Chambers Robert William

Who Goes There!

Robert Chambers

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Chambers R.

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Содержание

Robert W. Chambers
Who Goes There!

To J. HAMBLEN SEARS

Joseph! I've known you now for many years;
You are the Hero of this pretty story;
In him your every virtue reappears
Lighting his way along the road to glory.

All you possess adorns this Hero gay,
Your fatal beauty, curly hair, and so forth;
Like you he's always ready, night or day,
To pack his doggy clothes and ties and go forth.

No winsome maid beneath a summer sky,
Innured to prudence, modesty, and duty
Would dare demur or hesitate to fly
With such a manly specimen of beauty.

Accept, my friend, this tribute to your worth
As publisher, explorer, lover, fighter,
For men like you were destined from their birth
To make a millionaire of any writer.

R. W. C.

WHO GOES THERE!

Not with indifferent or with flippant hand
Draw the curtain's corner to disclose
A rose, a leaf, a path through this sad land
Untrampled yet by foes.
Out of the Past – the Heart's last Hermitage —
A wistful Phantom glides to me again
Here where I pace that solitary cage
They call, The World of Men.
In vain she mirrors me the Golden Age;
Vain is her Voice of Spring in wood and glen;
The winter sunlight falls across my page
Gilding a broken pen.
Withered the magic gardens which were mine;
Eden, in embers, blackens in the sun;
Rooting amid crushed roses the Wild Swine
Still root, and spare not one.

Village and spire and scented forest path,
Pastures and brooks, meadows and hills and fens
Heard not the secret whispering in Gath
There where the Gray Boar dens,
Till burst his dreadful clamour on the Rhine
And all the World shrank deafened by the roar
Aghast before the out-rush of Wild Swine
Led by the great Gray Boar.
Fallen the cloud-capped castles which were mine;
Cities in ashes whiten in the sun;
Rending the ruined shrines, the Rhenish Swine
Still rend, and spare not one.

PREFACE

The Crown Prince is partly right; the majority in the world is against him and what he stands for; but not against Germany and the Germans.

He professes surprise at the attitude of the United States. That attitude is the natural result of various causes among which are the following:

Distrust of any aggressor by a nation inclined toward peace.

Disgust at the "scrap of paper" episode.

Resentment at the invasion of Belgium.

Contempt for the Imperial Government which is industriously screwing the last penny of "indemnity" out of a ruined nation, which the people of the United States are taxing their private means to keep from starvation.

Further back there are other reasons.

For thirty years the press of Germany has seldom missed an opportunity to express its contempt for Americans. Any American who has ever lived in Germany or who has read German newspapers during the last thirty years is aware of the tone of the German press concerning America and Americans. No innuendoes have been too vulgar, no sneers too brutal for the editors of these papers, and, presumably for the readers.

Also Americans do not forget the attitude of the Imperial Government during the Spanish war. The bad manners of a German Admiral are bearing fruit.

Imperialism we Americans do not understand, but it need not make us unfriendly to empires.

But we do understand when manners are bad, or when a military caste, which maintains its traditions of personal honour by violence, becomes arrogant to the point of brutality.

A false notion of personal honour is alone enough to prevent a sympathetic understanding between two peoples.

America is not an enemy to Germany, only is it inexorably opposed to any Government which breaks faith; and which enthrones above all other gods the god of violence.

For the German soldiers who are dying in this Hohenzollern-Hapsburg war we have only sympathy and pity. We know they are as brave as any soldiers; that cruelty in the German Army is in no greater proportion than it is in any army.

But also we know that the cause of Imperial Germany is wrong; her civilization is founded on propositions impossible for any American to accept; her aims, ambitions, and ideals antagonistic to the progress to communal and individual liberty as we understand the terms. And that settles the matter for us.

CHAPTER I
IN THE MIST

They had selected for their business the outer face of an old garden wall. There were red tiles on the coping; dusty roadside vines half covered the base. Where plaster had peeled off a few weather-beaten bricks showed. Bees hummed in the trampled herbage.

Against this wall they backed the first six men. One, a mere boy, was crying, wiping his frightened eyes on his shirt-sleeve.

The dry crash of the volley ended the matter; all the men against the wall collapsed. Presently one of them, the boy who had been crying, moved his arm in the grass. A rifle spoke instantly, and he moved no more.

There came a low-spoken word of command, the firing squad shouldered rifles, wheeled, and moved off; and out of the sea-grey masses of infantry another squad of execution came marching up, smartly.

A dozen men, some in sabots, trousers, and dirty collarless shirts, some in well-cut business suits and straw hats, and all with their wrists tied behind them, stood silently awaiting their turns. One among them, a young man wearing a golf-cap, knickerbockers, heather-spats, and an absolutely colourless face, stood staring at the tumbled heaps of clothing along the foot of the wall as though stupified.

Six peasants went first; the men more smartly attired were to wait a little longer it appeared.

The emotionless and methodical preparations, the brisk precision of the operation, the cheerful celerity of the firing squad made it the more terrifying, stunning the victims to immobility.

The young man in the golf-cap and knickerbockers clenched his tied hands. Not an atom of colour remained in cheeks or lips, and he stood with face averted while the squad of execution was busy with its business.

There seemed to be some slight disorder along the wall – a defiant voice was raised hoarsely cursing all Germans; another, thin and hysterical, cheered for Belgium and the young King. Also this firing squad must have aimed badly, for bayonet and rifle-butt were used afterward and some delay occurred; and an officer, revolver swinging, prowled along the foot of the wall, kicking inquiringly at the dead heaps of heavy flesh that had collapsed there.

Houses lining the single village street began to leak smoke; smoke writhed and curled behind closed window-panes. Here and there a mounted Uhlan forced his big horse up on the sidewalk and drove his lance butt through the window glass.

Already the street was swimming in thin strata of smoke; the sea-grey uniforms of the German infantry seemed part of the haze; only the faces of the soldiery were visible – faces without bodies, thousands of flat, detached faces, thousands of little pig eyes set in a blank and foggy void. And over everything in the close, heavy air brooded the sour stench of a sweat-soaked, unwashed army.

A third squad of execution came swinging up, apparently out of nowhere, their heavy half-boots clumping in unison on the stony street.

The young man in the golf-cap and knickerbockers heard them coming and bit his bloodless lip.

After a moment the rhythm of the heavy boots ceased. The street became very silent, save where window glass continually fell tinkling to the sidewalk and the feathery whisper of flames became more audible from within the row of empty houses.

The young man lifted his eyes to the sombre and sunless sky. High up there above the mist and heavy bands of smoke he saw the feathery tops of tall trees, motionless.

Presently through the silence came the clatter of hoofs; Uhlans cantered past, pennons whipping from lance heads; then a soft two-toned bugle-call announced an automobile; and presently it loomed

up, huge, through the parted ranks of the infantry, a great grey, low-purring bulk, slowing, halting, still purring.

A grey-clad general officer sat in the tonneau, a grey-uniformed hussar was seated beside the grey-liveried chauffeur.

As the car stopped several officers were already beside the running-board, halted stiffly at attention. The general officer, his cigar between his gloved fingers, leaned over the edge of the tonneau and said something in a very quiet voice.

Instantly a slim, stiff infantry captain saluted, wheeled sharply, and walked straight to the little file of prisoners who stood with their wrists tied behind their backs, looking vacantly at the automobile.

"Which is the prisoner-hostage who says he is American?" he snapped out in his nasal Prussian voice.

The young man who wore a golf-cap took a short step forward, hesitated.

"You?"

"Yes."

"Fall in again!"

The officer nodded to a sergeant of infantry, and a squad of men shoved the prisoners into single file, facing not the fatal wall, but westward, along the street.

"March!" said somebody. And the next moment again: "Halt!" rang out with the snapping brevity of a cracked whip. The general officer leaned from the grey tonneau and looked steadily along the file of hostages until his glance fell upon the young man in the golf-cap.

"What is your name?" he asked quietly in English.

"My name is Guild."

"The rest?"

"Kervyn Guild."

"You say you are American?"

"Yes."

The general officer looked at him for a moment longer, then said something to the hussar aide-de-camp.

The aide threw open the car door and jumped out. A lieutenant took command of the escort. The hussar whispered instructions, turned and came to attention beside the running-board, then, at a nod from the general officer, jumped up beside the chauffeur. There came the soft-toned, mellow warning of the bugle; the grey machine glided off into the mist; the prisoners and escort followed it, marching briskly.

As they passed the end of the street two houses on their right suddenly roared up in one vast, smoke-shot tower of flame, and a brassy glare lighted up the mist around them.

Somewhere near by a woman began to scream; farther down the street, more windows and doors were being beaten in. From farther away, still, came the strains of military music, resonant, full, magnificent. A detail passed with spades to bury the dead who lay under the wall. All was order, precision, and cheerful despatch. The infantry column, along the halted flanks of which the prisoners were now being marched, came to attention. Company after company marked time, heavily; shouldered rifles. Uhlans in file came spurring through the centre of the street; a cyclist followed, rifle slung across his back, sitting at ease on his machine and gazing curiously about.

Out of the end of the village street marched the prisoners and their escort, but presently halted again.

Directly in front of them stood the grey automobile drawn up by the roadside before a pair of iron gates. The gates swung from high stucco walls. On top of the walls were soldiers sitting, rifle on knee; a machine gun commanded the drive, and across the gravel more soldiers were digging a trench, setting posts, and stringing barbed wire which they unwound from great wooden reels.

Through the gates escort and prisoners threaded their way, across a lawn already trampled by cavalry, and straight on toward a pleasant looking and somewhat old-fashioned house set amid older trees and shrubbery, badly broken.

Half a dozen grey-clad staff officers were eating and drinking on the low stone terrace; their horses picketed on the lawn, nibbled the crushed shrubbery. Sentries pacing the terrace and on guard at the door came to attention as the lieutenant in charge of the escort marched his prisoners in.

At a word from him an infantryman went from prisoner to prisoner untying the cords that bound their wrists behind them. Then they were marched into an old-fashioned drawing-room on the left, sentries were placed, the remainder of the escort sat down on the floor with their loaded rifles on their laps and their backs against the wall. Their officer, the lieutenant, walked across the hallway to the room on the left, where the sentry admitted him, then closed the door and resumed his heavy pacing of the black-tiled hall.

The sergeant in charge of the escort lifted his helmet with its grey-cloth covering, scratched his bullet head, yawned. Then he said, jerking a huge thumb toward the drawing-room: "There's a good wall in the garden behind the house. They'll make the fruit grow all the better – these Belgians."

The lieutenant, coming out of the room opposite, overheard him.

"What your crops need," he said in a mincing Berlin voice, "is plenty of good English filth to spade under. See that you bring in a few cart-loads."

And he went into the drawing-room where the prisoners stood by the windows looking out silently at a great pall of smoke which was hanging over the village through which they had just been marched.

"Which of you is the alleged American?" said the lieutenant in hesitating but correct English.

The young man in knickerbockers rose from a brocaded armchair.

"Follow me. General von Reiter does you the honour to question you."

The young man looked the lieutenant straight in the eye and smiled, stiffly perhaps, because his face was still pallid and the breath of death still chilled it.

"The honour," he said in an agreeably modulated voice, "is General von Reiter's. But I fear he won't realize it."

"What's that!" said the lieutenant sharply.

But young Guild shrugged his shoulders. "You wouldn't understand either. Besides you are too talkative for an underling. Do your duty – if you know how."

"Swine of a Yankee," said the lieutenant, speaking slowly and with painful precision, "do you suppose you are in your own sty of a Republic? Silence! A Prussian officer commands you! March!"

Guild dropped his hands into the pockets of his belted jacket. "You little shrimp," he said good humouredly, and followed the officer, who had now drawn his sword.

Out into the hall they filed, across it to the closed door. The sentry on duty there opened it; the lieutenant, very red in the face, delivered his prisoner, then, at a nod from the grey-clad officer who was sitting behind a writing desk, saluted, faced about, and marched out. The door closed sharply behind him.

CHAPTER II
THE MAN IN GREY

Young Guild looked steadily at the man in grey, and the man in grey gazed as steadily back from behind his desk.

He was a man of forty-five, lean, well built, blond, and of regular features save that his cheek-bones were a trifle high, which seemed to crowd his light blue eyes, make them narrower, and push them into a very slight slant. He had the well-groomed aspect of a Prussian officer, dry of skin, clean-shaven save for the mustache *en croc*, which his bony but powerful and well-kept hands absently caressed at intervals.

His forehead was broad and benevolent, but his eyes modified the humanity and his mouth almost denied it – a mouth firm without shrewdness, not bad, not cruel for the sake of cruelty, yet moulded in lines which promised no hope other than that iron justice which knows no mercy.

"Mr. Guild?"

"Yes, General."

General von Reiter folded his bony hands and rested them on the blotter.

"You say that you are American?"

"Yes."

"How came you to be among the Yslemont hostages?"

"I was stopping at the Hotel Poste when the Uhlans and cyclists suddenly appeared. The captain of Uhlans took the Burgomaster with whom I had been playing chess, myself, the notary, and other leading citizens."

"Did you tell him you are American?"

"Yes. But he paid no attention."

"Had you a passport?"

"Yes."

"Other papers to establish your identity?"

"A few business letters from New York. They read them, but told me they were of no use to me."

"Why did you not communicate with your nearest Consul or with the American Minister in Brussels?"

"They refused me the use of telephone and telegraph. They said that I am Belgian and properly liable to be taken as hostage for the good behaviour of Yslemont."

General von Reiter's hand was lifted meditatively to his mustache. He said: "What happened after you were refused permission to communicate with the American representatives?"

"We were all in the dining-room of the Hotel Poste under guard. At the Burgomaster's dictation I was writing out a proclamation warning the inhabitants of Yslemont not to commit any act of violence against the German soldiery and explaining that we were held as hostages for their good behaviour and that a shot fired at a German meant a dead wall and a squad of execution for us and the destruction of Yslemont for them – " He flushed, hesitated.

"Continue," said the general.

"While I was still writing the shots were fired. We all went to the window and we saw Uhlans galloping across the fields after some peasants who were running into the woods. Afterward two stretchers came by with Germans lying in them. After that an officer came and cursed us and the soldiers tied our hands behind our backs. We sat there in the dining-room until the Uhlans came riding into the street with their prisoners tied by ropes to their saddles. Then a major of infantry came into the dining-room and read our sentence to us. Then they marched us out into the fog."

The general crossed his spurred boots under the desk and lay back in his chair, looking at Guild all the while.

"So you are American, Mr. Guild?"

"Yes, General."

"In business in New York?"

"Yes."

"What business?"

"Real estate."

"Where?"

"Union Square, West."

"What is the name of the firm in which you are associated?"

"Guild and Darrel."

"Is that your partner's name?"

"Yes. Henry Darrel."

"Why are you here in Belgium?"

"I was making a foot tour in the Ardennes."

"Your business vacation?"

"Yes. I was to meet my partner in Luxembourg and return to New York with him."

"You and your partner are both absent from New York at the same time?"

"Yes."

"How is that?"

"Real estate in New York is quiet. There is practically no business now."

The general nodded. "Yes," he said, "much of what you tell me has been corroborated. In the Seegard Regiment of Infantry Number 569 you were recognized by several non-commissioned officers and men while you stood with the hostages awaiting – ah – justice," he added drily.

"Recognized?" repeated Guild.

"The soldiers who recognized you had served in New York hotels as clerks or waiters, I believe. The captain of that company, in consequence, very properly reported the matter to Colonel von Eschbach, who telephoned to me. And I am here to consider the matter."

Then, folding his arms and looking hard at Guild out of narrowing eyes that began to slant again:

"The hostages of Yslemont have justly forfeited their lives. Two of my officers have been murdered there in the streets. The law is plain. Is there any reason why these hostages should not pay the proper penalty?"

"The Burgomaster was in the act of dictating – "

"He should have dictated faster!"

"These gentlemen did not fire the shots – "

"But those over whom they exercised authority did!"

Guild fell silent and his features paled a little. The general watched him in silence for a moment and an inquiring expression came into his narrow eyes.

"Well?" he said at length.

Guild lifted his eyes.

"Well, sir," repeated the general. "I have said that there is no reason why the hostages taken at Yslemont should not be turned over to the squad of execution outside there in the hallway."

"I heard you say it."

The general looked at him curiously. "You have nothing to say?"

"No."

"Not for yourself?"

"No."

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Guild, what was your ultimate object in passing through Yslemont?"

"I have already told you that I had intended to make a foot tour through the Three Ardennes."

"*Had* intended?"

"Yes."

"Was that still your intention when you were made prisoner?"

After a moment's hesitation: "No," said Guild in a low voice.

"You altered your plan?"

"Yes."

"You decided to employ your vacation otherwise?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"I decided to enlist," said Guild. He was very white, now.

"Enlist?"

"Yes."

"In the British army?"

"The Belgian."

"Oh! So now you do not remind me that, as an American, you claim exemption from the execution of the sentence?"

"I have said enough," replied Guild. A slight colour showed over his cheek-bones.

"If I shoot the Burgomaster and the notary and the others in there, ought I to let you go – on your own representations?"

"I have said enough," repeated Guild.

"Oh! So you refuse to plead any particular exemption on account of your nationality?"

No answer.

"And you, by your silence, permit yourself to be implicated in the responsibility of your fellow-hostages?"

No reply.

"Why? – Mr. Guild. Is it, perhaps, after all because you are not an American in the strictest sense of that often misused term?"

There was no response.

"You were born in America?"

"Yes."

"Your father, perhaps, was born there?"

"Yes."

"Oh! And *his* father?"

"No."

"Oh! You are, I see, quite candid, Mr. Guild."

"Yes, when necessary."

"I see. Very well, then. Where do you get your Christian name, Kervyn? Is it an American name?"

"No."

"The name, Guild – is that an American name?"

"Yes."

"But —*is* it *your* name?"

"Yes."

"Was it, by chance, ever spelled a little differently – in times gone by, Mr. Guild?"

"Yes."

"Oh! And how, in times gone by, was it spelled by your – grandfather?"

Guild looked him calmly in the eyes. "It was spelled Gueldres," he said.

"I see, I see. That *is* interesting. Gueldres, Kervyn Gueldres. Why, it sounds almost Belgian. Let me see – if I remember – there was such a family inscribed in the Book of Gold. There was even a Kervyn of Gueldres – a count, was he not? – Comte d'Yvoir – Count of Yvoir, Hastière, and Lesse. Was he not – this Kervyn of Gueldres, many, many years ago?"

"I congratulate General von Reiter on his memory for such unimportant history as that of Belgium," said Guild, reddening.

"Oh, we Germans are studious in our youth – and thorough. Nothing is too unimportant to ignore and" – he smiled grimly – "nothing is too vast for us to undertake – and accomplish."

He lifted his hand to his mustache again. "Mr. Guild," he said, "at the elections in America you – ah – vote of course?"

"No."

"What?"

Guild remained silent.

The general, stroking his mustache, said pleasantly: "The Belgian nobility always interested me; it is so exclusive and there are so few families of the *classe noble*. Except for those ten families who are independent of Court favour – like the Croys and De Lignes – there seem to be only about thirty families who possess the privileges of the Golden Book. Is this not so?"

"General von Reiter appears to know."

The general seemed gratified at this corroboration of his own memory. "And," he went on amiably, "this Belgian nobility is a real nobility. Once of it, always a part of it. And, too, its code is so rigid, so inexorably precise that it seems almost Prussian. For example, the code of the Belgian aristocracy permits none of its members to go into any commercial business, any trade – even forbids an entry into high finance. Only the Church and Army are open to it; and in the Army only the two Guides regiments and the Lancers are permitted to young men of the aristocracy." He gazed almost mildly at the young man: "You are in business, you tell me?"

"Yes."

"Oh! Then of course you have never been a soldier."

Guild was silent.

"*Have* you ever served in the army?"

"Yes."

"Really! In what American regiment have you served?"

"In a militia regiment of cavalry – the 1st New York."

"How interesting. And – you have never served in the regular army?"

"N – " but Guild hesitated.

General von Reiter watched him intently.

"Did you reply in the negative, Mr. Guild?"

"No, I did not reply at all."

"Oh! Then would you be good enough to reply?"

"If – you insist."

"I insist."

"Very well," said Guild, reddening, "then I have served in the – Belgian army."

The general nodded without surprise: "In what regiment?"

"In the first regiment of Guides."

"You came from America to do this?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"When I became of military age."

"Noblesse oblige?"

No reply.

"In other words, you are an American with all the Belgian aristocracy's sense of responsibility to race and tradition. You are a good American, but there are inherited instincts which sent you back to serve two years with the colours – to serve a country which for ten hundred years your race has defended. And – the Guides alone was open to a Gueldres – where, in America, a Guild was free to choose. Monsieur, you are Belgian; and, as a Belgian, you were properly seized as a hostage and properly sentenced to pay the penalty for the murderous misbehaviour of your own people! I approve the sentence. Have you anything to say?"

"No."

The general regarded him closely, then rose, came around the end of the desk, walked across the room and halted directly in front of Guild.

"So you see there is no chance for you," he said, staring hard at him.

Guild managed to control his voice and speak clearly: "I see," he said.

"Suppose," said von Reiter, still staring at him, "I ask you to do me a favour?"

Guild's face was marble, but he managed to force a smile: "You ask a favour of a prisoner a few moments before his execution?"

"I do. Will you grant it?"

"What is it?"

"Nothing dishonourable to a good – American."

"That is not enough; and you know it."

"Very well. I shall tell you then. I have a daughter in England. I can't get her away from England – I can't get word to her. I – " suddenly his dry, blond features twitched, but instantly the man had them under iron control again, and he cleared his throat: "She is in England near London. We are at war with England. I want my daughter out of the country. I can't get her out. Go and get her for me!"

For a full minute the two men gazed at each other in silence. Then von Reiter said: "I know enough of you. If you say you'll do it I'll free the Burgomaster and the others in there – " he jerked his bony thumb toward the hallway outside – "If you say you'll do it – if you say you'll go to England, now, and find my daughter, and bring her here to me – or conduct her to whatever point I designate, I'll not have those men shot; I'll not burn the rest of Yslemont; I'll see that you are conducted to the Dutch frontier unmolested after you carry out your engagements with me. Will you do it?"

Guild met his intent gaze with a gaze as searching:

"What is your daughter's name?"

"Her name is Karen."

"Where am I to find her?"

"Thirty miles out of London at Westheath. She is known there as Karen Girard."

"What!" said Guild sharply.

"She chose to be so known in her profession."

"Her profession?"

"She has been on the stage – against my wishes. She is preparing herself further – contrary to my wishes. Until she disassociates herself from that profession she will not use the name of von Reiter."

Guild nodded slowly: "*That* is why your daughter is known as Karen Girard?"

"That is why. She is a young girl – nineteen. She went to school in her mother's country, Denmark. She imbibed notions there – and, later, in England among art students and others. It is the well-born who succumb most easily to nonsense once the discipline is relaxed. She has had her way in spite of my authority. Now it is time for such insubordination to cease. I wish to have my daughter back. I cannot get her. You are – American – to all intents and purposes, and you would be under no suspicion in England. Your appearance, your speech, your manners all are above suspicion. You *can* do this. I have made up my mind concerning you, and I trust you. Will you go to England, find my daughter and bring her back to me here; or, if I am ordered elsewhere, will you escort her to my country place in Silesia which is called Rehthal?"

"Suppose I do not find her? Suppose I fail?"

"You will return here and report to me."

"If I fail and I return here and report my failure, does that mean the execution of the gentlemen in the drawing-room yonder?"

"It does."

"And the destruction of Yslemont?"

"Absolutely."

"And – " the young man smiled – "incidentally it means my own execution, does it not?"

"It does."

They gazed at each other with intense interest.

"Under such circumstances do you think I'll come back if I am not successful?" inquired the younger man.

"I am satisfied that you will return if you say you will."

"Return to face my own execution?" repeated Guild, curiously. "You believe that of me? – of a man about whom you know nothing – a man who" – his animated features suddenly darkened and he caught his breath a moment, then – "a man who considers your nation a barbarous one, your rulers barbarians, your war inexcusable, your invasion of this land the vilest example of treachery and dishonour that the world has ever witnessed – you still believe that such a man might consider himself bound to return here if unsuccessful and face one of your murdering platoons? *Do* you?" he repeated, the slightest intonation of violence beginning to ring in the undertones of his voice.

Von Reiter's dry, blond features had become greyer and more set. His light blue eyes never left the other; behind their pale, steady scrutiny he seemed to be considering every word.

He drew in his breath, slowly; his very thin lips receded for a moment, then the fixed tranquillity returned.

"We Germans," he said drily, "care nothing for what Europe may think of us or say about us. Perhaps we are vandals, Goths, Huns – whatever you call them. Perhaps we are barbarians. I think we *are*! For we mean to scour the old world clean of its rottenness – cauterize it, cut out the old sores of a worn-out civilization, scrape its surface clean of the parasite nations. … And, if *fire* be necessary to burn out the last traces – " His light blue eyes glimmered a very reflection of the word – "then let fire pass. It has passed, before – God's Angel of the Flaming Sword has returned again to lead us! What is a cathedral or two – or pictures or foolish statues – or a million lives? Yes, if you choose, we are barbarians. And we intend to plow under the accumulated decay of the whole world, and burn up its rubbish and found our new world on virgin earth. Yes, we *are* barbarians. And our Emperor is a barbarian. And God, who creates with one hand and destroys with the other – God – autocrat of material creation, inexorable Over-Lord of ultimate material annihilation, is the greatest barbarian of all! Under His orders we are moving. In His name we annihilate! Amen!"

A dead silence ensued. And after it had lasted a little while the tall Prussian lifted his hand absently to his mustache and touched it caressingly.

"I am satisfied, whatever your opinion may be of me or of my people, that you will return if you say you will, successful or otherwise. I promise you immunity if you return with my daughter; I promise you a wall and a file of men if you return unsuccessful. But, in either event, I am satisfied that you will return. Will you go?"

"Yes," said Guild, thoughtfully. They stood for a moment longer, the young man gazing absently out of the window toward the menacing smoke pall which was increasing above Yslemont.

"You promise not to burn the remainder of the village?" he asked, turning to look at von Reiter.

"I promise not to burn it if you keep your promise."

"I'll try… And the Burgomaster, notary, magistrate, and the others are to be released?"

"If you do what I ask."

"Very well. It's worth trying for. Give me my credentials."

"You need no written ones. Letters are unsafe. You will go to my daughter, who has leased a small cottage at Westheath. You will say to her that you come from me; that *the question which she was to decide on the first of November must be decided sooner*, and that when she arrives at Rehthal in Silesia she is to telegraph me through the General Staff of her arrival. If I can obtain leave to go to Silesia I shall do so. If not, I shall telegraph my instructions to her."

"Will that be sufficient for your daughter to place her confidence in a man absolutely strange to her and accompany that man on a journey of several days?" asked Guild, slightly astonished.

"Not quite sufficient," said von Reiter, his dry, blond visage slightly relaxing.

He drew a rather plain ring from his bony finger: "See if you can wear that," he said. "Does it fit you?"

Guild tried it on. "Well enough."

"Is there any danger of its slipping off?"

Guild tried it on another finger, which it fitted snugly.

"It looks like any other plain gold ring," he remarked.

"Her name is engraved inside."

"Karen?"

"Karen."

There came a short pause. Then: "Do you know London?" asked von Reiter.

"Passably."

"Oh! You are likely to require a touring car. You'll find it difficult to get. May I recommend the Edmeston Agency? It's about the only agency, now, where any gasoline at all is obtainable. The Edmeston Agency. I use it when I am in London. Ask for Mr. Louis Grätz."

After a moment he added, "My chauffeur brought your luggage, rücksack, stick, and so forth, from Yslemont. You will go to the enemies' lines south of Ostend in my car. One of my aides-de-camp will accompany you and show you a letter of instructions before delivering you to the enemies' flag of truce. You will read the letter, learn it by heart, and return it to my aide, Captain von Klipper.

"There is a bedroom above. Go up there. Food will be sent you. Get what sleep you can, because you are to leave at sunrise. Is this arrangement agreeable to you —*Monsieur le Comte de Gueldres*?"

"Perfectly, General Baron von Reiter."

"Also. Then I have the honour to wish you good night and a pleasant sleep."

"I thank you and I have the honour to wish you the same," said Guild, bowing pleasantly.

General von Reiter stood aside and saluted with stiff courtesy as the young man passed out.

A few moments later a regimental band somewhere along the Yslemont highway began to play "Polen Blut."

If blood were the theme, they ought to have played it well enough.

CHAPTER III
TIPPERARY

At noon on the following day Kervyn Guild wrote to his friend Darrel:

Dear Harry:

Instead of joining you on the Black Erenz for the late August trout fishing I am obliged to go elsewhere.

I have had a most unpleasant experience, and it is not ended, and I do not yet know what the outcome is to be.

From the fact that I have not dated this letter it will be evident to you that I am not permitted to do so. Also you will understand that I have been caught somewhere in the war zone and that is why the name of the place from which I am writing you is omitted – by request.

We have halted for luncheon at a wayside inn – the gentleman who is kind enough to accompany me, and I – and I have obtained this benevolent gentleman's authorization to write you whatever I please as long as I do NOT

1st. Tell you where I am going.

2d. Tell you where I am.

3d. Tell you anything else that does not suit him.

And he isn't a censor at that; he is just a very efficient, polite, and rather good-looking German officer serving as aide on the staff of a certain German major-general.

Day before yesterday, after luncheon, I was playing a quiet game of chess with the Burgomaster of a certain Belgian village, and was taking a last look before setting out for Luxembourg on foot, rücksack, stick, and all, when – well, circumstances over which I had no control interrupted the game of chess. It was white to go and mate in three moves. The Burgomaster was playing black. I had him, Harry. Too bad, because he was the best player in – well in that neighbourhood. I opened with a Lopez and he replied most irregularly. It certainly was interesting. I am sorry that I couldn't mate him and analyze the game with him. However, thank Heaven, I did announce mate in three moves, and the old gentleman was still defiantly studying the situation. I admit he refused to resign.

I left that village toward evening in a large, grey automobile. I and the gentleman who still accompanies me slept fairly well that night, considering the fact that a town was on fire all around us.

In the morning we made slow progress in our automobile. Roads and fields were greenish grey with troops – a vast horde of them possessed the valleys; they enveloped the hills like fog-banks turning the whole world grey – infantry, artillery, cuirassiers, Uhlans, hussars – all mist colour from helmet to heel – and so are their waggons and guns and caissons and traction-engines and motor-cycles and armoured cars and aeroplanes.

The latter are magnificent in an artistic sense – perfect replicas of giant pigeon-hawks, circling, planing, sheering the air or sailing high, majestic as a very lammergeier, fierce, relentless, terrible.

My efficient companion who is reading this letter over my shoulder as I write it, and who has condescended to permit a ghost of a smile to mitigate, now and then,

the youthful seriousness of his countenance, is not likely to object when I say to you that what I have seen of the German army on the march is astoundingly impressive.

(He smiles again very boyishly and says he doesn't object.)

Order, precision, a knowledge of the country absolutely unhesitating marks its progress. There is much singing in the infantry ranks. The men march well, their physique is fine, the cavalry are superbly mounted, the guns – (He shakes his head, so never mind the guns.)

Their regimental bands are wonderful. It is a sheer delight to listen to them. They play everything from "Polen Blut" and "Sari," to Sousa, "Tannhäuser," and "A Hot Time," but I haven't yet heard "Tipperary." (He seems puzzled at this, but does not object.) I expect shortly to hear a band playing it. (I have to explain to my efficient companion that "Tipperary" is a tune which ought to take Berlin and Vienna *by storm* when they hear it. It takes Berlin and Vienna to really appreciate good music. He agrees with me.)

Yesterday we passed a convoy of prisoners, some were kilted. I was not permitted to speak to them – but, Oh, those wistful eyes of Scottish blue! I guess they understood, for they got all the tobacco I had left. (My companion is doubtful about this, but finally shrugs his shoulders.)

There is an awesome noise going on beyond us in – well in a certain direction. I think that all the artillery ever made is producing it. There's practically no smoke visible against the clear blue August sky – nothing to see at all except the feathery cotton fleece of shrapnel appearing, expanding, vanishing over a hill on the horizon, and two aeroplanes circling high like a pair of mated hawks.

And all the while this earth-rocking diapason continues more terrible, more majestic than any real thunder I ever heard.

We have had luncheon and are going on. He drank five quarts of Belgian beer! I am permitted a few minutes more and he orders the sixth quart. This is what I have to say:

In case anything should go wrong with me give the enclosed note to my mother. Please see to it that everything I have goes to her. My will is in my box in our safe at the office. It is all quite clear. There should be no trouble.

I expressed my trunk to your care in Luxembourg. You wrote me that you had received it and placed it in storage to await my leisurely arrival. In case of accident to me send it to my mother.

About the business, my share in any deals now on should go to my brother. After that if you care to take George in when he comes out of Harvard it would gratify his mother and me.

He's all to the good, you know. But don't do this if the business does not warrant it. Don't do it out of sentiment, Harry. If he promises to be of use, and if you have no other man in view, and if, as I say, business conditions warrant such an association with a view to eventual partnership, then if you care to take in George it will be all right.

He has sufficient capital, as you know. He lacks only the business experience. And he is intelligent and quick and it won't take him long.

But if you prefer somebody else don't hesitate. George is perfectly able to take care of his mother and himself.

This is all, I think. I'm sorry about the August fishing on the Black Erenz. It is a lovely stream and full of trout. All Luxembourg is lovely; it is a story-book country – a real land of romance. I wish I might have seen it again. Never were such forests,

such silver streams, such golden glades, such wild-flowers – never such hills, such meadows, such skies.

Well – if I come back to you, I come back. If not – good-bye, old fellow – with all it implies between friends of many years.

Say to your kind friends, the Courlands, who so graciously invited you to bring me with you to Lesse Forest, that I shall not be able to accept their delightful hospitality, and that my inability to do so must remain to me a regret as long as I live. (These guns are thundering enough to crack the very sky! I really wish I could hear some band playing "Tipperary.")

Good-bye for a while – or indefinitely. Good luck to you.

Kervyn Guild.

"Is that quite acceptable to you?" asked Guild of the young Death's Head hussar beside him.

"Quite acceptable," replied the officer politely. "But what is there remarkable in anybody drinking six quarts of beer?"

Guild laughed: "Here is the note that I desire to enclose with it, if I may do so." And he wrote:

Dearest:

You must not grieve too much. You have George. It could not be avoided, honourably. He and I are good Americans; we are, perhaps, something else, too. But what the Book of Gold holds it never releases; what is written there is never expunged. George must do what I did when the time comes. I would have done more – was meaning to – was on my way. Destiny has ordered it otherwise.

While I live I think always of you. And it shall be so until the last.

This letter is to be sent to you by Harry Darrel only in the event of my death.

There's a good chance for me. But if things go wrong, then, good-bye, dearest.

Kervyn.

P. S.

Tell George that it's up to him, now.

K.

He held out the letter cheerfully to the hussar, but the latter had read it, and he merely nodded in respectful silence. So Guild folded it, sealed it in an envelope, wrote on it, "For my Mother in case of my death," and inclosed it in his letter to Darrel.

"Any time you are ready now," he said, rising from the little enameled iron table under the arbour.

The hussar rose, clanking, and set a whistle to his lips. Then, turning: "I shall have yet one more glass of beer," he said blandly, but his eyes twinkled.

The grey car rolled up in a few moments. Over it at a vast height something soared in hawk-like circles. It may have been a hawk. There was no telling at such a height.

So they drove off again amid the world-shaking din of the guns paralleling the allied lines toward the west. Ostend lay somewhere in that direction, the channel flowed beyond; beyond that crouched England – where bands were playing "Tipperary" – and where, perhaps, a young girl was listening to that new battle song of which the young hussar beside him had never even heard.

As the grey car hummed westward over the Belgian road, Guild thought of these things while the whole world about him was shaking with the earthquake of the guns.

"Karen," he repeated under his breath, "Karen Girard."

After a while sentinels began to halt them every few rods. The chauffeur unrolled two white flags and set them in sockets on either side of the hood. The hussar beside him produced a letter from his grey despatch-pouch.

"General von Reiter's orders," he said briefly. "You are to read them now and return the letter to me before the enemies' parlementaire answers our flag."

Guild took the envelope, tore it open, and read:

> Orders received since our interview make it impossible for me to tell you where to find me on your return.
>
> My country place in Silesia is apparently out of the question at present as a residence for the person you are expected to bring back with you. The inclosed clipping from a Danish newspaper will explain why. Therefore you will sail from London on Wednesday or Sunday, taking a Holland liner. You will land at Amsterdam, go by rail through Utrecht, Helmond, Halen, Maastricht. You will be expected there. If I am not there you will remain over night.
>
> If you return from your journey *alone* and unsuccessful you will surrender yourself as prisoner to the nearest German post and ask the officer in charge to telegraph me.
>
> If you return successful you shall be permitted at Eijsden to continue your journey with the person you bring with you, across the Luxembourg border to Trois Fontaines, which is just beyond the Grand Duchy frontier; and you shall then deliver the person in question to the housekeeper of the hunting lodge, Marie Bergner. The lodge is called Quellenheim, and it belongs to me. If I am not there you must remain there over night. In the morning if you do not hear from me, you are at liberty to go where you please, and your engagements vis-à-vis to me are cancelled.
>
> *VON REITER, MAJ-GEN'L.*

The inclosed newspaper clipping had been translated into French and written out in long-hand. The translation read as follows:

> Russia's invasion of East Prussia, Posen and Silesia has sent a wave of panic over the eastern provinces of the German Empire, if reports from Copenhagen and Stockholm are to be credited. These reports are chiefly significant as indicating that the Russian advance is progressing more rapidly than has been asserted even by despatches from Petrograd.
>
> A correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* reports from Stockholm that the whole of eastern Germany is upset by the menace of Cossack raids. He hears that a diplomatic despatch from Vienna contains information that the civilian inhabitants of Koenigsberg, East Prussia, and Breslau, in Silesia, are abandoning their homes and that only the military will remain in these strongholds.
>
> From Copenhagen it is reported, allegedly from German sources, that Silesia expects devastation by fire and sword and that the wealthy Prussian landholders, whose immense estates cover Silesia, are leading the exodus toward the west. The military authorities have done everything possible to check the panic, fearing its hurtful influence on Germany's prospects, but have been unable to reassure the inhabitants. Many of these have seen bands of Cossacks who have penetrated a few miles over the border and their warnings have spread like a forest fire.

For a long while the young man studied the letter, reading and re-reading it, until, closing his eyes, he could repeat it word for word.

And when he was letter perfect he nodded and handed back the letter to the hussar, who pouched it.

A moment later the car ran in among a horde of mounted Uhlans, and one of their officers came galloping up alongside of the machine.

He and the hussar whispered together for a few minutes, then an Uhlan was summoned, a white cloth tied to his lance-shaft, and away he went on his powerful horse, the white flag snapping in the wind. Behind him cantered an Uhlan trumpeter.

Toward sunset the grey automobile rolled west out into open country. A vast flat plain stretched to the horizon, where the sunset flamed scarlet and rose.

But it was almost dusk before from somewhere across the plain came the faint strains of military music.

The hussar's immature mustache bristled. "British!" he remarked. "Gott in Himmel, what barbarous music!"

Guild said nothing. They were playing "Tipperary."

And now, through the late rays of the afterglow, an Uhlan trumpeter, sitting his horse on the road ahead, set his trumpet to his lips and sounded the parley again. Far, silvery, from the misty southwest, a British bugle answered.

Guild strained his eyes. Nothing moved on the plain. But, at a nod to the chauffeur from the hussar, the great grey automobile rolled forward, the two Uhlans walking their horses on either side.

Suddenly, east and west as far as the eye could see, trenches in endless parallels cut the plain, swarming with myriads and myriads of men in misty grey.

The next moment the hussar had passed a black silk handkerchief over Guild's eyes and was tying it rather tightly.

CHAPTER IV
BAD DREAMS

His first night in London was like a bad dream to him. Lying half awake on his bed, doggedly, tenaciously awaiting the sleep he needed, at intervals even on its vision-haunted borderland, but never drifting across it, he remained always darkly conscious of his errand and of his sinister predicament.

The ineffaceable scenes of the last three days obsessed him; his mind seemed to be unable to free itself. The quieter he lay, the more grimly determined he became that sleep should blot out these tragic memories for a few hours at least, the more bewildering grew the confusion in his haunted mind. Continually new details were evoked by his treacherous and insurgent memory – trifles terrible in their minor significance – the frightened boy against the wall snivelling against his ragged shirt-sleeve – the sprawling attitudes of the dead men in the dusty grass – and how, after a few moments, a mangled arm moved, blindly groping – and what quieted it.

Incidents, the petty details of sounds, of odours, of things irrelevant, multiplied and possessed him – the thin gold-rimmed spectacles on the Burgomaster's nose and the honest, incredulous eyes which gazed through them at him when he announced checkmate in three moves.

Did that tranquil episode happen years ago in another and calmer life? – or a few hours ago in this?

He heard again the startling and ominous sounds of raiding cavalry even before they had become visible in the misty street – the flat slapping gallop of the Uhlan's horses on the paved way, the tinkling clash of broken glass. Again the thick, sour, animal-like stench of the unwashed infantry seemed to assail and sicken him to the verge of faintness; and, half awake, he saw a world of fog set thick with human faces utterly detached from limbs and bodies – thousands and thousands of faces watching him out of thousands and thousands of little pig-like eyes.

His nerves finally drove him into motion and he swung himself out of bed and walked to the window.

His hotel was the Berkeley, and he looked out across Piccadilly into a silent, sad, unlighted city of shadows. Only a single line of lighted lamps outlined the broad thoroughfare. Crimson sparks twinkled here and there – the lights of cabs.

The great darkened Ritz towered opposite, Devonshire House squatted behind its grilles and shadowy walls on the right, and beyond the great dark thoroughfare stretched away into the night, melancholy, deserted save for the slight stirring of a policeman here and there or the passage of an automobile running in silence without lights.

He had been standing by the window for ten minutes or so, a lighted cigarette between his lips, both hands dropped into the pocket of his pyjamas, when he became aware of a slight sound – a very slight one – behind him.

He turned around and his eyes fell upon the knob of the door. Whether or not it was turning he could not determine in the dusk of the room. The only light in it came through his windows from the starry August night-sky.

After a moment he walked toward the door, bare-footed across the velvet carpet, halted, fixed his eyes on the door knob.

After a moment it began to turn again, almost imperceptibly. And, in him, every over-wrought nerve tightened to its full tension till he quivered. Slowly, discreetly, noiselessly the knob continued to turn. The door was not locked. Presently it began to open, the merest fraction of an inch at a time; then, abruptly but stealthily, it began to close again, as though the unseen intruder had caught sight of him, and Guild stepped forward swiftly and jerked the door wide open.

There was only the darkened hallway there, and a servant with a tray who said very coolly, "Thanky, sir," and entered the room.

"What-do-you-want?" asked Guild unsteadily.

"You ordered whiskey and soda for eleven o'clock, sir."

"I did not. Why do you try to enter my room without knocking?"

"I understood your orders were not to disturb you but to place the tray on the night-table beside your bed, sir."

Guild regarded him steadily. The servant, clean-shaven, typical, encountered the young man's gaze respectfully and with no more disturbance than seemed natural under the circumstances of a not unusual blunder.

Guild's nerves relaxed and he drew a deep, quiet breath.

"Somebody has made a mistake," he said. "I ordered nothing. And, hereafter, anybody coming to my door will knock. Is that plain?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"Have the goodness to make it very plain to the management."

"I'm sorry, sir – "

"You understand, now?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Very well… And, by the way, who on this corridor is likely to have ordered that whiskey?"

"Sir?"

"Somebody ordered it, I suppose?"

"Very likely the gentleman next door, sir – "

"All right," said Guild quietly. "Try the door while I stand here and look on."

"Very good, sir."

With equanimity unimpaired the waiter stepped to the next door on the corridor, placed his tray flat on the palm of his left hand, and, with his right hand, began to turn the knob, using, apparently, every precaution to make no noise.

But he was not successful; the glassware on his tray suddenly gave out a clear, tinkling clash, and, at the same moment the bedroom door opened from within and a man in evening dress appeared dimly framed by the doorway.

"Sorry, sir," said the waiter, "your whiskey, sir – "

He stepped inside the room and the door closed behind him. Guild quietly waited. Presently the waiter reappeared without the tray.

"Come here," motioned Guild.

The waiter said: "Yes, sir," in a natural voice. Doubtless the man next door could hear it, too.

Guild, annoyed, lowered his own voice: "Who is the gentleman in the next room?"

"A Mr. Vane, sir."

"From where?"

"I don't know, sir."

"What is he, English?"

"Yes sir, I believe so."

"You don't happen to know his business, do you?"

"No, sir."

"I ask – it's merely curiosity. Wait a moment." He turned, picked up a sovereign from a heap of coins on his night-table and gave it to the waiter.

"No need to repeat to anybody what I have asked you."

"Oh, no, sir – "

"All right. Listen very attentively to what I tell you. When I arrived here this afternoon I desired the management to hire for my use a powerful and absolutely reliable touring car and a chauffeur. I mentioned the Edmeston Agency and a Mr. Louis Grätz.

"Half an hour later the management informed me that they had secured such a car for me from Mr. Louis Grätz at the Edmeston Agency; that I was permitted sufficient gasoline to take me from here to Westheath, back here again, and then to the docks of the Holland Steamship Company next Sunday.

"I've changed my mind. Tomorrow is Wednesday and a steamer sails from Fresh Wharf for Amsterdam. Tell the management that I'll take that steamer and that I want them to telephone the Edmeston Agency to have the car here at six o'clock tomorrow morning."

"Very good, sir."

"Go down and tell them now. Ask them to confirm the change of orders by telephone."

"Very good, sir."

A quarter of an hour later the bell tinkled in his room: "Are you there, sir? Thank you, sir. The car is to be here at six o'clock. What time would you breakfast, Mr. Guild?"

"Five. Have it served here, please."

"Thank you, sir."

Guild went back to bed. Another detail bothered him now. If the man next door had ordered whiskey and soda for eleven, *to be placed on the night-table beside the bed*, why was he up and dressed and ready to open the door when the jingle of glassware awaited him?

Still there might be various natural explanations. Guild thought of several, but none of them suited him.

He began to feel dull and sleepy. That is the last he remembered, except that his sleep was disturbed by vaguely menacing dreams, until he awoke in the grey light of early morning, scarcely refreshed, and heard the waiter knocking. He rose, unlocked his door, and let him in with his tray.

When the waiter went out again Guild relocked his door, turned on his bath, took it red hot and then icy. And, thoroughly awake, now, he returned to his room, breakfasted, dressed, rang for his account, and a few minutes later descended in the lift to find his car and chauffeur waiting, and the tall, many-medalled porter at salute by the door.

"Westheath," he said to the smiling chauffeur. "Go as fast as you dare and by the direct route."

The chauffeur touched his peaked cap. He seemed an ideal chauffeur, neat, alert, smiling, well turned out in fact as the magnificent and powerful touring car which had been as thoroughly and minutely groomed as a race-horse or a debutante.

When the car rolled out into Piccadilly the waiter who had mistaken the order for whiskey, watched it from the dining-room windows. Several floors above, the man who had occupied the next bedroom also watched the departure of the car. When it was out of sight the man whose name was Vane went to the telephone and called 150 Fenchurch Street, E. C. It was the office of the Holland Steamship Company.

And the waiter who had entered the room unannounced, stood listening to the conversation over the wire, and finally took the transmitter himself for further conversation while Vane stood by listening, one hand resting familiarly on the waiter's shoulder.

After the waiter had hung up the receiver, Vane walked to the window, stood a moment looking out, then came slowly back.

"Gwynn," he said to the waiter, "this man, Guild, seems to be harmless. He's known at the American Embassy. He's an American in the real estate business in New York. It's true that Dart telegraphed from Ostend that Guild came to our lines in a German military automobile under a white flag. But he told a straight story. I'll run out to Westheath, and if his business there is clean and above-board, I think we can give him a clean bill of health."

Gwynn said, slowly: "I don't like the way he questioned me last night. Besides, a sovereign is too much even for an American."

"He might have been afraid of robbery."

"He was afraid of *something*."

"Very well. We've passage on the boat if necessary. I'll go out to Westheath anyway. If I don't care for what he is doing out there we can hold him on the dock."

"Another thing," mused Gwynn. "The Edmeston Agency may be quite all right, but the man's name is Grätz."

"He's been under scrutiny. He seems to be all right."

"All the same – his name is all wrong. What was that chauffeur's name?"

"Bush."

"*Busch?*"

"He spells it without a *c*. I saw his signature on the Agency rolls."

"Have you his history?"

"He's Canadian. I've sent for it."

"You'll find that his father spelled his name with a *c*," remarked Gwynn, gloomily. But Vane only laughed.

"I'm off," he said. "Stick around where I can get you on the telephone if necessary. But I don't think it will be necessary."

"I do," muttered Gwynn.

CHAPTER V
KAREN

The journey was the usual one through interminable London streets alternately respectable and squalid; and straight ahead through equally interminable suburbs with their endless "terraces," semi-detached and detached villas, and here and there a fine old house behind neglected garden walls, making its last forlorn stand against the all-destroying inroad of the London jungle.

There had been a heavy haze in London, but no fog. In the country, however, beyond the last outstretched suburban tentacle of the inky octopus the morning sun glimmered low through a golden smother, promising a glimpse of blue sky.

To Guild, one "heath" has always resembled another, and now, as they passed through the country at high speed, there seemed to him very little difference between the several named points which marked his progress toward Westheath. Hedges alternated with ivy-covered walls on either side of a wide, fine road; trees were splendid as usual, sheep fat, cattle sleek. Here and there a common or heath glimmered bewitchingly where sunlight fell among the whins; birds winged their way, waters glimmered, and the clean, singing August wind of England blew steadily in his face strangely reviving within him some ancient, forgotten, pre-natal wistfulness. Maybe it came from his American mother's English mother.

Near two villages and once on the open highway policemen leisurely signalled the chauffeur to stop, and came sauntering around to the tonneau to question Guild as to his origin, his business, and his destination; quiet, dignified, civil, respectable men they seemed to be in their night cloaks and their always smart and business-like helmets and uniforms.

All seemed satisfied, but all politely suggested that passports were now becoming fashionable in England. And Guild thanked them pleasantly and drove on.

"Bush," he said to his chauffeur, "this spy scare was ridiculed by the newspapers, but it looks to me as though it were being taken rather seriously after all."

"It is, sir."

"I understand that about thirty thousand German and Austrian reservists have been arrested in England since war began?"

"I hear so, sir."

"I suppose the country really is swarming with spies. The paper yesterday said that there was still a great and serious leakage of military information out of England. One paper, yesterday afternoon, reported that a number of spies had already been shot in the Tower."

"I have heard so, sir," said the chauffeur smilingly.

He was a blond, good-looking young fellow. Always his lips seemed to rest in pleasant curves as though his reveries were agreeable.

A few hideously modern detached villas were passed, then hedges, walls, a wood, a modern bridge.

"How near are we to Westheath now?" asked Guild, leaning forward in his seat.

"We are there, sir." And the smiling chauffeur slowed the car to a standstill at a cross-roads where furze and broom grew rankly over the heath and a few rather tawdry villas appeared among the trees beyond.

Guild looked at his watch. It was only a little after seven, an unearthly hour for a call upon any young girl, not to mention one to whom he was personally unknown.

A policeman still wearing his waterproof night cloak, came leisurely across to learn what was wanted.

"I am looking for the villa of Miss Girard – Miss Karen Girard," explained Guild.

"Hyacinth Villa, Number 169. Take the road to the right. It is the only house."

"Thank you."

The car moved forward, swung to the right. About a quarter of a mile away stood a small, modern stucco dwelling behind its hedge of privet. Beyond that there were woods again and dewy uplands glimmering with furze and brake.

When they arrived they found the driveway closed by a gate.

"Never mind; I'll walk to the house," said Guild.

The smiling chauffeur leaned back and opened the tonneau door; Guild descended, looked at the iron gate between its ugly stucco posts, peered through it up the drive with its parallel rows of recently planted lime trees. Everything about the place was recent if not brand new – ugly with the ugliness of well-to-do bad taste. Red geraniums and yellow cannas had been planted in fearsome juxtaposition, salvia flanked a red brick terrace – a most unholy combination of colour. In the early morning the sun exposed the place without mercy. It was lonesome and amazingly depressing.

Glancing up at the gate again he discovered a nickel-plated label riveted to one of the stucco posts. On it was the name of the place, "Hyacinth Villa," and its number 169.

There was no lodge, no bell, but the wicket gate was not locked. So Guild entered.

"Shall I drive up to the house, sir?" inquired the chauffeur.

"No; wait out here."

There seemed to be no sign of life about the house when at last he arrived in front of it – nobody apparently stirring at that hour. He hesitated; he still wore the same knickerbockers and cap which he had worn in Belgium. His sack, which was now in the car, contained only fresh linen; and he began to wonder what his reception might be in such a costume and at such an hour. He doubted that the unconventionality of the daughter of a Prussian aristocrat might extend far enough to accept him, his rather shabby clothes, and his explanation of the visit.

It was all very well for this young girl to kick over the tradition, cut home traces in the sacred cause of art, call herself Girard, and live in an impossible villa for art's sake. Few well-born Fräuleins ever did this sort of thing, but there had been instances. And anybody in Germany will always add that they invariably went to the devil.

Guild rang. After he had waited long enough he rang again. After that he resumed his ringing. Keeping his finger pressed on the electric button and laying his ear to the door. The bell was doing its duty inside the house; he could hear it.

Presently he heard a fumbling of chains and locks inside, the door opened on a crack and a sleepy voice inquired: "Is it you, Anna?"

Guild hesitated: "I wish to see Miss Girard. Is she at home?"

"Who are you?" demanded the voice no longer sleepy.

"My name is Guild. I am sorry to disturb Miss Girard at such an hour, but I cannot help it. Is Miss Girard in?"

"Yes; I am Miss Girard."

"Are you Miss Karen Girard?"

"Yes. Why do you wish to see me?"

"I can't tell you here. Are you dressed?"

There was a pause, then she said: "No."

"Please dress as quickly as you can. Dress for travel."

"What!"

"If you have a travelling dress put it on. You can pack your luggage while I am talking to you. But dress as quickly as you can and then return and let me in."

She said after a moment's silence: "I certainly shall not do any of those things until I know more about you and about your errand here."

"I have a message for you from General Baron Kurt von Reiter."

"That is possible," she said quietly. "What is the message?"

"I was to say to you that the question which you were to decide on the first of November must be decided sooner."

"I must have clearer proof that your message is genuine. I am sorry to distrust you but I have been annoyed lately."

"Very well," he said. "Open the door a little more. Don't be afraid. I merely wish you to look at a ring which I wear. I want you to draw it from my finger and look at what is engraved inside."

There was another silence. Then the door crack slowly widened.

"Please extend your hand," she said.

There was just enough of space for him to slip his hand between door and frame and he did so. There came a light, soft touch on his ring-finger. The ring slipped off.

When she spoke again her voice was altered: "I shall dress immediately," she said. "I shall not keep you waiting long. You will find the door open. Please come in when I have gone upstairs."

"Thank you."

He could hear her light, flying feet on the stairs; he waited a little longer, then opened the door.

The hallway was dark, and he left the door open, then entered the room to the left which seemed to be a library, music-room and living-room combined. Books, piano, easy chairs and sofas loomed in the dim light of drawn curtains. An easel on which stood a water-colour drawing occupied the end of the room, and beside it was a table on which were porcelain dishes, tubes of colour and scattered badger brushes.

It was evident that Miss Girard's talents were multiple, for he noticed also a violin and music stand near the piano, and on the violin score as well as on the score spread across the piano the same hand had written "Karen Girard."

He stood by the table, mechanically picking up, one after another, the books lying there. Some of the books were printed in French, some in German, in Italian, in Danish, in Swedish, in English. Miss Girard's name was written in all of them. Miss Girard appeared to be accomplished.

In the dim light Guild began to saunter around the room encountering various evidences of Miss Girard's taste and mode of living – one or two Braun photographs of Velasquez, Boucher, and Gainsborough on the walls – certainly a catholicism of taste entirely admirable; – one or two graceful bits of ancient Chinese art – blue and gold marvels of Pekin enamel; a mille-fleur tapestry panel, a bundle of golf clubs, a tennis bat, and a pair of spurs.

He thought for himself that when a girl goes in for all of these accomplishments it is because the gods have been otherwise unkind, and that she has to.

At the same time he remembered the voice he had heard through the scarcely opened door – the lovely voice of a young English girl – than which in all the world there is nothing half so lovely.

And it suddenly occurred to him that there had not been in it the faintest kind or trace of a German accent – that only its childish and sleepy sweetness had struck him first, and then its purity and its youthful and cultivated charm.

Yes, truly, the gods had been kind to this young German girl of nineteen, but it would be a little too much to ask of these same gods that they endow her with figure and features commensurate with her other charms and talents.

Then he suddenly remembered her profession, and that she was studying still for the dramatic profession. And he knew that this profession naturally required exterior charm of any woman who desired to embrace it.

While these ideas and speculations were occupying his mind he heard her on the stairs, and he turned and came forward as she entered the room.

She was a slender, straight girl of medium height; and her face was one of those fresh young faces which looked fragrant. And instantly the thought occurred to him that she was the vivid, living

incarnation of her own voice, with her lilac-blue eyes and soft white neck, and the full scarlet lips of one of those goddesses who was not very austere.

She wore a loosely-belted jacket of tan-coloured covert-cloth, and narrow skirts of the same, and a wide golden-brown hat, and tan spats. The gods had been very, very kind to Miss Girard, for she even adorned her clothes, and that phenomenon is not usual in Great Britain or among German Fräuleins however accomplished and however well born.

She said: "I beg your pardon for detaining you so long on the outside door-step. Since the war began my maid and I have been annoyed by strangers telephoning and even coming here to ask silly and impertinent questions. I suppose," she added, disdainfully, "it is because there is so much suspicion of foreigners in England."

"I quite understand," he said. "Being German, your neighbors gossip."

She shrugged her indifference.

"Shall we talk here?" she asked gravely, resting one very white hand on the back of a chair. "You come from General Baron Kurt von Reiter. The ring is a credential beyond dispute."

"We can talk anywhere you wish," he said, "but there is little time, and somebody must pack a traveller's satchel for you. Have you a maid?"

"She went to London yesterday evening. She was to have returned on the eleven o'clock train last night. I can't understand it."

"Are you alone in the house?"

"Yes. My cook sleeps out. She does not come until half-past nine. My maid serves my breakfast."

"You haven't had any, then?"

"No."

"Can you fix something for yourself?"

"Yes, of course. Shall I do so now?"

"Yes. I'll go to the kitchen with you while you are doing it. There are several things to say and the time is short."

She led the way; he opened the kitchen shutters and let in the sunshine, then stood a moment watching her as she moved about the place with graceful celerity, preparing cocoa over an alcohol lamp, buttering a roll or two and fetching cup, plate, spoon and marmalade.

"Have you breakfasted?" she asked, looking at him over her shoulder.

"Yes – it is very good of you – "

"There will be plenty of cocoa and rolls – if you care for them. The rolls are yesterday's and not fresh."

She poured the cocoa in two cups and looked at him again in grave invitation.

"You are sure there is plenty?" he asked, smilingly.

"Plenty."

"Then – I do seem to be rather hungry."

He drew a chair for her; she seated herself and ate with a youthful appetite. He drank his cocoa, ate his rolls, and tried not to look at her too often.

"This is why I am here," he said. "I saw General Baron von Reiter four days ago under somewhat extraordinary circumstances.

"He told me that since the war broke out he had not been able to communicate directly with you or to get you out of England, and he asked me to find you and bring you to his estate at Trois Fontaines in Luxembourg."

"To Quellenheim?" she asked, surprised and disturbed. "Is he there?"

"No, he is with a field army, and he does not know where orders from staff headquarters may send him."

"Still," she said, hesitating, "I should think that he might wish me to go to Silesia – "

"Silesia is threatened by the Russian army."

"Silesia!" she repeated, incredulously. "Cossacks in Silesia?" She sat, her cup of cocoa half raised to her lips, her surprised and disconcerted eyes on his. Then she set the cup aside.

"He wishes me to go to Quellenheim? With *you*?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Travelling on the continent is precarious."

Her eyes rested on his; she said with a candour which he began to understand was characteristic of her: "He seems to have confidence in you. I never heard him speak of you. You are American?"

"Yes."

"That is odd. He never cared for Americans."

Guild said: "He could not send a German into England."

"That is true. Nor an Englishman either. No Englishman would be likely to do anything to oblige a German."

She rose: "I don't understand why Anna, my maid, is still absent," she added uneasily. "My maid often goes to London, but never before has she remained over night. I don't know why she remained. She knew I was alone in the house."

She lifted her serious blue eyes to Guild, then gazed out of the window, evidently perplexed to the point of apprehension.

"I am worried," she said, "very much worried. But that doesn't help, does it?"

"What was her errand in London?" asked Guild.

"She has a brother there. I suppose it's all right or she would have telephoned me."

He said: "No doubt it is all right. And, may I ask you to hasten?"

She rose: "Where am I to go with you?"

"To London and then to the steamer."

"Today?"

"Today is Wednesday. No other Holland Line boat sails for Amsterdam before Sunday, and I have yet our passage to secure and I must also go to the War Office for a few moments. You see we have very little time."

"But I can't pack my boxes then?"

"You will have to leave them."

"You mean I may take only a satchel?"

"A suit-case and satchel if you wish. Leave a note for your maid instructing her to send by express whatever else you wish sent after you."

"Is this haste necessary, Mr. Guild?"

"Yes, it is. I want to get out of England. I am not sure that I can get out if we wait until Sunday."

"Why not?"

"I may be detained. I may not be permitted to leave with you. All foreigners are under more or less suspicion. I am rather sure that I have been under surveillance already at the Berkeley Hotel."

They had moved out into the hall together while he was speaking, and now, together, they went up the stairs.

"If you don't mind," she said, "my room is in disorder, but I'll have to pack there and you will have to sit there if you wish to talk to me."

It was a white and chintz room in dainty disorder.

She went away and returned in a moment or two with a satchel and suit-case. These she placed on the bed, opened, and then, dragging out various drawers of chiffonier and chest, began to transfer her apparel to the two bags.

"I am extremely sorry," he said, "to hurry you so inconveniently."

"I don't mind," she replied, busy with her packing. "You see I am an actress and I have travelled with a company in the provinces. That *was* an experience!" She turned her pretty head and looked at Guild. "I had no maid then, except at the theatres where we played, and I had to share her with three other girls. Really, Mr. Guild, it taught me how to pack things rather rapidly."

Her white hands were flying as she folded and placed garment after garment in the suit-case, serene, self-possessed, quite undisturbed by his presence at the rather intimate display of her apparel.

The garments were bewilderingly frail to him; she tucked and packed them into place; a faint fresh scent seemed to freshen the place.

He said: "I don't think we are going to have any trouble about leaving England. But, if any trouble does arise, would you have sufficient confidence in me to do what I say?"

She continued her packing for a few moments without replying, then turned and looked at him.

And at the same moment the telephone on the table beside her bed tinkled.

"There is Anna now!" she exclaimed with the emphasis of relief. "Will you pardon me? No, I don't mean you are to leave the room – "

She lifted the receiver: "Yes, I am here… Yes, this is Miss Girard. Yes, Miss Karen Girard… Mr. Louis Grätz? Oh, good morning!"

At the name of the man with whom she was speaking Guild turned around surprised. At the same instant the girl's face flushed brightly as she sat listening to what the distant Mr. Grätz was saying to her.

Guild watched her; perplexity, surprise, a deeper flush of consternation, all were successively visible on her youthful face.

"Yes," she said to Mr. Grätz. "Yes, I will do whatever he wishes… Yes, he is here – here in my room with me. We were talking while I packed. Yes, I will do so." And, turning her head a little she said to the young man behind her: "The Edmeston Agency desires to speak to you."

He rose and took the receiver from her hand and bent over beside her listening.

"Are you there?" inquired a pleasant voice.

"Yes."

"I am Grätz of the Edmeston Agency. Get that young lady out of the house at once. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Her maid is in trouble. This agency may be in trouble at any moment. She must not wait to pack. Get her into the car and take her to the wharf and on board at once. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Take her as your wife. Do you understand?"

"I understand what you say," he said, amazed.

"That is sufficient. Do as I tell you if you want to leave England."

"Very well. But I must first go to the War Office – "

"No!"

"I must!"

"No. It is useless; hopeless. It would have been the thing to do yesterday. An explanation there would have given you credentials and security. But not today. *She* could not hope to leave. Do you understand?"

"No, but I hear you."

"She could not expect permission to leave because her maid has been arrested."

"What!"

"Yes! The charge is most serious."

"What is it?"

"Get into your car with the young lady and start at once. Don't go to the steamship office in Fenchurch Street. Don't go to the War Office. Go nowhere except to the wharf. Your passage has

been secured as Mr. and Mrs. Kervyn Guild of New York. The initials on the baggage will be K. G. Your steamer tickets will be handed to you. You will pay no attention to the man who hands them to you, no attention to anybody. You will go aboard and go to your cabin until the ship is out at sea. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

"Good-bye."

CHAPTER VI
MR. AND MRS

Guild hung up the receiver, stood a moment in thought then turned around and looked gravely at the girl behind him. She gazed back at him as though still a trifle breathless after some sudden shock.

"What did that man say to you over the wire?" he asked in pleasant, even tones.

"He told me to trust you, and do what you told me to do. He said Anna, my maid, had been arrested."

"Who is he?" asked Guild grimly.

"Do you mean Mr. Grätz?"

"Yes; who is Mr. Grätz?"

"Don't *you* know him?" she said, astonished.

"I have never laid eyes on him. Your father recommended to me the Edmeston Agency and mentioned the name of a Louis Grätz who might be of use to me. That is all I know."

"My —*father*– you say?"

"Certainly, General Baron von Reiter."

"Oh!.. Then it must be quite all right. Only – I don't understand about my maid – "

"Did Mr. Grätz tell you she had been arrested?"

"Yes."

"On a serious charge?"

"Yes."

"Have you any idea what that charge may be?" he asked, studying her face.

"I haven't any idea," she said; "have you?"

"I don't know; perhaps I have. Is your maid German?"

"Yes."

"You brought her with you from Germany?"

"Yes."

"Where did you get her?"

"General von Reiter's housekeeper found her for me."

He hesitated, still looking steadily into those violet blue eyes of hers which seemed to question him so candidly. No, there could be no dishonesty there.

"Miss Girard," he said, "I find that I am going to be very much more frank with you than there once seemed any occasion for being. I am also going to say something to you that may possibly offend you. But I can't help it. It is this: Have you, through your letters to or from your father, imparted or received any military intelligence which might be detrimental to Great Britain or to her allies?"

"Do you mean am I a sort of spy?" she asked, flushing to the roots of her hair.

"In substance it amounts to that. And I shall have to ask you to answer me. And I'll tell you why I ask. I didn't intend to tell you; my personal and private affairs did not concern you. But they do now. And these happen to be the facts in my case: I was taken prisoner in Belgium by the cavalry forming the advance of your father's command. It happened four days ago; I was sentenced to military execution, led out for that purpose, reprieved by your father himself on condition that I undertake to find you and conduct you safely to Trois Fontaines near the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

"If I am unsuccessful in the undertaking, I am pledged to go back voluntarily and face a firing squad. If I am successful I am permitted to go free, and so are my fellow-hostages. And the little town where I was arrested is to be spared."

He passed one hand over his eyes, thoughtfully, then, looking at her very seriously:

"There seemed to be no reason why an honorable man might not accept such terms. I accepted them. But – things have happened here which I neither understand nor like. And I've got to say this to you; if my taking you back to your father means any detriment to England or to the cause England represents – in other words, if your returning to him means the imparting to him of any military information gathered here by you, then – I won't take you back; that's all!"

After a moment, half to herself, she said: "He really thinks me a spy. I knew it!"

"I *don't* think so. I am merely asking you!" he retorted impatiently. "There is something dead wrong here. I was intending to go to the War Office to tell them there very frankly about my predicament, and to ask permission to take you back in order to save my fellow-hostages, the village, and my own life; and now a man named Grätz of whom I know nothing calls me on the telephone and warns me not to go to the War Office but to get you out of England as soon as I can do it.

"What am I to think of this? What does this man Grätz mean when he tells me that your maid has been arrested on a serious charge and that the Edmeston Agency of a German automobile is in danger?"

The girl stood very still with one slender hand resting on her satchel, her face pale and quietly serious, her brows bent slightly inward as though she were trying to remember something or to solve some unpleasant problem not yet plain to her.

"One thing is clear," she said after a moment, lifting her candid eyes to his; "and that is, if you don't take me back certain friends of yours will be executed and a village in which you seem interested will be destroyed."

"If taking you back means any harm to England," he said, "I won't take you."

"And – your friends? What becomes of them?"

"My friends and the village must take the same chances that I do."

"What chances? Do you mean to go back without *me*?"

"I said I would," he replied drily.

"You said that if you went back without me they'd execute you."

"That's what I said. But there's no use in speculating on what is likely to happen to me if I go back without you. If you don't mind I think we had better start at once. We have had our warning from this man Grätz."

He gave her a searching glance, hesitated, then apparently came to an abrupt conclusion.

"Miss Girard," he said coolly, "your father once took a good look at me and then made up his mind about me. And he was not mistaken; I am what he believes me to be. Now, I also have seen you, and I've made up my mind concerning you. And I don't expect to be mistaken. So I say to you frankly I am an enemy to Germany – to your country – and I will not knowingly aid her – not to save my own skin or the skins of anybody else. Tell me then have you any military knowledge which you intend to impart to your father?"

"No," she said.

"Have you any suspicion that your maid has been involved in any such risky business?"

"I have no knowledge of anything military at all. I don't believe my maid has, either."

"You can recall no incident which might lead you to believe that your maid is engaged in that sort of affair?"

The girl was silent. He repeated the question. She said: "Anna has complained of being followed. I have already told you that she and I have been annoyed by impertinent telephone calls and by strange men coming here. Do you suppose they were from Scotland Yard?"

"Possibly. Have you any suspicion why your maid has been arrested?" he persisted. She hesitated; her straight brows knitted slightly again as though in a perplexed effort to remember and to understand. Then she looked up at Guild out of troubled eyes and shook her head:

"I don't know – I don't *know*– whatever my suspicions may be – "

"Suspicions!"

"My personal suspicions could scarcely concern you, Mr. Guild."

The snub was direct; he reddened.

"Very well," he said. "What you say gives me a decent chance for life." He drew a quick breath of relief. "I'm mighty glad," he said; "I have – have seen men die. It isn't – an – agreeable sight. I think we'd better go."

"In a moment."

She took her satchel and went into another room with it, closing the intervening door. She was gone only a few seconds. When she returned she had locked the satchel; he closed and strapped her suit-case and took it in his hand. Together they descended the stairway and started through the lower hall.

And what occurred there happened like lightning.

For, as he passed the door of the darkened living room, a man jumped out behind him and threw one arm around his throat, and another man stepped in front of him and snapped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists.

It was not even a struggle; Guild was being held too tightly. The girl shrank back against the wall, flattening herself against it, staring dumbly at the proceeding as though stunned. She did not even cry out when the man who had handcuffed Guild turned on her and caught her by the elbow.

"Come along quietly, miss," he began, when suddenly his voice died out in a groan and he crumpled up on the floor as Bush, the chauffeur, sprang from the passage-way behind him and struck him with something short and heavy.

The man who had thrown his arm around Guild's throat from behind, flung his handcuffed victim aside and whipped out a revolver, but the chauffeur knocked it out of his fist and hit him in the face two heavy, merciless blows, hurling him senseless across the stairs. And all the while the blond young chauffeur was smiling his fixed and murderous smile. And he was like a tiger now in every movement as he knelt, rummaged in the fallen men's pockets, found the key to the handcuffs, leaned over and unlocked them as Guild held out his manacled hands.

"Please watch them, sir," he said cheerfully. "I must find a curtain or something – "

He ran into the living-room, ripped off a long blue curtain, tore it into strips with his powerful blond hands, grinning cheerfully all the while.

"Best to tie them up, sir – this way – allow me, sir – this is the better way – the surer – "

Guild, working hard, he scarcely knew why, felt a touch on his arm.

"Are they dead?" whispered Karen Girard unsteadily.

"No – stunned."

"Are they robbers?"

The blond chauffeur looked up, laughed, then rolled a strip of cloth into a ball for a gag.

"I'm not entirely sure what they are," said Guild. "I'll tell you what I think when we're in the car."

The chauffeur completed his business, looked over the results of his efforts critically, rose to his feet, still smiling.

"Now, sir, if you please – and madam – " And he possessed himself of the luggage.

"Take the door-key, if you please, sir. Lock it on the outside. Thank you. This way, if you please, sir. I took it upon myself to bring the car up to the kitchen entrance."

The car stood there; the bags were flung in; Karen Girard stepped into the tonneau; Guild followed. At the same moment a woman appeared, coming along the brick walk.

"My maid of all work," exclaimed Karen. "What shall I say to her?"

"Anything, madam, but send her home," whispered Bush.

The girl leaned from the car and called out: "I have locked the house and am going away for the day, Mrs. Bulger. Please come tomorrow, as usual."

The woman thanked her, turned and went away again down the brick walk. They watched her out of sight.

"Now!" said Guild to the chauffeur, "drive to the Holland steamship wharf at – "

"I know, sir," smiled the blond chauffeur.

Which reply troubled the young man exceedingly, for it was evident to him now that, if not herself a spy, this young girl in his charge was watched, surrounded and protected by German agents of a sinister sort – agents known to her father, in evident communication with him, and thoroughly informed of the fact that he wanted his daughter to leave England at once and under the particular escort of Guild.

Nor had Guild the slightest doubt that the two men who had followed and handcuffed him were British Government agents, and that if this young girl's maid had really been arrested for espionage, and if the Edmeston people, too, were suspected, then suspicion had been also directed toward Miss Girard and naturally also to him, who was her visitor.

Guild's troubled gaze rested once more upon the young girl beside him. At the same moment, as though he had spoken to her she turned and looked at him out of eyes so honest, so fearless that he had responded aloud before he realized it: "It's all right. I know *you* are not deceiving me."

"No," she said, "I am not. But could you tell me what all this means – all this that has happened so swiftly, so terribly – "

"I have a pretty clear idea what it means… It's just as well that those detectives did not arrest me… Tell me, did you ever before see this chauffeur, Bush?"

"Never, Mr. Guild."

He nodded; he was slowly coming to a definite conclusion concerning the episode but he kept his own counsel. She said in a low, embarrassed voice: "You think me cowardly. I know it. But I really didn't know what to do."

She was very much in earnest, very intent on his expression, and he did not dare smile.

"What *could* you have done, Miss Girard?" he asked, pleasantly.

"I don't know. I – I felt as though we – you and I – were allies – and that I ought to help you. But it all passed too quickly – "

"There was nothing you could have done for me," he smiled.

She said reflectively: "I myself don't quite see how I could have helped matters. But I didn't wish you to believe me afraid to help you."

He looked into her wistful eyes smilingly: "Somehow," he said, "I don't believe you are really very much afraid of anything."

A slight shudder passed over her. "Violence is new to me. I am not very experienced – not very old you know. And I never saw men fight. And when" – she lowered her voice – "when that chauffeur struck them so heavily – so dreadfully – I – I have never seen men fight like that – strike each other in the face as though they – they meant murder – "

"Don't think of it now, Miss Girard. You must keep your nerve." He forced a laugh; "you'll need all your composure, too, because I've got something to tell you which you won't like. Shall I tell you now?"

"Yes, please."

"Then – the man, Grätz, says that you must go aboard that steamer as my wife."

The girl looked at him bewildered. "Somebody," continued Guild, "has taken passage for us as Mr. and Mrs. Kervyn Guild. Grätz warned me. My name is Kervyn. Yours is Karen. Our initials are alike. If there is any suspicion directed toward us there are the initials on your satchel and suit-case – and presumably on your clothing. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Do you mind?"

"I mind a little – yes. But I'll do what is necessary," she said, confused.

"I think it is necessary. This man Grätz who seems to know more about my business than I do, tells me so. I believe he is right."

She raised her tragic eyes to his but said nothing.

He leaned nearer to her and spoke in a low voice:

"I've been trying to reason it out," he said, "and I'll tell you what my conclusion is: A German automobile took me to the British lines under a white flag. No doubt Government agents had been informed by telegraph and they followed me as soon as I landed on English soil.

"At the Berkeley Hotel I felt very sure that I was being watched. Now, it appears, that this maid of yours has been arrested, and, from what I suspect in regard to the Edmeston Agency – the agency to which your father directed me – I feel very certain that somehow your maid has been involved in the espionage maintained here by the German Government.

"That chauffeur in front of us is from the Edmeston garage; you see what he did to those two detectives! It's very plain to me now that, innocent as you are, you never will be permitted to leave England, even if they don't arrest you, unless you can get out today with me.

"And if you don't leave England it means for me something very serious. It means that I shall have to keep my word and go back alone."

"I know," she nodded, looking up at him very earnestly.

He said without the slightest dramatic emphasis: "It really does mean my death, Miss Girard. I think, knowing your father, that there could be no possible hope for me if I go back there without you… And so, knowing that, I am naturally most anxious to clear out of England while I can do so – get away from here with you – if I can take you with a clear conscience. And" – he looked at her, "I feel that I can do that because you have told me that you have gathered no information for the enemies of England. And" – he smiled – "to look into your face, Miss Girard, is to believe you."

Some of the pretty color faded from her cheeks; she said: "You asked me if I were a spy. I am not. You asked me if, knowingly, I carry any military information which might aid the enemies of England. And I answered you that, knowingly, I do not carry any such information."

"That is sufficient," he concluded, smilingly.

"No, it is not sufficient," she said. "I wish to say a little more. Let me go to Trois Fontaines alone. I am accustomed to travel. There is no need to involve you. As long as I arrive there what difference does it make whether or not you accompany me?"

"I promised to accompany you."

"You promised that I should arrive safely at Trois Fontaines. It doesn't matter whether you accompany me. Please – please don't. I had rather you did not go."

He said, gravely: "I know how you must feel about travelling as my wife – "

"It isn't that."

"What is it then?" he asked, surprised.

"I don't wish you to take the risk of travelling with me."

"What risk? The worst that could happen to you would be your arrest and detention. If you are not a spy, you can not be proven one."

Her blue eyes gazed absently out across the sunny landscape through which they were speeding.

"You are not a spy," he replied; "what risk do you run – or I?"

She said, still gazing into the sunlit distance: "What is done to spies – if they are caught?"

"It usually means death, Miss Girard."

"I have – " she swallowed, caught her breath, breathed deeply; then – "I have heard so… It is possible that I might be suspected and detained… I had rather you did not attempt to go with me… Because – I do not wish you to get into any difficulty – on my – account."

"Nothing serious could happen to either you or me through anything that you have done."

"I am not sure."

"I am," he said. And added in a lower voice: "It is very generous of you – very kind."

Her own voice was lower still: "Please don't go with me, Mr. Guild. Let me go to the wharf alone. Let me take my chances alone. If there is any difficulty they will arrest you, too. And if I – were convicted – "

"You could not be. That is utterly impossible. Don't think of such things, Miss Girard."

"I *must* think of them. Will you tell me something?" She turned and looked at him curiously, almost wistfully.

"I want to ask you something. You – you said to me that if you thought me a spy, you would not help me to escape from England. You said so, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"You mean it, don't you?"

"I am afraid I do."

"Why? You are not English. You are an American. America is neutral. Why are you an enemy to Germany?"

"I can't tell you why," he said.

"*Are* you an enemy to Germany?"

"Yes – a bitter one."

"And if I were a spy, trying to escape from England – trying to escape – death – you would refuse to help me?"

She had turned entirely toward him on the seat beside him; her child-like hands clasped on the robe over her knees, her child-like face, pale, sweet, wistful, turned to his.

"Would you abandon me?" she asked.

"The situation is impossible – "

"Yes, but tell me."

"I don't care to think of such a – "

"Please answer me. Is your partisanship so bitter that you would wash your hands of me – let me go to my death? – go to your own, too, rather than help me?"

"Miss Girard, you are losing your composure – "

"No; I am perfectly composed. But I should like to know what you would do under such circumstances with a girl nineteen years old who stood in danger of death."

"I can't tell you," he said, perplexed and impatient. "I can't tell now what I might do."

"Would you denounce me?"

"No, of course not."

"Would you feel – sorry?"

"Sorry!" He looked at her; "I should think I would!"

"Sorry enough for me to help me get away?"

"Yes."

"Even if I carried military information to Germany?"

He looked into her eyes searchingly for a moment. "Yes," he said; "I'd do what I could for you to get you out of England."

"Even if I had lied to you?"

"You couldn't lie to anybody."

"But if I could? If I have lied and you found it out, would you still try to help me to get away?"

"You are asking something that – "

"Yes, you can answer it. You can think a while first and then answer. I want you to answer. I want to know what you'd do with me."

"You make it a personal matter?"

"Yes. I don't want to know what you'd do in theory; I wish you to tell me what you, personally, would do with me, Karen Girard, if you believed me to be a spy, and if you came to the conclusion that I had lied to you."

"Why do you ask all this? You are over-wrought, unstrung – "

"I am absolutely mistress of myself. And I wish to know what you would do with *me*? Would you let me die?"

"No."

"You'd stand by me still?"

"Yes. There's no use mincing matters. Yes, I would."

"You'd help me to leave England?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

There fell a silence between them, and his face slowly reddened.

"I am not sure why," he said slowly.

"I am. Shall I tell you?"

"Yes, tell me," he said, forcing himself to meet her clear gaze.

"Very well, I'll tell you. It is because we are friends. And that is the real truth. I realize it. From the very beginning it was a friendship, without effort, instantly and mutually understood. Is it not true?"

"Yes."

"And that – the instant liking – was the basis for our confidence in each other. Was it not?"

"It must have been. I trusted you without hesitation."

"And I you… And I did tell you the truth… But not all of it."

"What have you left untold?" he asked.

"Enough to – to frighten me – a little. I am beginning to be afraid – just enough afraid to feel troubled – rather deeply troubled about – you."

"About *me*!"

"Because – we are friends. I don't understand how it has happened so quickly. But it has happened to us – hasn't it?"

"Yes," he said, "it has. I – I am already – devoted to – our friendship."

"I am, too. It seems odd, doesn't it. I have had no friends among men. This is new to me. I don't know what to do about it. I want to be so loyal about it – I wish to be what a man – such a man as you are – desires of a friend – what he requires of friendship… *Do* you understand? I am really a trifle bewildered – with the surprise and pleasure of friendship – and with its obligations… But I am very sure that unselfishness is one of its obligations and that truth is another."

"Both are part of you."

"They seem to be now. And so – because we are friends – don't go to the wharf with me. Because I think I may be – arrested. And if I am – it may go hard with me."

She said it so gently, and her eyes were so clear and sweet that for a moment he did not grasp the subtler significance of her appeal.

"You *can't* be involved seriously," he insisted.

"I'm afraid it is possible."

"How?"

"I can only guess how. I may be wrong. But I dare not risk involving you."

"Can't you tell me a little more?"

"Please don't ask."

"Very well. But I shall not leave you."

"Please."

"No. You ask too little of friendship."

"I do not wish to ask too much. Let me get clear of this affair if I can. If I can't – let me at least remember that I have not involved you in my – ruin."

"Your ruin!"

"Yes. It may come to that. I don't know. I don't know exactly what all this tangle means – what really threatens me, what I have to dread. But I am afraid – afraid!" Her voice became unsteady for a moment and she stared straight ahead of her at the yellow haze which loomed nearer and nearer above the suburbs of London.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.