stood up. Jimmy seated himself on the Major's right, Inez on his left. Rapping loudly on the table the Major gradually silenced the buzz of voices. Gradually the noise and movement subsided. Expectant faces looked at the chairman as though believing that the next few minutes would see, through the alchemy of words, a world transformed and regenerated. The Major began:

"Ah, ladies and gentlemen . . ."

A woman screeched:

"Never mind the gentlemen—we're finished with them!"

A roar of laughter rocked the building. When all was quiet again the Major said:

"It is my—ah, pleasure to pronounce this inaugural meeting of the—ah, No More Babies League—ah, formally open. Absolutely."

"That's the stuff, Guns," whispered Jimmy. "You've got them in the hollow of your hand, my boy."

“By gad, yes,” agreed the Major. He raised his voice: “My colleagues, Miss Inez de Fuentes . . .”

A storm of cheering silenced him. Then:

“And my friend, Mr James Colburn . . .”

Again the cheers.

“And myself, as ’twere . . .”

Renewed cheering and laughter.

“Have convened this meeting to launch the No More Babies League . . .”

“And about time,” said a stout lady in the front row. “I’ve got twelve now, and if somebody don’t do something . . .”

“Order, order,” yelled the meeting.

The stout lady scowled at one and all.

“I’ll prob’ly ’ave twelve more,” she said defiantly.

The Major beamed at her:

“Madam,” he said. “You can rely on us. Allow me to go on.”

“Well, go on!” the woman snapped.

“Certainly. My friends and I have come to the—ah, conclusion that only the women of the world can save the world.”

The cheers became deafening. The Major polished his monocle; Jimmy clapped enthusiastically; Inez was frantically scribbling notes—and so were the reporters. Presently the Major went on:

“Some people will say—ah, that we are . . .”

“They’d better not,” hissed a thin lady in the second row.

“There is only one way to stop the war of the next generation—and that is for there to be no next generation. . . .”

A buzz of comment and approval interrupted him. Then he continued:

“The war-makers can’t make war without men. They must have gun-fodder. By your refusal to provide the gun-fodder you will stymie the blighters, so to speak; spike their bally guns, trump the ace, hit the bull, ring the bell—and all that. Absolutely.”

The cheering was terrific, and the reporter’s pencils were almost smoking.

“Magnificent,” whispered Jimmy. “Guns, you’re a riot.”

The Major held up a hand.

“The meeting is now open. The League is launched, by gad. The women of all lands are with us. No more gun-fodder! No more—ah, well, the

meeting's open, any way."

A pale-faced gentleman in the middle row stood up:

"May I ask a question?"

"No!" came from all sides.

The gentleman looked round him and slowly sat down. A movement at the stairs attracted Jimmy. He whispered to the others:

"Look who's here!"

"By gad—your pater, and Sir Francis—and Mrs Colburn. Gad that woman's a dream."

Inez stared coldly at Elaine.

"Why did she come?" she hissed.

Jimmy grinned.

"It's a hen party, isn't it?"

"Haw, haw, haw—with a few old cocks sprinkled here and there, so to speak."

Inez frowned.

"I will spik."

The Major raised an arm:

"Miss de Fuentes will now address you," he informed them.

A reporter turned and saw Peter Colburn. Whistling softly he nudged a colleague.

"Peter Colburn—himself—" he whispered.

"Peter Colburn? Oh, boy, this meeting's important."

"Write, you fool, write," grinned the first man.

Peter was glaring about him.

"Queer looking lot, Francis," he snapped.

A woman who heard the remark resented it.

"Queer looking lot yourself," she said shrilly.

"Hush, Peter," warned Sir Francis. "Tact, you know, tact."

"Huh!" grunted Peter. "Look at that fool, James."

"I see him," said Elaine. "Also the Lightning Flash."

"Order, order," said several voices.

Peter began to bristle.

"Sit down, Peter," said Sir Francis. "Here are three chairs."

Peter glared at the 'To Hell with Love' slogan.

“Bless my soul. . . .”

“Sit down—sit down.”

Inez thought she had better speak. Elaine and Jimmy were looking at each other far too intently. The Major rapped for silence.

“Miss de Fuente,” he announced.

“My frien’s . . .” Inez began. “I spik as a woman to women. We will ’ave no more babies. . . .”

A tumult of hand-clapping encouraged her. With flashing eyes and dramatic manner she flung out an arm.

“No! No more! You mus’ be free—you mus’ save ze world. . . .”

The pale gentleman stood up again:

“Madame, have you ever had a baby?”

Inez glared at him. The fat lady stood up.

“You mind your own business, you shrimp,” she hissed at the fellow.

“What she says is right. We’ll ’ave no more till someone gets some sense.”

Still the perfect lady, she sat down. A tired-looking woman stood up.

“’Ear, ’ear. The only time I ever gets a annual ’oliday is when I goes into ’ospital with another.”

“Good God!” panted Peter.

“Hush!” whispered Sir Francis.

Elaine coldly watched the proceedings. The Major thumped the table.

“Ladies—please. Miss de Fuentes . . .”

The fat lady shook a finger at the pale gentleman.

“You sit down—an’ stay down! Your sort ’as caused enough trouble in this world.”

“Madame, I’m a bachelor. . . .”

“Haw, haw, haw—Oh, sorry. Ladies, ladies! Miss de Fuente.”

Inez was swaying from side to side.

“You are ze woman crusad’, my frien’s. We will ’ave ze branches of ze league in ever’ country in ze world. Our banner it will float over ever’ ’ome. But you will not win zis fight wizzout a fight. . . .”

“You’re right there,” said the fat lady.

“Order, order!” said the Major. “Miss de Fuente . . .”

“Oh, boy!—oh, boy!” gasped a reporter. “Gimme another pencil somebody.”

Jimmy suddenly nudged the Major.

“Werner,” he whispered.

“By gad, yes,” breathed the Major.

Mr Werner it was. He stared across the room at Inez, then saw Elaine. Clicking his heels he took his place beside her. Inez went on:

“Some peeble will say ze world will come to ze stan’s still. Some peeble will say—but zis ’ave never be done before. No! But it will be done now. Ozzer peeble will say—you can’t do zis. Ha! Zat ees where ze women of ze world give zem ze knock-back. . . .”

“And about time too,” said the tired-looking woman.

Inez threw out both arms.

“Zen I say to you—do not weaken! Put on ze armour of zis crusad’—an’ put ze tin-opener out of ze ’usband’s reach.”

A tornado of laughter swept the room. Volley after volley of hand-clapping rattled the windows. Peter was moving uneasily.

“Huh!” he grunted. “Did you ever see such fools?”

“Hush!” urged Sir Francis.

The Major rapped the table.

“Ladies—ladies! Miss de Fuentes has put the matter in a nutshell, as ’twere. Mr James Colburn will now speak.”

Jimmy stood up.

“Mr Chairman, ladies. I had better not mention the gentlemen. . . .”

“You’d better not,” said an angular female.

Jimmy beamed at her.

“I support all that Miss de Fuentes has said. . . .”

Elaine’s lip curled. Peter stared at his progeny. Sir Francis merely drooped. Mr Werner was seen to shrug his shoulders. The reporters waited open-mouthed.

“Those who have the interest of humanity at heart see in this movement the only solution of the scourge of war—” to the Major he whispered:

“How am I doing, Guns?”

“Tophole,” said the Major.

“You will be accused of being unpatriotic, but you will detect at once the self-interest in that accusation.”

“Haw, haw, haw—Oh, sorry, old man.”

“The women of the world—that’s *you*—can stop this curse of war. How? How, you ask me?”

“We didn’t ask you,” said the stout lady. “Don’t try to teach your grandmother how to suck eggs, young man.”

“Ladies, you will revolutionize the world. Of course there may be trouble. . . .”

“There will be,” sighed the tired-looking woman.

“We’re prepared for that,” snapped the angular person.

“To think *that* idiot is my son,” said Peter bitterly.

“Hush!” said Sir Francis.

Elaine saw the smile on Mr Werner’s face. He was about to whisper something to her when the Major rapped the table. Jimmy went on:

“There will be trouble in Parliament. . . .”

“And not only in Parliament,” said the fat lady.

“There will be questions asked in the Press. . . .”

“And not only in the Press,” sighed the tired-looking woman.

“You will be asked, commanded. . . .”

“We know what’s coming,” said the angular person.

“In conclusion I repeat Miss de Fuentes’ advice. . . .”

“I dunno what my old man will say, but I’ll give it a go,” said a determined looking woman near Peter.

Jimmy went on:

“Look at Russia! Look at Germany! Look at Italy! China! Japan! Us! What would Hitler do with men of fifty? What would Stalin do with an army of grandfathers? What would Mussolini do with an air force of greybeards? Would they fight?”

“No!” howled the audience.

“I agree. And it’s up to you. Let the world grow older and wiser. No More Babies. Thank you.”

He sat down. Inez clutched at him:

“Oh, Jim-mee, you were wonderful.”

“Marvellous, old thing,” said the Major. “Didn’t know you had such a grip on the subject— —”

Inez stood up.

“As ze president . . .” she began.

A red-faced woman bobbed up:

"This ain't right. I won't be told what to do by a spinster—me with eight kids."

Inez smiled coldly.

"Ze spinster of to-day is ze mozzier of to-morrow—if she don't watch out . . ."

"Haw, haw, haw—Oh, sorry, old girl."

"I know ze men. Zey are cunning. Zey will protes', zey will be ver' angry. Zey will swear. Who cares? We will 'ave no more babies."

Peter stood up.

"Let's get out of this," he growled. "I wouldn't be found dead with this disgraceful and disloyal bunch of females."

Unfortunately he was overheard.

"Peter!" gasped Sir Francis.

But it was too late. A woman stood up, and pointing at Peter shrieked:

"That impudent old man just called us all disloyal and disgraceful females."

"By gad—by gad," muttered the Major.

"Oh, my hat," said Jimmy. "He's in it!"

"And in for it! — —" added the Major.

He hit the table madly, but the furious ones were swarming like wasps round Peter. Shrill voices were screaming:

"Disloyal and disgraceful, are we? Why should we have babies if we don't want to? We don't *have* to, do we? Throw him out! Black his eye! He's the sort we're up against!"

"Beat it," whispered a reporter. "They'll riot."

The Press retreated precipitately. Peter waved his arms.

"I don't care what you say," he roared. "I've never heard anything more stupid . . ."

Someone raised an umbrella and struck. Peter's hat settled down over his eyes. Furiously he wrenched at it.

"Leave this to me, Francis," he choked. "These women are a menace to the nation."

Whack! went the umbrella again. Down went the hat again. There came the sound of cloth tearing.

"Good heavens," yelled Jimmy. "They'll rip him to pieces, come on, Guns."

Inez screamed:

"Oh, oh! Someone 'it Zir Fran-zis in ze eye!"

"The police are barging in . . . Oh, well hit, sir!" from the Major.

"Zey are all fighting," wailed Inez. "Oh, Papa Pee-ter, oh, Papa Zir Fran-zis."

The uproar was deafening, with Peter's defiant yell above all:

"Leave this to ME, Francis!"

"Peter . . ."

"Oh by gad!"

"How dare you call us disloyal?"

"Ladies, ladies! . . ."

"Get him out of it . . ."

Blows, screams, yells, and Peter's raging voice in fierce denunciation.

"Traitors!" he roared.

"Mr Colburn . . ."

"I won't go, officer."

"Skin the old devil!"

Whack! And a constable staggered this time.

"Get them out," growled a sergeant of police. "They'll murder him."

Guarded by stalwart policemen Peter, Elaine, Sir Francis and Mr Werner were taken from Beppo's cafe to their car. After them pressed a shrieking horde.

"I still say you're a disgrace to the nation!" trumpeted Peter. "No more babies . . . BAH! We'll see about that!"

"Get in the car, Peter; get in the car," panted Sir Francis.

"Very well. But I . . ."

Whack! Whack!

The doors slammed and the car drove away, Peter's voice trailing back after it.

"No more babies . . . madness . . . MADNESS!"

CHAPTER XII

WHEN JIMMY saw his father's car he said to Inez and the Major:

"I thought they'd make for my rooms. Brace yourself for squalls, people."

The Major said quietly:

"I take off my bally hat to your pater, Jimmy. It was rather wonderful to see him stand up to the—er, ladies, and tell them exactly what he thought of them."

Jimmy grinned.

"There's no humbug about our Peter. He knows what he wants, says what he means, and doesn't hesitate to let you know. Pete's honest, British to the backbone, and has the courage of a bulldog. That car standing there means he hasn't finished with us yet."

Inez said sympathetically:

"Oh, poor Papa Pee-ter, and poor Papa Zir Fran-zis. I will be ver' nice to zem."

"You'd better be," said Jimmy grimly, "otherwise you'll be just a 'rag, a bone, and a hank of hair' when he's through with you."

He stopped their car, and they went to the lift. Peter's voice could be heard three floors away. It grew louder and more menacing as the lift stopped at the fifth floor, and as Jimmy opened the door of his rooms it met them like the blast of an explosion.

"JAMES! You scoundrel! You're a DISGRACE to me!"

Peter was pacing to and fro, his hat battered, his coat ripped right up the back. He shook a fist at his amiable son.

"Tell me," said Jimmy breathlessly. "How did this happen?"

Peter stopped pacing, choked, and fought for breath.

"How did it happen? No more babies, eh? You've made yourself, your wife and me objects of ridicule throughout the world."

"But really, sir . . ."

"SILENCE! Not another word. Not a peep out of you, my lad—not a PEEP! Those women—that crazy meeting—nothing that any man could do, could be more idiotic and out of place."

"By gad, sir I knew a fellow once who sent a sucking pig to the Synagogue . . ."

"Will you be quiet, sir?" hissed Peter.

“Certainly, sir,” said the Major stiffly. “But that fellow was a greater fathead than Jimmy.”

“I won’t LISTEN to you, Major Winterbottom,” howled Peter. “Keep out of this, sir.”

“Very well, sir,” said the Major coldly. “If your son is a little off, I can only offer my sympathy, sir . . .”

“Your sympathy . . . Not a word, sir—not a WORD! Look at me—look at Sir Francis . . .”

“I say,” exclaimed the Major. “He’s got a black eye!”

Elaine and Sir Francis were both seated. Mr Werner had evidently made his excuses and his exit. Sir Francis dabbed at his eye with a handkerchief. Elaine was as cold as marble.

Inez glided forward.

“It ees mos’ terrible,” she said soothingly. “An’ poor Mrs Colburn . . .”

“I would rather you did not discuss me,” said Elaine curtly.

Inez flushed and turned again to Peter.

“You sit down, Papa Pee-ter. Your poor face it ees so red . . .”

Peter thrust out his chin at her.

“I won’t sit down. You put James up to this. The sooner he kicks you out the better.”

Inez opened her eyes wide.

“Kick me out? Oh, Papa Pee-ter, Jim-mee will never do zat.”

“What have you to say to that?” demanded Peter of his son.

“I never kick a woman, sir. I’m sorry you have been in some sort of trouble, sir. And that goes for father Francis. Are you all right, Elaine?”

“Quite all right, thank you,” came icily.

Inez smiled brightly.

“Now we are all calm we will settle zis matter.”

“What matter?” rasped Peter.

“I am ze President of ze No More Babies League . . .”

Peter’s head sank between his shoulders.

“Not another word,” he roared. “I never want to hear that matter . . .”

Inez interrupted him. Her dark eyebrows were arched in an expression of innocent surprise.

“Oh, but, Papa Pee-ter—you mus’ ’elp us.”

“Help you? HELP you?” gasped Peter.

“Si, si, si!” cried Inez enthusiastically. “I am ze President. Mrs Colburn she ees name for ze vice-president . . .”

“No thanks,” said Elaine contemptuously.

Inez babbled on:

“Papa Pee-ter an’ Papa Zir Fran-zis zey are name for patron . . .”

“Stop,” croaked Peter. “I say stop!”

“No, no, no!” chattered Inez. “I ’ave already tol’ ze papers it ees so . . .”

Peter tottered to a seat and collapsed.

“God bless my soul,” he said weakly. Then he scowled at Jimmy. “I refuse to be a patron of this ridiculous—something.”

“And I,” said Sir Francis.

“And I,” said Elaine. “The whole thing is low, and disgusting. I should consider myself degraded.”

“No, no, no!” said Inez quickly. “You cannot see ze forest for ze trees. What we do ees to stop war, stop slaughter, stop ze recurring misery of ze world. You will be famous. Zey will put up ze monument . . .”

Peter stood up.

“I don’t want a damn monument. James, get on that ’phone and tell the papers Sir Francis and I have nothing to do with this incipient harlotry.”

“Oh, Papa Pee-ter—’ow *could* you say zat—”

“I say it and mean it, young woman. Millions of women throughout the world having no children. What is that but harlotry?”

“No, no, no . . .”

“Of course YOU wouldn’t think so.”

Inez gasped.

“Oh, oh, OH!” Then she smiled. “But I unnerstan’. Ze movement ees new. Ever’zing zat ees new ees suspec’. You’ ave ze old fashion idea zat women are for zat one zing only—to ’ave children. Always in ze past ze women zey do not talk—zey jus’ ’ave ze children. Zat Hitler say to German women: ‘Get back in ze kitchen an’ bedroom, an’ breed, an’ breed, an’ breed new soldiers for Germany.’ Mussolini say: ‘Breed, breed ze millions of bambinos for Italy.’ Why? Soldiers for Italy. We say to ze women of ze world—keep out of zat bedroom for awhile an’ zat Hitler an’ zat Mussolini an’ ze ozzers will be out of ze job. Wiz less men it would be a peaceful world, any way.”

“I won’t listen to you,” said Peter gruffly, “It’s twaddle, sheer twaddle. Sort of thing the enemies of England would try on here.”

Inez shook her head.

“Ah, but I lof England, Papa Pee-ter . . .”

A knock on the door silenced her.

“My man’s down town,” said Jimmy. “I’ll open it.”

He left the room. They heard a door open. A voice said:

“For Mrs John James Colburn.”

“My clothes,” said Elaine calmly.

Inez stiffened as several men carrying trunks came through the room.

“Put them in that room,” said Elaine.

The men did so, and then went out. Jimmy closed the door.

“Your cloe’s?” purred Inez.

Jimmy came back.

“Your clothes, Elaine?” he asked in surprise.

“I am staying here with you,” said Elaine.

Inez went pale.

“What ees zat?” she demanded.

“Those small cases—put them in the bedroom, James.”

Inez spat like a cat.

“He will not! I ’ave jus’ put my clo’es in zat bedroom.”

“You minx, you puss!” stormed Peter. “You take your clothes out of my son’s bedroom.”

Inez was furious.

“No—NO! Never! I am Jim-mee’s frien’.” She turned on Elaine: “You do not lof Jim-mee. I lof Jim-mee.”

Jimmy whispered:

“Say something, Guns—and say it quickly.”

“Haw, haw, haw!” said the Major. “Were those *your* clothes, Inez, old girl?”

“Si, si, si,” hissed Inez. “My cloe’s are in zat room.”

“Haw, haw, haw!—Sorry Inez. I had them sent back.”

Inez stepped back. She was white with rage.

“You do—what?” she screamed.

“Absolutely,” said the Major cheerfully. “Have I put my foot in it, as ’twere?”

“Oh, you fool,” panted Inez. “Oh, ze Guns ees ze big fool. But I will go! I will get zem again. She will not tak’ Jim-mee from me—No! I will tak’ Jim-mee from ’er wizzout any cloe’s. She ees ze damn dog in ze manger. He ees lonely. He ees desolate. But he find me, Inez de Fuentes. We are lofers. He ees mine! I will ’old ’im wizzout any cloe’s . . .”

“By gad!”

“You be quiet, you silly Guns . . .”

“Oh, very well, if you’re going to be rude as well as nude . . .”

Inez rushed from the room. Jimmy turned to the others.

“Excitable little thing, isn’t she?” he asked brightly.

Three pairs of eyes stared coldly at him.

“You don’t want to take in all Inez says—I don’t.”

Three pairs of eyes stared accusingly at him.

“She’s impetuous. Isn’t she, Guns?”

“Haw, haw, haw! Oh, very.”

“And extraordinary?”

“Gad, yes—and exhilarating.”

“And explicable?”

“Haw, haw, haw!—and extravagant, exuberant, exultant and exquisite.”

“Also expeditious, expansive, expensive and expectant?”

“Absolutely! And exhausting, explanatory, exemplary, exegetical and extant.”

Jimmy stopped the Major and turned to Peter.

“You are surely not going, sir?” he asked in astonishment.

Three pairs of eyes regarded him almost with hate.

“Going?” panted Peter. “In just one second I’ll be gone! How dare you, James? . . . How dare you?”

Like three persons in the grip of some form of paralysis Peter, Elaine and Sir Francis went stiffly from the room. The door slammed. Jimmy turned to the Major. They shook hands.

“Exit,” said Jimmy.

“Exactly,” said the Major.

CHAPTER XIII

MAJOR WINTERBOTTOM sat huddled on the seat of a taxi-cab. His wrist-watch showed the time to be just after midnight. In Wardour Street he stopped the taxi, paid the driver, and walked away. London, of course, was in darkness, and at this hour the streets were practically deserted.

He walked on, turned a corner, increased his pace, turned another corner, and paused when he came to a dingy door set in old and grimy bricks. Cautiously he looked about him, then taking a key from his pocket he opened the door and stepped into a narrow, black passage. Closing the door he went along the passage, made his way surely down a flight of wooden steps, and then knocked gently on another door. It opened.

“On the dot, old thing,” he said cheerfully.

The door closed, and a light flashed on.

“Good lad,” said Jimmy. “Any luck?”

The Major tossed his hat on the table.

“A bagful of it,” he chuckled.

Jimmy sat down on the couch.

“Anything from the Shade?” he asked.

The Major handed him a folded paper. Jimmy read it, then laughed softly.

“It says: ‘Dear Shadow—certain information I have is incomplete. Meet me in the shadow of Cleopatra’s Needle, and we’ll put in a few stitches together. My car will pass, so jump in. The Shade.’”

“What time?” asked the Major.

“One o’clock.”

“By gad—she’s wide awake, that girl. Er—could I do this instead of you, Jimmy?”

Jimmy laughed.

“You’d be wasting your time, Guns. She’s charming, but cold. She will take you into her confidence, but not into her arms.”

“Too bad,” regretted the Major.

Jimmy lit a cigarette.

“Did you follow Inez?” he asked.

The Major nodded.

“I did. She went straight to . . .”

“Werner?”

“Absolutely.”

Jimmy laughed.

“Inez is clever.”

“Correct,” said the Major. “Her No More Babies League is a perfect blind.”

Jimmy looked thoughtful.

“I sometimes wonder if she sometimes wonders why we took it up so readily. To certain unbalanced minds it would undoubtedly appeal.”

The Major grinned.

“Aren’t our minds supposed to be unbalanced?”

Jimmy chuckled.

“I must ask Peter.”

The Major looked at him thoughtfully.

“Nevertheless, Jimmy, I think Inez has, as they say, fallen for you.”

Jimmy shook his head: “She’s too coldly calculating.”

“She’s that, I believe. But I think you’ve got under her skin. Absolutely. She wasn’t altogether acting to-day. She’d live with you. I was watching her eyes. It’s my opinion she’d kill for you.”

“Good God!” Jimmy jerked out. “Don’t be absurd, Guns.”

The Major shrugged. Jimmy went on soberly:

“There’s just a chance, a faint chance, we’re both wrong about her.”

“In what way?”

“She could be either in with the crowd we’re up against—or she could be—the Shade.”

The Major stared at him in silence for a moment.

“Inez, the Shade?” he said softly.

“It is not impossible. I’m the Shadow, am I not?”

The Major whistled loud and long.

“I say! That’s a twist, old man.”

Jimmy inhaled:

“I know. But it’s all a guess just yet, and as I said she could be one—or the other.”

He looked at the telephone. Then:

“I suppose Elaine is at her rooms by now.”

“Er—matrimonial nostalgia?” murmured the Major.

“Definitely,” grunted Jimmy. “Elaine thinks I’m a frightful pill.”

“Gad,” said the Major wryly. “What must she think of me?”

Jimmy laughed heartily.

“Guns, I’d hate to ask her.”

“So would I. Do you think this war will be over soon?”

They both laughed.

“But I must keep it up,” said Jimmy. “A man must be a fool if his wife thinks so.”

“And wives, I suspect, frequently think so. But Inez. Do you think. . . .”

“Guns, I think I’m suspect.”

“Impossible,” snorted the Major.

“I merely said ‘suspect.’ And it isn’t impossible. We’ve twigged one or two who thought they were well underground. You never know when it will be our turn. Why would the passionate Inez make for Werner?”

“He was at the show this afternoon.”

“I know. Is she with him or against him? Is she with us or against us? Is she anything in this game at all?”

“No sign of recognition passed between them that I could see. But you’d better watch Inez, Jimmy. Whatever she is she’s a woman first.”

Jimmy looked thoughtful.

“I can’t drop her yet, Guns.”

“She could be dangerous. I’m thinking of—Mrs Colburn.”

Jimmy frowned.

“You don’t suggest Inez is a homicidal maniac, do you?”

The Major shrugged.

“When a woman like Inez is in love she can do anything. I’d keep them apart. Strike a spark with jealous passion and a stiletto could flash. It’s just a thought. Your lovely partner has been a sheltered woman, Jimmy, sheltered all her life. Inez is a tigress stalking the jungles of the world.”

Jimmy nodded. Then:

“Time I became the Shadow,” he said. “Have a look at the gear, Guns.”

While Jimmy changed into the clothes of the Shadow the Major inspected the automatics and examined the clips of cartridges and the torches. He placed four automatics on the table.

“All in order,” he announced. “Taking your keys?”

"Yes. May have to go in somewhere. Send me another telephone call from Blatley in the morning. Must keep Peter occupied and well out of this."

"Gad, yes. What sort of job do you want this time?"

Jimmy smiled.

"Making carriers for the carrier pigeons, perhaps."

"Haw, haw, haw! He'll bounce when he gets that one. Milne had a fit when I told him the one about the janitor."

"I'm ready," grunted Jimmy.

"Gas mask?"

Jimmy shook his head.

"I'll chance it. How's your time?"

"Twelve-thirty."

They compared watches.

"Follow me at a decent interval, Guns. I pick up the Shade at the Needle. Keep within gunshot somehow."

"I'll be there, old man."

To their astonishment the telephone rang. They stared at it. It was a secret number known only to themselves and the War Office.

"Milne?" suggested the Major.

"A cross call, most likely. I'd better answer it."

Lifting the receiver he whispered:

"Yes?"

A woman's voice spoke back in a whisper:

"Don't meet the Shade to-night. Do you hear? Don't meet the Shade to-night. Do you hear? Don't meet the Shade to-night. Do you hear?"

Jimmy replaced the receiver. The Major saw by his expression that something was amiss.

"What is it?"

Jimmy nodded at the telephone.

"A woman's voice told me in a whisper not to meet the Shade to-night. That's all."

The Major gaped.

"Good gad—the Shade herself?" he gasped.

Jimmy was staring at the telephone. Not any trace of the easy going man-about-town was now to be seen in either his face or manner. Grim and set was his expression, the muscles of his jaws clamped into knots.

“I don’t know. I can’t be sure. And that’s why I *must* meet the Shade. It may be a trap. It also suggests this hole is known to someone. If that is so they may come for us before long.”

The Major picked up an automatic.

“That—should be interesting,” he murmured.

“Let’s go,” said Jimmy.

CHAPTER XIV

EVEN while Jimmy and the Major were talking in the dug-out in Rotten Apple Lane, Peter, Sir Francis and Elaine were together in Peter's library. Peter, of course, was fulminating as he brandished several newspapers.

"It's an outrage—it's monstrous—" he told them. "How dare they link my name with this ridiculous league?"

"And mine," said Sir Francis.

"And mine," said Elaine. "But the league is creating a stir. The papers have already canvassed opinions. I'll read you one or two. The first is from the Countess of Midland. She says: 'I think the whole thing is an insult to the nation's intelligence. I have no children myself, of course, but to leave England defenceless and depopulated is the suggestion of maniacs. Women must have children.' . . . That's the opinion of the Countess."

"I agree," said Peter.

"I, too, concur," said Sir Francis.

"Wait a moment. Here's another. A mother of twelve speaks. She says: 'I heartily approve of the No More Babies League. After bringing twelve children into the world their fate, it seems, is to be blown to bits by bombs. They might just as well not have been born. No more babies, that's the idea, and teach the stupid men a lesson.'"

"She's a fool," grunted Peter.

"I concur," said Sir Francis.

"Well, when it comes to babies, she has had twelve, and the Countess has had none."

"I still say she's a fool."

"I concur."

"I certainly do not approve of this idiotic league, but it seems many will. It's the mothers of twelve who matter, not the Countesses with none. And underlying it all is this solid truth: if the women refused to have babies for ten or fifteen years there certainly wouldn't be any war."

"Damme," snarled Peter, "there wouldn't be anything."

"I concur."

Elaine smiled.

"Don't worry. The men will win every time. There'll be more servants for the countess, and more heartaches for the mothers of twelve, and there'll

be more millions of earnest young men willing to die for freedom, or for this or for that in another twenty years time.”

Peter glared at her.

“You sound like a communist.”

Elaine laughed.

“I’m just wondering, apart from this league, if the world will ever get sense?”

“No,” growled Peter. “This league proves that. How’s your eye, Francis?”

Sir Francis winced as he touched it. It was purple, swollen and painful.

“I would rather not discuss my eye, Peter,” he said stiffly. “If you hadn’t opened your mouth in characteristic manner my eye wouldn’t look like a slice of some tropical fruit.”

Peter frowned.

“Now don’t blame me, Francis . . .”

Elaine interrupted him by getting up and saying:

“You two may argue if you like. I’m going to James’s rooms.”

“I wouldn’t go near the whelp,” snarled Peter. “Now don’t do anything rash, Elaine. We must combine to convince James he is wrong. That’s what we must do—combine.”

“You can’t manage James as you would a rubber merger,” retorted Elaine. “That’s where you have made the mistake all along. Good-night.”

Peter stuck out his chin.

“Well, you manage the Inez woman, my girl. She’s a handful, that Spanish cat. And if you don’t get James out of her claws—she’ll tear him to pieces.”

“She’ll do nothing of the kind,” said Elaine coolly. “I’m going to handle James in my own way from now on. I’ve had enough of leaving things to you. Good-night.”

“Bah! Good-night!” grunted Peter. “You can’t argue with a woman, Francis.”

“Good-night, Elaine,” said Sir Francis.

Elaine left them. Sir Francis sighed.

“What a day!”

Peter clipped a cigar and lit it.

“Help yourself,” he grunted. “Elaine is to blame for all this trouble.”

Sir Francis frowned and shook his head.

“Be fair, Peter. You know James is to blame; but as he is your son you won’t admit it.”

Peter puffed furiously.

“No, Francis. Elaine is to blame. If she had been tactful in the first place . . .”

“How do you know she wasn’t?” snapped Sir Francis.

Peter stared at him.

“She couldn’t have been. They separated, didn’t they? A few weeks ago they were the happiest couple in London. Then Elaine gets mixed up with refugees . . .”

“She is sympathetic towards these unfortunate people.”

“She’s damned unsympathetic towards James. Now don’t quibble, Francis—don’t QUIBBLE! No doubt James resented being neglected. No doubt he resented taking a back seat while his wife spent her time in the company of other men.”

Sir Francis gestured wearily.

“Oh, don’t let us argue, Peter.”

Peter shrugged.

“I never argue, Francis, you know that.”

Sir Francis looked at him.

“It doesn’t matter who’s to blame,” he said. “What matters now is a reconciliation. Elaine has been very magnanimous in my opinion.”

“How?” barked Peter.

“Not every woman would return to a man who so easily is the prey of a woman like Miss de Fuentes.”

Peter dashed down his cigar.

“Really, Francis, to call James a ‘prey’ . . .”

“You called her a harlot.”

“Blister me . . .”

“You called her a Spanish cat, and stated that her claws would rip James to pieces.”

“Yes, but . . .”

Sir Francis held a handkerchief over his injured eye. The other eye glared defiantly at his life-long friend.

“You heard her say she intended to live with James. He’s entirely hypnotized—or he’s a spineless wart.”

Peter turned purple.

“Francis!” he gasped.

Sir Francis’s eye was stinging. He confronted Peter stiffly.

“There has always been a weakness in the Colburns . . .”

“Bless my soul!” choked Peter.

“And that weakness is women.”

Peter began to wave his arms.

“Dammit all, Francis . . .”

Sir Francis spoke coldly.

“It’s my turn to do some talking, Peter. I know where James gets his worst traits from—from you! When we were young you’d have gone crazy over a piece like this Fuentes woman. I’ve known you to hunt down a pretty girl as if you were a hound . . .”

“Francis—FRANCIS!”

“I won’t stop. I’m tired of Elaine being blamed for James’s congenital propensities . . .”

“Congenital propensities . . .” echoed Peter.

“He’s weak; he’s a fool; he’s stubborn; he can’t resist a handsome woman; he’s got too much money and not enough sense; he’s got too much time; he’s a misfit; he’s . . .”

“Stop—STOP!” yelled Peter.

“No! He’s lazy; he’s obstinate; he’s headstrong; he’s wilful; he’s insensitive to others; he’s just—you! The complete son of his father. He’s the same as you were. As he grows older he’ll be another Peter Colburn—all bounce, bluster and bluff. If he doesn’t come to his senses he’ll ruin himself as you would have been ruined if a very fine woman hadn’t saved you. I’m hoping Elaine will do the same for James as his mother did for you.”

“God bless my soul . . .” panted Peter.

“And now,” said Sir Francis severely, “I’ll have a cigar.”

“Curse me, your eye must be sore,” grumbled Peter. “I haven’t heard you let go like that since the night Fanny Bentley, of the old Gaiety, stuck a hatpin in you. You were a bit of a dog yourself, Francis. Still, I’m glad you didn’t get two black eyes, or you might really have said something.”

The telephone rang. Peter stumped to it.

“If it’s any of those newspaper fools— —” he said ominously.

“See who it is,” said Sir Francis testily.

Peter lifted the receiver.

“Eh? . . . Yes, Peter Colburn here. Who’s that speaking? . . . WHAT? . . . Yes, yes, I’m listening . . . WHAT . . . Who’s that speaking? . . . Yes, I hear. . . . Who’s SPEAKING? . . .”

“Don’t shout,” said Sir Francis.

Peter replaced the receiver.

“What is it, Peter?”

Peter was breathing heavily.

“I don’t know, Francis. A woman spoke to me. Spoke in a whisper, then cut off.”

Sir Francis forgot his injured eye.

“In a whisper, Peter?”

“Yes. It was uncanny. Never heard anything like it before.”

“But what did she say?”

Peter took a turn or two before replying. Then: “She said: ‘Do not leave your house to-night. Do you hear? Do not leave your house to-night. Do you hear?’”

Sir Francis rose to his feet.

“And then?” he asked.

“She cut off.”

Sir Francis stared at the telephone.

“Extraordinary,” he muttered.

Peter hit the table with his fist.

“I know, Francis—it’s that Inez woman. I’d know her husky, passionate voice anywhere.”

“But I doubt . . .” Sir Francis began.

Peter wagged a finger at him.

“I do. She knows Elaine is going to James’s rooms. She’s furious. She thinks she can influence James when he is by himself. But she doesn’t want to face ME! Francis, we’re going to James’s rooms at once.”

Sir Francis drooped.

“Peter—it has been a day, you know . . .”

“Don’t quit, Francis, don’t quit,” snarled Peter. “You want to see Elaine and Jimmy happy just as I do. We must act. God knows what that Spanish harpy will do. She’s dangerous. But she knows I won’t stand any of her nonsense. Come along.”

“Very well.”

“Now leave everything to me, Francis. The nerve of that woman telling ME not to leave my own house. Who does she think she is?”

“The future Mrs Colburn, I imagine,” said Sir Francis gloomily.

“Ha!” snorted Peter. “We’ll see about that. Come along and leave everything to me.”

“May the gods spare my other eye,” muttered Sir Francis.

“I’ll fix this Inez woman once and for all.”

The telephone rang again. Peter pounced on it.

“Yes—yes . . . Oh, it’s you again.”

A woman’s voice said in a whisper:

“On no account leave your house to-night. Do you hear?”

Peter was frowning.

“Who are you?” he hissed.

But a faint click told him the woman had hung up. Sir Francis looked thoughtful.

“Perhaps it isn’t Miss de Fuentes.”

Peter grunted.

“I’ll bet you a million it is. And even if it wasn’t, no woman is going to order me round. Let’s go.”

“Where?”

“To cut the claws of a cat,” said Peter grimly.

CHAPTER XV

JIMMY COLBURN threaded his way through the dark streets, comforted by the knowledge that the faithful and dependable Guns was in close if invisible support. He crossed Shaftesbury Avenue, skirted forlorn Piccadilly, turned into the Haymarket, traversed Trafalgar Square, flanked Charing Cross Station, and went down Villiers Street to the Embankment. Once or twice, as he thought of the inaugural meeting of the No More Babies League, he laughed softly. Then grim thoughts banished mirth. That he was in the danger zone he knew. The whispering voice over the wire proved that certain things were known about the Shadow. Did the woman know him as Jimmy Colburn as well? Who was the woman who had spoken? The Shade?

He shook his head as he padded silently along. Had she been the Shade she would have said so. If she were not the Shade then someone knew the Shadow and the Shade were working together. He clamped his jaw. It promised to be a grim night, and if he did not put a razor edge on his wits it could be a disastrous night.

The Embankment was black and deserted. Often he had walked along it before the war, observing the pathetic figures huddled on the seats under the plane trees, sometimes talking to them, always dipping deep into his pocket. But this night he had no time for philosophical speculation, no time to moralize. Cleopatra's Needle, still carrying the wounds of a bomb blast dealt on a night of the last war, loomed ahead. Verily was he a shadow now, soundless, swift, invisible. London was quiet, the Embankment silent, the river a stream of darkness.

He paused. A car passed slowly. He tensed himself, then relaxed and allowed the car to pass. One o'clock boomed. He waited, watching, soundless. Two o'clock came from the bell Big Ben. The minutes seemed hours. Other shadows went by, heads down, feet dragging, moved on by the police. He crossed and recrossed the road, avoiding contacts, remaining unseen. Then the whisper of tyres on the road brought him up taut. The car was just a black blur in the night, but he recognized it, and with a quick leap sprang to the running board and slipped through the open door into a seat.

"Almost given you up," he whispered.

The Shade replied:

"I said I would come. I knew you would wait."

He strained his eyes to see her, but like himself she was just a shadow. Taking care to alter his voice he said:

"Why did you 'phone me?"

Quickly she whispered:

“’Phone you? What do you mean?”

“A woman ’phoned me at an address I thought secret and unknown. She spoke in a whisper, as you always do.”

“What did she say?”

“‘Do not meet the Shade to-night.’”

The form of the Shade seemed to stiffen with astonishment.

“Oh! . . .” was breathed rather than said.

“You didn’t ’phone?”

“No. You didn’t tell me about your ’phone.”

He laughed softly.

“Then we’re spotted, my Shade.”

“Obviously, my Shadow,” was the reply. “A woman, you said. You are sure?”

“Quite.”

“You will go back there?”

“Yes. If they come looking for it—they can have it.”

She moved restlessly.

“Haven’t you any fear at all?”

“Plenty,” he chuckled. “But it must come—sooner or later. I rather thought, from your note, it may come to-night.”

“It may.”

“You’ve been trying to locate Grolman, haven’t you?”

He could see that she nodded.

“Shrewd guess, Shadow. And I’ve found him.”

“You’re uncanny. Where is he?”

“I’m taking you to him now. His hide-out is on a Dutch barge near old Puddle Dock beyond Blackfriars Bridge.”

“Good God,” chuckled Jimmy. “Did he tell you?”

“Scarcely. At least he didn’t know he was telling me. He’s not anxious to be stood up against a wall.”

“How did you . . .”

“Secret.”

“Sorry. We are going to the barge?”

“You are.”

“Talk fast, then.”

The Shade spoke quickly in the peculiar, whispering tone she affected to disguise her voice. Behind them, at no distance came another car. Once or twice Jimmy glimpsed it. Guns was there, and the astute Guns would know if he were being followed.

“What car is that?” asked the Shade.

“Pal of mine.”

“That’s a relief,” she sighed.

“You say the faked copies of embarkation orders are on that barge?”

“Yes. Otto, Fritz and Hermann will be there with Grolman, if I don’t miss my guess, and probably Hermann will leave for Germany, via the east coast, if we don’t throw a spanner into the works. I’ve arranged for a police launch to speed to the barge on a flash signal. But it’s up to the Shadow.”

“I get it. What about von Hagen?”

“Mystery. Still well under cover. No pointers yet.”

“Too bad. He’s the brains of this gang. We know that much.”

“Yes, but that’s all we do know. He may not be in this country.”

“True enough. By the way, you’re not Spanish, by any chance?”

“Spanish?” she echoed. There was quick surprise in her question.

“Are your eyes dark?”

“Secret.”

“Damn. Is your name Inez?”

The woman gave a slight gasp.

“Inez? Do you know a woman called Inez?”

“I have many contacts, as you have. I know a Miss Inez de Fuentes. . . .”

The Shade half turned as though to stare at him.

“Who are you?” she fired at him.

“Secret.”

“Damn. Are your eyes blue? I sometimes imagine they are.”

“Secret . . . Nice of you to think of me occasionally.”

“Do you know this woman well?”

“That depends. I’ve met her.”

“So have I.”

“I could swear it was Inez who ’phoned me.”

“I didn’t ’phone you.”

“Then you’re not Fuentes?”

“Secret.”

“Damn,” said Jimmy again.

“I heard you. I believe I have met you when you were not—the Shadow.”

“Then who am I?”

“Frankly, I don’t know.”

“It’s after twelve. Shall we unmask?”

She shrugged.

“This, my Shadow, is no carnival.”

He nodded.

“I’ve been tempted, each time I’ve been with you, to raise that scarf.”

She shrank from him.

“You wouldn’t . . .”

“No. I’ll play fair,” he reassured her. “To me you are the Shade. I think—No! Charming though you are, this, as you have said, is no carnival.”

“We stop outside that warehouse,” she informed him. “And then . . .”

“The Dutch barge—and Grolman.”

“The Dutch barge and Grolman.”

CHAPTER XVI

PETER and Sir Francis spoke little as they drove to Jimmy's rooms, went up in the lift, and knocked on the door. The voice of Inez said:

"Who is zat?"

Peter scowled at the door and knocked impatiently.

"Who is zat?" the voice of Inez demanded.

"It's ME, my good woman!" snapped Peter.

Sir Francis wondered whether the "good woman" was the cause of the door opening so quickly. Inez welcomed them both with the glad cry:

"Oh, Papa Pee-ter . . . Papa Zir Fran-zis! Oh, I so glad you come. Yes."

She closed the door behind them.

"Where's James?" demanded Peter brusquely. "Where's Mrs Colburn?"

Inez pouted. In spite of himself Peter silently acknowledged that she was a most alluring young woman. James was evidently not altogether a fool.

"Jim-mee ees not 'ere, Papa Pee-ter. An' Mrs Colburn? But I do not know. But come in, come in. . . ."

"We intend to come in, Miss de Fuentes, just as we intend that you must go out."

"Out? But I do not understan'. You sit zere, Papa Pee-ter."

"Thank you," said Peter stiffly.

"You sit zere, Papa Zir Fran-zis."

"Thank you," said Sir Francis coldly.

Inez smiled at him.

"Poor Papa Zir Fran-zis . . . 'ow ees zat eye?"

He blinked.

"I do not wish to discuss my eye, Miss de Fuentes," he said icily.

"Oh, ver' well, ver' well. It ees your eye, Papa Zir Fran-zis."

Peter glared at her.

"Now, young woman, where is my son?" he growled.

Inez smiled.

"Do you expect me to produce 'im like ze rabbit out of ze 'at?"

"Don't call my son a 'rabbit.' Where is he?"

Inez began to pace the room. Her face was serious now, her dark eyes gleaming. Peter and Sir Francis glimpsed a shapely leg swinging under the

slashed skirt.

"I do not know," she retorted. "Jim-mee will never tell me . . ."

Peter stared in surprise.

"What do you mean—never tell you?" he snapped.

Inez paused and looked at him. Undeniably she was attractive. Her gown was of black velvet with a magnificent collar of imitation pearls.

"I mean," she said bitterly, "zat Jim-mee never sleep 'ere. I do not know where he go at night."

Both men slowly rose to their feet.

"What's that?" said Peter incredulously.

"Not sleep here?" murmured Sir Francis.

Inez waved an impatient hand at them.

"Sit down, Papa Pee-ter, Papa Zir Fran-zis."

They slowly sat down.

"No! Jim-mee will not sleep 'ere. He let *me* sleep 'ere. But," very bitterly, "where he go at night I do not know."

"Bless my soul," panted Peter. "I understood . . ."

She interrupted him fiercely.

"Bah! I know! But you are a bad man, Papa Pee-ter."

Peter bristled.

"Now, now, young woman . . ."

She flashed him a scornful glance.

"A ver' bad man," she repeated. "You are not kind to Jim-mee or to me."

"Well, blister me!" gasped the rubber magnate.

"You suspec' Jim-mee of—of—of—Oh, you are so cruel, Papa Pee-ter an' Papa Zir Francis."

"Good heavens—she's crying!" said Sir Francis.

"I can see that," said Peter gruffly. "Now listen to me, Miss de Fuentes . . ."

Inez began to pace quickly.

"No! No! I am listen to you too much! I am be insult! I am be 'urt! In 'ere—" and she pointed to her bosom.

Peter was goggling. James was evidently a bit of a fool after all.

"Has James never . . . I mean, er . . ."

Inez's large dark eyes were misty with tears. She paused dramatically.

“Oh, Papa Pee-ter—I would not ’urt Jim-mee. Not for all ze world! He ees so ’onerable. Yes. You see zat leg?” she allowed it to show through the slash. “Jim-mee never once look at it. Never. He ees so ’onerable . . .”

“Curse me,” breathed Peter. “He must be. You hear that, Francis? I had an idea all along that you were wrong.”

Sir Francis swallowed hard.

“I was wrong? Really, Peter! I have never discussed Miss de Fuentes’ leg . . .”

“No, no, no! I mean about James. We both owe this young lady an apology, Francis.”

Inez blinked happily through her tears.

“No, no! Zat ees all forgot, Papa Pee-ter, Papa Zir Fran-zis. It was all a misunnerstan’. Jim-mee ees ver’ ’onerable, I am ver’ ’onerable woman. Poor Mrs Colburn—she t’ink I am so bad. She t’ink I want to take Jim-mee from ’er. No! I am ver’ ’onerable woman. I want to see zem ’appy.”

Peter began to smile. Quite a different face had Peter when he smiled. He looked almost boyish, and very much like Jimmy.

“Francis, we’re a pair of old fools. Bless my soul, with our experience we should have known better. We’re both very sorry, my dear. . . .”

“I concur,” said Sir Francis heartily. “Er—would you mind putting your leg back, Miss de Fuentes? Having only one eye I do not wish to strain it.”

Peter roared with laughter.

“Francis is a droll dog when you know him, Miss de Fuente.”

“Plis say Inez to me. Yes?”

Peter grinned at Sir Francis.

The leg went back under the skirt.

“I’ll get you ze whisk’, eh?” she said with a smile.

Peter beamed at her.

“You’re a thoughtful girl, Inez, as well as beautiful,” he said magnanimously. “James keeps a splendid whisky, Francis.”

“Oh, it ees marvellous,” agreed Inez.

She set a decanter and glasses before them. Peter rubbed his hands.

“Ha! This is better than quarrelling, Francis.”

Sir Francis patted his eye.

“I concur, Peter, I concur.”

“You’ll drink with us, Inez?” asked Peter.

She arched her brows.

“Should I, Papa Pee-ter, Papa Zir Fran-zis?”

“Of course,” said Peter heartily. “One wouldn’t hurt her, do you think, Francis?”

“Of course not,” agreed Sir Francis.

“Ver’ well,” said Inez happily. “I will pour ze whisk’ for you.”

Peter chuckled.

“Dammit—like old times, Francis.”

Inez laughed softly and poured stiff double whiskies.

“But you are so nice, really, Papa Pee-ter, Papa Zir Fran-zis. . . .”

“Why do you keep looking at the clock?” asked Peter. “Are you expecting someone?”

“No, no, no!” said Inez quickly. “Jim-mee will not come ’ere, I tol’ you zat. Zere you are, Papa Pee-ter, Papa Zir Fran-zis.”

“Thank you, Inez.”

“Thank you, Inez.”

“What you say? ’Ere’s ze luck? Yes?”

Peter winked at Sir Francis.

“The best of luck, Inez.”

“I concur.”

Peter smacked his lips as he set down his glass.

“Ah! I told you it was a fine whisky, Francis.”

Sir Francis set down his glass.

“Excellent, Peter.”

Inez set down her glass.

“Zer ver’ bes’ whisk’,” she agreed. “Jim-mee knows ze bes’ when he see it—ze bes’ whisk’, I mean.”

Peter dug Sir Francis in the ribs.

“Coy little thing,” he chuckled.

Sir Francis sighed.

“I wish I hadn’t this absurd eye.”

Peter smiled at Inez.

“Have a cigarette, my dear?”

Inez reached for her own case.

“No, no! You mus’ try one of zese, Papa Pee-ter.”

Peter beamed.

“Something special? Like the whisky?” he asked with the heavy archness of an out-of-practice elephant.

Inez gave him a slightly wicked wink.

“Ver’ special. Zey are from Japan.”

“Japan?” exclaimed both men.

They looked with interest at the cigarettes.

“Si. Japan. I light zem for you.”

“H’m . . .” said Peter, tasting the smoke. “Brown paper. . . .”

“Certainly a different aroma,” observed Sir Francis.

“Si. Zey smok’ like ze cig an’ smell like ze cigar.”

“Very pleasant,” said Peter.

“I concur,” said Sir Francis gallantly. “As pleasant as I have discovered Inez herself can be.”

“Oh, Papa Zir Fran-zis!”

She filled the glasses again. Peter grinned.

“Take care, Francis. . . . Beware,” he cautioned his friend.

Inez smiled at him.

“No, no! It ees little Inez who mus’ tak’ care.”

Peter and Sir Francis gave each other the wink of experience.

“’Ere ze luck,” said Inez.

“Your very good health, my dear,” said Peter.

“I concur.”

Down went the double whiskies.

“Ah! Now tell us about yourself, my dear,” invited Peter. “You are Spanish?”

Inez looked rather sad.

“Si. I am Spanish,” she said slowly. “I am from Madrid. But I am ze caged bird zere. I fly ’way, ha, ha, ha. . . .”

“Ha! Ha! Ha!” roared Peter.

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughed Sir Francis. “It isn’t every caged bird can do that.”

“Ha! Ha! Ha! Don’t be a silly ass, Francis.”

Sir Francis said knowingly:

“I understand all Spanish women are beautiful, Inez?”

Inez inhaled deeply.

“No, no, no, Papa Zir Fran-zis. Some are ver’ ugly—like me. Ha, ha, ha . . .”

“Ha! Ha! Ha!” yelled Peter. “Ha! Ha! Ha!”

Peter rocked with laughter, Sir Francis shook with mirth. Inez flashed an impatient look at the clock. Then she smiled quickly.

“You still like ze whisk’?”

“Fillemup,” instructed Peter. “Fillemup! Ha! Ha! Ha!”

“I c-concur,” said Sir Francis. “Old fellerslikeus—old fellerslikeus—old fellerslikeus. . . .”

“Ha! Ha! Ha! Thinks he’s a merrygoround—thinks he’s a merrygoround. Ha! Ha! Ha! Merrygoround, merrymerry gogo round—Ha! Ha! HA! HA! HA!”

“Luck,” cooed Inez.

“Luck!” they roared.

More double whiskies went down.

“Luckaluckaluck,” clucked Sir Francis.

“Monkey doodle,” yelled Peter. “Blisserme, Francis, blisser me —’slikeoltimes—’slikeoltimes.”

Inez looked startled for a moment. Peter and Sir Francis seemed to be going to pieces somewhat.

“You two dear boys are out for ze night out—yes?”

Peter grabbed her hand and patted it.

“Blisserme—why not?”

“Fillemup,” said Sir Francis owlishly. “Nevergetnozzzer—Nevergetnozzzer . . .”

“Nebuchadnezzar?” murmured Inez.

“No, no m’dear. Nevergetnozzzerchance.”

“Ha! Ha! HA! We’ve both been b-b-blind, Francis. She’s marvlous—marvlous—MONKEY DOODLE!”

Inez poured steadily.

“Luck,” she purred.

“’Swunnerful—’swunnerful g-girl,” insisted Peter.

“Brish Conshooshun! Ha! Ha! HA! I’m still allristillallri. Brish Conshooshun.”

“One more whisk’—no?” suggested Inez. “Zen we step out, yes?”

Peter and Sir Francis peered at each other and nodded.

“Thasserstyle,” said Peter.

Inez patted his cheek and handed him a whisky neat.

“Dear Papa Pee-ter—such a head in ze morn.”

“Luck!” roared Peter.

“Luckaluckaluckaluck . . .”

“Stop, Papa Zir Fran-zis.”

“Luckaluckaluckalucka . . .”

Inez smoothed his white hair.

“We go down to ze car—yes?”

“Come on, F-Francis. We’re gonnasee Lunnon.”

“Luckaluckaluckalucka . . .” babbled Sir Francis.

Inez laughed.

“Isn’t he so fonny?”

“Ha! Ha! HA!” yelled Peter. “Sillyfool’s drunk.”

Inez eyed him coldly.

“Come on, Papa Pee-ter, Papa Zir Fran-zis. Ze one whisk’ before we go.”

Sir Francis evidently did not hear her. He had started for the door.

“Luckaluckalucka . . .” he was yodelling.

“Ha! Ha! HA!”

Inez looked at the clock and frowned as they went out. In the dimly lit corridor she said:

“Ecus’ me plis, Papa Pee-ter an’ Papa Zir Fran-zis.”

Peter patted her on the shoulder with one hand and steadied Sir Francis with the other.

“’Sallri,” he chuckled.

Inez wrinkled her nose at him, flew into the lift, sent it down, ran to Peter’s car, jumped in, and drove off.

“Monkey doodle,” she sneered. “Bah!”

CHAPTER XVII

JIMMY turned his head and glanced back. Two pin points of light were following the Shade's car.

"Your . . . friend?" she asked.

"Yes," said Jimmy shortly.

She gave him a quick look, but darkness defeated scrutiny. Presently she stopped the car.

"Get out," she whispered. "Rendezvous."

Jimmy got out and looked about him. They were in a lane between tall buildings. Very little but looming shadows could be seen, but the brine of the river was pungent to the nostrils.

"You know this locality?" he whispered.

"I was over every inch of it to-day," came back softly.

"You take no chances."

"Should I? This way."

To his astonishment a door opened as she touched it.

"Arranged," she whispered. "Don't flash a torch. I know the way. Give me your hand."

The gloved hand she gave him betrayed nothing, and the blackness, and the scarf she wore, preserved identity.

They went along a passage.

"There's a window along here that overlooks Grolman's barge. It's moored right under it."

"How did you get . . ."

"Secret."

"Huh! Sorry."

They came to a window. There had been only one turn in the passage, and he had counted his steps. The pressure of the gloved hand relaxed.

"Look through—and down," she whispered.

"I see it—the barge."

Part of the window was without glass.

"What do you know about the barge?" he asked.

"Nothing about the barge itself. I haven't been on it. I've been watching from here. I saw Grolman and the others from this window. They come and go in a row boat. Once I heard a woman speak, but they are cautious."

He stared down at the dim, black shape, his eyes coming up the shadows that were masts.

“From there—to the Wilhelmstrasse, eh?”

“Yes. And you’ve no idea what’s below in the barge, how it’s built, or any construction details?”

“No. That’s your job.”

He grinned in the darkness.

“I suppose I ought to do something,” he retorted.

“You’ll go aboard?” she asked anxiously.

“Yes. Will you wait?”

“Yes.”

“You are safe here?”

“I don’t know, but I’ll wait,” she replied. “I can’t afford to lose you.”

“I can’t let anything happen to you, my Shade,” he told her earnestly. “How you do it all I don’t know.”

“Secret.”

“You tantalizing little devil,” he hissed.

He knew she was laughing softly:

“I am certainly wondering about you,” she retorted.

“Better get going, Shadow. It’s late.”

She raised the window. It went up without a sound.

“Full marks,” he muttered. “Here goes.”

“I’ll wait,” she whispered.

But he did not move.

“Something’s wrong,” he hissed.

He sensed rather than saw her alert attitude.

“Wrong?”

“The ’phone call.”

“Why? Is the answer on that barge?”

They both looked down.

“Don’t you think things are just a little too easy?” he asked.

She did not reply all at once. Then:

“I thought of that, but your guess is as good as mine.”

He shrugged.

“Then watch yourself. We’ll chance it. If anything goes wrong—skip it to my friend’s car. He’s dynamite when he gets going.”

“Can you drop on to the barge?” she whispered anxiously.

“It’s a terrible risk.”

He knew it was, and furthermore he had no way of getting back. If he had to cut loose, and managed to survive, his only way of escape would be the river.

“Wait,” she hissed.

He felt her leave him. But in a minute she returned.

“I saw this to-day. . . .”

His hands touched rope. With a sigh of relief he knotted it round the stout frame of the window.

“It won’t pull out,” he whispered. “Now I have a chance. Thanks.”

Almost at once he was gone, swinging out through the window and down the rope. Her gloved hands felt it quiver for awhile, then become still. He was on the barge.

Jimmy controlled his breathing as his rubber-soled shoes touched the deck. He could see only blurred outlines, dark, close and shapeless. Near where he stood a thick mast went up. A feeling movement with his foot told him the deck was littered with the odds and ends of the sea, leaving very little free space. Carefully he hugged the guiding length of a boom as he made aft, pausing several times to listen. Once, twice, his hands streaked for his pocket only to fall away again. Coils of rope and crouching casks set him grinning savagely and soundlessly.

There was no light, no sound. In spite of his cool nerve he felt his flesh creep a little. The whispering voice of the woman on the telephone still hissed in his ears. Her words had been significant and imperative. Do not meet the Shade! Was it all a trap, cunningly set?

He shrugged. In this game of fearful risks, this play of wit matching wit, hazards must be taken, deadly odds faced. This silent, black barge could be a trap for him, and for the Shade, yet it had to be searched, the job had to be done.

Slowly he crept towards the steps leading down to the cabin. He made no sound; he heard no sound.

He was about to put a stealthy foot on the first step when he heard the voices. The sudden sound of them, itself, was a shock. Bending forward he listened. Someone in the cabin was talking. Stretching out a hand he touched

wood. He went down three steps. A door gave him pause. Cursing under his breath he put his ear to the latch to listen. A woman said:

“I tell you he is too clever. We have waited hours now. He will not come.”

A man replied harshly:

“We made that mistake once before. He came.”

The woman said:

“He’s not on the barge yet, any way. Fritz and Hermann are up there waiting for him. . . .”

Jimmy froze. So Fritz and Hermann were waiting for him! And he was in this well, pinned against a locked door! He span round, staring up. It was a trap! A shadow was moving. He had been seen and followed. Like a panther he moved, his arms flashing out, his hands tightening like steel bands round two shins above him. With a mighty heave, he pulled, bringing the man crashing to the deck. Leaping out of the well as the second shadow lunged towards him he struck with cold ferocity, his fist smashing against bone. Knowing he had dazed the fellow he struck again, snapping the other’s head back. It was now or never. With a flying tackle he brought the man down, twisted him, lifted him, and sent him spinning over the side into the black water. But the first shadow sent a jet of flame stabbing the darkness. Jimmy felt the bullet spit hot air as it passed. There was scarcely any report, and he knew the other’s automatic had a silencer on it. Tense as a steel spring he faced the moving shadow, but the gun did not flame again. He heard a blow, a groan, a splash and then someone whispered:

“All right, old man?”

“Guns!” he panted softly. “Guns . . .”

The tall shadow of the Major came to him.

“On the dot, old thing.”

Jimmy wanted to laugh. The imperturbable Guns was not even breathing quickly.

Together they listened. There was no sound, no hint the swift brawl had been heard. Jimmy turned.

“How the devil did you . . .” he hissed.

“The little lady came sprinting for me, told me you were for it, and was gone before I could say ‘absolutely.’ So I just barged in, so to speak.”

“Did she go back into the warehouse?”

“No. Got into her car and streaked away.”

“Listen! I’m going down into that cabin. Fritz and Hermann are over the side. If they come aboard—deal with them.”

“Certainly, old man.”

Jimmy sprang down the steps and knocked on the cabin door.

“*Wer da?*” came gutturally from the other side.

“*Fritz und Hermann,*” said Jimmy deeply.

“*Was wollen Sie von mir?*”

Jimmy turned to the Major.

“Wants to know what we want with him,” he whispered.

The woman’s voice said impatiently:

“Open the door; open the door! It may be important.”

Jimmy hissed at the Major:

“Watch those others—here he comes.”

The Major vanished. A bolt was drawn. Jimmy hurled himself at the open door, sent it thudding against the man behind it, span like a top as he sprang for the table, and just too late reached for the lamp as a shot smashed it.

“The Shadow!” a woman screamed.

But already Jimmy had leapt across the cabin. A bullet split the air, then another. Crouching in the darkness he waited soundless and still. As yet he had not seen the man, and of the woman he had only a vague impression. It was she who had shot at the lamp, but the man had shot to kill the Shadow. In cool, biting English he said:

“We have you, Grolman . . .”

He moved quickly again. Grolman said harshly in English:

“Ah! But we have you, you prowling dog.”

Again Grolman’s automatic flamed.

“You fool!” said the woman hysterically. “They can prove nothing—if you kill this man.”

“Silence!” snarled Grolman.

Jimmy was creeping towards him. Although he knew the woman to be armed he ignored her for the moment. It was Grolman he wanted, Grolman he would get. But the German had also crept away to another position, and Jimmy’s quick, reaching grasp caught only black air. Then he drew his own automatic.

The woman whispered:

“Grolman—don’t shoot! Do you hear? Don’t shoot! Do you hear?”

It was the whispering voice of the woman who had telephoned. So this trap had been planned by Grolman, Fritz and Hermann. And she had warned him, had not wanted him to be killed.

“Silence!” hissed Grolman again.

“Grolman, you fool . . .”

“Silence!” came frantically from the German.

Jimmy fired. Something clattered to the floor. Then a body thudded against the planks. Jimmy heard Grolman groaning. With a choked scream the woman tore open the door and flew up the steps.

“Stop her,” yelled Jimmy.

But a splash outside told him she had eluded Guns and had jumped for it. Flashing his torch he saw Grolman sprawling and clawing at a smashed knee.

“You . . . dog!” the German spat at him. “I wish I had killed you.”

“I’m inclined to believe you,” said Jimmy coldly. “There Guns?”

“Absolutely,” said the Major.

Jimmy moved forward and picked up Grolman’s automatic.

“Search him while I search the cabin.”

Grolman laughed mockingly.

“You are too chivalrous, Englishman,” he sneered. “What you seek has gone—with the woman.”

In the torchlight Jimmy studied the dark, hate distorted face of the German.

“So you’re Grolman,” he grunted. “Search him, Guns. He may have another automatic.”

Grolman had. But the Major’s lithe pounce was too quick for him, and as the gun was torn from his hand he sagged back pain-racked and beaten.

“Typical Hun,” observed the Major coolly. “These fellows have the sporting instincts of a cobra.”

“Get him to Milne as quickly as you can,” said Jimmy. “There’s a police launch coming.”

“And you?” asked the Major.

Jimmy grinned.

“See you at Pete’s—for breakfast,” he chuckled.

CHAPTER XVIII

BREAKFAST in the vast, gloomy dining room of the Park Lane house was anything but a jovial affair. Rain dribbled down the high windows, and the crepuscular light gave the food a greenish tinge. Elaine, beautiful and refreshing to look at, again sat opposite Jimmy. Next to her was the Major, in particularly fine fettle this morning. But Sir Francis, who sat next to Jimmy, and Peter, who was at the head of the table, were both stiff, white, restrained, washed-out, irritable, and inwardly furious with each other and with everybody else. That they were at the table at all was due to sheer will power, and the pointing, spectral finger of conscience.

As usual, Wilkins, trained in all the Colburn ways, watched all things from the background. The telephone, at Peter's blunt command, had been moved well away from the table. It rang as he valiantly attempted to sip coffee.

"See who it is, Wilkins," he snarled.

Wilkins lifted the receiver, listened, and then said:

"It is a lady, sir. She is asking for someone by the name of Papa Pee-ter."

Peter whirled in a fury, but the effort set his head spinning. He wilted visibly.

"My God!" he groaned. "Tell her I'm out—tell her I'm dead——"

The Major appraised him through the monocle.

"But you're not really dead, sir," he said helpfully.

Peter sighed. He ignored the Major.

"Tell her, Wilkins."

Wilkins did so and replaced the receiver. Jimmy winked at the Major whose grin would have warned any one less dazed than Peter and Sir Francis.

"Some bacon, Jimmy?" he asked brightly.

Jimmy inspected the dish.

"Thanks, I will, Guns."

"Haw, haw, haw! Same here, old chap. You know, if there's one thing I do like it's fat bacon—swimming in greasy fat you know."

Peter swallowed something. Sir Francis closed his eyes.

"Major Winterbottom," said Peter huskily. "Would you mind NOT talking about fat bacon?"

“Not at all, sir,” said the Major affably. “Is your head bumping about a bit this morning, as ’twere. Jolly old anvil chorus, and all that?”

“Would you mind not TALKING about these things?”

“Not at all, not at all.”

“Then mind your own damn business——” snarled Peter. Then he groaned: “Oh, good lord—Oh, good lord. . . .”

“Haw, haw, haw—reminds me of the time I was fishing . . .”

“Please, Major Winterbottom,” pleaded Sir Francis.

The telephone rang. Wilkins listened.

“A lady, sir.”

Peter looked at Sir Francis.

“What lady, Wilkins?” he asked.

“The same lady, sir. She is asking for someone called Papa Zir Fran-zis.”

“Oh, my God. . . .”

“Wilkins,” said Sir Francis with terrific dignity, “I’m positively not at home.”

Elaine looked from one to the other.

“What have you two been up to?”

Peter glanced at her and shuddered.

“Mind your own business!” he snapped.

The suspicion in Elaine’s eyes deepened.

“There’s something fishy . . .” she began.

“Haw, haw, haw! I was telling you. The fishiest thing that ever happened to me happened when I was fishing . . .”

“Not really?” sneered Elaine.

The Major beamed at her.

“Absolutely. We were using prawns for bait—things like large shrimps, you know, Mr Colburn——”

“Yes, yes, I know,” said Peter testily. “What do you think I am—an idiot?”

“Scarcely, sir. We were fishing—it was in the East, by the way. . . .”

“Mysterious things happen in the East.”

“Indubitably, Mrs Colburn. We were fishing. The others were having luck, but I hadn’t caught any bally fish. Haw, haw, haw! Incidentally, we were drinking rum. . . .”

“Oh . . .” groaned Peter.

“You like rum, sir?”

“NO!” came like a thunderclap. Then more softly: “Oh, good lord, good lord. Get on with it if you must.”

“Certainly, sir. Thinking my prawn, which was still alive, would like a stiffener before going down as a free meal, as ’twere, I dipped the blighter in the rum. By gad—he did wriggle—haw, haw, haw! Must have been lapping it up.”

“For heaven’s sake . . .” gasped Peter.

“Really . . .” panted Sir Francis.

Guns impaled a piece of bacon and allowed the fat to drip from it as he went on:

“I’m getting along, sir. Over went my line, down it went, and all at once it became taut. . . .”

“Yes, yes, YES! Oh . . .”

“I hauled in, you know . . .”

“And,” said Elaine with heavy sarcasm, “a fish had obligingly swallowed the prawn.”

The Major grinned.

“Not at all, Mrs Colburn. On the contrary, the prawn had a large fish by the throat and was making a great fight for it.”

Peter sat back and glared. Sir Francis’s eyes had a glazed look about them.

“By heaven! If you don’t stop talking about FISH, and prawns, and rum . . .”

“I understand, sir—you’ll be seasick.”

“Oh, my God—who let this fellow in?”

Jimmy stared at his parent.

“You and father Francis have been on a binge,” he accused.

“JAMES!”

Jimmy shook his head.

“You look like a couple of bilious frogs, and those significant ’phone calls. Is there a woman behind this moral collapse?”

Peter went limp. Sir Francis bowed his head. Neither spoke.

“So,” said Jimmy sternly, “there is a woman in it?”

“Well, indirectly,” admitted Peter sourly.

“Haw, haw, haw! Cherchez la femme, which is all the bally French I know, or need to know.”

“Don’t babble, sir,” snarled Peter.

“Who is she, sir?” demanded Jimmy. “And how far has this secret sin gone?”

Peter gasped.

“Secret sin? How dare you, James!”

A sudden commotion beyond the dining room attracted them. A sharp voice said angrily:

“But I will see Papa Pee-ter, an’ Papa Zir Fran-zis. . . .”

Inez came in like a whirlwind. She paused just beside the door, her eyes flashing as she surveyed the group at the table.

“I am in!” she said defiantly.

“Cherchez la femme,” murmured the Major. “She is in.”

Elaine’s poise was superb.

“You are just in time for some coffee, Miss de Fuentes,” she said suavely. “Wilkins, pour coffee for Miss de Fuentes.”

Peter looked guiltily at Sir Francis. Sir Francis kept his head down. The Major chattered inanely:

“Inez, old girl, have you met Mr Colburn senior? And Sir Francis Martindale?”

Inez came forward with the measured, chalk-line walk of the trained mannequin.

“Of course I ’ave,” she said deeply. “Ze Guns he forget. Zank you, I will ’ave coffee. ’Ow ees Papa Pee-ter zis morn, an’ Papa Zir Fran-zis?”

Peter braced himself.

“Miss de Fuentes. . . .” he began heavily.

Inez’s brows shot up.

“No, no! Las’ night it was ‘Inez.’ Las’ night it was ‘monkey doodle,’ and ‘luckaluckaluckalucka’!”

Peter’s head sank.

“Haw, haw, haw! Some binge, by gad.”

Inez smiled at them understandingly.

“Ah! Zey were two naughty little boys las’ night. . . .”

Jimmy grinned.

“Two naughty little boys. . . .” he echoed.

Peter's head came up.

"You keep out of this, James!" he snapped. "Pass the damn butter."

The Major beckoned to Inez.

"Here, next to me, old girl," he said, patting a chair.

She seated herself beside him and stripped off her gauntlets. The Major adjusted his monocle, turned and surveyed her.

"You look marvellous," he said as though thoroughly impressed. "For a wanton you wear well, you know. Absolutely."

Peter dropped the butter. Wilkins juggled with the coffee pot. Elaine sat very still. Jimmy ladled out a large spoonful of marmalade. Sir Francis opened his eyes very wide, and Inez glared at the unsmiling Guns.

"Marmalade, Guns?" asked Jimmy.

"Thanks, old man. How about Mr Colburn?"

"NO!"

"Ah! I forgot. Sir Francis?"

"N-no."

"Naturally not. Inez, have you come to blackmail these two cringing . . ."

"I'm NOT cringing!" roared Peter. "How DARE you, sir!"

"I am rebuked again," said the Major gravely. "Perhaps Inez will tell us why she is here?"

Peter half rose.

"Does that concern you, sir?" he snarled. "Will you hold your TONGUE?"

"NO!" yelled Guns at the top of his voice.

Sir Francis jumped. Jimmy splashed his coffee. Elaine winced. Inez opened her mouth and then closed it. So startled was Peter that he slid down into his chair without comment.

"Why have you come here, Miss de Fuente?" asked Elaine.

Inez arched her pencilled brows as she took the coffee from Wilkins.

"Surely Papa Pee-ter an' Papa Zir Fran-zis zey tell you? 'Ave zey forgot?"

Peter glanced at Sir Francis who would not look at him.

"Forgot what?" asked Peter slowly.

Inez waved a tiny spoon at him.

"Zis ees ze day, Papa Pee-ter. . . ."

Jimmy grinned.

"This is the day, sir . . ." he murmured.

"Haw, haw, haw! This is the day, Mr Colburn," said the Major.

Peter clenched a fist. His head felt fit to burst; there were multi-coloured rockets exploding before his eyes; and in his ears was the roaring of many vast waterfalls.

"What day?" he panted. "What day?"

Inez pouted.

"Ah! Zey 'ave forgot. Las' night zey promise to lead ze procesh of ze League of No More Babies."

Peter almost leapt out of his chair.

"I did nothing of the kind," he roared. "Francis—wake up! Miss de Fuentes—FRANCIS! Wake UP!"

Sir Francis blinked.

"I heard you, Peter. I don't remember what you said."

Peter began to wave his arms.

"Miss de Fuentes, I did NOT!"

Inez smiled slowly at him, very slowly.

"Oh," she murmured. "Las' night it was 'Inez'."

Jimmy almost choked.

"You forget, sir. Last night it was 'Inez'."

"Haw, haw, haw! Don't you recollect, sir? Last night it was 'Inez'."

Elaine looked at her father.

"Was it 'Inez' with you also?" she demanded.

Sir Francis looked thoroughly miserable.

"Elaine, dear, the breakfast table is not the place for post mortems."

Peter sat down. He looked like a man who had been stabbed in the back.

"My God!" he breathed. "What a woman—what a . . ."

Jimmy helped himself to more marmalade.

"If you've given your word, sir, you're for it," he said judicially.

Peter began to look hunted.

"James, you keep out of this."

Inez came round to Jimmy, sat on the arm of his chair, draped a shapely arm round his shoulder, and smiled sweetly at Elaine.

"Jim-mee, you are misunnerstood, poor boy."

Elaine's lips thinned.

“By whom?” she asked scornfully.

Inez smiled down at him.

“By ever’body. I tol’ Papa Pee-ter an’ Papa Zir Fran-zis las’ night Jim-mee ees ’onerable man.”

Jimmy turned and stared up at her. The Major paused in the act of stirring his coffee. Elaine shrugged and selected toast. Inez went on:

“I tol’ zem I am ’onerable woman.”

The monocle dropped from the Major’s eye.

“Haw, haw, haw!”

Inez jumped to her feet.

“Oh, zat Guns!” she said furiously. “Jim-mee, you mus’ ’elp me.”

Jimmy stole a glance at Elaine.

“Guns and I are right with you, Inez.”

“Absolutely,” said the Major.

Inez went on:

“I tol’ ze reporters to come ’ere—also ze ladies. Zey were all delight . . .”

Peter put his hands to his head.

“What’s that?” he moaned.

“Ze ladies of ze committee. I tol’ zem to come early. Zey will be ’ere any time now.”

Peter glared at Sir Francis.

“Now see what you’ve done, Francis,” he said bitterly.

Sir Francis braced himself.

“I?” he retorted crossly. “This is the result of leaving everything to you—and all my life I’ve been in trouble because of it.”

“Now Francis . . .”

Elaine said:

“Don’t quarrel. Miss de Fuentes will entertain you all. I must ask you to excuse me. So many honourable people all together is just a little overpowering.”

Jimmy smiled at her.

“You are going somewhere?” he asked gently.

“I have an appointment.”

Jimmy watched her closely.

“The heel-clicking Mr Karl Werner?” he murmured.

Inez's eyes narrowed, but she did not speak.

"With Mr Werner," said Elaine coolly. "We are to go into the matter of refugees."

"Where?" asked Jimmy.

Elaine flushed slightly.

"At his rooms, if it matters to you."

"Haw, haw, haw!" guffawed the Major. "Have you got a pain, or something, Inez, old girl?"

Inez was breathing quickly. Her eyes were glittering and hard as she stared at Elaine.

"No," she said harshly. "But when I say I am 'onorable woman everybody sniff. Mrs Colburn ees ver' silly to go to zat Werner. He ees bad man."

Jimmy, the Major and Elaine stared at her.

"How do you know that?" asked Elaine calmly.

"Never mind," said Inez quickly. "I know plenty peeble."

"You know Werner?" asked Jimmy.

She shook her head.

"No, no! I 'ave never spoke to 'im. But ozzier women tell me. Mr Werner get zem up in zat place of ees an' lock ze door, so zey say."

Elaine stood up. Her manner was cold and contemptuous.

"I am not concerned with what other women say about Mr Werner. I have found him all that a man should be. He is a gentleman."

"Bah!" hissed Inez. "He ees . . ."

"What?" asked Jimmy softly.

Inez shrugged.

"What do it matter, any way. I don't care where she go."

Jimmy looked at Elaine.

"You are being foolish, Elaine."

Elaine stared back at him, and then at Inez.

"Foolish?" she murmured. "You won't mind if I laugh, will you?"

With that she walked from the room. Peter groaned. Sir Francis slumped in his chair. Elaine's voice came back to them.

"I think," it said, "your committee is arriving. You have my sympathy."

Peter closed his eyes.

"Francis," he croaked, "we're sunk."

CHAPTER XIX

WILKINS, trained for every emergency the mind of men can foresee, failed to stem the invasion. What had happened was simple. A man-servant had opened the door, only to be brushed aside by the eager ladies and grinning reporters. Not even Hitler's gentle Gestapo could have stopped them. In they swarmed, to be met by Inez at the door of the dining room. Inez was again her smiling, charming, impetuous self. Proudly she led the committee of the No More Babies League into the Presence.

"Follow me, ladies. There he ees—zere ees ze great man 'imself—zere."

Peter stood up, but after an all-embracing stare sank down again.

"Francis," he said hoarsely, "I repeat—we're sunk!"

"I concur."

The volatile Inez was chattering happily:

"Do not be 'fraid of 'im, my dears. Zat ees Pee-ter Colburn—zat ees Zir Fran-zis Martindale—zat ees Jim-mee Colburn—an' zat," somewhat contemptuously, "ees ze Guns."

Jimmy whispered to the Major:

"I have to go. Save Pete and Sir Francis from the clutches, will you?"

The Major grinned.

"Absolutely. Toddle along, old man."

Inez protested volubly.

"No, no, Jim-mee—you mus' not go . . ."

Jimmy bowed to the ladies.

"My father will . . ."

"JAMES!"

Jimmy grinned.

"That's my father. He is deeply interested ladies. Good morning."

Click! went the cameras—flash! went the flares. Peter began to sidle crab-wise towards the door. Inez pounced on him.

"No, no, no! Papa Pee-ter! Ze ladies 'ave come to see—you!"

Peter sat down. Sir Francis had not moved. The Major doubted if he could.

"Ladies," growled Peter. "There has been some mistake. . . ."

"Haw, haw, haw!" said the Major. "That reminds me of a sea-faring friend of mine. . . ."

“Oh, zat Guns!”

“Major Winterbottom . . .”

“Don’t stop me, sir. After an absence of three years from home he came back to find another addition to his family, as ’twere. On raising his eyebrows, so to speak, his wife told him it had merely blown in. Haw, haw, haw! It’s an ill wind, you know . . .”

Inez turned to the ladies.

“Ze Guns,” said she, tapping her forehead, “ees not all ’ere.”

The ladies stared coldly at the Major, at each other, and remained silent. Inez went on:

“Ladies of ze committee. Papa Pee-ter—I mean Mr Pee-ter Colburn will now spik.”

Peter shuddered. A battery of eyes and cameras stared at him. He stared back. Something about these women chilled him. They seemed to look right through him.

“So *that’s* a multi-millionaire!” said the fat lady.

“Ladies . . .” began Peter.

“He looks just like our Alf,” said the thin woman.

“Ladies,” snarled Peter.

Inez smiled at him.

“Now, now, Papa Pee-ter. Las’ night . . .”

Peter sighed.

“Francis, you fool—help me out,” he hissed.

Sir Francis ignored him.

“Ladies,” growled Peter, “I understand you have been told that Sir Francis and I are patrons of this league. Well, you can take it from me . . .”

“Tact, Peter, tact,” whispered Sir Francis.

Inez was watching Peter with narrowed eyes.

“Papa Pee-ter,” she said ominously.

Peter sighed.

“Yes, yes, YES! I was only . . .”

“Haw, haw, haw . . .”

“Major Winterbottom . . .”

“Carry on, sir.”

“Ladies, this is a delicate situation. . . .”

“Haw, haw, HAW!”

Peter turned on him.

“Major WINTERBOTTOM!”

“Absolutely, sir. Your words reminded me of another delicate situation, as ’twere . . .”

“Major—Winterbottom!” snarled Peter. “I have certain proposals to make.”

“Dash it all, that’s uncanny, sir. . . .”

“What’s uncanny?” roared Peter.

The Major polished his monocle and adjusted it.

“Speaking of proposals—reminds me of a girl friend of mine. Haw, haw, haw! She went punting one day with a fellow, and he proposed to her. Haw, haw, haw! She didn’t mind the punting, but the proposal left her cold, so to speak. When the fellow asked why she was so silent she told him her father had proposed to her mother when *they* were punting, and he, silly ass, was drowned on the way home—haw, haw, haw!”

The ladies stared at him with eyes of stone.

“Major Winterbottom,” gasped Peter. “Will you be quiet, sir?”

“Certainly, sir.”

Inez eyed him furiously.

“Oh, zat Guns. . . .”

“Ladies,” snapped Peter. “I’m going to say straight out . . .”

“Papa Pee-ter,” murmured Inez.

“. . . to say straight out,” gulped Peter, “that such a matter as the No More Babies League will need careful consideration.”

“Absolutely,” said the Major.

“The details will be . . .”

“Haw, haw, haw—confidential!”

“Confidential!—no, NO! I didn’t mean that. Confound that ass!”

“Control, Peter, control,” murmured Sir Francis.

“Curse me,” panted Peter. “Where was I? Where WAS I?”

“Peter—Peter . . .”

“Leave everything to me, Francis. If that idiot over there will stop interrupting me. . . .”

“Over where, sir?” asked the Major.

Peter began to wave his arms to the astonishment of the ladies and the delight of the Press.

“I was trying to make it clear that such unique resolutions, such a delicate—no, no! Such a personal and domestic . . .”

“By gad, sir . . .”

“There he is again,” wailed Peter.

“I want to help you, sir. Speaking of personal and domestic faux pas . . .”

“I won’t listen to you, Major Winterbottom. . . .”

The Major stiffened.

“Then I shall tell the ladies, sir. Ladies. Delicate situations differ. Do they not? Ah, you agree. I am reminded of a friend of mine. Elderly bloke, tons of money. Well, he and his wife decided to practise birth control—am I too direct? It was purely for taxation purposes, you know. His wife was young. Coming home unexpectedly one night from his club he found her sitting on the knee of an energetic young fellow. There was a delicate situation, by gad. Absolutely. Dramatically, my friend, the elderly bloke, you know, pointed to the young man, the energetic fellow, you know, and said: ‘So you’re the person who has been at my cherry brandy!’ Haw, haw, haw! Tact, you know. Utterly, utterly, utterly!”

Peter sat down. Everything was a blur for the moment. Sir Francis staggered to his feet:

“Ladies,” he said courteously. “Mr Colburn and I are delighted to meet you. We regret you have been, we regret that you have been . . .”

“Don’t wander, Francis,” snarled Peter.

Sir Francis got a grip on himself.

“I suggest this meeting be postponed so that we may consider, so that we may consider . . .”

“Don’t babble, Francis—don’t BABBLE!” said Peter hoarsely.

Sir Francis went on:

“We will let you know—ah, we will let you know—ah, our future plans.”

“A great speech, Sir Francis,” said the Major.

Inez forced a smile.

“Si. We ’ave done good work zis morn.”

“Just a minute,” snapped the fat lady. “Is this all that’s goin’ to ’appen? We ain’t done nothin’, we ain’t said nothin’, and I didn’t come ’ere to waste me time. . . .”

“Me neither,” said the thin woman angrily.

“Me neither,” said the angular one ominously.

The Major stood up.

“Haw, haw, haw! Ladies, the morning has just begun for you. . . .”

They stared at him.

“Mr Peter Colburn, in his zeal for the league, has arranged for an audience at the palace. . . .”

“What’s that?” choked Peter.

The Major beamed.

“Now, now, Mr Colburn, I know you said not to divulge this secret, but . . .”

“Major WINTERBOTTOM!” howled Peter. “What madness . . .”

“Let him speak,” said the fat lady. “What’s that about the palis?”

The ladies listened with all their ears. So did the reporters.

The Major adjusted his monocle.

“Ladies, Mr Peter Colburn is modesty itself. He would not tell you you are going from here to the palace. . . .”

“My God, my God,” moaned Peter.

The Major went on:

“Haw, haw, haw! This is a national matter. I think I’ll trickle along myself. If you will be so good as to wait in the street. . . .”

“The palis!” hissed the fat lady.

“The palis!” said the thin woman triumphantly.

“The palis!” panted the angular one.

Inez, silent but furious, was pushed aside. In a body the excited ladies rushed for the door. After them rushed the reporters eager for the scoop of the year. The Major turned cheerfully to Peter when the room was empty.

“You fool—you utter, crazy fool!” rasped Peter. “Sending these fanatics to Buckingham Palace. . . .”

“Haw, haw, haw! Leave the staff work to me, sir.”

“But,” moaned Peter. “Buckingham Palace!”

“Haw, haw, haw! Not at all, sir.”

Peter stared.

“Curse me—you SAID the palace.”

“Absolutely,” said the Major cheerfully. “The Crystal Palace. I’ll tell the taxi-drivers—and send the bill in to you.”

Taking Inez by the arm he drew her gently but firmly with him.

“I think,” said Sir Francis slowly, “we owe the Major something.”

Peter was still fighting for his breath:

“Cherry brandy . . . prawns . . . proposals . . . punts . . . palaces. I’ll go MAD!”

“Haw, haw, haw!” came from the doorway. “See you in Switzerland, sir—right on the bally Matterhorn. And remember the slogan, sir—NO MORE BABIES! Haw, haw, haw!”

Inez became temperamental all at once. Her restraint vanished, her dark eyes blazed with hate.

“No! I will not go wiz ze Guns! I ’ate ze Guns. . . .”

The Major put a firm hand on her arm.

“Inez, old girl,” he said pleasantly, “you’re for it.”

She twisted away from him and stood crouched and wary.

“What do you mean?” she hissed.

Peter and Sir Francis stared at them. The Major took slow steps towards her.

“I mean,” he said curtly, “that Colonel Milne, of the War Office, had expressed a desire to talk with you— —”

Inez went white.

“I do not know zat man,” she panted. “An’ zat man will never know me.”

The Major went on coldly:

“On Colonel Milne’s desk are several imitation pearls. They were found in the cabin of a barge. Last night you wore a black velvet dress with a collar of imitation pearls. Last night . . .”

Inez turned like a flash and sped for the door. The Major watched her go, a slow smile twisting his lips.

“What the devil is all this, Major Winterbottom?” roared Peter.

The Major surveyed him through the monocle.

“Will you be quiet, sir?” he snapped.

Then he walked out. Peter bounced to his feet, swayed, tottered, sagged, and sank. The Major was gone.

“Francis,” groaned Peter, “I’m losing my punch.”

Sir Francis blinked at him.

“Thank God for that,” he said fervently.

CHAPTER XX

ELAINE stopped her roadster outside Mr Karl Werner's rooms. The rain was heavier, blowing gustily in a wind that kept heads down and collars up. She shivered slightly as she surveyed the street and the house. Both were aloof and unfriendly. She sat for a few minutes deep in thought, then stretching out her hand took a small automatic from the flap in the car door and placed it in an inside pocket of the close fitting jacket she wore under her rain-proof.

"He locks the door, I understand," she muttered.

Leaving the car she ran across the streaming pavement and up the stone steps. She knocked, and almost at once the door opened and Mr Karl Werner himself held out both hands in welcome.

"So—" he said heartily. "You did come — —"

Elaine laughed lightly as she stepped into a gloomy hall.

"I keep my promises," she informed him.

He smiled at her.

"But of course," he said deeply. "This way. Your husband doesn't know you are here, of course?"

Elaine shrugged.

"Husbands should not know—everything," she retorted.

He chuckled.

"*Nein!* Come now. We go up the stairs. My studio is right at the top."

"Oh," murmured Elaine. "At the top?"

"Three flights," said Mr Werner apologetically. "But then I didn't design this house. Please go first — —"

"As you wish."

Mr Werner's prominent blue eyes dwelt critically and appreciatively on sheer silk stockings, slender waist, and Titian hair peeping from under a scarlet beret. He smiled as he mounted the stairs.

"Do you . . . paint in your studio?" Elaine asked.

"Oh, yes . . . I paint," he replied.

"That is interesting," she said over her shoulder.

"Ach! Not really, you know. I should not have said it like that. I daub."

"That certainly sounds different."

"*Ja!* But I am an artist at least in my appreciation of beauty. *Ja!*"

“Much higher?” panted Elaine.

He stepped beside her.

“*Nein!* Here we are. It is splendid of you to come.”

She nodded.

“I’m beginning to think it is,” she agreed.

“In here, my dear lady. . . .”

He opened a door and she went in. Mr Werner closed the door and very quietly locked it. Elaine seemed not to notice the action, she was looking up at the glass that gave light to this large room. The rain was splashing on the glass. She allowed her eyes to take in the details of the room. A table was set for morning tea. Near by was an easel supporting paint-stained overalls and a charcoal sketch of a nude woman. In a corner, behind cretonne curtains was a couch. Near the street windows a kettle steamed on a gas-ring. Several carved chests rested on the floor, and here and there were cheap and gaudy rugs. It was a large room, cold, and with somehow an atmosphere of unpleasant suggestion. Nowhere was any evidence of the valuable collection of pictorial records Mr Werner talked so much about.

The touch of his fingers on her shoulder brought her to herself.

“Your rain-proof? May I take it?” he asked.

She nodded, and slipped it off, taking off her beret at the same time. Mr Werner placed them on a chair.

“Not very much in the way of amenities,” he said, “but perhaps enough.”

“And your collection of photographs?” she asked.

He laughed.

“Of them—presently, my dear Mrs Colburn. Some tea first?”

She nodded.

“Thank you.”

He smiled at her.

“Ach, forgive me for saying it, but you are very lovely. But come along. Perhaps you will pour the tea? I made it when I saw your car coming.”

Elaine laughed.

“Then you were watching for me?”

Mr Werner placed a chair for her.

“Who wouldn’t watch for the most beautiful woman in London?”

Elaine smiled deprecatingly.

“Really, Mr Werner . . .”

He nodded.

"I know it would be trite—if it were not the truth," he said deeply.

His fingers lightly brushed her hair. Just a touch as he lingered beside her.

"Let us concentrate on the tea. Shall we?" she murmured.

He laughed, and they sat down.

"I suppose," he said, "so many men have said that—it sounds banal. *Ja?*"

"So many men have said it," she acknowledged. "And it does sound banal. Sugar?"

"Please. Two lumps. What are you looking at so intently?"

"Your hand. The peculiar scar."

He raised the hand.

"A duel. He left his mark."

"And you?" she murmured.

Mr Werner smiled.

"I killed him," he said pleasantly.

Elaine looked away from him.

"Oh!" she said involuntarily.

He watched her closely.

"You . . . are horrified?"

"A little. And startled, I think," she replied. "We don't have the duel in England any more."

He nodded.

"It is also illegal now in Germany, but in certain quarters we wink at that. But your men? Aren't they in danger of becoming soft?"

Her eyes came back to his.

"Perhaps you are right," she said thoughtfully.

He looked at her for a long moment.

"Your husband? Has he ever fought a duel?"

Elaine threw back her head and laughed. In spite of herself the idea of the indolent James fighting a duel, or even fighting at all, was highly amusing.

"Don't be absurd, Mr Werner. My husband is not a fighting man—it seems."

His eyes were cold and calculating as he watched her. Undoubtedly she was the most superb creature he had ever persuaded to come to these rooms. He smiled, well pleased with himself.

“If I may say so, he is not a very appreciative man.”

Elaine seemed pleased at the suggestion.

“You mean—he neglects me?”

“*Ja!* I could not help saying it—I know how you feel. But were you mine, I would take a scar on every inch of my body to keep you.”

She looked away from him.

“I like your tea. Isn’t it unusual for a German to know how to make a really good cup of tea?”

“I think that is so,” he admitted. “But I have travelled much. I have been in Australia, they drink much tea there.”

“Ah! Would you say the Australian men are soft?” she murmured.

He shrugged.

“*Nein! Ach, Gott*—I remember them. But they will not fight for England this time.”

“I will pour you another cup. You think the Australians, the Canadians, the New Zealanders, the Indians, the South Africans—will not fight for England?”

He sneered.

“*Nein.* Your Empire is a money empire—it is not a living thing of blood.”

“Didn’t someone in Germany think and say that in the early days of the last war?”

He moved uncomfortably.

“*Ach*—we must not talk war. My poor Germany herself is not happy. And but for England—I might be unhappy too. It all came of this scar. But I repeat, for you I would . . .”

She interrupted him.

“Judging by the way you keep looking at me—I wonder you are not scars all over.”

He laughed heartily.

“Ach! I have never been a woman’s man. *Nein! Gar nicht!* But I do not suggest I have not loved. Most women I hold in contempt. I despise them.”

“Indeed?” said Elaine coolly.

“Ja! But every once in a long while a woman comes into my life. Ah! That one is different. She has to be else would I not notice her. Such a one, if you will forgive me, is you.”

Elaine looked startled. She covered her confusion by retorting:

“I suppose any woman would forgive you for saying that to her, Mr Werner.”

“Let it be just—Karl,” he pleaded.

She shook her head.

“Thank you, but . . . later . . . perhaps.”

He sat back regarding her through half-closed eyes.

“Later? Ach! That is a tragic word. That hesitation, that withholding, and a world is lost.”

“You mean—a lady?” murmured Elaine.

He nodded.

“Ja! But tell me about yourself while you sip your tea?”

Elaine took a small notebook from her bag.

“I have here a list of newcomers . . .”

Mr Werner’s expression became sad.

“My poor countrymen. Where did you get those names?”

“Where I get them all—from Colonel Milne of the War Office. You have met Milne?”

Mr Werner nodded.

“He is kind, but then so are you, dear lady. He gives you the names, and you take these unfortunates, myself with them, to your lovely heart. I am honoured you should consult me concerning them.”

She seemed not to be observing him.

“I have much to thank you for . . .”

“Karl.”

She shook her head provocatively.

“Later, perhaps. You know Germany very well, don’t you?”

He nodded.

“I am a student of languages. I resented the stupid regime now crushing Germany. I spoke bluntly. I was punished for my indiscretion. My interest, which was that of an impartial student, turned to hate. I have not forgiven . . .”

Elaine looked at him sympathetically.

"You have been very helpful to me. Do you know any of these people? Hauptmann, Hausfeld, Dietz, Scholtz, Gieselmann, Wesche, Schubach, Schroeder. . . ."

She paused.

"They are, of course, all familiar names," he told her. "But I would have to see the men. You will help them?"

"Of course."

Mr Werner caught her hand and pressed it to his lips.

"I am prostrate before you. You are so kind, so adorable. Please tell me—are you going to divorce your husband?"

The swift directness of the unexpected question sent a flush of colour to her cheeks. She replied haltingly.

"I—I have considered it."

He released her hand.

"A thousand apologies," he said contritely. "But you—for me you are the woman I meet once in the years. I give you my gratitude, my thanks, my life — —"

Elaine's hands were trembling. Her lovely eyes were downcast in demure modesty.

"I—I still think your tea is delicious," she said a little breathlessly.

He sighed.

"Ach! It is so cruel of you to throw tea at me. But you are right, the tea is delicious. I noticed you observing my sketch."

Elaine took care not to look at it.

"I remember—you daubed. But time is flying, Mr Werner. . . ."

"Karl—please," he said imploringly.

She shook her head.

"I am of the cold English, you know," she told him.

He sat back and stared at her.

"You? *Nein!* Such eyes, such lips, such a body. *Nein!* You are not cold. Some day some man will strike the spark that will set ablaze the things that are you. *Gott!* If I could be that man. . . ."

She asked coolly:

"Did you ask me here to see your pictures—or to make love to me?"

He looked eagerly at her.

"Why should I deny it? The pictures you may see, but I wanted you. I am—how do you say it?"

"Crazy about me?" she prompted.

His reply came explosively as he stood up.

"Ja! Elaine . . ."

She rose to her feet.

"Please, Mr Werner. I am enjoying my tea so much. . . ."

"You are not angry with me?" he panted.

She smiled.

"Why should I be? But that does not mean I shall permit you to progress . . . so rapidly."

"You have a neat way of expressing yourself," he said with a sigh. "But you give me hope. I would do anything for you."

"Anything?" she murmured.

"Ja! Name it."

Elaine looked down.

"If I—if I wanted to leave England, Karl . . ."

His eyes lit up fiercely. She was responding. Soon she would surrender.

"Leave England?" he said huskily. "You mean—your husband?"

She hesitated.

"Please do not ask me the reason."

"No, no, no! I will not. Where would you go?"

"Where can I go—where now is happiness for me?"

He shook his head slowly.

"Ah! You are hurt. You are bruised. Your heart is torn. I know. I will tell you something, but you must not tell . . ."

"Karl . . ." she said softly.

Mr Werner was losing control. The beauty of this woman beside him, the imminence of possession, the savage lust of mastery were all seething in his brain.

"To-night," he said thickly, "I go to Germany. You will come with me."

She was astonished.

"But Karl—you dare not go back to Germany."

He laughed harshly.

"So many think. You and I will go there. Ach! What happiness, what heaven!"

Elaine had opened her bag again.

"Then this letter," she said bitterly. "It is to my husband. I meant to post it . . . when I was sure."

"You have left him?"

"An idle question now, Karl. But he must get it to-day. Didn't I see a pillar box . . ."

"Give me that letter, Elaine—I will run down and post it."

She nodded.

"I am glad. But . . . hurry, Karl."

The smile she gave him set him breathing quickly.

"*Ja!*" he grunted. "I will hurry."

He took the letter and walked to the door. He laughed at he unlocked it.

"A precaution . . . against stupid husbands," he said with a chuckle.

She waved a hand to him.

"I'll have some more tea," she said.

"And when I return?" he asked from the doorway.

She regarded him steadily.

"You shall see — —" she murmured.

Leaving the door he came back to her. Warned by the glitter in his eyes she stood up. Before she could move his arms were around her.

"Karl — —" she panted. "The letter first."

But Mr Werner was beyond reason. The warmth of her, the pressure of her lissom body against him, the parted lips, the lovely eyes, were all lashing him to a frenzy of desire.

"Please . . ." she said chokingly.

A bitter voice from the door mimicked her and mocked him.

"Plis . . ." it said stingingly.

Mr Werner released Elaine as if she had scalded him. Both whirled to see Inez standing just inside the door.

"You forgot to lock the door a second time," she said icily. "I see it now, my Karl. I am to be fooled so easily, eh? I come with all speed to warn you — fool that I am."

"You know each other?" panted Elaine.

Inez's dark eyes were black slits of hate.

"*Ja!* I know Karl, and Karl knows me. You see, Mrs Colburn, Karl Werner is my husband."

Mr Werner was white with anger. The most desirable woman he had ever snared was snatched from him in a moment. He did not speak.

Elaine shrugged as though amused by the situation.

“I seem to remember that I also have a husband, Miss de Fuentes.”

“Bah! That fool!” sneered Inez. “But he is no greater fool than I have been. I will talk to you alone, my Karl.”

Mr Werner clicked his heels and bowed stiffly. Still he did not speak. Elaine walked to the door.

“Once in a long while a woman comes into his life,” she said with a smile. “Such a woman am I, I am told. *Auf wiedersehen*, Karl. I have seen all the pictures . . . I need to see. Somehow, I don’t think you will go to Germany to-night.”

Coldly she stared at them both, then turned and walked from the room.

CHAPTER XXI

MR WERNER quietly shut the door and locked it. Then he turned.

"You . . . fool!" he snarled.

Inez, now the first gust of passionate fury had passed, stood white-faced and trembling, but still angry and defiant. She did not move as he came to her.

"You are indiscreet, my dear Freda," he continued.

Her eyes blazed at him.

"And what have you been—with that woman?" she flung back.

"Not what you have been with Colburn," he sneered.

Her expression was contemptuous.

"That is a lie, Karl—and you know it," she shrilled at him. "And you would not like me to tell the Colburn woman you are not Karl Werner but . . ."

His hand came up and struck her hard across the cheek. With a choked cry she stumbled back, a quivering hand going up to touch the stinging flesh, her dark eyes wide with a new hatred and bitter resentment. Mr Werner, as though the blow had pleased him, said pleasantly:

"Fritz, Hermann and I, as you know, go to Germany to-night. You go with us. My dear Freda, your usefulness has ended. You know what that means—in Germany."

At that she came swiftly forward, her expression completely altered.

"Karl—no! No, Karl—you would not do that to me?"

He laughed.

"I repeat, you go to Germany to-night."

Her voice rose almost to a shriek.

"No! Karl! Do not send me back there."

He smiled at her.

"You are afraid, my dear Freda?" he sneered.

Frantically she clawed at him, but he struck her hands from him.

"Karl," she whispered, "they would kill me."

He shrugged.

"You are foolish and hysterical," he said suavely. "But you must remain in Germany. You are a menace to me here, and what is more, a menace to Germany—"

Inez retreated a few paces.

"I am a menace?" she asked harshly. "And to Germany? When it is I who know where the menace to you and to Germany lies?"

His gaze sharpened.

"What do you mean?"

"I know who hurled Fritz and Hermann into the river last night. I know who shot Grolman. And they know I know. I came to warn you. I know who the man is, where he is to be found, and where he can be trapped and destroyed. If you do not listen to me he will destroy you."

Mr Werner watched her closely.

"Why have you not told me this before?" he demanded.

"Until this morning I was not sure."

"It is the Shadow?"

"*Ja!* The Shadow."

Mr Werner was leaning forward slightly.

"Who is he?"

Inez eyed him closely.

"If I tell—will you send me back to Germany?" she panted.

He smiled at her.

"Ach! I did not mean that, Freda," he said smoothly. "I was annoyed because you were indiscreet. Who is the Shadow?"

"You . . . promise?"

"*Ja!*" he said contemptuously.

Her voice seemed to catch in her throat, as she said:

"The Shadow is—Jimmy Colburn."

Had she hit him between the eyes he could not have been more astonished. He stood blinking as if not comprehending what she had said. Then, slowly:

"The Shadow is that fool Colburn?"

She nodded quickly.

"*Ja!*"

Mr Werner relaxed, took a turn or two, and then paused.

"*Gott im Himmel!* Colburn—the Shadow!"

"John James Colburn, the idiot, the fool, the idler, the coward—and the Shadow," she said steadily.

"Does his wife know this?" he asked sharply.

“No. She is ashamed of him.”

“If you can prove he is the Shadow. . . .”

Inez shrugged.

“I can prove it. Watching the War Office recently I saw him and Milne walking together. I thought it strange. Such opposites. I wondered. As they passed by my car I crouched down below the window. I heard Milne call him ‘Colonel.’ They went on. He left Milne and I followed his car. He left it in Soho. I left mine there. I watched him go into a lane, bend down, lift an iron grille, disappear. I waited. Hours later the grille lifted again. The Shadow flitted along the lane and vanished.”

“Where does he hide in Soho?”

“Rotten Apple Lane. Fifty-six. Under a cafe. I found the other entrance. I took a chance, went down into the dug-out, saw the telephone. On the base of it was written in pencil the secret number. That is how I was able to ’phone. Last night I warned him to keep away from the barge. But he has no fear. I also warned Peter Colburn to stay in his house in Park Lane. I feared he would come to his son’s rooms and delay me. That’s just what the old fool did. I had to get them drunk quickly, and then race for the barge. Colburn works with a woman called the Shade. Who she is I don’t know.”

Mr Werner swore deeply. Then he laughed.

“I shall inform the Wilhelmstrasse of your good work, my dear,” he said unctuously. “But I fear . . . that after all you must go to Germany.”

Inez stood very still.

“So,” she whispered. “You are determined to have the Colburn woman?”

Mr Werner looked coldly at her.

“I am determined to serve Germany,” he said gruffly.

Inez sighed, and the shrug of her shoulders and the spread of her hands indicated resignation and helplessness.

“Very well, Karl. I will go to Germany. You may serve Germany as you will.”

He smiled thinly.

“That is sensible, Freda. Now there is much to be done.”

He walked to a telephone and called a number.

“Fritz?” he asked in German. “Is that Fritz? Karl here. Get Hermann and come to my house. I will meet you down on the pavement. Do not come up. Bring all papers with you. We go to Germany, and we start our journey from Rotten Apple Lane. I know the telephone is a risk, but it’s the last we take. Hurry — —”

He put down the receiver and turned to face his wife.

“We are going to dispel a shadow,” he said pleasantly. “Would you like to see Colburn die?”

Inez stood scarcely breathing. Her face was white as chalk, her dark eyes were staring and fixed.

“No!” she whispered.

He laughed. .

“Somehow I knew it.”

His hand went to his pocket. He drew out an automatic. It had a silencer on it. Inez did not move, but her eyes went dull all at once.

“Karl . . . after all the years . . . you would not . . .”

He smiled at her.

“I could forgive you—but for Colburn.”

She screamed as he fired.

“Karl!—*ach, Gott . . .*”

He gave just one glance at her as she lay crumpled on the floor.

“Colburn,” he snarled. “I’ll attend to Colburn— —”

Inez lay still. He went to the door, putting the automatic in his pocket as he walked.

“*Leben Sie wohl*,” he grunted.

The door was closed and locked after him. For a long time Inez lay without movement, blood trickling from a corner of her mouth. Then her eyes turned slowly to the telephone. Karl Werner had forgotten it. A brief flash lit her eyes. Slowly she dragged herself to the instrument, lifted the receiver, and called Peter Colburn’s number. She spoke a few words, closed the circuit, called another number and spoke to Milne. With an effort she called yet another number, the secret number of a telephone in a Soho cellar. As the receiver crashed from her hand she whispered:

“I am sorry, Jim-mee. *Leben Sie wohl*. . . .”

CHAPTER XXII

JIMMY switched on the light in the dug-out, seated himself, and lit a cigarette. There was a brooding light in his dark eyes.

“What I can’t understand, Guns, is how Elaine could go to such a hound as Werner.”

“Nothing in that,” said the Major. “She’s doing fine work for the refugees. Werner is a refugee. No reason why she shouldn’t go.”

Jimmy grunted.

“Yes, but—you say he was alone with her?”

The Major hesitated, then:

“Nothing in that either, Jimmy. No call for a crowd, you know.”

Jimmy’s face was sombre, his jaw set, his eyes bleak.

“You followed Inez to Werner’s?”

The Major seated himself.

“I did.”

Jimmy glared at him.

“Guns, for the first time in a long friendship you’re holding back on me.”

The Major flushed. He had been close on Inez’s heels all the way from Park Lane to the dismal attic with the glass roof. He had waited on the lower stairs while she listened at the locked door. As she moved he had moved. When she had opened the door he had gone up the stairs at express speed, and had arrived at the door in time to see Werner release Elaine. Dumbfounded he had listened, and then crept away. Inez’s revelation of her marriage to Werner had jarred him. As Elaine turned to leave he bolted down the stairs and out of the house. Of all this he had told but a part. Not for his life even would he have told of Elaine being in Werner’s arms. Whatever her reason any explanation, if one were ever made, must come from her. But of the rest he was free to talk.

“Just waited until we got to the dug-out, old man,” he muttered.

“Then let’s have it.”

He lit a cigarette.

“I’ve some news for you. Inez is Werner’s wife.”

Jimmy stared at him.

“His wife?” he jerked out. “Are you sure?”

“Absolutely. In a fit of jealousy she blurted it out.”

Jimmy inhaled slowly.

“Guns,” he said quietly, “we’re getting somewhere.”

“I think so,” said the Major. “Milne thinks so. That makes the seductive Inez a German, you know.”

“I know,” said Jimmy. “Did you see the drivel about Peter in the noon papers? Called him a traitor to England.”

The Major nodded:

“Tough, I admit.”

Jimmy grinned.

“He can take it. I wonder why Inez started such a crazy stunt? Or is it crazy?”

The Major regarded him steadily.

“It wouldn’t be crazy, old man, if she, as a German woman, could persuade English women to cease having sons.”

Jimmy’s lips thinned.

“You’re right. The idea probably originated in the brain trust in the Wilhelmstrasse. We know Inez is the woman of the barge—the pearls gave her away.”

“Absolutely.”

“Guns, if we don’t move fast—they will. Do you see why Inez attached herself to me?”

The Major stared at him.

“But she couldn’t know . . .”

Jimmy shrugged.

“She knows,” he said positively. “She knows I’m the Shadow. She knows of this dug-out. I heard her whisper to Grolman last night on the barge. It was the voice that whispered over this ’phone. Therefore she knows who I am and where I am.”

“Why haven’t they done us in then?” asked the Major.

Jimmy laughed grimly.

“Even they have to get us in the right spot for that. Inez knew her association with me was a danger to herself. If I were murdered she’d be pulled in. This isn’t Germany, and they know it.”

“It makes sense,” the Major admitted. “But why has Werner been so attentive to Mrs Colburn?”

"That's easy," snarled Jimmy. "Elaine is the most beautiful woman in England. Werner wanted her, therefore he sends Inez after me while he goes after Elaine."

"They're sorting themselves out," said the Major. "But who is your friend—the Shade?"

"Oh, Milne explained her. I asked him straight out only a little while ago. Frenchwoman, very clever. Has done great work for us before."

"Grolman and the others were evidently taking orders from Werner. Inez as Werner's wife proves that."

Jimmy looked thoughtful.

"There's no finger pointing at Werner."

"Except Inez's."

"I am wondering how many times Elaine has been to his rooms. And why? Above all—why?"

"I can't say, of course."

Jimmy grinned at him.

"You're like a cat on hot bricks, Guns. What's the matter with you?"

The Major adjusted his monocle.

"Nothing. Absolutely."

"Rotten finesse," grunted Jimmy. "You know something about Werner and Elaine. What is it?"

"My dear boy . . ."

Jimmy sighed.

"All right. Don't choke yourself thinking up a lie. You'll tell me in your own time and way. But I'd like to know what the hell you *did* see at Werner's."

"I've told you. Any message from the Shade?"

"Nothing."

"May be to-night . . ."

"My boy," said Jimmy coolly, "we're going to Werner's. I have the feeling the curtain is coming down. If Inez took the false embarkation orders back to Werner, supposing Werner is in the game . . ."

"He must be, somewhere. Inez is, and she's his wife."

Jimmy nodded.

"Yes. You'll come with me and fire the first shot."

"And my excuse for going to Werner's?"

Jimmy grinned.

"A message from Elaine to Karl—if you're spotted."

"You dirty dog."

Jimmy laughed.

"'All's fair in love and war'," he quoted aptly.

"H'm," said the Major thoughtfully. "You may be right."

The telephone blurred softly. Jimmy lifted the receiver.

"Yes?" he whispered.

Guns was amazed at the swift change that came over him. He had leapt to his feet and stood tense as he listened.

"Who? Inez? Yes, I thought it was you. Eh? . . . They're coming here? Who? Fritz, Hermann—and Karl von Hagen! For God's sake—Inez, what's the matter with you? . . . He—shot you? Inez—Inez . . ."

Jimmy turned to the Major.

"Says Werner—von Hagen, she called him—shot her. She said something in German, then I heard the receiver fall. He must have . . ."

Jimmy and the Major span as the dug-out door crashed open. They did not move as Mr Werner, followed by two grim-faced men, came in. Mr Werner, his automatic level and deadly, said quietly:

"The Shadow, I understand — —"

Fritz and Hermann closed the door. Not any of them knew that the receiver of the telephone, not being replaced, sent a shrill warning to a certain room in the War Office.

Jimmy looked blandly at the Major. The Major coolly adjusted his monocle and stared at Mr Werner and the two obviously Teutonic gentlemen.

"Jimmy," he said in astonishment. "It's old Werner."

Mr Werner spoke to Fritz and Hermann.

"Search the place."

Jimmy laughed.

"What is all this, Werner. You look like a Nazi spy — —"

"Haw, haw, haw!" guffawed the Major. "I knew a spy once — —"

"They shot him, of course?" said Mr Werner coldly.

"Utterly, utterly, utterly!"

"Don't move, Colburn."

Jimmy laughed again.

“Shoot the dog,” snarled one of the men.

Jimmy eyed the fellow.

“I believe it’s friend Hermann!”

The man lurched forward, his face twisted with hate.

“*Ja!* It is Hermann. It is my turn now. . . .”

“Get back,” said Mr Werner curtly.

“Ach! Kill the fool,” came from the man Fritz.

“Ah, friend Fritz. Your face is swollen, old man. Did you bump into something, somewhere?”

“Haw, haw, haw . . .”

“You will bump into something soon,” said Fritz heavily.

“Continue to search,” snapped Mr Werner. “I have to call on his wife—presently.”

Jimmy’s eyes narrowed.

“Whose wife?”

“Your wife—who has expressed the desire to go to Germany with me,” said Mr Werner pleasantly.

Jimmy grinned at him.

“Up to her tricks again. Lots of swine pester her, you know. She tells them all the same story.”

“Haw, haw, haw! Reminds me of the time I was in Afghanistan. They have Afghans there, you know. . . .”

“I do not wish to know. Don’t move, Colburn. Mrs Colburn is anxious to leave England—and she is leaving with me.”

Jimmy yawned.

“Frightfully energetic, Elaine. Always rushing here, and rushing there. Fatiguing. I see you have a silencer on your automatic, Mr Werner.”

“I am glad you notice it.”

Jimmy nodded.

“Inez said you had.”

Mr Werner stared at him.

“Inez?” he snapped.

“Absolutely—little Freda, your wife, you know.”

Mr Werner did not move. Fritz and Hermann had ceased their search to stare.

"You shot her awhile ago, old man," Jimmy added. "*Leben Sie wohl*, you know, Karl . . . von Hagen."

Mr Werner went slightly green. The automatic trembled, then steadied itself. Jimmy went on calmly:

"Not too hard on that trigger, old man. You've done enough killing with it to-day. In fact, to tell you the truth, you've made your last kill."

Mr Werner's jaw was set, his eyes like steel. Jimmy smiled at him.

"You Huns are a stereotyped breed. Like the Bourbons of old you forget nothing, and you learn nothing. You, von Hagen, and the regional Gauleiters with you, still think of espionage as a dark cloak and a pulled down hat brim. Not at all."

"By gad, not at all," said the Major.

"Shoot him," croaked Fritz.

"*Nein*," said Mr Werner hoarsely. "She will be here in five minutes. If she does not come in that time—I will shoot."

"Bravo!" crowed the Major. "Right here, sir—over the heart."

Jimmy shook his head.

"There you go again, von Hagen. The old rigid rules. No wonder your country is always in a mess. In your pockets are copies of our embarkation orders—all cooked and cock-eyed for your benefit."

"Utterly," said the Major gravely.

Fritz Hermann and Mr Werner all moved uneasily, exchanging glances. Jimmy went on:

"Also the locations of newly erected munition plants, and figures relating to production and control—also cooked and cock-eyed for your enlightenment."

"Kill him," yelled Hermann.

Jimmy held up a hand.

"Ridiculous, old man. If von Hagen weren't so vindictive he wouldn't be so stupid."

"So . . ." said Mr Werner. "I am stupid, eh?"

Jimmy's tone was kindly.

"You mustn't become ruffled. We all pull these boners at times. I know you're in a tight spot."

Fritz, Hermann and Mr Werner all moved uneasily. The cold assurance of the two Englishmen was both disturbing and unnerving. Mr Werner seemed to awaken out of an hypnotic sleep.

"You talk well, Colburn, and you have courage," he said gruffly.

Jimmy laughed.

"I wish Inez were here to hear all this. She's dead, you know."

Mr Werner's hands shook as he glared at his wrist-watch.

"Inez will not be here," he said harshly, "but another will."

"Haw, haw, haw—fellow's potty," said the Major.

"*Gott!*" gasped Fritz. "Get it over, Karl."

"*Ja, Ja, Ja!*" chattered Hermann. "Shoot and let us begone. Something is wrong, Karl."

"Man's wasting our time, Jimmy," said the Major huffily.

"Very well," said Mr Werner slowly. "It is time, anyway."

The eyes of Jimmy and the Major were hawklike. They saw the imperceptible movement of the trigger finger, they saw it pause as a knock sounded on the door.

"Open it," gloated Mr Werner. "I promised you sport, you shall have it."

Fritz flung open the door, and then staggered back.

"JAMES!" roared a voice. "What the devil are you doing in THIS filthy dump?"

"Peter?" gasped Jimmy.

Peter, followed by Sir Francis and several out-of-breath ladies, stormed into the cramped dug-out.

"Now!" yelled Jimmy.

With a flying tackle he brought von Hagen down. The Major tripped Fritz and uppercut the dazed Hermann.

"Haw, haw, haw . . ."

"Steady, von Hagen . . ."

"You dog—you're choking me."

"Deliberately," snarled Jimmy. "Drop that gun."

Mr Werner saw the light go black. The automatic fell from his clawing fingers. Jimmy pounced on it, and then dragged Mr Werner to his feet. A short-arm jolt of terrific power set the bullet head rocking like a china doll's. Mr Werner lurched against a wall and then fell on the couch.

"I have the feeling," said Jimmy coldly, "I owe you that."

"Absolutely," said the Major. "Utterly, utterly, utterly—and again absolutely. He knows why. Haw, haw, haw!"

Peter, Sir Francis and the ladies were backed against a wall. As Fritz and Hermann were thrown on the couch Peter surged forward.

“Explain this unseemliness, James,” he rasped.

Jimmy smiled at him.

“You may have the automatic, sir, for a souvenir . . .”

“I don’t WANT the thing,” shouted Peter. “I got a ’phone call from that Inez woman telling me to get here as quickly as I could. These ladies . . .”

“Mr Colburn,” panted the fat lady. “You wouldn’t wait for us to explain . . .”

“Madam,” said Peter firmly. “I have finished with you. I resent being hounded like this—taxi-cabs following my car, women yelling at me.”

“We wanted you to stop.”

“I won’t have it.”

“Mr Colburn,” came in chorus. “We had to see you— —”

“Yes,” panted the fat lady.

“Yes,” panted the thin woman.

“Ladies,” said Peter, “I am as bewildered as any of you. Mr Werner, what are you doing here, sir? Why did you have that gun in your hand?”

Mr Werner closed his eyes.

“I have nothing to say,” he muttered.

“Haw, haw, haw! *Lieder ohne Worte*, so to speak.”

“Will you keep out of this, sir?” snapped Peter. “Wherever you are there is trouble.”

“Mr Colburn . . .”

“Madam, I refuse to discuss the matter further,” said Peter with all the dignity at his command.

“And I,” said Sir Francis.

“What is all this, James?” demanded his father.

Jimmy nodded at Mr Werner.

“On your right is a murderer—Mr Karl Werner. The others are Hun spies . . .”

“Murderer!” gasped Peter.

“Spies!” hissed the ladies.

They jumped nervously as the door swung open again. Colonel Milne, Elaine, and several hard-faced men came in.

"I congratulate you, Colonel Colburn," said Milne. "And you, Major." To the hard-faced men he said: "Take them away."

Peter glared about him as Mr Werner, Fritz and Hermann went out.

"I must correct you, sir," he said heavily. "I had nothing to do with this, and I am not a Colonel—"

Milne smiled.

"I know that, Mr Colburn. But your son is."

Peter goggled. Elaine stared at Milne.

"You didn't tell me my husband was a Colonel."

He patted her arm.

"My dear Shade . . ." he murmured.

Jimmy's jaw dropped.

"What's that?" he rasped.

The Colonel grinned.

"May I introduce both?" he said wryly. "The Shade—and the Shadow."

"The Shadow?" roared Peter. "Where is the Shadow?"

Milne pointed at Jimmy.

"There he is, sir. Colonel John James Colburn of Intelligence—sometimes known to me as the Shadow."

"Jimmy!" choked Elaine. "You . . ."

Jimmy was staring at her.

"Elaine!" he marvelled. "The Shade—you! No wonder I wanted to make love to you."

"JAMES!" snarled Peter. "How dare you . . ."

"Oh, heavens, yes," panted Elaine. "Jimmy, if I had known it was you . . ."

He grinned at her.

"And if I had known it was you. Milne told me you were a Frenchwoman—I'll take that up with him later."

Milne laughed as Peter glared at Jimmy.

"So you're Colonel Colburn, you cub! Damme, Jimmy, I'm proud of you—and of Elaine. I see it all now, of course, but I knew all along everything would be all right. You see, Francis? I told you to leave everything to me . . ."

Sir Francis laughed.

"I seem to remember it, Peter. Come along, come along, everybody. Colonel Milne, Major Winterbottom, you, James, Elaine and I are all going somewhere. And this time, Peter, leave everything to me."

"Mr Colburn," said the ladies.

Peter faced them grimly.

"Ladies, I refuse to discuss the No More Babies League. It's defunct—no longer exists."

"Oh, thank heaven!" said the fat lady with great relief.

"Thank God," said the angular one.

The Major peered suspiciously at them through his monocle.

"Dash it all, ladies—why all this expression of thanks?" he asked.

"Because," said the fat lady demurely, "we've discovered we're all goin' to have babies. Ain't it singular?"

"Singular?" gasped the Major. "Gad—it's mass production."

The ladies turned away.

"Good-bye, Sir Francis," they called.

"Good-bye," murmured Sir Francis.

"Good-bye, Mr Colburn—and thank you so much."

"Good-bye," grunted Peter. "But don't thank me."

"Haw, haw, haw! Well, I think we'll all trickle along."

Jimmy turned to Elaine with well-feigned alarm.

"Madam—are *you* going to have a baby?" he asked.

Peter's roar almost shattered the dug-out.

"JAMES!" he thundered.

Elaine put two shapely arms round her husband's neck.

"Jimmy," she whispered with a smile, "how *dare* you?"

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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 *James! How Dare You!*, by E. V. (Edward Vivian) Timms.]