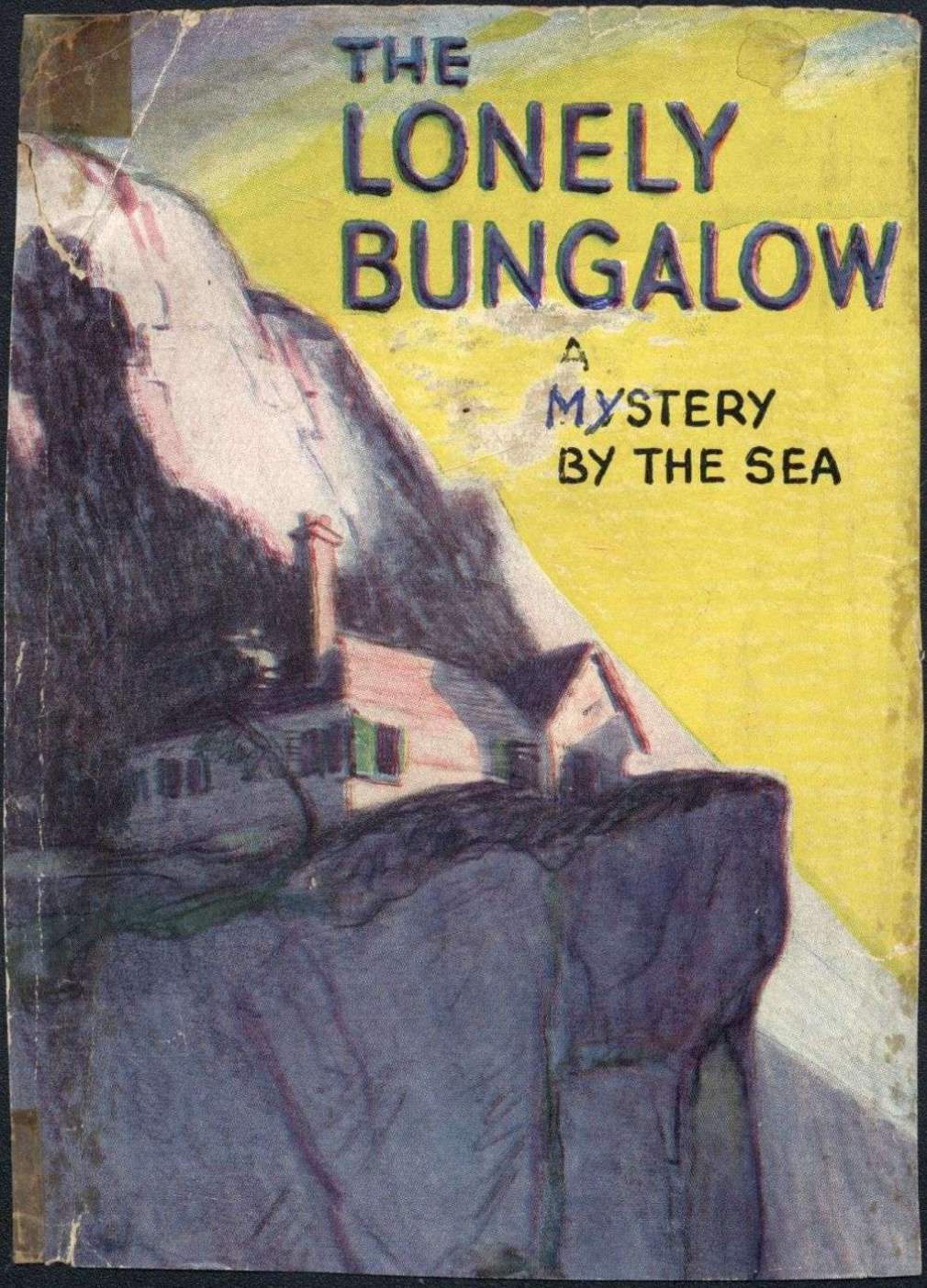
THE LONELY BUNGALOW

A MYSTERY BY THE SEA



Title: The Lonely Bungalow

Date of first publication: 1931

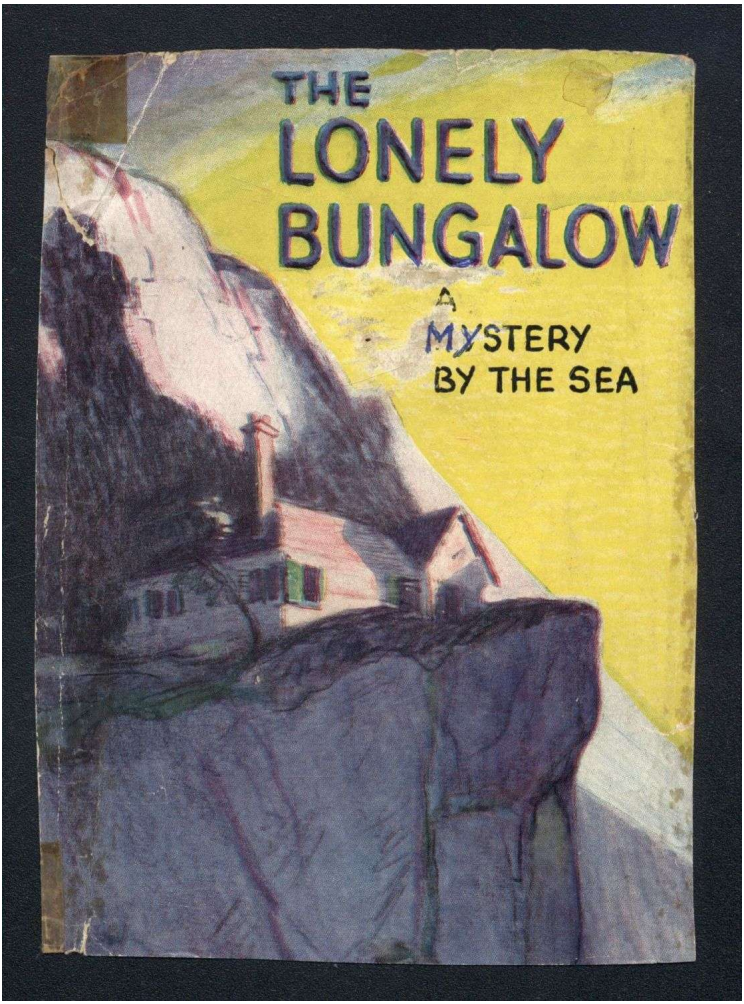
Author: Henry Taprell Dorling (as "Taffrail") (1883-1968)

Date first posted: June 15, 2021

Date last updated: June 15, 2021

Faded Page eBook #20210627

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines, Chuck Greif & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at https://www.pgdpcanada.net



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THE LONELY BUNGALOW

BY

"TAFFRAIL"

(Captain Taprell Dorling, D.S.O., R.N.)

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LIMITED LONDON

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The characters in this book are entirely imaginary, and have no relation to any living person.

First Published January 1931
Reprinted January 1931
Reprinted August 1932

Made and Printed in Great Britain for Hodder and Stoughton, Limited, by Ebenezer Baylis and Son, Ltd., The Trinity Press, Worcester, and London.

CHAPTER ONE

It was only natural that Dick Corfield, immediately on his return to England from a lengthy sojourn abroad, should gravitate to his married sister's flat in Knightsbridge. He was a bachelor and an orphan, a Commander of the Royal Navy, who had left the Service under the retirement scheme of 1922. His record, both in peace and in war, had been a good one. Nevertheless, this had not saved his neck from the fatal 'axe' of post-war retrenchment.

Since that fatal day when he had received the official intimation that he was one of the many who had been selected as fit subjects for national economy, he had tried his hand at various things. His last job had been to steam an ancient tramp steamer out to China, a task which had resulted in the loss of that vessel, and had brought Corfield more adventures than he had thought possible in an enlightened twentieth century. Since China he had wandered about the East, finally coming home across Canada after eighteen months' absence from England.

He arrived in London from Liverpool on an afternoon in April, and having deposited his luggage at his Club in Pall Mall and secured a room for the customary fortnight, took taxi to Knightsbridge.

The porter, who was usually to be seen hovering about in the hallway of the block of buildings where Corfield's sister lived, was nowhere to be seen. Only his peaked cap was hanging in the recess beside the lift. The man himself was probably seated comfortably at his own fireside in the basement.

But Corfield knew his way blindfold. Entering the lift he closed the doors and pressed the button for the second floor. A swift ascent, and in perhaps thirty seconds he was ringing the bell beside a dark blue enamelled door at the end of a short passage.

There was no reply. He rang again.

There came the barking of a dog from inside, followed by the sound of footsteps and conversation. More excited yelps, then a whine and a loud snuffling as the animal applied his nose to the crack of the door.

Corfield smiled. He knew these symptoms of old. Trust old Toddy, his sister's Sealyham, never to allow anyone into the flat until they had been personally inspected and approved by himself.

The door swung open, and a fat white dog on absurdly short legs hurled itself at the visitor. A girl stood framed in the opening.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, staring at him.

"Down, Toddy! Behave yourself!" she added. "I'm sorry. He always goes on like this."

"I expect he's pleased to see me," said Corfield, taking the animal into his arms, where Toddy, wriggling with joy, tried to lick his face.

"Evidently," said the girl.

Corfield looked at her. He had expected to see Mary, his sister's parlourmaid, trim and neat in her dark blue dress and frilly cap and apron. But this girl was someone quite different, a lady, obviously. He could not properly see her face, for the light was behind her, but she wore a well-cut

coat and skirt, silk stockings, and expensive looking lizard-skin shoes. She was a complete stranger.

For a moment he gazed at her, tongue-tied. “You don’t know me from Adam,” he said at last.

“I’m afraid I don’t,” said she pleasantly, eyeing him with curiosity.

“This *is* still Mrs. Tremayne’s flat, isn’t it?”

“Of course,” she replied. “That dog’s covering you with hair, by the way.”

“I’m Mrs. Tremayne’s brother,” he said, depositing Toddy on the floor.

“Her brother Dick?” the girl inquired, looking at him with renewed interest.

He nodded.

“But I thought you were abroad.”

“I got back to London this afternoon.”

“You’re not very like your photograph,” she said.

“I’ll show you my card, if you like,” he replied.

“Nonsense!” she laughed. “I recognise your eyebrows. Besides, Toddy knew you at once. Come in,” she added. “I’m Calliope Heddon. I’d better explain.”

He entered, took off his hat and overcoat, and followed her into the large sitting-room, half study, half lounge, that he knew so well.

Except that the curtains were now shot purple instead of peacock blue, the room was the same as when he had last seen it—the same pictures and photographs, the same comfortable sofas and armchairs, with Diana’s baby grand piano, her bureau in the curtained recess by the window

where the light came over her left shoulder, Ben's huge knee-hole writing-table littered with piles of papers, an untidy array of his pipes on the mantelpiece, the children's gramophone and Toddy's gnawed old basket into which he immediately curled himself. It was a happy, livable room, and Corfield had always loved it. There was a wood fire blazing on the open hearth, beside it an armchair with a crumpled evening paper open at the crossword puzzle, and a small, low tea-table with the remains of a meal.

"I've only just finished tea," said Calliope. "Have you had it, by the way?"

"Yes, thanks," he replied.

"Sure?" she asked, smiling. "I can easily make some more. It's no trouble."

"No, really. Please don't," he said. "I had it at my club."

"Well, a whisky and soda? Or shall I make you a cocktail?"

"Neither, thanks."

"Sit down then, and have one of Ben's cigarettes," she ordered, proffering a silver box from the mantelpiece. "I'll have one myself.—Thanks."

They lit up. Corfield stretched his long legs to the fire with a sigh of contentment. The deep armchair was very comfortable.

"You must be wondering who the dickens I am and what I'm doing here," said the girl, sitting down and leaning back with her feet crossed.

"I am rather intrigued," Corfield confessed, looking at her.

She was something under thirty, he decided, not exactly pretty in the strict sense of the word; but fresh-looking and

decidedly attractive. She had a pleasant voice with queer little inflexions and a nice laugh. He liked her shingled hair, which was a deep chestnut colour with strands of gleaming gold and copper which shone when she moved her head. Though not knowing much about such things, he judged it was natural, like her complexion. And he was right.

He was not sufficiently expert to venture any opinion on her nose and mouth; but she had a pair of well-shaped, expressive hazel eyes which seemed to twinkle when she laughed, long lashes and well-marked eyebrows, red lips, and two rows of even white teeth. For the rest she was neither tall nor short, neither stout nor exactly slender. Her figure, so far as he was capable of judging women's figures, was good. Certainly, she was no animated cylinder like some of the girls he had met, and the silk-clad calves and ankles that appeared beneath the hem of her brown skirt were sturdy enough, though well-shaped. Also she knew how to dress and to wear her clothes. She obviously went to a good tailor.

"Diana and Ben went abroad over a month ago," she started by explaining. "They're due back next week."

"Did they take Ronnie and Lucy with them?" Corfield asked.

She nodded and smiled.

"I'm looking after the flat while they're away," she said. "I'm doing caretaker."

"Oh!"

"I don't get any wages," Calliope laughed. "Ordinarily, I share a flat in Chelsea with another female. But it's being done up, and what with one thing and another they've practically pulled the place to bits. Diana, when she heard I was homeless, made me come here, and when she and Ben

went off to Switzerland with the children—that was just about the time our hired assassins discovered the whole of our hot water pipes would have to be renewed—they absolutely insisted I should stay on. So here I am, and here I stay for at least another three weeks until my own abode is habitable."

"I see," said Corfield.

"And what are your plans?" Calliope asked.

"Haven't had time to make any yet," he replied. "I've got no settled home."

She thought for a moment.

"Are you doing anything to-night?"

"Nothing much," he replied. "I shall dine at my club, probably meet a friend or two, and possibly get a rubber of bridge. Then I shall turn in early."

"In other words, you're at a loose end," she observed, looking at him.

He nodded.

"Would it bore you frightfully to stay and have a scratch meal here with me?" she asked. "You needn't change, and there's heaps of food."

"I don't know," he started, anxious at first to excuse himself. "You see...."

"Now you're going to invent a host of reasons why you shouldn't dine with me!" she interrupted with a grimace.

"No," he said. "Personally, I should like to, but ... but," he hesitated.

"But what?" she insisted.

"Ought I to dine here alone with you?" he asked.

“Ought you to dine here with me?” Calliope echoed, her eyes wide open in astonishment. “Good Lord!” she added. “What’s the matter with the man? Aren’t I perfectly respectable?”

“Thoroughly so, I should imagine,” Corfield said awkwardly. “I only meant....”

“You only meant we ought to have a chaperone,” she put in, her amusement getting the better of her. “Heavens! Is this the twentieth century, or am I still wearing my grandmother’s crinoline? Haven’t you ever dined alone with a woman?”

“Sometimes,” he said sheepishly.

“Well, why not with me?” she demanded. “D’you think I’ve got designs on you?”

“Great Scott, no!” he exclaimed, reddening. “I merely thought people might talk, and all that sort of thing.”

“Prehistoric notion!” Calliope retorted, chuckling with amusement. “And if people do want to talk, let ’em!—Anyhow. Will you dine, or will you not?”

“I will,” he said, not at all displeased. “And thank you very much.”

She flung the end of her cigarette into the fire and stood up.

“And now I’m going to make each of us a cocktail,” she said. “What’s yours?”

“Dry Martini,” said Corfield, levering himself from his chair and preceding her to the door, which he opened.

“With an olive?” she asked.

“Please.”

“So be it,” she said, leaving the room. “No,” she added with a smile, as he tried to follow. “You needn’t come. I’m

quite a competent barmaid."

Corfield sauntered back to the fireplace and lit another cigarette. In a few minutes Calliope was back with two glasses on a tray. They helped themselves.

"Happy days!" she said, lifting her glass.

"Salue," he nodded back, looking her full in the eyes. They were very nice eyes, that he was forced to admit.

"Is it all right?" she asked, sipping.

"Excellent," he said. "D'you realise this is my first drink in England for over eighteen months?"

"Then it's a most auspicious occasion," she replied, smiling at him.

Dinner was an eminently satisfactory meal, and it was not until a quarter past eleven that Corfield finally rose to leave. He had certainly enjoyed himself, and Calliope's pale green evening dress suited her wonderfully.

She accompanied him into the hall and helped him on with his coat.

"I must make you respectable," she said, busying herself with a clothes brush. "Toddy moults horribly, poor darling!—There, that's better. If you wait a minute while I put on a coat, I'll come and see you off the premises. Toddy must have his usual scamper."

With the dog following they walked down the stairs, through the hall, and out into the street.

"Good night," said Corfield, shaking hands on the pavement. "Thank you for a very pleasant evening, Miss Heddon."

"Good night," she replied. "But don't you think I might be Calliope, and that I might call you Dick? After all, I've

known Diana for years.”

“By all means,” he said. “By the way ... er—are *you* doing anything to-morrow evening?”

Calliope smiled and thought for a moment.

“No,” she said. “Nothing particular.”

“Well, would you take pity on me and come and dine at my club?” he asked. “We might feed early and go on to a show. I haven’t been inside a theatre for heaven knows how long.”

“Are you sure you want me?”

“Of course I do. I’m sick of my own company.”

“Then I should love to come,” she replied.

He gave her the necessary directions.

“Seven-fifteen at the ladies’ entrance, and I’ll get the tickets to-morrow morning. You won’t forget, will you?”

“Certainly not,” she said. “By the way, d’you want a taxi?”

“I’ll walk till I find one,” Corfield replied. “Good night, and thanks so much.”

“Good night, and thank you for coming,” she answered.

A most satisfactory evening, Corfield thought to himself as he turned the corner after a final wave. And what a nice person Calliope was. She was so downright and sensible, with a pronounced sense of humour, and no nonsense about her. She was unsentimental, he came to the conclusion; the sort of girl with whom a man could be friendly without the necessity of falling in love.

Corfield was frightened of most women; but somehow he couldn’t be frightened of Calliope Heddon.

And that dinner at his club, followed by a theatre and supper afterwards, was the first of many.

CHAPTER TWO

It was on a sunny morning, three months later, that Corfield brought his two-seater Alvis to a standstill in the parking place outside the Admiralty on the Horse Guards Parade. Partly because he was in a good temper, partly because the weather was perfect and he was looking forward to spending the week-end in the country with people he liked, life seemed well worth living.

Old Lukes, the one-armed, blue-uniformed porter who guarded the Admiralty entrance, hurried forward with his usual smiling salute to open the door of the car as Corfield clicked on the hand-brake. He and Lukes knew each other well. Indeed, there were few people who had served at the Admiralty since the war whom Lukes did not know.

He was a perambulating Navy List who never forgot a face, and a useful man, too. After years at the Admiralty he knew the interior of that huge building as well as his own little house at Dalston. In the labyrinth of corridors it was difficult for a newcomer to find his way about; but Lukes knew every cell in the hive, who lived in it, and precisely what he did.

"Good morning, sir," he said, as Corfield slid his body along the seat and disembarked from his car. "Long time since I've seen you, sir."

"Good morning, Lukes," the commander replied cheerfully, readjusting his bowler hat and gathering up his gloves and umbrella. "How's the sciatica?"

"Nicely, sir, thank you. It don't worry me much in this hot weather."

“I’m glad of that,” said Corfield. “You might keep an eye on the car and see nobody pinches the rug.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” said Lukes as Corfield walked off. “I’ll watch her....”

‘Keeping his eye upon officers’ cars, of which there were many, brought Lukes quite a substantial little income in odd half-crowns, florins, and shillings. At Christmas, too, he reaped the benefit of civility and good-humour.

Entering the building Corfield signed the book, climbed a short flight of steps, passed through a glass-panelled swing door, up another flight of steps, and turned right along a tessellated corridor.

Turning a corner he gave his name to a porter and was ushered into the room in which he had formerly worked as one of the staff of the Naval Information Department. It was the same as ever. Some half a dozen officers were busy at their desks, and almost every square foot of floor space was occupied by desks, tables, chairs, filing cabinets, and a safe or two. Except for a caricature in chalk over the mantelpiece, and a card bearing the legend in red letters:

WE ARE BUSY!
IF YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY,
SAY IT QUICK!

there was no attempt at decoration. The room was severely utilitarian; downright untidy, some might have called it.

Yet there was method in it all. Precisely what each of those officers did one cannot mention, but they were all experts in their particular line of business, and between them they practically encompassed the maritime globe. They were *au fait* with what went on in chancelleries and ministries of marine all over the world. Foreign policies, treaties,

shipbuilding programmes, and the like were at their finger ends. They referred to members of their own government and to foreign statesmen by nicknames, and, though they had never met them in the flesh, knew their minds and policies almost as they knew those of their own wives, if they were married. Locked up in their brains, hidden away in those safes and steel filing cabinets, were secrets which many outsiders would have given the world to know.

Threading his way across the room to where a man in a black alpaca jacket was busy at his desk in the window, Corfield tapped him on the shoulder.

“Hullo, Shorty!” he said.

The man looked up with a frown of impatience, which changed to a smile of delighted recognition when he saw who had disturbed him.

“Dick, old boy!” he exclaimed, rising to his feet and wringing Corfield’s hand. “By George! It’s good to see you! What the devil have you been doing with yourself all these months?”

“Oh! routing round and having a fairly good time,” Corfield replied.

“By the way,” he said, after some minutes’ conversation, “months ago I sent in a report about the piracy business round about Hong-Kong.”

“Yes, I know,” said the other. “Did you get an acknowledgment?”

Corfield nodded.

“Yes,” he said. “The D.N.I. wrote me rather a nice letter. Meanwhile, d’you think I could see him? He told me to blow in some morning and have a yarn with him.”

“I’ll find out if he’s disengaged,” the other replied, pressing a bell-push on his writing table.

“Is he in a good temper?” Corfield inquired.

“Sunny, old boy!” came the laughing answer. “He’s been a perfect little angel for at least a fortnight.”

A messenger entered the room and came across to the table.

“Struthers,” he was ordered, “Go up and find out if the D.N.I. is engaged. If he isn’t, tell his messenger to ask if he can see Commander Corfield?”

The man left the room, to return in less than five minutes.

“The admiral will see Commander Corfield now, sir,” he said.

“Right,” said Shorty. “You know your way, old boy?” he added.

“I should hope so,” said Corfield with a grin. “Didn’t I sit at this desk of yours for over two years?”

“Of course. I was forgetting.—Well, au revoir, old bean. Good luck with the little man.”

CHAPTER THREE

Rear Admiral Parry Houston, C.B., C.M.G., the Director of Naval Information, sat at the littered desk in his comfortable room on the first floor writing a minute on the covering sheet of a docket. He looked up with a smile as his visitor entered, waved his pen to indicate he was busy for the moment, and resumed his work with a frown of thoughtful concentration.

Corfield glanced at the little man as he sat there writing at his desk, pausing now and then with his lips pursed to think of a suitable word or expression. Everybody loved him and had the most implicit confidence in his judgment. Besides being shrewd and so eminently fitted for his responsible position, the D.N.I. was so human and understanding, so ready to stick by his subordinates, so appreciative of a good story, and so ready to hear it from anyone.

But there was no denying that he did not suffer fools gladly. Moreover, he had his bad days, and sometimes—very rarely, happily—when his digestion was out of order or he was suffering from a lack of exercise, he became a veritable little raging volcano when things went wrong, damning everybody and everything with explosive impartiality.

It was advisable during such outbursts to walk warily and to keep a smiling face, and as a warning signal to all and sundry that the going was bad, the occupants of the lower room were in the habit of sticking a small yellow flag in the large pincushion on the mantelpiece.

It was a replica of the quarantine flag as used at sea, and they all knew its purport: “Stand clear! I have infectious disease on board.”

But to-day nothing was amiss. The admiral was clearly in a sunny humour.

“Sit down,” he said without looking up, putting his pen between his teeth, blotting his untidy minute, all covered with erasures and alterations, retying the white tape round the substantial docket, and hurling it into his “out” basket with a gesture of relief for some unfortunate typist to deal with.

“Well,” he continued, removing the pen from his mouth, and leaning back to gaze with wrinkled brow at his visitor. “And how’s the world treating you, Corfield? Also,” he added, without giving time for an answer, “What the devil d’you mean by disturbing me on a busy forenoon?—Look at all those papers!” he went on, waving a hand at the documents piled high in his ‘in’ and ‘out’ baskets. “Tripe, most of it, written by windbags with plenty of time to waste, which I haven’t!... But sit down. Have a cigarette.”

He left his chair to place his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat and to lean against the mantelpiece of grey polished marble with his heels on the fender.

“Now,” he said. “Tell me all about yourself?”

“There’s not much to tell, sir,” Corfield replied. “But I’m glad to hear my report from Hong-Kong was some use to you.”

“Oh, that report of yours,” said the admiral looking rather vague. “Yes, yes, of course, I remember.”

Corfield, who was tolerably certain that the D.N.I., with a thousand and one important matters to attend to, remembered nothing whatever about his seventeen pages of close typescript, smiled to himself.

“You wrote me a letter about them, sir,” he explained.

“Of course I did,” the D.N.I. said, toying with his watch-chain. “I’m always writing letters. And what are you up to now, Corfield?”

“Oh, playing around doing the usual things,” the commander replied. “I’m off to Cornwall the week after next yachting with a friend.”

The admiral seemed to prick up his ears.

“Cornwall?” he repeated.

“Yes, sir.”

“Do you know Cornwall well?”

“All that part to the west’ard of Falmouth and Newquay,” the commander replied, wondering why the little admiral’s voice had suddenly become serious.

“What about the coast?” the D.N.I. inquired.

“I know that better than anything, sir. I’ve walked nearly every inch of it, and have spent four summers messing round with a pal in a ten-tonner. I’m doing the same this year, or at least I intended to.”

“And where d’you join your friend?”

“Either at Falmouth or Penzance,” Corfield said. “I’m not quite certain which.”

“D’you know the coast about the Lizard?”

Corfield grinned. “Very much so, sir,” he replied.

“Good!” said the admiral. “It’s a funny coincidence, but at the moment Cornwall’s rather on my mind.—Come along and have a look at this chart.”

He led the way to a large table by the window.

“Now here’s the Lizard,” he said, possessing himself of a pair of dividers. “And here’s a place called Mullion.”

“Yes, sir.”

“What sort of coast is it?” came his next question. “I can see more or less from the chart; but what does it look like?”

“Mostly grey cliffs between a hundred and a hundred and fifty feet high with outlying rocks and pinnacles and a few sandy coves,” Corfield explained. “They get the full brunt of the sou’westerly gales, and the cliffs are very steep and broken up—very picturesque; but a damned nasty place to get caught in a sailing craft in a sou’westerly wind.”

“Is it possible to land?”

“In flat calm weather, certainly,” said the other. “But there’s generally a lop, and I shouldn’t care to risk landing in anything like a stiff breeze or a swell. But a lee could be found here and there if a fellow really knew the place.”

“Ah,” said the D.N.I. looking at him. “Then in calm weather one might get ashore in almost any of these coves, what?”

“Yes,” said Corfield.

The admiral studied the chart.

“I take it the coast’s more or less wild?” he observed.

“More or less, sir,” Corfield agreed. “Lizard town and the coves near it, particularly Kynance, are full of trippers in the season, and so is Mullion. But the stretch between them is very wild, merely a few scattered farms and cottages. The roads, except the main road to the Lizard, are bad,” he went on to explain, wondering what this cross-examination was leading up to.

“I’ll come to the point,” said the D.N.I. guessing what was in his mind. “But first of all, would you like to combine pleasure with a little job for me?”

“I ... I don’t quite understand, sir,” said Corfield. “How can I do a job for you? I’m retired.”

“I know that,” said the D.N.I. “The fact that you are makes it all the better. It’s nothing very onerous. At least, I don’t see why it should be onerous.”

“I shall be delighted to be of any use, sir.”

“Right. Now what I’m going to tell you is strictly confidential. It’s not to go beyond this room, unless you decide to take it on and find it absolutely necessary to tell someone else.” His voice was serious.

“I understand, sir,” said the commander, deeply interested.

“Somewhere within five or six miles of the Lizard there’s an unauthorised wireless station, which has been heard sending signals. Nobody’s been able to locate it, and it’s quite on the cards that it’s a low-power set in a car or motor-lorry with a portable aerial. It shifts from place to place; but always within this area.” He drew a circle with his forefinger on the chart just north of the Lizard.

Corfield, who was all attention, opened his mouth to ask a question. The admiral silenced him with a gesture.

“Now it’s been noticed,” he went on, “that signals have only been heard after dark in fine weather at a certain state of the tide—that is, about an hour before dead low water, and when there’s been no moon. They haven’t been answered to our knowledge; but they’ve been made on seven different occasions in code. And on three of those different occasions fishermen have reported sighting a fast motor-boat, or submarine on the surface, with no lights, on or off the coast between Mullion and the Lizard. One fellow who reported her steaming south-east at high speed and saw her silhouette in the glare of the Lizard light, is confident she was a

submarine. He saw her low hull and conning-tower.—Now what d'you make of that, Corfield?"

"It sounds mysterious enough, sir," the commander agreed, scratching his chin. "I presume she's not British?"

"If it's a submarine she can't be British, for we can keep track of all our craft," said the D.N.I. with an air of mystery. "Naturally we can't keep tally of every motor-boat. There must be scores of them in Falmouth and Penzance and other places. Personally, I'm inclined to pin my faith to the submarine theory. The fellow who reported her as such was an ex-leading-seaman R.N."

"In other words, sir, she's a foreigner!" Corfield broke in.

"Precisely," nodded the D.N.I. "A foreign submarine nosing around inside British territorial waters after dark. Funny sort of thing, isn't it?"

The commander agreed.

"Now, look here," the admiral continued, going across to his desk, opening a drawer, and hunting inside it to produce a paper. "I've had the evidence, such as it is, mapped out in a sort of table. You'll notice how it all fits in."

He handed it over.

DATE	SIGNALS HEARD	TIME OF LOW WATER AT LIZARD	REMARKS
May 11	2057-2100	2156	Weather at Lizard at 2100. Light westerly breeze. Overcast. Slight haze. Calm. No moon. Visibility 2 miles.

May 13	2150	2243	Master of Penzance fishing vessel “Boy Ted” reported large motor-boat without lights lying stopped 3 miles W.N.W. of Lizard light at 2130. “Boy Ted” which passed within 100 yards and saw men on deck, hailed, thinking motor-boat might need assistance. No reply. Weather calm. Overcast. Dark. No moon.
May 28	0010	0113	Weather at Lizard at midnight. Calm. Starlit with no moon. Visibility 4 miles.
June 1	0230-0233	0327	Skipper of Newlyn fishing vessel “Honesty” lying at drift nets 10 miles W. by N. of Lizard, reported being passed by motor-craft with no lights at 0235. Stranger was steering easterly at high speed. Skipper of fishing vessel took her for some British man-of-war engaged in manœuvres; but no

			naval vessels were in the vicinity at the time stated. Night dark with stars. No moon. Light S. Wly. airs. Sea calm.
June 3	0327-0330	0431	Weather at Lizard at 0330. Light S.Wly breeze. Overcast. Sea calm. No moon. Slight haze to seaward.
June 15	0121-0128	0228	Weather at Lizard at 0130. Cloudy with passing showers. Sea calm. No moon. Visibility 2 miles.
June 17	0235-0239	0344	John Burge, second hand of Porthleven fishing vessel “Sisters Three” reported sighting submarine on surface in glare of Lizard light at about 0445. She was close in under the land with no lights showing, steering S.E. at high speed. Weather calm. Slight drizzle. Information corroborated by William Trevorn (Burge is ex-leading-seaman R.N.)

NOTE 1. All times are British Summer Time, i.e. one hour in advance of Greenwich.

NOTE 2. A grey submarine flying no colours, nationality unknown, was sighted by S.S. "Carngarth" 15 miles S.E. of Eddystone lighthouse at 0740 on June 17th. When first sighted, submarine was steering eastward at high speed; but dived when steamer was within 2½ miles and was not seen again. Corroborated by master of "Carngarth" and other reliable witnesses. No British submarine was in the vicinity at the time stated.

Corfield gazed at the neatly typewritten document with attention. The times were recorded in the usual naval manner by taking the day as one of twenty-four hours from midnight to midnight, and it was certainly noticeable that on each of the seven occasions the mysterious wireless signals had been heard, it was at roughly one hour before the time of low water at the Lizard, and at a time when the weather was fine with no moon. Was this mere haphazard coincidence, or were the signals connected in some way with the state of the tide and weather?

On May 13th, moreover, twenty minutes before the signal had been intercepted, a large motor-boat (query, was she really a motor-boat?) had been sighted stationary and without lights within a mile of the stretch of coast running north-westward from the Lizard. Was she there by a mere fluke, or was there any connection between her and the wireless signals? It seemed possible that she might be hovering off the coast waiting for the signal before she approached it. If so, what was her purpose, and why should she choose low water?

The incident on June 1st, too, was rather peculiar. The motor-craft seen steering east at high speed without lights had been sighted a few minutes after the signals were intercepted, and in a position about eight miles off the land. She was steering directly towards the shore—indeed, almost straight for the spot where the other vessel had been seen over a fortnight before. And again it was a dark night with no moon. Again the time was roughly within an hour of low water. It seemed beyond the bounds of possibility that it could be mere coincidence.

The submarine sighted on June 17th by John Burge of the *Sisters Three* had been seen in similar weather conditions one hour *after* high water proceeding seaward from much the same area as that in which the motor-boats had been reported on the previous occasions. She also, though steaming on the surface, carried no lights. Was she the same submarine that had been sighted by the *Carngarth* off the Eddystone three hours later and had suddenly submerged?

It was perfectly possible, Corfield discovered when he measured the distance on the chart. From the Lizard to a spot fifteen miles south-east of the Eddystone was approximately forty miles, and the time interval between the two sightings was five minutes short of three hours. This gave her a speed of a shade under fourteen knots which, if she had travelled throughout on the surface, was nothing remarkable.

But what submarine could she be?

“I don’t quite know what to make of it, sir,” he said, very puzzled. “D’you think they’re smuggling stuff ashore?”

“What sort of stuff?” the D.N.I. asked.

“Lace, brandy, tobacco, saccharine,” said Corfield, trying on the spur of the moment to remember a list of articles liable

to duty. “Oh, yes, sir, and what about optical instruments and cocaine?”

The D.N.I. smiled and shook his head.

“No,” he said. “I’ve been looking at the ordnance maps. The roads near the coast are past praying for. If they’re running regular cargoes of contraband, they’d have to do it in bulk to make it worth their while. In other words, they’d want a fleet of motor-lorries to cart the stuff away, and they’d attract attention on lonely roads at night. Anyhow, the police would soon tumble to the fact that something unusual was going on. No, nothing of that sort has been happening. We must think of something else.”

“I can’t think of anything else but smuggling, sir,” said Corfield, after consideration.

“I can think of a good many possibilities,” the D.N.I. replied. “But it’s no good worrying you with conjectures. I want you to keep an open mind, to go down to Cornwall, and keep your weather eye lifting.”

Corfield smiled.

“To be a sort of detective, sir?” he asked.

“Something of the kind,” the admiral nodded. “What d’you think of the idea? Will you take it on?”

Corfield seemed a little doubtful.

“I’m keen enough,” he said. “As keen as mustard; but what about the customs? If there’s smuggling going on, surely it’s their job?”

“I never said it was smuggling,” said the D.N.I. with a mysterious smile. “I have my own ideas on the matter, of course; but I want you to go down to Cornwall and to form yours.”

“I see, sir. But where do the police come in? Isn’t it a matter for them—or the coastguard?”

“Quite possibly it may be, if the yarn of these craft seen near the Lizard isn’t all balderdash from beginning to end.”

“I see,” said the commander, stroking his chin.

“You’ll understand,” the D.N.I. went on, “that we don’t want to put them on the track until we’ve something more definite to give them. At present, the whole business is in the air. I want to find out more.—I must find out more!” he added. “If you can’t take it on, Corfield, someone else will.”

“Oh, don’t think I’m jibbing, sir! I should love the job, though the Lord only knows if I’m any good at that sort of thing.”

The D.N.I. looked at him.

“You needn’t be so damnably modest,” he said.

“That’s kind of you, sir,” Corfield returned, pleased at the implied compliment. “So you want me to ... to....”

“To go down to Cornwall as a civilian, and to question those fishermen who’ve made those reports. Also to keep your weather eye lifting on that stretch of coast we’ve already mentioned. Start off by walking along it by daylight, and make a note of any particularly likely looking landing-place—then watch it by night an hour or two either side of low water, when it’s flat calm with no moon, and see what happens. It’s quite on the cards that nothing will, and that the whole yarn’s bunkum from beginning to end. Anyhow, I want to make certain, and that’s where you come in.—I can’t order you to go, naturally; but are you on?”

“Am I not, sir!” Corfield laughed. “I’m more or less at a loose end. It doesn’t matter a hoot if I put off my cruise for a

week or two.”

“What cruise?” the D.N.I. queried.

“My cruise in the yacht,” Corfield explained.

“Ah, of course. But the yacht might be useful. One never knows.”

“That’s true, sir.”

“Then I’m to take it you’ll undertake it?” the admiral asked.

“Most certainly you can, sir.”

“Stout fellow!” said the D.N.I. patting him approvingly on the shoulder. “Now listen carefully,” he continued. “You should be there by Thursday—no, Friday week. That’s the next period when there’s no moon. Keep your eyes skinned, interview those men I told you about, and let me know by wire if anything happens—if it does. We’ll manufacture a code before you go. Send all wires to my private address, and not to the Admiralty—You’ve got a car?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, send telegrams from the nearest town. Village postmistresses sometimes talk. If it is absolutely necessary for you to tell anyone else what I’ve told you, you can do so; but be careful. I’ll leave that to your discretion.”

“My friend in the *Lora* will have to know, sir,” said Corfield. “That is, if we do use the yacht.”

“Yes,” the D.N.I. nodded. “Who is your pal, by the way?”

“A chap called Elliott, sir, a retired N.O.”

“Not ‘Foxy’ Elliott, who left the service when he came into that money?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I used to know him,” said the D.N.I. “And a damned good shipmate he was.—Anyhow,” he went on to say. “You’d better get busy and think out your arrangements. I’ll leave the details to you. But study the lie of the land, Corfield, and think out how I communicate with you, and let me know what you decide. If there’s anything else, come and tell me. In any case, I must see you again before you go.”

“I’d better have the largest scale chart and some big scale ordnance maps,” said Corfield, as he accompanied the D.N.I. towards the door. “Also the papers you mentioned.”

“Ah!” said the admiral. “I’d forgotten. What’s your address?”

The commander told him. The D.N.I. wrote it down.

“I’ll send you all the stuff this afternoon by special messenger,” he said. “Is there anything else?”

“Nothing at present, sir,” said Corfield, shaking hands.

The interview was at an end. The commander left the room to find himself walking along the corridor and downstairs with his brain in a fair imitation of a whirl.

Secret submarines, nocturnal visits to a lonely coast, and himself as a glorified spy or secret-service agent—why, this was better than a novel by Sapper or Edgar Wallace, even more exciting than the war which was fast fading from people’s memories.

Perhaps, on the other hand, there was nothing in it at all. He might easily be off on a wild goose chase brought about by the perfervid imaginations and irresponsible yarns of a few Cornish fishermen.

CHAPTER FOUR

AFTER an early lunch, Corfield left London in his car shortly before half-past one. It was Saturday afternoon and the roads were crowded with week-end motorists taking advantage of the fine weather. Nevertheless, he made good going, and by five and twenty minutes past three he had left the main road past Alton, and was driving through a picturesque village with a cricket match in progress on its green. At three forty-eight by the clock on the dashboard, he passed through the lodge gates of the Manor, crunched up the winding gravel drive, and drew up at the front-door of the long, low house. There was an air of somnolent peace and restfulness about the place that was very refreshing after the noise and heat of London.

The butler himself opened the front-door to his ring.

"Good afternoon, Saxby," he said. "How's the lumbago?"

"Nicely, sir, thank you," the man replied, pleased to see him, and pleased to think that his ailments were remembered. "Haven't had a touch of 'im for near on six weeks. Allow me, sir," he added, relieving Corfield of his hat and tennis racquet. "I'll whistle up Eames and tell 'im to take the car round to the garridge, sir. Your suit case'll be put in your room.—We've put you in the blue room, sir, with bathroom attached."

"Good for you!" the commander laughed. "Where's her ladyship?"

"In the garden, sir, along with Sir Charles and the young people. We've tennis this afternoon, sir. Will you go straight to your room, sir, or shall I show you through."

“I’d better say how d’you do, Saxby.”

“By the way,” he went on to ask, as the butler piloted him through the hall and into the drawing room with the open French windows leading on to the terrace. “Who’s here?”

Saxby came to a halt.

“Stayin’ in the house, sir?”

Corfield nodded.

“Mister George is stoppin’ till Tuesday evenin’, sir. Miss Maryon came yesterday and leaves Monday mornin’. Miss Helen is likewise ’ere, and Mister Tony’s got week-end leave from ’is ship at Portsmouth and goes back to-morrow night,” said Saxby, enumerating the four Ossiter sons and daughters. He considered it due to his position occasionally to drop his aspirates. “Outside the family, sir, we ’ave the Honourable Perkins....”

“The Honourable how-much?” Corfield asked.

“Perkins, sir. Mister Richard Perkins, ’e was, sir,” Saxby explained in a heavy whisper. “ ’is father’s recently been made Lord Findon, sir. It’s a noo creation, sir, quite noo. I doubt you won’t ’ave heard of it. The Honourable Perkins is the heir.”

From the look of disdainful disgust on the butler’s face the creation was too new altogether.

Corfield almost laughed.

“Who else is here?” he asked.

“Mister Neville, sir, who’s in the same regiment as Mister George, an’ a bit of a lad, sir, beggin’ your pardon. Also we’ve got a foreign gentleman arrivin’ in time for dinner. Russian prince, I ’eard he was. Then there’s Miss ’Eddon.”

“Miss Calliope Heddon?” Corfield eagerly demanded.

“Yes, sir.”

“Splendid!”

“Some’ow, I thought you’d be pleased to ’ear that, sir,” Saxby grinned.

Corfield could forgive the familiarity. Saxby was an old friend. He had known him on and off since boyhood, as he had known Marston and the Ossiters.

It was good to hear that Calliope was staying in the house. Corfield liked his host and hostess. He liked George and Maryon, and Helen, and young Tony, the irrepressible sub-lieutenant. He liked Neville, George’s rather harum-scarum friend, and was prepared to put up with Saxby’s evident *bête noire*, the Honourable Perkins, and the Russian Prince. But he liked Calliope better than them all.

Lady Ossiter, breathless and palpitating, greeted him with smiles, called him her ‘dear boy,’ and seemed pleased to see him. Sir Charles, taking him affectionately by the elbow, offered him whisky and soda or iced hock and seltzer, both of which he refused. He greeted George and Maryon and Neville, George’s friend, who were not playing tennis, and was introduced to two solemn-faced girls he had never met before. On the far court Helen Ossiter and an exquisite-looking young man with a sleek black head and wonderful flowing trousers were battling against Calliope and a stranger.

George Ossiter, rising languidly from his chair, took Corfield by the arm.

“You’d better come along and change, Dick,” he said affably. “They’ll want you for the next set. I’ll take you to your room.”

They strolled off together.

“God!” George exclaimed, as they passed out of earshot.

“What’s up?” his friend inquired.

“Of all the ghastliest week-ends this is the ghastliest,” said the soldier despondently. “Where in the hell does mother collect her week-end parties?—and her tennis females are mostly rabbits. That pair I was sitting out with are about as lively as mutes at a pauper funeral! They’ve hardly uttered since they arrived.”

“They look harmless enough,” Corfield put in.

“Harmless!” groaned George. “That’s the devil of it! The girls round about here are all prunes and prisms, and if one of ’em showed her garters the others would have hysterics. The place is like a confounded conventicle! I think you and I had better whoop it up a bit, old lad—” he added breezily.

“I’m respectable, George. One of the apples of your mother’s eye.”

“Then she’ll rope you in for a subscription to her Dumb Animals Protection Society,” replied Lady Ossiter’s eldest son as they entered the house. “That’s her latest craze.”

“Who’s Perkins?” Corfield asked, as they went up the stairs together.

“Mother’s latest lizard,” the soldier replied contemptuously. “One of those ‘nyah-nyah’ blokes reekin’ of money. He don’t believe in war, or anything rough like that. No, merchandise is his *métier*—But I’m forgetting,” he added, as they passed along a corridor and halted before a door. “The lizard isn’t our only exhibit.”

Corfield laughed as he followed his friend into the room.

“Who else is there?” he asked.

“A perishin’ dago who’s coming to-night in time for dinner. Some bloomin’ Bolshie that Helen picked up at a dance and persuaded mother to ask for the week-end.”

“D’you mean Saxby’s Russian Prince? What’s he like?”

“Lord knows! I haven’t seen the blighter; but according to Helen he’s devastatingly good-looking and dances like a professional.—God knows where she picks up all these strange people! I hate ’em all!”

“Have you everything you want, old boy?” he rattled on. “I see they’ve done your unpacking?”

“Yes, everything, I think.”

“I’ll be trotting then,” said George, turning to leave the room after helping himself to one of Corfield’s cigarettes. “See you in ten minutes or so.”

He left the room and closed the door behind him, only to re-open it an instant later and to put his grinning face inside.

“I say, Dick!”

“Hullo?”

“If you hurry up I’ll keep Calliope for you for the next set. —She’s the pick of our bunch.”

“Stout fellow!” Corfield laughed.

The door closed and he was left alone. What with George’s feud against his detestable Perkins, and the advent of the aristocratic Russian carpet-seller, Corfield’s peaceful week-end promised to be rather interesting—possibly exciting.

CHAPTER FIVE

It was not until after tea on the lawn and three strenuous sets of tennis that Corfield was at last able to disappear with Calliope. Dressed entirely in white except for her beige silk stockings, her face slightly flushed, and her tawny hair gleaming like a beacon in the afternoon sun, she was looking her best.

"I like this place," she said, settling herself on the low seat under the old mulberry tree at the far end of the yew hedge, and gazing out across the little river meandering through a lush green meadow in which Sir Charles' small herd of Alderneys cropped the grass and swished their tails to keep off the swarms of flies. "It's restful. No noise of cars—nothing to disturb one."

Corfield flung himself down at her feet and reflectively chewed a stem of grass.

"I wonder if you'd like to live here always?" he asked. "You'd miss your gaiety in town."

She smiled.

"I wonder," she said.

He rolled over on his side to produce a cigarette case from the pocket of his blazer.

"Cigarette?" he asked, holding it out.

"Thanks," she said, taking one.

He fumbled for his lighter and scrambled to his knees to light it for her. Calliope leant forward.

He found himself gazing at her at close range. He liked the colour of her hair and the way it curled round her ears. He

liked her long eyelashes, and her eyes. Yes. She was certainly attractive.

“Thanks,” she said, leaning back to puff out a cloud of tobacco smoke.

“I’m glad you’re here,” he said awkwardly, reseating himself on the ground and lighting his own cigarette.

“Didn’t you know I was coming?” she asked him with a smile.

“I hadn’t the faintest idea.”

“And I didn’t know you were coming till I arrived yesterday,” she observed, looking at him. “I only got the invitation three days ago from Lady O., because Maryon was coming. She’s my friend, you know. We were at school together.”

“I know,” he nodded.

“How’s Diana?” she asked.

“Quite bobbish,” he said. “I say, Calliope.”

“Well?”

“Tell me about the Russian who’s arriving to-night.”

“Boris Polinoff?”

“Yes. Have you met him?”

“Oh yes,” she replied. “I’ve seen him several times in town with Helen.”

Corfield frowned. “O-oh!” he said dubiously. “And what’s he like?”

“Rather pathetic,” she told him. “You see, he really was a prince, and now he has to make his living by selling rugs and carpets. But he seems well enough off,” she added. “He

dresses well, and is always dancing and dining out and going to theatres.”

“Married?”

“No.”

“What’s he look like?”

“Very dark and good-looking. Funny-looking eyes which seem to peer right through one. He’s a peculiar sort of person, rather mysterious. He talks English as well as we do; but ... but I don’t altogether like him. There’s something strange about him that makes me want to shut up like an oyster. Some people I know rave about him.—He’s not the sort of man I would trust, anyway.”

“Have you met him often?”

“Perhaps half-a-dozen times,” she said. “And that reminds me. He was in our party the other night at the de Paris, and your name cropped up.”

“My name!” Corfield exclaimed. “But I’ve never met the man!”

“Perhaps not,” she said. “Anyhow, he seemed to know something about you. He asked if you were the Corfield who’d been out in China fairly recently.”

“The deuce he did!” said Corfield, very surprised.

Calliope nodded.

“What else did he say about me?” he asked.

“That you must be rather an interesting person to talk to and that he hoped he’d meet you one day.”

“And he’ll meet me here, this evening,” he returned after a pause. “Now why the devil should he want to meet me? What can we possibly have in common?”

“Goodness knows,” she answered with a shrug of her shoulders.

“I must find out,” he said. “But I shan’t have long. I’m leaving town on Thursday.”

“Oh!” she said. “Where are you going?”

“Cornwall, for a month.”

“Cornwall!” she echoed. “That’s funny. I’m going to Cornwall sometime this week.”

“Whereabouts?”

“Mother and father have been lent a cottage or bungalow on the coast. Mother’s dreading the solitude, and has persuaded me to go down there for a fortnight. I shall stay a bit longer if I like it; but I don’t expect I shall.”

“North coast or south coast?” he inquired.

“South coast,” she replied. “Mother’s two letters have been very vague, but I gather it’s somewhere near a place called Mullion.”

“Mullion!” he exclaimed, with sudden interest.

“And why not?” she inquired.

“Merely because I shall be in that district for a week or so.”

“But where are you staying?”

“I haven’t made any definite plans. I was going to look about.”

“Then you must come to us,” she said with an air of finality. “You’ve met father and mother, and I know we’ve plenty of room.—Yes, Dick! You must come to us, you must. We’ll regard it as settled. It’ll be topping! We can bathe and scramble about the cliffs, and be thoroughly lazy if we feel

like it. In the intervals of being bored by me, you can talk to father and mother.”

After all, thought Corfield to himself, why not? He need not tell Calliope precisely what his mission was. She needn’t know anything beyond the fact that he was there on a holiday. He could do what the D.N.I. wanted him to do, and combine business with pleasure.

“It might perhaps be done,” he said after a minute’s thought.

“Oh, Dick!” she cried, her eyes sparkling. “How perfectly gorgeous!”

“I should like it, Calliope,” he said, looking at her.

“Honest Injun?” she asked. “Are you certain you won’t be deadly bored?”

“Bored!” he exclaimed. “Good Lord, no!”

“Very well, then. That’s settled. I shall write to mother, telling her I’m bringing a friend.”

“How are you going down?” he asked.

“By train, I suppose.”

“But why not come with me by car on Thursday?” he suggested, suddenly smitten with the idea. “I was going to start from Town more or less at cockcrow and do the trip in one day.”

“Are you quite sure you want me?” she asked.

“Of course I do!” he exclaimed. “Don’t you realise I ... oh! damn! Damn and blast!”

Most inopportunely, Tony Ossiter and one of the vicarage girls had come into sight at the far end of the yew hedge.

“Hi, sir!” Tony bellowed, hailing him like a boatswain’s mate. “They want you to make up another set! We’ve been looking for you all over the place.”

Corfield rose to his feet and carefully dusted his white flannel trousers.

“I suppose we’d better go,” he said.

“I suppose we must,” said she, rising.

“And you won’t forget about Thursday?”

“Forget,” she said, looking at him. “Of course I won’t! Why on earth should I?”

Halfway across the lawn he remembered something else.

“I say, Calliope!” he whispered, putting his hand on her arm.

“Well?”

“Please don’t say a word to anyone about my going to Cornwall. It’s important!”

“Why this mystery?” she asked. “Don’t you want people to know we’re going together?”

“It’s not that at all, Calliope,” he replied, looking foolish.

“What is it, then?”

“I ... I can’t very well tell you,” Corfield stammered. “It’s confidential. I’ll explain some day.”

“Something you have to do?” she inquired.

He nodded.

“Something mysterious and confidential?”

“Yes,” he replied. “Something which might be ... er, well, rather exciting.”

“I don’t quite understand,” she said, a puzzled look on her face.

CHAPTER SIX

THE evening meal at Marston was timed to start at eight o'clock. It was between a quarter and twenty minutes past the hour, however, when old Saxby, after allowing what he considered a decent interval for the assimilation of sherry and cocktails, waddled into the hall, flung open the double doors of the dining-room, and made his usual jerky bow with the announcement: "Dinner is served, Me Lady."

Corfield found himself placed on Lady Ossiter's left at the foot of the long table, with Perkins opposite. Calliope, to his unspeakable disgust, was sitting at the far end and on Sir Charles's left, with Polinoff beside her. Without craning, he could only just glimpse the top of her head over the tall silver centre-piece filled with its mass of roses which scented the room.

It was deuced bad luck, he thought to himself—rather uncharitable of Lady O. to have sent him in with somebody else when she might have known that he was rather fond of Calliope. But perhaps she didn't realise how the land lay. It was foolish of him not to have mentioned it beforehand. Then she might have arranged it more to his liking.

But it was too late now. He was marooned with his hostess on one hand, Maryon on the other, and the exquisite Perkins opposite, while Calliope, charming in a filmy dress of some jade-green material with a string of pearls round her throat, was condemned to spending the next hour and a half talking to Sir Charles and Polinoff.

Damnation!

He also, like Calliope, distrusted Polinoff, though for a different reason. The Russian was well-spoken, so much so

that one would hardly have guessed him to be a foreigner, while from the conversation Corfield had had with him before going up to change for dinner, it was evident that he knew many people in London, a good deal about the world and its affairs, and was accepted in London society. He seemed to go everywhere—and do everything—rather unusual for a Russian refugee who made an ostensible living out of selling Persian rugs and carpets.

But his questions about Corfield's future movements had been altogether too shrewd and intelligent for the commander's liking. Answering evasively, the commander had carefully steered the conversation into another channel. It had seemed almost as if there were something that Polinoff badly wanted to know.

But perhaps, Corfield reflected, there was really nothing behind it all. Perhaps he had been rather prejudiced by what Calliope had told him. All the same, he couldn't like him. Polinoff was a little too suave, rather too subtle in his seemingly artless questions.

At first sight Corfield had put him down as a libertine, a man who would stop at nothing if once he set his heart on a woman. And young Tony Ossiter, who was by no means a fool, had disliked the man on sight. Searching his wits for a suitable nickname for use out of Polinoff's hearing, he had christened him 'Rasputin,' beardless though he might be. It was merely his youthful way of showing that he considered the Russian 'a nasty piece of work.'

Dinner that night seemed an interminable function so far as Corfield was concerned. What he ate, what he talked about to Lady Ossiter and Maryon, he hardly noticed. The conversation went in fits and starts, with Maryon gossiping

with a stranger on her left, and Perkins making most of the running with Lady O.

It was not until ten minutes to ten, after the first circuit of the decanters, that the hostess marshalled the women from the room, leaving the men to forgather round Sir Charles at the other end of the table. The port passed a second time, and a third. Sir Charles recited a rather blatant limerick about a lady from Ryde, while the insufferable Perkins, rather flushed about the face, capped it with a long and complicated story of which nobody saw the point. Tony, who was bubbling over to spin his latest yarn was snubbed in brotherly fashion by George, who insisted on telling one of his own. Then Polinoff, egged on by George, became really interesting on the subject of his own country under Bolshevist rule. He had been there, it seemed, since the revolution.

Cigarettes and cigars were handed round by Saxby. Coffee and liqueurs followed.

Ten minutes' further conversation, after which Sir Charles suggested Bridge for some and Snooker for the others. It was young Tony who wanted someone else to play the pianola so that he might dance with a girl who had come to dinner, Connie Davenant, rather a flame of his.

At eighteen minutes past ten, smoking their cigars, the men finally left the dining-room and wandered into the hall.

"Going to play bridge or bang the balls about, Dickie?" George inquired, tucking his arm into Corfield's.

"Not for me," said the commander.

"Then let's escape!" said George in a whisper. "Come along to the gun room, and I'll show you the new pair of Purdeys that the old boy has given me for my birthday. I won't keep you long," he added with a portentous wink. "I'll

make young Tony tell Calliope to be on the terrace beyond the yew hedge in ten minutes' time. How's that for strategy?"

"I leave it entirely to you," said Corfield with a smile. "She may prefer something else."

"We'll see," said the soldier mysteriously, hurrying after his sailor brother, putting an arm round his shoulder, and murmuring into his ear.

The sub-lieutenant listened attentively, nodded in the commander's direction with a wink and an impertinent grin, and hurried off on his errand. His mission was not altogether altruistic. He wanted also to find his beloved Connie, and if nobody would play that wretched pianola, he'd start the gramophone, whatever the bridge players said.

Corfield and George disappeared down a passage, passed through a swing-door, walked along a stone-flagged passage and so into the gun-room, where, for the next quarter of an hour, the sailor listened to his friend's dissertation on sporting weapons of precision, one of the few things beyond soldiering and horses upon which he was really keen.

"I'll let you go now," he said at last, replacing his beloved guns in their cases and looking up with a grin. "I expect she'll be there. You needn't go through the hall. Go straight along the passage outside, cut through the door at the end, and you'll find yourself in the garden. Good Luck!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

A FEW minutes later Corfield was walking silently across the lawn towards the yew hedge. He noiselessly climbed the grass slope on which it was planted, passed through an opening, and looked down towards the river, whence came the murmur of voices.

It was dark with no moon, but outlined against the greyish sheen of the still water he saw two figures standing on the bank. Their backs were towards him. One he could recognise as Calliope. The other was a man. What man?

He suddenly heard Calliope's voice raised in expostulation.

"I tell you I won't!" she exclaimed, her tone very clear and penetrating. "Why d'you keep on asking?"

The reply was inaudible.

"How dare you follow me through the garden?" she went on. "I told you I didn't want you."

"Don't be a little fool!" came the man's voice—Polinoff's, "I merely want...."

Before Corfield could move down the slope to interfere he saw the Russian's arm go round the girl's neck. The pair seemed to be struggling. He heard Calliope breathing in short little gasps. Their heads came together. Then a sudden, sharp cry of anger.

"You beast! You beast!" the girl cried, fighting to free herself. "Let me go!"

"I'm coming, Calliope!" Corfield shouted, furious with anger as he started down the bank to help her.

Even as he spoke his feet shot from under him on the slippery turf. He fell with a thump on his back, and started to

slide.

Polinoff, who had released Calliope, turned towards him. And as Corfield landed in an undignified sitting posture on the grass path almost at the girl's feet, he saw her right arm go up, swing through the air, and her clenched fist land full in the Russian's face.

"Take that, you brute!"

Polinoff, with a yelp of mingled pain and surprise, took a hasty step to the rear and slipped on the greasy bank. He toppled backwards clawing the air. Then came a splash as he fell into the river.

"Calliope," asked Corfield anxiously, scrambling to his feet. "Calliope, are you all right?"

She was sobbing with rage.

"Calliope, old thing," he repeated. "Tell me you're all right."

"That foul brute kissed me!" she exclaimed, her voice husky with anger.

She fell to wiping her lips with the back of her hand.

"God! I'll half-kill the swine!" Corfield muttered, beside himself with fury. "You go back to the house. We'll settle this alone."

"No, Dickie, no!" she wailed, her voice full of anxiety. "Don't do anything! Don't! I'd much rather you didn't!"

He stared at her in amazement. At one moment she had felt like murdering the man who had insulted her. The next, she was begging him off the punishment he deserved.

"D'you really mean that?" he asked.

"Yes ... yes! Pull him out, Dick! He may be drowning. The river there's fifteen feet deep!... Oh, pull him out quickly ...

quickly!”

Polinoff, breathing in gasps, was clawing at the muddy bank trying to heave himself out of the water. But each time he drew himself waist high in an endeavour to get a leg on to the bank, his hand-hold gave and he slipped backwards.

Corfield stepped forward, clutched him by the collar of his coat, and jerked him dripping on to the bank.

“Now—what the hell d’you mean by it?” he demanded, his voice trembling with passion as he stood over him with clenched fists. “Get up, you swine!”

Polinoff scrambled to his feet, and stood facing his adversary.

“You call me swine!” he said, his voice full of menace.

“Of course I do! What the hell d’you mean by ... by insulting Miss Heddon?”

“Is there any harm in kissing a girl?” Polinoff asked sarcastically. “Have you never kissed a girl?”

“Don’t bandy words with me, you damned cad!” the naval officer blazed out, curbing his fervent desire to lash out with his fists at the pale, sneering face in front of him. “You call yourself a gentleman, don’t you?”

“Certainly,” the other replied. “Do I understand you to say that I am not?”

“I’m damned if I’ll argue with you!” Corfield retorted angrily. “For two pins I’d throttle you. What have you got to say for yourself?”

“I say nothing,” said Polinoff with a shrug of his shoulders. “To kiss a girl is no sin.”

“Bah! I’m sick of hearing that!—Now what you will do, Polinoff, is to go back to the house, make what excuse you

like, and clear off in your car to-night. To-night! Understand?”

“You dictate to me? You command me?”

“Yes, I do! Perhaps you’d prefer me to tell Sir Charles. But possibly you’ve never seen Sir Charles really angry,” he added ominously. “I have. If I tell him what’s happened, he’ll probably go for you with a hunting crop, so I warn you.”

For a moment the two men faced each other, their fists clenched, their eyes blazing.

“I have nothing further to say ... now,” said Polinoff, at last, his voice almost a snarl. “I go to-night, yes. But perhaps some day Commander Corfield, we meet again.”

“Are you daring to threaten me?” Corfield demanded, moving forward. “If so, I’ll be damned if I don’t....”

“Don’t hit him, Dickie!” Calliope broke in, putting a hand on his shoulder.

“I wouldn’t dirty my hands with the swine!” the commander growled. “But he threatened me.”

“I never threaten,” said Polinoff. “I act.”

“And what the devil d’you mean by that?”

“I merely say that perhaps we meet again,” the Russian returned, his voice evil. “The tables may perhaps be turned—next time. And now I will say good night.” He turned on his heel and walked off.

“Hi!” called Corfield.

“You talk to me?” asked Polinoff, stopping and turning round.

“I do. When you get back to London, you can write a letter of apology to Miss Heddon. And now, clear out, unless you want me to help you in a way you won’t like!”

Polinoff laughed derisively and moved off.

“Thank you, Dick!” said Calliope quietly, slipping her arm through his.

“Never mind,” he said, squeezing her arm. “I only wish to heaven you’d let me thrash him.”

At that moment there came a sudden diversion in the shape of a blinding ray of light from the terrace above. For an instant it rested on Calliope and Corfield at the water’s edge, and then travelled to the right until it fell on Polinoff, who had climbed the bank and was walking along the terrace. His face, shirt front and clothes were streaked with mud, dripping with water.

“I say, Connie, old thing!” came Tony Ossiter’s penetrating voice. “How lucky we brought the torch. Look what I’ve found, dearie!”

Corfield heard Miss Davenant’s excited giggle as the light shone full on the Russian.

“I’m blowed if our priceless old Rasputin hasn’t been for a swim in the river!” said Tony with a laugh. “Gawd! Look at his clothes!... I say, old bean,” he went on, as the Russian approached. “What’s up? What the hell have you been doing?”

“Let me pass, damn you!” Polinoff hissed, waving him aside. “Take that light off my face!”

“A bit ratty, are we?” said Tony amusedly, switching off his light. “All the same, old chap, I advise you to have a hot whisky and a good rub-down before you turn in—and a hot-water bottle in your bed.”

“Don’t be a damned young fool!” snarled the Russian as he passed.

“Perfect little gentleman, I must say,” Tony muttered as Polinoff finally passed out of earshot. “I say, sir,” he called to Corfield. “What *has* really been happening? Have you all been bathing, or what?”

The commander did not enlighten him.

CHAPTER EIGHT

It was Thursday evening. Mr. and Mrs. Heddon, Calliope's parents, had been at One Tree Bungalow since the previous Monday.

The little house was a full three miles from the nearest village with a post-office, and except for a few scattered farms and cottages there were no nearer habitations. It stood facing nearly west in a dip in a wild stretch of rugged coast, close to the edge of a low grey cliff overlooking a small sandy cove and the sea.

To the west-north-west and north-west there was a distant view of the opposite coast round about Land's End and the northern shore of Mount's Bay, an undulating line of misty mauve, clear-cut against the pale blue sky on the horizon, which harmonised with the ever-changing colouring of the sea, as patches of brilliant sunlight alternating with cloud shadows travelled slowly across its surface.

There was always something to look at—distant steamers making the Lizard lighthouse as they ploughed their way up or down the English Channel, the brown sails of the fleets of Cornish pilchard boats flocking out of Mount's Bay before sundown. After dark the expanse of indigo sea twinkled with their lights, for all the world like the lights of a town adrift upon the waters.

Freddie Bardsley, Heddon's friend, who had taken a fancy to the spot during a motor tour and had built the bungalow on the site of an old cottage, had spared neither trouble nor expense. It was a substantial little single-storied house of grey stone with thick walls, slated roof, and green shuttered windows. It took its name from the single stunted tree which

struggled for existence in the little garden running almost to the edge of the cliff, though why Bardsley had called it a ‘bungalow’ was something of a mystery. Beyond the fact that it had only one storey, it bore no resemblance whatever to the average, gimcrack habitations which seemed to spring up like mushrooms in the night on the outskirts of the less fashionable seaside towns.

It had its own well and small pumping engine for filling the cisterns, and was connected by telephone to the nearest exchange over three miles away, which in itself must have cost a mint of money. It had electric light, supplied by another small engine in an outhouse, a garage for two cars, and, as a house agent would say ‘all modern amenities water h. and c. in the bedrooms, and furnished regardless of expense.’ Everything, even to the tiled bathroom, and the anthracite cooking stove in the little kitchen, was good and expensive. The beds were comfortable, the furniture, pictures, plate, linen, crockery, cutlery, all of the very best.

Money, too, had been spent upon the little flower garden in front of the house, though without much success. The soil was too poor and the ground too windswept, for plants really to thrive. Some stunted-looking antirrhiniums struggled for existence. Only the hardy pink thrift, some imported thyme, and patches of mauve, blue, pink and yellow statice, seemed really to flourish in the arid beds between the low grey walls and paved, twisting little pathways.

The sharp-looking, foxy-faced Symons, a small man inclined to be argumentative and truculent, who bicycled in every alternate day to run the pumping and electric light engines and to do odd jobs, was nothing of a gardener. Moreover, as Heddon had soon found out, he was downright

lazy, considering he had done a fair day's work when he had topped up the electric-lighting batteries, filled the cisterns, and produced half-a-dozen seedy-looking lettuces without hearts from the little kitchen garden at the back. He was a disgruntled, unsatisfactory man to have about the place, a man with a perpetual grievance. But remonstrance was useless. Symons was Bardsley's servant, not Heddon's.

Mrs. Symons bicycled in daily, to 'do' for the tenants, arriving at half-past eight in the morning and leaving after supper. She was a tolerable cook when she set her mind to it, though after twenty years of married life she seemed to have borrowed the sharp tongue, shrill voice, and discontented outlook upon life enjoyed by her little rat of a husband.

It was hopeless for Mrs. Heddon to suggest their individual likes and dislikes to Mrs. Symons. She obviously regarded visitors as nothing more than a nuisance, and either went her own way regardless of everything, or else maintained an attitude of sulky intractability. Moreover, it would have been beneath her dignity to have called her temporary mistress anything but 'Mrs. 'Eddon.'

It surprised both Heddon and his wife that Bardsley, a rich bachelor who loved comfort, and must have spent some thousands in rebuilding the house and furnishing it, should have kept such an unsatisfactory couple as servants. But he seemed to use it very seldom. For the last year, from what the Symons' said, he had not been there at all. Either he was thoroughly bored with the place, or else he had fancied the site, rebuilt the old cottage for a mere whim, and then, on its completion, had lost all interest in it. Nevertheless, it was a delightful spot for a summer holiday to people who preferred the wild charm of nature and a wonderful vista of rocky cliffs

and sea to the garish amenities and bustle of the usual seaside town. No cars or motor-coaches ever came near One Tree Bungalow. No trippers picnicked on the cliffs or littered the sandy cove with paper and chocolate wrappers. Except for Mr. and Mrs. Symons, who spent most of every alternate day screaming at each other in the kitchen, all was peace.

It was late evening. Heddon and his wife had finished their supper, though the oval table in the bay window was freshly laid for a meal. Heddon himself, in an armchair with his back to the wonderful glow of the sun gradually nearing the horizon, was reading a book. His wife, sitting bolt upright with a card-table before her, was playing 'Miss Milligan'.

"Will you have the light?" he asked, putting down his book with a yawn, uncrossing his long legs, and removing his horn-rimmed glasses to peer at his wife.

"Let's wait a little, Michael," she said, looking up. "It's a pity to shut out the last of the daylight."

He shambled awkwardly to his feet, yawned again, stretched himself, and strolled across to the open French window to the left of the bay-window leading to the short, stone-flagged terrace outside. He wore untidy grey-flannel trousers very baggy at the knees, a pair of rubber-soled tennis shoes which had once been white, and an unspeakable tweed jacket over a grey flannel shirt open at the neck. His lean face was burnt red by the sun, and looking at him, not one of his many readers would have suspected him of being the immaculately-dressed author whose photograph they sometimes saw in the newspapers and publisher's catalogues. His holiday clothes would have disgraced a scarecrow.

"O-o-o-h!" he yawned again. "This air makes me feel confoundedly sleepy."

His wife, intent upon her game, did not reply. With a glance at her over his shoulder, Heddon leant against the door-post gazing across the shining sea while automatically filling and lighting his pipe.

“What time did Calliope say she would arrive?” he asked, turning round. “It’s getting late. I want to go to bed.”

“She didn’t say,” said Mrs. Heddon, her eyes still upon her cards. “You know how vague she is.”

“But surely she wrote to you. Didn’t she say when we were to expect her?”

His wife looked up and shook her head.

“No,” she replied. “Merely a post card to say that she and a friend would arrive by car on Thursday.”

“I don’t like it,” said Heddon. “We’re two-seventy-five miles from London—By the way, I presume they were going to do it in the day?”

“She didn’t say, Michael.”

“If they started this morning at seven o’clock, say, they surely ought to be here by now,” he continued, his expression rather worried. “Two-seventy-five miles is nothing for Calliope when she gets going.—Is she coming in her own car or the friend’s?”

“I really don’t know, Michael.”

“Who’s’ her friend?”

“I don’t know that either,” Mrs. Heddon replied. “Calliope has swarms of girl friends. It may be any one of them, Enid, perhaps, or the Corbyn girl, or Molly Kearsley—I don’t know.”

“I don’t like it,” he murmured. “These long trips by car, you know, and two girls alone. Suppose they’ve had a

breakdown? Anything might have happened.—Anything! They might have had an accident.... I suppose she knows our address and telephone number?”

“I gave it to her,” his wife observed, beginning to look anxious in her turn. “But I wish you wouldn’t suggest these possibilities, Michael. You make me feel nervous. D’you really imagine....”

“I suppose there’s really no need for us to feel anxious,” Heddon interrupted. “If something serious had happened, we should have heard by telephone. But Calliope’s a careful driver. She’s never had a smash yet, and I don’t really see why she should now.—All the same, I wish she’d come.”

“So do I,” Mrs. Heddon replied. “Michael,” she continued after a short pause, “I’m beginning to dislike that Mrs. Symons and her husband.”

“You can’t dislike them more than I do,” he said. “But what’s happened now?”

“It’s her general attitude, and her dislike to taking any orders from me. This morning she practically told me I had no right to tell her anything.—She’s a beast of a woman, Michael.”

“And her husband’s no better,” Heddon put in.

“But I believe Mrs. Symons wants to get rid of us,” Mrs. Heddon went on. “She’s been trying to frighten me.”

“Frighten you! How?”

“She says this place is haunted, Michael,” she said almost in a whisper.

“Haunted!”

“Yes. And I don’t like it. You know that this house was built on the site of an older cottage. That wall with the locked

cupboard is practically the only part of the old building which remains.”

She pointed across the room to the rough stone wall, distempered in pale cream above and panelled in oak below, which separated the large living room and one of the bedrooms.

As Heddon had already noticed, the wall was enormously thick. The fireplace in the centre was an old-fashioned one, probably the original cooking place of the older building. And close beside it was the large locked cupboard, fully six feet high, with a substantial door and Yale lock. He had never seen inside it, and the key was not in his possession. According to Symons it contained some of Bardsley’s belongings.

“But what’s the wall got to do with the place being haunted?” he asked, going over to the sofa and sitting beside her.

“It’s not the wall,” she replied with a shudder. “It’s the cupboard, Michael—the cupboard!”

“It looks a very ordinary sort of cupboard,” he said, gazing at it. “I suppose it contains a few odds and ends of Bardsley’s that he wanted to keep locked up.”

“Who told you so?”

“Symons.”

“Mr. Bardsley said nothing about it?”

Heddon shook his head.

“Could you write to him and ask?”

“I could hardly get a reply before we leave, Mary. Bardsley’s in America. I’ve only got his London address.”

“It’s the cupboard which worries me, Michael,” she murmured, her eyes fixed upon it. “I can’t help my nerves; but ... but I hate being left alone in this room after dark. I’m always expecting it to open, and something ... something horrible to come out.—Ugh! I hate it!”

“In that case we’d better leave to-morrow,” he replied. “Why should you be worried? We can easily pack up and go to some hotel.”

But his wife shook her head.

“I may be a nervous fool,” she answered. “But I have some pride, Michael. I’m not going to run away and let that detestable Mrs. Symons triumph over us. She wants to get rid of us. I won’t be got rid of.”

“And now I come to think about it that might also account for Symons’ behaviour,” said he, pondering. “He’s very rude and surly.—Look here, Mary, why don’t we make up our minds to pack up and leave to-morrow?”

“No, Michael, no! I’m not going to be routed by Mrs. Symons.”

“How did she try to frighten you?”

“You know that ledge of rock we can see at low tide?”

“The Shutters?”

She nodded.

“Switch on the light before I begin,” she broke off. “It’s getting dark. This room feels ... creepy.”

He left her side, crossed the room and flooded it with light from the switch by the doorway leading in from the little hall.

“That’s better,” he said, seating himself beside her. “Now, let’s hear the story.”

“Years ago a ship ran ashore on the rocks near this cove and was wrecked,” Mrs. Heddon began. “It was during a thick fog, I think she said. Anyhow, most of the people were drowned, all but two. One of them was a girl coming home from abroad, the other was a sailor. They came ashore in this cove, Michael, climbed the low part of the cliff, and got into this house, or rather the one that used to be here. The girl ... girl,” she hesitated and paused.

“Well?” he said gently.

“The girl was someone rather well known, though Mrs. Symons didn’t mention the name. She managed to bring her jewel case with her when the ship was wrecked....”

“How on earth could she have done that if it was a sort of *sauve qui peut* in a thick fog?” Heddon asked. He was always a stickler for detail.

“I don’t know, Michael, I’m merely telling you what Mrs. Symons told me.—Anyhow, the girl had some jewels with her, and during the night ... during the night the sailor strangled her and ran away with her jewellery. Months afterwards they found her body in that cupboard, or the one that used to be there....” She shuddered.

Heddon left her side for a moment, went across the room, and carefully examined the cupboard door. Only the lock was new. The heavy oak of which it was made looked black and worm-eaten, centuries old. He ran his fingers over it, rapped upon it with his knuckles. The dull thuds showed the wood was very thick.

“Don’t, Michael!” his wife exclaimed.

“The door’s old enough,” he said; “the wall’s so thick there must be room enough inside for six grisly skeletons, let alone one.”

“I wish you wouldn’t joke about it!” she exclaimed. “Come and sit down again, I haven’t told you everything.”

He went back to the sofa and relit his pipe.

“Well,” he said.

“You can believe it or not,” she continued, her voice low. “But Mrs. Symons says that sometimes, on foggy nights, people hear the crash of that ship hitting the rocks, the ringing of a bell, and the shrieks of people drowning. Then, a little later, the sailor and the girl come into the house. They ... they struggle and he murders her, and puts her there ... there!”

She pointed across the room.

“Pooh! I don’t believe a word of it,” Heddon scoffed. “It’s merely a silly tale of Mrs. Symons’s.”

“Then why is it the ghosts were seen by a party of people camping here before Mr. Bardsley built this house?” whispered his wife. “Why is it they heard a crash as if a ship had hit rocks? Why did they hear the bell tolling and people shrieking?”

“Probably their imagination,” Heddon replied, feeling distinctly uncomfortable. “The sea makes strange noises, and so do the gulls. You’ve heard them yourself.”

“Then why is it none of the villagers will come near this place after dark, Michael? Even that old clergyman we talked to in the village the other day seemed surprised when I said we were here. Do you remember what he replied?”

“I can’t say I do.”

“He said: ‘God be with you and protect you from the evils of the night.’ He said it in a whisper, Michael. Perhaps he didn’t intend me to hear; but I did. How do you account for that?”

“Even clergymen may be superstitious,” he replied, with a cheerfulness he did not feel.

CHAPTER NINE

It was at half-past six on the Thursday morning that Corfield drew up in his car outside Calliope's little house in Chelsea. She was already waiting for him, and ten minutes later, with the suitcases piled in the dickey, they were driving down King's Road on their way to Putney Bridge, Richmond, and Staines.

There was every promise of a hot, windless day. It was still too early for any great congestion of traffic. The little car was pulling well, and by seven forty-five they had passed through Staines and Egham and were breasting the long hill leading up from Virginia Water.

They passed through Sunningdale, waiting the inevitable five minutes at the level crossing to allow a leisurely train to collect its passengers and to steam Londonwards, then sleepy little Bagshot, the 'Jolly Farmer' at the fork of the roads, Camberley, Blackwater, and over the Hartford Bridge Flats into Hartley Wintney. Hook, and the six mile run into Basingstoke, where breakfast had been ordered at a hotel.

They were well ahead of time and he was running at an easy thirty-five, when, about two miles short of the town, there came the deep note of a horn from an overtaking car behind. Drawing over to the near side of the road, Corfield waved it on. It was a big open Daimler, painted a peculiar greyish-blue with wings of dark grey, which swished past them at something over fifty miles an hour. Corfield, who was paying no particular attention, noticed casually as it passed that there were three men behind and two in front. The man driving, whose hat was pulled well down over his eyes, was evidently the owner.

As it drew ahead and he steered again towards the crown of the road, Calliope suddenly sat bolt upright and gazed intently through the windscreen.

“Now that’s funny!” she exclaimed.

“What?”

“That car.”

“Why?” he asked, noticing it bore a white oval nationality plate with the letters ‘G.B.’ in black. It was already too far ahead to see the identification mark and number, which seemed partly obliterated.

“Because I’ve been in that car, or one very like it,” she replied.

“Are you certain?” he asked.

“It’s the colour I’m going by,” she replied. “Besides, it’s an open Daimler. You generally see them with saloon bodies.”

“That’s true,” he said casually, accelerating to have the other car in sight again after negotiating a curve in the road. “Who’s is it?”

“Boris Polinoff’s,” said Calliope.

“Polinoff’s!” he exclaimed, irritated at her use of the Russian’s Christian name. “Are you certain?”

“It’s the only open Daimler of that colour I’ve ever seen,” she said, as they swept round the bend and the other car again came in sight, far ahead.

“You didn’t notice the number?”

“No. But I’ll swear it’s the same car, Dick. About five weeks ago he and another man took Enid and myself to Maidenhead. You remember I told you we’d spent a day on the river.”

“I know you did!” he exclaimed. “God! I hate to think you’ve been anywhere with a swine like that!”

“But why not?” she demanded, looking at him, her voice expressionless. “He’d behaved quite decently up to that night at Marston.”

“No reason at all, Calliope,” he replied with a shrug of his shoulders. After all, he had no right to censor her comings and goings, or to choose her companions.

For the moment, however, his heart was heavy, full of a vague suspicion that she was fonder of Polinoff than she would have him believe.

But Calliope’s next words allayed his dismal forebodings.

“Dick,” she said seriously. “Let me tell you, here and now, once and for all, that Boris Polinoff is nothing to me at all. Until last Saturday I merely regarded him as a casual friend. Now, I regard him as a beastly little worm, and that’s on my honour.”

“Thank God for that!” he murmured.

“And if you think I would ever have gone alone in a car, as I am going with you to-day,” she added, “you’re jolly well mistaken. I don’t trust him. I never have.—You believe me, don’t you?”

“Of course I do,” he replied thankfully. “I trust you through and through, Calliope. I always have.”

“Thank you,” she said. “It’s rather nice to have a great big bully like you to look after one,” she added. “You’re so keen that I should always behave like a perfect lady, so terribly anxious to fight anyone who annoys me!”

He grunted something unintelligible under his breath. Women were beyond him. At one moment they were all over

one, so to speak, and the next, for no reason at all that he could see, they suddenly became as cold as icebergs. Why shouldn't he be secretly annoyed because Calliope had been on the river with another man?

Long before they came into Basingstoke, the Daimler, travelling fast, had disappeared, and two minutes before the appointed time the Alvis came to a standstill before the hotel where breakfast had been ordered.

"What I want to know is this," Corfield thoughtfully observed, as Calliope left the car. "Was Polinoff in that Daimler?"

"I don't know," she replied. "It flashed past too quickly. I didn't really notice it until it was ahead."

"But if he was in it," the commander went on, his voice full of suspicion. "Where was he going? Anyhow, why should his car be travelling west on the same day as ourselves?"

Now he came to think of it, he had told the hands at the garage where he kept his car that he was going to Cornwall, though he had not mentioned the precise place. He had even consulted the proprietor as to the best roads out of London and to the west.

And suppose, for some reason, that Polinoff really was interested in his movements and had found out where he kept his car? A casual question or two would give him his probable route and time of departure. To overhaul him and to keep track of his movements would be comparatively easy.

Corfield cursed himself for a fool.

"You can't be certain that he was even in the car," Calliope pointed out. "Anyhow, what does it matter?"

“What’s a carpet merchant doing with a Daimler?” he asked, as he slid along the seat and stepped out into the road. “If he can afford to run a big car ... by the way,” he broke off. “I suppose it *is* his car?”

“It certainly was from the way he talked,” Calliope said.

“If he’s got the money to buy and run a big car, why the deuce should he trouble to sell carpets for a living?” Corfield persisted.

“Ask me another,” she answered with a casual shrug of her shoulders. “Perhaps he’s doing well in the carpet line?”

“Must be,” he grunted. “Where’s his shop?”

“Somewhere in Knightsbridge, I believe. I don’t know the exact address.”

“Umph!” Corfield growled, frowning and pursing his lips. “I’ve ordered breakfast,” he suddenly added. “You probably want to powder your nose. I’ll join you in a minute.”

He accompanied her to the hotel door, watched her disappear, and then returned to the car, where he threw open the dickey, and grappled for his suitcase. He unfastened it hurriedly, glanced over his shoulder to see that nobody was looking, and furtively transferred something to his coat pocket. Something else, a small brown cardboard box, he put in the pocket of the door by the driver’s seat after running his thumbnail round the gummed label which fastened the lid.

A few minutes later, having shut and locked the dickey, he joined Calliope in the hall and followed her into the coffee-room. The tablecloth was not exactly fresh; but they both had healthy appetites. After their drive even the indifferent coffee, the salt, stringy bacon, the leathery fried eggs, and flabby toast and marmalade tasted delicious.

But Corfield, who was unusually thoughtful and found some difficulty in replying to Calliope's conversation, had a vague satisfaction in feeling the stubby little ·32″ automatic which nestled awkwardly beside his tobacco pouch in the right-hand pocket of his jacket.

It was lucky he held a pistol licence. All the same, it seemed absurdly melodramatic for a retired commander of His Majesty's Navy to be cruising round the peaceful countryside with an attractive girl, and a loaded pistol in his pocket.

Why should he carry a pistol at all? What possible justification was there for thinking it might be of use? He wouldn't like Calliope to become aware of it. She would probably be greatly amused.

But one never knew. At the back of his mind he had a vague presentiment that something was going to happen—something unusual.

CHAPTER TEN

THEY left Basingstoke at half-past nine, and two hours later were speeding along the twelve mile stretch to Ilchester with the engine running all out. So far, few cars had overtaken them.

About five miles past Wincanton, however, Corfield heard the deep note of a horn from behind. Drawing over to the near side of the road he waved the overtaking car on. It was a hot day. The hood of the Alvis was up for the sake of coolness; but glancing in the mirror on his windscreen he saw the fluted silver radiator-top of the car behind. It was a Daimler. With a start of surprise he recognised its greyish-blue body with wings of a deeper grey—the same car that had passed them just before reaching Basingstoke—Polinoff's.

"He's overtaking us again!" he exclaimed, pulling down his hat over his eyes. "Turn up your coat collar, Calliope!" he added hastily. "Try not to be seen!"

"Whatever's the matter?" she demanded. "Why shouldn't we be seen?"

"It's Polinoff's car!" he hurriedly explained, intent upon his steering.

He realised the futility of concealment, for if those on board the Daimler were really interested in his movements, they must be aware of his identification mark and number. Nevertheless, there was always the possibility that their meeting was fortuitous, that the Daimler's journey west had nothing to do with his own. It must have stopped somewhere to give its occupants time for breakfast. Nevertheless, it

seemed rather strange that it should overtake them twice within about four hours.

Turning up her collar over her ears and hastily tucking her tell-tale side curls beneath her dark blue beret, Calliope snuggled down in her seat, but still kept a watchful eye upon what went on. Things were becoming interesting.

Corfield, meanwhile, having slackened speed to allow the Daimler to pass more rapidly, hugged the left side of the road. There was no curb or footpath, merely a rough grassy verge terminating in a ditch and a bank topped by a low, thickset hedge.

In his driving-mirror he saw the shining nose of the other car almost in line with his tail-light. It was travelling fast—perhaps forty-five miles an hour to the Alvis's thirty-five. He could see two figures in the front seat behind the windscreen—one, the driver, with a slouch hat pulled down over his eyes, and the other bareheaded. The driver was not unlike Polinoff, though, intent upon his steering, Corfield had no time for anything but the hastiest glimpse.

In spite of the width of the road and the absence of traffic, the driver of the heavy car still kept to the crown of the highway.

"Cursed road-hog!" the commander muttered to himself. He was being given very little room.

The Daimler's bonnet drew level with his driving seat, and for a moment or two the cars ran parallel, their wings nearly touching. Dreading a collision, Corfield reduced his speed by releasing the accelerator and putting down the clutch pedal.

He glanced hurriedly to the right with an angry look and unparliamentary language on his lips, to find himself looking at close range into the eyes of the man sitting beside the

Daimler's driver. The fellow, with a grin all over his face, airily waved a hand.

Corfield shook his fist in reply, to which the man replied with a contemptuous grimace.

"Damn the blighter!" the commander muttered, boiling with rage.

Still fearful of a collision if the other car swerved at all to the left, he threw his gear-lever into neutral and dabbed at the foot-brake. The Daimler shot ahead and clear, its back wing missing the Alvis's front mudguard by a matter of inches. It was one of the narrowest shaves of an accident Corfield had ever experienced.

"He ought to be hanged for dangerous driving," he exclaimed, his heart in his mouth as he felt his near wheels jolting slightly as they left the road and ran on to the grass. "Get his number, Calliope!"

He moved the wheel slightly to bring the car back into the road, increasing speed to keep the Daimler in sight.

"I can't read it," said the girl, peering ahead through the open windscreen. "It's not showing."

The number plate of the Daimler was obscured. There was luggage on the carrier behind covered in green Willesden canvas, a corner of which seemed to be fastened across the identification mark.

The obscuration might be accidental. On the other hand, it might be deliberate. Was it deliberate?

Corfield was still pondering over the matter when he noticed he was coming up on the Daimler, which seemed to have reduced its speed. It was an open car, and two of the three occupants in the back, evidently kneeling on the seat,

were peering in his direction. What was happening now? Why were they so interested?

He still held his speed. An idea had come into his head of passing the Daimler, going ahead, and then drawing his own car across the road to compel the other to stop. Then he would get out, tell the driver precisely what he thought of him, demand his name and address, and have a look at the number-plate with a view to lodging a charge for dangerous driving.

From fifty yards, the interval between the two cars rapidly diminished to thirty yards ... twenty ... ten. Then the Daimler seemed to increase speed again and to maintain its distance ahead, the two men in the back still looking in Corfield's direction and talking to each other.

Accelerating, the commander tried to approach. He gained a few feet; but the heavier car accelerated to preserve the interval. A third head bobbed up alongside the two others. All three faces were gazing in his direction. What on earth were they about?

A moment later Corfield noticed a slight haze which seemed to be following behind the other car. It was too high up to come from the exhaust—besides, there was no smell of oil. As he watched it gradually became denser—a bluish cloud almost like the drifting smoke of a bonfire.

Calliope, sitting beside him, suddenly gasped, and then started to cough. She moved to find her handkerchief. Glancing towards her, Corfield noticed that her eyes were streaming. Her coughing increased, hard, dry, hacking coughs which shook her whole body. Thoroughly alarmed he tried to ask what was the matter....

Funny thing! His eyes also had started to water. Then the tears started to roll down his face. The air seemed suddenly full of a peculiar smell like pear-drops—pungent, cloying, utterly sickening. He found difficulty in breathing. There came a strange tickling sensation at the back of his throat. He felt himself choking, gasping for breath. He coughed, and coughed again with a feeling of violent nausea.

God! What was happening? He couldn't see!

What of Calliope?

His body seemed to be going limp. There came a drumming in his ears.

Do something! his brain told him. For heaven's sake—DO something! Calliope will be killed ... Calliope....

With a last instinctive effort to stop the car, he managed to press down the clutch-pedal, to fling the gear lever into neutral, and to jam on both brakes.

He remembered a bumping as they left the road and swerved diagonally across the grass verge towards the ditch. Then a horrible vision passed through his mind of Calliope pinned beneath an overturned car and slowly drowning in a foot of muddy water.

Next, everything seemed to relax and to go black. His foot fell off the foot-brake.

Oblivion. The car went bounding on.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Mr. Reginald Pyke, a travelling representative of the National and Universal Insurance Company, Limited, is not one of the major characters in this story. He merely flits hurriedly through two chapters, and then discreetly vanishes, like a well-behaved, neatly-dressed, and benevolent little ghost.

But it was after eleven o'clock on Thursday morning that Mr. Pyke, having finished some business in Ilchester, left that place in his Morris-Cowley on his way back to London. At precisely five-and-twenty minutes to twelve, bowling along towards Wincanton at a steady thirty miles an hour, he saw a grey two-seater car in rather an unconventional attitude on the far side of the road. It had evidently swerved across the grass margin, and now lay with one front wheel in the ditch, one back wheel in the air, leaning drunkenly as though it were trying to burrow its way through to Australia. The hood was up; but he could see figures inside.

An adventure, thought Mr. Pyke, hissing through his teeth as he brought his car to a standstill with a squealing of brakes. He carefully switched off the engine, got down into the road, and walked across for a closer investigation.

Inside the car were a man and a young woman—the girl uncomfortably wedged in the passenger's seat by the body of the man, which had been flung sideways across her lap. Both had their eyes tight shut and were breathing heavily with their mouths wide open. Their faces were unnaturally pale; but there were no signs of bodily injury—no cuts, no blood. Mr. Pyke felt vaguely disappointed. He longed to use his first-aid outfit.

With an instinctive “Pardon me”, the methodically-minded little man opened the door beside the driver, cautiously mounted the running-board, and leant over the wheel to switch off the engine, which was still ticking.

“Coo!” he muttered to himself with a horrified expression. “Drunk! Drunk as Lords!”

He stopped the engine, tested the hand-brake to find it full on, and then climbed down to remove his hat and run his fingers through his mop of ginger-coloured hair.

“Coo!” he said again. It was his stock expression in moments of perturbation.

He was frankly puzzled. What should he do next?

Accidents were all very well. Mr. Pyke, having been through a course in first-aid, could put a broken limb in splints, apply a tourniquet, bandage an injury, and staunch blood with the best of them. But these people were hideously and blindly drunk.

“Lord!” he murmured, gazing at them. “Sozzled as owls, and at this time o’ the morning!”

He touched the driver on the knee; but the man did not stir. He shook him gently by the leg, then more violently, again and again. Still there was no response.

“Hi!” exclaimed Mr. Pyke, beginning to feel genuinely hot and bothered. “Wake up, can’t you! Wake up, I say!”

The man evinced no emotion; but continued to lie across his companion’s lap, breathing stertorously. He was not dead, at any rate. Nor was the girl.

Mr. Pyke looked at the girl more closely. She was a lady, obviously. Sober, she would have been attractive—but now, with pale cheeks, blanched lips and wide-open mouth, her

face looked like a plaster death-mask. She was young, something under thirty. It was a pity, he thought, that a girl could so far forget herself as to drink until she was insensible.

All the same, Mr. Pyke was something of a knight-errant, and here was a female in distress. As a brave little citizen who was a firm upholder of the British constitution, paid his rates and taxes with unfailing regularity and maintained a wife and what he called his two 'kiddies' in a little house at Balham, it was his duty to assist all females in distress—females drunk, or females sober. For the man, who should have known better than to force drinks upon an innocent girl, particularly at such an ungodly hour of the morning, and to have become hopelessly drunk himself in charge of a car, he felt no sympathy whatever.

But something had to be done.

The car lay at an angle to the ditch, and going to the other side of it he saw its near front wheel, breaking down the soft margin, was submerged in muddy water half-way up to the axle. He managed, however, to open the door without actually wetting his feet.

Next, removing his hat and placing it carefully out of harm's way, he took the girl by the shoulders, and started to slide her body from the seat to drag her backwards through the open door.

She was substantially built, no light weight; but gathering her safely into his arms, he staggered off and deposited her full length upon the grass.

She murmured something unintelligible as he put her down.

Her eyes were still shut; but Mr. Pyke noted the signs of returning consciousness with satisfaction.

“Crumbs!” he muttered, looking wildly round for something upon which to place her head. “She hasn’t half had a drop!”

But her head must be pillowed on something: the heads of unconscious ladies invariably were. There was nothing else for it, he must use his coat. Whipping it off, he rolled it up, lifted her by the shoulders, and put it under her head. She continued to sleep.

Returning to the car, Mr. Pyke proceeded to deal with the man. Him he treated with less ceremony, dragging him by the shoulders with his heels dragging in the grass, and depositing him by the side of his companion.

“Wake up!” Mr. Pyke ordered, unceremoniously pushing him in the ribs with his foot. “Wake up, I say!”

The man did not reply. He merely lay on his back, gasping like a fish.

“Coo!” said Mr. Pyke, gazing at him. “Drunk isn’t the word for it!”

What was to be done next, he wondered? Should he try artificial respiration for the apparently drowned, or was that not a good thing for the palpably drunk?

He had a brandy flask in his car ready for emergencies. But, no. Brandy, the hair of the dog that had bitten them, might not be the best thing for an intoxicated lady and her gentleman friend. But Mr. Pyke also had a vacuum flask of hot coffee intended for his lunch, and coffee was a stimulant. Excellent notion!

Hatless, and in his shirt sleeves, Mr. Pyke trotted across the road to his car. About two hundred yards away a lorry was approaching from the direction of Wincanton. Hastily

possessing himself of his vacuum flask, Mr. Pyke darted out into the road and waved it to a standstill.

“There’s been an accident!” he hurriedly exclaimed. “Car in the ditch.” He pointed it out.

The lorry-driver, a man of slow comprehension, gazed at Mr. Pyke for a moment without speaking, and then turned his attention to the wrecked car. His scrutiny finished, he cleared his throat, spat noisily, and descended from his seat.

“ ’Ow did it ’appen?” he wanted to know, joining Mr. Pyke in the road. “Did you ’it ’im?”

“Did I hit him!” said Mr. Pyke indignantly, annoyed at the slur on his own driving. “No, I didn’t hit him. I found them like this a few minutes ago. If you ask me....” he paused.

“ ’Urry up,” growled the lorry-driver irritably. “I’m on a job. I carn’t stand about ’ere ’ummin’ an’ ’awin’! Spit it ’art!”

“If you ask me,” said Mr. Pyke, in a whisper, “the man in charge was drunk. There’s a lady with him.” He was too chivalrous to mention that the lady also showed signs of intoxication.

“Let’s ’ave a look,” said the other, beginning to show faint signs of interest.

They walked together across the road and approached the two inanimate figures prone upon the grass.

“There!” said Mr. Pyke with a gesture of triumph.

The lorry-driver peered at one and then at the other, his cap on the back of his head, and gently sucking his breath. His inspection was a prolonged one. It was almost as though he were trying to mesmerise two corpses back to life.

“They’re toffs,” he grunted at last. “Ain’t ’arf ’ad a blind by the looks of ’em. Don’t mind a splash meself sometimes; but only toffs can afford to get blotto before the arternoon.—You leave ’em alone, mister,” he added, turning to Mr. Pyke. “They’ll wake up in an hour or two.”

“But I can’t leave them like this,” Mr. Pyke protested, his feelings of chivalry aroused. “I simply can’t!”

“ ’Ave it yer own way, then,” said the lorry-man shrugging his shoulders. “Don’t ask me to ’elp yer, that’s all. I’ve got a job to do. I carn’t sit ’ere all day ’oldin’ people’s ’ands. They’re pickled, I tell yer—pickled, canned, stewed to the gills, blotto—in other words, stark, starin’, ruddy well drunk!”

The lady’s eyelids flickered. Her eyes opened. She suddenly sat up. Mr. Pyke gallantly darted forward, knelt by her side, and started to fan her with his hat.

The lorry-driver guffawed with amusement.

“Much good that’ll do ’er,” he observed. “What she wants is a hemetic. She’s drunk, I keeps tellin’ yer!”

“That’s a lie!” Calliope observed feebly, doing her best to glare at him.

“Wot’s a lie?” demanded the lorry-man.

“You said I was drunk! I distinctly heard you.”

“Well, ain’t yer?” he demanded with an air of surprise. “Mind yer, miss,” he added, “I’m not blamin’ yer. If yer chooses to get tight an’ shoves yer car in the ditch, it’s yer own bloomin’ business, not mine.”

“But I tell you we aren’t drunk!” Calliope exclaimed, her eyes blazing with indignation. “How dare you say such a thing?”

“ ’Ow dare I?” came the retort. “S’trewth, miss, d’yer think I don’t know a bloke when ’e’s pickled? ’Ow about your gennelman friend?”

“It’s monstrous!” the girl exclaimed.

The lorry-driver snorted with derision and pointed an accusing finger at Corfield.

“D’yer mean to tell me that bloke ain’t stewed?” he demanded. “S’trewth, miss. D’yer mean....”

Mr. Pyke, anxious to stop an unseemly argument, dropped his hat and reached forward with his vacuum flask.

“Now you drink this, miss,” he said, kneeling by Calliope’s side, unscrewing the metal cap of his flask, filling it with steaming coffee and burning his fingers in the process, before placing an arm round her shoulders in the most approved fashion.

“What is it?” the girl demanded, her voice ungracious as she gazed at him with the deepest suspicion.

“Coffee,” said Mr. Pyke. “It’ll make you feel better. Drink it up like a good gal.”

Calliope glared. Her colour was returning.

“Do you also think I’m drunk?” she asked angrily.

“I never said so, miss,” said Mr. Pyke gently, trying to humour her. “Now be a good gal and have a sip.”

“Don’t you dare tell me to be a good girl!” she exclaimed. “I won’t be insulted!”

“Wot are yer then?” the lorry-man guffawed. “A bad one?”

“Sorry, miss,” Mr. Pyke apologised. “No offence meant, I’m sure. Anyhow,” he added in a whisper. “Don’t mind what he says.”

He took the cup by its wire handle and held it to her lips.

“Take your beastly stuff away!” she exclaimed.

“ ’Oity toity!” laughed the lorry-man.

“You may laugh!” said Calliope, with withering contempt. “I hate a mannerless fool!”

“ ’Oo’s a fool?” demanded the lorry-driver, becoming angry in his turn.

“You are!” Calliope hurled back.

“Ho!” retorted the other. “I’m a fool, am I? I ’aven’t got no manners, ’aven’t I? You thinks I don’t know when a bloke’s blotto, eh? But if you wus a man, miss, ’stead of a female, I’d teach yer....”

“You merely make me tired,” Calliope returned with a sigh. “Tell me,” she said addressing Mr. Pyke. “Who *is* your loud-voiced friend? He’s beginning to get on my nerves.”

“Ho! That’s the game is it?” said the lorry-man, raising his voice in disgust. “I makes yer tired, does I, miss? I blinkin’ well gits on your nerves, does I—that’s the way the hupper classes treats an honest workin’ man, is it? I comes ’ere to ’elp, don’t I? Call it gratitoode treatin’ me like this?—Well, me lady, seein’ as ’ow I ain’t wanted ’ere I’ll be hup, horf, an’ ruddy well hout of it!”

He spat contemptuously, turned on his heel, marched back to the road with dignity, turned the starting-handle of his vehicle with unnecessary violence, mounted the driving-seat, and drove clattering down the road and out of sight without even so much as a look behind.

“Thank goodness he’s gone!” said Calliope with a sigh of relief. “Who is he?”

“Ask me another!” said Mr. Pyke.

“And who are you?” she demanded.

“I’m an insurance agent, miss. Name of Pyke. Reginald Pyke.”

Calliope looked at him. He had a kindly little face.

“I’m sorry I was rude about the coffee,” she apologised. “I’m not feeling very well. But I’m not drunk, Mr. Pyke. On my honour I’m not! You believe that, don’t you?”

“Seein’ is believing,” Mr. Pyke tactfully replied. “Now do have a sip at the coffee, Miss.”

Merely to oblige him, not because she really wanted it, Calliope allowed him to put it to her lips.

“How’s my friend?” she wanted to know, finishing the little cup in a single swallow.

“Still horse-de-combat,” said Mr. Pyke.

“But hadn’t we better do something?” Calliope suggested anxiously.

“Better leave him alone, Miss,” counselled Mr. Pyke, noticing that Corfield’s colour was returning and his breathing easier. “He’ll come round in a minute or two unless ... unless....”

“Unless what?”

“Unless he’s very bad,” explained Mr. Pyke.

“But ... but do you mean to say that you think ... you dare to insinuate that he’s drunk—intoxicated?” she demanded angrily.

“Who says I’m drunk?” Corfield muttered, rolling over on his side and opening his eyes. “Oh, hell! What the devil’s happened?—Calliope, are you there?”

“I’m here, Dick,” she said, moving over to him on her knees. “How are you feeling?”

“Rotten!” he replied, sitting up to hold his head. “Perfectly putrid.”

“And the car’s in the ditch.”

“Lord!” said Corfield wearily. “I’m beginning to remember—the car ahead, that cloud of smoke, and that ghastly smell. Then you started coughing with the tears running down your face. Then my throat went groggy and I couldn’t breathe properly—couldn’t see, either, for the water streaming out of my eyes. I remember jamming on the brakes and the car going bumpity—bump—then I flopped out. So we landed in the ditch, did we?”

“It seems so,” said Calliope.

“And who are you?” Corfield demanded, turning his eyes on Mr. Pyke.

“A friend in need,” Calliope explained. “He came to help us.”

“Name o’ Pyke,” that gentleman supplemented. “I was on my way from Ilchester to London. I saw your car in the ditch and came across. That’s my car over on the other side of the road.

“Thank you,” said Corfield gratefully. “That was good of you, Pyke.”

“Not at all. Not at all,” said the little man with a pleased smile. “Glad to be of assistance. An honour, I assure you.”

“By the way,” Corfield continued. “I wonder if you passed a grey Daimler....”

“Bluish-grey,” Calliope corrected him. “More blue than grey, Dickie.”

“ ... a bluish-grey Daimler with darker grey wings, between here and Ilchester?” the commander went on to ask. “It was an open car, with two men sitting in the front, and three at the back. We couldn’t see her number plate; but she had one of those G.B. oval things on the off rear wing.”

“I passed no Daimler between here and Ilchester,” said Mr. Pyke with decision. “If I had, I should have noticed it. I’m observant, in a manner of speaking, and there’s not much traffic on the road this morning.”

“Which means he’s probably turned off down some side road?” the other observed.

“Quite possible,” Mr. Pyke agreed. “But may I venture to ask why you are so anxious about the Daimler?” he asked.

“Because the people in that car tried to murder us!”

“Murder us?” Calliope squeaked.

“Murder you?” Mr. Pyke echoed, his eyes goggling.

“Well, if it wasn’t a deliberate shot at murder, it was something damned like it,” said Corfield, his voice serious. “D’you remember that cloud of blue smoke, Calliope?”

She nodded.

“And that peculiar smell?”

She nodded again.

“And then our eyes started to run and all the rest of it?”

“Yes,” she said.

“Then I lost control of the car and she flopped herself in the ditch.”

“Yes,” she replied.

“Well,” said the commander. “That cloud of smoke was gas.”

“Gas!” Mr. Pyke exclaimed in horror.

“Yes, gas,” Corfield replied. “G. A. S. Don’t ask me whether it was lethal gas or merely lachrymatory—you know, the stuff that makes you weep and practically blinds you. It smelt bad enough for anything, whatever it was. But the Daimler slowed down after it got ahead of us, if you remember, Calliope? When I tried to overtake it, it shot on again, keeping at about the same distance, with those devils looking at us over the back.”

“I remember,” she replied.

“You mean they deliberately turned on this gas to make you lose control of the car and have a disaster?” asked Mr. Pyke, his voice incredulous.

“That’s precisely what I do mean,” Corfield replied. “They hoped we’d have a smash, and either kill ourselves or wake up in hospital. They wanted to make quite certain that I didn’t reach Corn—— that we didn’t get any further,” he hastily corrected himself.

“But I don’t understand,” said Mr. Pyke, shaking his head in perplexity.

“Neither do I entirely,” Corfield replied. “But gas it was. Why should those fellows have been looking at us over the back to see what happened? What *was* that cloud of blue-looking stuff?”

Calliope stared at him in amazement. So did Mr. Pyke.

It was the first time Mr. Pyke had ever been mixed up in a case of attempted murder, and now he was hearing of one first-hand.

But was Corfield pulling his leg, or, in vulgar parlance, having him out for a trot?

“I say, sir,” he asked. “I suppose you are really serious?”

“Serious?” came the reply. “My good sir, I was never more serious in my life! Wouldn’t you be serious if someone tried to murder you?”

Mr. Pyke was convinced.

“Coo!” he murmured, his eyes nearly popping out of his head.

CHAPTER TWELVE

"QUESTION is," said Mr. Pyke, when they had examined the damage. "What's to be done now? Your front axle's bust. You won't be able to go on."

Corfield scratched his chin.

"How far are you going, may I ask?" Mr. Pyke queried.

"Right away west, beyond Plymouth."

"Coo!" said Mr. Pyke.

"You wouldn't sell me your car, I suppose?" said Corfield, glancing at the Morris-Cowley.

" 'Tisn't mine, in a manner of speaking," Mr. Pyke was forced to admit. "It belongs to the firm. I merely have the use of it.—But I'll tell you what I can do."

"And what's that?"

"Run the lady and yourself back to Ilchester," he suggested. "It won't take me more'n a matter of twenty minutes or half an hour."

"Where we could hire another car, and tell a garage to send for mine," said Corfield. "We must get down to-night if we can."

"Very well then," said Mr. Pyke. "Much luggage, may I ask?"

"Three suitcases, a hatbox, and some golf clubs."

"I can do that, easy," the little man replied. "But you'll take my tip and stop at the nearest house to see if they can send someone to mind your car," he went on to advise. "Else you'll have everything pinched—tools, spare wheel, lamps, the whole blessed caboodle."

Corfield agreed.

Twenty minutes later having stopped at a farm about three-quarters of a mile away from the scene of the accident, where, for the sum of five shillings, Corfield induced an overgrown schoolboy to keep an eye on the Alvis until the arrival of the breakdown gang from the garage, the Morris-Cowley was on its way to Ilchester. Calliope, who had recovered her spirits, sat in the front seat chatting gaily to Mr. Pyke. Corfield was in the back with the luggage.

They entered the little town, and at thirteen minutes to one Mr. Pyke brought the car to a standstill outside 'Alpha Motors, Ltd. Open day and night.'

"You'll find the chaps here very obligin'," said Mr. Pyke, disembarking. "They'll do anything you want, if you just mention my name. We do their insurance business."

"We mustn't keep you," said Corfield, passing out their luggage. "I expect you're in a hurry."

"Yes," said Mr. Pyke. "I oughter to be getting on."

"But a word in your ear, Pyke, before you leave us," the commander went on, taking the little man by the arm. "Look here," he whispered, so that Calliope could not hear. "I want you to promise me you won't say a word about this business."

"D'you mean you're not going to report it to the police?" asked Mr. Pyke, obviously disappointed and not a little surprised.

Gone were all his chances of figuring in the newspapers. Gone was the wonderful story in which he would be one of the leading figures.

“Mean to tell me you’re not going to say a word about it?” he queried again. “Heavens alive! If those blokes tried to murder you....”

“I’ve a particular reason for asking,” Corfield anxiously explained, going on to tell him who he was, and giving him a purposely distorted account of his mission. “I’m more or less on secret service,” he added. “If facts leaked out it would spoil everything!”

Mr. Pyke’s blue eyes bulged with astonishment. Attempted murder, a commander of the Royal Navy on some secret mission to do with foreigners—Snakes alive!

“Mum’s the word, then,” he replied in a sepulchral whisper.

“You’ll merely say you found us ditched?” Corfield suggested. “Steering gear mishap, or something of that sort, eh?”

“Righto, commander,” said Mr. Pyke, with a mysterious wink. “I tumble. Trust me.”

“Good man!” said Corfield, patting him on the shoulder.

“I say,” he added awkwardly. It was difficult to know how Mr. Pyke should be suitably rewarded. He obviously couldn’t be tipped. “What about that petrol you’ve wasted in bringing us on here? We’re tremendously grateful to you for all you’ve done for us, and the question is, how are we going to show it?”

Mr. Pyke’s eyes flashed. He flung out his chest.

“I tried to help,” he said proudly. “I tried to do you a good turn, and I’m glad if you’re grateful, commander. I don’t want anything else. Shouldn’t take it if it was offered.”

“Calliope!” called Corfield. “D’you mind coming here for a moment?”

Calliope, who was examining a decrepit second-hand Ford in the window of Alpha Motors, came across and joined them.

“I’ve just been telling Pyke how grateful we are,” Corfield explained.

“Of course,” said Calliope, with her sweetest smile. “He’s behaved like a perfect brick!”

Mr. Pyke coloured and murmured his thanks.

“And I’m wondering if Pyke will lunch with us one day when we return to London,” the commander continued. “And perhaps Mrs. Pyke will come as well, if there is a Mrs. Pyke?”

“Pleased, I’m sure,” said Pyke, his eyes twinkling. “And the wife will be delighted.”

“Well, let me have your card,” said the commander, producing his pocket-book and giving Mr. Pyke a card of his own. “I’ll write when I return and suggest a date.”

“Pleased, I’m sure.—But I’d best be hoppin’ along,” he added, hastily, nervous lest Corfield should try to give him a present. “Nothing else I can do, I suppose?”

“Nothing, thanks very much,” said Corfield. “You’ve already done enough. And when I get back, I’ll write.”

They shook hands, Mr. Pyke raised his hat, climbed into his car, and started the engine. He circled round, waved a hand in farewell, ‘tuf-tuffed’ slowly down the street, and disappeared.

“Nice little man,” said Calliope, taking Corfield by the arm. “I rather love him. Oughtn’t we to give him something?

What about a cigarette case?”

“I suppose we ought,” said Corfield.

“And what do we do next, Dick?”

“Beg, borrow, or steal another car,” the commander replied.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

It was past three o'clock before they finally left Ilchester. The people at Alpha Motors, Ltd., as Mr. Pyke had said, proved very obliging. Not only did they send for the broken-down Alvis and promise to have it repaired as a 'rush job'; but also, after payment of a small deposit, allowed Corfield to hire a second-hand car while his own was *hors de combat*.

It was about three miles out of Ilchester that Calliope, who had been pondering over the events of the morning, determined to get to the root of what was perplexing her.

"I say, Dick?" she asked.

"Hullo," he replied.

"I want to know what's at the back of all this business. Why should those people in the Daimler try to get rid of us?"

The commander, who had expected cross-examination on the subject, felt anything but happy.

"It's me they're probably after," he answered.

"You!" said Calliope, raising her eyebrows. "Why?"

"Because they evidently want to prevent my getting to Cornwall."

"Oh!" she said, her forehead puckered in thought. "But why, Dick? I don't in the least understand."

"I can't ... that is to say, it's very difficult for me to tell you," he replied lamely.

Calliope sat bolt upright.

"D'you mean to say you don't trust me?" she asked. "Because if you don't, I think I'd better...."

“No, no! It’s not that at all,” he broke in. “Of course I trust you implicitly.”

“Well, what’s the mystery?” she asked, coming to the point. “There’s something going on that I know nothing about.—Why, last Saturday night, did you say I mustn’t mention Cornwall? Why, when Mr. Pyke asked where you were going did you merely say ‘west of Plymouth,’ instead of telling him straight out where we were going? Why, when the garage people asked for your name and address, did you give your London address?”

Corfield felt himself becoming more and more involved. Calliope was too intelligent. She had the unhappy knack,—unhappy, at least in so far as the present situation was concerned,—of putting two and two together.

Should he make a clean breast of everything? Should he tell her all that the D.N.I. had told him—about the mysterious submarines or motor-boats that had been sighted, or were supposed to have been sighted, near the Lizard?

He realised now that he had been rather a fool ever to have accepted her offer of hospitality. He should have come on his mission alone, without mixing himself up with a girl. He hated dragging Calliope into it—hated to think that her life had already been risked on his account, and through his foolishness. He felt rather like a criminal.

If it hadn’t been for the deliberate attempt to wreck his car, everything would have been all right, and no explanations would have been necessary. But now, quite naturally, Calliope wanted to know the why and wherefore of everything. She was almost certain to be annoyed, to put it mildly, if he refused to tell her.

But how could he tell her?

“It isn’t fair, Dick!” she continued, when he made no reply. “Why shouldn’t I know? Surely you trust me?”

“Of course I trust you,” he stammered awkwardly, averting his eyes from her face. “It’s not that at all. But please don’t ask me to explain, for I can’t—upon my honour I can’t! Later, perhaps, but not now.”

“There’s something behind all this,” she said, her voice changing. “Why are you going to Cornwall at all?”

“I told you. I’ve got a job to do there.”

“But there’s something behind it,” she persisted, obviously dissatisfied. “I’m not altogether a fool.”

“Of course not,” he said.

“And when I volunteered—when I suggested your coming to stay with us,” Calliope continued, “was that something else already in your mind?”

“It was.”

“And did you know beforehand that my people were in Cornwall, and that I was probably going to stay with them?”

“No,” he replied, feeling utterly miserable.

“So ... so you’re not coming to Cornwall on my account?”

“No, not entirely, Calliope.”

“Then you’ve merely been making use of me,” she said.

“That’s hardly fair,” he said slowly. “You see I ... I, oh, damn it!” he added impatiently. “Don’t cross-examine me! I wish you’d take my word for it that I can’t tell you. Don’t you understand?”

“Not in the very least,” she said coldly, shaking her head. “I want to get to the bottom of it.”

“But I can’t tell you,” he reiterated. “I swear I can’t!”

“Is that something more important to you than—than I am?” she asked in a low voice, turning her eyes away.

He looked at her, his face a picture of misery.

“That’s hardly a fair question,” he said gently. “You know I’m very fond of you, Calliope.”

“It doesn’t look like it,” she retorted with an incredulous sniff.

“But it’s true!” he insisted. “I’ll swear it’s true! But ... but I’m a naval officer first, even though I am retired. I have my job to consider—my duty, if you like to think of it in that way. In other words, I’m pledged more or less to secrecy. It’s inadvisable to tell anyone, even you.”

“So there is a mystery,” she said.

Corfield did not trouble to deny it.

“And I’m not allowed to share in it?”

“I’ve already told you that I can’t tell you.”

“So I’m not to be trusted!” she exclaimed, her temper rising. “I can come with you in a car and be nearly killed because someone doesn’t want you to get to Cornwall; but yet....”

“You’re being unfair,” he interrupted.

“Unfair!” she retorted. “That’s what you think, is it? I can be nearly killed; but yet I mayn’t be told what is at the back of it all.—Very well, then!” she added with an air of finality, her voice hard.

“Do be reasonable,” Corfield urged, putting his left hand on her arm as she sat beside him.

“Reasonable!” she snorted, pushing him away. “Who on earth would be reasonable if they’d ... they’d nearly been killed in a ditch and didn’t know what it was all about?”

For perhaps fifteen miles she maintained a stony silence, her thoughts very troubled. Corfield almost made up his mind that it was all over between them.

Then he suddenly felt her hand on his arm.

“Well?” he asked, turning to look at her.

“Dick,” she said anxiously. “Forgive me for being a beast. I’ve got a vile headache.”

“Poor old thing!” he commiserated. “And so have I. My forehead feels as if it would burst. I expect it’s that beastly stuff we swallowed.”

“I’ve got a beast of a temper,” she murmured.

“Anyone would feel a bit upset after nearly being hurled into a ditch,” he replied.

“I was rather a beast,” she said. “All the same, Dick, I think you might tell me a little more.”

“Can’t you possess your soul in patience for another twenty-four hours?” he asked.

Calliope made a face.

“Why not tell me now?”

“Because I’ve got a splitting headache and want to concentrate on driving the car,” he replied. “It’s a long story, and very complicated.”

“I think you’re a pig!” she exclaimed. “I’ll bet your headache’s no worse than mine.”

Corfield did not reply.

For the rest of the journey she took care to let her companion know that she was annoyed. She spoke no more than was necessary, and with a polite frigidity when she did. It displeased her to think that Corfield evidently imagined her

to be the sort of namby-pamby fool who could not be trusted with a secret. Very well, then! The man who thought that about her must be put in his proper place.

Honiton—Exeter where they stopped for a late tea, and then through Moreton Hampstead and across Dartmoor to Two Bridges and Tavistock. Callington, Liskeard, Lostwithiel, St. Austell, and Truro, to Helston, where they arrived shortly after half-past nine o'clock.

Mullion, with the last gleams of a glorious sunset still lingering on the western horizon out at sea. Some time after half past ten, after twice losing their way, and travelling for a few miles over some of the worst roads that Corfield had ever come across, they came at last to the little habitation which could be only One Tree Bungalow.

"Thank heaven we've arrived!" said Corfield with a sigh of relief. "How's the headache?"

"Damnable!" Calliope replied ungraciously.

"I'm sorry," he said sympathetically.

"A fat lot you care!" she threw back.

"That's not fair, Calliope!" he said.

"Oh, isn't it!" she retorted with an impatient shrug of her shoulders. "And it's not fair of you to refuse to tell me this beastly old secret of yours."

"I will tell you," Corfield began, very worried. "I'll...."

But she did not stop to listen. Turning her back upon him she walked towards the door of the bungalow.

"So that's that!" he muttered to himself, stepping out to remove the suitcases.

Relations between Calliope and himself were distinctly strained. To-night, dog-tired, with his head feeling as though

it were full of smouldering fire, he could not drive another yard. But to-morrow—yes, to-morrow, he would look for somewhere else to lay his head.

Fool that he had been ever to embark upon this project with a girl in tow! He might have guessed that something untoward would happen.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Michael Heddon, lounging on the sofa beside his wife in the sitting-room at One Tree Bungalow, suddenly sat upright to listen.

"I heard a car!" he said.

"I didn't," said his wife.

"Yes," he exclaimed, rising to his feet as he heard the click of the front-door latch.

He walked hurriedly towards the door leading to the small hall outside; but Mrs. Heddon, rising from her seat, clutched him by the arm.

"Michael!" she whispered.

"Well, dear?"

"Promise me you won't say a word to Calliope of what we've been talking about," she said. "I don't want her to be frightened."

"Trust me for that," he replied. "I should merely be laughed to scorn. Calliope's much too matter of fact to believe in...."

He broke off as someone came across the hall. The door opened. Their daughter came into the room.

"Hullo, old dears!" she exclaimed cheerily, coming forward to embrace her parents. "How goes it?—You're both looking pretty bobbish and sunburnt.—Sorry we're so late; but we had a bit of a smash the other side of Ilchester, and had to come on in another car."

"Any damage?" Heddon anxiously inquired.

“Not to us,” said Calliope gaily. “The steering gear went wrong, and the old car flew straight into the ditch and bust her front axle ... that’s all.”

“And quite enough,” said her father mournfully. “You might have been killed, old lady.”

“Old pessimist!” laughed his daughter, squeezing his arm. “You really shouldn’t worry about me. I’ve merely got rather a headache.—Luckily, we managed to get a lift into Ilchester, where we hired another car, so here we are—at last.”

“And where’s your friend?” Mrs. Heddon asked.

“Outside collecting the luggage,” said Calliope. “I’m dying for a cigarette, daddy dear.”

“You and your friend mustn’t mind being together,” Mrs. Heddon said. “We’ve only got two double bedrooms, so I’ve arranged for you both to sleep in the spare-room.”

Calliope stared at her mother in amazement.

“There are two nice beds,” Mrs. Heddon continued.

Calliope’s eyes twinkled. She threw back her head, blew out a cloud of cigarette smoke, and burst out laughing.

“How perfectly priceless!” she exclaimed.

“Priceless!” said her mother, looking very puzzled. “I don’t understand, Calliope! I’m sure you’ll both be very comfortable. Why should it be so amusing?”

“It’s not that, mother,” Calliope laughed. “I’m amused because you’re being so delightfully improper. I’m not even engaged to Dick, let alone married, and you’re suggesting ... well!”

Mrs. Heddon stared.

“Dick!” she exclaimed, in a hushed and horrified voice. “Dick!”

“Yes,” Calliope nodded, her expression unconcerned. “And how I should like to have seen his ugly old face if he’d heard you suggesting our sleeping ... well, in the same apartment!”

“Dick!” Mrs. Heddon repeated in an awed voice. “D’you ... d’you mean to tell me, Calliope, that you’ve arrived here at ten o’clock at night with a ... a man?”

“And why ever not?” the girl demanded.

“My dear child!” her mother returned. “*Whatever* are you thinking of?”

“I don’t see anything wrong in it.”

“You really might have let us know, old lady,” Heddon put in, his arm on his daughter’s shoulder. “It makes things a little bit awkward.”

“But I thought I’d told you, mother,” Calliope answered, feeling rather guilty. “Anyhow, you said there was plenty of room.—Sorry if I’ve done the wrong thing.”

“But we’ve only two double bedrooms!” said Mrs. Heddon, distractedly.

“Well, Dick can camp out on the sofa,” Calliope laughed. “He’ll love it.”

“But Calliope, darling,” her mother continued, greatly concerned. “You don’t mean to say you’ve motored all the way from London with a man?”

“How else could I have come, my precious?”

“By train, dear.”

“I loathe trains if I can go by car,” Calliope explained. “Besides, Dick happens to be rather a friend of mine, or was until we had a tiff.—He’s really rather an old dear, and most ultra-respectable. You could trust him alone on a desert island with the most ravishing and amorous female in the world.”

“You shouldn’t talk in that flippant way!” said Mrs. Heddon, clicking her tongue and shaking her head in disapproval.

“I’m sorry,” Calliope sighed. “I’m always saying the wrong thing.”

“I don’t know what you girls think about these sort of things,” her mother continued. “When I was your age and your dear father was a young man, I’m sure....”

Calliope had heard all this sort of thing before, many times.

“But you’ve met Dick!” she interrupted. “Naturally, I shouldn’t ask a complete stranger. He’s dined with you, and you both said you liked him.”

“But that doesn’t alter the fact that he’s *a man*!” Mrs. Heddon protested. “It was unwise of you, darling. Think of your reputation. What would people say?”

“As if I cared a hoot what people say!” Calliope retorted with her sweetest smile. “My conscience is perfectly clear. As for my old reputation, well, I don’t expect I’ve got a shred of it left. Nobody has nowadays.” She shrugged her shoulders.

“You really shouldn’t say such things, Calliope!” her mother chided, genuinely agitated. “I don’t like it.”

“Poor pet!” Calliope returned, still smiling. “You needn’t be alarmed. I haven’t gone in off the deep end yet.”

“The deep end?” murmured Mrs. Heddon.

“Merely that I’m not an abandoned woman, mother darling. I don’t believe in free love, or anything of that sort.”

“I know, my dear, I know,” said Mrs. Heddon miserably. “But you should really....”

“Anyhow, I’m glad it’s Corfield,” her husband broke in, anxious to stave off further discussion. “I liked him. We must do our best to make him comfortable.”

“Thank you, old thing,” said Calliope.

“But you shouldn’t go out of your way to shock your mother,” her father continued. “She doesn’t like it.”

“I wouldn’t do it if she weren’t so easily shocked,” Calliope returned. “—Cheer up, mother dear,” she added, moving across to kiss her female parent. “The worst hasn’t happened yet, and isn’t likely to.”

Mrs. Heddon accepted the caress with a deep sigh.

“Very well, Michael,” she agreed in a self-sacrificing tone of voice. “As Calliope has asked Captain Corfield to stay, I suppose we must do our best for him. He can sleep on the sofa here with the blankets and things from the second bed in the spare-room.”

“And I’ll show him where to put the car,” said Heddon, moving towards the door.

“I’ll come with you, Daddy,” said his daughter, taking him by the arm.

The supper to which Calliope and Corfield presently sat down was not a lively meal. Everybody was tired, and both Calliope and Corfield had headaches. Mrs. Heddon had assumed a constrained attitude of disapproval, while her daughter was strictly on the defensive. Heddon, yearning for his bed, and with difficulty curbing his constant desire to yawn, tried to make polite conversation with his guest. But it was rather a half-hearted conversation, for the commander’s mind was full of other things.

His nerves were keyed up. He felt full of suppressed excitement as he thought over the events of the morning, turning them over and over in his mind.

If what Calliope had said were correct, and there was no reason to doubt it, that Daimler car was undoubtedly Polinoff's. But had Polinoff been driving it that morning? Had he been the instigator of that elaborate attempt to wreck the Alvis?

It was obvious that someone, perhaps Polinoff himself, wished to prevent him—Corfield—from reaching Cornwall. That meant that the mysterious someone knew of the mission with which he had been entrusted by the Director of Naval Information. How had he managed to discover it? Moreover, what was the connection, or possible connection, between Polinoff, the submarines or motor-boats supposed to have been sighted off the Cornish coast, and that attack upon himself and Calliope the same morning?

Anyhow, the meeting between the Daimler and his own Alvis could not have been fortuitous. It must have been arranged beforehand, and it was he those men had been after, not Calliope. Thinking nothing of it, suspecting nothing, Corfield had made no secret of his destination at the garage at which he kept his car in London. A casual question or two would have led to the discovery of his probable route and intended time of departure from London. People who were deliberately out to prevent him doing something he wanted to do, would be clever enough to discover that method of finding out what they wanted to know.

The previous Saturday evening, before dinner at Marston, Corfield had distrusted Polinoff's questions. They had been altogether too shrewd and too searching to be disinterested.

The Russian, very cunningly, had tried to pump him, and the commander had carefully steered the conversation into another channel.

Something lay behind it all; but what—*what*?

He felt glad he had not come unarmed. The pistol in his pocket, puny, toy-like little weapon though it was, gave him a feeling of security. He was beginning to realise that he was up against a tougher proposition than he had bargained for. People who tried to wreck a car, possibly in the hope of maiming or killing its occupants, might not stop at murder.

The first trick in the game, however, had undoubtedly been his. Someone or somebody unknown had tried to prevent him from reaching Cornwall. Nevertheless, he had arrived all the same, and more or less at the time he had intended to.

How long would it take his hidden enemies to discover that their attempt to stop him had come to nothing? Not very long, he concluded. The next move might take place within twenty-four hours, possibly that very night.

But what of Calliope? Was it fair to drag her into it? Her life had already been endangered. Could he allow her to become more deeply involved, to run further risks?

Pondering over the question, revolving it in his mind, he saw quite clearly that he must take the girl into his confidence and tell her everything. She knew quite a lot already. Moreover, he had made her promise that she would say nothing to her people of what had happened in the morning. The D.N.I. had more or less pledged him to secrecy. On the other hand, he had also told him he could impart his information to anyone else if it were ‘absolutely necessary’. The moment, he considered, had come.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE opportunity came half-an-hour later after supper had been cleared away, when Calliope and Corfield, perhaps by design, found themselves leaning over the low wall at the end of the small garden overlooking the sea. She was smoking a last cigarette before going to bed.

"Calliope," he said softly, watching her face as it showed as a pale white blur in the starlight.

"Well?"

"There's something I want to tell you," he said.

"And just about time," she observed almost tartly. "I don't see why I should run the risk of being killed without knowing why."

Corfield looked at her, trying to guess her thoughts.

"What's the matter?" he said.

"Nothing," she said. "I'm merely tired out with a splitting headache and want to go to bed. I shall feel better in the morning—what is it you have to say?"

"You'll swear not to tell another soul?" he asked in a whisper. "You mustn't even tell your people. Leave me to do that, if necessary."

"Very well," she answered. "But you needn't think I want to worm your silly old secrets out of you," she added dryly. "If I can't be trusted, I'd better not be told."

Corfield was rather taken aback.

"But ... but I never said I didn't trust you," he expostulated. "You know jolly well I do! Do you want me to tell you, or do you not?" he demanded.

“Do exactly as you like,” she said ungraciously.

Ignoring her ill-humour, he proceeded to give her the story of his interview with the D.N.I., of the submarine or motor-boats, and precisely what he had to do. He continued about Polinoff, and Polinoff’s car, the attempt to wreck the Alvis, and the probable reason. Without unduly stressing it, he went on to say that the affair was by no means over yet—that he had a vague premonition of danger. He told her of everything that he knew, or suspected. Would she care to back out of it before it was too late? She might, for all he knew, be running risks. Should he tell Mr. Heddon what had happened, and advise him to take her and Mrs. Heddon away?

“I hope you don’t think I’m exaggerating,” he concluded. “But there’s something behind it all, something I don’t understand.”

To his surprise, Calliope laughed.

“If you think I’m going to be left out of this, you’re jolly well mistaken!” she exclaimed. “It’s too thrilling for words, quite like a blood-curdling novel!—When, precisely, are we to be murdered?”

“I wish you’d be serious,” he protested.

“But I am!” she replied, thoroughly on her mettle. “I was never more serious in my life. You’re not going to scare me away. Now it’s started, I’m coming in with you in this affair, up to the neck!”

“Two heads are always better than one,” he replied. “But are you sure, absolutely certain, that you wouldn’t prefer to steer clear of the whole business?”

“I’ve already told you I’ll do all I can to help,” she replied. “Really, Dick, I mean that.”

“Then I shall be jolly grateful for your help, Calliope.”

“Thank you,” she said. “But for the time let’s forget what’s happened. What about bathing to-morrow before breakfast. Has your Lordship noticed what a topping beach this is?”

“Yes,” he said, gazing down at the little cove at their feet.

“I’ll call you at half-past seven,” she said.

“Splendid idea,” he replied. “I wonder....”

“Calliope!” came Heddon’s voice from the direction of the house. “Corfield!”

“Hullo?”

“Aren’t you two ever coming to bed?” asked Heddon. “It’s nearly eleven o’clock!”

“Coming now!” Calliope answered.

“Good night, Dick!” she added.

“Good night,” he replied, as they moved off towards the house. “I think you’re behaving like a brick over this affair. It’s topping of you to come in with me.”

“Rot!” she laughed. “I’m feeling rather thrilled. All the same, I wish you’d trusted me to start with.”

A quarter of an hour later, after a final whisky and soda, and a last visit from his host, Corfield lay stretched out beneath his blankets on the sitting-room sofa.

All the lights were switched off. He had purposely pulled the curtains aside from over the open windows, and through them came the gentle lapping sound of the sea and the vague murmur of a fitful breeze. The night was warm, and he was tired and sleepy. The sofa, though rather narrow, had let-down ends, and was well-padded and as comfortable as any bunk on board a ship.

He had changed its position, and from where he lay he could see the oblong patch of pale indigo sky, spangled with stars, outlined by the long window. It was divided into eight small vertical oblongs by the wooden window-frames and hanging curtains. To the left came two more patches of sky showing through the twin glass panels of the closed French window opening on to the garden. The moon had not yet risen. The room was in virtual darkness, which accentuated the starry brilliance of the sky outside. It was a perfect night, calm and peaceful.

He yawned and stretched himself before feeling under the pillow for something that was there. He smiled at the touch of the cold steel, yawned again, rolled over, and drew the blankets well up under his chin with a little grunt of satisfaction.

In five minutes he was fast asleep.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

WHY he awoke, and precisely at what time, Corfield never really knew. He opened his eyes, however, to find the room bathed in moonlight with patches of clear-cut shadow, the uncurtained windows oblongs of pale luminosity against the misty brilliance outside.

It must be foggy. Mingled with the gentle swish of the sea breaking in the little cove below, he could hear the distant grunting of the fog-signal at the Lizard lighthouse—a prolonged blast followed by a shorter one once every minute. The whistle of a steamer also sounded faintly at intervals as she evidently rounded the promontory.

Then quite suddenly, there came another sound from somewhere near at hand which caused him to raise his head and listen. It was the noise of an ordinary Klaxon horn, a little indistinct; but no more than half a mile distant. It was not the horn of a car, that he would take his oath. The sound came from the sea, and whatever vessel or boat was making it must be perilously close into the dangerous coast with its fangs and hidden ledges of rock.

Thick weather must have come on suddenly, and this was probably some fisherman lost in the fog who was cautiously nosing his way up the coast on his way home to his own little harbour—Porthleven, perhaps. Corfield by no means envied the unknown mariner blindly groping his way through the murk. The poor man had his full sympathy. It was good to be ashore where fogs and rocks troubled one not.

He was thumping his pillows to softness, about to resume his interrupted slumber, when another sound came to his ears. At once on the alert, he raised himself on his elbow to listen.

There it was again—an unmistakable creak on the wooden floor of the verandah outside the window!

Listening intently he heard nothing further for the moment. Almost he persuaded himself it was mere cracking of a loose board due to the heat, perhaps....

It came again, and closer! This time, moreover, it was accompanied by a gentle scuffling. Someone, or something, was furtively creeping along the verandah from the right. Even now the visitor must be outside the window of the room occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Heddon. In another moment....

There it was again—nearer still!

Corfield sat up with his scalp tingling. He was not nervous, merely very excited. He hardly dared to breathe, as he groped under his pillow and possessed himself of his pistol with his gaze fixed on the right edge of the brilliantly-lit window. The safety catch of his little weapon went over with a gentle 'snick.' Had they tracked him already? Was an attack coming?

He had not long to wait.

The head and body of a man from the waist up, clearly silhouetted against the moonlight, slid noiselessly into view in the right-hand pane of the long window. The figure paused and turned. As Corfield watched, he saw the face pressed close to the glass with the two hands shielding the eyes. It remained there motionless, peering into the room, trying to probe its secrets.

Holding his breath, not daring to move, Corfield watched.

Who was the unknown stranger? Was he a mere burglar, out for what he could steal, or was he someone else—

someone connected in some way with the attempted wrecking of his car?

Whoever the stranger was, his prolonged, silent scrutiny was very unnerving. Could he see into the room?

But that could hardly be possible. The sofa lay diagonally across it with its foot almost pointing at the French window to the left. Sitting up, Corfield was looking at the stranger over its back. Even if it were daylight, only the top of his head could be seen from where the man stood, and that, if he remained still, must now be practically invisible. The room could hardly be called dark; but the watcher had the light behind him, and the sofa, by mere good luck, stood in a patch of deep shadow.

For a moment or two the commander considered the possibility of leaving his couch, worming his way across the floor to the French window, and then rushing out to come to grips with the intruder. But on his way he would have to cross a patch of bright moonlight. He would probably be seen, and while fumbling with the door handle the man would make his escape. What chance had he of catching him in a possible cross-country race in nothing but his bare feet and pyjamas?

For a full minute, though it seemed much longer to Corfield, the scrutiny of those eyes continued. Then, from seaward, there again came the eerie sound of that Klaxon. It did not seem to have altered its position since he had heard it last. And this time it made a definite signal—short, long, short,—pause—, short, long, short,—pause—, short, long, short,—letter R. of the Morse Code.

The watcher put down his arms and turned to listen. For a moment he stood there motionless, and then, apparently

satisfied, resumed his soft, slow progress along the verandah to the left.

Those R's in the Morse code were not the signals of some fisherman lost in the fog, Corfield realised. They had some mysterious connection with this man whose shadow he was watching with his nerves tense with suppressed excitement.

At the third window from the right, which happened to be open, the man paused and put his head into the room. Stifling a sudden desire to sneeze, Corfield watched, until evidently assured that the room was empty, the stranger moved on.

His clear-cut silhouette passed slowly across the fourth window from the right—the fifth, the sixth—silently, furtively. He reached the seventh, the eighth—and then appeared, outlined almost to the knees, in the glass panels of the French window.

The psychological moment was arriving.

He bent down to the catch. In a moment the left-hand door swung silently open. Fully revealed for the first time, the stranger stood for a moment in the brilliant oblong of moonlight.

He was a smallish man, dressed in what looked like a fisherman's jersey and dark trousers. Bareheaded, he wore rubber-soled shoes of dirty white canvas. He was apparently unarmed, for there were no signs of any weapon in his hand.

Nerving himself for a supreme effort, Corfield watched him enter the room and stand for a moment, apparently listening. Then, dropping to his hands and knees, the intruder crept silently across the floor, keeping inside the belt of shadow close under the windows. Peering over the back of the sofa Corfield watched his dark figure advancing on all fours, for all the world like a large dog. Passing behind the

sofa, the man skirted the table and paused for a moment to listen outside the room occupied by the Heddons. Then, turning right, he resumed his progress past the old-fashioned fireplace, and approached the large cupboard in the wall to the right of it.

Confident that nobody was in the room, he rose to his feet without further attempt at concealment.

Then came the click of the lock,—a Yale lock, as Corfield had previously noticed. The cupboard door opened, and the man passed inside. There was a squeak, then a gentle thud. So the visitor, whoever he was, knew his way about the house. Moreover, he had a key of the cupboard.

For what seemed æons of time Corfield waited, expecting every moment to see the man come out with what he sought. But the minutes passed and he did not emerge, neither were there any further sounds of movement. At last Corfield's patience became exhausted. Determined to see for himself, he slipped off his bedclothes, left the sofa without a sound, and padded softly across to the cupboard to peer inside, his pistol ready.

The interior was intensely dark. Listening intently, he could detect no sound. Shifting the weapon to his left hand, he approached the opening and put his hand inside, expecting to encounter the feel of a rough jersey. He was fully prepared for a tussle. But he felt nothing—nothing at all.

To strike a match would be dangerous. Besides, his matches were in his coat pocket, which would mean another journey across the room to where his clothes lay on a chair. But feeling cautiously with his hands he judged that the interior was large. The sides were out of reach. The place

smelt abominably ... a dank airless stench of mustiness and decay. He wanted to cough.

He could not explore thoroughly without light, and light, for the moment, was out of the question. Neither did he wish to risk making a noise.

But somewhere inside, in some recess or corner that he hadn't been able to investigate, the man must still be cowering.

Putting his hand on the door, his fingers strayed over its oaken surface. They reached the lock. The key was still in it!

So the fellow had left the key behind, possibly by accident. Anyhow, it showed that he intended to return. Very well, then. He should remain there until daylight. Removing the key, Corfield quietly pushed the door to. It closed noiselessly, to lock itself with a gentle click.

Excellent! When daylight came he would tell Heddon what had occurred, and they could hand over the burglar, or whoever he was, to the police. It was hardly worth while rousing the household now. Meanwhile, he would keep watch.

Rather pleased with himself, the commander strolled over to the window and looked out. It was very foggy, so thick that the sea was altogether invisible. Had it not been for the murk, the brilliant moon would have made the night almost as bright as daylight. As it was, the haze was full of a curious luminous brilliance. The time, he noted by his wrist-watch, was a quarter to four. Very soon it would be dawn. But it was an ungodly hour to be leaning out of the window gazing at a damp fog while listening to the regular murmur of the distant fog-signal at the Lizard. It was clammy and cold and miserable. So he went back to the sofa, thrust his pistol under

the pillow, tied the key in his handkerchief, wrapped himself in a blanket, and settled down to watch. Before long, if he were not greatly mistaken, the prisoner must make some sound and betray himself. Realising he was shut in, he might even start thumping on the door. But he couldn't get out, that was quite certain.

Ten minutes passed—a quarter of an hour. Corfield yawned. His vigil was becoming monotonous. Prisoner or no prisoner, he badly wanted to sleep.

Twenty minutes. Almost he made up his mind to switch on the electric light and to look for something to read. Yes, and he'd smoke a pipe. He might just as well be comfortable.

With his eyes on the dark shadow of the cupboard door he was about to put his intention into effect, when a slight sound from the verandah attracted his attention.

Glancing in that direction he nearly froze with horror. The dark shape of another man was clearly outlined in the open window, the third from the right. He was looking into the room.

For a moment, his heart throbbing, Corfield gazed at the apparition in silence. Then the newcomer spoke.

"Bill!" he said, in a low, hissing whisper. "Are ye there?"

There was no reply.

"Bill, hurry up, mate! Time's drawin' on!"

Corfield did not wait for any more. Snatching his pistol he hurled himself off the sofa and dashed for the French window.

But the man was quicker. He bounded along the verandah as the commander reached the door and darted outside. As Corfield started to run, he could see a dark figure scrambling

over the low garden wall thirty feet away. Bringing up his pistol Corfield fired—once, twice. The man disappeared. The chances were a thousand to one that he had not been hit.

Pursuit was impossible, and there was no time to investigate, for simultaneously with the reports of his weapon there came a scream of terror from the open window of the Heddons' bedroom. Then the sound of Heddon's voice, followed by the switching on of a light.

For a moment Corfield hesitated. Should he wait and explain to his host when he put out his head, as assuredly he must?

But that would be awkward, he realised. He didn't want to explain in Mrs. Heddon's hearing. She would probably be alarmed, and already he could hear her sobbing and crying, and her husband trying to comfort her. Moreover, Corfield's large frame was rather sketchily attired in exiguous pyjamas which had shrunk badly in the wash. They were skin tight, hardly decent. Some buttons were missing. There was a hand's breadth of bare skin about his middle. He must make himself presentable, whatever happened.

Darting hurriedly back to the sitting-room, he switched on the light and whipped on his dressing-gown. The whole incident, from the time he had seen the man to the time he had returned, could not have lasted more than half a minute.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE murmur of conversation, and the frightened tones of Mrs. Heddon, still came from the conjugal bedroom. A moment later the door of Calliope's room, at the other end of the room, suddenly burst open. Calliope herself stood framed in the opening, her eyes heavy with sleep, her bright hair becomingly tousled. She wore a black embroidered kimono, beneath which appeared the legs of her jade-green pyjama trousers.

"What on earth's been happening?" she demanded, folding her wrap round her slim body and advancing into the room.

"Happening!" said Corfield, hurriedly tying the girdle of his dressing-gown. "Lord! What hasn't?"

"Well don't stand there looking like a fool, Dick! What happened? Who fired that shot?"

"I did."

"Heavens! If mother heard it she'll have hysterics!"

"She's having 'em already," Corfield muttered.

Calliope evidently did not hear.

"Tell me what's been happening?" she demanded again.

He explained. Her eyes opened wider and wider.

"And you say you've got one locked up in the cupboard?" she asked, her eyes dancing with excitement.

Corfield nodded.

"How perfectly priceless!" she exclaimed. "Let's have him out and look at him?"

He shook his head.

“Better tell your father first,” he said. “It’s for him to decide.”

“M’yes, perhaps it is,” she agreed. “I’ll tell him.”

She walked across the room with her mules flapping on the polished flooring.

“Daddy!” she called, rapping sharply on the door of her parent’s bedroom. “Daddy, come out!”

The door opened and Heddon appeared. He looked agitated, very wild about the head, and wore a pair of unspeakable grey and pink striped flannel pyjamas.

“We’ve had burglars!” Calliope explained, pulling him into the room.

“Your mother’s had hysterics!” said Heddon, gesticulating despairingly. He spoke indistinctly, for the excellent reason that his false teeth still reposed in a tumbler of water on his wash-stand.

“You’re hopeless, daddy!” said Calliope severely, clicking her tongue in disapproval.

“I’ve tried her with sal volatile, brandy, two aspirins, and her own special mixture!” he replied, rather aggrieved. “What else can I do? What else could anyone do, I ask you?—Oh my God! And I came here for a rest and quietness!”

“You’d better let me look after her!” Calliope broke in, entering the bedroom. “You’re no good. Meanwhile, Dick’s got something to tell you.” She closed the door behind her.

“Anyhow, give me a moment to get something on,” Heddon grumbled. “I shall catch cold if I go about like this.... Phew, it’s foggy!”

He presently emerged in a thick plum-coloured dressing-gown with black silk facings, a comforter round his neck, an

ancient slouch hat rather small for him perched on the top of his sparse head, and his feet thrust into a pair of gum boots.

“Now, Corfield,” he said, relapsing into a chair, and stretching out his long legs. “Let’s hear all about it?”

For the second time the commander had to tell his story, while his host listened with attention.

“So my wife did see someone rush past her window,” he said at last. “It wasn’t merely her imagination.”

“Decidedly not!” Corfield replied.

“And you fired your shot as he jumped over the wall?” Heddon asked.

“Two shots,” said the other.

“They woke me up, of course—that, and my wife screaming.—I suppose you didn’t hit him? Ought we to look?”

Corfield shook his head.

“Lord, no!” he said. “I didn’t really want to hit him. I merely thought I’d put the wind up him. I expect he’s scared stiff, poor devil!” he added with a laugh. “He was off like a scalded dog, leaving his pal behind.”

“And you say the other man’s in that cupboard,” Heddon whispered, looking towards it and stroking his unshaven chin. “Are you sure?”

“Of course I’m sure.”

“You’re quite certain you didn’t imagine it?”

“Good Lord, no! Didn’t I tell you I found the key left in the lock? Here it is.”

“That’s strange!” Heddon said, his brow wrinkled. “There’s no key to that cupboard in our possession. It’s

supposed to be kept locked.—What should this man be doing with the key, and why should he come here at this time of morning?”

“Lord knows!” Corfield answered. “Anyhow, the chap’s inside, and there he jolly well remains until we let him out.”

“But suppose he’s got a pistol and shoots the moment we open the door?” Heddon suggested.

“I’ve got a pistol as well,” said Corfield grimly.

“And what do you suggest we shall do?” Heddon asked anxiously. “I hate all this sort of thing. It ... it quite unnerves me.”

“Ring up the police station and let ’em know. Then we might have a look at our little gentleman,” said the commander. “I’m rather anxious to see who he is.”

He walked carelessly over to the cupboard, and placed his ear against the oak door.

“I should come away from that door, if I were you,” Heddon advised.

“Why, what’s the matter?”

“He might shoot through it.”

Corfield moved aside.

“Very well,” he said. “Let’s go and telephone.”

The instrument was in the hall, and switching on the light, Heddon lifted off the receiver and applied it to his ear.

“They’re deuced slow in answering,” he said after a lengthy interval, agitating the receiver hook. “Hullo!... HULLO!... Exchange!... Are you there?”

There was no reply.

“What the deuce has happened?” Heddon plaintively inquired. “There’s no answer!—Hullo!—Exchange!”

“It’s no good shouting,” said Corfield quietly.

“I suppose they think that because it’s early in the morning nobody ever wants to use the telephone!” Heddon exclaimed. “It’s scandalous!—Hullo!—HULLO!—Exchange!—Why can’t you answer!—Damn it! No reply, Corfield! Monstrous, I call it!”

Corfield burst out laughing.

“I can’t see anything to be amused at!” his host exclaimed. “What’s the matter with the cursed thing?”

“The line may be down,” the commander suggested.

Heddon snorted.

“Why on earth should the line be down?” he demanded.

“Because someone may have cut it. I suppose it goes across country, doesn’t it?”

“Yes,” Heddon replied. “Ours is the only telephone for miles.—D’you suggest that someone’s had the amazing effrontery to cut our wires?”

“If they had the effrontery to enter the house at four o’clock in the morning and to open the cupboard I should say they’d be capable of anything.”

“And what’s the next move?” asked Heddon, thoroughly agitated, replacing the receiver on its hook.

“Let’s yank that little perisher out of the cupboard and give him a bit of our mind,” said Corfield. “When we’ve questioned him we can lock him up again.”

“For God’s sake be careful!” Heddon whispered, as they returned to the sitting-room.

“I’ll be careful enough!” the other laughed, producing the pistol from the pocket of his dressing-gown and marching across to the cupboard door without hesitation.

With the weapon ready in his right hand, he unlocked and flung open the door with his left.

“Come out!” he ordered sternly. “I’ve got you covered!”

There was no answer.

“Come out, I say!” Corfield repeated. “It’s no good skulking in there!”

Still there was no reply.

With the electric light on in the sitting-room he could see most of the interior of the cupboard, which was unusually large. But there were no signs of any man, merely an appalling litter of boxes and papers on the shelves and floor, and that curious penetrating odour of damp and mustiness.

But there were still corners that he could not see. In one of those the man must be cowering—he must be.

“Let’s have a light,” he said to his host.

Heddon produced an electric torch from the mantelpiece and handed it across at arm’s length, carefully avoiding the cupboard door.

“For God’s sake look out what you are doing!” he cautioned. “Do be careful!”

“Don’t worry,” said the commander, flicking on the torch, listening for a moment, and then stepping inside the cupboard with his pistol ready. He turned the miniature searchlight here, there and everywhere—on the walls, on the brick roof, on the floor.

“Well I’m blistered!” he exclaimed at last, utterly amazed.

“Wh ... what’s the matter?” Heddon inquired. “Is he dead?”

“Dead be damned!” replied the other. “No. The blighter’s skipped—hopped it, as clean as a whistle!”

“So it was a ghost, after all!” Heddon whispered in an awe-stricken undertone. “If my wife hears of this she’ll....”

“Ghost be jiggered!” Corfield rudely retorted. “Ghosts don’t use keys!”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE cupboard, which Heddon and Corfield had carefully examined at daylight, yielded no clue whatever to the mystery. Yet, with his own eyes, Corfield had seen the intruder enter it. As he had not emerged, it was obvious there must be some secret outlet. For nearly an hour they probed its inner recesses with an electric torch, examining likely-looking cracks, rapping with their knuckles, sounding the walls and sides, pulling at the littered shelves in the hope of finding some secret door or opening. But luck was against them. They found nothing.

"This absolutely beats me!" said Corfield, emerging with his clothes, face, and hands covered with dust. "Where the devil can that fellow have got to?"

"Don't ask me!" Heddon replied helplessly, his hands in the pockets of his grey flannel trousers and an unlit pipe between his teeth. "Short of pulling the place to bits, I don't see how we'll ever find out."

Breakfast had come and gone, and they were still discussing the affair that was uppermost in their minds.

Mrs. Heddon, after toying feebly with a morsel of toast and a cup of weak tea, was still in bed, overcome. Mrs. Symons, the 'daily help' who should have arrived at half-past eight, had not put in an appearance. Nor had her husband, who was supposed to come every alternate day to run the electric-light plant, wash the car, and do odd jobs.

"I want to know what's to be done next," said Heddon almost plaintively, running his fingers through his untidy hair.

“I’ve told you everything I know,” Corfield replied. “First the submarine or motor-boat that’s been appearing off this coast; then Polinoff’s questions to me at Marston; lastly, that attempt to wreck our car yesterday morning. On top of it all comes that business of last night. What d’you make of it all?”

“It’s deuced hard to see any connection between three or four isolated incidents,” Heddon observed. “I don’t know what to think. Honestly, I don’t.”

“It was certainly Polinoff’s car that tried to do us in yesterday,” Corfield pointed out. “Calliope was positive about that. As for the connection between last night’s episode and the gas business in the morning—well, it’s difficult to prove there is any connection. I merely feel it in my bones.

“I may be wrong, hopelessly wrong,” he went on to say. “But I’ve told you the whole story from A to Z, and so far as I can figure it out that fellow Polinoff or someone else, was desperately anxious to stop my coming here.—Why didn’t he want me to come?”

“I’m sure I don’t know,” said Heddon.

“Merely because he’s connected in some way or another with what’s been happening here,” the commander explained. “In all probability he knows I’ve been sent down here unofficially to investigate, though how he discovered it the Lord alone knows!—But Polinoff, or someone else, wants the coast clear. I’m in the way. Therefore he tried to get rid of me.”

Heddon did not reply.

The commander, sucking at his pipe, thought for a moment.

“I think I’d better go,” he said at last. “I don’t see why I should drag you into this affair by staying here.”

“What? Do you mean you’ll leave me with my wife and daughter after what happened last night?”

“You can easily clear out,” Corfield suggested.

“Do you think they’ll come again?”

“It seems quite on the cards.”

“Well, let ’em!” said Heddon, with a burst of sudden ferocity that was utterly unlike him. “I’ll be damned if I’m going to be evicted from my house by a gang of aliens! It’s my wife and Calliope I’m thinking about, really. D’you think they ought to go?”

“You’ll have a job with Calliope,” Corfield warned him. “From what she said last night, I doubt if you’ll budge her. She looks upon it as rather a thrill.”

Heddon sighed.

“But what about my wife?” he asked. “I might persuade her to leave. She hates the place, anyhow.”

“And if you can make Calliope go and look after her, so much the better,” Corfield put in. “One never knows what may happen, I....”

Calliope, wearing rubber-soled shoes, came out of the house and walked noiselessly down the path towards them.

“Who’s taking my name in vain?” she demanded, hearing the last remark. “Who am I to look after, Dick?”

Corfield looked helplessly at Heddon.

“It’s like this, my dear,” the elder man explained. “Corfield and I have been talking things over. Your mother mustn’t stop here after what happened last night.”

“That,” said Calliope, “is as plain as pikestaff.—But tell me, Dick,” she added, “did I hear you suggesting that I should go too?”

Corfield looked awkward.

“M’yes,” he stammered. “That was rather my idea.”

“Because I happen to be a female, you seem to imagine I’m a helpless fool!” she exclaimed, her eyes angry. “You’re trying to get rid of me because you think there may be trouble here, aren’t you now?”

“Do be sensible!” her father put in. “We merely want to get you out of harm’s way. Your mother will probably like to go to the Chandlers. You’d better go there with her.”

“Damn the Chandlers!” Calliope retorted. “You know perfectly well that Cousin Molly loves looking after people, and doesn’t want me to help. All we have to do is to put mother in a train and wire to Cousin Molly to meet her at Plymouth. If it’s merely a question of the train journey, I’ll go with her and come back as soon as I can.”

“I wish you’d be sensible,” her father said, looking at Corfield.

“Rubbish!” she snorted.

“Something might happen to you, Calliope,” said Corfield. “You see....”

“Hell!” she broke in with a stamp of her foot. “You’ll make me really angry if you go on like this! One would imagine we were living in the ’fifties of last century. Do both of you think that because I’m a girl I haven’t got the pluck of a louse?”

Heddon winced.

“I never said so,” Corfield protested.

“Nor did I,” her father added. “We merely thought it would be a good idea if you steered clear of this business.”

“Then I’m afraid you must think again, Daddy darling,” she said, a dangerous sweetness in her voice. “I’ve made up my mind. I’ll take mother by train; but I’ll get back as soon as I can. I’ve every intention of seeing this thing out, so now you know—both of you!”

“Very well, then,” her father replied miserably. “I’ve nothing further to say.”

Calliope laughed.

“There’s nothing to be said,” she answered. “What I came out to tell you is that neither Mrs. Symons nor her husband have turned up, and it’s nearly ten o’clock. Someone will have to go and buy some food. We’re running short.”

“What about telephoning?” Heddon suggested.

“You can’t,” said Corfield. “The line’s still down. I tried to get on after breakfast.”

“I’d forgotten,” said Heddon. “I must go and see the post-office people.

“And I’ll make out a list of what we want,” said Calliope. “But if mother’s leaving and I’m going to take her, you two will have to look after yourselves for to-day. Let’s hope Mrs. Symons turns up to-morrow, otherwise I see myself doing the cooking.” She made a wry face.

“There’s the electric light,” said Heddon.

“What about it?” Corfield inquired.

“The engine ought to be run to top up the accumulators,” his host explained. “That’s Symons’s job. I don’t know the first thing about it.”

“But I do,” said the commander. “You can leave it to me.”

“Good! That at least is something off our minds.”

Corfield and Heddon continued to discuss their arrangements while Calliope went off to look up trains, to return in a few minutes with a wrinkled forehead and the Bradshaw in her hand.

“I suppose Helston’s the nearest station?”

Her father nodded.

“Well, if Mother and I catch the one five from there and change at Gwinear Road, we apparently get to North Road, Plymouth, at about four o’clock,” she said. “If I catch the four fifty-five from there I get back to Helston at eight-fifteen. Verify, please, Daddy.”

She handed him the Bradshaw.

Heddon took the time-table and fished in his pocket for his horn-rimmed spectacles.

“Yes,” he said, after running his finger down the closely-figured columns. “That seems right; but we’ll ask at the station. Perhaps you’ll have to change at Truro. I’ll take you into Helston in the car. We’ll lunch early.”

“Then will one of you meet the eight-fifteen at Helston?” Calliope asked.

“Yes,” they said together.

Calliope left them, and after some further conversation it was decided that Heddon, having taken his wife and daughter to the station in his car, should do what shopping was necessary, interview the post-office people about the telephone, and return to the bungalow as quickly as possible. It was inadvisable, they both agreed, to leave the house empty for longer than was absolutely necessary.

Corfield, meanwhile, had plenty on hand.

From what the D.N.I. had impressed upon him before leaving London, he must, as soon as possible, interview various fishermen.

The skipper of the *Boy Ted*, of Penzance, had reported a large motor-boat with no lights near the Lizard on the night of May 13th. Another motor-boat, also without lights, had been sighted at 2.35 a.m. on June 1st by the skipper of the *Honesty* of Newlyn. The evidence of John Burge, an ex-naval seaman, the second hand of the Porthleven fishing vessel *Sisters Three*, was more important still. It was this man who had seen what he declared was a submarine with no lights near the Lizard at about 4.45 a.m. on the morning of June 17th. All these men must, if humanly possible, be run to earth and closely questioned.

Even if he were lucky enough to find them without delay, which seemed hardly likely, Corfield realised it would take him nearly the whole day. Newlyn, on the opposite side of Mount's Bay, was a good twenty-three miles by road, with Penzance one mile this side of it. Porthleven was roughly twelve miles off and more or less on the way. Since John Burge's evidence was the most important, he would call there first.

But, in addition to all this, the commander also wanted to send a telegram to his friend "Foxy" Elliott in his yacht at Falmouth, to whom he had already written. He would suggest to "Foxy" that he should bring the *Lora* round to Porthleven, which had a little harbour, and was barely eight miles distant by sea. "Foxy", if near at hand, might prove a useful ally, and they could always fetch him by car if need be. Moreover, the *Lora*, with her auxiliary motor, might be useful.

“I’d better go and explain to my wife,” said Heddon, shambling to his feet.

“And I shall have to be making a move if I’m to do all I have to,” said Corfield, following him up the path. “You might give me the key of the garage.”

“You’ll find it on the brass tray in the hall,” said Heddon.

Ten minutes later Corfield was ready to leave.

“I’d better give you this,” said the commander, giving Heddon the key of the garage. “And if I were you, I should have a look at that padlock of yours. It’s none too secure. I had a job to open it, and the hasp’s badly bent.”

Heddon produced his spectacles and went across to peer at it.

“This is most peculiar!” he exclaimed, after a brief examination. “The padlock was perfectly all right when I locked the garage last night.”

“You mean it’s been monkeyed with?” Corfield asked.

Heddon nodded.

“Yes. Four days ago the proper key of the garage was lost. As I couldn’t lock it, I got a man to come and fit this padlock. You’ll notice I had the fastenings bolted right through the doors with nuts on the other side,” he went on. “They’re not screwed on in the ordinary way.”

“And someone’s put the end of a spanner in here, and tried to burst it open,” Corfield said, pointing to the distorted hasp and several deep scratches and indentations on the brown paint of the door itself. “It’s lucky it’s pretty substantial. He’s all but carried it away!”

“But why?” asked Heddon, running his fingers through his hair with a puzzled expression on his face. “Why should

someone want to get at the cars?”

“God knows!” Corfield replied, climbing into the driving seat. “But you can bet it’s all part and parcel of what happened last night.”

He started his engine and let in his clutch. The car moved out through the gate and started to bump slowly down the road outside. In another minute, turning a corner, it was out of sight, to leave Heddon with a dubious look on his face solemnly scratching his chin.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

It was not until after half-past eleven that Corfield finally ran John Burge to earth.

Directed to the little harbour, crammed with fishing craft preparing for their night's work, he came upon a group of ancient mariners in jerseys sunning themselves on one of the jetties. Smoking their pipes they sat solemnly around gazing pensively out to sea, hardly exchanging a syllable.

"Do you happen to know a man called John Burge?" Corfield inquired politely, addressing a white-bearded, weather-beaten old man seated on a fish-box.

The old fisherman glanced up at him with a pair of bright blue eyes very wrinkled at the corners, allowed his gaze to travel from Corfield's face to his shoes and back again, and then removed his pipe and expectorated noisily.

"Jan Burge, mister?" he croaked, scratching a bushy eyebrow with his pipe-stem.

"Yes," said the commander.

"Aye," the ancient nodded. "I knows Jan Burge, mister. Me an' 'is dad was friends like until 'e died laast year an' we buried 'em up along St. Anthony's. 'Is name was Tam Burge. 'E 'ad fower sons an' tu darters, an' the youngest, Emily, that is...."

"It's John Burge that I want. The one that was once in the Navy," the Commander interrupted, not at all anxious to hear the entire family history. "Can you tell me where I'm likely to find him?"

"Aye," murmured the old man. "I wus comin' tu thaat, mister. But what d'you waant 'em fur?"

“Just to have a talk with him,” Corfield explained.

“Y’u’m a friend o’ Jan’s?”

“I’ve never seen him before,” Corfield confessed.

The fisherman pursed his lips.

“Well, mister,” he rambled on. “If you waants to see Jan, maybe ’e’s along tu ’is ’ome in Duck Street. Maybe....”

“And where’s Duck Street?”

“Y’u listen to what I’m sayin’, mister,” the old fellow broke in, chuckling softly to himself. “I ’aven’t near finished. Maybe, as I says, ’e’s along tu ’is ’ome in Duck Street. Maybe ’e’s ’avin’ ’is mornin’ pint at the pooblic oop the road, an’ maybe, ’e’s along o’ old Bill Travis aboard ’is boat out yonder.”

He pointed to a cluster of fishing craft in the middle of the harbour.

“D’you mean the *Sisters Three*?” Corfield queried, beginning to lose patience.

The mahogany-faced mariner shook his head.

“No,” he replied. “The *Sisters Three* is Bob Oliver’s boat. Jan Burge doan’t ’ave nothin’ tu du wi’ ’er.”

“But surely he used to be in the *Sisters Three*,” Corfield said.

“Maybe, maybe,” the other answered. “They chops an’ changes when it suits ’em like. But Jan Burge is now workin’ along o’ old Bill Travis in the *Effie an’ Eva*. That’s ’is boat now. Y’u bide a minute, mister,” he added, shambling to his feet. “I’ll find out fur ye if ’e’s there.”

He walked totteringly to the edge of the jetty, put his two hands to his mouth, and shouted.

“Aiie!” he howled. “Bill Travis! Are y’u there?”

If the old fellow’s body was infirm his voice was certainly not. He let loose a roar which would not have disgraced the mate of a windjammer, causing nearly every man in the harbour to turn his head in his direction, and startling even the somnolent seagulls into sudden flight.

A man in one of the boats stood up and waved a hand.

“Is Jan Burge along o’ y’u?” the old boy bellowed between his cupped hands.

“Aye!” came back the answer.

“Then tell ’em there’s someone ’ere waants tu see ’em! Someone as lukes like a gennelman!”

Burge was presently sculling himself ashore in a dinghy, and wishing the old fisherman good day, Corfield went down the steps on to the little beach to meet him.

The boat’s bows crunched ashore, and a man stepped out over the bows.

“Did y’u waant to speak tu me, sir?” he asked pleasantly, straightening his back and making a half salute as he spotted Corfield’s naval tie. “Y’u’m a naval officer, sir?”

The commander nodded and smiled and held out his hand, which Burge shook. He was a man of nearly forty, Corfield judged, a big, husky fellow with a tanned face and a cheerful expression with nothing to tell him from the ordinary fishermen except a pair of ancient but unmistakable bluejacket’s trousers tucked into the tops of his leather sea-boots, that, and the occasional ‘sir’ with which he punctuated his conversation.

“Yes,” said Corfield. “I am a naval officer, or rather, I was. I retired in twenty-two.”

“An’ I left in twenty-three at the end o’ my first twelve, sir,” said Burge with a pleasant grin. “We haven’t ever been shipmates, sir?” he went on to ask, peering into Corfield’s face.

The commander shook his head.

“No,” he replied. “I did most of my later time in destroyers.”

“I was in submarines, sir.”

For some minutes they exchanged reminiscences and sought for mutual acquaintances, before Corfield had an opportunity of coming to the point.

“I’ve come here to find out about that submarine you sighted on June 17th, Burge,” he managed to say at last. “I’ve been sent by the Admiralty, and I must ask you not to tell anyone that I’ve asked you questions.”

“That’s all right, sir. Mum’s the word,” said the other. “But is anything up, sir?” he went on to ask, his voice serious.

Corfield explained all that was necessary, and proceeded to question him as to precisely what he had seen on the night in question.

“You’re absolutely certain she was a submarine?” he concluded by asking.

Burge grinned.

“I don’t make no mistake about that, sir,” he exclaimed, shaking his head. “I’ve done nigh on six years in submarines. I knows what they looks like, sir, even at night. She was a large one, about the size of one of our ‘L boats’.”

Corfield was convinced.

“But that’s not all, sir,” the man continued, coming a little closer and sinking his voice to a whisper. “That there

submarine, or one exactly like ’er, was sighted agen this mornin’, early!”

“This morning!” Corfield echoed, utterly astounded.

“Yes, sir.”

“Did you see her?”

“No, sir. She was sighted in the fog by Tim Penny o’ the *Clara Todd*. An’ Tim weren’t the only one, sir. The others aboard the *Clara* saw her too.”

“Can I see Tim Penny?” Corfield demanded, his heart throbbing with excitement.

“Not to-day, sir,” said Burge, shaking his head. “Tim’s over tu Newlyn in the *Clara*. He won’t be back here until nigh on dinner time tu-morrow.”

“But are you certain he knows a submarine when he sees one?” the commander queried. “It’s easy enough to mistake one after dark, particularly in fog.”

Burge laughed.

“He knows ’em as well as I du, sir,” he answered. “Tim Penny don’t spin no benders. I’d trust him anywhere, likewise believe anythin’ he says.”

“And how d’you know all this, Burge?”

“ ’Cos Tim tells me, sir,” the ex-seaman explained. “Y’u see Tim knows that I’d sighted one before, so we compare notes like.”

“What time was she sighted and where?” came the commander’s next question.

“About nine or ten mile down the coast towards the Lizard, sir. She was lyin’ stopped in the fog, Tim said, with no lights, an’ within a few hundred yards of the shore, ’cos Tim could hear the sea breakin’ on the rocks. He passed her in the *Clara*

with his motor goin' at about fifty yards, and could see men on her deck. Then all at once they started messin' about wi' their hooter—sounded like signals, Tim said."

"And what time did this happen?" asked Corfield anxiously.

"Nigh on four o'clock this mornin', sir."

That clinched it.

Nine or ten miles down the coast towards the Lizard from Porthleven was just about the position of the little cove where One Tree Bungalow stood. Allowing a quarter of an hour for possible inaccuracies in time, moreover, it was at about four o'clock that Corfield had heard the signalling in the fog and had seen the man peering in through the sitting-room window.

He half made up his mind to tell Burge everything, to enlist him as an ally. A moment's thought, however, showed him it might be rather unwise. The man looked thoroughly honest and trustworthy, and had told his story without contradicting himself. But he knew nothing of him really, and for all he knew Burge might broadcast the yarn all over the countryside.

"Look here," he said, feigning an indifference he did not feel. "If I want you to lend me a hand at any time, would you come along?"

Burge, scenting a mystery, grinned all over his face.

"Y'u give me the word, sir, an' I'll be there," he said at once. "Fishing's not everythin'. 'Tis mortal dull o' times. When would y'u be wantin' me, sir?"

"I can't tell you," said Corfield. "Possibly I shan't want you at all; but I'd better know where you live in case I do."

“I’m away most nights ’cept Saturdays and Sundays, sir. But in the daytime, eighteen Duck Lane will always find me. I lodges along o’ my married sister, Mrs. Gage.”

Corfield noted down the address in his pocket-book.

“I’ll let you know,” he said. “And mind,” he added, “don’t go piping what I’ve told you all over the place. Keep it to yourself. It’s important.”

“Aye aye, sir. Mum’s the word,” the seaman replied. “But if there’s goin’ to be a dust up or anythin’, sir,” he added, “I’ll thank y’u kindly to let me have a share in it. Fishin’s a dreary job, sir, in a manner o’ speakin’, for one who was in the Navy.”

The man was obviously so keen to help that Corfield could not altogether deny him.

“I’ll do my best,” he said. “But it’s quite on the cards that there won’t be any excitement. Meanwhile, I must be off. Good-bye, Burge, and thanks for all you’ve told me—and mum’s the word, mind!”

“I understand, sir.”

“Oh, by the way,” Corfield added. “What time was it low water this morning?”

The man thought for a moment.

“Tide’s ebbin’ now, sir,” he replied, looking over his shoulder. “It was floodin’ when we got in at six o’clock. It would be dead low water between two and three this mornin’, sir.”

Corfield nodded in comprehension. Every little piece of the complicated puzzle was beginning to dovetail into its neighbours. It was within an hour of low water he remembered, that the mysterious wireless signals had been

heard on previous occasions and that submarines or motor-boats had been sighted.

But on her latest appearance, only eight hours ago, the night had not been dark throughout. It had been so when he went to bed soon after eleven o'clock. Between half-past three and four o'clock in the morning, however, when he had been woken up by the sound of the Klaxon from seaward, and had afterwards seen the man look in through the window and enter the room, the fog had been lit up by the brilliance of the risen moon. That, however, seemed a minor point. Everything else seemed to fit in perfectly.

"Well, I must be off, Burge," said Corfield, after thanking him again. "I've got several jobs to do."

They solemnly shook hands.

"And y'u won't forget, sir, that I'm here if I'm wanted," said the seaman as they parted.

"I won't," said the commander.

Evading further conversation with the ancient mariner who left his fish-box and hobbled towards him as he climbed the slippery steps of the jetty, Corfield went straight back to his car and drove the two miles into Helston. He possessed corroboration enough. The evidence of the other fishermen at Penzance and Newlyn was unnecessary.

From Helston he despatched two telegrams. One to his friend 'Foxy' Elliott at Falmouth, and the other to the D.N.I.'s private address in London.

"Suggest you bring *Lora* Porthleven soon as possible weather salubrious excellent fishing wire me time arrival P.O. Helston. Dick," he said in the first.

And to the D.N.I.—“Bella arrived 0400 this morning nine pounds all well wire me any congratulations. P.O. Helston. Corfield.”

Satisfied with his morning’s work, he had a hurried lunch and then went on to the railway station in time to meet the Heddons.

“You here!” said Calliope in surprise when she saw him. “I thought you’d gone to Penzance?”

“I went to Porthleven,” he said.

“Why not to Penzance?”

“Because it wasn’t necessary.”

“Oh,” she said, rather puzzled. “Did you find out anything?”

“Nothing much,” he replied airily.

But his expression gave the lie to his words, and Calliope, quick to realise that something unusual had happened, promptly took charge of the situation.

“Daddy,” she ordered. “You might look after mother and get hold of a porter and see to the luggage. Find out exactly where we change, and don’t forget the tickets. Mine’s a return, mind. Dick and I will go and buy something to read. You can join us on the platform.”

“Now,” she said, when Corfield had been marched out of earshot. “What have you discovered?”

“How did you know I’d discovered anything?” he parried.

“Because, my good man, you’re grinning all over your face. You’ve found out something.”

“And what if I have, Miss Inquisitive?”

“Oh, hurry up!” she exclaimed, shaking him by the arm in her impatience. “We’ve only a few minutes.—Don’t stand there grinning like an ape!”

Under a promise of secrecy he told her as much as he could until the arrival of Heddon and his wife with the luggage put a stop to private conversation.

“So things have already started to move,” Calliope whispered, as they walked together along the platform looking for a carriage.

Corfield nodded.

“Well thank heaven I’m arriving here again at eight-fifteen to-night,” she said. “Either you or daddy must meet me, don’t forget?”

“No,” said Corfield. “I won’t forget.”

Five minutes later, with Mrs. Heddon in a corner seat with a bottle of smelling-salts and her back to the engine, and Calliope waving out of the window, the train was leaving the station.

The two men watched it until it rounded a curve and passed out of sight.

“Thank goodness my wife’s away!” Heddon murmured with a sigh of heartfelt relief.

CHAPTER TWENTY

"I MUST be getting back," said Heddon, when he had listened attentively to all Corfield had to tell him and had asked many questions. "By the way—I called at the post office on my way here and told them about the telephone."

"Oh," said Corfield. "I'd forgotten. What did they say?"

"It seems they tried to ring us up at about eleven last night and couldn't get through."

"Anything important?"

"No. Merely a call from my agent in London. Something about the American rights in a book of mine.—Anyhow, they're already tracing the fault. If it's a simple break it should be all right again by this evening."

"A simple cut, you mean," Corfield put in. "I'll bet it was deliberate. There's been no bad weather."

"They said something about cattle where the line goes across country."

Corfield laughed.

"Cows don't climb telephone poles," he said. "Anyhow, let's hope the blessed thing's all right by to-night. I don't like being marooned at the back of beyond with no means of getting hold of anyone."

"Nor do I," Heddon agreed. "But I must get back at once," he added. "They'll want to test our instrument and there's nobody in the house.—What about you?"

"I'm expecting answers to some wires I sent off," Corfield said. "By the way," he continued, his face thoughtful. "That fellow Symons and his wife.—Why didn't they turn up this morning?"

“I don’t know.”

“Have they ever stayed away like this before?”

“No.”

“Then doesn’t it strike you as peculiar that they should stop away after what happened last night?”

“D’you mean that Symons had something to do with it?”

“I hardly know what to think. But what was Mrs. Symons’s idea of trying to frighten your wife with her yarns of ghosts and things? She was trying to get you both out of the house, wasn’t she?”

“It certainly looked like it.”

“Well then,” the commander continued. “Suppose she wanted to get you away because of what she knew was to happen last night, or early this morning, to be accurate? In other words, suppose they knew this submarine was due to arrive when it did, and wanted the coast clear?”

“Good Lord!” Heddon exclaimed. “D’you mean....”

“Let me go on,” Corfield broke in. “Let’s assume for a moment they wanted the house empty. Mrs. Symons, knowing your wife’s nerves aren’t good, starts off by spinning yarns and trying to frighten her in the hope that she’d leave and that you would go with her.”

“Yes,” said Heddon.

“Things became a little difficult for them when you refused to budge. Another complication cropped up when the Symons’s found out that you’d two extra people coming to stay. Presumably your wife told her that?”

“Of course.”

“All the same, Mrs. Symons thought, as your wife did that the extra visitors were Calliope and another girl.”

“Yes. We’ve only the one spare room.”

“In other words, there would be three women in the house and only one man, yourself,” Corfield pointed out. “Those four people would be sleeping in the two bedrooms, so whatever happened the chances were a hundred to one against anyone being in the sitting-room after midnight or so. We’ve already assumed that the Symons’s knew when the submarine was due to arrive. Suppose, again, it was important to communicate with this submarine by word of mouth, and that, in spite of the risk, someone had to do it?”

“What? The Symons’s?” Heddon asked, rather bewildered.

“Not necessarily the Symons’s; but someone else the Symons’s knew of—those men who came last night—that fellow who opened the cupboard door with the key and obviously knew his way about. Because we couldn’t find a way out of that cupboard it doesn’t mean there isn’t one, for how else did that man disappear? It’s clear to me, perfectly clear, that the cupboard’s really an entrance to a tunnel or passage, and where else should it lead to but the beach?”

“I follow you,” said Heddon.

“That man, then,” Corfield continued, “came in through the sitting-room and into the cupboard to go down to the beach. He probably had to communicate with someone from the submarine, which we know was lying close in just about that time. She could easily have sent someone ashore in a boat.”

“But there’s a sort of path down to the beach,” Heddon pointed out.

“What sort of a path?” Corfield asked. “I haven’t had time to look.”

“Not the sort of path I’d care to use in pitch darkness,” Heddon admitted.

“Quite so,” Corfield smiled. “The passage through the sitting-room and cupboard is probably easier.—Anyhow, whatever the reason, and in spite of the risk, the fellow used it, having taken the precaution to cut our telephone wires beforehand so that, if he were spotted, we couldn’t ring up the police.”

“And what happened next?” he went on to explain. “The fellow came back through the passage and found the cupboard door locked on the outside. That must have given him rather a shock, for it’s not the sort of door that could have swung to of its own accord. Like a fool, he also left the key behind, and he’ll be wondering who the deuce has got hold of it. Meanwhile, when he didn’t return, his pal outside the house got anxious and came to find out what had happened. Him I chased off the premises.”

“And the first man returned to the beach and got away by the cliff path?” Heddon asked.

“Obviously,” Corfield agreed, “unless there’s any other path.”

“There isn’t,” said Heddon. “I know the cove pretty well. —But tell me,” he added, “what’s all this leading up to?”

“It merely shows that all the facts hang together,” said Corfield. “It also goes to prove that the Symons’s knew beforehand of what was to happen last night, and that their non-appearance this morning is accounted for by the fact that one man found the cupboard locked, while the other was chased off and shot at. In short, they’ve got the wind up, and pretty badly.”

Heddon agreed.

“And what do you suggest?” he asked.

“Do you know where the Symons’s live?”

“In a village just the other side of Mullion.”

“Then I’ll fill in time by going to see them,” the commander said. “I might be able to find out something.”

“I could call there on my way back,” Heddon suggested.

Corfield shook his head.

“No,” he said. “That wouldn’t do. They know you. I’m a stranger. I could go to their house, pitch ’em some sort of fairy tale, and find out what I can.”

Heddon gave him full directions, and within ten minutes, having called at a garage for oil and petrol, Corfield was on his way back to Mullion. About thirty-five minutes later he was rapping on the door of an untidy stone cottage with an unkempt little garden running down towards the road.

He was conscious of footsteps inside the house; but had to wait some minutes and knock twice before the door was finally unlatched. A small, slatternly-looking, sharp-featured woman with rather a truculent expression appeared in the opening.

“Well?” she demanded, looking Corfield up and down.

“Does Mr. Symons live here?” he asked.

“Yes,” she said shortly. “What do you want with him?”

“I wanted to see him about running an electric-light plant,” Corfield said glibly.

“Oh,” said the woman. “Who told you about Mr. Symons?”

“A friend of mine—a Mr. Beecham,” Corfield replied, mentioning the first name that came into his head.

“Never heard the name,” said Mrs. Symons testily.

“Possibly not,” said Corfield. “All the same, Mr. Beecham knew all about Mr. Symons. He told me that Mr. Symons—by the way, are you Mrs. Symons?”

The woman nodded.

“Well,” said Corfield with a smile. “Your husband must be quite well known as an expert. Anyhow, I wanted his advice about the batteries in this plant. I thought I might be able to get him to come and have a look at them. You see,” he added, wondering how on earth he was going to get inside the cottage. “I’m a mere novice.”

“Stranger to these parts?” Mrs. Symons inquired sharply, her eyes fixed upon him.

“Yes,” lied Corfield. “I’m thinking of taking a house near here for the summer. There’s one I rather like; but I want the batteries of the electric lighting set looked at before I make up my mind. That’s where Mr. Symons comes in.”

“You’d best come inside and talk to him yourself,” she said, standing aside to let him enter. “If you’ll take a seat, I’ll tell him.”

She disappeared into the back premises, whence he heard her go upstairs. Then the sound of footsteps and voices from overhead.

Corfield looked round the stuffy little room.

It was the ordinary front sitting-room of a cottage, with the shabbiest of shoddy furniture and the papered walls hung with cheap, garish pictures and enlarged photographs in heavy gilt frames. The place was untidy and uncared for, the linoleum-covered floor dirty, the hearthrug torn and threadbare, the lace curtains over the two windows grey from

want of washing. The top of an open piano with yellow keys was grey with dust. So were the shelves of the overmantel, which was crammed with trashy ornaments and vases. The room smelt stuffy and unaired. Mrs. Symons obviously had no pride in her home.

But the room smelt of something else besides unairedness—fresh tobacco smoke, the smoke of a pipe. And there, close to a hideous American clock which had stopped at half-past eight, was the pipe itself.

Corfield reached out and picked it up. The bowl was still warm. A few minutes before it was still being smoked. If it belonged to Symons, why had he suddenly vanished upstairs?

The footsteps and conversation overhead ceased. Corfield heard someone coming downstairs, and in another moment Symons himself came into the room followed by his wife.

He was a foxy-faced little man with shifty eyes and a furtive expression. His right hand was awkwardly bandaged, Corfield instantly noticed, and he limped slightly as he came into the room.

"Good afternoon," said the Commander pleasantly. "I came to see if you could help me—that is, if you could come and have a look at the batteries of an electric lighting plant."

"The gentleman's thinking of taking a house here for the summer," Mrs. Symons put in.

"What sort of plant?" Symons asked suspiciously.

"All I know is that it's a Petter engine," Corfield replied.

"When do yer want me to come, Mister?"

"To-day," said Corfield.

"Can't be done," Symons returned, shaking his head. "I've hurt me hand. Can't do nothin' for three or four days."

“My husband’s hurt himself,” Mrs. Symons started to explain. “He had a tumble last night down the....”

Symons turned on her with a face of fury.

“Can’t you let me do the talkin’, Annie?” he demanded with unnecessary vehemence. “Mind yer own business, carn’t yer? What’s it got to do with you how I hurt meself? Always puttin’ yer oar in, that’s what you are!”

“No need to get on your high horse about it, anyhow, Albert!” she retorted, looking as if she would have liked to box his ears. “Can’t I open my mouth without you flying out at me?”

“Aw, shut up, Annie!” he flung back. “Mind yer own business, carn’t yer!—What happened, mister, was that I fell off me bike after dark. My missus thinks I’m goin’ to die, but ’t isn’t nothin’ to worry about.”

“So it means you can’t come to-day?” Corfield asked.

Symons nodded.

“Yes,” he said. “That’s it.”

“Well, I must be getting on then,” said the commander, moving towards the door. “I’m sorry to have troubled you—Good afternoon.”

He let himself out. Even as he walked down the little pathway to his car the sounds of acrimonious discussion broke out from within. Mrs. Symons, to judge from her shrill invective, seemed fully capable of holding her own.

Climbing into the driving-seat, Corfield had a glimpse of Symons’s face watching him from between the window curtains as he let in the clutch and moved down the road.

He had not discovered much, it is true, though his visit had not altogether been wasted.

Item 1—Both Symons and his wife were surly, shifty-faced, and sly—utterly untrustworthy if he was any judge of character.

Item 2—Symons, who had been in the sitting-room when he had knocked on the door, had hastily retreated to a bedroom above. Why?

Item 3—Symons had had an accident of some sort during the night. His wife had started to explain that he had had a tumble down something or other. Then, evidently fearful that she was letting the cat out of the bag, Symons rounded on her and explained his injury by saying he had fallen off his bicycle. Was it possible that he had been the unknown visitor of the early morning? Finding his egress barred by the closing of the cupboard door, had he been forced to use the dangerous cliff path in the darkness, where he had fallen and hurt himself?

Item 4—Symons's figure more or less coincided with that of the man Corfield had seen silhouetted against the foggy moonlight in the French window, though Corfield had not seen the intruder's face. He had, however, heard him addressed as 'Bill' by the second man. Symons's baptismal name was Albert. But anyone might be 'Bill' to his friends. Perhaps Symons was Albert William.

It was shortly after three o'clock that Corfield got back to the post-office at Helston to find replies to both his telegrams.

"Sailing to-night expect arrive Porthleven daylight to-morrow Saturday," said 'Foxy' Elliott.

That from the D.N.I. was longer and more cryptic.

"Good work glad it was a big one let me know how mother and child progress cousin Beatrice arrives Penzance to-

morrow morning Saturday communicate with her if necessary she has full discretion to act indications early this morning as you might expect.”

Corfield smiled to himself as he read it.

The D.N.I. wanted to know any further developments, and informed him that the usual wireless signals had been heard off the coast prior to the appearance of the submarine. But ‘Cousin Beatrice’, by the code arranged between them, meant one of His Majesty’s destroyers.

Truly things were beginning to hum when the Royal Navy took a hand in the proceedings.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

"Ah, here you are!" said Heddon with an air of great relief, as Corfield ran his car into the garage and left the driving-seat. "The telephone's working again."

"What was wrong?"

"Both wires were down about a mile from here," Heddon explained. "There was a clean cut."

"Precisely what I imagined," said Corfield.

"They're going to inform the police," his host observed, as he pushed to and locked the garage doors.

"That's a damned nuisance!" Corfield replied, rather annoyed. "We don't want the local constabulary butting in and spoiling our show! They'll be buzzing round asking questions and scare these fellows away. Has anything else been happening?"

"Nothing, thank heaven!"

"I don't like the look of that Symons family," Corfield continued, following his host into the house. "There's more in 'em than meets the eye."

"So you saw them?"

Corfield nodded.

While swallowing a hasty cup of tea and a biscuit, he told the story of his visit.

"But what's behind it all?" Heddon anxiously inquired. "This house belongs to Bardsley. You surely don't mean that he knows what's going on?—I've known him for years!"

"Not for a moment," Corfield replied. "All I do say is that he's a precious bad judge of character. I wouldn't trust the

Symons's a fathom; but Bardsley's apparently given them the free run of the place. It's simply asking for trouble to trust people like that. Do you know how long they've been caretakers here?"

Heddon shook his head.

"I wonder the place hasn't been completely gutted," Corfield resumed. "The Symons's aren't on the straight that's perfectly obvious!"

"You mean that...."

"I mean they've been got at, bribed if you like, by someone else, someone who knew the history of this place, knew that there was some sort of a passage between the house and the beach, and wanted the free run of it!—Everything hinges on that cupboard," he added, pointing towards its oaken door.—Lord! I wish to heaven we could find out how that chap got away!"

"Shall we have another look?" Heddon suggested.

"Not now. I want to see that cliff path and the beach. You'd better come with me."

"Can't you sit down for half an hour?" the elder man complained. "We've been on the job all day."

Corfield looked at him.

"For all we know we'll be on the job all night as well, and all to-morrow too!" he laughed. "There'll be no sitting down yet awhile.—Come on!"

The cliff path, which they presently came to negotiate, was uninviting enough.

Little used, it was nothing more nor less than a narrow track descending in a series of short, steep, irregular zigzags down the almost sheer face of the low grey cliff. In places,

hardly more than a foot wide, it was overhung by buttresses of solid weatherworn rock, which made it necessary to lean outwards and to take advantage of every little crevice with the fingers while carefully exploring for the next foothold in the treacherous surface. Here and there it was partially blocked by small landslides of loose boulders and stone which had descended from above. At one particular spot, not far from the bottom, where a little stream gushing out from a deep crevice had brought down the soil, there was an accumulation of earth, a sloping ramp of slime and slippery grass which threatened to precipitate the incautious negotiator head first on to the beach twenty feet beneath.

"Be very careful here!" warned Heddon, who led the way, digging his fingers into the cracks as he prepared to cross the patch.

Corfield, whose eyes were everywhere, brought him to a halt.

"Hold on!" he suddenly exclaimed, peering at the path ahead of his companion. "Stop!"

"What's the matter?"

"Those marks!" he exclaimed, pointing. "Don't mess 'em up!"

Heddon fumbled for his glasses.

"Let me pass you!" said Corfield impatiently.

Worming his way by his companion, he bent down to investigate, presently to raise himself with a low whistle.

"When did you last use this path?" he asked over his shoulder, his voice full of suppressed excitement.

Heddon thought for a moment.

“Three or four days ago,” he answered at last. “I don’t bathe, you see. There’s nothing much to take me on to the beach.”

“And did anyone use it this morning?” Corfield anxiously inquired. “What about Calliope?”

“She was in the house or garden the whole morning until we went to the station.”

“Very well, then!” Corfield exclaimed with an air of triumph. “I’m no detective; but I’ll bet my boots someone’s been on this path within the last twenty-four hours! Look!”

Heddon, with glasses on his nose, bent forward to peer over Corfield’s shoulder, who was pointing to where the runnel of water, almost a small stream, trickled through the earthy bank and fell over the edge of the path to splash on the beach below.

“You see those footmarks,” he said, dropping to his hands and knees. “If they weren’t new, they’d have been washed away. They’re not more than a day old, that I’ll swear!—And look there,” he went on, pointing. “Someone’s come up this path quite recently. You can see where he’s dug in his toes and trodden sideways to keep his footing. There and there,” he went on, indicating gashes in the greasy mud where the greenish slime had been removed. “That’s where he missed treading on the more solid part and has slipped!—Why did he miss treading on the stones or grass? Because he came up at night, of course!”

“In other words, it was used by the man you saw go into the cupboard?” said Heddon quietly.

“It certainly looks like it,” Corfield agreed. “And I noticed in the moonlight that the fellow was wearing white sand-shoes.—Well, here’s his hoof-mark! Look at it!”

He was gazing at the clear imprint of the sole of a man's foot outlined in a patch of clayey mud almost the consistency of plasticene. The impression, perfectly distinct, was criss-crossed with lines and minute diamond-shaped indentations—the mark of an ordinary Plimsoll sand-shoe.

"And Symons, you say, was limping and had one hand in a bandage," Heddon observed thoughtfully.

Corfield laughed.

"Yes," he said. "He tumbled off his bicycle!—Bicycle my eye! No, Symons is a double-barrelled liar. He was the fellow scrambling up this path at some ungodly hour this morning!

"I wonder the blighter didn't break his neck," he added, peering over the edge of the path. "He must have slid down that sloping ledge and landed among those boulders. Lord! Why didn't he really hurt himself, instead of merely skinning his posterior? Then we might have caught him!"

Moving cautiously on down the slope, they eventually found themselves on the beach. It was almost dead low water, which permitted them to see all there was to be seen—which was surprisingly little.

At the highest spring tides the water evidently washed right up to the foot of the cliffs, the beach being composed of smooth, grey, waterworn boulders and large stones heaped up in all directions by the furious south-westerly gales driving in from seaward. Every crevice in the cliff-face itself was littered with the usual debris of the sea—cork floats from fishermen's nets, portions of splintered packing cases, odd bits of wood of every description. Lower down, towards the water's edge, the stones gradually diminished in size to small pebbles, pebbles of every imaginable colour, and finally to shingle.

Except for a few odd patches round about low water mark, there was hardly a trace of sand. Taking it all round, Corfield was disappointed. It was the most unpromising and impossible place in which to find the line of tell-tale footmarks he had so fervently wished to see.

Examining every cleft and cave in turn, in the hope of discovering a possible outlet for a passage, they moved slowly along the cove to the north until they could proceed no further without wading. Retracing their steps they then walked south, past the bungalow on the cliff and the spot where the path came down to the beach, and on for nearly fifty yards to the curving ledge of rocks, known as the Shutters, jutting out into the water from a buttress of cliff that fell almost sheer from a height of nearly a hundred feet.

Deep fissures there were in plenty; but again, though they explored them all, nothing which looked the least bit like the seaward end of a tunnel. Nevertheless, somewhere or other within that semi-circle of little more than a hundred yards of cliff, there must surely be an opening. How else had that man found his way out of the cupboard except by a tunnel?

Or was it possible that the passage terminated somewhere on *terra firma* inland from the cliff edge? It seemed extremely improbable, for if this were so, what purpose could it serve? Moreover, why should the intruder of the early morning have come in through the house at all, if merely to emerge outside on the same level?

No. Corfield could only believe the evidence of his own eyes. A man had entered the cupboard and had not emerged. The cupboard was now empty, therefore, unless the fellow were still hiding underground, he must have come out somewhere—somewhere on or near the beach. Those tracks

in the mud on the cliff path were all pointing in one direction, up. Nobody except Heddon and himself had descended, that he could swear.

“It’s devilish strange,” he said with a puzzled expression, standing back a short distance from the cliff foot to gaze up at the jagged grey wall towering high above him. “There’s not a sign of a hole anywhere, no steps, no nothing. I wonder if we’re merely making fools of ourselves?”

“Perhaps we’d better try....” Heddon began.

But Corfield was not listening. His attention had been attracted by a small pebble rattling down the cliff, which struck a boulder almost at his feet and ricochetted into the air. It was followed by a little cascade of earth, then by some more stones, finally by a clod of earth with grass attached.

“Back!” he yelled, suddenly realising what was happening. “Run, man! Run!”

He whisked his companion round, seized him by the arm, and started to rush him down the beach.

They were just in time.

In a cloud of dust and shower of loose earth and stones, a large, wedge-shaped section of the cliff edge broke away and started to slide downwards with a rumble. Gradually disintegrating, it gathered speed, striking a buttress of rock to burst like a great shell. Fragments of rock of all sizes rained down on to the beach in a crashing shower.

Neither Corfield nor Heddon saw the great mass slide downward and land. Pounding heavily through the shingle, they were flying for their lives. But they knew their danger. Close behind them they heard the heavy, smashing impact,

and saw a smaller fragment or two whizzing through the air over their shoulders.

It was not until they had travelled thirty yards from the cliff-foot that Corfield dared to halt and turn.

“God!” he exclaimed breathlessly, feeling physically ill and his knees trembling.

The beach, where they had been standing a few seconds before, was overhung by a cloud of dust, and freshly littered with chunks and boulders of newly-riven rock. Some tons of the cliff edge must have fallen. Had their flight been delayed a moment, they must have been killed by the avalanche.

Heddon, with the cold sweat on his forehead, was shaking all over.

“I m-must sit down,” he murmured, his face ghastly. “I’m feeling rather sick. S-sorry for being a fool, but ... but I can’t help it.”

He relapsed on to the beach, where he sat with his face buried in his hands.

Corfield could sympathise. He also felt unnerved. The whole affair had been so sudden and so utterly unexpected.

Raising his head, he peered overhead at the place whence the mass had descended. It clearly showed as a lighter grey scar against the dull, weather-beaten appearance of the rest of the cliff.

And as he looked he wondered. Falls of cliff were common enough, as was evident from the condition of the beach. But for weeks there had been no rain to loosen the retaining soil.

Was it possible that someone could have liberated a boulder from the summit, which had set the whole mass sliding? The intelligent use of a crowbar or lever could easily

start a landslide. And if that were the case, it meant that there was someone concealed overhead watching their movements, someone who had deliberately tried to murder them!

Such a thing was unlikely, and for the time being at any rate he determined to say nothing to Heddon. Nevertheless the possibility must not be ignored.

Five minutes later, by which time Heddon had sufficiently recovered, they were climbing the cliff path. Leaving his friend at the summit, Corfield made his way to where the cliff had broken away. He spent ten minutes searching the ground for any sign of human occupancy; but without success. The short turf was too hard to show footmarks, and there were no cigarette ends, spent matches, or scraps of paper that criminals in novels generally left lying about for the benefit of amateur detectives.

Secretly disappointed, the commander went back to the house, to find Heddon in the sitting-room curiously examining a sheet of paper.

"I found this on the mat in the hall," he said in an agitated voice. "It must have been dropped in through the letterbox while we were down on the beach." He handed it to Corfield, together with an ordinary white commercial envelope of the cheapest variety without name or address.

The paper itself, a white unwatermarked sheet torn from a writing pad, bore a short message in typewritten capital letters.

WHY DO YOU CHOOSE TO
INTERFERE? BE WARNED
IN TIME, OR IT WILL BE
THE WORSE FOR YOU
AND YOUR FAMILY. WE

HAVE ACTED BEFORE,
AND WILL NOT HESITATE
TO ACT AGAIN. BE
WARNED IN TIME.

DEEDS NOT WORDS.

X.

"Well I'm damned!" Corfield exclaimed. "If this doesn't beat the band!"

He re-read the message in his hand. Paper and envelope told him nothing; but to one who knew, as he was well aware, every make of typewriter, and every individual machine, printed differently. By a process of elimination, it was possible for an expert to discover on what machine any particular typescript had been printed, and possibly who had typed it. Individual touch was almost as distinctive as handwriting.

And this missive, in purple ink, had not been typed by a professional. There were several mistakes, where letters had been wrongly printed at first, and afterwards over-printed. Some, moreover, were more lightly marked than others, which showed that the keys had been struck with varying strength. Also, all the E's and S's, and in some cases also the A's, were slightly smudged at the lower right hand corners, which showed that the machine was not a new one.

But Corfield was no expert, and could not tell whether the message had been typed on a Remington, Yost, Standard, Corona, or any other of the multitudinous makes he had heard of. Short of comparing the printing of every machine in the district, how could he possibly discover who had typed this?

“You’re surely not going to be frightened by a nonsensical blood-and-thunder production like this?” he said.

“No-o; but all the same, Corfield, it’s most disturbing. I came down here for a quiet holiday and to think out the plot for a novel. And here I find myself involved in a first-class mystery, and that.” He pointed to the letter in Corfield’s hand.

“Never mind,” laughed the commander. “What’s the use of getting rattled over an affair like this?”

“If you expect me to sing and dance you’ve come to the wrong man,” said Heddon with a glum face. “Let me look at that letter again.”

Corfield handed it over, felt for his pipe and tobacco, and sauntered out through the French window on to the terrace. He had passed off the affair as a joke, but all the same, he himself was feeling a little disturbed.

Someone had been to the house during their absence on the beach, someone who was evidently keeping a careful watch on their movements. Was it possible that this same person had also been responsible for the cliff incident? True, there was no proof that the fall had been caused by anything other than natural causes. But one never knew.

Heddon, left alone, stared at the typescript with a rapt expression. He then went across to the bureau, where he seated himself. Taking his portable typewriter out of its case on the floor, he ran a piece of paper through the carrier.

It was an old machine which he had brought down to Cornwall as an afterthought in case the spirit moved him to use it. When away on holiday he invariably wrote all his private correspondence with a pen, and while at home, dictated most of it to the efficient Miss Eames, his secretary.

He had not used a typewriter for months, and laboriously, with a good deal of hesitation, started to tap at the keyboard.

Corfield, hearing the unaccustomed sound from outside, leant in through the window puffing his pipe.

“What on earth are you doing?” he asked.

Heddon scowled, and went on tapping deliberately.

“If it’s a short story you’re writing, I hope you’ll leave me out of it,” Corfield laughed.

“For heaven’s sake, shut up!” the elder man burst out with unusual vehemence. “Wait a minute, wait!” He waved a hand and went on typing.

Completing the work he ran the paper off the carrier of the machine, and compared it with the typewritten warning.

“Of all the damned cheek!” he gasped, staring at them alternately.

“What’s the matter?”

“Matter?” Heddon exclaimed, seething with indignation as he crossed the room and thrust the paper into Corfield’s hands. “Look at that, Corfield! Look!—I’m blowed if some impudent rascal didn’t write me that threatening letter on my own typewriter—my own machine, if you please!”

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

It was at about twenty minutes to six that there came a ring on the telephone. Heddon left his chair, and went to the instrument in the little hall.

"Hullo?" Corfield heard him say. "Yes, that's me.... A telegram, oh yes!... Yes, please! Wait a moment, I'll write it down."

"I'm ready," he continued. "Handed in ... where did you say?... Oh yes, I've got that, at four-fifty.... Mother and self arrived safely all serene, yes ... not quite so fast, please.... Yes. Cousin who?... Molly, no, not Polly, Molly, I said ... M for Monkey!... What?... Then please speak more distinctly ... Cousin Molly met us with car.... Catching four fifty-five back as arranged ... arriving eight-fifteen.... Love. Calliope ... Yes, I've got that.... Thank you." He hung up the receiver and sauntered back to the sitting-room.

"A wire from Calliope," he said.

"Yes," said Corfield. "I heard. Shall I meet her?"

"I'd be very obliged if you would," said Heddon.

"Then I'll go. If the train's punctual we ought to be back by a quarter to nine, long before dark. You can cook some food while we're away."

Heddon looked doubtful.

For the next hour and a half Corfield busied himself with running the electric-light engine and oiling his hireling car, and at ten minutes past eight, after a leisurely run through the warm summer evening, pulled up outside the station at Helston.

Lighting his pipe, he took up his position by the ticket collector as the train puffed into sight and drew up at the platform. The passengers started to disembark—some obvious holiday-making families with children laden with boats, spades and buckets; commercial travellers; a farmer or two; trippers with picnic baskets; sedate married couples; young women in thin summer dresses accompanied by bareheaded, long-haired young men in floppy grey flannel trousers, multi-coloured blazers, and shirts open at the neck. They started to filter through the barrier—the usual heterogeneous crowd; but as yet no signs of Calliope.

She must have come in the back part of the train, and be among those knots of people still hanging about the platform. He must possess his soul in patience. She would appear before long.

The crowd still upon the platform gradually dispersed and came through the barrier with their luggage, but nowhere could he see Calliope's figure and her unmistakable blue hat. He began to feel worried.

The platform became deserted except for a porter or two, and the guard handing out crates, boxes, and parcels from the luggage van. Still there were no signs of her. It was at twenty-six minutes past the hour by the station clock, when, the last passengers having come and gone, Corfield realised that she had not arrived.

Full of a vague anxiety, his heart felt heavy within him. Could she have missed the connection?

A few minutes talk with the station master convinced him that this was impossible if she had caught the train from Plymouth that she had mentioned. The four fifty-five from Plymouth, said the official, turning over the pages of his

time-table, reached Truro at six forty-three. The lady could change either at Truro or at Redruth, further on, but in either case should arrive at Gwinear Road at seven forty-three. Waiting seven minutes, she should then catch the local leaving at seven-fifty, which was the train that had just come in.

Was it possible, Corfield asked, that the main line train had been late, and that the connections had been missed?

The station master shook his head. He had certainly known such a thing to happen, though rarely. But if the connections were missed, they invariably let him know by telephone from up the line.

No. If the lady had actually caught the four fifty-five out of Plymouth, she should have been here before now. Either she had missed that train altogether, or else had forgotten to change at Truro or Redruth, and had been carried on to Penzance, where she would have been due at seven forty-three. The next available train from Plymouth, the six forty-five, would get her to Helston at ten o'clock.

But Corfield felt far from happy. Failure to catch trains and to keep appointments was not one of Calliope's failings. She was invariably punctual to the minute.

Five minutes later he was ringing up Heddon at the bungalow.

"Calliope's not turned up," he told him. "You've not had a wire by any chance?"

He heard Heddon's little gasp of agitated surprise. No. There had been no telegram. What could have happened?

"I don't like the look of it," Corfield replied. "Her wire was handed in five minutes before the train was due to leave

Plymouth. Why on earth should she miss it on top of that?”

He went on to explain the possibilities suggested by the station master, and listened to the other man’s answer.

“I agree,” Corfield said, his voice serious. “It *is* peculiar. She would have wired or telephoned if she’d missed the train, and if she had, you’d have had it before the telegraph office closed. She’d have done the same if she’d gone on to Penzance by train.... You don’t like it.... No, nor do I.... Very well.... I’d better tell them at once.... Yes, I know more or less what she is wearing.... Yes, I’ll go there at once, and then wait on here and meet the ten o’clock.... Yes, that’s the last train to-night.... No, if she doesn’t come by that she can’t possibly get here until the morning unless she hires a car.... Right, I’m going now.”

It was useless to take any risks, and within a quarter of an hour Corfield was at the police station interviewing a sergeant, who listened attentively to what he had to say and wrote down particulars.

“Miss Calliope Heddon. Aged about twenty-eight. Fresh complexion. Reddish hair. Hazel eyes. Height about five feet four or five inches. Slight build. Wearing small blue hat with paste arrow, dark blue coat and skirt with fawn coloured....”

The telephone bell rang. The sergeant put down his pen with a grunt and marched across to the instrument.

“Hullo!” he said. “This is the police. Who’s that speaking, please?... Oh yes! Who is it you want?... Commander who?...”

“I expect it’s for me!” said Corfield, leaving his chair.

The sergeant listened for a moment, and then handed him the receiver. “It’s a Mr. Heddon,” he said.

“Hullo?” said Corfield. “That you, Heddon?... You have? Thank God for that!... I am pleased!... She rang up herself, yes.... Missed the train and was staying the night at a hotel in Truro. Splendid. I am glad!... Yes, of course. I’ll come straight back.”

“There’ll be no need to trouble you now, sergeant,” said Corfield, replacing the receiver on its hook and turning round with a joyful expression on his face. “The lady’s telephoned to her father. She’s staying the night at Truro and will be here in the morning.”

“Pity she didn’t think of that before, sir,” the sergeant laughed, tearing up the paper upon which he had written Calliope’s description, and dropping the pieces into the waste paper basket. “However, there’s no harm done. I’m glad everything’s all right.—Good night, sir.”

“Good night, sergeant. Thanks very much.”

The sun was slowly setting over the western shore of Mount’s Bay in a blaze of scarlet and orange as Corfield drove the ten miles home. He reached the house at a quarter to ten to find Heddon waiting for him.

“I’m glad it’s all right,” he said thankfully. “I had a horrible idea that something might be wrong.”

“And so had I,” said Heddon.

“What exactly did she say?” Corfield inquired.

“Merely that she’d missed the connection at Truro....”

“Missed the connection! She had seventeen minutes to wait, and the main line train was running to time. How the deuce could she have missed it?”

“Perhaps she went out to have a look at the town and forgot the time?”

Corfield clicked his tongue.

“That’s not a bit like Calliope,” he said with a thoughtful frown. “But tell me what she said?”

“I heard her say ‘Is that you daddy?’ I said ‘yes.’ Then she said: ‘This is Calliope speaking. I’m awfully sorry, but I’ve missed the train at Truro. I’m putting up at an hotel for the night.’ That’s all.”

“She didn’t say what hotel?”

Heddon shook his head.

“No,” he replied. “I was just going to ask her when she rang off.”

“Suddenly?” Corfield asked.

“Yes,” the elder man said.

“Oh!” Corfield murmured, his brow knitted in a puzzled frown. “Did her voice sound the same as usual?”

Heddon thought for a moment.

“Now I come to think of it, it sounded rather husky, as though she were tired. And she spoke rather more deliberately than she ordinarily does. But the line was bad. I heard people whispering most of the time.”

“My God!” the commander cried.

“What’s the matter?”

“Why did she miss that train when she had seventeen minutes to spare?” Corfield demanded, his voice serious. “Why didn’t she tell you where she was putting up? Why didn’t she speak in her ordinary voice, and why did you hear whispering?—I smell a rat. I’m going to find out!”

He went to the telephone, lifted the receiver off its hook, and put it to his ear.

“Exchange!—Hullo! Yes. Look here, we received a message at about ten minutes past nine. Can you please tell me where it came from? It’s urgent.... Good, you’ll find out!” His tone was anxious.

Then came a minute’s pause.

“Yes, I’m here. Go ahead.”

The small voice at the other end of the wire delivered its message.

“Are you perfectly sure?” Corfield asked, his voice nearly breaking. “Oh, my God!”

He slammed the receiver back on its hook and turned to his companion.

“Calliope’s message wasn’t sent from Truro!” he muttered, wiping his forehead. “It ... it came from a public call office in some village about four miles along the main road from Redruth to Helston! That’s nowhere near Truro.”

Heddon stared at him in consternation.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

CALLIOPE's journey to Plymouth with her mother was uneventful, and punctual to the minute their train drew up at North Road Station.

Cousin Molly, stouter and more red-faced than ever, hurried forward to meet them, and a few minutes later Mrs. Heddon was safely in the car. Calliope waved her hand as it turned and left the station yard. She loved her mother; but the expression on her face as she turned to go back through the booking-hall was one of distinct relief. Her murmured remark sounded suspiciously like a fervently uttered "Thank God!"

She had a full three-quarters of an hour to wait for the return train, and after a dismal tea at the buffet, filled in the time by buying a selection of unwanted literature at the bookstall and sending a telegram to her father.

Soon after five o'clock, with Calliope yawning in the corner of her first-class carriage, the four-fifty-five from Plymouth was rolling westward over the Saltash Bridge. She removed her hat, put up the arm of her seat, swung her legs on to the cushions, and composed herself to slumber. By the time the train was passing through St. Germans she was fast asleep.

An hour later she awoke with a start as the train drew to a standstill. Glancing sleepily out of the window and then at her wrist-watch, she noticed the time was just after half-past six. In another ten minutes or so they would be at Truro.

She yawned. Ten minutes—she was very tired, she might just as well have another short nap.

But it was not to be. A woman walking down the corridor halted outside, glanced in, and started to fumble with the handle of the sliding door.

Damn! She was coming in. Calliope hastily swung her feet to the floor, and sat up to pat her hair.

“I’m afraid I’ve disturbed you,” said the newcomer, coming in and taking the corner seat opposite after putting a small suitcase on the rack.

“Not at all,” Calliope smiled. “I was merely having a nap.”

“It’s much too hot to make travelling a pleasure,” the stranger replied, taking off her gloves as the train left the station. “I’m feeling rather faint myself.”

Calliope glanced at her.

She was a dark, pleasant-looking woman, slightly made up about the lips and eyes; but well-spoken and obviously a lady. Her age, Calliope judged, was between thirty-five and forty. Carefully manicured, with pink, pointed finger-nails, she wore a thin platinum wedding ring. The string of pearls round her throat were real. So were the diamonds in the unostentatious bar brooch at the opening of her loose silk blouse. Her hat, her neat coat and skirt, her stockings and shoes, were faultless and expensive. Calliope took in all these details with one sweeping look of appraisement.

“Is there anything I can do?” Calliope asked politely, as her *vis-à-vis* took off her hat and leaned back with closed eyes.

“I ... don’t think so, thank you. It’s this terrible heat.”

“But you look ill,” Calliope said.

“I don’t feel very well,” the lady languidly replied. “I’m supposed to have a heart, and I’m afraid I’ve been rather overdoing it. I ... I only just managed to catch the train.”

“Are you sure there’s nothing I can do? How far are you going?”

“Truro,” the other replied. “My car’s meeting me there. But I ought to introduce myself. My name’s Barwick. You are ...?”

Calliope told her.

“I change at Truro, too,” she added. “I’m on my way to Gwinear Road, where I change again for Helston.”

Mrs. Barwick leant back with an air of suffering. For some minutes there was silence.

“Look here, Mrs. Barwick,” Calliope said suddenly, as the train roared through a tunnel and out into the open country beyond. “I really can’t let you go by yourself. You look as if you might collapse at any moment.”

“I certainly feel as though I might,” said Mrs. Barwick. “But ... but I hate to inconvenience you. After all, my dear, we’re perfect strangers.”

Calliope laughed.

“But what does that matter?” she asked. “Tell me, is there anything I can do?”

“Do you think you could ... would you mind seeing me home in my car? I ... I know it’s a great deal to ask, a great favour; but ... but I don’t fancy being left at the mercy of any chauffeur when ... when I’m feeling like this.”

Calliope looked doubtful.

“But my train,” she said. “I have to catch the connection at Truro.”

“I was going to suggest that my car could take you wherever you want to go when it’s taken me home, Miss Heddon. I know it’s a great favour to ask of a perfect

stranger, and ... and if I weren't feeling so desperately seedy I wouldn't....”

She paused, to lean back with closed eyes and fan her face with a handkerchief.

Calliope, rather alarmed at Mrs. Barwick’s condition, considered the question.

Mrs. Barwick was in obvious distress. She hated to leave her. It seemed utterly churlish and ungracious. And if Mrs. Barwick’s car would take her wherever she wanted to go, it could make no possible difference to Calliope. She could still be at Helston at eight-fifteen, where she would find Dick Corfield or her father waiting.

“If you’re quite sure you don’t mind my using your car, I’ll certainly come home with you,” she said.

Mrs. Barwick opened her eyes and smiled. “That’s what I call really generous,” she said.

“Not a bit,” Calliope returned.

The train was nearing Truro station, and Calliope, after powdering her nose, stood up to put on her hat while regarding herself in the mirror beneath the luggage rack. Her back was towards Mrs. Barwick. She did not observe the little smile of triumph on that lady’s face. It had been easy, delightfully easy, delightfully easy—far simpler than Mrs. Barwick had expected.

The train came to a standstill. They alighted and walked out of the station, Mrs. Barwick leaning heavily on Calliope’s arm. Outside, a uniformed chauffeur came forward, touched his cap, and relieved the girl of the elder woman’s little suitcase.

He led the way to a Rolls-Royce, put the suitcase in the car, and held open the rear door for them to enter.

“Home, madam?” he asked, placing a light rug over their knees.

Mrs. Barwick nodded weakly. She was still feeling very faint. Even the short distance from the railway carriage to the car seemed to have overtaxed her strength. Calliope felt anxious.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

It was after passing through Redruth that they turned left for a short distance, and then branched right along the Helston road. About a mile further on, as the car was travelling up a moderately steep hill through a lonely stretch of country, Mrs. Barwick suddenly lifted the speaking tube and spoke to the chauffeur.

"Cairns," Calliope heard her say. "I want you to stop and pick up that gentleman."

Calliope looked ahead. A man, standing by the roadway about fifty yards ahead with his hat well down over his eyes was looking in their direction.

Calliope opened her mouth to ask a question, but Mrs. Barwick forestalled her.

"It's just a friend of mine," she explained hastily, as the car slowed down and then stopped.

From where Calliope sat on the off-side, she could not see the stranger as the car drew up. A moment later, however, when he opened the door and got in, she sat back in her corner with a gasp of startled astonishment.

It was Polinoff—Boris Polinoff!

"Good evening, Miss Heddon," he said, smiling as he let down the folding seat opposite. "So we meet again?"

"You," Calliope exclaimed, fear clutching at her heart.

"Yes, Miss Heddon, me," Polinoff replied, his dark eyes fixed upon hers. "You don't seem exactly pleased to see me. —But perhaps that isn't to be wondered at," he continued, smiling again. "Last time we met I seem to remember a slight

... er—disagreement. Never mind, Miss Heddon, perhaps I shall have better luck this time."

"You beast!" Calliope burst out, as the car gathered headway. "Mrs. Barwick, do you know this man?"

"Certainly," said the elder woman, whose faintness seemed to have vanished.

"Stop the car at once, please! I'll walk!" Calliope exclaimed, her anger rising.

"Let me out, I say!" she added, fumbling with the door handle when they gave no signs of complying. "How dare you keep me here against my will?—Let me out! If you don't, I'll jump!" She tried to scramble to her feet.

"None of that!" Polinoff growled, a revengeful gleam in his eyes as he removed her fingers from the door handle, and pushed her roughly back into the seat. "No, Miss Heddon, after all the trouble we've taken to find you, I'm afraid you must be our guest for two or three days."

"Guest!" Calliope shouted, beside herself with rage. "Your guest, you dirty little beast!—So this is why you pretended to be ill and offered me the use of your car?" she went on, turning furiously on Mrs. Barwick. "You persuaded me to come so that I should meet this little worm!—Pah!"

"My dear child," said Mrs. Barwick sweetly, shrugging her shoulders. "Why not be reasonable? Why not make up your mind to...."

"Reasonable!" Calliope snorted. "Why should I be kept here against my will?—Let me out at once! If you don't...." she hesitated. Her voice trailed away into a sob. She was powerless, and knew it.

“And if we don’t let you out, what do you propose to do, my peach blossom?” asked Polinoff sneeringly, leaning forward and looking her in the eyes. “Why not do as dear Freda says, and be reasonable.”

“It’s no good looking at the road,” he added with a leer. “You may see a few people here and there, perhaps; but however loud you scream you won’t be heard. Our friend Cairns won’t stop, and this is a closed car, remember. If you really became obstreperous, my pet, I’ve always got this.”

He dived his hand into his overcoat pocket and showed her a small blue automatic.

“I don’t want to use it, of course,” he went suavely on. “I should hate to use it on you, Calliope, but....”

“Don’t dare to call me Calliope!” she exclaimed.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I meant Miss Heddon, of course. Anyhow, as I was saying, I should hate to have to use a weapon”—toying with the pistol in his hand. “You’re the last person I should really care to hurt, Cal.... I mean, Miss Heddon. I’m rather fond of you, you see, in spite of the unkind way you treated me the other night. All the same, we mean all we say. We’re dreadfully in earnest, aren’t we, Freda?”

Mrs. Barwick nodded.

“And what are you going to do with me?” Calliope demanded, realising she was utterly in their hands.

“Merely detain you for two or three days to make certain that your friend, Commander ... let’s see, what’s his name? Oh, yes, Commander Corfield, doesn’t interfere with our plans. It’s a matter of urgency, believe me.—Freda will make

you quite happy and comfortable, and I can give you my word of honour....”

“Your word of honour!” the girl broke in, her voice full of contempt. “You’re the last person on God’s earth I’d ever dream of trusting! Your word of honour! You’re a cad, I tell you, a brute and a bully, and once I thought you were a ... a gentleman!”

Her scornful words touched Polinoff on the raw.

“If you say much more you’ll regret it!” he interrupted, his eyes smouldering with anger.

“I’ll say exactly what I like!” Calliope retorted.

“No, you won’t,” he said ominously, slipping the pistol back into his pocket and leaning forward. “You listen to me, my girl. If you behave yourself, you will come to no harm. If you don’t, you’ll be hurt.”

By way of reply, Calliope suddenly leant forward and struck him with her clenched fist full between the eyes. She would have struck him again, had not Mrs. Barwick flung herself across the car and pinioned her hands.

“Let me go!” shouted Calliope, struggling wildly to free herself and kicking out with her feet.

Stronger than her adversary, she managed to wrench her hands free and to fasten them on the other woman’s throat. She bent Mrs. Barwick over backwards, her strong grip closing on her wind-pipe, shaking her, throttling her, her sole desire to kill.

But she was reckoning without Polinoff, who, recovering from the surprise of her sudden blow, came to Mrs. Barwick’s help.

Calliope found herself seized from behind and dragged away. The other woman relapsed gasping into her corner.

"You damned little hell-cat!" the Russian hissed, his face pale and distorted with fury, with a trickle of blood welling down from the corner of one eye. "My God! I'll teach you!"

Calliope fought with all her strength; but it was useless. Polinoff was stronger. He had sinews of iron. Holding on to her wrists he slowly forced her backwards. She resisted until her muscles cracked.

"You little devil!" he muttered between his teeth. "I'll repay you for hitting me!—Freda! Give me your scarf, quick! We'll tie this lady's hands."

Mrs. Barwick, recovering, took the thin silk scarf from her neck and came to his assistance. In another moment Calliope's wrists were securely tied. She lay back panting—sobbing with impotent rage.

"She's nearly strangled me!" Mrs. Barwick exclaimed, touching her throat and glaring at Calliope with baleful eyes.

"Nothing to what she gave me!" Polinoff snorted, dabbing a swollen nose and eyelid with his hand and then looking at the blood on his fingers. "She's strong, the spitfire, damned strong!—But I'll get my own back!" he added evilly. "To-night I'll teach her ladyship a lesson she won't like! My God, I will!"

"Don't be a fool, Boris!" Mrs. Barwick exclaimed. "I'm not going to have any of your philandering nonsense while she's with me, remember, so put that quite out of your head!"

"Well, give me a handkerchief or something," Polinoff snapped.

"What d'you want it for?" Mrs. Barwick demanded.

“To gag her, of course! We don’t want her to scream the place down.”

“I haven’t got a handkerchief big enough for that.”

“Give it to me and don’t argue!” the Russian snarled. “You don’t want us to be spotted, do you?”

“I’m beginning to feel I was a damned fool ever to have embarked on this business!” Mrs. Barwick retorted, fumbling in her bag to produce a small square of linen. “You promised me there would be no violence.”

“Violence be damned!” Polinoff returned, producing a silk handkerchief of his own.

“Now, my beauty!”

Leaning over Calliope, he succeeded, after another struggle, in forcing Mrs. Barwick’s rolled-up handkerchief into her mouth, after which he passed his own across it and knotted it securely behind her neck.

“There, Miss Heddon!” he said, satisfied with his work. “If you scream now you’ll probably choke yourself. Having done that we’ll just put you in the bottom of the car so that you can’t see where we’re going.”

Putting his arms under Calliope’s knees and round her shoulders, he slid her to the floor and covered her with a rug.

“And now we’re quite happy and comfortable, eh? No more fighting, you fascinating little tigress! I rather love you, you know,” he added evilly, leaning over her. “For two pins I’d kiss you now, you vixen.—It’s no good glaring at me with those lovely eyes of yours,” he went on with a laugh. “I love you all the more when you look fierce.—I could easily kiss you if I wanted to.—Wouldn’t you like it, eh?—It wouldn’t be on the mouth, of course, because you’re gagged, my pretty

one. But I might kiss you on the cheek, mightn't I? You couldn't scratch my eyes out, or even object, my beauty."

He leant over Calliope until she could feel his breath upon her face. She leant back as far as she could, a look of terror in her eyes.

"So you don't like me, my dear Miss Heddon," he continued with a sneer. "You...."

"Stop taunting her, you fool!" Mrs. Barwick suddenly exclaimed, putting a hand on his shoulder.

"And what the devil's come over you, Freda?" asked Polinoff, turning towards her.

"Stop it, I say!" Mrs. Barwick repeated.

"Why?" said the Russian, with an air of mild surprise. "Why shouldn't I get my own back? This is the second time she's hit me in the face, don't forget!"

"I say, stop it!" Mrs. Barwick exclaimed, beginning to lose her temper. "If there's any more nonsense of this sort, I'll back out of this business straight away!"

"The devil you will!" he sneered. "You can't back out of it now, my dear Freda. You know that as well as I do."

"Can't I?" she retorted, tossing her head with a glint of venom in her eyes. "You don't know what I can do, Boris, until I really try."

"If I thought you were going to do the dirty, I'd put you out, just like that!" he flung back, snapping his fingers. "You're nothing to me!"

"Thank God for that!" she retaliated with vigour. "And God help the woman who is!"

For some minutes they wrangled, Mrs. Barwick more than holding her own. Then, to Polinoff's surprise, she suddenly

burst out laughing.

“And what the devil’s amusing you now, Freda?” he demanded angrily.

“Oh, nothing much, Boris dear. Can’t I have my private thoughts?”

“Not when I’m concerned. What are you laughing at?”

“Do you really want to know?” she asked with mock seriousness. “You mayn’t be very pleased if I tell you.”

“Tell me at once! I’m not here to be treated like a damned child!”

“Really, Boris, your language is dreadful—But if you really want to know why I was so amused, my dear man, I was merely wondering what sort of a fool you’d look if that Commander What’s-his-name ever gets hold of you.—He’ll skin you alive, you poor little rabbit!—I shall be....”

“You’ll be what?” the Russian roared.

“It will be interesting to see it, dear Boris,” Mrs. Barwick said sweetly. “I wonder who’ll win?”

Polinoff’s reply was largely unprintable.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

HER mind full of doubts and fears as to what her captors intended to do with her, Calliope was beginning to feel exhausted. Seated on the floor of the car, her position was cramped and uncomfortable. The gag in her mouth was irksome and made her jaws ache, while her hands, firmly tied together by the wrists, were numb and swollen. Work them as she might, she could not contrive to loosen the tight ligature which bound them. But her brain was still active. Her sharp eyes noted everything that went on.

Sitting with her back to the door and facing the near side of the car, she could see nothing through the window opposite but the feathery top of a high hedge. About five minutes before they had left the smoothness of the main road, and had turned to the right. They were now travelling slowly over the bad surface of a narrow by-lane, turning and twisting, but moving always in a westerly direction, as she could tell from the position of the sun.

Before leaving the main road they had several times passed other cars, as she was aware from the occasional horns and the swishing noise as they sped by. Once, through the window, she had caught sight of the tops of the windows and the white roof of a motor-omnibus. On another occasion Polinoff, who was watching her intently, looked ahead and hurriedly whipped a corner of the rug over her face. From the swerve immediately afterwards, followed by the roar of some vehicle they were passing, Calliope surmised they must be overtaking a char-a-banc, whose occupants seated high, might have looked down and seen her bound and helpless.

She was correct. It was a char-a-banc, and Polinoff was taking no risks.

She had long since given up any hope of attracting attention. She had come to realise there was no possible chance of rescue, unless, by some lucky chance, they collided with another car and were forced to stop. But that in itself was so improbable as hardly to be worth considering. And beyond the fact that they were now travelling westward, she had no idea where they were taking her. Unfamiliar with the local topography, she could not form a mental picture of the map.

She blamed herself bitterly for having been so childishly simple as to have trusted Mrs. Barwick. That lady's illness had merely been a sham, part and parcel of a plot to kidnap her, to hold her as a sort of hostage to prevent Dick Corfield from doing what he had set out to do. She, by mere foolishness, had jeopardised his chance of success. They would probably let him know that they had captured her, and threaten that if he did not cease his activities, something horrible would happen to her.

What could they do to her? Or rather, what could they not do?

She could imagine many forms of unpleasantness. Polinoff was a cruel beast by the look of him. He would stick at nothing, and she was completely in his power. She shuddered at the prospect.

But she was unhappier still because she had let down poor old Dick Corfield. He had trusted her, and she had behaved like any silly schoolgirl.

If she had not been so ready to believe in all that Mrs. Barwick had told her, Mrs. Barwick, who now seemed

nothing more nor less than an adventuress in league with Polinoff, she would now have been in the train on her way to Helston.

What would happen when she did not arrive?

She could picture her father's harassed anxiety, his frantic telephone messages, his general helplessness and inability to make up his mind. Poor dear old daddy! She was very fond of him; but he was hopelessly unpractical. Whenever anything went wrong, even the simplest thing, he invariably worked himself into a perfect frenzy and imagined that the worst had occurred. She could imagine his state of agitation when he heard she had disappeared.

Dick Corfield, however, stolid, level-headed old Dick could be trusted to keep his wits about him and to do the right thing, however angry he might be at her stupidity. He was practical, efficient, energetic, and imperturbable.

But what could they do to find her?

Would they inform the police that she had vanished, and have the description broadcast by the B.B.C. as an S.O.S.. She could almost hear the announcer reading it out before the second news bulletin at nine o'clock:—"Missing from her home. Calliope Heddon, unmarried, aged 28, reddish hair, wearing blue coat and skirt, small blue hat, tan stockings.... Anyone having seen the missing girl is requested to inform the Chief Constable of Cornwall, telephone number ... or any police station—I will repeat that."

Suppose nobody had seen her getting into the car with Mrs. Barwick at Truro?

If her father or Corfield rang up the railway station at Truro, would anybody be able to tell them anything? Might a porter or someone else have noticed the Rolls Royce? She,

Calliope, had not even observed its identification mark and number, though precious little use it would have been if she had!

Oh God! It seemed utterly hopeless! The police might comb the countryside without finding her.

She looked at Mrs. Barwick and then at Polinoff, who had not spoken since their quarrel. Mrs. Barwick did not look the sort of woman who would allow her to be ill-treated, and she had certainly stopped Polinoff from taunting her some minutes ago. Her face was not unpleasant, and she spoke as a lady.

And again she took stock of the Russian. She could see the lines of sensuality in his face and the cruelty in his narrow, dark eyes. His thin, tight-lipped mouth looked evil, and she realised what she had never realised before—that with certain expressions the general appearance of his face was distinctly Mongolian. There was Tartar blood somewhere in his ancestry.

She could never trust him, she concluded with a little shiver of frightened apprehension. He looked the sort of man who would stop at nothing when it came to getting his own way with a woman he fancied.

The car slowed down. Mrs. Barwick looked up.

“We’re getting close,” she said in an expressionless voice.

“Then I’d better blindfold her,” Polinoff replied. “We don’t want her to see where we’re going, do we, my dear Freda?”

Mrs. Barwick shrugged her shoulders.

“It’s all the same to me,” she said. “Have it your own way.”

Polinoff untied the handkerchief from Calliope's mouth, removed the gag, and retied the handkerchief round her eyes.

"Sorry to worry you," he said, rather more gently than before. "But you'll just have to put up with it—It won't be for long."

She made no reply and did not attempt to struggle. Resistance now was clearly useless. She must reserve her strength and energy for a more convenient opportunity.

A few minutes later she felt the car slow down and swerve to the right. Then the crunching sound of the tyres upon gravel. Another slight turn to the left, then to the right, and the car came to a standstill.

"Here we are," Calliope heard Mrs. Barwick say. "We'll have to help her out."

Calliope was assisted to her feet and out of the car.

"Mind the steps," Mrs. Barwick warned, a hand under her arm. "There are six of them—one, two, three, four, five, six—That's all right!"

A few paces on, and they came to a halt. Mrs. Barwick released her. There came the click of a lock and the creak of a door. Calliope again felt the other woman's hand at her elbow guiding her forward. She knew that she had entered a house, could feel herself treading over a polished floor, then across a rug, another strip of floor and another rug.

"Straight upstairs?" she heard Polinoff ask.

"No," said Mrs. Barwick. "The little morning room."

A few steps along a passage, and again they stopped. She felt herself led into a room, and guided to a sofa. She sat down. Mrs. Barwick untied the handkerchief from her eyes and freed her wrists.

“You’ve tied her up tightly enough,” she said to Polinoff, clicking her tongue in disapproval. “Her hands are swollen.”

“As if that mattered!” he retorted, sitting on the arm of a chair with one leg swinging and choosing a cigarette. “Do be sensible, Freda. You didn’t want another fight, did you?—There’s no pleasing you women.”

“Don’t be so damned superior!” Mrs. Barwick flashed back, evidently in the worst of humours.

“And for God’s sake don’t lose your temper!” Polinoff retorted. “I know you’re a spitfire; but you’d better not vent it on me.”

Mrs. Barwick looked at him with contempt in her eyes.

“Bah!” she exclaimed. “Who the devil are you to dictate to me?”

Polinoff, smiling inscrutably, carefully inserted the end of his cigarette into a long amber holder, lit it, and puffed out a cloud of smoke.

“I was a damned fool ever to have asked you to come in on this business,” he said bitingly. “God knows why I did!” He shrugged his shoulders.

Mrs. Barwick’s eyes blazed with sudden anger.

“Look here!” she exclaimed, her voice trembling. “I’ve had just about enough of this, Boris! If you go on much longer I’ll have no further truck with you, so understand that!”

The Russian slapped his thigh and chuckled with amusement.

“That’s wonderful!” he sniggered. “So you’ll have no further truck with me, what?”

Mrs. Barwick, glaring back at him, nodded.

“I don’t think you’ve got this business quite right,” he went on, his voice sarcastic. “You see, my dear Freda....”

“Don’t you ‘my dear Freda’ me!” she broke in, her eyes smouldering. “I’m about sick of it! You know damn well we hate each other!”

“Oh, all right, all right,” he replied casually. “I’ll call you Mrs. Barwick if you prefer it. But what I was going to say, when you so rudely interrupted me, was that you’re far too deeply implicated to back out now.”

“Oh, am I?” she snapped.

“Yes. And one word from me, mind, and you’ll find yourself ... well, I won’t let out secrets in front of Miss Heddon here; but you know as well as I do what will happen —something mighty unpleasant, eh Mrs. Barwick? It’s no good your riding your high horse now, dear lady,” he sneered. “It’s too late, and that’s all about it!”

Mrs. Barwick, her face flushed, opened her mouth to retort; but thought better of it.

While they wrangled, Calliope had looked round the room. It was an ordinary little apartment, poorly, if not scantily, furnished with a mahogany sofa, a couple of armchairs covered in faded chintz, a treadle sewing machine in the space by the window, and a large, round mahogany table in the centre with a jaundiced-looking palm on a wool mat. The carpet underfoot was worn and thread-bare, and the walls, covered with some sort of brown varnished paper showing signs of damp, were relieved by a number of nondescript, faded prints in heavy gold frames. The room had no individuality. It was colourless and depressing. To judge from its general appearance, the obviously cast-off furniture, the pictures, and a collection of hideous china ornaments on the

overmantel, it was the sort of apartment which might have been used as a maid's sitting-room.

"As you've no servants in this barrack of yours, I think you'd better go and get this girl some food before we have to start off again," Polinoff said. "And while you're about it, you might have the goodness to bring me a brandy and soda."

"D'you think I'm going to leave you here alone with Miss Heddon?" Mrs. Barwick asked, deliberately seating herself in one of the armchairs. "No, no, my friend. That wasn't in the contract. Whatever else I may be, I'm English, and so is Miss Heddon. You're not English, Boris Polinoff, and so far as women are concerned—well, I don't trust you!"

Any ordinary man would have bridled at the insult, and Calliope watched to see how he would take it. The Russian merely smiled and shrugged his shoulders with indifference.

"Your remarks leave me quite cold," he observed. "Why not call me a damned dago and have done with it?—I don't mind! Call me any name you care to lay your tongue to!"

Mrs. Barwick made no reply.

"But I do want my brandy and soda and Miss Heddon must have some food," he resumed after a pause. "If you can't...."

"I don't want any food, thank you," said Calliope, finding her voice. "I want to know what you're going to do with me?"

"That you will find out in good time, Miss Heddon," said Polinoff, glancing in her direction.

"But look here, you intractable person," he continued, addressing Mrs. Barwick. "I'll give you my sacred word of honour that nothing will happen to Miss Heddon while you're out of the room. Will that satisfy you?"

“You promise?” Mrs. Barwick asked, looking at him.

“I promise on my word of honour,” he declared.

“Then for once I’ll trust you,” she replied, leaving her chair and going to the door. “I shan’t be long—Be careful Miss Heddon doesn’t hurt you while I’m away,” she laughed.

The Russian growled something unintelligible under his breath as she closed the door behind her.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Mrs. Barwick had not been out of the room for more than a minute, when Polinoff turned to Calliope.

"I'm sorry to put you to all this inconvenience," he began, his dark eyes fixed upon hers and a subtle smile curling his thin mouth. "But it's necessary, I assure you."

"Necessary!" she exclaimed, her temper rising. "Necessary!—How dare you have me waylaid?—I suppose you don't realise that we're in England. But I can tell you this, when I do get away, my father will raise...."

"But your father doesn't come into it," he interrupted, fidgetting with his hands. "And suppose you don't ... er, well, suppose you don't get away?"

"What d'you mean?" she demanded, her heart fluttering.

"I mean," said Polinoff casually, examining his long finger-nails, "that you, and I, and Mrs. Barwick are alone in this house, quite alone. There are no servants, unless we count the chauffeur, and he's one of my men. In other words, you're completely in our power."

Calliope gave a little gasp.

"Then what are you going to do to me, you horrible little cad?" she whispered after a pause, her voice vibrant with mingled wrath and anxiety.

"That entirely depends upon you," he replied. "If you do as I tell you, forty-eight hours or so may see you free. If you don't," he added, his voice changing, "this house has cellars. There is room in them for fifty—a hundred, men. They are dark and damp, with the walls all covered with mildew and fungus, and the floors slimy. There are rats and spiders and

other abominations. They are the sort of cellars that a person might be lost in.”

“Good God!” Calliope muttered, unable to repress a shudder. “D’you mean that you’re going to put me there?”

Polinoff would not look her in the face.

“I hate to frighten a pretty girl, a girl I might be fond of if she allowed me,” he resumed, an evil smile on his sallow face. “I shouldn’t like to think of you locked underground without much food and water, mouldering away in all that slime and filth. But if we did put you there, and ... er, were forced to leave you, the chances are you wouldn’t be found for two or three months, if at all.”

“You wouldn’t dare!” Calliope cried, jumping to her feet.

“Sit down!” he ordered, diving his hand into his coat pocket.

Calliope hesitated.

“Sit down, I say!” he repeated angrily.

His hand reappeared with the pistol in its grasp.

For one insane moment Calliope had the idea of rushing upon him, knocking the weapon out of his hand, and chancing her strength in a rough and tumble, for though strong and wiry, Polinoff was small. But the pistol frightened her. He was evidently determined to use it if necessary. And she stood no chance whatever against an armed and desperate man.

“What about your promise to Mrs. Barwick?” she asked, merely to gain time.

“Damn Mrs. Barwick!” he retorted, standing up. “I order you to sit down unless you want something unpleasant to happen.”

“And suppose I refuse?”

“Then I shall be compelled to use this,” he replied grimly, bringing the automatic up level with her chest and advancing towards her with his finger crooked round the trigger. “I give you one more chance! If you don’t sit down before I count five I shall fire. One—two—three—”

Calliope gazed fascinated at the little ring of bright steel round the dark orifice of the pistol’s muzzle. It seemed absurd that so tiny a bullet could kill a human being. Nevertheless, the sight of it unnerved her.

“Four,” said Polinoff after a pause.

“Take it away!” she sobbed wildly, relapsing on the sofa. “Oh—Oh, why d’you want to bully me like this?” She leant forward, her face in her hands.

“Now we can talk peaceably,” he said, re-seating himself on the arm of his chair and returning the weapon to his pocket. “You really must be reasonable, you know.”

“Reasonable!” she sniffed. “How could anyone be reasonable with a brute like you?”

“You can cut out all that nonsense!” he retorted roughly. “I’ve no time to waste. I’ve some questions to ask, and it will serve you best if you tell me the truth—First of all, this man Corfield is a great friend of yours, isn’t he?”

Calliope did not reply.

“Answer me, can’t you?” he demanded, his voice menacing. “I warn you there’ll be trouble if you don’t!”

“What if he is?” she said brokenly.

“I know he’s one of your best friends. You drove down together yesterday from London. I know what route you used, where you stopped, and what time you arrived, so none

of that is news to me—What I want to know is, why is Corfield down here at all?”

“Why shouldn’t he come to Cornwall,” she replied miserably. “As a matter of fact, he’s staying with us.”

“I know that as well as you do,” he returned. “Did your people ask him, or did you, may I ask?”

“I did,” said Calliope.

Polinoff sniggered.

“So he *is* a flame of yours,” he sneered. “And not the first, eh?”

“How dare you say that!” she retorted hotly.

“You have a proverb about making a silk purse out of a sow’s ear,” he replied with a shrug of his shoulders. “I’ve been called a cad so often this afternoon, that it’s time you expected me to behave as one—However, that’s got nothing to do with it. I presume you asked Corfield to stay with you during that week-end at Marston?”

Calliope did not reply.

Polinoff did not press his question.

“Is seeing you his only reason for being down here?” he went on to ask.

“How on earth should I know?”

“But you do know, dear lady,” he insisted.

“Why?”

“For the simple reason that Corfield’s most probably told you everything, that’s why. He’s in love with you, any fool could see that.—Come on, now! What other reason had Corfield for coming to Cornwall?”

Calliope thought for a moment. Whatever she did she must not let her questioner have any inkling that she was privy to Corfield's plans.

"Come on!" said the Russian brusquely. "I'm waiting."

"He told me he was coming here yachting," she explained, as though the admission were being wrung out of her.

"Yachting?" said Polinoff, his expression changing.

"Yes," Calliope nodded, relieved to see that he apparently believed her statement. "He's got a friend at Falmouth with a yacht, and he'd arranged to spend a fortnight with him."

"And you persuaded him to come and stay with you instead?" he inquired with a smile. "Doesn't that rather bear out my theory that he's in love with you?"

"He was going for his cruise afterwards," Calliope murmured.

"Oh," said Polinoff, stroking his chin and gazing at her. "So he was going on for his cruise afterwards—Well, will you swear on your sacred word of honour that you know of no other reason for his being down here?"

"What other reason should there be?" she asked.

"But I want you to swear on your sacred word of honour," he persisted. "I must really.... Oh, damn!"

There came a sound from outside. The door opened and Mrs. Barwick came into the room with a tray, which she put down on the large table.

"Here you are," she said ungraciously, looking first at Polinoff and then at Calliope. "Now what's been going on?" she demanded, noticing the girl's condition.

"Miss Heddon and I have merely been having a little friendly discussion," Polinoff explained.

“It looks like it!” Mrs. Barwick snorted. “What’s he been saying, Miss Heddon?”

“Nothing that really matters,” said Calliope.

What was the use of discussing affairs again with Mrs. Barwick, Polinoff’s ally, through whose instrumentality she had been brought here? The pair had quarrelled, it is true, and quarrelled violently. For some private reason of their own they were at enmity and seemed to hate each other, while the woman had even threatened to have nothing further to do with the Russian’s ‘business’. But that was no reason for Calliope to expect any mercy from Mrs. Barwick, to regard her as a possible friend. Neither did an attempt to enlist her sympathy serve any useful purpose while Polinoff himself was present. It would be frustrated at once. He manifestly had the upper hand.

“You’d better have something to eat,” said Mrs. Barwick, holding out a plate of sandwiches.

“I don’t want anything, thanks.”

“Well, something to drink, then?”

Calliope shook her head.

“You’d better have a nibble at something,” Polinoff put in, moving over to the table to help himself to brandy and soda. “We shall be leaving here in about ten minutes.”

“Leaving?” Calliope asked, looking up.

The Russian nodded.

“Yes,” he said. “But not permanently. I merely want you to send a telephone message to your father. When you’ve done that, we shall come back to this house, and I’ll hand you over to our mutual friend, Mrs. Barwick, for safe custody. I have important business elsewhere.”

“You want me to telephone to my father?” Calliope asked in surprise.

“Yes,” Polinoff replied, his mouth full.

“And suppose I refuse?”

“You won’t refuse if you value your life,” he retorted grimly. “I shall tell you precisely what to say, and shall listen to you saying it. If you don’t, you know what to expect—the cellars!”

“Why the devil must you keep on threatening her?” Mrs. Barwick demanded.

“Oh, mind your own business!” Polinoff snapped, turning on her in a fury. “Why the hell can’t you let me run my own show as I think best?”

“I don’t see the least use in telephoning,” the woman flung back. “It’s damned silly! What’s the use of taking unnecessary risks?”

“Mind your own business!” he shouted with a stamp of his foot. “If I say I want her to telephone, she shall telephone, and that’s all about it!—We leave here in the small car in ten minutes’ time, and I’ll drive. You’d better go and bring it round to the door, now!”

Mrs. Barwick opened her mouth to expostulate.

“Damn it!” the Russian burst out, losing all control of himself. “Don’t argue with me, Freda! Go and do as I say, and for God’s sake look sharp about it! D’you think I’m going to have the whole show spoilt by you?—Go on, I say!” he continued shrilly, when she showed no signs of moving. “Go on, damn you!”

“Oh, very well,” said Mrs. Barwick in a surly voice, moving towards the door. “Anyhow, I think you’re being a

fool.”

“I didn’t ask you what you thought!” he shouted as she put her hand on the handle. “You’ll do as you’re told.”

“You’re behaving like a perfect lunatic,” Mrs. Barwick said contemptuously over her shoulder, as she opened the door and left the room.

Polinoff stared after her for a moment muttering to himself, and then started to walk up and down the room, gesticulating as he went.

“She called me a lunatic!” he exclaimed, suddenly coming to a halt in front of Calliope, to bend over her with his fists clenched and eyes blazing. “Women! Pah! Did you ever meet a woman you could trust?—Did you, did you?”

Calliope, thinking he was about to strike her, shrank back with terror in her eyes, and lifted her arms to protect herself.

“My God, no!” he went on hysterically, answering his own question with a snarl which showed his teeth. “Cringe, damn you, cringe!” he almost shouted, waving his fists in her face and grimacing like a madman. “For two pins I’d take you by that smooth throat of yours and throttle the life out of you!”

He opened his hands and pushed them threateningly towards her, his long fingers crooked like talons.

Calliope screamed in terror.

For a moment Polinoff glared at her, his face working. Then he suddenly dropped his hands and resumed his erect position.

“You think I’m mad,” he said in his ordinary conversational voice. “A happy-go-lucky, merry old lunatic.” He laughed shrilly. “A maniac—a homicidal maniac, what? —Oh, no, no, no! Nothing quite so exciting as that!”

He began again to pace up and down the worn carpet, waving his arms, shrugging his shoulders, muttering to himself.

The girl watched him anxiously. Never before had she suspected him of insanity. Looking at him now, however, she was not so certain.

Was he really a maniac? She could quite well believe it. Never in all her life had she seen any man behave like this. And she was utterly in his power, to do what he liked with!

She felt as if her brain were about to burst, as though she were on the verge of an hysterical breakdown. Unable to control her muscles, she felt herself shuddering, trembling all over.

Keep calm! Keep calm, her commonsense told her. She must keep her wits about her. But the strain of the past hour was beginning to tell. How could anyone keep calm in the presence of a man whose instincts and passions seemed to be those of an untamed savage? At any moment he might be seized with a demoniacal desire to torture or to kill.

Mrs. Barwick came back into the room to announce that the car was at the door.

“Then we’d better be going,” said Polinoff. “Miss Heddon?”

Calliope looked up, her face miserable. Would this mental torture never cease?

“I’m going to take you to a telephone box in a village about three miles away from here. From there you will telephone to your father, and tell him that you missed the train at Truro and that you’re staying there the night. D’you understand?”

Calliope nodded. Perhaps here was a chance of letting her father know what had happened. But Polinoff's next words dashed her hopes to the ground.

"I shall be there with you!" he said sharply. "At the least sign of any hanky-panky there'll be trouble, so be very careful."

"What am I to say?" she asked feebly.

"You'll merely say you're speaking from Truro, that you've missed the train, and are staying there for the night, that's all. Do you understand?"

"Yes," she said slowly, racking her wits for some method of telling her father what she wanted him to know, while still carrying out Polinoff's orders.

A few minutes later, with the Russian at the wheel of a small, closed four-seater, and the blindfolded Calliope with Mrs. Barwick in the back, they had again left the house and were speeding down the drive.

Polinoff drove fast, and after a sharp run of ten minutes the car drew up with a squeaking of brakes.

"Here we are!" he grunted, turning round in the driving-seat. "Take that bandage off her eyes, Freda. Let her get out."

He left the car. Calliope followed.

Glancing instinctively at the watch on her wrist she noted the time was eight minutes past nine. They were in the straggling main street of a picturesque little village with grey stone houses, a few small shops, an inn, and the inevitable garage with its scarlet petrol pump. The car had drawn up by a grocer's shop, outside of which, on the pavement, was a public telephone booth.

She cast her eyes up and down the street in an effort to discover the name of the place. But there was no post office in sight, and the public-house sign and fascia boards over the shop windows told her nothing. Her gaze wandered to a knot of people clustered round a small car replenishing its petrol at the garage almost opposite.

She was a good runner. Should she make a sudden dash for freedom? She measured the distance with her eyes. It was not more than fifty yards. If she once got a yard's start, she could certainly outstrip Polinoff, and he would never dare to use his pistol. She nerved herself for the effort.

But the Russian, watching her intently, noticed the direction in which she was looking and sensed her thoughts.

"None of that!" he growled, taking her by the elbow with a grip which hurt. "Eyes front, dear lady! Straight ahead."

There was nothing for it but to obey. Together they entered the telephone box.

"Now no nonsense!" he warned her ominously, after shutting the door behind them. "If you try to say anything beyond what I told you, it'll be unpleasant for you, so be careful!—What's more, don't forget I'm standing behind you, and that I've got a little persuader in my pocket.—Now get through!"

He put down a handful of coppers.

Calliope lifted the receiver, listened for a moment, and then asked for the number. There was a pause, then: "Three pennies, please," from the operator at the exchange, finally the unmistakable "Hullo! Who's that speaking?" of her father.

“Is that you, Daddy?” Calliope asked, trying to gain time and probing her mind for some eleventh hour method of letting him know of her plight.

“Be careful!” Polinoff whispered under his breath, his left hand out to put down the receiver hook in case she tried to betray him.

“This is Calliope speaking,” she continued, her voice strained and unnatural. “Calliope, yes—Can you hear me?”

She paused.

“Go on!” Polinoff hissed in her ear, nudging her in the back. “Get on with it!”

It was useless to resist. The tone of his voice told her he was desperately in earnest. There was nothing for it but to obey.

“This is Calliope speaking,” she repeated, almost sobbing in her anxiety. “I’m very sorry, Daddy; but I’ve missed the train at Truro.—I’m ... I’m putting up at an hotel for the night.”

She heard her father ask a question, but could say no more, for at that moment Polinoff slammed down the receiver hook to interrupt the connection, snatched the receiver from her hand, and replaced it.

The sun was nearing the western horizon when the little car drew up at the house whence they had set out. But Calliope did not see it. Once more, she was blindfolded.

“This is where I say good-bye for the present, Miss Heddon,” said Polinoff, without leaving the car. “I’ve got some work to do to-night,” he added sarcastically, “and shan’t have the pleasure of your company again until to-morrow morning.”

His voice sounded unusually cheerful.

Calliope, who was leaving the car with Mrs. Barwick's hand on her elbow, did not reply.

"I trust you to look after her, Freda," he continued, his tone changing. "If she gives any trouble, don't hesitate to use—coercion."

"Oh, go and teach your grandmother to suck eggs!" Mrs. Barwick retorted irritably. "Come, Miss Heddon."

Calliope went.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

THE time was ten minutes past ten.

Through a rift in the dense purple cloud masses banked up in the sky westward, a broad pathway of living scarlet and orange from the setting sun blazed across the ruffled sea and shone in through the open windows of the sitting-room at One Tree Bungalow. The opposite coast showed as a thin, undulating smear of intense indigo slashed across the horizon to the west. To the south-west, beyond the point where the land ended, the darkening sea was gradually becoming dotted with the myriad lights of the Mount's Bay fishing fleets.

The fitful breeze puffing in from seaward and stirring the curtains caused an occasional rustling and tinkling of curtain-rings. These sounds mingled with the discordant chatter of gulls seeking their roosting-places in the cliffs, and the rhythmic, musical susurration of the sea on the beach below.

A scratch meal was laid on the table in the bow-window; but neither Heddon nor Corfield had had much thought of food. Their minds were occupied otherwise—Heddon sprawled out in an armchair staring into vacancy with a miserable expression while uttering an occasional deep sigh and running his fingers through his lank hair; Corfield padding restlessly up and down the room, to and fro, with a set look on his face, an unlit pipe between his teeth, and his hands thrust into the pockets of his grey flannel trousers. Sometimes in his perambulation he halted for a while at the French window, to gaze out across the sea with troubled, unseeing eyes.

For some minutes neither man had spoken. They were both thinking of Calliope; Heddon with all the anxiety of a

devoted parent, and Corfield with the equally overwhelming concern of a lover.

It was only since he had realised her danger that he had come to understand the true intensity of his feelings for her. He had liked her before, liked her as a friend and as a companion. But now he loved her beyond anything else in the world. And the woman he adored was in danger, possibly in peril of her life or something worse, and all through his infernal, crass stupidity.

A hundred, a thousand times he had cursed himself bitterly for a blundering, witless fool. Why had he allowed her to be dragged into this business at all? Why had he been so stupidly selfish as ever to have accepted her proffered hospitality, when he should obviously have concentrated his entire thought and energy on the work in hand, the work with which he had been entrusted by the D.N.I.? And why, in the name of heaven, had he not insisted, insisted with all the strength at his command, on Calliope remaining away with her mother? He had not been firm enough, he considered, and if Heddon and himself had put their heads together, and had ordered instead of suggesting, Calliope must surely have obeyed.

But it was too late to think of all that now. Something had to be done, and that quickly. Already twenty precious minutes had been wasted; but though he had racked his brains as to what ought to be done, the solution of the problem seemed no nearer.

On reconsideration, he hesitated to suggest calling in the police. Beyond the fact that Calliope's telephone message had been sent from that wayside telephone box, there was no real evidence to give them, though it was true that the police

themselves, with her description at their disposal, could probably have set machinery in motion to discover where she had last been definitely seen.

But if the police were to be told of her disappearance, Corfield must let them know everything that the D.N.I. had told him, and everything that he had since discovered. That would mean that the affair would assume an official aspect and be taken out of his hands altogether. Also, how should he explain who he was and what he was doing? He had no written orders. Beyond a typewritten copy of all the information upon the subject that the D.N.I. possessed, he had no documentary evidence of any sort to show that the work had been delegated to him. No doubt the police, if they disbelieved him, could prove the truth of his story by communicating with the D.N.I, at the Admiralty; but at the best he would be regarded as an interloping amateur butting in on a business that was not rightly his.

"I wish to heaven you'd stop marching up and down!" Heddon grumbled, in an unusual burst of irritability. "I can't think when you're stamping to and fro."

"Sorry," Corfield apologised, halting to balance himself on the arm of a chair. "I say, Heddon," he went on to ask. "What the hell *are* we to do?"

"That's what I'm trying to make up my mind about," the other replied moodily. "You say they told you Calliope's telephone message came from a box on the road between Redruth and Helston?"

The commander nodded.

"And that tells us precisely nothing except that she was probably taken there in a car," said Heddon with a gesture of despair. "In other words, she was going somewhere in a car

about an hour ago when I got her message. She may be anywhere by now, anywhere!”

Corfield, with a solemn and thoughtful face, was staring into vacancy and tapping his teeth with his pipe-stem.

“If she was taken in a car, and I don’t see how else she could have got there, where did she get into it?” he queried. “The chances are it was at one of the places where she’d have to change trains,” he went on, answering his own question. “In other words, it was either at Truro, Redruth, or Gwinear Road.”

“Or at any of the other places at which the train may have stopped,” the other put in.

“Yes, but one of the changing places is far more likely. I’m inclined to pin my faith to Truro.”

“Why Truro?”

“Because Truro was mentioned in her message, and because it’s further away than either Redruth or Gwinear Road, and therefore more difficult for us to trace her movements,” Corfield answered.

“Surmise. Pure surmise,” said Heddon with a shrug of his shoulders.

“But that’s all we have to work upon up to date,” the commander pointed out. “We’re working on probabilities—and there’s another thing I’m puzzled over.”

Heddon looked up.

“I presume we may take it Calliope was *made* to send that false message?” Corfield asked.

“I should say so.”

“Well, why did they make her send it?”

“So that we shouldn’t start making inquiries,” Heddon answered. “What other reason could there be?”

“I don’t agree. We’re not dealing with fools, Heddon. They must have known that if we smelt a rat we could easily find out where she ’phoned from.”

“And what then? What’s at the back of your mind?”

“I believe she was forced to send us that message, a message which we’d realise was palpably false if we chose to make inquiries at the exchange, so that we should know that they’d got her, and intended holding her as a hostage. They want to prove to us they’re in earnest. What about that typewritten message this afternoon?”

Heddon searched his pocket, produced the sheet of paper, and put on his glasses.

“ ‘Why do you choose to interfere?’ ” he read again. “ ‘Be warned in time, or it will be the worse for you and your family. We have acted before, and will not hesitate to act again. Be warned in time.’ ”

“So it wasn’t an empty threat,” Corfield pointed out, his voice serious. “They *have* acted again by kidnapping Calliope, and it’s my belief they made her send that ’phone message so that we should know they’d got her.”

Heddon groaned in his anxiety.

“You don’t think they’ll ... they’ll hurt her?” he murmured pitifully.

“I don’t think they’d dare to,” said Corfield. “If they did, they’d be running a mighty grave risk. No, I think they’re putting up a bluff. We shall hear more of this, you may depend. They’ll try to make terms. If we clear out of this house and give them a free run, they’ll probably let her go.”

“And if we don’t?” Heddon queried.

“We needn’t think of that now,” Corfield replied. “We must wait and see what they do next, unless we let the police know at once—But suppose I ring up the railway station at Truro and ask ’em a few questions?”

“If you think it’s likely to be the least use I wish you would,” said Heddon. “Personally, I think we’d better go the whole hog and ring up the police straight away.”

“Let’s have a shot at Truro first,” the naval officer suggested. “We may find out something.”

“Fire away then,” said Heddon miserably.

Corfield left the room and went out into the hall. In a few minutes he was speaking to the stationmaster at Truro.

No. Calliope’s train had not been very crowded, the stationmaster said. He had not noticed a lady of her appearance arriving by the six forty-three from Plymouth, though as she was going on to Gwinear Road, she might equally well have changed at Redruth. Had she any luggage?

She had not, Corfield replied. Could the stationmaster make inquiries from the ticket-collector and the porters? He was sorry to trouble him; but the matter was urgent, very urgent.

The man who had collected the tickets had long since gone off duty, the stationmaster answered, and so had most of the porters who had met the six forty-three. The ticket-collector would not be back at the station until eight o’clock in the morning. If the gentleman would leave his telephone number, he would make inquiries in the morning and let him know the result as soon as he humanly could. Beyond that he could do

nothing. The ticket-collector lived some miles out. By this time he was probably in bed.

Corfield thanked him and rang off.

Redruth and Gwinear Road also produced negative results. Nobody resembling Calliope had been seen, though, as most of the staff had now left their work, no really definite answer could be given until the morning. If the gentleman would ring up again some time after nine o'clock further inquiries could be made.

"Nothing doing!" said Corfield with a disconsolate shrug of his shoulders, going back into the sitting-room.

"I was afraid so," Heddon replied distractedly. "What did they say?"

The commander told him.

"Well, what about the police?" the elder man suggested. "This business is really serious, Corfield. You must see that."

"God!" the other exclaimed, clenching his hands. "Don't I know it?—But if we do ring up the police, what answer are we likely to get?—They can't do anything at this time of night, and their reply will be the same: 'we shall have to wait until the morning'—Oh, damn!" he cried miserably. "Damn and blast!"

"You're right there," Heddon agreed. "I don't see what anyone can do until to-morrow. That's the worst of it—But I shan't sleep a wink to-night!"

"Sleep! How could anyone sleep with this hanging over their heads?—Good God! no! If I thought it would be the least use I'd take the car and go to the police now, and to Truro and these other places as well. But what's the use of it? What good can I do?"

“None at all,” Heddon replied, shaking his head.

“And supposing something happens here to-night?” Corfield said. “Suppose we have another visitation?”

“That,” said Heddon, holding his head in his hands, “would be the last straw. My nerves have nearly gone to pot as it is.”

“But I don’t think anything will happen,” the commander pointed out.

“Why?”

“Because I think they’ve kidnapped Calliope as a hostage. Before long, probably some time to-morrow, they’ll send us an ultimatum.”

“An ultimatum?”

Corfield nodded.

“Yes,” he said. “They’ll tell us to clear out, or take the consequences. If they’ve got Calliope, and we haven’t got the dog’s chance of tracing her, they’ve got the whip hand.”

“And what do you propose we shall do?”

“I haven’t really thought it out,” Corfield said. “But whatever happens, we must pretend to clear out and give them the place to themselves—There’s a destroyer lying off Penzance,” he went on to say. “First thing to-morrow morning I must go and have a talk with her skipper and see what we can arrange about this submarine business. I must also have a yarn with Foxy Elliott, the chap I told you about, who’s arriving at Porthleven in his yacht at daylight. He might even give me a passage across to Penzance.”

“And what about me?” Heddon anxiously queried.

“Suppose you motor to Truro and make inquiries at the station?” Corfield told him. “If you can’t find out anything

there, try Redruth and Gwinear Road."

"I'll do that," Heddon exclaimed, clutching at the straw. "Most certainly I will!"

"And if you think it necessary to go to the police, you mustn't mind me," said Corfield. "If they come in now it may certainly queer my pitch in this submarine business; but that doesn't matter. If there's no help for it, it'll have to be queered. I'm just as anxious about Calliope as you are, Heddon," he continued, his voice changing. "You see, I'm ... I'm ... well, Calliope's everything in this world to me, everything!"

Heddon looked up at him with a face of mingled concern and amazement.

"D'you mean you're...."

"I mean I love her," Corfield replied awkwardly, with the feeling that he was blushing like a schoolgirl. "I want her to marry me, if ... if she'll have me."

"Have you asked her?" Heddon queried.

"No, not yet."

"Her mother and I half expected this," said Heddon slowly, smiling wanly in spite of himself.

"My God!" Corfield muttered between his teeth. "If a single hair of her head's.... What's that?" he suddenly broke off.

A loud rat-tat had sounded on the front door knocker.

Corfield, with Heddon at his heels, marched across the room and into the hall. His hand, in his pocket, was closed round the butt of his automatic.

"Shall I switch on the light?" Heddon whispered.

"Yes."

Corfield, ready for any emergency, flung open the door. In his state of nervous tension, he had half expected an intrusion in force. Instead of that, standing on the doorstep with a bicycle, was one small boy, a comical-looking urchin perhaps twelve years old wearing what looked like his father's cap, and a pair of ragged knickerbockers several sizes too large for him.

"Be y'u Mister 'Eddon?" he inquired shrilly, looking up into Corfield's face.

"No," said the commander. "But Mister Heddon's here. What is it you want?"

Heddon came forward.

"I wus told tu give y'u this!" said the lad, tendering a small parcel done up in brown paper.

Heddon took it and slipped off the string. It contained a single worn washleather glove, together with a sheet of paper.

He put the glove to his nose and sniffed.

"This is Calliope's," he said in a low voice, handing it to his companion.

"Calliope's!" Corfield murmured, smelling it and turning it over and over in his hands.

There was no mistaking it. The glove smelt faintly of the soap that Calliope always affected, a scent that he knew well. And that very morning, when he had seen her last at the railway station, she had worn gloves precisely like this. He smelt it again, before putting it in the inside pocket of his jacket.

"What's in the note?" he went on to inquire.

Heddon handed it over.

Corfield read it with a frown.

“Who gave you this?” he demanded.

“A gennelman on the road,” the boy answered.

“What road?”

“The road thru’ where I lives, zur.”

“And where d’you live?”

“Meaver, zur.”

“And whereabouts is that?”

“Near tu Mullion, zur—about ’fower tu five mile from here.”

“Oh!” said Corfield, scratching his chin. “And what sort of gentleman was he?”

“Nice gennelman, zur,” said the urchin cheerfully. “He give me five shillin’s tu bring the parcel here.”

“The devil he did!—And what did he look like?”

“I doan’t rightly know, zur,” said the boy after a moment’s hesitation, “He wus dressed just like a gennelman, zur, small gennelman with dark hair. He wus sittin’ in his car when he seed me with me bike outside our door with Bert Holloway. He calls me over....”

“What sort of a car was he sitting in?” Corfield asked.

“I doan’s rightly know, zur.”

The commander clicked his tongue with impatience.

“And beyond the fact that the gentleman was small with dark hair, you can’t describe him, what?”

“No, zur.”

“And what’s your name?”

“Tummas Pentreath, zur,” said the lad, rather nervous at his prolonged cross-examination.

“Thomas Pentreath of.... Where did you say you lived?”

“Meaver, zur.”

“Spell it, Tommy!” Corfield ordered.

The boy did so.

“We’ll make a note of that,” said Corfield to Heddon. “It may come in useful.”

“Good night, Tommy Pentreath,” he added with a nod. “How did you find your way here?”

“Gennelman told me, zur.”

“I see,” said Corfield. “But the next time strange gentlemen in motor-cars give you five shillings to carry parcels on your bicycle, Tommy, it might pay you to notice what they look like—Understand?”

“No, zur,” the urchin returned, looking as though he wanted to burst into tears. “I doan’t rightly know what y’u means.”

Corfield sighed and shrugged his shoulders.

“All right, Tommy,” he added, handing him a sixpence. “It doesn’t matter—Good night.”

The urchin pocketed the coin with a relieved grin, made a half salute, and wheeled his machine round.

Together they watched him mount and wobble perilously out through the gates until he disappeared down the lane in the gathering darkness.

“A singularly unobservant child,” said Heddon, looking after him.

“So it’s come,” said Corfield reading the note again and holding it up to the light to peer for a possible watermark.

“What d’you make of it?” Heddon asked, his voice anxious.

“It’s just what I expected,” Corfield returned.

The note was written in capitals to disguise the handwriting.

> “YOUR DAUGHTER IS IN NO DANGER PROVIDED YOU AND YOUR FRIEND VACATE YOUR BUNGALOW BY NOON TO-MORROW, SATURDAY. IF YOU REMAIN, YOU DO SO AT HER PERIL AND YOUR OWN, SO THE RESPONSIBILITY IS YOURS. IT IS USELESS TO INVOKE THE HELP OF THE POLICE, AND TO DO SO WILL HAVE UNPLEASANT CONSEQUENCES BOTH FOR YOURSELVES AND HER. IF YOU ARE CLEAR AWAY BY NOON, YOUR DAUGHTER WILL BE AT THE SITHNEY COMMON CROSS ROADS ONE MILE NORTH-WEST OF HELSTON PUNCTUALLY AT 2 P.M. ON SUNDAY. NOTE PARTICULARLY WHAT WE SAY ABOUT THE POLICE. HERE’S YOUR DAUGHTER’S GLOVE. WE SHOULD BE LOATH TO SEND YOU ONE OF HER EARS TO SHOW THAT WE ARE REALLY IN EARNEST. X.”

“The brazen effrontery!” Heddon spluttered angrily, reading it again over his companion’s shoulder. “Of all the damned impudence!”

Corfield stared at the writing with pursed lips and a frown on his face.

“They wouldn’t dare!” he murmured to himself, his hand trembling. “My God! Cut off one of her ears!—No!” he added aloud. “They wouldn’t dare, Heddon. It’s all melodramatic twaddle!—Send us one of her ears, indeed!” he went on, his fists clenched and his eyes blazing. “My God! If they did!”

“But what must we do?” Heddon nervously inquired. “D’you think it’s a mere threat?”

“I’m certain of it,” the commander declared. “But we must do as they suggest.”

“What?”

“Be clear of this house by noon to-morrow,” Corfield explained. “There are more ways than one of circumventing the swine! We’ll get Calliope back, and diddle ’em yet! But,” he added fiercely, “God help the man who’s kidnapped her!”

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE bedroom on the second floor to which Calliope was taken by Mrs. Barwick immediately on her return to the house, had once been a nursery. A faded frieze illustrating the adventures of Jack and Jill, little Miss Muffet, Jack Horner, and other nursery rhyme characters, still ran round the walls between picture-rail and ceiling. Some coloured lithographs from long-forgotten Christmas supplements hung upon the peeling wall-paper. There were toy cupboards set in the walls. A battered rocking horse, minus much of its paint, its tail, and most of its mane, stood forlornly in one corner. There was a tall, brass-railed wire fireguard in front of the rusty, old-fashioned fireplace.

By the addition of a small iron bedstead, a chest of drawers and a washstand, the apartment had been converted into a bedroom.

In spite of the opened windows, however, one of which, Calliope immediately noticed, had a broken sash-cord and was propped open with a short iron poker, the room smelt dank and airless, as though it had been unoccupied for months, if not for years. It had been cleaned and dusted, but only superficially. Cobwebs still lingered in the corners near the ceiling. The threadbare carpet sadly needed beating, and there were little piles of dust in the corners of the room. The glass in the heavily barred window was grimed, and much of the light was shut out by a tangle of ivy and creeper hanging from the outside wall above. Altogether, it was one of the most cheerless and depressing rooms that Calliope had ever entered.

“I’m afraid this is the best we can do for you, Miss Heddon,” said Mrs. Barwick.

Calliope, her nose wrinkling with disgust as she detected the unmistakable odour of mice, did not reply.

“You see, it’s the only room with a barred window,” Mrs. Barwick went on to explain. “Not that the bars are very secure, I’m afraid. But even if you did manage to remove one or two, you’d only break your neck if you tried to escape by the window. It’s a sheer drop to the ground, and there are no drain-pipes, so you’d be well advised not to try it.”

“I’m not a fool!” Calliope exclaimed, with an indifferent shrug of her shoulders, turning her back and strolling carelessly to the window. Whatever happened, she must not let Mrs. Barwick see that she really minded. Outwardly, at any rate, she must remain cool and collected.

“I’m going to lock you in,” Mrs. Barwick said pleasantly. “I shall be back with some supper before long.”

Calliope did not reply. She heard the thud of the door as it shut behind her. Then the click of the unoiled lock. She was a prisoner.

For a moment she had the idea of shouting for help out of the window; but the most casual glance showed its utter futility. At the back of the house, it looked down upon a tangle of wild, unkempt flower garden, its paths overgrown with moss and the once trim lawns like hayfields. About two hundred yards away the garden terminated in a grey stone wall, over which she could see the red-tiled roofs of potting-sheds or outhouses. Then a large patch of overgrown and neglected kitchen-garden with fruit trees. Next another wall, with a broad meadow beyond it. Finally, a full three-quarters of a mile distant, the margin of a dense wood on gradually

rising ground which effectually shut out the skyline except where, in one direction, she could see a line of bluish hills in the far distance showing over the tree-tops.

From a spot far beyond the trees, a thin smear of smoke ascended vertically in the still evening air. Otherwise, there was no sign of anything human, no trace of any house or cottage. No road seemed to pass anywhere near, for listening intently Calliope could neither hear the rumble of traffic, nor the cheerful note of a motor-horn.

Not a sound disturbed the stillness. Even the very birds seemed hushed. The dead silence was unnatural, eerie and uncomfortable. She felt herself shivering with morbid anxiety which she could not control—alone in this ghastly, dimly-lit old nursery which had once resounded to the laughter of children. The uncared-for house, with its wild garden, seemed mysterious and horrible, peopled with ghosts. The weird uncanniness of the place was beginning to have its effect upon her nerves.

The sound of footsteps in the passage outside, followed by the click of the lock and the entry of Mrs. Barwick with a laden tray, came as a distinct relief.

“This is the best I can do for you, Miss Heddon,” she said cheerfully, putting down the tray. “I’ve brought you cigarettes, too.”

Calliope deliberately turned her back and gazed out of the window.

“I’ll come back before dark and bring you candles and some books to read,” Mrs. Barwick continued.

Calliope did not reply.

Mrs. Barwick left the room and locked the door behind her.

Alone again, Calliope fell to pacing up and down like a caged animal, racking her brains for some method of escape.

But how could she escape?

If she attacked Mrs. Barwick she had every chance of worsting her, for she was strong and muscular. But it was hardly likely that Mrs. Barwick was unarmed, and even if she did defeat her in a rough and tumble, Cairns, the chauffeur, was probably lurking downstairs, and no doubt had orders to prevent her escape. And she, Calliope, had nothing but her bare hands.

Then her eyes suddenly lit upon the poker holding up the window, a stout bar of iron about eighteen inches long, formidable as a weapon, if properly used. Without much difficulty she noiselessly raised the heavy window, lowered it gently, and stood back with the poker in her hand. The feel of it made her happier. Now, she was not altogether defenceless, and if Polinoff did come ...

Her eyes searched the room for a suitable hiding-place. Under the pillow of the bed, or underneath the mattress? No. Both these places were too inaccessible if she wanted to use it in a hurry. Behind the cushions of that basketwork armchair beside the little low table on which Mrs. Barwick had placed the supper tray? The very place! The short bar of iron fitted snugly in the space between the cushion and the side of the chair.

For a moment or two she considered the feasibility of creeping to the door the next time she heard Mrs. Barwick's footstep outside, and bringing her weapon crashing down on her skull when she entered the room. Nothing would be easier, and if it had been Polinoff she would not have hesitated.

With Mrs. Barwick, however, it was rather different. A good hearty blow from that poker might quite conceivably kill outright, and she didn't want that. Her attitude, except during that brief tussle in the car, when Calliope had seized her by the throat, had been more kindly than otherwise. At any rate, on more than one occasion she had stood as a buffer between her and Polinoff's brutality.

What was her connection with Polinoff, who had called her 'Freda', and then had been snapped up when he used a term of endearment? They, obviously, knew each other well, though it was perfectly evident there was no love lost between them. But for some reason Mrs. Barwick was Polinoff's tool. Had he blackmailed her for some youthful indiscretion? He was just the sort of man who would not hesitate to blackmail a woman for purposes of his own.

And the Rolls-Royce—was it her car? Polinoff had talked of Cairns, the chauffeur, as being one of 'my men' or 'our men' Calliope could not remember which. That rather went to prove what she already knew, that a gang was implicated in this affair, and that the car was probably not Mrs. Barwick's.

At all events, the house in which Calliope was a prisoner did not seem to fit in with Mrs. Barwick's rather flamboyant personality. That lady obviously had money, and from what the girl had seen of the morning-room downstairs, the hall, the stairs, the room she was now in, and the garden, the whole place was poverty-stricken and threadbare.

Calliope was an ordinary healthy young animal. After an early lunch, an unsatisfactory tea at the railway buffet at Plymouth, and two trying days in succession, she was tired and genuinely hungry. After all, the food which stood so

temptingly on the tray before her could hardly be drugged—they only drugged food in novels. Besides, she had seen Mrs. Barwick herself open the bottle of wine with a corkscrew, and she was certain it had not been tampered with.

She poured out half a glass of it and drank, to find it good. She cut off and nibbled a small portion of the liver wing of the chicken, and it was tender. The ham looked pink and succulent, the rolls fresh, and the lettuce crisp. After all, there was no sense in fasting. She wanted every ounce of her strength and will-power to cope with what might come.

Overcome by hunger, she sat down in the basket chair and pulled the tray towards her, eating daintily at first, then ravenously. She polished off every morsel of the food, including the large chunk of cold apple tart and the clotted cream in the little glass dish. And when she had eaten, and drunk the bottle of Beaune to the dregs, her nerves were less on edge. She felt stronger and more at peace with herself, more capable of dealing with any eventuality that might arise—even Polinoff. Had she not the poker?

Lighting one of Mrs. Barwick's cigarettes she strolled over to the window and looked out. It was getting on for half-past ten. The sunset flush was fading from the sky, and night was gradually approaching. It would be a clear, dark night with no moon. Great masses of rounded cumulus were sailing leisurely across a sky powdered with stars.

Her heart heavy, she wondered what they were doing at One Tree Bungalow. Were her father and Dick Corfield frantically driving about the country in their cars trying to discover what had become of her? If only she had not been such a fool as to have offered to help Mrs. Barwick, she would be with them now—sitting perhaps on the terrace

while they smoked their pipes, watching the sea changing from rose-pink to gold and lemon-yellow, and from lemon-yellow to sapphire and deep indigo as the last of the sunset light faded and the night came down.

But it was too late to think of that now.

Leaving the window and walking across the room, her observant eyes fell upon the large cupboard to the left of the fireplace. She pulled open the door, instantly to be greeted by the overpowering smell of mice. A pile of old books and newspapers on the floor, their edges torn and frayed, showed where the little animals had been busily at work. Otherwise the cupboard was empty.

She had a rooted aversion for all creeping and scuttering things, but overcoming her repugnance, gingerly lifted one of the books and carried it to the window.

It was the bound copy of a boy's magazine, and on the flyleaf 'Robert Molyneux Fairbairn from Uncle Geoffrey, on his eleventh birthday. August 8th, 1903.' So Robert M. Fairbairn, if still alive, was now a man of thirty-seven.

In a tattered girl's picture book, in thin hand-writing, she found 'To Miss Angela, with love from Nannie, October 10th, 1900.' In another, in childishly sprawled calligraphy, 'Angela Elfreda Fairbairn from her luving Auntie Minnie, Chrissmass, 1901'. Angela must have been about six or seven when she received those books, Calliope came to the conclusion, so she must now be a woman about a year younger than her brother, say about thirty-six.

'Angela Elfreda Fairbairn.'

She read the name again.

Elfreda? Why did it sound familiar?

Of course!

Elfreda might naturally be shortened into ‘Freda’, which was how Mrs. Barwick had been addressed by Polinoff! Moreover, the ages seemed to tally. Mrs. Barwick was somewhere in the latish thirties.

Calliope saw it now. Mrs. Barwick’s maiden name had been Fairbairn, and she had had a brother nearly the same age as herself. This room had once been their nursery. And quite possibly Mrs. Barwick’s parents were dead, and this gloomy untenanted old house belonged to her.

But beyond the fact that this new piece of knowledge would undoubtedly enable her to trace her place of imprisonment when she finally emerged, it seemed of little use now. Nevertheless, it was amusing to think that Polinoff’s elaborate arrangements to prevent her discovering her whereabouts had all been rendered futile by the opportune discovery of a child’s picture book.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

At One Tree Bungalow the short summer night passed off without incident. It was not really dark until a quarter to eleven, and soon after five o'clock the first rays of the still hidden sun were spreading upwards through the cloud-rifts on the eastern sky like the questioning fingers of a titan. Some forty minutes later, swollen and distended like a great blood-orange, the sun topped the horizon and the day began.

Heddon and Corfield had shared the night between them, one resting while the other remained alert and watchful. Until 2.30 a.m. when he took over the watch, Corfield had been stretched out on the sofa in the sitting-room. He had not expected that his anxiety and activity of mind would permit him to sleep; but he was mistaken. The strain of the last two days and the intervening night had induced a physical exhaustion. He was tired out. After a few minutes of tossing and turning, and of yawning and grunting and pulling the blanket well up under his chin, he had fallen off into a deep and satisfying slumber, to sleep as calmly and as blissfully as a healthy child. Three and a half hours sleep were not much; but in the small, chill hours of the morning when Heddon called him with a cup of steaming cocoa and some biscuits, he rose feeling like a giant refreshed.

Three or four times during his watch, Corfield had prowled noiselessly round the bungalow with his eyes questing the darkness and his ears cocked for the slightest suspicious sound. He had an uncomfortable feeling that the house was being watched, a vague intuition, nothing more. But he heard nothing—saw no signs of anything human.

Some portion of the time he had spent sitting on the low parapet of the little garden outside the house, gazing pensively out to sea, watching, always watching, for any trace of movement on the beach below, or in the dark waters of the little cove beyond it. He squatted there for minutes at a time, not even daring to smoke lest the glow of a comforting pipe should betray his presence to any hidden watcher. The night was intensely calm and still; but except for the ceaseless swish of the sea and the grating of shingle, mingled with the occasional squawking cry of a fishing cormorant, nothing broke the quietude.

There came the first gleams of daylight, followed by a sudden, shrill, quarrelsome discordancy as the gulls left their roosting places in the cliffs in search of their morning meal. Sitting on the wall with his legs crossed, an elbow on his knee, and his unshaven chin cupped in the palm of one hand, he watched the birds flapping heavily seaward, wheeling and circling against the paling sky.

The lights of the fishing fleet on the horizon flickered out as the drifters hurried back to harbour with their night's catches. The sea faded from indigo to shining steel-grey in the light of the dawn as he sat there thinking, thinking all the time, of Calliope. He could not keep his mind off her.

He remained, still like a brooding statue, until the sun rose over the hills at his back. The calm sea, its glassy surface ruffled here and there by errant catspaws of breeze, became luminous and softly brilliant with a medley of delicate mauve and rose and pale green, mingled with the faintest yellow and orange, for all the world like a great stretch of shimmering, iridescent silk.

He rose with a yawn to stretch himself, and thoughtfully filled and lit his pipe. For a minute or two he paced up and down with his hands deep in his trousers' pockets, savouring the bliss of the first smoke of the day.

After about five minutes, feeling the pangs of a healthy appetite, he padded back to the house in search of something to eat. Passing softly into the sitting-room on tip-toe, he paused for a moment to look at Heddon, who was still snoring blissfully.

It was nearly six o'clock when he reached the pantry, helped himself to biscuits, and went into the little kitchen to set a kettle of water on the paraffin stove to boil for cocoa. It had not even started to sing before the sudden jangle of the telephone bell brought him hurriedly back through the living-room and out into the hall. Heddon, he noticed as he passed, was still asleep.

Corfield took off the receiver.

"Hullo!" he said.

"Is that you, Dick?" came Calliope's voice from the other end, faint but unmistakable.

For a moment he could hardly believe his ears. He had made up his mind for the worst, and here was Calliope calmly ringing him up. His heart thrilled with excitement.

"Calliope!" he exclaimed joyfully.

He heard her reply, heard her little laugh.

"Thank God!" he muttered to himself, sighing with heartfelt relief.

"I say," he added aloud. "Where are you speaking from?"

"A baker's shop on the outskirts of Helston," she told him.

Burning to know what had been happening, Corfield was about to ask her, when it suddenly occurred to him that someone might be overhearing their conversation.

“Parlez-vous Français?” he asked.

“Certainement,” she answered with a laugh.

“Very well, then,” he continued in halting French. “Talk French. Someone may be listening. Do you understand me.”

“Je vous comprends parfaitement,” said Calliope.

“Well, what’s been happening?” Corfield queried still in French. “Why didn’t you arrive last night.”

“Adventures, many adventures,” she replied. “It’s rather a long story. I’d better tell you later.”

“Were they unpleasant adventures?”

“Not exactly pleasant,” she confessed. Monsieur P.—Corfield would know to whom she referred—was responsible for them. But she’d better tell him later. Meanwhile what should she do?

“You must be very tired,” Corfield said.

“I am,” she answered. “But it’s been very exciting.”

“Voulez-vous aller vous coucher?” the commander asked, thinking that bed and a good sound sleep would be the best thing for her.

But bed, apparently, was the last thing Calliope was thinking of. She was tired, certainly, but how could she solemnly go to bed in broad daylight? No. All she really wanted was a bath and a change of raiment—and breakfast afterwards. She’d feel better then.

She must go on to the best hotel in Helston, Corfield told her, the Moon, he believed it was called, not far from the station. She should take a room there, and order a bath, and

breakfast for three. He would shave and make himself more or less respectable, and with her father, would be with her in three quarters of an hour, at the latest. Meanwhile, she must go straight to the hotel, and not stir outside until he came. Whatever happened, she must go straight to the hotel and remain there.

Calliope understood.

What about clothes, he asked as an afterthought? What did she want? He had better bring them with him in the car.

Calliope laughed outright.

It was *très difficile*, she explained, to tell a man in French over the telephone, a man, moreover, who presumably knew nothing of *lingérie*, precisely what she wanted. He had better rummage the chest-of-drawers in her room, she went on, relapsing into English. In the second long drawer he'd find a whole collection, and she'd prefer some of the lemon-coloured silk ones, if he could find them. The pink and the pale green were no good. They were intended for evening dress.

Corfield thought he understood.

Then she would like her sponge, her tooth-brush and etceteras, a brown jumper suit he would find hanging in the cupboard, a brown felt hat with a paste ornament, and a pair of brown crocodile shoes. He could put the entire collection into her small leather suitcase. There was nothing else she could think of.

Oh, yes! A cake of her soap, of course, her hairbrush and comb, her dressing-gown, a handkerchief or two, and a pair of clean silk stockings from the right-hand small drawer.

"Sure there's nothing else?" Corfield queried.

“No, that’s the lot,” she replied. “Good-bye, old thing! Don’t be long.”

“Bet your life I won’t!” he said delightfully.

He rang off, and returned to the sitting-room with a jubilant face to tell Heddon the news.

Within five minutes they were both hurriedly shaving in the bathroom, while keeping up a running fire of conversation.

“Shall I take my car?” Heddon asked, lathering his face.

“Yes,” said Corfield. “And take some clothes for the night with you. We’d better leave this house altogether for the time.”

“But why?” the elder man queried, pausing with his shaving-brush poised. “What’s the good of leaving now we’ve found Calliope?”

“Because we want Polinoff and his friends to think that we’ve left,” Corfield explained. “D’you remember what I told you last night—about that destroyer, I mean?”

Heddon nodded.

“Well, then,” the commander continued. “I’ll get hold of Foxy Elliott this morning. Then he and I will go over and have a yarn with the skipper of that destroyer, and hatch up a scheme to cop these blighters from the sea. It’s to-night they intend doing what they want to do—bet you anything you like.”

Heddon grunted, and started rubbing the lather into his chin.

“What about Calliope and myself?” he asked.

“You can either come along with Foxy and myself, or else go to an hotel,” Corfield replied, scraping his bristles with a

so-called safety razor. “Oh damn!—I’ve slashed myself.”

“Cotton-wool in the drawer under the looking glass,” said his host. “Is the yacht a very big one?” he went on to inquire.

“She can sleep four comfortably, and six at a pinch,” Corfield replied. “Why do you ask?”

“Because I’m very liable to sea-sickness,” the other replied mournfully. “Will she toss about a lot?”

“Not on a day like this,” said Corfield with a laugh.

“And what had I better do with the key of this house?”

“Lock the door and take the key with you,” the commander replied. “You bet they’ll have a duplicate. If they haven’t, it’s their lookout, not ours.”

A few minutes later, tolerably presentable, Corfield was looking over the clothes in Calliope’s chest of drawers. He handled them reverently, amazed at their inadequate flimsiness. How any girl could avoid catching her death of cold in such exiguous garments was utterly beyond his comprehension.

The pink ones, had she said, or was it the lemon yellow or pale green, or mauve, or garments of the various other colours of the spectrum that he saw in such riotous confusion?

Better pack the lot and make certain, he thought to himself. Better pack everything she possessed, then they couldn’t possibly be stolen!

He crammed everything of Calliope’s that he could find into her two suitcases and round hat-box; walking shoes on top of her three evening dresses, under-wear and stockings rolled tightly up and jammed in wherever they would fit. He certainly made a good job of it, a seamanlike job. There was

room and to spare; but the sight would have reduced any woman to hysterics.

Then he hurriedly packed his own things, which, thank heaven, was easier.

Ten minutes afterwards, both cars had left the garage, and were moving cautiously over the bad surface of the lane leading to the main road. In another quarter of an hour, turning left on to a better surface, Corfield trod on the gas and let his car rip.

She was a hireling which had once seen better days. Thirty-five was all she would do with the accelerator hard down; but as he clutched her steering wheel and listened to the strange noises emanating from beneath the bonnet mingling with the rattle of the bodywork, he found himself humming a little tune.

It was a gorgeous morning. Every revolution of the decrepit engine was bringing him nearer to Calliope—Calliope, bless her heart!

Life was once more well worth living. Hurrah for everything and damnation to Polinoff!

It was some time after seven o'clock, with Heddon close behind, that he came to a standstill in front of the Moon Hotel in Helston. Leaving his car he entered the Inn. There was nobody in the hall, but pushing open a door marked 'Coffee Room' he saw an untidy maid laying the tables for breakfast.

"I want to see a lady called Miss Heddon," he hurriedly explained. "Will you tell her her luggage has arrived."

The girl stared at him and shook her head.

"There's no Miss Heddon here," she said slowly, wiping a plate with the corner of her apron.

“Of course there is!” he laughed. “She rang me up about an hour ago and I told her to come here and order breakfast. She’s probably having her bath. You might go and have a look.”

“There’s no lady ordered breakfast, and no lady havin’ a bath,” the girl replied. “We’ve three single commercial gents and a married couple, that’s all.”

“But ... but.... Are you quite certain?”

“Of course I’m certain!” she snapped, annoyed at being doubted. “I’ve been up since six o’clock. No lady’s come here this morning.”

Heddon came into the room.

“Where is she?” he asked eagerly, coming forward.

“She hasn’t come,” said Corfield, his heart as heavy as lead.

Heddon’s expression changed.

“Hasn’t come!” he repeated. “Good God, Corfield! What’s happened? Where is she?”

“Heaven knows!” said the commander, biting his lip. “She’s disappeared again!”

They looked miserably at each other.

“Perhaps she’s made a mistake and gone to another hotel,” the elder man presently suggested.

“We can but look,” Corfield agreed.

But within twenty minutes they had tried all the likely hotels the little place boasted, and Calliope was not in any of them. She had disappeared.

Heddon, licking his dry lips, looked apprehensively at Corfield. Corfield, sick at heart, looked back at him. Their

thoughts were similar, and they hardly dared to voice them.

Then the commander had an inspiration.

Calliope had telephoned from a baker's shop. He would ring up the exchange and discover whence the call had emanated. A short conversation gave him the answer. Within a few minutes they were at the shop itself.

A large, contented-looking woman was sorting out newly-baked rolls on to trays. She remembered the young lady perfectly she replied in answer to their agitated questioning. It wasn't more than an hour ago that she had come in and had asked if she could use the telephone. A nice-spoken young lady she was, though she had looked rather tired and "nervous like." The woman had paid particular attention to her, for it was early for anyone to be out. She wasn't dressed "like none o' them trippers." She was obviously a lady, a real lady.

"Did anyone else come into the shop while she was here?" Corfield impatiently asked.

The woman shook her head.

"Did you see or hear her talking to anyone?" Heddon demanded.

Again the answer was in the negative.

"Which way did she go?" Corfield asked.

"I doan't rightly know, zur," the baker's wife replied.

"And you didn't notice any motor car passing or stopping outside at about the time she left?"

"No, zur. I did not. Leastways, we have cars passin' marnin', 'nune, an' night, what with charabangs and such-like. They comes at all times."

There was obviously nothing more to be gleaned from her.

Calliope had disappeared again—without leaving a trace.

Corfield and Heddon passed out into the road.

“I’m sick of this!” said Heddon despondently. “I’m going to the police.”

“There’s nothing else for it,” the commander agreed.

“And what about you?” the elder man asked.

“I’ll get Foxy Elliott on the job,” Corfield replied. “Perhaps he’ll be able to think of something.”

“I hope so,” said Heddon. “Most certainly I hope so.”

“And then Foxy and I will have to go and see that bloke in the destroyer,” Corfield continued. “We must get busy at once.”

Heddon nodded.

“And you’d better take Calliope’s gear,” the commander went on with a sigh. “It’s in my car. I ... I thought she’d need it. But now....” he hesitated, his eyes full of agony, “she won’t.”

His voice was strained and unnatural.

CHAPTER THIRTY

It was nearly eleven o'clock when Calliope heard the sound of footsteps outside the room. Then the noise of the key in the lock, followed by the entry of Mrs. Barwick.

She carried a lighted oil lamp in one hand and a candlestick in the other. Calliope moved casually towards the armchair where she had concealed the poker, noticing as she did so that the elder woman, with her hands full, had omitted to shut the door behind her. The key, moreover, was still in the lock, and on the outside.

"I'm sorry to have left you in the dark," Mrs. Barwick apologised, putting the lamp and candlestick on the table.

The idea came into Calliope's head of smashing the lamp and making a bolt for it. But she did not know the interior of the house, and Cairns, the chauffeur, was probably somewhere downstairs. Physically, Calliope was more than a match for Mrs. Barwick if it came to a rough and tumble struggle; but how could she ever hope to get past the burly Cairns?

"Aren't there any servants in the house?" Calliope asked.

Mrs. Barwick, who was bending over the table examining the wick of the lamp, which was smoking vilely, shook her head.

"Not a soul," she replied. "We're quite ... that is to say," she hurriedly corrected herself, "there are no regular servants. My chauffeur, of course, is downstairs."

Calliope's heart jumped. There was a chance of escape, after all. From the sudden way Mrs. Barwick had corrected herself, she was certain that the two of them were the only

occupants of the house. Cairns, the chauffeur, had merely been mentioned as an afterthought to discourage any attempt at escape.

“Is there anything else you want before you go to bed?” Mrs. Barwick inquired, still examining the lamp.

“No thanks,” said Calliope, trying to speak calmly, but with her heart fluttering with excitement. Her mind was fully made up. She would act, here and now. She reached down, possessed herself of the poker, and hid it behind her back. Then with a sudden movement, she was between Mrs. Barwick and the open door.

“What are you doing?” Mrs. Barwick demanded sharply, turning on her heel.

“Oh!” she continued, glancing at the open door with a startled expression. “I’ve left the door open.”

She made a movement towards it, but Calliope cut her off.

“What is it you want, Miss Heddon?” Mrs. Barwick went on to ask, her voice silky. “You can’t run away, if that’s what you’re thinking of. My chauffeur’s downstairs, remember. You’ll only get hurt, and I’m sure I don’t want any unpleasantness.”

“Your chauffeur isn’t in the house,” Calliope retorted, hoping she did not look so nervous as she felt. “We’re alone, so what’s the good of lying?”

“Let me pass!” Mrs. Barwick exclaimed angrily, trying to push her aside.

“No,” said Calliope firmly, her heart throbbing with anxiety.

“Will you let me pass, Miss Heddon!”

“No!” Calliope exclaimed, stepping back with her eyes on the other woman’s. “I warn you that I’ve got this.”

She produced the poker and drew back her arm ready to strike.

“Put that thing down!” Mrs. Barwick ordered, her eyes anxious.

“No!” said Calliope firmly. “I’d ... I’d rather not hurt you, but if you don’t stand back I shall have to. Stand back!”

Almost she expected Mrs. Barwick to produce a pistol. At the least sign of her doing so, Calliope, her nerves tense, would have brought her weapon crashing down on her skull. But Mrs. Barwick, obviously unarmed, did nothing of the sort. She fell back a pace, and stood there licking her carmined lips, eyeing Calliope as though trying to read her thoughts, wondering what to do.

“Sit down,” said Calliope firmly, realising that she had the other woman at a complete disadvantage, and that, moreover, she was badly frightened. “Sit down!... Sit down, I say!” when Mrs. Barwick showed signs of hesitation.

Calliope raised her weapon.

Mrs. Barwick relapsed into the chair.

“What is it you want?” she asked feebly.

“Want?” said Calliope. “I’m going to lock you in this room.”

“Lock me in this room!” the other woman repeated, her eyes anxious as she leant forward gripping the arms of her chair. “For God’s sake, Miss Heddon! Don’t do that! Don’t.”

“I most certainly shall!” Calliope exclaimed, toying with her weapon. “I’m going to treat you as you would have treated me.”

Mrs. Barwick, seeing the girl was in earnest, dabbed her eyes with a pocket handkerchief.

"But Boris Polinoff!" she whimpered. "He'll probably kill me!"

"That's your business, Mrs. Barwick," said Calliope, steeling her heart and walking to the door. "Good night."

She left the room, shut the door before Mrs. Barwick could make any further protestations, and locked it on the outside, taking the key with her.

With the poker still in her hand she crept silently downstairs, listening for any sound. But all was still and silent. She reached the hall without incident, opened the front door, and passed out into the open air. A few moments later she was cautiously making her way down the dark drive—free!

Seized by some impulse she paused for a moment, and turned to look at the house behind her. Surrounded by trees, with its squat dark bulk silhouetted against the lighter darkness of the sky, the glass in its unlighted windows reflecting the stars, it looked eerie and menacing. A faint breeze rustled the tree-tops overhead. Something stirred in a thick clump of rhododendron behind her. Her nerves all on edge, she turned to face it with throbbing heart, the poker clutched in her hand. A rabbit, two rabbits, scuttled across the drive almost at her feet. She breathed again. Far away, an owl hooted in the darkness. Then the crow of a cock pheasant.

Summoning up her courage, Calliope walked on. She was not clear of danger yet. For all she knew the house might be watched. There was also the possibility that Polinoff might change his mind for some reason and return.

The drive, palely illuminated in the light of the stars filtering through the trees which nearly met overhead, curved

and twisted before her. It was fringed by verges of unkempt grass, sometimes by dense clumps of shrubs and tangled undergrowth. It was almost like walking through a tunnel, but keeping to the side where the shadow seemed deepest, Calliope kept steadily on. Twice, moving along the grass, she fell into concealed ditches, which sent her sprawling almost to the knees in oozy slime. After ten minutes, however, turning a bend, she saw the gateway close ahead. There was no lodge, and passing cautiously into the road, she turned left, and hurried on.

She was desperately tired; but her heart was full of thankfulness. She was free. Motors might be passing, even at this time of night. She had money in her bag. She might be able to get a lift.

She had not gone a mile, however, when her left heel, which she had blistered at tennis some days before, started to irritate. Another quarter of a mile, and it was really painful. It seemed raw and swollen. She began to limp.

Spying a gap in the hedge, with a stack beyond, she scrambled through it and sat down with her back to the sweet-smelling wall of hay. Her shoe came off, then her stocking. She gingerly felt her heel, which had started to throb. She powdered it from the little box in her hand-bag.

She was very tired. The night was warm, and it was comfortable sitting in the loose hay. She would allow herself a quarter-of-an-hour's rest before she started off again. Fifteen minutes one way or the other could surely make no difference. But fatigue asserted itself. Her eyes closed, and within five minutes she was fast asleep.

It was when the first glimmer of daylight was brightening the eastern horizon that she awoke with a start, and

remembered where she was. Her wrist-watch showed it to be a few minutes before four-forty-five. She had been asleep for something over four hours.

But she felt refreshed, and her heel was less swollen and painful. Pulling on her stocking, she replaced the shoe without difficulty and stood up to tidy herself, shaking and combing her hair, settling her hat and brushing the shreds of hay from her dark coat and skirt. Her shoes were muddy, and her silk stockings soiled almost to the knees. But she could not help that. What did it matter?

She was free again. It was going to be a glorious day and very soon she would find some kind-hearted person with a car who would give her a lift into Helston. She would telephone to her father and to Dick Corfield—good old Dick! What a dance her foolishness must have led them, poor old dears!

But it was all right now. They would forgive her. Life was well worth living, and that hateful Boris Polinoff a creature of the past. She laughed happily.

Scrambling through the gap into the road she walked on. Twenty minutes later, limping a little, for her heel again started to hurt, she reached the main road and turned right. It was shortly after half-past-five, seated beside a grinning boy on the driving seat of an antiquated motor van filled with vegetables, that Calliope was approaching Helston.

“I want to telephone,” she said.

“I’ll be turnin’ off in a minute or two, miss,” the youth replied. “But if y’u goes straight on towards the town, y’u’ll come across Mumm’s the baker, in the first block of houses on the left, ’bout a couple o’ hundred yards on. They’ll be open, miss, an’ they’ll let y’u use the telephone, fur sure.”

Set down on the road, she tried to tip the driver; but without success. Then, following his directions, she set off alone and found Mumm's, the baker, with Mrs. Mumm inside. Calliope put through her call to One Tree Bungalow, and heard Dick Corfield's joyful voice the other end. They conversed, partly in French. Yes. She would go to the hotel, order an early breakfast for three, and then have a bath. Dick Corfield and her father would join her before long.

Munching a crisp roll, hot from the oven, she left the shop and walked on. She had another half mile to go before she reached the outskirts of the little town, and had barely left the house when she heard a car approaching from behind. She moved instinctively over to the left to allow it to pass, but the car slowed down and came to a standstill beside her.

"Good morning, Miss Heddon," came a sneering voice, a voice she knew well—Polinoff's. "This is a surprise. You're out early."

Her heart almost stopped beating. For a moment she thought of taking to her heels, or of screaming for help. But there was not a soul in sight. She turned to face him.

"Don't let's have any trouble," said Polinoff, relinquishing the wheel and sliding his body along the driving seat with a small automatic in his left hand pointed full at her chest. "Monson!"

"Sir!"

"Get Miss Heddon inside. Don't be rough unless she struggles."

A thick-set, burly man with an evil face, climbed out of the back of the car and came towards her.

"What are you going to do?" Calliope demanded.

“Wait and see,” said Polinoff with an evil leer. “You won’t escape a second time, that I’ll guarantee. What a mercy we found you, my dear! And won’t I have a word to say to our beloved Freda when we meet. How did you get away, Miss Heddon?”

Calliope did not reply.

“Get her inside, Monson!” the Russian snapped.

“Come on, miss!” said the man gruffly, seizing her arm in a grip of steel. “Inside, miss, if you please, and sharp about it!”

It was useless to struggle. Calliope was caught.

Sick at heart, speechless with rage and fear and astonishment, she allowed herself to be pushed into the back of the closed car. The door was banged behind her.

“Sit her on the floor!” Polinoff ordered over his shoulder, letting in the clutch. “Don’t let her be seen.”

The machine shot forward.

“Where are you taking me?” Calliope demanded, finding her voice.

“Where your friends can’t find you, my pretty dear,” Polinoff chuckled. “Somewhere where I shall have you entirely to myself—to do as I like with.”

“You beast!” she sobbed. “You unutterable blackguard!”

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

It was not until after nine o'clock that Corfield, chafing with impatience, was sculled off to the *Lora* which was moored up among the pilchard boats in Porthleven harbour. There was nobody to be seen on deck, but telling the boatman to wait, he scrambled hurriedly on board and climbed down the narrow ladder leading to the saloon. The little ship was only a ten tonner. There was no owner's cabin, and in the saloon, as he expected, he found his friend Foxy Elliott stretched out on one of the settees snoring blissfully among his blankets. It took some time to wake him.

"I didn't tie up here until a quarter past four this morning, Dick," he explained, yawning and rubbing his eyes. "Had a bit of a job getting round from Falmouth. There wasn't enough breeze for sailing and a beastly swell. Then the motor conked out yesterday afternoon and all but put me ashore on the Lizard. Took me the best part of four hours to get her running again. I'm single-handed, you see."

"Single-handed?"

"M-yes. My paid assassin and I parted brass-rags at Falmouth, so I put the blighter ashore."

"And is your engine running all right now?" Corfield inquired.

Much depended upon the *Lora's* motor if she were to be used in the way that Corfield intended.

"Runnin' like a lamb, old son," said Foxy. "Why d'you ask?"

"Because I've got a job for you, Foxy. For the pair of us, that is. You know I told you in my letter I was staying with

the parents of a girl I'd met?"

Foxy pricked up his ears.

"A girl!" he exclaimed, staring hard at his friend with a smile wrinkling his face. "Gosh, man! You don't mean to tell me you've got a female in tow, you old reprobate? What sort of a girl is she, anyhow?"

"Not the sort you think she might be," said Corfield cryptically.

"Well, let's hear all about her, then," Elliott rejoined, swinging his legs to the floor. "You don't mind if I shove on some clothes, old son, do you? This place isn't Cowes, but even so I can't very well go to sea in pyjamas."

Corfield started to tell him everything—of the submarine or motor-boat that had been seen off the coast, of what the D.N.I. had told him, of what had occurred since he had left London, of Polinoff, of the happenings at One Tree Bungalow.

"Gawd!" Foxy exclaimed, long before his friend had finished, as he wriggled into a sweater that had once been white and a pair of unspeakable grey flannel trousers. "This sounds something like business!"

"Business!" said Corfield glumly. "I should damn well think it was!"

He went on to tell him of Calliope's first abduction, or what he knew of it, of her telephone message that morning, and of her second disappearance barely a couple of hours before.

"And what d'you want me to do?" Elliott eagerly queried, when he had heard the story to its end.

“To get under weigh at once, so that we can go over to Penzance and have a yarn with the skipper of that destroyer,” Corfield told him. “He’s been sent here by the Admiralty.”

“I can be ready in a quarter of an hour,” Elliott said, thrusting his feet into a pair of rubber sea-boots. “Have you had breakfast, by the way?”

“No. I haven’t had time to think of it.”

“Then we’ll have it on the run across. You’ll have to put up with what I can give you, old thing. I feed any old how and at any old time in this hooker, as you know.”

“It doesn’t matter a hoot to me when or what I eat,” Corfield assured him.

“I wish to heaven I had someone to do the cooking, though,” Foxy said. “Baker wasn’t a bad cook, for all his sins, and I hate sweating drops of blood over that blasted Primus down in the forecastle. I wonder if that destroyer of yours could spare us a decent A.B. for a day or two?”

Corfield suddenly bethought himself of John Burge, the ex-bluejacket whom he had interviewed about the submarine. He had seemed an honest, dependable sort of man, altogether a likeable fellow, and had been very anxious to help.

“I believe I could get you a man from here,” he said, feeling for his pocket-book. “I’ve got his address. He’s a fisherman, who was in the Service.”

“Good man! D’you think he’ll come?”

“He will if he’s at home,” Corfield answered. “I’ll write a note and send it ashore by my boatman.”

“Fire away,” said Foxy. “And while we’re waiting, you and I had better prepare for sea. How’s the wind?”

“Fairish breeze from the southward,” Corfield replied.

The note was sent ashore, and with Corfield's help the mainsail was hoisted. This done, Elliott went below to start up the engine for leaving harbour, leaving his friend on deck to make ready for slipping from the buoy. He had hardly finished his work when he saw the boat returning from the shore. To his delight Burge was sitting in the bows. She came alongside and he scrambled out.

"Come on board to join, sir," he said, putting a small canvas bag with his belongings on the deck, and grinning all over his face as he made Corfield the naval salute. "What's in the wind, sir?" he went on to ask. "And who does this packet belong to?"

His seaman's eye roved aloft and round the *Lora's* trim deck.

"All in good time, Burge," said the commander hurriedly, shaking hands. "We're getting under weigh now. Can you stay with us a day or two?"

"Stay ten days if you like, sir," said Burge cheerfully.

The boatman was paid and departed for the shore.

The engine was popping merrily and a cloud of blue vapour from the exhaust poisoning the atmosphere. Elliott, wiping his grimy hands on a piece of waste, came on deck and Burge was introduced. Five minutes later, with Foxy at the helm, the *Lora* was freed from her moorings and circling round for the harbour entrance. In a few minutes more, when clear of the land, the motor was stopped and the propeller disconnected.

The mainsail swelled out in a hard curve to starboard as the little ship felt the breeze and the water started to splash and ripple round her forefoot. The fore staysail, jib and

mizzen were set—the topsail dragged out of its locker and hoisted.

"Now she feels it!" cried Foxy triumphantly, bracing the tiller against his body as the yacht heeled over with her lee scuppers nearly awash. "Ease off a bit of that main-sheet, Burge. She's pulling like a racehorse!... Steady! That'll do!—And now, what about breakfast?"

The day was delicious, with a bright sun, a dappled sky, and a little sea just breaking in the strong breeze. Even Corfield felt less depressed, for here was life and movement. Something useful was being done at last, something tangible. They had no more than ten miles to go, and the *Lora*, booming along, must be making good every bit of eight knots.

In something under an hour they would be alongside that destroyer lying at anchor off Penzance. She was one of His Majesty's ships, and trust the Navy to help and to do the right thing when it came to an emergency. Corfield had a profound faith in his old Service.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

HEDDON brought his car to a standstill at the pavement near the Police Station at Helston. Switching off his engine he sat there, composing and turning over in his mind the story he intended to tell the police of Calliope's disappearance.

"Beg pardon, sir," said a voice at his elbow, as he remained wrapped in thought with his eyes on the house-tops. "Are you Mister 'Eddon—Mister Michael 'Eddon?"

Heddon came down to earth with a start of surprise to find himself looking into the grey-green eyes of a man with a red face and the build of a heavyweight boxer. He was neatly dressed in the double-breasted blue coat, breeches, black leggings, and peaked cap of a chauffeur.

"Eh?" said Heddon vacantly. "What d'you want?"

The man repeated his question.

"My name is Heddon," its owner answered.

"Mister Michael 'Eddon, sir?" the chauffeur queried, regarding him without the flicker of an eyelid. "I don't want to make no mistake, sir."

"You are not making a mistake. I am Michael Heddon."

"Well, sir," the man continued, still staring hard. "I'm chauffeur to Major Ridgeway, the Chief Constable."

"The Chief Constable!" Heddon exclaimed.

"Yes, sir. The Major sent me in 'ere to see if I could find you. He wants to see you at once, sir. He said I was to bring you along in the car."

"Very kind of him," Heddon replied with a frown of perplexity. "But I don't quite understand. What has Major ... er, what did you say his name was?"

“Major Ridgeway, sir, the Chief Constable.”

“Well, what has the Chief Constable to do with me?”

“I don’t rightly know for certain, sir,” the chauffeur said. “But puttin’ two and two together, I thinks it ’as somethin’ to do with a young lady who’s missin’.”

Heddon’s heart leapt.

“Do you mean my daughter?” he asked eagerly.

“Yes, sir, that’s what I gathered from over’earin’ scraps o’ what the Major was sayin’.”

“Have they found her?”

The chauffeur shook his head.

“No, sir,” he answered. “They ’av’n’t, not yet, that is.”

“Then you mean that the police are already on the track?”

“Yes sir.”

“And who told them she’d disappeared?”

“That’s more’n I can say, sir,” came the reply. “But the Major’s on the job himself, and the Major don’t take a hand in things unless they’re extra hurgent, in a manner o’ speakin’. My orders is, sir, to take you out to him at once.”

“But where is he?” Heddon demanded, his brain in a whirl of mystification.

“Out at the ’ouse where you’re livin’, sir—the little ’ouse on the cliff overlookin’ the sea. That’s where I just come from, sir. The Major’s investigatin’—’im and a whole lot of ’tecs an’ policemen.”

Heddon scratched his chin.

How, in the name of all that was mysterious, did Major Ridgeway know that Calliope had disappeared? Who could

have informed the police? Moreover, how was the Major aware that he, Heddon, had gone into Helston?

“I’m afraid I don’t understand,” he said, shaking his head. “How does the Chief Constable know that my daughter’s disappeared, and that I was to be found here?”

“That’s more than I can say, sir,” the chauffeur replied, looking puzzled himself. “But the police, sir....” he hesitated for a moment. “Well, sir, the police ’as ways an’ means o’ knowin’ things that the likes of us knows nothin’ about—telephones, an’ suchlike. All I knows is, sir, that the Major wants to see you at your ’ouse immediate, and sent me along ’ere to bring you out in ’is own car. If you takes my advice, sir, you’ll come along quick. There’s the car there, sir.”

He pointed to an expensive-looking Austin saloon drawn up at the pavement behind Heddon’s own more elderly vehicle.

“But I’ve my own car,” Heddon objected. “Why shouldn’t I come out in that?”

“No reason at all why you shouldn’t, sir,” said the man with a smile. “But whatever you decide, sir, it had best be done at once. The Major said it was hurgent, an’ when ’e says that ’e means it.”

“And he didn’t give you a note or anything?”

“No, sir. ’E ... ’e was in too much of a’ nurry to think o’ writin’ notes.”

“I see,” said Heddon, satisfied. “Then I’ll drive out there straight away. You’ll follow, I suppose?”

“Yessir,” the man answered, touching his cap. “I’ll follow right enough.”

Heddon restarted his engine, took off the brake, depressed his clutch pedal, and slid in the lever. The car moved forward. Then an ominous bumping sound from behind warned him that something was wrong. He stopped the car.

“What the devil’s the matter now?” he demanded irritably, looking round. “What’s that noise?”

The chauffeur walked round the back of the car and came forward again with a barely suppressed grin.

“One of your back tyres is flat, sir,” he explained. “She’s runnin’ on the rim. I noticed she was a bit down when I first saw you.”

“But it was all right a few minutes ago!”

“She’s flat as a pancake now, sir, any’ow.”

Filled with annoyance Heddon left his vehicle to see for himself. The most cursory glance showed that the chauffeur was telling the truth.

“And what had I better do now?” he asked helplessly.

“You could put on the spare wheel, sir, and trust to luck. But if you take my advice, you’ll not go runnin’ on these by-roads without a spare. Likely as not you’ll get another puncture, and you’d be properly dished, sir.”

“And what do you suggest?” Heddon asked.

“Put your car into the nearest garridge an’ come out with me, sir. It may take ’arf an hour or more to repair that hinner tube of yours, and you can’t afford to waste ’arf an hour, sir —leastways, you wouldn’t if you was me.”

There was nothing else for it but to take the man’s advice, and to the nearest garage, which luckily happened to be only fifty yards down the road, Heddon’s car was ignominiously taken and handed over.

A few minutes later, sitting in the back of Major Ridgeway's Austin, clutching the padded seat with both hands, and alternately gazing with apprehension at the flying hedges, and at the chauffeur's broad back and thick red neck, Heddon was being whirled out to One Tree Bungalow at a speed at which he would never have dared to drive himself. But the man was a good driver, though once or twice, peering at him sideways, Heddon could have sworn he was laughing. Secretly irritated, he wondered what might be the joke.

The journey, in spite of the appalling condition of the lane leading from the main road to the bungalow, which Heddon usually did at a crawl of less than ten miles an hour, was accomplished in something under twenty minutes. Rather shaken, the passenger disembarked at his own front door.

"You'll find the Major inside the 'ouse," said the chauffeur, omitting his usual 'sir' and speaking in rather an off-hand way.

"Eh?" asked Heddon, blinking in the strong sunlight as he turned and wiped his spectacles.

"Inside the 'ouse," the man gruffly repeated, leaving the driving seat.

Followed, as he noticed, by the chauffeur, Heddon opened the front door, walked through the little hall, and into the big sitting-room.

A slim, dark man, neither young nor old, with a pale, oval face, sleek hair and a bored expression, rose to his feet from the settee as he entered. He looked rather youthful for a Chief Constable, Heddon thought to himself; but he was well dressed and distinguished-looking, obviously a gentleman.

"So you've come, Mr. Heddon," said the stranger, eyeing his visitor with a smile, a lighted cigarette in one hand, the

other in the pocket of his flannel jacket, but without any attempt to come forward and shake hands. “I’ve been wanting to see you,” he added.

“Of course,” said Heddon. “It’s about my daughter, isn’t it? You’re Major Ridgeway?”

“Major Ridgeway!” said the dark man with a puzzled frown. “No, Mr. Heddon, that’s not my name.”

“Do you mean to tell me you are not Major Ridgeway, the Chief Constable?”

The stranger seemed amused.

“I was never a constable in my life,” he said. “I....”

“But your chauffeur told me I was wanted out here to interview the Chief Constable!” Heddon angrily broke in. “You don’t tell me I’ve been brought here under false pretences?”

“I shouldn’t say that,” the dark man replied. “It was very important that you should come out here, believe me.”

“And who the devil may you be?” Heddon demanded.

“Me?” said the stranger with a shrug of his shoulders, and an exasperating smile still on his face. “Oh, I’m just an ordinary sort of person. But before I explain I’d like to clear up this mystery—Grimes!”

“Sir?” said the chauffeur, coming into the room from the hall.

“Shut that door!” his master ordered.

The man obeyed.

“What’s this story that Mr. Heddon tells me about the Chief Constable?”

Grimes twiddled his cap. A grin spread over his heavy features.

“Well, sir,” he explained. “You told me as ’ow I was to get Mr. ’Eddon out ’ere from ’Elston by ’ook or by crook. If you remembers, sir, you said I was to hinvent any old story that I likes. So I goes ahead, sir, an’ hinvents one.”

“Oh, you did, did you?” his master laughed.

“Yessir. I tells Mister ’Eddon, beggin’ ’is pardon, that the Chief Constable was out ’ere with all the police an’ ’tecs lookin’ for traces of ’is missin’ daughter. Mister ’Eddon swallows the bait, sir, an’ ’ere we are!”

“This is a damned outrage!” Heddon exclaimed, his face flushing with anger. “As for you, sir,” he added, stepping forward with his fists clenched. “I’ll ... I’ll....”

“Oh, no!” the dark man retorted, moving back a pace and whipping his hand out of his jacket pocket with an automatic in his grasp. “We’ll discuss matters quietly, if you please.”

“I say this is an outrage!” Heddon flung back. “And now you dare to threaten me!”

“And I say you’d better sit down in that chair and try to control yourself,” the other replied, levelling his weapon. “You’re here, and in our power, so you’d better make the best of it. Go on—sit down!”

Realising he was cornered, Heddon licked his dry lips, and sat.

“As for you, Grimes, I think you’re a genius,” the man with the pistol went pleasantly on. “Tell me, did you have any difficulty?”

“No, sir, only Mr. ’Eddon wanted to come out in ’is own car, so I ’ad to puncture one of ’is back tyres to stop ’im. So

the tyre bein' flat, in a manner o' speakin', 'avin' been pricked by me with me little bradawl, I persuaded 'im to leave 'is car at a garridge an' to come out 'ere in yours."

"Excellent, Grimes. I congratulate you."

"Thank you, sir."

"And may I ask what you intend to do with me?" Heddon broke in, his face quivering with anger.

"You may ask," his gaoler replied. "But I'm not certain I shall tell you."

"Who are you?"

"I prefer to remain anonymous for the present. But perhaps I may recall myself to your memory if I call myself Mr. X.... Ah!" he continued laughing. "I see you *do* remember."

"So you ... you are the man who wrote me those threatening letters?" Heddon burst out.

"I have that honour," the other replied with a bow, the weapon still in his hand. "You see, Heddon, I know a great deal more about you, and your daughter, and this house, and, shall we say, Commander Corfield, than perhaps you realise.... By the way, where is our mutual friend, Corfield?"

"I haven't the ghost of a notion!" Heddon replied.

The other man eyed him for a moment or two without speaking.

"I believe you're telling the truth," he said at length. "I suppose the fool's still scouring the countryside interviewing policemen and asking them if they've seen Miss Heddon. Poor benighted idiot!—But what the hell does he mean by trying to butt in on my affairs?" he went on to demand, his voice raised.

“You’d better catch him and find out,” Heddon answered with a shrug of his shoulders.

“Which is precisely what I’ve been trying to do since he left this house with you this morning,” Mr. X retorted, his eyes smouldering. “With any luck I should have had him out here by now. But it won’t be long before he’s nabbed. And when he is, my God!”

“Do you mind telling me if my daughter is well?” Heddon asked.

“Miss Heddon is perfectly well,” Mr. X replied. “It can’t have been more than a quarter of an hour ago that we finished breakfast, quite a pleasant little meal, though hardly chatty.” He waved towards the littered table in the bay window.

“D’you mean she’s in this house?” Heddon cried, leaning forward.

“Well, yes, in a way,” came the answer. “I should say, at a guess, that she’s actually within thirty feet of where you’re sitting.”

“Thirty feet! Where is she, then?”

“Ah—ha! Now you’re asking too much.”

“But is she well?” Heddon demanded, full of anxiety.

“Except for being extremely intractable and bad-tempered with me, I think I can honestly say there is nothing at all the matter with her.”

“Thank God for that!” Heddon murmured.

“And provided you’re sensible,” Mr. X went on, his voice suave, “nothing really unpleasant will happen to her, or to you, for that matter—No. It’s Corfield I’m anxious to get even with, and when I get hold of him I shan’t worry about

his feelings, oh, no! I hate Corfield!" His face was working with excitement.

"Blindfold him, Grimes," he added to the chauffeur. "Here, take my handkerchief."

It was useless to resist, and Heddon allowed the man to bandage the thick silk across his eyes and to knot it behind his head. There was a moment's silence, then the click of a lock, a dull thud, and footsteps coming towards him.

"Get up!" the stranger ordered, taking him by the arm. "Get hold of his other arm, Grimes!"

Half walking, half carried, Heddon was conducted across the room, and through a doorway.

"Now be careful here," the stranger warned him, guiding his foot on to a stone step and releasing his arm. "There are ten steps down, so you'd better count 'em. If you put out your arms you'll feel the wall on either side of you. When you get to the bottom you can take the handkerchief from your eyes. Easy now!"

"Where are you putting me?" Heddon demanded, suddenly resisting with all his strength.

"Go on, you fool!" the stranger exclaimed, giving him a violent push.

The elder man's feet shot from underneath him. Before he properly realised what had happened, he was half bumping, half sliding down a flight of slippery steps. Even as he recovered himself and whipped the bandage from his eyes, a thud overhead told him that the door above had been closed. He was a prisoner.

Blinking in the dim light that came in through a small opening to his right, an opening barred with iron uprights set

in the solid rock, and overgrown with vegetation, Heddon realised at once where he was.

He had been taken in through the cupboard in the living room, a trap-door had been opened, and he had been thrust through it, and down some steps, rather painfully. This, then, was the place to which the mysterious intruder had disappeared.

Still sitting where he had fallen, he gazed around him with curiosity. From what he could see he seemed to be in a cave hollowed out of the rock, a sort of dungeon smelling evilly of damp and decay. It was a largish cave, roughly circular, and fully twenty feet across. Then, as his eyes became accustomed to the semi-darkness, he saw in the corner nearly opposite where he sat a deep shadow which looked like the entrance to a passage.

Of course! He had it now. This must be the passage through which Corfield's supposed prisoner had made his escape. Rising to his feet, he hobbled towards it, his hands outstretched to save himself if he fell.

Reaching the entrance he halted for a moment to peer inside. Then, with his fingers on the damp rock wall on either side, he passed cautiously within, pausing every now and then in his efforts to see what lay ahead.

He felt himself turning a corner, turned it to find himself in pitch darkness, and was about to move on, when he heard the sound of footsteps coming towards him. He felt his hair rising. Who was this new intruder?

The wavering gleam of an electric torch came nodding into view as somebody turned a corner about six feet ahead. For a moment the light showed up the rock walls, oozy and green with slime. Then it flickered towards him.

“Who’s that?” came a startled voice, a woman’s voice.

“Calliope!” Heddon exclaimed.

“Daddy!” she cried, coming forward. “Oh, my dear! You poor old thing! How on earth did you get here?”

“We can discuss that when we get out,” said Heddon, kissing her. “Thank God you’re safe, my girl!”

“Oh, I’m all right,” she said. “I’m only desperately tired—But we can’t get out, old man. I’ve been exploring. There’s a door about twenty feet further on, a door all barred with rusty iron, and it’s locked. I can’t budge it.”

“Are you certain?”

“Perfectly,” she said. “Let’s go back to the cave. We can make ourselves fairly comfortable. I insisted on having the mattresses from two of the beds, and some blankets and eiderdowns. And there’s food and water as well, enough to last us for weeks.”

“But who’s responsible for all this?” Heddon demanded, as he followed her back to the cave. “And where did you get that torch?”

“I saw it in the sitting-room and hid it when that little beast wasn’t looking. I knew what he was going to do with me, you see.”

“But who is this you’re talking about?” Heddon asked.

“Why, don’t you know?” said Calliope. “It’s Polinoff, Boris Polinoff.”

For the next hour or more they sat together, Calliope telling her story, and Heddon his.

“And how long is he likely to keep us here?” Heddon asked.

“I should think till to-morrow morning,” she said. “It’s to-night that something’s going to happen.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Carmichael Spencer, the Commander of His Majesty's torpedo boat destroyer *Aeolus*, with Corfield looking over his shoulder, sat at the table in his cabin examining the large scale chart of the coast spread out in front of him. The blue-covered "Admiralty Tide Tables" and a signal pad covered with calculations lay at his elbow.

Foxy Elliott, with a tankard of beer at hand and the foulest of pipes in his mouth, lay stretched out on the settee along the ship's side under the row of scuttles idly flipping over the pages of an illustrated weekly. He affected to be uninterested in what the other two were discussing. In reality, he was all ears, and had heard every word that had been said.

"Damned good beer of yours, Spencer!" he suddenly remarked with a satisfied sigh, after imbibing noisily.

"Want some more?" asked the destroyer's captain, without looking round.

"Not just yet, thanks," Foxy replied. "But I shall in five minutes' time, old boy!"

"I wish to heaven you'd leave your beer and come down to hard tacks!" Corfield complained. "Can't you see that this is urgent?"

"Of course I see it!" said Foxy with a grin. "Haven't I been listening to you two blokes chin-wagging for over half-an-hour?"

"Well, why not come and lend a hand instead of sitting there smoking that pipe of yours and never saying a word?" Corfield demanded. "All you've done up to date is to ask for beer, and more beer."

“Yes, and it’ll be still more beer in a minute,” Foxy retorted pleasantly, draining what remained in the tankard. “I’m a glutton so far as beer is concerned, and I don’t keep it on board my hooker.”

“I wish to heaven you’d be serious!” Corfield observed.

“I never was more serious in my life,” the other replied. “But why should I interfere? No, Dick. Spencer and yourself had better go ahead and hatch up your scheme, and then, when it’s all nicely cut and dried, I’ll fall in with your suggestions. It’s not up to me to take a leading part in this entertainment. Spencer and yourself are the heroes of the piece—or perhaps the villains, I’m damned if I know which.”

Commander Spencer thought it time to have a word.

“Well, as I told you, I’ve got practically *carte blanche* to do as I think fit,” he put in. “I’m not allowed to use violence, that is, to open fire, unless violence is first offered to me. Now, here’s the cove where that house of yours is,” he went on, dabbing his forefinger on the chart. “And this, I take it, is the ledge of rock called the Shutters.”

“Yes,” Corfield agreed.

Foxy Elliott, uncoiling himself from the settee, sauntered over to the table with his hands in his trousers’ pockets.

“And so far as I can work it out from the Tide Tables,” Spencer continued, “it’s low water to-night, or rather to-morrow morning, between three and four.”

“There or thereabouts,” Foxy grunted.

“And there’s no moon to-night,” said Corfield.

“No,” said Spencer. “But what about the weather?” he went on to ask. “What’s it going to be like landing on an open beach? It’s blowing fairly fresh from the southward at

present, quite enough to make it damn' unpleasant if not dangerous."

"But if your people can't land, their's can't either," Foxy pointed out. "Anyhow, I've been messin' about in these parts quite long enough now to be a pretty good weather prophet, and if you ask me...." he hesitated, and glanced at Corfield.

"Well?" the others asked together.

"This breeze will die away at sundown or before," Foxy declared. "It'll be a dark, overcast night and flat calm, though perhaps a little bit of a swell from the southward. The cove's pretty well sheltered from due south," he added peering at the chart. "And provided you make for the beach in the southern part of the cove, that is, under the lee of this ledge of rock, I'll guarantee that I could get even my small dinghy ashore without shipping a bucketful of water. If you blokes don't believe what I say," he added, "chalk me down a liar!"

"I think Foxy's correct," Corfield observed.

"And so do I," said Spencer.

"Well, propound your scheme, Spencer," Elliott went on, his tone still bantering.

"What I suggest is this," said the destroyer's commander. "I'll weigh after dark, and between eleven and half-past I'll have my ship off your cove about half to three-quarters of a mile out. We'll have no lights showing, and I'll take particular care we make no noise. I'll have a searchlight ready at a moment's notice, and a whaler in the water, with half-a-dozen men besides the crew, ready to pull ashore at once if they are wanted."

"How will they be armed?" Corfield asked. "These fellows may be dangerous!"

“I’ll give ’em pistols,” said Spencer. “But they’ll have orders not to use them unless it’s really necessary. But besides pistols, they’ll have home-made truncheons, and if they like to get busy with those I shan’t worry if someone gets his head broken. They’ll be wearing blues and battle bowlers....”

“Battle bowlers?” Corfield asked.

“Steel helmets, you ass!” Foxy explained.

“And,” Spencer went on, “in case there’s a shimozzle in the dark, each man will wear a white armlet on his left arm. Then they’ll know who to smite and who not to. Is there anything else either of you can think of for my part of the show?”

“What are you going to do about the submarine or motor-boat, or whatever she is?” Corfield asked.

“I shall act according to circumstances,” the destroyer’s captain replied. “It’s no use laying down hard and fast rules as to what’s to be done when the unexpected always happens.”

“Quite,” agreed Corfield. “And who’s going to be in charge of your landing party?”

Spencer thought for a moment.

“I’ll put the Sub in charge,” he said. “Young Ossiter. He’s a bright lad, and will love a scrap if one comes off.”

Corfield, who had completely forgotten that Tony Ossiter was serving in the *Aeolus*, was pleased. Tony knew Polinoff by sight. And Tony was a stout fellow, eager for anything that was at all out of the usual.

“I’d better see young Ossiter before I leave,” Corfield said. “I know him and his people very well. I might put him wise

as to what to expect.”

“By all means,” Spencer agreed. “Now, what’s the rest of the scheme you have in your mind, Corfield?”

“If Foxy agrees,” Corfield started to explain. “I propose that he and I shall land this afternoon from the *Lora* further along the coast....”

“What’s that?” Elliott interrupted. “You’re not asking me to leave my ship while she’s under weigh, are you?”

“I thought Burge might remain in her,” his friend pointed out.

“I could lend you a couple of men if that’s any help,” Spencer put in.

Foxy thought for a moment.

“It’s against my rules,” he said, “but sooner than miss the fun I’ll risk it.”

“Good man!” Corfield exclaimed. “I knew you would!”

“But what’s the gentle idea?” Foxy wanted to know.

“You and I will be landed from the *Lora* before dark about a mile down the coast from the cove,” Corfield started to explain.

“Why not let me take you back to Porthleven, and then go on in the car?” Elliott suggested. “We’ve got lashings of time.”

“Because I’m certain the house is being watched,” said Corfield. “If we’re seen anywhere near it, the whole scheme will go phut.”

“I see,” Foxy nodded.

“Briefly, my idea is this,” Corfield went on to explain. “You and I, Foxy, will be landed about a mile down the coast

just before dark, the *Lora* having made a détour and coming from the southward, so as not to attract attention. We'll land in your dinghy, and we'll take haversacks with some food and water. We'll make our way along the beach as best we can till we get to the ledge of rocks to the southward of the cove, and there we'll hide above high water mark and see what happens. If the submarine appears and anyone lands, we'll see where they go and what they do. If, as I suspect, there's a secret passage from the beach up through the cliff to that cupboard I told you about in the house, we shall probably find the entrance. The rest...." and he paused for a moment. "The rest is on the lap of the gods."

"You'd better lend us a Verey pistol with a few cartridges," he went on, turning to Spencer. "Give me three red and, say, half a dozen white. If anything's happening ashore, I'll fire a red light as a signal to you to send your whaler in with the men. I'll use the white lights in case they're necessary for lighting up the place; but unless I fire two red, one after the other, which will mean I'm in trouble, don't switch on your searchlight, for it will only give the show away."

"I've got you," Spencer nodded. "What about arms, and so on?"

"I've got a pistol of my own. What about you, Foxy?"

"Spencer had better lend me one," Elliott grunted.

"I will," said the destroyer's commander. "And don't forget your white armlets. I don't want my people to run foul of you. White handkerchiefs will do."

"I'll remember," said Corfield.

"Is there anything else you want?"

Corfield thought for a moment.

“Yes,” he said. “A couple of decent electric torches, and I’d be obliged if you’d chop me off a couple of eighteen inch lengths off a boathook stave. They’ll come in handy if it comes to a scrap. They’d better have a becket at one end so that they’ll hang from the wrist.”

“Proper bloodthirsty old blighter, isn’t he?” said Foxy, looking at him with a smile.

Corfield looked back at Elliott.

“You’d be ruddy well bloodthirsty,” he said, “if ... if ...” he hesitated.

“If there happened to be a lady in the case?” Foxy asked, his voice suddenly gentle.

“Well ... er ... yes,” Corfield was forced to admit.

“Well, I’m all for drinking her health,” said Spencer, ringing the bell hanging over his table. “Having done which, we’ll drink again to the damnation of our friend ... what did you say the blighter’s name was?”

“Polinoff. Blast him!” said Corfield, as the door opened and Spencer’s steward came into the cabin.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

As Foxy Elliott had predicted, the evening came down dark and overcast with hardly a breath of wind. Making a wide détour to avoid being seen by any possible watchers near the bungalow, the *Lora*, shortly before dark, had crept in to within a few hundred yards of the rocky shore, and landed Corfield and Elliott about three quarters of a mile down the coast from what, for want of a better name, they referred to as "Bungalow Cove". There was a little swell on the beach; but choosing a sheltered spot under the lee of a fang of rock jutting seaward, they had been put ashore without much difficulty in the yacht's dinghy sculled by a fat, cheerful bluejacket lent from the *Aeolus*.

To avoid moving while they might yet be seen, they had hidden themselves in the rocks above high-water mark. They had watched the dinghy return to the yacht, saw her hoisted on board, and had then seen the *Lora* standing out to sea under her motor until her familiar hull faded away against the faint traces of the sunset which still lingered in the cloudy sky to the westward.

When she was finally out of sight and darkness had come, they moved off along the beach feeling like a couple of conspirators, being careful to make no noise and to keep well under the cliffs. Rounding a rocky promontory, they came to the hiding place which Corfield had selected, a small stretch of shingle behind a smooth, water-worn granite boulder at the foot of a towering cliff, from which they had a clear view out to sea. By turning his head, Corfield could also see the dim shape of the bungalow silhouetted against the skyline. There

were no lights in any of its windows. Not a soul seemed to be stirring.

They had landed shortly before ten, and it was now over twenty minutes past midnight by Corfield's luminous wrist-watch. Lying there on the shingle talking in low whispers to his friend, while keeping a sharp lookout to seaward and on the cliffs overhead, he was beginning to feel cold, and cramped, and uncomfortable. He had never realised that a summer night could be so chilly, and bitterly regretted that he was not more warmly dressed. It was annoying, also, to say the least of it, not to be able to smoke. The glare of a match or the glow of a pipe, however, might have led to their discovery, and he didn't dare to risk it.

But neither Corfield nor his fellow adventurer were sorry for the flask of raw whisky that they had remembered at the last moment before landing. They were grateful enough for an occasional nip and a bite at a sandwich, though to Corfield neither came up to the pipe for which his soul yearned.

Time and time again they had gazed anxiously seaward to see if they could detect any traces of the *Aeolus* in the offing. If Spencer had stuck to his programme, the destroyer must have been in her station for an hour or more, and once or twice, searching the horizon with their night glasses, they thought they caught a glimpse of her long, low shape a good distance out. But the night was too dark to make certain. The shadows on the sea were too baffling, and what they had seen might easily have been the ridge of a larger swell than usual rolling gently shorewards.

It must have been at about five and twenty minutes to one, when Corfield was again sweeping the horizon, that his

companion uttered a low exclamation and clutched him by the arm.

“What is it?” Corfield whispered.

“I heard the sound of a motor up there on top of the cliffs,” said Elliott, listening intently.

“What? Up there by the house?”

“Yes. But don’t talk. Perhaps I’ll hear it again.”

Corfield, his heart thumping, put a hand to his ear, the better to listen. For a minute or more he lay, hardly daring to breathe. But never a sound came to his ears except the soughing of the gentle breeze as it eddied fitfully round about the cliffs, and the swishing of the little swell breaking on the beach.

Elliott, prone and motionless, still had his eye rivetted on the cliff edge overhead while straining his ears to catch the slightest sound.

“I can’t hear anything more,” he was forced to admit at last. “But it was the engine of a car, that I’ll swear.”

“Look!” he suddenly broke off, his voice full of suppressed excitement. “D’you see that light?”

Corfield had already noticed it—a brilliant pin-point which had suddenly flashed from a spot beneath the bungalow and seemingly about ten or fifteen feet below the crest of the cliff.

There it was again—and again, and from the very same spot!

Whoever was using it must be on the face of the cliff itself. Did it mean that someone with a carelessly covered lantern was moving up or down that dangerous path that he and Heddon had investigated? If so, the man was risking his neck.

The light flickered on again, then disappeared.

It was too white and too concentrated for an ordinary lantern, Corfield came to the conclusion. Moreover, it had showed in the same place as before. It was stationary.

With his eyes rivetted to the spot, Corfield opened his mouth to ask Foxy what he thought about it. But the light suddenly showed again, and then started to blink rapidly in and out, in and out—short-short-short—pause—long, long, long—short, short, short.

By heavens! He had it now.

“It’s Morse!” he whispered, hardly able to breathe in his excitement. “They’re signalling out to sea!”

“To that submarine?” he heard his companion ask in his ear.

“Looks like it!” Corfield grunted. “Keep your eyes skinned out to sea! Something’ll probably happen before long! I’ll try to read what they’re making!” he added hurriedly, as the light continued to flicker.

His knowledge of the Morse code was rusty through years of disuse, but trying to concentrate, he kept his eyes fixed on the spot.

Short-short-short, that was S. Long-long-long, that was O. Short-short-short, that was S again.

“Lord!” he muttered aloud, piecing it together in his mind.

It was S.O.S.—S.O.S., the wireless distress signal commonly used at sea!

S-O-S. There it went again!

But who could be in distress on the cliff at this time of night, and why in the name of all that was holy should they flash their signal out to sea? There seemed no rhyme or reason for it.

Then, as he watched, the flashes changed.

Short-short-long, that was U. Long-short, N. Long-short-short, D. Short, E. Short-long-short—damn! Corfield had forgotten what that meant, and could not stop to probe his memory.

Long-short, N. Short, E. Short-long, A. Long, T. Short-short-short-short, H.

He had missed one letter, but with a gasp of surprise realised that the word could only be ’underneath’.

Who was underneath? What in hades did it all mean?

But the light continued to work.

Short-short-short-short, H. Long-long-long, O. Short-short-long, U. Short-short-short, S. Short, E. ‘House’.

‘UNDERNEATH HOUSE’ had been spelt out letter by letter!

Then—long-short-long-short, C. Short-long, A. Short-long-short-short, L. Short-long-short-short, L again. Short-short, I. Long-long-long, O. Short-long-long-short, he missed that. Short, that was E. A pause, and then four shorts, which was H.

Corfield had seen enough. His heart suddenly felt as heavy as lead within him.

‘S.O.S.—S.O.S.—S.O.S.’ had been spelled out. ‘Un-derneath house. Calliope H,’ which could only mean Calliope Heddon!

Calliope, underneath the house, and in danger!

Did it mean she was stuck on that horrible cliff path unable to get up or down? If so, how could she have got there? Might she have been brought out to the bungalow in the car which Elliott had heard, and have managed to make her

escape? Even now Polinoff, who could not be alone, might be looking for her.

He didn't even know that Calliope knew the Morse code. Nevertheless, she must have flashed off her signal into the blue on the off-chance that someone would see and act upon it.

Calliope was in danger! That was enough. Hurriedly warning Elliott to remain where he was, and to use his discretion if anything happened, above all, to fire the red Verey light if he considered the men from the *Aeolus* should be landed, Corfield, after making certain he had his pistol and electric torch with him, scrambled to his feet.

"I hope I shan't be long," he bent down to whisper in his companion's ear. "Do you understand what to do?"

"Of course, you old ass!" Foxy laughed. "You leave it to me, but for God's sake don't break your neck!"

Foxy Elliott was beginning to enjoy himself.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

MAKING his way across a patch of open shingle, Corfield moved cautiously along the foot of the cliff towards where the path came down to the beach. He had little difficulty in finding it, and within three minutes had started to worm his way up on all fours. He passed the little stream and the bank of slippery earth where they had seen the footmarks, and in a far shorter time than he had thought it possible, found himself close to the top of the cliff.

He had already passed the place where he had seen the light. Yet there was no trace of anything to account for it.

'Underneath the house,' Calliope's signal had said—Underneath!

Could he take the word literally? In other words, was Calliope immured in some sort of a cellar or tunnel dug under the bungalow itself, a cellar which had an opening or window of some sort concealed in the face of the cliff and from which she had signalled?

He was contemplating the risk of switching on his torch to search the face of the cliff, when, like a miniature searchlight, a little ray of light suddenly stabbed the darkness from behind a buttress of rock about ten feet from where he sat.

He moved hurriedly down the sloping path until he was immediately beneath it, only to find, on looking up, that the rock overhung the path at a horrible angle and was quite inaccessible. But from somewhere on top of that rock, barely eight feet overhead, someone, probably Calliope, was again using a lamp.

Nearly frantic with anxiety and impatience, he moved up the path once more, and flicked on his torch to examine the face of the cliff. The momentary flash showed a narrow zig-zag cleft travelling diagonally across the face of the rock. It was no more than a slit, but it led upwards, towards the place where he wanted to go. At the best it would just give room for his toes, though if he lost his foothold he must fall a full fifty feet onto the beach beneath.

But the risk had to be taken, and blessing the forethought which had caused him to wear thin, rubber-soled shoes, he steeled his heart and began the ascent.

For the first few feet the going was comparatively easy. But he very soon found that the buttress sloped outwards, so that even with his fingers hooked in any little projection he could find, he had the greatest difficulty in keeping his feet in the cleft. The strain on his muscles began to tell, but spreadeagled against the rock like a spider on a wall, he managed to edge his way along, inch by inch, feeling for every hold. It was a dizzy, nerve-racking method of progression.

His right foot slipped once, and, hanging on by his hands, he gave himself up for lost. Swinging in his legs, however, he managed, more by luck than anything else, to find the crack with his right foot, and, exerting all his strength, was just able to recover himself. Trembling, feeling physically sick, he remained for a moment to recover his nerve before moving on. There was no going back. To retreat was even more dangerous than to advance.

Another few feet, and he found to his joy that the side of the rock became perpendicular. His progress became less painful, and looking up he could see that the rock terminated

about four feet overhead. He moved on, faster than before, the buttress gradually beginning to slope inwards. Haste and over-confidence, however, nearly led to his undoing. He was just about to transfer his weight to his right hand, with which he was clutching the wiry stem of a low-growing bush, when it came away by the roots, bringing a clod of turf with it. Again, nearly blinded by falling earth, he all but tumbled headlong.

An eternity seemed to pass before he finally felt his fingers resting on level turf. He moved on until it was level with his chest, and then, with an effort, got one knee over the edge and fell forward on to a narrow grassy plateau, a mere ledge about eight feet down from the summit of the cliff, which he could see above him. Panting with the exertion, sweating in every pore, he lay there for a moment to recover his strength.

Then, on his hands and knees, he started to move to the right. He had not travelled more than a yard when he heard someone speak. Raising his head, he listened.

"It's no use, daddy," he heard a woman's voice say—Calliope's voice.

His heart bounded with joy. At last he was somewhere near her.

"Calliope!" he whispered. "Calliope! Where are you?"

"Who's that?" he heard her ask sharply, her voice seeming to come out of the rock from somewhere over his left shoulder.

"It's me!" he said, louder this time. "Dick Corfield!"

"Dick!" she exclaimed. "Oh, thank God! Daddy! daddy! He's come! He's here!"

So Heddon was there too. That could only mean that he also had been waylaid. But had he been waylaid before or after going to the police about Calliope's disappearance? The point was rather important.

"But where are you?" he went on to ask. "Your voice sounds quite close; but I can't see anything!"

"We're in a cellar underneath the bungalow," she replied, her voice trembling with suppressed emotion. "It's got a hole in the wall looking over the beach and the sea, at which I'm standing."

"Show that light of yours," Corfield whispered, standing up. "And for God's sake don't talk too loud, someone may hear!"

Something clicked, and the gleam of a torch flashed out from a hole in the rock about level with his shoulders. Tearing down a tangle of hanging vegetation he leant forward, and Calliope's hand was in his.

"Oh, you darling!" she murmured with a catch in her voice. "I knew you'd come! I felt it all along. We've been here...."

"There's no time to explain now!" he interrupted. "I must get you out, at once! Give me your hands."

It was his idea to free them from their prison, to hide them somewhere on the top of the cliff, which seemed easy of access, then to rejoin Foxy by the cliff path, and to wait for what happened next.

"But it's no use, Dick," she answered. "The hole's barred!"

"Barred!" he exclaimed, his spirits falling to zero.

He switched on his torch and shone it through his half-closed fingers on the opening. Calliope was right. It was

barred from top to bottom with rusty iron rods fully an inch thick and barely six inches apart. Top and bottom their ends were set into the solid rock.

Switching off his light he seized one of them in his hand, put his feet against the wall for leverage, and tried to wrench it away. Sweating, straining, he exerted every ounce of strength in his body, but the thing would not budge. He tried another, another, and yet a fourth. He tried them all, pulling and grunting. But his efforts were useless. Nothing short of a file, or a hacksaw, or a stick of dynamite could release them that way.

"It's no go!" he said miserably, panting after his exertions. "I suppose there's nothing in there I can use as a lever—a crowbar, or anything?"

"No," said Heddon, joining his daughter at the opening.

Corfield thought over the situation. Whatever he did he could not leave Calliope where she was. There was Polinoff to be considered.

"Is there anyone in the house?" he whispered.

"I don't know," Heddon replied. "We've been down here for over twelve hours."

"And they put you in through the cupboard in the sitting-room?"

"Yes."

"Did you manage to go to the police?" Corfield anxiously queried.

"No," Heddon was forced to confess. "They got me out here on a cock and bull story about seeing the Chief Constable."

“Oh damn!” the commander muttered. “Look here,” he went on to say. “I’ve got the key of that cupboard on me, the key that man left in the lock the night we were visited. Can I possibly get you out that way?”

“I believe I can help,” Calliope broke in, her voice hopeful. “When they bundled me down here I saw what they did. They opened the trap-door by moving the second shelf from the top at the back of the cupboard. They swung it to the right, remember, to the right! The second shelf. It pivots in the middle, somehow.”

“Then I’m damned if I don’t have a shot at getting you out that way!” Corfield announced.

Calliope, however, suddenly thought better of it.

“But, Dick,” she asked, her voice very anxious. “Suppose they’re in the house? No, I don’t think you’d better try it. I ... I couldn’t bear it if anything happened to you! Don’t try it, Dick! Promise me you won’t!”

She reached out, took his hand in hers, and squeezed it.

“Don’t try it, Dick! Don’t!” she went on, her voice full of entreaty. “Never mind about us. We shall get out sooner or later, and shan’t come to any harm. I was a selfish pig to suggest ... to suggest....”

“But I must!” Corfield broke in. “D’you think now I’ve found you I’m going to leave you at the mercy of that swine, Polinoff?—No, I’m going into that house whatever happens, and if that little brute gets in my way, God help him!”

“But he’s not alone!” Calliope wailed. “There were three or four of them. For God’s sake, Dick, for my sake, don’t try it! Don’t!”

But Corfield had made up his mind.

“It’s no good trying to prevent me, old thing,” he said. “Really, it isn’t. With any luck I’ll have you out in ten minutes—au revoir.”

He wrung her hand, released it, and moved away.

“Dick!” he heard her call after him, her tone agonised. “Oh, Dick! Come back! Come back!”

For a moment he hesitated, his heart riven at the sound of her voice. But what was the good of prolonging the argument? His way was clear, and he did not wish to be dissuaded. Calliope must be rescued, and her father too. That, for the time being, was all that really mattered.

Negotiating without much difficulty a rampart of turf which led to the edge of the cliff, a way, if he had known of it, which would have given him easier access to the cellar window than the way he had come, he soon found himself at the summit with the low garden wall close ahead. Peering cautiously over it he saw there were no lights in the bungalow, no signs of anyone being present.

In a moment he was over the wall, and dropping to his knees felt in his pocket for his pistol. With the weapon ready for use he crept across the little garden towards the house.

Reaching the steps leading to the veranda he paused to listen, heard nothing, and then moved on towards the French window leading into the sitting-room. He put his hand up and noiselessly turned the handle. The door swung open without a sound, and he was inside.

He stopped again to listen, crouching on his hands and knees. There was no smell of fresh tobacco smoke, nothing which led him to suppose that it might be occupied. Overjoyed at his luck he was about to move across the floor towards the cupboard when he heard the faintest rustle, as

though someone had stirred within a few feet of him. With his pistol ready and his nerves tense he waited for what might happen.

Yes. Someone was in the room. He could hear the man's quick breathing.

"Who's there?" came a frightened voice, as the beam of an electric torch flickered out and moved along the floor towards him.

Corfield did not wait. Cramming the pistol into his pocket, he jumped to his feet and hurled himself in the direction of the light, to find himself struggling with someone in an armchair.

The torch fell to the floor and went out. Feeling for the man's neck, he forced him backwards. His opponent, who was small and wiry, struggled with all his might, but could do nothing. Caught at a hopeless disadvantage, he was soon fighting for breath with Corfield's fingers round his throat.

Not wishing to throttle the fellow, Corfield released his grasp, knelt on his chest, and pinioned both his wrists in his left hand.

"You'd better be quiet!" he grunted, as the man wriggled beneath him. "Lie quiet, you fool, unless you want a crack on the head!"

"And now we'll see who you are!" he added, feeling for his torch and shining it on the other's face.

It was Symons—Symons, the rat-faced little man whom Corfield had interviewed; the man who was supposed to come on alternate days to do the odd jobs at the bungalow and to run the electric lighting plant. Symons, the fellow

whom Corfield strongly suspected of being the nocturnal intruder who had vanished through the cupboard.

“And what the deuce are you doing here?” he demanded fiercely, releasing him.

“An’ I wants to know what you’re doin’ ’ere!” Symons retorted, his voice truculent. “I’m caretaker ’ere, if you wants to know, an’ you comes breakin’ into the ’ouse at this time o’ night an’ assaultin’ a chap what’s doin’ ’is duty, that’s what you’re doin’! I’ll ’ave the law on you for this, see if I don’t. You’ve ’urt me, you ’ave, squeezin’ my throat like that. Damn near throttled me!” He gingerly felt his neck and throat.

“So you’re the caretaker, are you?” Corfield laughed.

“ ’Aven’t I said so already? What I wants to know is, ’oo are you?”

“You’ll find that out soon enough when I hand you over to the police.”

“When I ’ands you over, you means. You’re the one ’oo’s done the burglin’!” Symons flung back.

“It’s no use lying!” Corfield angrily exclaimed. “This house, if you want to know, was occupied until this morning. Who told you to come here and take care of it?”

Symons’ tone changed.

“That isn’t nothin’ to do with you,” he replied, still trying to brazen it out. “I tells you, I’m caretaker ’ere, an’ my wife’s cook.”

“I’ve no time to....” Corfield suddenly stopped.

His ear had caught the throb of a motor. It was coming nearer. There was no time to be lost.

“Get up!” he ordered sharply.

“An’ supposin’ I don’t, what then,” asked Symons, a look of triumph in his eyes. “You’re too late. They’re comin’!”

Corfield whipped out his pistol.

“Get up, if you don’t want a bullet through you!” he snapped.

For a moment the other man hesitated, and then thought better of it. The tone of Corfield’s voice warned him that he was in earnest. He shambled to his feet.

“Now go to the cupboard and unlock it!”

“Which cupboard?”

“Walk straight across the room,” said Corfield, placing his pistol muzzle in the small of the man’s back. “I’ll direct you. No nonsense now, or this thing may go off.”

The sound of the approaching car was louder. It had turned the corner of the lane not fifty yards from the front door.

“Open it!” he ordered.

“I’ve lost me key, mister!”

“Well, I’ll open it,” said Corfield, producing his own key from his trousers’ pocket and flinging open the door. “Now, get inside!... Get inside, I say!” when the man showed signs of hesitation.

Symons obeyed.

Corfield entered after him, and closed the door. It shut with a thud. He heard the click of the lock.

“Now, open the trap-door!” Corfield commanded, shining his torch on the second shelf.

“Suppose I don’t know ’ow?” asked Symons, anxious to gain time.

“Of course you know how!” Corfield angrily exclaimed. “You’ve been in and out of this place before, haven’t you?”

“What d’yer mean?”

“Precisely what I say! Open that trap-door and look slippy about it if you don’t want to be hurt!”

He emphasised his remark by taking Symons’s neck in his right hand and squeezing it, not really hard, but sufficiently hard to be uncomfortable.

“ ’Ow!” the little man squeaked. “Let go, can’t yer? There’s no use in getting nasty about it.”

“Then open it!” said the commander, tightening his grasp.

Symons took the shelf in both hands, swung it to the right, and a trap-door lifted noiselessly at their feet. Releasing him, Corfield shone his torch down the hole and could see steps vanishing into the darkness.

Pushing the man before him he forced him to descend.

“How d’you shut the damned thing?” he asked, halting his prisoner.

“Pull the door towards you,” Symons said. “There’s an ’andle on the underside.”

The trap-door came down with a thud.

“An’ now you can’t get out, mister!” Symons exclaimed, his voice triumphant. “You’ve copped me, mister; but you’ve blinkin’ well copped yourself! Presently my friends’ll be along, then you’ll....”

“Get on down and don’t talk so much!” Corfield burst out.

Symons went off into a shrill cackle of laughter, until another prod in the back from the pistol muzzle warned him that his mirth was unseemly.

“So here I am,” said Corfield, reaching the bottom with his prisoner, where they were met by Calliope and Heddon. “I’ve brought Symons with me. I found him in the sitting-room. Better search his pockets, Heddon—Hands up, Symons!”

With the torch on his face and a pistol pointed at his stomach, the man had no option but to obey, and was duly relieved of his knife, a hank of stout twine, a small automatic pistol, fully loaded, and a packet of ammunition. The other miscellaneous contents they allowed him to retain.

“You’d better have this,” said Corfield, handing the pistol to Heddon, who shrank from it as though it were a snake.

“But I don’t want that beastly thing!” Heddon protested, drawing back. “What should I do with it?”

“Shoot someone before they shoot you,” Corfield grunted.

“If you don’t take it, Daddy, I will,” Calliope put in. “Give it to me, Dick!”

“D’you mind her having it?” Corfield asked.

“Not if she really wants it,” said Heddon.

“Be careful,” said Corfield, handing it to her. “They’re tricky things.”

“Don’t worry,” she replied. “I know how they work.”

“And the next thing,” the commander added cheerfully, “is to find our way out. We can’t go back by the way we came. A car drove up to the house just as I came down, and those chaps are in the house by now. We must get out through the tunnel. It opens somewhere down on the beach.”

“But it’s impossible, Dick!” Calliope exclaimed, her voice tremulous. “I’ve already explored! There’s a door some way down, a great heavy door. Nothing on earth will budge it if we haven’t got the key!”

“But....”

“That’s what I was going to tell you when you went off in such a hurry!” she continued, her voice nearly breaking. “But you wouldn’t stop to listen. And now....”

“Heddon, see if Symons has got the key!” Corfield broke in. “Quick!”

“He hasn’t. I’ve been through all his pockets.”

“How does that door open, Symons?” Corfield demanded, his voice threatening.

“With a key, which I ’aven’t got,” the man sneered. “You’re fair copped, mister. The only way you’ll get out is when my friends lets you out through that ’ole we came down. An’ they’ll be ’ere in a minute!”

Corfield could have kicked himself.

“So it seems I’ve torn it, badly!” he said ruefully. “I’m sorry for making such a damnable mess of things!”

“My dear, don’t apologise,” Calliope answered bravely. “It’s not your fault, Dick. And ... and if there’s one thing we can be thankful for, it’s that you’re here with us. That’s all to the good, isn’t it?”

Corfield himself wasn’t so sure. Cooped up in this sort of dungeon he was impotent. Everything now depended upon Foxy.

“All the same, I think we’ll have a look at that door,” he said. “You, Symons, can lead the way. Then you, Calliope, and then you, Heddon. I’ll bring up the rear in case of accidents!”

They made their way into the passage; but not all the battering and pushing in the world could move that oaken,

iron-bound door set into the solid rock. They were trapped, hopelessly.

“So you sees I was tellin’ the truth, mister,” said Symons with a chuckle of glee. “I told you you’d fair copped yourself, didn’t I now? An’ my friends won’t be ’arf savage when they finds you, ’cos you’re the bloke they wants to come across! You’re the one who’s ’bin spoilin’ their game, and they wants their revenge, you see if they don’t!”

“Oh, shut up!” Corfield muttered angrily.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

"And what's going to happen now, Dick?" Calliope asked after a pause, her voice anxious.

"We'll start off by tying up Symons and putting something in his mouth so that he can't sing out," Corfield replied.

"I warns you it'll be the worse for you if you 'urts me," Symons muttered.

"You won't be hurt if you obey orders.—Heddon, cut me off two lengths of that twine!"

"You'd better cover him with your pistol, Calliope," said the commander when this had been done. "If he tries to bolt, just let him have one in the legs. You can't possibly miss. Now, Symons, your hands behind your back, and don't forget we're three to one!"

A few moments saw him with his hands tied, his feet securely lashed together, and his mouth gagged with Heddon's and Corfield's handkerchiefs. This done, they sat him down on the floor of the passage with his back to the door.

"What next?" Heddon asked.

"I'm going back to the cave to hold 'em up," the commander said. "Calliope, you stay here and keep an eye on our little friend."

Followed by Heddon, whose agitated breathing he could hear close behind him, Corfield crept noiselessly back along the passage, halting at intervals to listen. He could hear no sound, and entering the cave, pistol in hand, started to move along the rocky wall to the left towards the barred opening

looking out over the sea. Peering out, he could see nothing except the blackness of the night.

Pocketing his pistol, he seized the lower end of one of the iron rods and tried again to wrench it from its fastening. It seemed to shake a little as he pulled it.

“Catch hold of this bar!” he whispered. “I believe it’s loose! If we can wrench it away we can get out!—Put your hands between mine!—Yes, that’s it.—Now then—one, two, three—heave!”

Something cracked. The bottom end of the bar came away.

“She’s coming!” Corfield murmured, his voice triumphant. “Another pull and I believe we’ll do it! Stand by to tug again when I give the word!”

He put one foot against the wall for better leverage.

“Now—one, two, three—heave!”

The rod suddenly came away in their hands, and Corfield fell backwards on to the floor with Heddon on top of him.

He picked himself up and helped his companion to rise.

“We can get out!” he exclaimed breathlessly, going to the opening and feeling for the gap with his hands. “Go back and tell Calliope to....”

“Do nothing of the sort!” suddenly came a voice from behind them. “Stay where you are, Commander Corfield and put your hands up! We’ve got you covered.”

Corfield whipped round and pulled out his weapon. Even as he did so a dot of light about the size of a shilling came out of the darkness, and fell on his right shoulder. He jumped aside to avoid it, bringing up his arm to shoot.

But he was too late. Before he could pull the trigger a pistol spat, its report magnified by the cave almost to the

sound of a 12 bore. He felt a searing pain between his right shoulder and elbow. His arm went limp. The pistol dropped from his nerveless fingers and fell to the floor.

"Damn you!" he muttered, gritting his teeth with mingled rage and pain.

The invisible man laughed unpleasantly.

"I told you to put your hands up, and you didn't," he said. "But I didn't shoot to kill. Oh, no, Commander Corfield, I don't want to kill you—not yet, anyway. That little light you may have noticed is a new gadget of mine, a night sight for close-range work with a pistol. Wherever that spot of light falls when I cock the trigger, my bullet is bound to strike. Ingenious, isn't it?

"No," he added, guessing what was in Corfield's mind. "Don't try to pick up your pistol. Next time I shoot to kill, and you'll notice this very ingenious little light of mine is hovering somewhere near your heart."

Nursing his right elbow, Corfield could feel the blood trickling down his arm and through his fingers. The wound hurt abominably, though by some lucky chance the bone appeared to be untouched.

"Perhaps you'll realise I'm in earnest," the taunting voice went on.

The cave suddenly became flooded with the glare of a powerful electric lamp on a wandering lead which disappeared up the steps leading to the cupboard in the sitting-room above.

Confronting Corfield and Heddon were four masked men, all armed with pistols. One, the smallest, he recognised as Polinoff. Another was the chauffeur who had met Heddon in

Helston and brought him out to the bungalow. The other two were strangers.

Polinoff, motioning with his pistol, said something in a language that Corfield did not understand, and a man carrying a piece of sacking, pushed past them and hung it over the window.

“You two had better stand apart,” Polinoff went on in English. “I don’t want you whispering together.—In fact, I think the old gentleman had better be taken upstairs. I’ve no use for him just at present.” He gave an order, and two of his men came forward and tried to take Heddon by the arms.

“I won’t go!” he exclaimed, backing against the wall with clenched fists.

“Don’t be a damned fool!” Polinoff laughed.

“I tell you I won’t go!” Heddon shouted, lashing out at the face of the nearest man.

The fellow, who happened to be the burly chauffeur, instantly caught his arm and twisted it behind his back until Heddon winced with the pain of it.

“Go on! Take him upstairs!” Polinoff ordered roughly.

“And what are we to do with ’im when we gets ’im up there?” the chauffeur inquired.

“Turn him over to the others,” the Russian ordered. “Tell them to tie him up. I want you back here at once!”

Still resisting, Heddon was half pushed, half carried across the cave and up the flight of steps leading to the cupboard.

“And now, Corfield, I can deal with you,” Polinoff snarled.

He came across with his pistol levelled at Corfield’s stomach, and stood staring at him with his eyes glittering through the holes in his mask.

Corfield did not reply.

“So you don’t answer,” Polinoff jeered. “Perhaps that’ll teach you better manners.” He struck him across the face with his disengaged hand.

“You damned little cur!” the commander exclaimed, white with fury, as he stepped back a pace and measured his distance.

What happened next took place in a flash. With his eyes still on Polinoff’s, Corfield suddenly seized his right wrist with his left hand and swept the pistol aside, forcing it backwards with all his strength when clear of his body. The weapon went off, the bullet flattening itself harmlessly against the roof.

The Russian shouted for help, but even as he did so Corfield, kicking with all his might, swept him off his feet.

The man behind started forward to help his master, but at that moment there came another diversion in the shape of a report from the other side of the cave. The man, shot through the shoulder, dropped his pistol and fell with a howl. Out of the tail of his eye, Corfield caught sight of Calliope with a smoking pistol in her hand, standing in the entrance to the passage. She came into the cave.

Polinoff, on his hands and knees, had started to rise to his feet. In spite of his wounded arm, Corfield flung himself down on top of him and bore him backwards, feeling for his throat with his left hand.

He caught a glimpse of Calliope standing over the man, who lay groaning on the floor. Then there came a sudden rush of feet from the stairs. She shouted something unintelligible, and raised her pistol and fired. But her shot evidently went

wide. The next thing that Corfield knew was that he was lifted bodily off his victim and hurled roughly aside.

Half stunned through striking his head on the hard floor, he tried to rise. But an overpowering weight lay across his chest. Sick and dizzy, almost fainting with the pain of his wounded arm, he realised that the burly man in the chauffeur's uniform was kneeling over him. The fellow's mask had dropped off, and his coarse, bloated face, bestial with rage, seemed to dance before Corfield's eyes. The man lifted his fist and struck savagely at the commander's head. The blow landed on his left cheek, and squirming aside, Corfield tried to avoid the next.

"Ah, would yer!" the man grunted, raising his fist and striking again, this time on the point of the chin.

Corfield felt the dull impact of the blow and the warm taste of blood in his mouth. He seemed to be aching all over, and was too weak really to struggle.

The man struck once more, and he was past caring what happened. Everything went black. His senses flickered out and left him. It was the first time in his life he had really fainted.

* * * *

It must have been ten minutes or a quarter of an hour later that he opened his eyes again to find himself sitting with his back to the wall of the cave and dripping with water. His wounded arm, which had begun to stiffen, hurt excruciatingly.

Polinoff, standing close beside him, was looking down with his mask off and an evil smile on his face, while the leering chauffeur, holding the bucket whose contents he had recently emptied over him, stood by his master. On the other

side of the cave, tied in a chair which Corfield recognised as having come from the sitting-room, was Calliope.

Her back was towards him. He could not see her face, but a horrible anxiety came over him as he noticed she did not move. Pray heaven she had not been hurt.

“That’ll do,” said Polinoff abruptly. “He’s come to.—Bring in Symons!”

The chauffeur, with a grin, put down the bucket and disappeared into the passage.

Polinoff lit a cigarette and strolled over to Corfield, kicking savagely at his legs.

“And now, my friend, I’m going to show you how I treat people who displease me!” he exclaimed, glaring at his victim with a baleful look in his eyes.

“You damned cur!” Corfield muttered weakly, his heart full of rage as he looked at Calliope’s back. “What have you done to Miss Heddon?”

“Miss Heddon became slightly obstreperous, so I was forced to quieten her.... Oh no! Nothing rough, I assure you,” as he saw the look in Corfield’s eyes. “Merely a prick with a hypodermic needle. I wouldn’t hurt Miss Heddon for the world,” he went on sneeringly. “You see I’m rather fond of her, and when you’ve been got rid of, perhaps she’ll change her mind and be fond of me!”

“You can keep her name out of it,” Corfield growled. “But you talk pretty glibly about getting rid of me. Rather easier said than done, isn’t it?”

“People who climb cliffs at night sometimes fall and break their necks,” said Polinoff, grinning and leaning forward to puff out a cloud of smoke in his prisoner’s face. “I propose

that you shall break yours, but not just yet. I've got other things to do first."

Corfield laughed; but his heart was as heavy as lead within him. He realised Polinoff was in deadly earnest.

"But here's our little friend," the Russian continued, as the chauffeur reappeared from the passage pushing Symons in front of him.

"Well, Symons? What have you got to say for yourself?"

"Say for meself?" the little man blustered, looking at Polinoff with frightened eyes. " 'Ow d'you mean?"

Polinoff took a sudden step towards him, his face quivering with anger.

"Didn't I put you on watch in the house?" he shouted, his voice tremulous with passion. "And yet, you damned little reptile, you allow yourself to be captured and trussed up!—I paid you to do as I ordered, and...."

"I was attacked," Symons interrupted, licking his dry lips. "I didn't 'ave no chance!"

"I paid you to take no chances!" Polinoff broke in. "You had a pistol. You didn't even use it.—Well, I've a short way with people like you.—Stand aside, Grimes!"

He motioned the chauffeur away, and advanced on Symons with his automatic in his hand.

The poor wretch, realising what was coming, fell on his knees whimpering for mercy and tried to clasp Polinoff round the legs. The latter kicked him roughly aside, and before Corfield realised what was happening, there came the sharp crack of a pistol. Symons, shot through the head at the distance of a few feet, fell over backwards.

“So that’s that,” said the Russian casually. “Now, Corfield, perhaps you’ll realise I’m in earnest.”

The commander, horror-stricken at what had just occurred, stared at him in amazement.

“Are you mad?” he managed to gasp. “Do you realise you’ve murdered him?”

Polinoff shrugged his shoulders.

“You can call it what you like,” he replied, casually replacing the weapon in his pocket. “Presently I shall deal with you, though in a different way.”

“You devil!” Corfield burst out.

“Just a little tumble over the cliffs,” Polinoff went on. “It’ll all be over in an instant. You have ten or twelve minutes to live, Corfield. Ten or twelve....”

But Corfield was not listening to what he was saying. His ear had caught the sound of a faint whistle from out at sea, which came in through the opening in the outer wall of the cave. There it was again—short, long, short. Letter R of the Morse code.

His heart leapt. Something was happening. Before long Foxy Elliott would take action.

Glancing at Calliope, he noticed she had not moved her position.

“You don’t seem to be very interested in what I’m saying,” said Polinoff, who did not seem to have heard the whistle blasts.

Corfield’s heart was throbbing with excitement, but he managed to simulate a yawn of indifference.

“No,” he said. “I’m not really interested. I think you said I had ten or twelve minutes to live, didn’t you?”

“I did,” said Polinoff. “I shall....” he broke off as there came a rush of footsteps down the steps and one of his men, a complete stranger to Corfield, burst into the cave and gabbled excitedly in his own language, gesticulating the while.

Polinoff answered in the same tongue. The man hastily retired by the way he had come.

“I have some business to attend to now,” the Russian added, turning to his prisoner. “But I shall be back before long to finish our little argument. I’ll give you about ten minutes from now, so if you want to say any prayers you’d better begin.”

“What’ll I do with this ’ere?” the chauffeur demanded, stirring the corpse of Symons with his foot.

“Leave it,” said Polinoff. “It’ll be pleasant company for Miss Heddon when she wakes up and finds Commander Corfield gone.”

“And what about me, sir?” the chauffeur asked.

“Join the others up top,” Polinoff ordered.

The man slouched off and disappeared.

“Then I’ll say *au revoir*, my dear Corfield,” Polinoff added. “Happy dreams, my friend. Make your peace with the world, and all that sort of thing. Ten minutes, only ten minutes, mind, and you can’t escape!”

Producing an electric torch he entered the passage and disappeared. Corfield, hardly daring to breathe, heard his footsteps grow fainter and fainter. Then the squeaking of hinges, followed by the thud of a heavy door.

Corfield and Calliope were alone.

Thank God, they had not bound him!

Rising to his feet with an effort which hurt him, the commander tip-toed to the foot of the stairs and listened. The trap-door and cupboard leading to the room above were both open, but he could hear no sounds of movement or conversation.

Staggering across the cave, he came to Calliope, who was asleep in her chair with her head lolling over on one shoulder. Her wrists were tied together, her ankles to the legs of the chair.

With his left hand Corfield produced the knife he habitually carried in his left trousers' pocket. He managed to open the blade, and in a few seconds the girl was free.

He paused for a moment to listen, but could hear no sound.

Polinoff had said he would be away for ten minutes, but at any moment one of his men might take it into his head to enter the cave.

Why had he and Calliope been left unguarded? Had Polinoff really forgotten the broken bar, or did he think that escape was impossible that way? Perhaps the hole was guarded by someone on the outside. Whether it was or not, however, the risk was worth it.

Calliope was no light weight, but, putting his left arm round her inert body he managed to drag her to the opening, where he stopped for a moment, breathless and almost sick with the pain of his wound. Then, lifting her on his left shoulder, he managed to seat her on the rocky sill with her back against one of the bars. Next he lowered her gently backwards until her head and shoulders were outside.

It was comparatively simple, though it hurt him a lot, to squeeze his own body through the opening and to drop to the ground outside. This done, he managed, inch by inch, to drag

Calliope through after him until her weight was again on his left shoulder. Her feet swung to the ground, and he lowered her gently, very gently, and stood for a moment to recover his breath.

It was good to be breathing God's fresh air again instead of the fetid atmosphere of the cave. But pray Heaven that his strength would last. The pain in his arm was agonising. His face felt swollen and tender. He was aching all over, and shivering with cold. If only he had more strength all would be well; but he felt as weak as a baby.

Half dragging, half lifting Calliope's limp body, he moved painfully on. It was some fifteen feet from the opening that he came across a small clump of bushes on a turf-covered ledge overlooking the cove and the sea. It was screened from the top of the cliff, and it was there that he laid Calliope down, pillowing her head on his lap, stroking her face and hair with his left hand, whispering into her ear.

His heart was very full.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

ELLIOTT's impatience was slowly giving way to downright anxiety. Over half-an-hour must have passed since Corfield had left him, and still there were no signs of his return. Had his friend climbed the cliff and entered the house?

Several times, at fairly long intervals, Foxy had seen the gleam of what looked like an electric torch in the original spot on the cliff face, which probably meant that Corfield was investigating. But it had ceased now. He had seen no wink of light for over twenty minutes.

Chiefly for something to do, Foxy started to count the seconds. He had not reached one hundred, however, when he stiffened and raised his head to listen. Above the rustle of the little swell breaking upon the beach he had again heard the regular throbbing of a motor somewhere on the top of the cliff. It was travelling in low gear and coming nearer, evidently approaching the house. In the pitch darkness the rhythmic sound, alternately swelling and dying away on the fitful breeze, seemed eerie and menacing. That motor carried no lights, for if it had he must have seen the glare of them.

The purring sound suddenly ceased as the engine was shut off. Even now men might be entering the house to find Corfield alone. He might be one against many. He would be caught—trapped!

Beside himself with anxiety, Elliott raised himself to his knees and put his hands to his mouth with the idea of shouting at the pitch of his voice to warn Corfield of his danger. But his bellow, he suddenly recollected, would carry half a mile on a night like this. It would inevitably give the

show away. He must stifle his anxiety and wait—wait and see what happened.

By this time he felt certain in his mind that something untoward had taken place, something unexpected. Should he try and find the cliff path and go to Corfield's help?

But he couldn't be certain that Corfield was in the house, and if he left his post there would be nobody left on the beach in case anyone landed, nobody to give the alarm to the *Aeolus* out at sea.

Corfield's instructions before leaving had been sufficiently clear and explicit. Foxy was to remain on the beach to track anyone who landed, and to fire the Verey light if help were needed from the destroyer. If he went off on some possible wild goose chase he might wreck the whole plan.

Why in heaven's name didn't Corfield return, or show some signs of his presence? Straightforward danger Elliott did not object to, for danger was no new thing. It was the uncertainty, this not knowing what to do, that was so upsetting.

He was still gazing at the cliff expecting to see signs of movement, or perhaps a flash of light in the darkened windows of the bungalow, when a sound out at sea caused him to look round. It was the blast of a whistle, a whistle softly blown, and could not have come from more than a quarter of a mile away.

It sounded again—short, long, short, twice repeated. Gazing in the direction whence it came, Elliott could see nothing, for the horizon was dark and misty. Then he remembered the night glasses which Corfield had left behind. He raised them to his eyes, twiddled the focussing screw, and

looked, sweeping them to and fro. Then, with a gasp of astonishment, he held them steady.

A few hundred yards seawards a long black shape with a peculiar hump in the middle seemed to be floating motionless on the dark water. It looked for all the world like a ledge of rock with an upstanding buttress in the centre. But there were no rocks right out in the centre of the bay.

The glasses were good ones. Even in the darkness Elliott recognised the object for what it really was, the long low hull and upstanding conning tower of a submarine.

He could see the gentle swell creaming and spluttering over her low bow, and a gentle breath of air fanning in from the sea brought a sudden whiff of oil-fuel to his nostrils. Above the sound of the little waves breaking on the beach he heard, or thought he could hear, the muffled throb of moving machinery.

The whistle blew again, a little louder this time, as though the man blowing it were becoming impatient.

It was answered by another blast from the top of the cliff, and turning his head Elliott saw a spot of green light winking in and out, from a place on the cliff edge just to the right of the bungalow. Then it disappeared.

For some moments there was no sound except the lap-ping of the water on the beach below. Then, quite suddenly, he heard the crunching of shingle, and a dark figure seemed to detach itself from the intense shadow at the base of the cliffs not more than fifteen feet from where he lay. It came towards him.

Convinced that it was Corfield returning, Foxy nearly spoke. Then some instinct warned him to keep silent. It was as well. Seeing the man more clearly as he approached, he

realised with a feeling of dismay that it was not his friend; but a smaller, slighter man altogether—a stranger!

How had this man so suddenly appeared? It seemed as though he had stepped out of the very face of the cliff.

The man, whoever he was, was coming directly towards him. With his heart throbbing with excitement Foxy gripped his wooden club and waited, ready to spring to his feet and to strike. Discovery seemed inevitable. But with his head bent and eyes on the ground, the man swerved, passed his hiding place within six feet, and moved on down the beach. It was too dark to see him clearly, but from the careless way he walked it was plain enough that he had no suspicion of being watched. He was even smoking a cigarette.

Moving unconcernedly on, the man reached the water's edge some thirty feet below where Foxy lay concealed. His figure was now silhouetted against the sea and water, and watching him intently Elliott saw him staring out to sea, evidently waiting for something to happen.

The tide was a long way out. To the left the ledge of rock known as the Shutters was well uncovered and clearly visible as a black streak against the lighter darkness of the sea. Some little distance to the right the shape of the submarine could now be seen with the naked eye. The reek of oil-fuel persisted, and Foxy could hear the sound of a man's voice, evidently giving orders through a megaphone.

Next, as he watched, a black blob appeared midway between the submarine and the shore, approaching rapidly. It was a small boat. Presently, as it drew nearer, he could hear the splashing of its oars.

The watcher on the beach walked rapidly to the right towards the spot for which it was making, and hailed it when

it was a short distance away. There came an answering shout from the boat. The rowers stopped pulling, with their craft bobbing and curtseying in the swell a couple of fathoms out. She was an absurdly small boat, Foxy noticed, smaller even than the *Lora's* dinghy.

A gruff conversation ensued between someone in the boat and the man on the beach, who was evidently giving directions. Then she was rowed slowly along parallel to the shore, and presently came to land under the lee of a tongue of rock. Three men disembarked, carried ashore what looked like small suitcases, and then, helped by the fourth, dragged their little craft clear of the water. After more talking they took up their belongings and came up the beach, led by the man Foxy had first seen.

Keeping perfectly still, hardly daring to breathe, Elliott watched them as they approached, watched them as they passed within a few feet, and moved on towards the cliffs, laughing and talking together in some language that he could not understand.

The most difficult part of his work was yet to come, for, according to what Corfield had told him, he must track these men and see where they went. But how should he do it?

If their feet made a noise on the shingle, his would do the same, even though he was wearing rubber-soled shoes. He could not follow them in the ordinary way, for that would instantly lead to his discovery, and, whatever happened, he must not be seen. But he must act at once.

As the tail of the little procession disappeared into the shadow of the cliff, he started to squirm his way up a sloping mass of rock towards where he could see another great buttress above. Climbing for about six feet he found himself

on its flat top and noiselessly advanced on his hands and knees. It was perhaps a dozen feet across, and lying down again he peered over the edge.

Quite unwittingly, he had taken a short cut. He found himself peering down into a narrow gulley between the huge boulder on which he lay and the face of the cliff itself. Even as he put his head over the edge he saw the four men, still in single file, coming round the corner towards him.

For a moment he thought he must be discovered, for the party must pass immediately beneath. But, perched at a height of twelve feet or more he realised that the outline of his head was not silhouetted against the sky. There was another great mass of rock behind him. Provided he made no sound the chances were a hundred to one that he would not be seen.

The party came to a sudden standstill. Someone flicked on a torch, and for an instant Elliott thought he had been discovered.

But no. The ray of light was directed towards the face of the cliff itself, at which he stared in astonishment. Did these foreigners, cumbered with their suitcases or whatever it was they were carrying, propose to scale it? It looked as sheer and as inaccessible as the side of a house. Not even a mountain goat could have obtained a foothold.

A moment later, however, as the spot of light was directed further to the right, he saw what the man with the torch was pointing out. It was the narrow entrance to a cave, little more than a broad fissure in the escarpment of grey rock, its sandy floor littered with drift-wood and its damp sides festooned with hanging seaweed, which showed that it was partly covered by the sea at high water.

The four men were almost immediately underneath the spot where Elliott lay, and for a full minute or more stood there discussing something in a language he could not even guess. Then the leader, followed by the others in single file, moved on to the entrance of the cave and passed inside. He disappeared, followed in turn by his three companions. For a moment he heard the scrabbling sound of their footsteps and the grunting murmur of conversation. Then all sounds ceased. The four strangers had vanished into the very heart of the rock.

So this, then, was the entrance to the tunnel leading to the bungalow that Corfield had told him about, but whose exit on the beach he had been unable to find.

Elated at his success, Foxy's first instinct was to follow. But a moment's consideration showed him that this was inadvisable, at anyrate for the present. The fact that they had left their boat on the beach showed that someone intended returning to the submarine, which he could still see lying off the entrance to the cove. More men might even be landing. Another scheme flashed through his mind.

Sliding his way down the rock where he had been lying, he arrived noiselessly on the beach and halted for a moment to look up at the bungalow. Nobody seemed to be stirring, and turning his back he made his way to where the boat was drawn up on the sand close to the water's edge.

In the darkness it was difficult to see full details; but feeling with his hands he realised it was a small, collapsible dinghy of stout painted canvas stretched over an interior framework of wood. Rolling it over without difficulty he drew his knife from his trousers' pocket and opened the heavy blade. One tearing slash was sufficient to rip the

canvas from bow to stem. He was about to repeat the process on the other side of the keel, when he heard a shout from the cliff above. He had been seen!

Turning to look, he saw a flash from the same direction. Then the sharp crack of a pistol, followed by the whine of a bullet and the vicious smack as it buried itself in the shingle some distance away.

“Rotten!” he laughed, digging in the point of his knife again and ripping taut canvas as easily as the parchment of a drum.

The man on the cliff might almost have heard him. His weapon flashed again. This time his bullet whined overhead and plopped into the sea.

The range was far too long and the night too dark for accurate shooting, and while the unseen marksman emptied the magazine of his weapon uselessly into the void, Foxy leisurely righted the boat.

He then set off at a loping run up the beach to his original hiding place, where, breathless and laughing, he flung himself down under cover, anxious to see what happened next. Things had started to move. He was beginning to enjoy himself. If anyone tried to launch that boat, it would fill like a punctured kettle in a duck-pond.

Gazing up at the cliff he could see no signs of the man who had fired. Out at sea, however, the thin mist was gradually starting to dissolve. The submarine was still clearly to be seen, motionless against the background of sky. She seemed even closer in than before, and from her he could catch the sound of excited voices. The pistol shots had evidently been heard.

He could do no more unaided. The time for action had come. What had happened to Corfield he could not guess; but three men had come ashore from the submarine and he knew where they had gone. He had scuttled their boat so that their retreat was cut off, while the submarine was well inshore. It was high time the *Aeolus* and her men took part in the proceedings.

Producing the Verey pistol, he felt in his pocket for the milled edge of a red cartridge, cocked the hammer, pointed the muzzle upwards, and fired.

The sharp report echoed and re-echoed about the cliffs and set the startled gulls whirling and screaming through the night. A trail of sparks shot aloft, to break into a ball of red fire which curved over and fell towards the sea. Cliffs and sea became suddenly bathed in rufous brilliance, in which the hull of the submarine stood sharply out as though cut in black cardboard. The screeching of the gulls redoubled in its intensity. He could hear men shouting. Then the ball of coloured fire met the water with a hiss, and the picture vanished as suddenly as it had come.

One red—that was the signal for the destroyer to send in her party. Pray heaven they would not be long in arriving!

But he had better warn her to switch on her searchlight. Then she would see the submarine.

He reloaded and fired again. Again everything was bathed in that reddish glow. And before it had subsided the blinding white ray of a searchlight flashed out from the sea and swept slowly to and fro across the beach and cliffs. He could see the light reflected from the windows of the bungalow, saw a group of men on the cliff edge, shouting, gesticulating,

pointing seaward. Then the ray became steady on the submarine.

There came a flash from out at sea, followed by the sullen boom of a gun.

The *Aeolus* had opened fire!

With his heart in his mouth Foxy waited for the shell to pitch. Instead, however, of the spray fountain he expected there came a report from high overhead, and the bluish-white glare of a star-shell augmented the blaze of the searchlight. The night became as bright as daylight.

Then the crackle of pistol shots sounded suddenly from seaward, and in the brilliance he caught sight of a boat pulling lustily shorewards—a boat with at least five oars, a destroyer's whaler filled with men.

Making certain that his white armlet was properly in place, for he did not wish to be smitten on the head by some over-zealous blue-jacket, he left his hiding place and ran down the beach as the boat approached.

"This way," he shouted, putting his hands to his mouth. "Pull a bit more to starboard, and you'll find a lee!"

"Oars!" came the voice of an officer.

The men ceased to row, though the boat, maintaining her impetus, still came towards him.

"And who the hell are you?" demanded the voice.

"I'm Elliott, Commander Elliott. I'm with Corfield; but he's been away for nearly an hour!"

"The devil he has!" the officer replied, spotting Foxy's armlet. "Give way, lads!—In bow. Stand by to jump out forward!"

The sailors bent to their oars again, and with a shout of "Way enough!" from the officer the whaler's bows ran ashore with a crunching of shingle.

Seamen, one or two of them armed with rifles and bayonets, others with pistols and truncheons, and a third with a mysterious-looking canvas bag over his shoulders, but all wearing steel helmets, leapt out, chattering and laughing like a party of boys at a school-treat.

"Keep silence, dammit!" shouted the officer, who was young Tony Ossiter, making his way forward and jumping over the bows on to the beach.

"Now, sir," he added hurriedly. "Can you tell me what's been happening?"

Elliott explained the situation in as few words as possible.

"If you take my advice," he concluded breathlessly, "you'll send three or four hands up the cliff path. You and I, with the others, go in through the cave. We must hurry, though!"

"Right, sir," said the sub-lieutenant, proceeding to give his orders.

"Have you got any explosives in case you have to blow up anything?" Elliott asked.

"I've got everything," young Ossiter replied, taking his pistol out of its holster to make certain it was loaded. "And a home-made bomb or two in case we have to stink 'em out.—Come on, lads, at the double!"

Breaking into a run the party reached the base of the cliffs, where Petty Officer Smithson and a party of three men were shown where the path came down to the beach.

"Strewth!" muttered one of them, glancing overhead with a comical look on his face. "So long, chums! I'm no longer a

blinking matlo. I'm a muckin' chimpanzee like you sees in the Zoo! You watch me climbin' rocks with me tail!"

Somebody tittered.

"Get on!" the little officer growled. "Not so much talk. Shin up and look smart about it! And Smithson, the password is 'Scapa', don't forget. See that all your men know it."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Leaving the petty officer and his men to make the ascent as best they could, the sub-lieutenant and his party ran off to the right and came to the entrance of the cave, which Elliott had no difficulty in finding. They entered it in single file, and in a few seconds, slipping, sliding, and to the accompaniment of much grunting and *sotto-voce* profanity, found themselves climbing up and through a gradually narrowing passage in the heart of the rock. Even with the light from three electric torches, progress was not easy.

"Gawd!" exclaimed one of the sailors, as there came the thudding crash of a heavy explosion from somewhere outside. "What in hell's that?"

"Only the ship firin' another star-shell," said his mate.

"Star-shell be blistered!" the first speaker retorted with contempt. "That wasn't no gun firing. That there was a depth-charge, or somethin' like it!—Bet you my tot o' rum it was!"

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

CALLIOPE, lying full length on the grass with her head pillowed on Corfield's lap, stirred uneasily, muttered something unintelligible under her breath, and sat up.

"What's that?" she demanded with a little gasp of horror, as Corfield put his left hand on her shoulder.

"Cheer up, old thing!" he whispered. "It's only me—Dick."

"Dick!" she repeated, as though she didn't believe it. "Dick?"

"Of course!" he said. "Who else?"

"But where are we?" she asked. "What's happened?"

"Ssh!" he hissed. "Don't talk so loud!—You're quite safe. I managed to get you out of the cave, that's all."

"Ooh!" she exclaimed with a shudder. "I remember now.—Heavens! If only I weren't so frightfully sleepy!"

"They doped you," he told her. "Are you feeling all right otherwise?"

"Only a bit hazy as to what's been happening. What has been going on?"

"What hasn't," he snorted. "Every sort of thing. I can't explain now. It would take far too long."

"Dick," she said, her voice full of gratitude, as she reached out and squeezed his hand. "You are an old brick!"

"A silly old fool, you mean!" he replied bitterly. "It's all my fault for having let you in for this rotten business."

"But I insisted! I wanted to be in it, you know I did!"

"Why?" he asked.

“Because ... well,” she hesitated. “Well, because you were in it, if you really want to know. I couldn’t bear to.... But you’re all sopping wet!” she broke off, her hands straying over his clothes.

“Ow!” he murmured, as she touched his wounded arm. “Look out!”

“What’s the matter?”

“I got plugged through the right arm,” he said.

“Oh, Dick!” she cried, her voice trembling with anxiety. “Shot, d’you mean?”

She came closer, until he could feel the warmth of her body, then took him carefully in her arms and tried to nurse him. To Corfield, in his shattered condition, it was very comforting.

“Oughtn’t we to do something?” she whispered apprehensively. “What about a bandage? Does it hurt most frightfully?”

“Not so much as it might,” he answered. “It’s gone more or less numb now. It’s only when I try to move it, or have it touched, that it gives me gyp.”

“But a bandage, Dick,” she tried to insist.

“We can’t bandage it now,” he replied, sitting up. “We can’t see to do it, for one thing, besides....”

“I say!” he broke off abruptly, gazing at the sea. “Calliope! Look there! D’you see anything, or is it my imagination?”

He pointed downwards to a spot in a line with the centre of the cove and beyond where its guarding promontories showed as deep black masses against the paler darkness of the sea.

“There!” he whispered excitedly. “That long black line with a sort of hump in the middle!... There, d’you see the sea breaking over it?”

“Yes,” Calliope breathed. “It seems to be moving.”

“That’s their submarine!” he muttered, forgetting all his pains and hurts in his excitement. “And look!” he continued. “D’you see that black blob between it and the shore? It’s moving towards us.”

“Yes.”

“That’s a boat! Someone’s landing!”

Calliope did not reply.

“And they’ll get away by car,” Corfield muttered, scrambling to his knees. “Lord! I must stop ’em!”

“What are you going to do? How can you stop them?” she asked, her voice very perturbed.

“Put their car out of action.”

“But it must be on the road outside the house,” she pointed out. “You’ll be caught!—Oh, Dick! Must you really go, must you?”

There was a catch in her voice. He felt her hand on his sound arm.

“Is it really necessary?” she asked again.

“Absolutely!” he declared. “If I can’t do something, they’ll get clear away.”

It was taking a frightful risk, and well he knew it. Moreover, he was entirely unarmed.

“Then I’m coming with you,” said Calliope firmly.

“You!” he exclaimed, aghast at the idea. “But ... but....”

“It’s no good arguing,” she interrupted. “I’m coming! I’m not going to have you wandering about and getting into trouble again with that wounded arm of yours.”

“Particularly if one’s a blood-thirsty female,” Corfield laughed. “You shot a man, to-night, old thing.”

“It’s a pity I didn’t kill the wretch instead of merely wounding him,” she observed regretfully. “If I’d realised you’d been wounded I’d have fired again as he lay on the ground.”

“Murderous-minded darling!” Corfield whispered.

“Murderous how much?” she asked.

“I’ll tell you later,” he replied. “We must be off!”

He took a last look at the boat, and for the first time noticed the dark figure of a man on the beach.

“Look!” he said, pointing. “One of them is down on the beach already.”

“What’s the plan?” Calliope asked breathlessly.

“You follow me!” he told her. “We’ll crawl up this slope to the top of the cliff and then strike inland through the heather for about a hundred yards. We’ll work round the back of the house. As they’ll probably all be looking out to sea, the chances are a hundred to a halfpenny we shan’t be spotted. You know the hedge running alongside the garage?”

“Yes.”

“We’ll make for that and see who’s about. There may be more than one car, and if it’s humanly possible we’ll do the dirty on ’em.”

“How?” Calliope asked in a whisper.

“Open the bonnets and cut the wires to the plugs and magneto!” Corfield said hurriedly. “Come on!”

Crawling up the bank on their hands and knees without much difficulty, they found themselves on the edge of the cliff about fifty yards south of the garden wall of the bungalow, where Corfield, halting Calliope with a whisper, stopped for a moment to investigate.

It was intensely dark. Not a sound was to be heard except the rustling of the breeze and the gentle murmur of the sea breaking on the beach below. Not a gleam of light showed in the windows of the bungalow, not a man seemed to be about.

Moving on, crouching as low as possible to avoid being silhouetted against the sky, they ran at full speed for the scrub and heather a little further inland. Here, by sheer good luck, they found a narrow gully leading in the right direction, and walking along it without much risk of detection, found themselves at the rear of the house. Leaving their cover, they then crawled out and turned left across the hundred yards or so of open moorland which had to be traversed before reaching the hedge. It was the most dangerous part of the journey.

To their left, the dark shape of the house lay silhouetted against the background of sky. To reach their goal they must pass it within seventy or eighty feet, and if, by any chance, Polinoff had posted a sentry at the back of the bungalow, they must almost certainly be seen.

But luck was on their side. Crossing the open space at a walk, crouching as low as possible, they reached the hedge without incident and flung themselves down. Peering through a gap into the road they could see two cars drawn up outside the house. They were both covered cars, and though nobody was visible, it was possible, just possible, that someone might be inside them.

“Are you all right?” Corfield whispered to Calliope, as she lay panting beside him.

“Perfectly,” she murmured in his ear. “Except that my skirt’s almost torn to ribbons by those brambles.”

“Duty before decency,” he chuckled softly, remembering the episode of the boatswain’s trousers in “Mr. Midshipman Easy”. “D’you see this gap just to the right of me?”

“Yes.”

“We’ll have a short breather and then get out through that. Meanwhile, old thing,” he added, feeling in his coat pocket. “Here’s a knife. You might open the big blade. I’ve only got one hand.

“Nervous?” he asked as she handed it back, looking down at her face which showed palely in the darkness.

“Not a bit,” she replied, her voice trembling a little. “I’m tremendously thrilled. What, exactly, am I to do, Dick?”

“Stand by me,” he whispered. “If you see anyone coming, give me a shout. If we have to bolt for it, run up the road away from the house. I shall be behind you, and if it’s only one man, we’ll lead him off a bit and then go for him. Provided we keep our heads we can’t come to much harm.—Are you ready?”

“Yes.”

“Come on, then.”

Followed by Calliope, he crawled through the gap on his hands and knees, to find himself in the shallow ditch by the roadside. Bent double, he was just about to creep out into the road itself, when he heard a sudden shout, followed by a gabble of excited conversation. Then the smacking report of a pistol.

He shrank back, crouching low.

“What’s that?” Calliope whispered, clutching his arm.

The weapon cracked again.

“It’s from the front of the house, somewhere in the garden!” he answered breathlessly. “They’ve got the wind up about something; but it’s got nothing to do with us.—Come on!”

The night was still as black as pitch, and trusting to luck that he would not be seen, he leapt out of the ditch and made for the nearest car.

In a moment, his fingers shaking with excitement, he was fumbling with the catches of the bonnet, Calliope helping him. They fell away with a slight metallic click.

“Ssh! Careful now!” he hissed, as she lifted the side of the bonnet by its handle and laid it back.

The engine, still warm, lay exposed. Feeling with his fingers, Corfield found the electric wire leading to the magneto. He cut it with his knife, afterwards slipping off the cover of the contact breaker which he tore away and put in his pocket. This done, he reached over the engine and hurriedly severed three of the cables leading to the sparking plugs.

“Shut the bonnet!” he murmured. “Don’t worry about the catches!”

She obeyed.

“And now for the other one!” he said, his heart thumping.

The two vehicles lay almost side by side, and it was the work of a few seconds to disable the second. And Calliope had just closed the bonnet when there came a faint pop from

somewhere far below on the beach. A trail of sparks rose skywards.

“Down!” Corfield breathed, seizing his companion by the arm and crouching low as the sky suddenly became brilliant with the crimson glare of a Verey light.

“Thank God!” he muttered.

“What is it?” Calliope gasped, startled at the sudden illumination.

“Never mind now!” Corfield hurriedly whispered. “The moment it goes out, make a rush for the wall and shin over it. I must see what’s going on!”

His heart was thumping like a sledge-hammer. He could hear men shouting somewhere in front of the bungalow, while the air was full of the discordant screaming of frightened gulls disturbed from their roosting places in the cliffs.

Whatever happened, however, he must reach some position whence he could see what was going on in the cove. The simplest way lay ahead, over the low stone wall at the far side of the road and across a short slope of thick heather leading to the cliff’s edge. The bungalow garden could not be more than thirty or forty feet to the left, and the garden was where Polinoff’s men seemed to be.

The heather, however, would provide ample cover provided they could get over the wall unseen, and to judge from the noise they were making, shouting and hailing each other, the gang were already in a state of panic.

The ruddy glare expired as suddenly as it had come. Clutching Calliope by the elbow Corfield skirted the car, rushed across the road, and reached the wall. It was no more

than a couple of feet high, and together they scrambled over it, to find themselves standing in thick heather almost to their knees.

“Careful now!” he exclaimed, starting forward.

He had barely taken three paces when there came another report and a second Verey light rose from the beach.

“Down!” he ordered, flopping to his knees and dragging Calliope with him. “Keep flat, old girl, and follow me! I’m going to crawl!”

In his intense excitement the throbbing ache of his wounded arm had given way to a peculiar feeling of numbness. He felt no pain at all. His nerves tense, he merely had that overpowering desire to see what was happening.

Followed by Calliope, he started to crawl, fighting, pushing his way through the tough, springy roots of the thick heather, half-blinded in dust. And suddenly the night became day as the searchlight of the *Aeolus* shone out in a ray of blinding brilliance.

“Don’t wait!” he heard himself shout to Calliope in a voice that he hardly recognised as his own.

“I’m coming,” he heard her coughing reply behind him. “How much further?”

“Lord knows!” he replied.

An eternity seemed to pass before, peering out through a patch of heather, he found himself almost at the edge of the cliff with the cove and the sea beneath him. He was trembling with excitement, wet through with perspiration.

Calliope, breathing in short, fierce gasps as though she were choking, flung herself down beside him. Moments passed before either of them were in a condition to speak,

though if speech had been possible, neither would have uttered a word.

Sea, cove and cliffs were bathed in bluish-white brilliance. A short distance seaward they could see the light shining from the wet, rounded grey side of a submarine. Men were running about her low deck. The water round her stern swirled and bubbled as her propeller revolved. She seemed to be turning slowly to starboard, as though to stand out to sea.

Then, from further afield, there came the golden red flash of a gun. It was followed by the deep 'boom', which echoed and re-echoed from the cliffs. Then, almost immediately, a ball of blue flame seemed to burst out in the sky, and hung there, drifting slowly to leeward.

"Oooh!" Calliope cried, moving closer.

"It's all right, old dear!" he replied, patting her hand. "Don't get the wind up! The *Aeolus*, that destroyer I told you about, has merely fired a star-shell.—Don't talk! Watch what happens."

Several things took place in quick succession. First a boat, looking like some enormous water insect, passed close under the stern of the submarine to the accompaniment of the popping of pistols, and moved rapidly towards the shore. Then a dark figure ran down the beach to the water's edge. They could hear someone shouting.

"That's Elliott!" Corfield muttered. "He's telling 'em where to land.

"The *Aeolus* is landing men!" he explained, his eyes fixed on the boat. "Young Tony Ossiter's in charge."

"Tony Ossiter?"

“Yes,” said Corfield. “Oh, for God’s sake get on with it!” he burst out, as the men in the boat ceased to row and he heard someone in her hail the man ashore. “Get on, Tony! Get ashore, you young ass!”

The delay did not last long. The whaler reached the beach and they saw the men disembark.

“For heaven’s sake, man, get a move on!” Corfield muttered again, fuming with impatience as he watched them talking on the beach. “They’re holding a mother’s meeting, damn ’em!—Tony, you young idiot, I’ll never forgive you if you’re too late!”

The delay, really, was inconsiderable, just sufficient to give Tony Ossiter time to grasp the situation; but it was with a sigh of infinite relief that Corfield watched the dark figures of the bluejackets scampering up the beach to disappear from his view under the overhang of the cliffs.

The searchlight from the *Aeolus* was still illuminating the scene, though the ship herself seemed to be steaming inshore. She was approaching the submarine, which by this time was almost stern on to the beach and moving rapidly seaward with the water breaking over her low bow. Her speed increased as they watched.

“My God! She’ll get away! She’ll get away!” Corfield found himself repeating in his agitation.

The two vessels were barely more than half a mile apart, the *Aeolus* in darkness and the submarine bathed in the glare of the searchlight. The submarine, however, seemed to be getting lower and lower in the water.

“She’s submerging!” Corfield moaned, gripping Calliope’s hand hard in the anxiety of the moment. “She’ll escape!”

But she did not.

Something splashed into the water from the dark shape of the destroyer. Corfield caught his breath.

A peculiar, whitish streak seemed to lengthen rapidly out across the dark sea. There was a moment's suspense, and then a dome-shaped mound of whitened water rose at the submarine's side just before her conning tower. It seemed to burst upwards in a great towering pillar of white spray mingled with black smoke which shot almost to the heavens.

Then the thudding, shattering thump of a mighty explosion which shook the air and seemed to squeeze the ear-drums.

"What is it, Dick?" Calliope cried in a sobbing, awe-stricken whisper.

"A torpedo!" he replied breathlessly, himself appalled at the spectacle.

The column of water seemed to hang for a moment before it fell back into the sea with a sound like a roaring waterfall. They had a glimpse of a dripping grey bow flung skywards like a huge spear-head. For a few seconds it remained poised, and then slowly disappeared as if plucked down by some giant hand. The water bubbled and frothed in the place where it had been.

Calliope, unnerved at the sight, and exhausted after days of strain and anxiety, could not repress a fit of shuddering.

"So that's that," said Corfield grimly, looking out to sea. "She won't trouble us again."

As he spoke there came the sound of excited voices behind them. Polinoff's gang, perhaps Polinoff himself, was attempting flight. Even now they were trying to start the cars.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

THERE came the shrill blast of a whistle, followed by the sound of voices raised in argument.

"I tell you I can't move the damned thing!" someone roared in exasperation, as Corfield, pulling Calliope to her feet, started back to investigate what was happening.

"Be quiet, you fool! D'you want to give the whole show away?" came Polinoff's excited voice. "Quiet, I tell you!"

"It's you oo's given the 'ole show away!" the other man growled. "A fine ruddy mess you got us into!"

"Don't argue, damn it! Leave it!" Polinoff cried. "Get back to the house!"

There came the noise of flying feet—then silence.

Corfield, with Calliope close behind him, reached the wall and peered over. The cars were as he had left them. The men had disappeared.

Putting a leg over the wall with the intention of getting into the road, he felt Calliope's hand on his shoulder.

"Keep down a minute!" she whispered under her breath.

"What's up?" he queried, slipping back and crouching down.

"I heard a noise from the garden!" she said. "It sounded like footsteps!"

Corfield listened a moment, and heard nothing. He was just about to say so when there came a sudden crash followed by the tinkle of falling glass.

"Someone's breaking up the happy home!" he chuckled. "That's a window, by the sound of it."

For perhaps another minute, with their nerves tense, they lay there listening. There were no further sounds.

“We’ll go and have a look!” he exclaimed impatiently, rising to his feet. “I can’t stay here doing nothing.”

Calliope agreed. Together they climbed the wall, skirted the car, and approached the front door of the bungalow.

“ ’Alt! Who goes there?” came a loud challenge, as the dark figure of a man detached itself from the black mass of the building, came a few paces towards them, and then stood still.

“Friend!” Corfield shouted in reply, almost beside himself with joy.

The stray gleams of the destroyer’s searchlight coming round the corner of the bungalow had shown him the figure of a sailor, a seaman in gaiters and steel helmet, armed with a rifle which he held at the charge. The light shone on the vicious-looking blade of his fixed bayonet.

“Advance, friend, and give the countersign!” the bluejacket roared.

Corfield hesitated. He knew nothing of any countersign.

“Give the countersign!” the sailor ordered again.

“But I don’t know any countersign,” the commander replied.

“Ho!” the seaman exclaimed, his voice threatening. “That’s the game is it? Well, the pair of you’s under arrest. Stay where you are, an’ put your ’ands up! If you makes a move, I fires.—‘Ands up, I say!”

“Do as he says!” Corfield whispered hurriedly to Calliope, raising his own left hand.

“This gentleman can’t put his right hand up,” she said. “He’s been wounded.”

“That’s perfectly true,” Corfield put in.

The sailor’s orders evidently did not allow for such a contingency; but he was a man of resource.

“If the gentleman carn’t put ’is right ’and up, ’e carn’t,” he said suspiciously. “But if ’e moves, or put’s ’is right ’and to his pocket, I’ve got ’im covered—see? So no ’anky-panky games with me!”

“This is all damned nonsense!” Corfield exclaimed, exasperated at the delay. “This lady is Miss Heddon. She....”

“I carn’t ’elp ’oo she is!” the bluejacket broke in, advancing until his levelled bayonet was within a foot of Corfield’s chest. “Didn’t even know she wus a lady until I ’eard ’er voice.”

Calliope tittered with amusement.

“I don’t wonder,” she laughed, glancing down at her skirt, parts of which were missing and the remainder hanging in streamers to display the silken garments beneath.

“This isn’t no laughin’ matter,” the sailor answered reprovingly. “The pair of you’s suspicious characters, an’ you’re under arrest pendin’ hinvestigation. You don’t know the countersign, an’ you ’aven’t got no white band on your arms, so ’ow should I know ’oo you blinkin’ well are?”

Corfield sighed with impatience.

“I’m a naval officer!” he retorted. “My name’s Commander Corfield.”

“I’ve ’eard that yarn before!” the sailor snorted.

“But damn it all, man! Can’t you see....”

“I can’t see nothin’!” the seaman interrupted. “You says you’re a naval officer, but I don’t believe you.”

“But you must believe me, and pretty damned quick!” Corfield exclaimed.

“If you don’t watch it I’ll run you in for offerin’ bad language to a sentry,” the man observed. “You’ll get ’ung for that, likely as not,—’ung, you mark my words! The pair of you’s suspicious characters loiterin’ in a suspicious manner, an’ I ’as my orders to arrest suspicious characters prowlin’ about ’ere.”

“Well, if you don’t believe me, for heaven’s sake have a closer look!” the commander almost shouted. “Haven’t you got a torch? Who’s in charge of your party?—Don’t laugh!” he added to Calliope, who had gone off into a fit of almost hysterical giggling. “This is getting beyond a joke!”

“But I can’t help it!” she replied weakly, the tears streaming down her face. “It’s priceless!”

“Priceless?” Corfield snorted. “I call it pathetic! This man holds us up, and all the time Polinoff and his crowd are getting clear away!—Haven’t you got a torch?” he went on to ask the seaman.

“Yus.”

“Then for God’s sake switch it on and have a good look at me! I promise you I won’t try to run away.”

“But can I please put my hands down?” Calliope asked, still very amused. “I’m getting tired.”

“You can both put your ’ands down while I ’as a look at you,” the bluejacket said. “But no ’anky-panky, mind! If you moves, I’ve got you covered!”

Still holding the rifle in his left hand, he fumbled in the front of his jumper. Something clicked. A ray of brilliant light fell first on Corfield's face, then on Calliope's, then travelled up and down their bodies.

" 'Oly smoke!" the sailor gasped in astonishment, staring at their blackened countenances streaked with perspiration, their dishevelled clothing, and unkempt hair. "Strewth! If you're a naval officer, then I'm the Shah of Persia!"

"Don't be a damned fool!" the commander growled, while Calliope succumbed to another burst of merriment. "For God's sake send for whoever's in charge of your party!"

"Aye, I will," the bluejacket said. "An' perhaps 'e'll be as pleased to see you as I was! Fair cop, I calls it."

He switched off his torch and blew a whistle twice. Almost at once the bungalow door opened and someone came out.

"What's up with you?" the newcomer asked.

"I've arrested a man an' a woman loiterin' in a suspicious manner!" the sentry reported in his most official voice. "The bloke says 'e's a naval officer, but I don't believe 'im. Bin callin' me names, too. The woman's...."

"March 'em inside and we'll have a look at 'em!" Petty Officer Smithson interrupted.

"Party—shun!" the sailor commanded, bringing his rifle to the slope. "Left turn!—Right wheel! Into the 'ouse, quick march!"

"Well, of all the damned things!" Corfield exploded as he marched off with Calliope falling into step behind him.

"Silence in the ranks!" their custodian roared. "Left!—Left!—Left, right, left!"

It was Able Seaman Baker's night out, and he certainly made the most of it. He was enjoying himself hugely. Incidents like this did not often happen in the piping times of peace.

He might even be officially commended for coolness and presence of mind in capturing two criminals—desperadoes indeed, from what he had seen of them. Almost he could see his photograph in the newspapers, together with a description of his exploit. Wouldn't it please the young woman with whom he was 'walking out' at Portsmouth?

Yes. Able Seaman Baker was a very proud man.

CHAPTER FORTY

It took Corfield little time to persuade Petty Officer Smithson of his respectability, and Able Seaman Baker, baulked of what he considered a 'fair cop', retired to resume his post as sentry. He was a disappointed and disgruntled man.

Heddon, a gag in his mouth and his feet and hands tied, had been discovered stretched out on the bed in his own room. Released and questioned by the petty officer, he had been utterly vague as to what had really happened, and had contented himself by indulging in what, for him, was unduly profane language. Things certainly had been trying enough to exasperate a saint, let alone a jaded author who had come to Cornwall for a rest cure.

And as if the anxiety of his daughter's abduction weren't enough, he had been imprisoned in the cave, roughly manhandled, tied up, and flung on a bed. Released from his bonds, he had then been severely cross-examined by a fat petty officer who evidently regarded him as a criminal. The Royal Navy should have known better. He, Heddon, a criminal? The very idea of it!

"Cheer up, Daddy!" Calliope had laughed, patting him on the shoulder.

"Cheer up be damned!" he had muttered, glowering in his armchair. "I'm sick of this whole business—sick to death! Look what the pair of you have let me in for!" He looked from Calliope to Corfield with reproachful eyes.

"But surely, sir, we...." Corfield began.

“I don’t want to hear any excuses!” Heddon interrupted with a wave of his hand. “A fine mess you’ve made of it. And now the Navy seem to have taken charge! They’ve broken into the house! Look at that, sir, look!” He waved a hand towards the broken glass of the French window. “Such goings on! Why can’t a man be left in peace?”

Corfield looked at Calliope and Calliope looked at Corfield. She winked and made a slight grimace. He understood. Explanation was useless. Heddon was left to glower by himself.

The girl left the room.

“You say you’ve seen nothing of any other people?” Corfield asked the petty officer as she disappeared.

“No, sir. We came up the path from the beach according to orders, and climbs over the garden wall. My orders were, sir, to occupy the house and arrest anyone we finds, so I advances on the house, tried that door there,” he nodded at the French window, “finds it locked, so takes the liberty of smashin’ the glass with the butt of a rifle.” He paused.

“And then?” Corfield queried.

“We then enters the house cautious like, and after huntin’ around a bit and seein’ nobody, finds the electric light switch. We switches on, and after nosin’ around in all the rooms, finds the old gent there lashed up on his bed.” He sank his voice to a whisper and nodded in Heddon’s direction.

“We releases him, sir, and then starts in on questioning him; but can’t get no sense out of him nohow. Anyway, I sees straight off he isn’t exactly the criminal type—he doesn’t look it, does he, sir?—so I just says to meself, ‘I’ll keep an eye on him,’ in a manner of speakin’, in case I’ve made a mistake.—After that, sir, Able Seaman Baker blows his

whistle, and I goes outside to see what's up. There I finds him with you and the young lady, sir."

"How many men are in your party?

"Me and three A.B.'s, sir."

"And where's the fourth?" Corfield asked.

"I posted him as sentry on the cliffs, close to the end of the garden wall, sir," Smithson replied. "He has orders to keep a sharp lookout, and if he sees anyone prowling about to shout like mad so's to let me know."

"Good!" Corfield nodded. By taking this precaution, the petty officer had unwittingly made it impossible for anyone to leave the cave by way of the opening through which Calliope and he had escaped.

"Then they've either made off across country, or else they've gone to ground in the tunnel," the commander observed.

"Tunnel, sir?" echoed Smithson, looking mystified. "What tunnel, sir? I don't rightly understand!"

"The tunnel leading from this room to the beach," Corfield explained. "Was that cupboard door shut when you came in?" He pointed to it.

"It was just as you see it now, sir. It hasn't been touched."

"That door leads to a cave underneath where we are now," Corfield told him. "From the cave there's a passage of some sort through the rock to the beach. I don't know where the beach opening is; but I believe it's only accessible at low water."

"I got it now, sir," said the petty officer with a grin of understanding. "When we landed, sir, we were met by a person called.... I can't rightly remember his name."

“Elliott?” Corfield prompted.

“Yes, sir, Elliott it was. Well, sir, I hears him talkin’ to the sub-lootenant, Mister Ossiter, sir, who’s in charge of our party. It seems that this chap Elliott had seen some men go into some passage in the cliff from the beach....”

“He’d found the entrance, then?” Corfield broke in, delighted at the news.

“Yes, sir. So while me and three men were sent up the cliff, Mister Ossiter and the rest of the party goes along with Elliott to show ’em the way.”

“So they’re in the tunnel now?” the commander asked, his voice eager with excitement.

“Yes, sir. Leastways, they’re still in it if they haven’t come out the other end agen. Is there any more entrances, sir?”

“Only a hole in the face of the cliff,” said Corfield. “And that’s just under where you’ve put that other sentry. He’s a reliable man, I suppose?”

“Able Seaman Wiggins, sir? Oh yes, sir, he’s all right.”

While Corfield was still turning over the situation in his mind, Calliope returned to the room.

“Dick,” she said, coming towards him. “I’ve....”

“Wait a minute, Calliope, please,” he said. “There’s something I must discuss.”

“But it’s your arm I’m thinking about,” she replied. “It ought to be bandaged. I’ve got some warm water and disinfectant and everything in the bathroom.”

“My arm will have to wait. There’s something far more important on hand.”

“Nonsense, it can’t wait!” Calliope exclaimed. “You may get blood poisoning.”

“I must risk that,” he returned. “Smithson?”

“Sir?”

“I’ve got the key of that cupboard. We’ll open the door and get down into the cave. If they’re there, or in the passage, they’ll be caught between us and Mr. Ossiter’s party. D’you see the idea?”

“Yes, sir.”

“But it’s possible they’ll show fight,” Corfield pointed out. “They’re desperate. When they realise they’re cornered they may open fire.”

“I don’t mind that,” the petty officer grinned. “Fightin’ don’t worry me, sir. But what I’m thinkin’ is that we may get mixed up with the other party under the sub-lootenant. So I’m suggestin’, sir, as he’s in charge of the operations, beggin’ your pardon, we’d best let him carry it out his own way. His orders to me, sir, was to occupy the house, nothing more. That’s what he’ll expect me to do, and if I does anythin’ else there may be a mix up and someone’ll get in the soup.”

Corfield considered the question.

“You’re right,” he was forced to admit, after a moment’s deliberation. “We’d better leave things as they are and see what happens.”

“Yes, sir. And if you takes my advice, sir, you’ll let the young lady dish up that arm of yours. It looks ugly to me, sir, and I’ve heard of men gettin’ lockjaw from wounds like that goin’ dirty. I’ll run the show here, sir. You’re a casualty.”

“I’ll be damned if I am!” Corfield objected.

“Of course you are!” said Calliope soothingly, taking him by the arm. “Come on, Dick. I’ll soon make you

comfortable.”

He started to protest.

“Commander Corfield is very obstinate,” she said, smiling gratefully in Smithson’s direction.

The Petty Officer grinned.

“All sailors are, Miss,” he replied. “Leastways, that’s what my missus is always sayin’ to me,—and she oughter know, seein’ that she comes of a naval family, her father bein’ a late chief orficer in the coastguard and one of her brothers a sergeant of marines. But women, miss—naval ladies, that is—aren’t the same.... Lawd! What’s that?”

There had come a shout from outside, followed by the crack of a firearm.

Smithson and the able seaman waited not upon the order of their going, but pounded heavily out into the garden.

Corfield, with Calliope following, dashed after them. Even as they stepped through the French window there came the louder report of a rifle.

Jumping over the low wall to the left of the little garden they ran through the thick heather and came breathlessly to the spot on the cliff edge where Smithson was already questioning the sentry. For the moment both men seemed to be busy talking at once.

“What happened, anyhow?” the petty officer managed to ask.

“I saw a dark figure advancin’ up that slope towards me,” the sentry explained, his voice quivering with excitement. “I ses to him, ‘ ’Alt, ’oo goes there?’ but he doesn’t ’alt. No. ’Stead of ’altin’, he comes on. I ’ears a bang as ’e fires ’is

pistol. ’Is bullet whistles past my ear, so I ups with me rifle and fires back at ’im, the perisher!”

“Did you hit him?” Corfield and Smithson demanded simultaneously.

“ ’It ’im?” said the man, sucking his teeth. “Couldn’t ’ardly miss, seein’ ’e was no more’n a couple of fathoms off me.”

“And what happened then?” the petty officer asked.

“ ’Appened? Why, he gives a ’nowl of dismay and topples over backwards, clawin’ at the air.”

Corfield grinned. Able Seaman Wiggins, the sentry, was evidently well up in the phraseology of sensational fiction.

“Then he’s fallen on the beach and broken his neck,” said the commander.

“And a blinkin’ good job, too!” Wiggins replied. “ ’E nearly pipped me, the perisher!”

“Are you certain he did fire at you first?” Smithson asked, a touch of anxiety in his voice. “ ’Cos if you’ve bin and gone and killed ’im, someone’ll have to stand the racket.”

“Certain?” the sentry snorted. “Certain ’e fired at me? O’ course I’m certain! Couldn’t make no mistake about that, could I, seein’ as ’ow he was almost as close to me as you are!”

“Then we’d best have a look for the corpse,” said the petty officer.

“I should account for the others first if I were you,” Corfield said, walking towards the cliff edge with the intention of peering over. “It’s a sheer drop, and if he’s....”

He never finished what he was going to say, for at that moment Calliope screamed, a sudden shrill cry of fear.

Corfield spun round. The dark figure of a man seemed to rise out of a little fold in the ground almost at his feet. He felt himself grappled, and in an instant, separated from the others by a matter of three or four yards, he was fighting for his life within a foot or two of the verge of the cliff.

He had been taken unaware. Handicapped by his wounded arm, he felt the stranger's arms slide up his body and his sinewy fingers fasten round his throat. He found himself gasping, choking for breath. Then, with one leg between his, the fellow tried to trip him up.

For a moment, twisting, turning, and grunting, the pair remained locked together, staggering and reeling to and fro. Corfield was the heavier man. But he was wounded, and his adversary though smaller, was strong and wiry, with muscles like iron.

Calliope screamed something unintelligible, and started down the slope towards them. Smithson and his two bluejackets followed.

But before they arrived, the commander, by a mighty effort, managed to twist his body round so that he faced the cliff-edge. His left arm went round his opponent's waist, and kicking sideways with all his strength he forced the man to release his grasp on his windpipe. He staggered backwards.

Corfield lunged at his face and missed, but striving to recover his balance, the fellow trod on the crumbling earth at the very margin of the cliff. It broke away, and with a wild yell of terror he toppled over and disappeared into the night.

Corfield flung himself backwards—just in time.

"God!" he muttered, shaking all over, and feeling physically sick. His right arm hurt excruciatingly.

Calliope reached his side.

“Dick! Oh, Dick!” she sobbed in terror, putting her strong young arms round him and pulling him back. “Come away! Come away! I.... I thought you were over the edge!”

“And so I nearly was!” he grunted breathlessly. “Another six inches, and I should have been!”

“Thank God!” she murmured incoherently, the tears of mingled fear and gratitude streaming down her face. “Oh, Dick! Thank God you’re safe!”

“Thank God I am, old thing!” he echoed simply, stroking her head with his left hand.

“But ... but ... who was it, Dick?” she whispered, as though unwilling to learn the truth.

“Polinoff!” he answered quietly.

For a moment Calliope did not reply. Then he felt her arms slide round his neck as she pulled his face down to her own.

“Dick!” she whispered fiercely, pressing close to him. “If you’d been killed, I’d ... I’d ... I think it would have been the end of me, the end, d’you hear? I ... I love you, darling man! I love you, Dick!—I can’t get on without you.... God knows I can’t, and I thought you were ... were killed!”

He felt her warm lips on his in the first real kiss he had ever experienced. His heart thrilled in a wild intoxication. He had never known it would be quite like this. His left arm went round her waist. He pressed her closer.

“You love me?” he heard himself asking, his face buried in her hair.

“I adore you!” she murmured brokenly. “How can I ever....”

Petty Officer Smithson, who was close behind them, coughed discreetly. They separated.

“Beg your pardon, sir, but I think we’d best be getting back to the house.”

“The house? Oh, yes, of course, Smithson,” exclaimed Corfield guiltily. “I think we’d better.... Come on, you beloved thing!” he whispered in Calliope’s ear. “You adorable little brown mouse of mine!”

“Damn!” she muttered, her voice full of happiness. “That Smithson man’s spoilt it!”

“Spoilt what?” Corfield asked.

“I wanted you to kiss me, Dick.”

“Later,” he murmured. “Later, darling. Let’s wait until we’re alone.”

“But why did you call me your brown mouse?” she asked, as they started to make their way back.

“A term of endearment, my pet. It was the first thing that came into my mind. I used to make pets of ’em as a boy.”

“But I hate mice, Dick—nasty, smelly things!”

“I love them,” he said. “And this one most of all. She smells ... er....”

“You beast!” she laughed. “What do I smell of?”

“Everything that’s wonderful,” he replied. “An indescribable sort of smell—the sort of smell that makes me go all sort of potty inside, just because it’s yours, and nobody else’s.”

“And I suppose,” said she, “that that is supposed to be a compliment?”

“Most certainly,” he answered.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

REACHING the sitting-room they found Heddon with one ear glued to the door of the cupboard.

"I'm glad you've come back," he said. "There's been an earthquake or something going on inside here—thumps, and bumps, and shouting. It sounds as if someone has been hurt, and I didn't know what to do. I thought they might break through, so I informed them that I was fully armed, which of course I wasn't."

Corfield laughed outright.

"We'd better have a look," he said, producing the key of the cupboard and giving it to Petty Officer Smithson. "You might open the door, and if anyone's inside just scrag him."

Smithson inserted the key, turned it, and flung it open. They all peered inside. The cupboard was empty. Only a black hole in the floor showed that the trap-door was open!

"Down below there!" Corfield shouted.

"Hallo!" came an answering hail. "Who's that?"

"It's me, Corfield."

"You, sir?" came the incredulous voice of young Tony Ossiter, as he came up the steps from the cave and his head appeared through the trap. "Good lord, sir! What in hades has been happening?"

"If you'll condescend to come up I'll tell you," said Corfield.

The sub-lieutenant, fully armed, climbed into the cupboard and stepped out into the room.

"Lord!" he gasped, staring at Calliope in astonishment. "What in heck are you doing here, Calliope?"

“And why shouldn’t I be here, Tony?” she laughed.

“No reason at all, old thing,” he said gaily. “But to look at your face and clothes one would think you’d been crawlin’ through barbed wire, and then rollin’ in the dustbin. Been havin’ a night out?”

“Several!” she smiled, not in the least annoyed. “But you’re not much better, Tony dear,” she added, eyeing the green slime on his uniform, the dirt on his face, and the mud thick on his knees. “If your dear mamma could see you now she’d send you straight to the bathroom.”

Young Ossiter laughed.

“If you’d been crawlin’ up a beastly, stinkin’, slimy passage, sometimes on your hands and knees, but more often than not on the flat of your tummy, you’d look even worse than you do now,” he retorted, examining himself all over. “Lord! But I didn’t know I was as bad as this!”

“When you’ve finished this merry badinage, perhaps you’ll kindly let us know what’s been happening?” Corfield interrupted dryly. “Time’s precious.”

Tony scratched his head and wiped his dirty face with a handkerchief.

“I found your friend Elliott on the beach when we landed,” he started to explain. “He told me about the entrance to the cave, so I sent Smithson and his party up the cliff path you told me about, and took the rest of our braves and Elliott to the tunnel. Just as we got inside we heard a hell of a thump ... by the way, sir, what was it?”

Corfield told him. The sub-lieutenant’s eyes opened wide in astonishment.

“Crumbs!” he exclaimed. “So they torpedoed her, did they? Lord! How I wish I’d been there and seen it!”

“You’ll hear all about it anon,” said the commander. “Meanwhile, what happened to you?”

“Well, sir, we climbed up and through a damned dark tunnel all oozin’ water and filth and stinkin’ like a sewer. We slid about all over the shop with me and the sailors cursing something ’orrid. We went what seemed miles until we came to a sort of door. It was open, so on we went. Then, after a bit, we found ourselves in a sort of cave, and just as I put my head inside someone let go at me with a pistol at a range of a few feet. I biffed him over the head with my club and flopped him out. To cut a long story short, we found three fellows there, three live ones, that is, and one very dead, shot through the napper. They fought like hell; but the sailors and I knocked ’em down and lashed ’em up. One’s a sort of chauffeur man....”

“You say you’ve got them?” Corfield inquired.

Tony nodded.

“Two others must have got through that hole in the cliff,” the commander explained. “They both went over the edge, one after being shot by one of your sentries, and the other after a scrap with me.”

“Deaders?” the sub-lieutenant queried.

“As dead as mutton,” Corfield said.

“Gawd! What a night out!” Tony exclaimed. “Three dead and three prisoners!”

“What happened to you afterwards?” Corfield went on to ask.

“I didn’t fancy going back by the way I’d come,” the sub-lieutenant said, “so looking round for some other way out I came across these steps. I crawled up ’em and found myself in that cupboard. The door was locked, and I couldn’t break it down.”

Corfield, catching Heddon’s eye, permitted himself to grin.

“Then I heard someone talking the other side,” Tony went on. “I couldn’t hear exactly what he said, but told him to open the door and not to be a B. F.!”

“Oh!” Heddon exclaimed.

“Go on,” ordered Corfield.

“Well, that’s about all. I couldn’t budge the beastly door, so went down again. Then, after a bit, I heard you sing out, and here I am—But tell me, what *is* all this merry little racket about? Who are these people?”

Corfield told him.

“But what exactly have they been doing?” Tony wanted to know.

“They’ve been dodging the immigration people and passing alien agitators into this country without passports,” Corfield explained. “That chap Polinoff was running the show. He got so much a head for every one who got in.”

Tony Ossiter looked incredulous.

“Are you pulling my leg, sir?” he asked.

“Pulling your leg!” Corfield exclaimed. “Good Lord, no, boy! Ask Heddon here. Ask Calliope, ask anyone!”

“Well, I’ll be damned in little heaps!” Tony ejaculated. A bluejacket came into the room, stood strictly to attention, and looked from Petty Officer Smithson to Tony and back again.

“What is it?” Tony asked him.

“Petty Officer Smithson sent me down that there path to find them blokes what had fallen over the cliff,” said the man, breathing heavily.

“Did you find ’em?”

“Yessir. I finds ’em all of a ’eap within a few feet of each other.”

“Dead?” asked Corfield.

“Yessir. It made me fair sick to look at ’em. Pulp, they was. They must have fell head first on them there rocks. They was....”

“You might spare us the lurid details,” Corfield quietly put in. “There’s a lady present.”

Five minutes later, with his coat off, Corfield was in the bathroom having his arm attended to by Calliope.

“Does it hurt much, you poor old thing?” she asked, anxiously, snipping away the sleeve of his shirt, which was sodden and caked with blood.

“Not so much as it might,” he grinned, loving the touch of her fingers.

“It looks nasty,” she said with a wry face. “I wonder if we ought to take you straight to a doctor?”

“That can wait,” he said. “I don’t want....”

“Can I be of any help?” Heddon asked, putting his head in through the door. “Have you everything you want, my dear?”

“Run away, Daddy!” Calliope laughed. “You’ll only be in the way.”

He disappeared.

For a moment there was silence.

“Calliope?” Corfield suddenly asked.

“Well?”

“Do you honestly mean what you said just now?”

“What did I say?” she asked, busy with a sponge.

“That ... that you loved me,” he said awkwardly.

His voice sounded strange and unnatural. Everything depended upon her answer.

“Love you, Dick!” she murmured brokenly. “My dear, I’ve loved you for months and months!”

“Well, put that beastly sponge away!” he ordered.

She obeyed.

“And now come here,” he continued, rising from his chair and pulling her towards him with his sound arm.

“What d’you want?” she asked feebly, looking up at him with her eyes shining.

“You, you beloved thing!” he exclaimed fiercely, straining her to him and kissing her on the lips, again and again. “You —only you! And sometimes I’ve thought....”

“What did you think, darling man?” she asked, drawing her head back to look into his eyes.

“Sometimes I thought you hated me.”

“Hated you?” she echoed tenderly, her heart full of happiness as she put her arms round his neck and drew his head to hers, revelling in the feel of his rough cheek as she kissed him on the mouth. “You are a stupid old thing! I adore you, my dear, adore you, do you hear?”

“And you’re just the most adorable and precious thing I’ve ever met!” he said awkwardly. “I’m such an awful fool. I know nothing of women.”

“Then I shall have to teach you, Dick,” she whispered happily. “Don’t you think I’ve been longing for you to kiss me and hold me tight in your arms? Don’t you know I want you to trample on me, and do what you like with me, you old ogre, and love it, all the time?”

“God knows, I’d go through fire and water for you, Calliope darling!” he exclaimed, stroking her face and kissing her.

“And Dick?”

“Well, my poppet?”

“Will you promise to call me ‘mouse’ sometimes? It was the first pet name you ever called me.”

“I thought you didn’t like ’em?”

“I don’t,” she replied. “And I’m not very small, and not the least bit mousey. But it was your first name for me, and ... and I rather love it. So promise you’ll use it, sometimes.”

“I promise,” he said, kissing her eyes.

FINIS.

WOKING,
1929-30.

[The end of *The Lonely Bungalow* by Henry Taprell Dorling (as "Taffrail")]