

Ruth

*of the*

• U • S • A •



EDWIN  
BALMER







RUTH OF THE  
U. S. A.







Ruth crouched beside Gerry, and shot through the wreckage at the circling German plane

# Ruth of the U. S. A.

BY  
EDWIN BALMER

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TO  
THE MEMORY OF  
*My Father*  
AN ENGLISHMAN AND AN  
AMERICAN



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# RUTH OF THE U. S. A.

## CHAPTER I

### A BEGGAR AND A PASSPORT

**I**T WAS the day for great destinies. Germany was starving; yet German armies, stronger and better prepared than ever before, were about to annihilate the British and the French. Austria, crumbling, was secretly suing for peace; yet Austria was awaiting only the melting of snow in the mountain passes before striking for Venice and Padua. Russia was reorganizing to fight again on the side of the allies; Russia, prostrate, had become a mere reservoir of manpower for the Hohenzollerns. The U-boats were beaten; the U-boats were sweeping the seas. America had half a million men in France; America had only "symbolical battalions" parading in Paris.

A thousand lies balanced a thousand denials; the pointer of credulity swung toward the lies again; and so it swung and swung with everything uncertain but the one fact which seemed, on this day, perfectly plain—American effort had collapsed. America not only had failed to aid her allies during the nine months since she had entered the war; she seemed to have ceased even to care for herself. Complete proof of this was that for five

days now industries had been shut down, offices were empty, furnaces cold.

Upon that particular Tuesday morning, the fifth day of this halt, a girl named Ruth Alden awoke in an underheated room at an Ontario Street boarding house—awoke, merely one of the millions of the inconsiderable in Chicago as yet forbidden any extraordinary transaction either to her credit or to her debit in the mighty accounts of the world war. If it be true that tremendous fates approaching cast their shadows before, she was unconscious of such shadows as she arose that morning. To be sure, she reminded herself when she was dressing that this was the day that Gerry Hull was arriving home from France; and she thought about him a good deal; but this was only as thousands of other romance-starved girls of twenty-two or thereabouts, who also were getting up by gaslight in underheated rooms at that January dawn, were thinking about Gerry Hull. That was, Ruth would like, if she could, to welcome him home to his own people and to thank him that day, in the name of his city and of his country, for what he had done. But this was to her then merely a wild, unrealizable fantasy.

What was actual and immediately before her was that Mr. Sam Hilton—the younger of the Hilton brothers, for whom she was office manager—had a real estate deal on at his office. He was to be there at eight o'clock, whether the office was heated or not, and she also was to be there to draw deeds and releases and so on; for someone named Cady who was over draft age, but had himself accepted by an engineer regiment, was sacrificing a fine factory property for a quick sale and Sam Hilton, who was in

class one but still hoped somehow to avoid being called, was snapping up the bargain.

So Ruth hurried downtown much as usual upon that cold morning; and she felt only a little more conscious contempt for Sam Hilton—and for herself—as she sat beside him from eight until after nine, with her great coat on and with her hands pulled up in her sleeves to keep them warm while he schemed and reschemed to make a certain feature of his deal with the patriotic Cady more favorable to himself. He had tossed the morning paper upon his desk in front of him with the columns folded up which displayed Gerry Hull's picture in his uniform and which told about Gerry Hull's arriving that morning and about his service in France. Thus Ruth knew that Sam Hilton had been reading about Lieutenant Hull also; and, indeed, Hilton referred to him when he had made the last correction upon the contract and was in good humor and ready to put business aside for a few minutes and be personal.

"Gerry Hull's come home today from France, I see. Some fighter, that boy!" he exclaimed with admiration. "Ain't he?"

Ruth gazed at Hilton with wonder. She could have understood a man like Sam Hilton if he refused to read at all about Gerry Hull; or she could have understood if, reading, Sam Hilton denied admiration. But how could a young man know about Lieutenant Hull and admire him and feel no personal reproach at himself staying safe and satisfied and out of "it"?

"Some flier!" he was going on with his enthusiastic praise. "How many Huns has he got—fourteen?"

Ruth knew the exact number; but she did not tell him. "Lieutenant Hull is here under orders and upon special duty," she said. "They sent him home or he wouldn't be away from the front now." The blood warmed in her face as she delivered this rebuke gently to Sam Hilton. He stared at her and the color deepened, staining her clear, delicate temples and forehead. "They had to send him here to stir us up."

"What's the matter with us?" Sam Hilton questioned with honest lack of concern. Her way of mentioning Gerry Hull had not hit him at all; and he was not seeking any answer to his question. He was watching Ruth flush and thinking that she was mighty pretty with as much color as she had now. He liked her in that coat, too; for the collar of dark fur, though not of good quality, made her youthful face even more "high class" looking than usual. Sam Hilton spent a great deal of money on his own clothes without ever achieving the coveted "class" in his appearance; while this girl, who worked for him and who had only one outfit that he ever saw, always looked right. She came of good people, he knew — little town people and not rich, since she had to work and send money home; but they were "refined."

Ruth's bearing and general appearance had pretty well assured Sam of this — the graceful way she stood straight and held up her head, the oval contour of her face as well as the pretty, proud little nose and chin, sweet and yet self-reliant like her eyes which were blue and direct and thoughtful looking below brown brows. Her hair was lighter than her brows and she had a great deal of it; a little wavy and a marvelous amber in color and in quality.

It seemed to take in the sunlight like amber when she moved past the window and to let the light become a part of it. Her hands which she thrust from her sleeves now and clasped in front of her, were small and well shaped, though strong and capable too. She had altogether so many "refined" characteristics that it was only to make absolutely certain about her and her family that Sam had paid someone ten dollars to verify the information about herself which she had supplied when he had employed her. This information, fully verified, was that her father, who was dead, had been an attorney at Onarga, Illinois, where her mother was living with three younger sisters, the oldest fourteen. Mrs. Alden took sewing; and since Ruth sent home fifteen dollars a week out of her twenty-five, the family got along. This fifteen dollars a week, totaling seven hundred and eighty a year which the family would continue to need and would expect from Ruth or from whomever married her, bothered Sam Hilton. But he thought this morning that she was worth wasting that much for as he watched her small hands clasping, watched the light upon her hair and the flush sort of fluttering—now fading, now deepening—on her smooth cheek. Having banished business from his mind, he was thinking about her so intently that it did not occur to him that she could be thinking of anyone else. Sam Hilton could not easily imagine anyone flushing thus merely because she was dreaming of a boy whom she had never met and could never meet and who certainly wouldn't know or care anything about her.

"He was hurt a couple of weeks ago," she said, "or probably he wouldn't have left at all."

That jolted Sam Hilton. It did not bring him any rebuke; it simply made him angry that this girl had been dreaming all that time about Gerry Hull instead of about himself.

"Was the Lady Agnes hurt too?" he asked.

"Hurt? No."

"Well, she's come with him." Sam leaned forward and referred to the folded newspaper. "'Lady Agnes Ertyle, the daughter of the late Earl of Durran who was killed at Ypres in 1915, whose two brothers fell, one at Jutland on the *Invincible* and the other at Cambrai,'" he read aloud, "'is also in the party.'" He skipped down the column condensing the following paragraphs: "She's to stay at his mamma's house on Astor Street while in Chicago. She's twenty-one; her picture was printed yesterday. Did you see it?"

This was a direct question; and Ruth had to answer, "Yes."

"He's satisfied with her, I should say; but maybe he's come home to look further," Sam said with his heaviest sarcasm. He straightened, satisfied that he had brought Ruth back to earth. "Now I'm going over to see Cady; he'll sign this as it is, I think." Sam put the draft of the contract in his pocket. "He leaves town this noon, so he has to. I'll be all clear by twelve. You're clear for the day now. Have lunch with me, Miss Alden?"

Ruth refused him quietly. He often asked her for lunch and she always refused; so he was used to it.

"All right. You're free for the day," he repeated generously and, without more ceremony, he hurried off to Cady.

Ruth waited until he had time to leave the building before she closed the office and went down the stairs. She stepped out to the street, only one girl among thousands that morning dismissed from bleak offices—one of thousands to whom it seemed ignominious that day, when all the war was going so badly and when Gerry Hull was arriving from France, to go right back to one's room and do nothing more for the war than to knit until it was time to go to bed and sleep to arise next morning to come down to make out more deeds and contracts for men like Sam Hilton.

Had it been a month or two earlier, Ruth again would have made the rounds of the headquarters where girls gave themselves for real war work; but now she knew that further effort would be fruitless. Everyone in Chicago, who possessed authority to select girls for work in France, knew her registration card by heart—her name, her age, the fact that she had a high-school education. They were familiar with the occupations in which she claimed experience—office assistant; cooking; care of children (had she not taken care of her sisters?); first aid; can drive motor car; operate typewriter. Everyone knew that her health was excellent; her sight and hearing perfect. She would go “anywhere”; she would start “at any time.” But everyone also knew that answer which truth had obliged her to write to the challenge, “What persons dependent upon you, if any?” So everyone knew that though Ruth Alden would give herself to any work, someone had to find, above her expenses, seven hundred and eighty dollars a year for her family.

Accordingly she could think of nothing better to do

this morning than to join the throng of those who were going to Michigan Avenue and to the building where the British and French party, with which Gerry Hull was traveling, would be welcomed to the city. Ruth had no idea of being admitted to the building; she merely stood in the crowd upon the walk; but close to where she stood, a limousine halted. A window of the car was down; and suddenly Ruth saw Gerry Hull right before her. She knew him at once from his picture; he was tall and active looking, even though sitting quiet in the car; he was bending forward a bit and the sudden, slight motions of his straight, lithe shoulders and the quick turn of his head as he gazed out, told of the vigor and impetuosity which — Ruth knew — were his.

He had a clear, dark skin; his hair and brows were dark; his eyes, blue and observant and interested. He had the firm, determined chin of a fighter; his mouth was pleasant and likable. He was younger looking than his pictures had made him appear; not younger than his age, which Ruth knew was twenty-four. Indeed, he looked older than four and twenty; yet one could not say that he looked two years older or five or ten; the maturity which war had brought Gerry Hull was not the sort which one could reckon in years. It made one—at least it made Ruth—pulse all at once with amazing feeling for him, with a strange mixture of anger that such a boy must have experienced that which had so seared his soul, and of pride in him that he had sought the experience. He was a little excited now at being home again, Ruth thought, in this city where his grandfather had made his fortune, where his father had died and where he, himself,

had spent his boyhood; he turned to point out something to the girl who was seated beside him; so Ruth gazed at her and recognized her, too. She was Lady Agnes Ertyle, young and slight and very lovely with her brown hair and gray eyes and fair, English complexion and straight, pure features. She had something too of that maturity, not of years, which Gerry Hull had; she was a little tired and not excited as was he. But for all that, she was beautiful and very young and not at all a strange creation in spite of her title and in spite of all that her family—her father and her brothers and she herself—had done in Belgium and in France. Indeed, she was only a girl of twenty-two or three. So Ruth quite forgot herself in the feeling of rebuke which this view of Gerry Hull and Lady Agnes brought to her. They were not much older or intrinsically different from herself and they had already done so much; and she—nothing!

She was so close to them that they had to observe her; and the English girl nodded to her friendlily and a little surprised. Gerry Hull seemed not surprised; but he did not nod; he just gazed back at her.

“What ought I be doing?” Ruth heard her voice appealing to them.

Lady Agnes Ertyle attempted no reply to this extraordinary query; but Gerry Hull’s eyes were studying her and he seemed, in some way, to understand her perplexity and dismay.

“Anyone can trust you to find out!” he replied to her aloud, yet as if in comment to himself rather than in answer to her. The car moved and left Ruth with that—with Gerry Hull’s assurance to himself that she could be

trusted to discover what she should do. She did not completely understand what he meant; for she did not know what he had been thinking when she suddenly thought out aloud before him and surprised him into doing the same. Nevertheless this brief encounter stirred and stimulated her; she could not meekly return to her room after this; so, when the crowd broke up, she went over to State Street.

The wide, wind-swept way, busy and bleak below the towering sheer of the great department stores, the hotels and office buildings on either hand seemed to Ruth never so sordid and self-concerned as upon this morning. Here and there a flag flapped from a rope stretched across the street or from a pole pointing obliquely to the sky; but these merely acknowledged formal recognition of a state of war; they were not symbols of any evident performance of act of defense. The people who passed either entirely ignored these flags or noticed them dully, without the slightest show of feeling. Many of these people, as Ruth knew, must have sons or brothers in the training camps; a few might possess sons in the regiments already across the water; but if Ruth observed any of these, she was unable to distinguish them this morning from the throng of the indifferent going about their private and petty preoccupations with complete engrossment. Likewise was she powerless to discriminate those—not few in number—who mingled freely in the groups passing under the flags but who gazed up, not with true indifference, but with hotly hostile reactions.

The great majority even of the so-called Germans in Chicago were loyal to America, Ruth knew; but from the

many hundred thousand who, before the American declaration of war, had sympathized with and supported the cause of the Fatherland, there were thousands now who had become only more fervent and reckless in their allegiance to Germany since the United States had joined its enemies—thousands who put the advantage of the Fatherland above every individual consideration and who, unable to espouse their cause now openly, took to clandestine schemes of ugly and treacherous conception. Thought of them came to Ruth as she passed two men speaking in low tones to each other, speaking in English but with marked Teutonic accent; they stared at her sharply and with a different scrutiny from that which men ordinarily gave when estimating Ruth's face and figure. One of them seemed about to speak to her; but, glancing at the other people on the walk, he instantly reconsidered and passed by with his companion. Ruth flushed and hurried on down the street until suddenly she realized that one of the men who had stared at her, had passed her and was walking ahead of her, glancing back.

She halted, then, a little excited and undecided what was best to do. The man went on, evidently not venturing the boldness of stopping, too; and while Ruth remained undecided, a street beggar seized the opportunity of offering her his wares.

This man was a cripple who, in spite of the severe cold of the morning, was seated on the walk with his crutches before him; he pretended to be a pencil vendor and displayed in his mittened hand an open box half full of pencils; and he had a pile of unopened boxes at his side. He had taken station at that particular spot on State

Street where most people must pass on their way to and from the chief department stores; but his trade evidently had been so slack this morning that he felt need of more aggressive mendicancy. He scrambled a few yards up the walk to where Ruth had halted and, gazing up at her, he jerked the edge of her coat.

“Buy a pencil, lady?”

Ruth looked down at the man, who was very cold and ill-dressed and pitiful; she took a dime from her purse and proffered it to him. He gazed up at her gratefully and with keen, questioning eyes; and, instead of taking a pencil from his open box, he picked up one of the unopened boxes which he had carried with him.

“Take a box, lady,” he pleaded, squirming with a painful effort which struck a pang of pity through Ruth; it made her think, not alone of his crippled agony, but the pain of the thousands—of the millions from the battle fields.

Ruth returned her dime to her purse and took out a dollar bill; the beggar thrust the mittened fingers of his left hand between his teeth, jerked off the ragged mitten and grabbed the dollar bill.

“That pays for two boxes,” he said, gazing again up at Ruth keenly.

“I’ll take two,” Ruth said, accepting the sale which the man had forced rather than deciding it herself.

He selected two boxes from the pile at his side and, glancing at her face sharply once more, he handed her the boxes and thanked her. She thrust the boxes into her muff and hurried on.

When she realized the strangeness of this transaction a

few moments later, it seemed to have been wholly due to the beggar's having taken advantage of her excitement after meeting Gerry Hull and her uneasiness at being followed by the German. She had no use for two boxes of cheap pencils and she could not afford to give a dollar to a street cripple who probably was an impostor. She felt that she had acted quite crazily; now she had to take a North State Street car to return to her room.

She had been saving, out of her money which she kept for herself, a ridiculous little fund to enable her perhaps to take advantage of a chance to "do" something some day; now because Lieutenant Hull had spoken kindly to her, she had flung away a dollar. She tried to keep her thought from her foolishness; and she succeeded in this readily by reviewing all the slight incident of her meeting with Gerry Hull. She had known something about him ever since she was a little girl, and pictures of him—a little boy with his grandfather—and articles about his grandfather and about him, too, appeared in the Chicago newspaper which her father read. Ruth could recall her father telling her about the great Andrew Hull, how he had come to Chicago as a poor boy and had made himself one of the greatest men in the industrial life of the nation; how he owned land and city buildings and great factories and railroads; and the reason that the newspapers so often printed the picture of the little boy was because some day he would own them all.

And Ruth knew that this had come true; and that the little boy, whose bold, likeable face had looked out upon her from the pictures; the tall, handsome, athletic and reckless youth who had gone to school in the East and,

later, in England had become the possessor of great power and wealth in Chicago but instead of being at all spoiled by it, he was a clean, brave young man — a soldier having offered himself and having fought in the most perilous of all services and having fought well; a soldier who was a little flushed and excited about being home again among his people and who had spoken friendly to her.

Ruth reached her room, only remembering the pencil boxes when she dropped them from her muff upon her table. The solid sound they made — not rattling as pencils should — caused her to tear the pasted paper from about one box. She had bought not even pencils but only boxes packed with paper. Now she had the cover off and was staring at the contents. A new fifty dollar bank note was on top. Underneath that was another; below that, another — others. They made a packet enclosed in a strip such as banks use and this was denominated \$1,000.00. There were twenty fifty-dollar notes in this packet.

Ruth lifted it out; she rubbed her eyes and lifted out another packet labeled one thousand dollars made up of ten bills of one hundred dollars each; on the bottom were five one hundred dollar notes, not fastened together. The box held nothing else.

Her pulses pounded and beat in her head; her hands touching the money went hot, went cold. This money was real; but her obtaining it must be a mistake. The box must have been the beggar's bank which he had kept beside him; therefore his money had no meaning for her. But now the cripple's insistence upon halting her, his

keen observation of her, his slowness at last to make the sale, stirred swift instincts of doubt. She seized and tore open the other box which she had bought.

No pencils in it; nor money. It held printed or engraved papers, folded and refolded tightly. One huge paper was on top, displaying bright red stamps and a ribbon and seals. This was an official government document; a passport to France! The picture of the holder was pasted upon a corner, stamped with the seal of the United States; and it was her picture! In strange clothes; but herself!

For the instant, as things swam before her in her excitement, there came to Ruth the Cinderella wonder which a girl, who has been really a little child once, can never quite cease to believe—the wonder of a wish by magic made true. The pencils in the beggar's boxes had been changed by her purchase of them to money for her and a passport to France. And for this magic, Gerry Hull was in some way responsible. She had appealed to him; he had spoken to her and thenceforth all things she touched turned to fairy gold—or better than gold; American bank notes and a passport to France!

Then the moment of Ruth, the little girl and the dreamer, was gone; and Ruth, the business woman competent to earn twenty-five dollars a week, examined what she held in her hand. As she made out the papers more clearly, her heart only beat faster and harder; her hands went moist and trembled and her breath was pent in by presence of the great challenge which had come to her, which was not fairy at all but very real and mortal and which put at stake her life and honor but which offered

her something to "do" beyond even her dreams. For the picture upon the passport was not of her but only of a girl very much like her; the name, as inscribed in the body of the passport and as written in hand across the picture and under the seal of the United States, was not her own but of someone named Cynthia Gail; and along with the passport was an unattached paper covered with small, distinct handwriting of a man relating who Cynthia Gail was and what the recipient of this money and this passport was expected to do. This paper like the passport was complete and unturned. There was besides a page of correspondence paper, of good quality, written upon both sides in the large, free handwriting of a girl—the same hand which had signed the photograph and the passport, "Cynthia Gail."

Ruth read these papers and she went to her door and locked it, she went to her window and peered cautiously out. If anyone had followed her, he was not now in evidence. The old, dilapidated street was deserted as usual at this time and on such a day except for a delivery truck speeding past, a woman or two on the way to the car line, and a few pallid children venturing out in the cold. Listening for sounds below, Ruth heard no unusual movements; so she drew far back from the window with the money and with the passport and with the explanatory paper and the letter which she laid before her and examined most carefully again.

## CHAPTER II

### THE WAND OF WAR

THE man who had formed the small, distinct characters covering the paper of instructions had written in English; but while he was quite familiar with English script, it was evident that he had written with the deliberate pains of a person who realizes the need of differentiating his letters from the formation natural to him. That formation, clearly, was German script. Like everyone else, Ruth knew German families; and, like many other American girls who had been in high schools before the outbreak of the war, she had chosen German for a modern language course. Indeed, she had learned German well enough so that when confronted by the question on her War Registration card, *What foreign languages do you read well?* she had written, *German.*

She had no difficulty, therefore, in recognizing from the too broad tops of the a's, the too pointed c's and the loops which twice crossed the t's that the writer had been educated first to write German. He had failed nowhere to carefully and accurately write the English form of the letters for which the German form was very different, such as k and r and s; it was only in the characters where the two scripts were similar that his care had been less.

You are (he had written) the daughter of Charles Farwell Gail, a dry-goods merchant of Decatur, Illinois. Your father and mother—ages 48 and 45—are living; you have one older brother, Charles, now twenty-six years old who quarreled with his father four years ago and went away and has not been heard from. The family believe that he entered the war in some capacity years ago; if so, he probably was killed for he was of reckless disposition. You do not write to him, of course; but in your letters home you refer to being always on watch for word from Charles. You were twenty-four years old on November 17. You have no sisters but one younger brother, Frank, 12 on the tenth of May, who is a boy scout; inform him of all boy-scout matters in your letters. Your other immediate family is a sister of your mother now living with your parents; she is a widow, Mrs. Howard Grange, maiden name Cynthia Gifford. You were named for her; she has a chronic ailment—diabetes. You write to her; you always inquire of her condition in letters to your parents. Your closest girl friend is Cora Tresdale, La Salle, Illinois, who was your roommate at Wellesley College, Wellesley, Mass.; you were both class of 1915; you write to her occasionally. You recently have been much interested in 2nd Lieutenant George A. Byrne, from Decatur, now at Camp Grant; he saw you in Chicago this past Saturday. Probably you are engaged to him; in any case, your status with him will be better defined by letter which will arrive for you at the Hotel Champlain, this city, Room 347.

It is essential that you at once go to hotel and continue your identity there. Immediately answer by telegram any important inquiry for you; immediately answer all letters. Buy a typewriter of traveling design and do all correspondence on that, saying that you are taking it up for convenience. Your signature is on passport; herewith also a portion of letter with your writing. So far as known, you do not sign nicknames, except to your father to whom you are

“Thia.” Mail arriving for you, or to arrive at hotel, together with possessions in room will inform you of your affairs more fully. So far as now known you have no intimate friends in Chicago; you are to start Thursday evening for Hoboken where you report Saturday morning to Mrs. Donald G. Gresham for work in the devastated districts in France, where you will observe all desired matters, particularly in regard to number, dispositions, personnel, equipment and morale of arriving American forces; reporting. If and when it proves impractical to forward proper reports, you will make report in person, via Switzerland; apply for passport to Lucerne.

With this, the connected writing abruptly ended; there was no signature and no notation except at the bottom of the sheet was an asterisk referring to an asterisk before the first mention of “mother.” This note supplied, “Mother’s maiden name, Julia Trowbridge Gifford,” and also the street address in Decatur. Below that was the significant addenda:

Cynthia Gail killed in Sunday night wreck; identification now extremely improbable; but watch papers for news. No suspicion yet at home or hotel; *but you must appear at once and answer any inquiry.*

This last command, which was a repetition, was emphatically underlined. The page of the letter in Cynthia Gail’s handwriting was addressed to her mother and was largely a list of clothing—chemises, waists, stockings, and other articles—which she had bought in Chicago and charged to her father’s account at two department stores. A paragraph confided to her mother her feeling of in-

significance at the little part she might play in the war, though it had seemed so big before she started away:

Yet no one knows what lies before one; even I may be given my great moment to grasp!

The letter was unfinished; Cynthia Gail evidently had been carrying it with her to complete and mail later when she was killed.

Ruth placed it under her pillow with the other paper and the passport and the money; she unlocked her door and went out, locking it behind her; descending to the first floor, she obtained the yesterday's paper and brought it back to her room. She found readily the account of a wreck on Sunday evening when a train had crashed through a street car. It had proved very difficult to identify certain of the victims; and one had not been identified at all; she had been described only as a young girl, well dressed, fur toque, blue coat with dark fur collar.

The magic of this money and the passport had faded quite away; the chain of vital, mortal occurrences which had brought them to Ruth Alden was becoming evident.

There had been, first of all, an American girl named Cynthia Gail of Decatur, Illinois, young like Ruth but without responsibilities, loyal and ardent to play her part in the war. She had applied for overseas work; the government therefore had investigated her, approved her and issued her a passport and permitted her to make all arrangements for the journey to France and for work there. She had left her home in Decatur and had come alone, probably, to Chicago, arriving not later than Saturday.

She apparently had been alone in the city on Sunday evening after Lieutenant George Byrne had returned to Camp Grant; also it was fairly certain that she had no intimate friends in Chicago as she had been stopping at a hotel. On Sunday evening she had been on the car which was struck by the train.

This much was positive; the next circumstances had more of conjecture; but Ruth could reason them out.

Someone among those who first went to the wreck found Cynthia Gail dead and found her passport upon her. This person might have been a German agent who was observing her; much more probably he was simply a German sympathizer who was sufficiently intelligent to appreciate at once the value of his find. At any rate, someone removed the passport and letter and other possessions which would identify Cynthia Gail; and that someone either acted promptly for himself and for Germany or brought his discoveries to others who acted very energetically. For they must immediately have got in touch with people in Decatur who supplied them with the information on the page of instructions; and they also must have made investigation of Cynthia Gail's doings in Chicago.

The Germans thereupon found that they possessed not merely a passport but a most valuable post and an identity to use for their own purposes. If they could at once substitute one of their own people for Cynthia Gail—before inquiry for Cynthia Gail would be made or knowledge of her loss arise—this substitute would be able to proceed to France without serious suspicion; she would be able to move about with considerable freedom, probably, in the

districts of France where Americans were holding the lines and could gather and forward information of all sorts of the greatest value to the Germans. They simply must find a German girl near enough like Cynthia Gail and clever and courageous enough to forge her signature, assume her place in her family, and in general play her rôle.

It was plain that the Germans who obtained the passport knew of some German girl upon whom they could depend; but they could not—or did not dare to attempt to—communicate directly with her. Ruth knew vaguely that hundreds of Germans, suspected of hostile activities, silently had disappeared. She knew that the American secret service constantly was causing the arrest of others and keeping many more under observation. It was certain, therefore, that communication between enemy agents in Chicago must have been becoming difficult and dangerous; moreover, Ruth had read that it was a principle of the German-spy organization to keep its agents ignorant of the activities of others in the same organization; so it seemed quite probable that the people who had possession of Cynthia Gail's passport knew that there was a German girl in the city who might play Cynthia's part but that they could not locate her. Yet they were obliged to find her, and to do it quickly, so that she could take up the rôle of Cynthia Gail before inquiries would be made.

What better way of finding a girl in Chicago than posting yourself as a beggar on State Street between the great stores? It was indeed almost certain that if the girl they sought was anywhere in the city, sooner or later she would pass that spot. Obviously the two Germans who

had mixed with the crowd on State Street also had been searching for their German confederate; they had mistaken Ruth for her; and one of them had somehow signaled the beggar to accost her.

This had come to Ruth, therefore, not because she was chosen by fate; it simply had happened to her, instead of to another of the hundreds of girls who had passed down State Street that morning, because she chanced to possess a certain sort of hair and eyes, shape of nose and chin, and way of carrying her head not unique at all but, in fact, very like two other girls—one who had been loyal and eager as she, but who now lay dead and another girl who had been sought by enemy agents for their work, but who had not been found and who, probably, would not now be found by them.

For, after giving the boxes to Ruth, the German who played the beggar would not search further; that delivery of the passport and the orders to her was proof that he believed she was the girl he sought. She had only to follow the orders given and she would be accepted by other German agents as one of themselves! She would pretend to them that she was going as a German spy into France in order that she could go, an American spy, into Germany! For that was what her orders read.

“You will report in person via Switzerland!” they said.

What a tremendous thing had been given her to do! What risks to run; what plans to make; what stratagems to scheme and to outwit! Upon her—her who an hour ago had been among the most futile and inconsiderable in all the world of war—now might hang the fate of the

great moment if she did not fail, if she dared to do without regard to herself to the uttermost! She must do it alone, if she was to do it at all! She could not tell anyone! For the Germans who had entrusted this to her might be watching her. If she went to the American Secret Service, the Germans almost surely would know; and that would end any chance of their continuing to believe her their agent. No; if she was to do it, she must do it of herself; and she was going to do it!

This money, which she recounted, freed her at once from all bonds here. She speculated, of course, about whose it had been. She was almost sure it had not been Cynthia Gail's; for a young girl upon an honest errand would not have carried so great an amount in cash. No; Ruth had heard of the lavishness with which the Germans spent money in America and of the extravagant enterprises they hazarded in the hope of serving their cause in some way; and she was certain that this had been German money and that its association with the passport had not begun until the passport fell into hostile hands. The money, consequently, was Ruth's spoil from the enemy; she would send home two thousand dollars to free her from her obligation to her family for more than two years while she would keep the remainder for her personal expenses.

The passport too was recovered from the enemy; yet it had belonged to that girl, very like Ruth, who lay dead and unrecognized since this had been taken from her. There came to Ruth, accordingly, one of those weak, peacetime shocks of horror at the idea of leaving that girl to be put away in a nameless grave. As if one more

nameless grave, amid the myriads of the war, made a difference!

Ruth gazed into the eyes of the girl of the picture; and that girl's words, which had seemed only a commonplace of the letter, spoke articulate with living hope. "Even I may be given my great moment to grasp!"

What could she care for a name on her grave?

"You can't be thinking of so small and silly a thing for me!" the girl of the picture seemed to say. "When you and I may save perhaps a thousand, ten thousand, a million men! I left home to serve; you know my dreams, for you have dreamed them too; and, more than you, I had opportunity offered to do. And instead, almost before I had started, I was killed stupidly and, it seemed for nothing. It almost happened that—instead of serving—I was about to become the means of betrayal of our armies. But you came to save me from that; you came to do for me, and for yourself, more than either of us dreamed to do. Be sure of me, as I would be sure of you in my place! Save me, with you, for our great moment! Carry me on!"

Ruth put the picture down. "We'll go on together!" she made her compact with the soul of Cynthia Gail.

She was glad that, before acting upon her decision, she had no time to dwell upon the consequences. She must accept her rôle at once or forever forsake it. Indeed, she might already be too late. She went to her washbowl and bathed; she redid her hair, more like the girl in the picture. The dress which she had been wearing was her best for the street so she put it on again. She put on her hat and coat; she separated two hundred dollars from the

rest of the money and put it in her purse; the balance, together with the passport and the page of Cynthia Gail's letter, she secured in her knitting bag. The sheet of orders with the information about Cynthia Gail gave her hesitation. She reread it again carefully; and she was almost certain that she could remember everything; but, being informed of so little, she must be certain to have that exact. So she reached for her leaflet of instructions for knitting helmets, socks, and sweaters, and she wrote upon the margin, in almost imperceptible strokes, shorthand curls and dashes, condensing the related facts about Cynthia Gail. She put this in her bag, destroyed the original and, taking up her bag, she went out.

Every few moments as she proceeded down the dun and drab street, in nowise changed from the half hour before, she pressed the bag against her side to feel the hardness of the packets pinned in the bottom; she needed this feelable proof to assure her that this last half hour had not been all her fantasy but that truly the wand of war, which she had seen to lift so many out of the drudge of mean, mercenary tasks, had touched her too.

She hailed a taxicab as soon as she was out of sight of the boarding house and directed it to the best downtown store where she bought, with part of the two hundred dollars, such a fur toque and such a blue coat with a fur collar as she supposed Cynthia Gail might have possessed. She had qualms while she was paying for them; she seemed to be spending a beggar's money, given her by mistake. She wore the new toque and the coat, instructing that her old garments be sent, without name, to the war-relief shop.

Out upon the street again, the fact that she had spent the money brought her only exultation; it had begun to commit her by deed, as well as by determination and had begun to muster her in among those bound to abandon all advantage—her security, her life—in the great cause of her country. It had seemed to her, before, the highest and most wonderful cause for which a people had ever aroused; and now, as she could begin to think herself serving that cause, what might happen to her had become the tiniest and meanest consideration.

She took another taxicab for the Hotel Champlain. She knew this for a handsome and fashionable hotel on the north side near the lake; she had never been in such a hotel as a guest. Now she must remember that she had had a room there since last week and she had been away from it since Sunday night, visiting, and she had kept the room rather than go to the trouble of giving it up. When she approached the hotel, she leaned forward in her seat and glanced at herself in the little glass fixed in one side of the cab. She saw that she was not trembling outwardly and that she had good color—too much rather than too little; and she looked well in the new, expensive coat and toque.

When the cab stopped and the hotel doorman came out, she gave him money to pay the driver and she went at once into the hotel, passing many people who were sitting about or standing.

The room-clerk at the desk looked up at her, as a room-clerk gazes at a good looking and well-dressed girl who is a guest.

“Key, please,” she said quietly. She had to risk her

voice without knowing how Cynthia Gail had spoken. That was one thing which the Germans had forgotten to ascertain—or had been unable to discover—for her. But the clerk noticed nothing strange.

“Yes, Miss Gail,” he recognized her, and he turned to take the key out of box 347. “Mail too, Miss Gail?”

“Please.”

He handed Ruth three letters, two postmarked Decatur and one Rockford, and also the yellow envelope of a telegram. He turned back to the box and fumbled for a card.

“There was a gentleman here for you ’bout half an hour ago, Miss Gail,” the clerk recollected. “He waited a while but I guess he’s gone. He left this card for you.”

Ruth was holding the letters and also the telegram unopened; she had not cared to inquire into their contents when in view of others. It was far safer to wait until she could be alone before investigating matters which might further confuse her. So she was very glad that the man who had been “here for her” was not present at that instant; certainly she required all the advantage which delay and the mail and the contents of Cynthia Gail’s room could give her.

She had thought, of course, of the possibility of someone awaiting her; and she had recognized three contingencies in that case. A man who called for her might be a friend or a relative of Cynthia Gail; this, though difficult enough, would be easiest and least dangerous of all. The man might be a United States agent aware that Cynthia Gail was dead, that her passport had fallen into hostile hands; he therefore would have come to take her

as an enemy spy with a stolen passport. The man might be a German agent sent there to aid her or give her further orders or information, if the Germans still were satisfied that they had put the passport into proper hands; if they were not—that is, if they had learned that the beggar had made a mistake—then the man might be a German who had come to lure her away to recover the passport and punish her.

The man's card, with his name—Mr. Hubert Lennon, engraved in the middle—told nothing more about him.

“I will be in my room,” Ruth said to the clerk, when she glanced up from the card. “If Mr. Lennon returns or anyone else calls, telephone me.”

She moved toward the elevator as quickly as possible; but the room-clerk's eyes already were attracted toward a number of men entering from the street.

“He's not gone, Miss Gail! Here he is now!” the clerk called.

Ruth pretended not to hear; but no elevator happened to be waiting into which she could escape.

“Here's the gentleman for you!” a bellboy announced to Ruth so that she had to turn and face then and there the gentleman who had been waiting for her.

## CHAPTER III

### THE NEW RÔLE

**T**HE man who advanced from the group which had just entered the hotel, appeared to be about thirty years old; he was tall and sparely built and stooped very slightly as though in youth he had outgrown his strength and had never quite caught up. He had a prominent nose and a chin which, at first glance, seemed forceful; but that impression altered at once to a feeling that here was a man of whom something might have been made but had not. He was not at all dissolute or unpleasant looking; his mouth was sensitive, almost shy, with only lines of amiability about it; his eyes, which looked smaller than they really were because of the thick lenses of his glasses, were gray and good natured and observant. His hair was black and turning gray — prematurely beyond doubt. It was chiefly the grayness of his hair, indeed, which made Ruth suppose him as old as thirty. He wore a dark overcoat and gray suit — good clothes, so good that one noticed them last — the kind of clothes which Sam Hilton always thought he was buying and never procured. He pulled off a heavy glove to offer a big, boyish hand.

“How do you do, Cy — Miss Gail?” he greeted her. He was quite sure of her but doubtful as to use of her given name.

“Hubert Lennon!” Ruth exclaimed, giving her hand

to his grasp—a nice, pleased, and friendly grasp. She had ventured that, whoever he was, he had known Cynthia Gail long ago but had not seen her recently; not for several years, perhaps, when she was so young a girl that everyone called her Cynthia. Her venture went well.

She was able to learn from him, without his suspecting that she had not known, that she had an engagement with him for the afternoon; they were to go somewhere—she could not well inquire where—for some event of distinct importance for which she was supposed to be “ready.”

“I’m not ready, I’m sorry to say,” Ruth seized swiftly the chance for fleeing to refuge in “her” room. “I’ve just come in, you know. But I’ll dress as quickly as I can.”

“I’ll be right here,” he agreed.

She stepped into a waiting elevator and drew back into the corner; two men, who talked together, followed her in and the car started upwards. If the Germans had sent someone to the hotel to observe her when she appeared to take the place of Cynthia Gail, that person pretty clearly was not Hubert Lennon, Ruth thought; but she could not be sure of these two men. They were usual looking, middle-aged men of the successful type who gazed at her more than casually; neither of them called a floor until after Ruth asked for the third; then the other said, “Fourth,” sharply while the man who remained silent left the elevator after Ruth. She was conscious that he came behind her while she followed the room numbers along the hallway until she found the door of 347; he passed her while she was opening it. She entered and, putting the key on the inside, she locked herself in, pressing close to the panel

to hear whether the man returned. But she heard only a rapping at a door farther on; the man's voice saying, "I, Adele;" then a woman's and a child's voices.

"Nerves!" Ruth reproached herself. "You have to begin better than this."

She was in a large and well-furnished bedroom; the bed and bureau and dressing table were set in a sort of alcove, half partitioned off from the end of the room where was a lounge with a lamp and a writing desk. These were hotel furniture, of course; the other articles—the pretty, dainty toilet things upon the dressing table, the dresses and the suit upon the hangers in the closet, the nightdress and kimono upon the hooks, the boots on the rack, the waists, stockings, undergarments, and all the other girl's things laid in the drawers—were now, of necessity, Ruth's. There was a new steamer trunk upon a low stand beyond the bed; the trunk had been closed after being unpacked and the key had been left in it. A small, brown traveling bag—also new—stood on the floor beside it. Upon the table, beside a couple of books and magazines, was a pile of department-store packages—evidently Cynthia Gail's purchases which she had listed in her letter to her mother. The articles, having been bought on Saturday, had been delivered on Monday and therefore had merely been placed in the room.

Ruth could give these no present concern; she could waste no time upon examination of the clothes in the closet or in the drawers. She bent at once before the mirror of the dressing table where Cynthia Gail had stuck in two kodak pictures and two cards at the edge of the glass. The pictures were both of the same young man—a tall,

straight, and strongly built boy in officer's uniform; probably Lieutenant Byrne, Ruth thought; at least he was not Hubert Lennon; and the cards in the glass betrayed nothing about him, either; both, plainly, were "reminder" cards, one having "Sunday, 4:30!" written triumphantly across it, the other, "Mrs. Malcolm Corliss, Superior 9979."

Ruth knew — who in Chicago did not know? — of Mrs. Malcolm Corliss, particularly since America entered the war. Ruth knew that the Superior number was a telephone probably in Mrs. Corliss' big home on the Lake Shore Drive. Ruth picked up the leather portfolio lying upon the dressing table; opening it, she faced four portrait photographs; an alert, able and kindly looking man of about fifty; a woman a few years younger, not very unlike Ruth's own mother and with similarly sweet eyes and a similar abundance of beautiful hair. These photographs had been but recently taken. The third was several years old and was of a handsome, vigorous, defiant looking boy of twenty-one or two; the fourth was of a cunning, bold little youth of twelve in boy-scout uniform. Ruth had no doubt that these were Cynthia Gail's family; she was very glad to have that sight of them; yet they told her nothing of use in the immediate emergency. Her hand fell to the drawer of the dresser where, a moment ago, Ruth had seen a pile of letters; she recognized that she must examine everything; yet it was easier for her to open first the letters which had never become quite Cynthia Gail's — the three letters and the dispatch which the clerk had given Ruth.

She opened the telegram first and found it was from

her father. She was thinking of herself, not as Ruth Alden, but as actually being Cynthia Gail now. It was a great advantage to be able to fancy and to dream; she *was* Cynthia Gail; she *must* be Cynthia henceforth or she could not continue what she was doing even here alone by herself; and surely she could not keep up before others unless, in every relation, she thought of herself as that other girl.

Letter received; it's like you, but by all means go ahead;  
I'll back you. Love. Father.

That told nothing except that she had, in some recent letter, suggested an evidently adventurous deviation from her first plan.

The first letter from Decatur which Cynthia Gail now opened was from her mother — a sweet, concerned motherly letter of the sort which that girl, who had been Ruth Alden, well knew and which made her cry a little. It told absolutely nothing about anyone whom Cynthia might meet in Chicago except the one line, "I'm very glad that Mrs. Malcolm Corliss has telephoned to you." The second letter from Decatur, written a day earlier than the other, was from her father; from this Cynthia gained chiefly the information — which the Germans had not supplied her — that her father had accompanied her to Chicago, established her at the hotel and then been called back home by business. He had been "sorry to leave her alone" but of course she was meeting small risks compared to those she was to run. The letter from Rockford, which had arrived only that morning, was from George — that meant George Byrne. She had been engaged to



She looked away, half expecting the sound of the music, and the roses, and palms, and Gerry Hull would vanish



him, it appeared; but they had quarreled on Sunday; he felt wholly to blame for it now; he was very, very sorry; he loved her and could not give her up. Would she not write him, please, as soon as she could bring herself to?

The letter was all about themselves — just of her and of him. No one else at all was mentioned. The letters in the drawer — eight in number — were all from him; they mentioned, incidentally, many people but all apparently of Decatur; there was no reference of any sort to anyone named Hubert or Lennon.

She returned the letters to their place in the drawer and laid with them those newly received. The mail, if it gave her small help, at least had failed to present any immediately difficult problem of its own. There was apparently no anxiety at home about her; she safely could delay responding until later in the afternoon; but she could not much longer delay rejoining Hubert Lennon or sending him some excuse; and offering excuse, when knowing nothing about the engagement to which she was committed, was perhaps more dangerous than boldly appearing where she was expected. The Germans had told her that they believed she had no close friends in Chicago; and, so far as she had added to that original information, it seemed confirmed.

The telephone bell rang and gave her a jump; it was not the suddenness of the sound, but the sign that even there when she was alone a call might make demand which she could not satisfy. She calmed herself with an effort before lifting the receiver and replying.

“Cynthia?” a woman’s voice asked.

“Yes,” she said.

"It's a large afternoon affair, dear," the voice said easily. "But quite wartime. I'd wear the yellow dress."

"Thank you, I will," Cynthia said, and the woman hung up.

That shocked Cynthia back to Ruth again; she stood in the center of the room, turning about slowly and with muscles pulling with queer, jerky little tugs. The message had purported to be a friendly telephone call from some woman who knew her intimately; but Ruth quickly estimated that that was merely what the message was meant to appear. For if the woman really were so intimate a friend of Cynthia Gail, she would not have made so short and casual a conversation with a girl whom she could not have seen or communicated with since Sunday. No; it was plain that the Germans again were aiding her; plain that they had learned—perhaps from Hubert Lennon waiting for her in the hotel lobby—about her afternoon engagement; plain, too, that they were ordering her to go.

A new and beautiful yellow dress, suitable for afternoon wear, was among the garments in the closet; there was an underskirt and stockings and everything else. Ruth was Cynthia again as she slipped quickly out of her street dress, took off shoes and stockings and redressed completely. She found a hat which evidently was to be worn with the yellow dress. So completely was she Cynthia now, as she bent for a final look in the glass, that she did not think that she looked better than Ruth Alden ever had; she wondered, instead, whether she looked as well as she should. She found no coat which seemed distinctly for the afternoon; so she put on the coat which she had bought. She carried her knitting bag with her

as before — it was quite an advantage to have a receptacle as capacious as a knitting bag which she could keep with her no matter where she went. Descending to the ground floor, she found about the same number and about the same sort of people passing back and forth or lounging in the lobby. Hubert Lennon was there and he placed himself beside her as she surrendered her room key.

“You’re perfectly corking, Cynthia!” he admired her, evidently having decided during his wait that he could say her name.

Color — the delicate rose blush in her clear skin which Sam Hilton so greatly liked — deepened on her cheek.

“All ready now, Hubert,” she said; her use of his name greatly pleased him and he grasped her arm, unnecessarily, to guide her out.

“Just a minute,” she hesitated as she approached the telegraph desk. “I’ve a wire to send to father.”

The plan had popped out with the impulse which had formed it; she had had no idea the moment before of telegraphing to Charles Gail. But now the ecstasy of the daring game — the game beginning here in small perils, perhaps, but also perhaps in great; the game which was swiftly to lead, if she could make it lead, across the sea and through France into Switzerland and then into the land of the enemy upon the Rhine — had caught her; and she knew instinctively how to reply to that as yet uncomprehended telegram from her father.

She reached for the dispatch blanks before she remembered that, though her handwriting would not be delivered in Decatur, still here she would be leaving a record in writing which was not like Cynthia Gail’s. So she merely

took up the pen in her gloved fingers and gave it to Hubert Lennon who had not yet put his gloves on.

"You write for me, please," she requested. "Mr. Charles F. Gail," she directed and gave the home street number in Decatur. "Thanks for your wire telling me to go ahead. I knew you'd back me. Love. Thia."

"What?" Lennon said at the last word.

"Just sign it 'Thia.'"

He did so; she charged the dispatch to her room and they went out. The color was still warm in her face. If one of the men in the lobby was a German stationed to observe how she did and if he had seen her start the mistake of writing the telegram, he had seen also an instant recovery, she thought.

A large, luxurious limousine, driven by a chauffeur in private livery, moved up as they came to the curb. When they settled side by side on the soft cushions, the driver started away to the north without requiring instructions.

"You were fifteen years old when I last had a ride with you," Hubert obligingly informed her.

That was nine years ago, in nineteen nine, Cynthia made the mental note; she had become twenty-four years old instead of twenty-two, since the morning.

"But I knew you right away," he went on. "Aunt Emilie would have come for you but you see when she telephoned and found you weren't in at half-past one, she knew she couldn't call for you and get to Mrs. Corliss' on time. And she's a stickler for being on time."

So it was to Mrs. Corliss' they were going—to her great home on the drive. The car was keeping on northward along the snow-banked boulevard with the white

and arctic lake away to the right and, on the left, the great grounds of Mrs. Potter Palmer's home.

"She'd have sent a maid for you," Hubert explained, "but I said it was stupid silly to send a maid after a girl who's going into the war zone."

"I'm glad you came instead for another ride with me," Cynthia said.

He reddened with pleasure. In whatever circles he moved, it was plain he received no great attention from girls.

"I tried to get into army and navy both, Cynthia," he blurted, apropos of nothing except that he seemed to feel that he owed explanation to her as to why he was not in uniform. "But they turned me down—eyes. Even the Canadians turned me down. But Aunt Emilie's giving an ambulance; and they're going to let me drive it. They get under fire sometimes, I hear. On the French front."

"They're often under fire," Cynthia assured. "A lot of ambulance men have been killed and wounded; so that's no slacker service."

"Not if you can't get in anything better," he said, "but mighty little beside what Gerry Hull's been doing."

She startled a little. He had spoken Gerry Hull's name with far less familiarity than Sam Hilton had uttered it that morning; but Hubert Lennon's was with the familiarity of one who knows personally the man mentioned.

"You've seen him since he's back?" Cynthia asked. It came to her suddenly that they—he and she—were going to meet Gerry Hull!

The car was slowing before the turn in the driveway for Mrs. Corliss' city home; a number of cars were ahead and others took line behind for the *porte cochère* where guests were entering the house.

"Yes; I know him pretty well," Hubert said with a sort of pitiful pride. He was sensitive to the fact that, when he had spoken of Gerry Hull, her interest in him had so quickened; but he was quite unresentful of it. "I'll see that he knows you, Cynthia," he promised.

She sat quiet, trying to think what to say to Hubert Lennon after this; but he did not want the talk brought back to himself. He spoke only of his friend until the man opened the door of the car; the house door was opened at the same moment; and Cynthia, gathering her coat about her and clutching close to her knitting bag, stepped out of the car and into the hall, warm and scented with hot-house flowers, murmurous with the voices and movement of many people in the big rooms beyond. A man servant directed her to a room where maids were in attendance and where she laid off her coat. She had never in her life been at any affair larger than a wedding or a reception to a congressman at Onarga; so it was a good deal all at once to find oneself a guest of Mrs. Corliss', for it was plain that this reception was by no means a public affair but that the guests all had been carefully selected; it was more to be present carrying a knitting bag (fortunately many others brought knitting bags) in which were twenty-three hundred dollars and a passport to France; and something more yet to meet Gerry Hull—or rather, have him meet you. For when she came out to the hall again, Hubert was waiting for her.

“I can’t find Aunt Emilie just now, Cynthia,” he said. “But I’ve Gerry. There’s no sense in getting into that jam. We’ll go to the conservatory; and Gerry’ll come there. This way, Cynthia. Quick!”

## CHAPTER IV

AT MRS. CORLISS'

SHE followed him about the fringes of the groups pressing into the great front room where a stringed orchestra was starting the first, glorious notes of the *Marseillaise*; and suddenly a man's voice, in all the power and beauty of the opera singer and with the passion of a Frenchman singing for his people, burst out with the battle song:

*Allons, enfants de la Patrie,  
Le jour de gloire est arrivé!  
Contre nous de la tyrannie  
L'étendard sanglant est levé . . . .*

It lifted her as nothing had ever before. "Go, children of your country; the day of glory is here! Against us the bloody standard of tyranny is raised! . . . ."

She had sung that marvelous hymn of the French since she was a child; before she had understood it at all, the leap and lilt of the verse had thrilled her. It had become to her next an historical song of freedom; when the war started—and America was not in—the song had ceased to resound from the past. The victory of the French upon the Marne, the pursuit to the Aisne; then the stand at Verdun gave it living, vibrant voice. Still it had been a voice calling to others—a voice which Ruth might hear

but to which she might not reply. But now, as it called to her: "*Aux armes! . . . Marchons! Marchons!* . . ." she was to march with it!

The wonder of that made her a little dizzy and set her pulse fluttering in her throat. The song was finished and she was amid the long fronds of palms, the hanging vines, and the red of winter roses in the conservatory. She looked about and discovered Hubert Lennon guiding Gerry Hull to her.

"Cynthia, this is Gerry Hull; Gerry, this is Cynthia Gail."

He was in his uniform which he had worn in the French service; he had applied to be transferred from his old escadrille to an American squadron, Ruth knew; but the transfer was not yet effected. The ribbons of his decorations—the *Croix de Guerre*, the *Médaille Militaire*, the Cross of the Legion of Honor—ran in a little, brilliant row across the left breast of his jacket. It bothered him as her eyes went to them. He would not have sought the display—she thought—of wearing his decorations here at home; but since he was appearing in a formal—almost an official function—he had no choice about it. And she recognized instantly that he had not followed his friend out of the "jam" of the other rooms to meet her in order to hear more praise of himself from her.

He was, indeed, far more interested in her than in himself. "Why, I've met you before, Miss Gail," he said, and evidently was puzzling to place her.

Ruth went warm with pleasure. "I spoke to you on the street—when your car stopped on Michigan Avenue

this morning," she confessed. She had not been Cynthia Gail, then; but he could not know that.

"Of course! And I said some stuffy sort of thing to you, didn't I?"

"I didn't think it — stuffy," Ruth denied, utilizing his word. There were seats where they were; and suddenly it occurred to her, when he glanced at them, that he was remaining standing because she was, and that he would like to sit down, and delay there with her. She gasped a little at this realization; and she seated herself upon a gaily painted bench. He looked about before he sat down.

"Hello; I say, where's Hub?"

Lennon had disappeared; and Ruth knew why. She had forgotten him in the excitement of meeting Gerry Hull; so he had felt himself in the way and had immediately withdrawn. But she could do nothing to mend that matter now; she turned to Gerry Hull, who was on the bench beside her.

He had more quickly banished any concern over his friend's disappearance and was observing Ruth with so frank an interest that, instead of gazing away from her when she looked about at him, his eyes for an instant rested upon hers; his were meditative, almost wistful eyes for that moment. They made her think, suddenly, of the little boy whose picture with his grandfather she used to see in her father's newspaper — an alert, energetic little boy, yet with a look of wonder in his eyes why so much fuss was made about him.

"I seem to've been saying no end of stuffy things since I've been back, Miss Gail; they appeared to be what I was expected to say. But I'm about at the finish of 'em. I'm

to say something here this afternoon; and I'm going to say exactly what I think. Wouldn't you?"

"Of course I would," Ruth said.

"Then you forgive me?"

"For what?"

"Posing like such a self-righteous chump in a cab that you felt you ought to ask me what you should do!"

"You haven't been posing," Ruth denied for him again. "Why, when I saw you, what amazed me was that—" she stopped suddenly as she saw color come to his face.

"That I wasn't striking an attitude? Look here, I'm—or I was—one man in fifty thousand in the foreign legion; and one in thousands who've been in the air a bit. I'd no idea what I was getting into when they told me to come home here or I'd—" he stopped and shifted the subject from himself with abrupt finality. "You're going to France, Hub tells me. You've been there in peacetime, of course—Paris surely."

Ruth nodded. She had not thought that, as Cynthia, she must have been abroad until he was so certain of it.

"Did you ever go about old Paris and just poke around, Miss Gail?"

"In those quaint, crooked little streets which change their names every time they twist?"

"The Rue des Saints Pères, the Rue Pavée—that name rather takes one back, doesn't it? Some time ago it must have been when in Paris a citizen could describe where he lived by saying it was on 'the paved street.'"

"Yet it was only in the fifteenth century that wolves used to come in winter into Paris."

"To scare François Villon into his *Lodgings for a*

*Night?*” Gerry said. “So you know that story of Stevenson’s, too?”

“Yes.”

“I suppose, though, you had to stay at the Continental, or the Regina, or some hotel like that, didn’t you? I did at first, when my tutor used to take me. You’d have been with your parents, of course——”

“Of course,” Ruth said.

“But have you planned where you’ll stay now? You’ll choose your own billets, I believe.”

Ruth appealed to her memories of Du Maurier and Victor Hugo; she had read, long ago, *Trilby* and *Les Misérables*, of course, and *Notre-Dame de Paris*; and she knew a good bit about old Paris.

“The Latin Quarter’s cheapest, I suppose.”

“And any amount the most sport!”

She got along very well; or he was not at all critical. He was relaxing with her from the strain of being upon exhibition; and he seemed to be having a very good time. The joy of this made her bold to plan with him all sorts of explorations of Paris when they would meet over there with a day off. She looked away and closed her eyes for a second, half expecting that when she opened them the sound of music, and the roses, and palms, and conservatory, and Gerry Hull must have vanished; but he was there when she glanced back. And she noticed agreeable and pleasing things about him—the way his dark hair brushed back above his temples, the character in his strong, well-formed hands.

Lady Agnes came out looking for him; and he called her over:

"Oh, Agnes, here we are!"

So Ruth met Lady Agnes, too; but Lady Agnes took him away, laughingly scolding him for having left her so long alone among all those American people. Ruth did not follow; and while she lingered beside the bench where he had sat with her, she warned herself that Gerry Hull had paid her attention as a man of his breeding would have paid any girl whom he had been brought out to meet. Then the blood, warm within her, insisted that he had not disliked her; he had even liked her for herself.

The approach of an elderly woman in a gray dress returned Ruth to the realities and the risks of the fraud she had been playing to win Gerry Hull's liking. For the woman gazed at her questioningly and swiftly came up.

Ruth arose. Was this Hubert Lennon's "Aunt Emilie?" she wondered. Had she recently seen the real Cynthia so that she was aware that Ruth was not she?

No; the woman was calling her Cynthia; and with the careful enunciation of the syllables, Ruth recognized the voice as that which had addressed her over the telephone when she was in her room at the hotel.

"Cynthia, you are doing well—excellently!" This could refer only to the fact that she had met Gerry Hull already and had not displeased him. "Develop this opportunity to the utmost; you may find him of greatest possible use when you are in France!"

## CHAPTER V

“YOU'RE NOT LIKE ANYONE ELSE”

**T**HE woman immediately moved away and left the conservatory. No one could have observed her speaking to Ruth except, perhaps, Hubert Lennon, who now had reappeared and, finding Ruth alone, offered his escort shyly. If he had noticed and if he wondered what acquaintance Cynthia had happened upon here, he did not inquire.

“We'd better go into the other rooms,” he suggested. “They're starting speeches.”

She accompanied him, abstractedly. Whatever question she had held as to whether the Germans held her under surveillance had been answered; but it was evident that so far, at least, her appearance in the part of Cynthia Gail had satisfied them—indeed, more than satisfied. What beset Ruth at this moment was the fact that she now knew the identity of an unsuspected enemy among the guests in this house; but she could not accuse that woman without at the same time involving herself. It presented a nice problem in values; Ruth must be quite confident that she possessed the will and the ability to aid her side to greater extent than this woman could harm it; or she must expose the enemy even at the cost of betraying herself.

She looked for the woman while Hubert led her through

the first large room in the front of the big house, where scores of guests who had been standing or moving about were beginning to find places in the rows of chairs which servants were setting up. Hubert took Ruth to a small, nervously intent lady with glistening black hair and brows, who was seated and half turned about emphatically conversing with the people behind her.

“Aunt Emilie, here's Cynthia,” Hubert said loudly to win her attention; she looked up, scrutinized Ruth and smiled.

“I had to help Mrs. Corliss receive, dear; or I'd have called for you myself. So glad Hubert has you here.”

Ruth took the hand which she outstretched and was drawn down beside her. Aunt Emilie (Ruth knew no name for her in relation to herself and therefore used none in her reply) continued to hold Ruth's hand affectionately for several moments and patted it with approval when at last she let it go. Years ago she had been a close friend of Cynthia Gail's mother, it developed; Julia Gail had written her that Cynthia was in Chicago on her way to France; Aunt Emilie had asked Mrs. Corliss to telephone to Cynthia on Saturday inviting her here; Aunt Emilie herself had telephoned on Sunday and Monday to the hotel to find Cynthia, but vainly each time.

“Where in the world were you all that time, my dear child?”

A man's voice suddenly rose above the murmur in the room. The man was standing upon a little platform toward which the chairs were faced and with him were an officer in the uniform of the French Alpine chasseurs, Lady Agnes Ertyle, and Gerry Hull. For an instant the

start of the speaking was to Ruth only a happy interruption postponing the problem of explanations to "Aunt Emilie"; but the next minute Ruth had forgotten all about that small matter. Gerry Hull, from his place on the platform, was looking for her.

The French officer, having been introduced, had commenced to address his audience in emphatic, exalted English; the others upon the platform had sat down. Gerry Hull's glance, which had been going about the room studying the people present, had steadied to the look of a search for some special one; his eyes found Ruth and rested. She was that special one. He looked away soon; but his eyes had ceased to search and again, when Ruth glanced directly at him, she found him observing her.

She leaned forward a little and tried not to look toward him or to think about him too much; but that was hard to do. She had recognized that, when Hubert Lennon had summoned Gerry Hull out to the conservatory, something had been troubling him and he had been on the brink of a decision. He had met her during the moments when he must decide and, in a way, he had referred the decision to her. "They're going to make me say something here this afternoon; and this time I'm going to say exactly what I think. Wouldn't you?"

She had told him that she would, without knowing at all what it was about. Now it seemed to her that, as his time for speaking approached, he was finding his determination more difficult.

The French officer was making an extravagant address, praising everyone here and all Americans for coming into the war to save France and civilization; he was com-

plimenting every American deed, proclaiming gratitude in the name of his country for the aid which America had given; and, while he was speaking thus excessively, Ruth was aware that Gerry Hull was watching her most intently; and when she glanced up at him she saw him draw up straighter in his chair and sit there, looking away, with lips tight shut. The French officer finished and, after the applause, Lady Agnes Ertyle was introduced and she spoke earnestly and simply, telling a little of the work of Americans in Belgium and in France, of the great value of American contributions and moral support; she added her praise and thanks for American aid.

It seemed to Ruth that once Gerry Hull was about to interrupt. But he did not; no one else appeared to notice his agitation; everyone was applauding the pretty English girl who had spoken so gracefully and was sitting down. The gentleman who was making the introductions was beginning to relate who Gerry Hull was and what he had done, when Gerry suddenly stood up. Everyone saw him and clapped wildly; the introducer halted and turned; he smiled and sat down, leaving him standing alone before his friends.

Men here and there were rising while they applauded and called his name; other men, women, and girls got to their feet. Hubert Lennon, on Ruth's left, was one of the first to stand up; his aunt was standing. So Ruth arose then, too; everyone throughout the great rooms was standing now in honor of Gerry Hull. He gazed about and went white a little; he was looking again for someone lost in all the standing throng; he was looking for Ruth! He saw her and studied her queerly again for

a moment. She sat down; others began settling back and the rooms became still.

“I beg your pardon,” Ruth heard Gerry Hull’s voice apologizing first to the man who had tried to introduce him. “I beg the pardon of you all for what I’m going to say. It’s not a word of what I’m supposed to say, I know; it’ll be just what I think and feel.

“We’re not doing our part, people!” he burst out passionately without more preparation. “We’re still taking protection behind England and France, as we’ve done since the start of the war! We ought to be there in force now! God knows, we ought to have been there in force three years ago! But instead of being on the battle line with them in force even with theirs, our position is so pitiable that we make our allies feel grateful for a few score of destroyers and a couple of army divisions holding down quiet sectors in Lorraine. That’s because our allies have become so used to expecting nothing—or next to nothing—of America that anything at all which we do fills them with such sincere amazement that they compliment and overwhelm us with thanks of the sort you have heard.”

He turned about to the French officer and to Lady Agnes, who had just spoken. “Forgive me!” he cried to them so that all in the rooms could hear. “You know I mean no offense to you or lack of appreciation of what you have said. You cannot tell the truth to my people; I can for you, and I must!”

He straightened and spoke to his own people again. “On the day that German uhlans rode across the Belgian border, Belgium and England and France—yes, even

Russia—looked to us to come in; or, at least, to protest and, if our protest was not respected, to enforce it by our arms. But we did nothing—nothing but send a few dollars for Belgian relief, a few ships of grain and a few civilians to distribute it. The outrages of the Boche beasts went on—Termonde, Louvain, the massacres of the Armenians; the systematic starvation and enslavement of Belgians, Poles, Serbians; and we subscribed a little more money for relief. Here and there American missionaries saved a life or two. That's all we did, my friends! So here in our country and in our own newspapers the German Imperial Embassy paid for and had printed advertisements boasting that they were going to sink without warning ships sailing from our ports with our own people aboard; and they sank the *Lusitania*!

“Then England and France and the remnant of Belgium said, ‘Surely now America must come in!’ But you know what we did!”

He stopped, breathless, and Ruth was leaning forward, breathless too. The passion which had seized and was swaying him was rousing like passions in the others before him; his revolt had become their revolt; and they warmed and kindled with him. But she did not. Though this outburst of his soul brought to her feeling for him, himself, beyond what she could have believed, the meaning of what he said did not so inflame her. Her feeling was amazingly personal to him.

“We protested,” he was going on. “Protested; and did nothing! They sank our ships and murdered our own people under the American flag; and we continued to protest! And England and France and the nations hold-

ing back the Boche with them ceased to honor us with expectations of action; so, expecting nothing, naturally they became more grateful and amazed at anything which we happened to do. When the Kaiser told us he might allow us—if we were very good—one ship a week to Europe, provided we sent him notice in advance and we painted it in stripes, just as he said, and when that at last was too much for us to take, they honored us in Europe with wondering what we would do; and they thanked and complimented us, their new ally, for sending them more doctors and medical supplies without charging them for it, and after a while a few divisions of soldiers.

“God knows I would say no word against our men who have gone to France; I speak for them! For I have been an American in France and have learned some of the shame of it! The shame,” he repeated passionately, “of being an American! I have gone about an ordinary duty, performing it much after the fashion of my comrades in the French service—or in the British—and when I have returned, I have found that what I happened to do is the thing picked out for special mention and praise to the public, when others who have done the same or more than myself have not had that honor. Because I was an American! They feel they must yet compliment and thank Americans for doing what they have been doing as a matter of course all this time that we have stayed out; so they thank and praise us for beginning to do now what we ought to have done in 1914.

“We have been sitting here—you and I—letting our allies thank us for at last beginning to fight a little of our war! Think of that when they have been giving them-

selves and their all — all — in our cause for three and a half years!”

He stepped back suddenly and stood with bowed head as though — Ruth thought — he had meant to say more, but suddenly had found that he could not. She was trembling as she sat staring at him; she was alone in her chair now; for the people all about, overswept by their feelings, were standing up again, and clapping wildly, and calling out: “France! France! . . . England! France! . . . Belgium! . . . England!” they were crying in adulation.

She saw him again for an instant; he had stepped back a little farther, and raised his head, and was gazing at the people acclaiming him and the allies for whom he had spoken. He stared about and seemed to seek her — at least, he gazed about when this great acclaim suddenly bewildered him, as he had gazed before he had spoken and when his eyes had found her. She stood up then; but he turned about to Lady Agnes, who had risen and was beside him; the people in front of Ruth screened him from sight and when she got view of the platform again he was gone.

The guests were leaving their chairs and moving toward the rooms where refreshments were being served; but it was many minutes before Ruth heard anyone mention other matters than the war and Gerry Hull’s speech. That had been a thoroughly remarkable and sincere statement of the American position, Ruth heard the people about her saying; to have heard it was a real experience.

It had come as the climax of what for Ruth was far more than that; the darkening of the early winter night

outside the drawn curtains of the windows, the tinkling of a little clock for the half hour—half-past four—brought to her the amazing transformation worked upon Ruth Alden since, scarcely six hours before, the wonderful wand of war had touched her. With the dawn of this same day which was slipping so fast into the irrevocable past, she had awakened to dream as of a wish unrealizable that she might welcome Gerry Hull home; now she knew him; she had talked with him alone; when she had been among all his friends in the other room, he had sought her with his eyes. He had disappeared from the rooms now; and no one seemed to know where he had gone, though many inquired. But Ruth knew; so she slipped away from Hubert Lennon and from his Aunt Emilie, who had forgotten all about asking where Cynthia had been the last two days; and Ruth returned to the conservatory.

Upon that bench where they had sat together, hidden by the palms, and hanging vines, and the roses, she saw him sitting alone, bent forward with his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands, staring down at the floor.

He looked up quickly as he heard her step; she halted, frightened for a moment by her own boldness. If he had chosen that spot for his flight from the others, it would mean—she had felt—that he was willing that she should return there. But how did she know that? Might it not be wholly in her fancy that, since they had separated, he had thought about her at all?

“Hello, Miss Gail!” he hailed her quickly, but so quietly that it was certain he wished no one else to know that he was there. “I was wondering how I could get you here.”

Her heart began beating once more. “I wondered if you’d be here,” she said; he could make of that a good deal what he liked.

He stood up. “Let’s stay here, please,” he asked her, whispering; and he bent a little while he waited for her to be seated, hiding from sight of anyone who might glance over the tops of the palms. He was beside her on the bench now.

“I want you to tell me what I did in there just now, Miss Gail,” he asked. “Agnes Ertyle can’t, of course; others, whom I know pretty well, won’t. But you will, I think.”

The complete friendliness of this confidence made Ruth wonder what he might have known about Cynthia Gail, which let him thus so instinctively disclose himself to her; but it was not to Cynthia Gail; it was to her, herself, Ruth!

“I’ve only known you for an hour, Miss Gail; but I’d rather have your honest opinion than that of any other American.”

From the way he said that, she could not tell whether he had chosen his word purposely to except Lady Agnes Ertyle from any comparison with her; and she wanted to know!

“I think you meant to say a very, very fine thing,” Ruth told him simply.

“But I actually said——”

“You’ve been a long time away from home—from America, our country,” Ruth interrupted him before he could get her into greater difficulties. “You’ve only known me an hour; but, of course, I’ve known you—or

about you—for a good many years. Everyone has. You've been away ever since the start of the war, of course; and even before that you were away, mostly in England, for the greater part of your time, weren't you?"

"I was at school at Harrow for a while," he confessed. "And I was at Cambridge in 1913-1914."

"That's what I thought. So while you've called yourself an American and you've meant to stay an American—I know you meant that—you couldn't quite really become one, could you?"

He drew back from her a trifle and his eyes rested upon hers a little confused, while color crept into his brown face and across his forehead.

"Please tell me just what you want to," he begged.

"I don't want to tell you a thing unpleasant!" she cried quietly. "And I can't, unless you'll believe that I never admired anyone so much as you when you were speaking—I mean anyone," she qualified quickly, "who was saying things which I believed all wrong!"

Terror for her boldness caught her again; but it was because he had seen that with him she must be bold—or honest—that he had wanted her there; for he did want her there and more than before. While he had been speaking, she had been thinking about him—thinking as well as feeling for him; and she had been thinking about him ever since—thinking thoughts her own, or at least distinct from his and from those of his friends in the other rooms who had so acclaimed him and from whom he had fled. He realized it; and that was why he wanted her.

"I believe that to be a true American is the highest honor in the world today," she said with the simplicity of

deep feeling. “I believe that, so far from having anything to be ashamed about, an American—particularly such an American as you might be——”

“Might be!” he repeated.

“Has more to be rightly proud of than anyone else! And not alone because America is in the war now, but because—at the cost of staying out so long—our country came in when and how she did! You understand I say nothing against our allies—nothing like what you have said against our own country! Belgium got the first attack of the Germans and fought back, oh, so nobly, and so bravely, and hopelessly; but Belgium was invaded! France fought, as everyone knows, in self-defense and for a principle; England fought in self-defense, too, as well as for a principle—for were not the German guns almost at her shores? But we have gone in for a principle—and in self-defense, too, perhaps; but for the principle first! Oh, there is a difference in that! A hundred million people safe and unthreatened—for whether or not we really were safe and unthreatened, we believed we were—going into a war without idea of any possible gain or advantage solely for a principle! Oh, I don't mean to make a speech to you.”

“Go on!” he ordered. “I've just made one; you go on now.”

“You spoke about the Kaiser's order to us about how to paint our ships, as if the insult of that was what at last brought us in! How little that had to do with it for us! It merely happened to come at the time we could at last go in—when a hundred million people, not in danger which they could see or feel, decided to go in, knowing

even better than those who had decided earlier what it was going to mean. For the war was different then from what it was at first; the Russia of the Czar and of the empire was gone; and in France and in England there was a difference, too. Oh, I don't know how to say it; just France, at first, was fighting as France and for France against Germany; and England, for England, was doing the same. And America couldn't do that—I mean fight for America; she couldn't join with allies who were fighting for themselves or even for one another. The side of the allies had to become more than that before we could go in; and it is and we're in! Oh, I don't know how or when it will appear; but I know—know that before long you will be prouder to be an American than you ever dreamed you could be if we had gone in like the others when you thought we should."

She had been gazing at him and, for a few moments, he had been staring in bewilderment at her; but now he was turned away and she could see from the set of his lips, from the pulse throbbing below his temple as the muscles of his face pulled taut, how she had offended him.

"Thank you," he said to her shortly.

"I've hurt you!"

"Didn't you mean to?"

"Not this way."

"You told what you thought; I asked to know it. How do you happen to be here, Miss Gail?" he asked with sudden directness after a pause.

Ruth recollected swiftly Cynthia Gail's connections through Hubert Lennon's aunt with Mrs. Corliss and she related them to Gerry Hull, perforce; and this unavoidable

deception distressed her more than all the previous ones she had played. She realized that, in order to understand what she had said, he was trying to understand her; and she wished that she could tell him that she was Ruth Alden, working, only as late as that morning, in Hilton Brothers’ office.

“You’re not like anyone else here,” he said, without pressing his inquiry further. “Hub Lennon told me that he had a different sort of girl with him. These other people are all like myself; you saw the way they took what I said. They didn’t take it as said against them; they’ve been in the war, heart and soul, since the first. You’ve only come in when we—I mean America,” he corrected with a wince, “came in. I think I felt that without knowing it; that’s why I talked to you more than to all the rest together. That’s why I needed to see you again; you’re more of an American, I guess, than anyone else here.”

He said that with a touch of bitterness which prevented her offering reply.

“You haven’t hurt me as me,” he denied. “If you just told me that my country believed I was wrong and had been fighting for something lower than it was willing to fight for until April, 1917, why that would be all right. But what you have said is against the finest, noblest, most chivalrous men the world ever knew—a good many of them dead, now, fallen on the field of honor, Americans—Americans of the highest heart, Norman Prince, Kiffen Rockwell, Vic Chapman, and the rest! If being American means to wait, after you see beasts like the Germans murdering women and children, until you’ve sat-

ified your smug soul that everyone who's fighting the beast is just your sort, they weren't Americans and I'm not an American either, thank God!"

He arose from beside her in his overwhelming emotion; and she, without knowing what she did, put out a hand, and caught his sleeve, and pulled him down beside her again.

"Wait!" she almost commanded him. "I can't have you misunderstand me so! This morning when I woke up—it was before I knew I was to meet you—I tried to imagine knowing you!"

"To tell me what you have?"

"To thank you for what you have done!"

"You're a strange person!"

"Oh, I can't explain everything even to myself!" Ruth cried. "I only know that you—and the men you've mentioned—had the wonderful right to do, of yourselves, fine and brave things before our country had the right!"

That was sheer stupidity to him, she saw; and she could not make it clearer. He wanted to leave her now; but he did not forget himself as he had the moment earlier. He waited for her to rise and he accompanied her to the other rooms. They separated without formal leave-taking as others claimed him, and Hubert Lennon found her. Hubert and his aunt took her back to the hotel, where Aunt Emilie—Ruth yet had no name for her—offered an invitation for luncheon tomorrow or the day after. Ruth accepted for the second day and went up to her room, where she locked herself in, took off the yellow dress, and flung herself face downward across the bed.

Except for the chocolate and little cakes served at Mrs. Corliss', she had eaten nothing since breakfast; but she scarcely thought to be hungry or considered her weariness now. What a day had been given to her; and how frightfully she had bungled it! She had met Gerry Hull, and he had found interest in her, and she had taken advantage of his interest only to offend, and insult him, and turn him away! The Germans, upon whose support she must depend in all her plans, had given her a first definite order; and she had completely disregarded it in her absorption in offending Gerry Hull. At any moment, therefore, they might take action against her—either direct action of their own, or give information which would expose her to the American authorities, and bring about her arrest and disgrace. A miserable end, now, not only to her great resolves of that morning, but to any possible rehabilitation with Gerry Hull! For if that morning she had dreamed of meeting him, now this night a thousand times intensified she thought of him again and again—constantly, it seemed. And yet she would not have taken back a word of that which had angered him and turned him away.

She got up at last and went down alone to dinner; and, when nothing more happened, she returned to her own room, where after more carefully going over all Cynthia Gail's things, she took plain paper and an envelope and wrote a short note to Sam Hilton, informing him that most important personal matters suddenly had forced her to give up her position with him; she wrote the landlady at her boarding house that she had been called home and would either return or send for her trunk later. She mailed these herself and went to bed.

The next morning she bought a small typewriter, of the sort which one can carry traveling, and took up Cynthia Gail's correspondence. Neither the mail of that day nor the telephone presented to her any difficult problem; and she had no new callers. Indeed, except for Hubert Lennon, who "looked by" — as he spoke of it — just before noon, she encountered no one who had anything to say to her until, walking out early in the afternoon, she met upon the street the woman in gray who had given her the order about Gerry Hull on yesterday afternoon.

Ruth went a little weak with fright when the woman caught step beside her; but the woman at once surprised her with reassurance.

"Gerry Hull returns to France from here," the woman informed abruptly. "He will be transferred to the American air service there; he will sail from New York probably on the *Ribot* next week. That is a passenger vessel, carrying cargo, of course; but not yet used for troop shipments. Passengers proceed as individuals. You will probably be allowed a certain amount of choice in selecting your ship. So you shall report at New York and endeavor to secure passage upon the *Ribot*. Understand?"

"Perfectly," Ruth said.

"Your friendship with Gerry Hull will prove invaluable in France! Do nothing to jeopardize it! You have done with him, well! But you are in too much danger here; go East tonight; wait there."

The woman went away. How much did she know about what had passed with Gerry Hull, Ruth wondered. She had seen, probably, that Ruth was with him again in the conservatory after his speech and that they had

stayed there a long time together. She had done with him, well ! She smiled woefully to herself ; at least it seemed to have aided her that the Germans thought so.

It would have puzzled her more, certainly, if she had known that after the time when Gerry Hull and she forgot to whisper and forgot, indeed, everyone but themselves, the woman had heard almost every word which was said ; and that the woman’s opinion of the girl who was playing the part of Cynthia Gail was that she was a very clever one to know enough and dare enough to take single and violent opposition to Gerry Hull. For the Germans, in preparation for this war, had made a most elaborate and detailed study of psychology of individuals and of nations. That study of nations has not shown conspicuously successful results ; but their determination of factors which are supposed to influence individuals is said to have fared far better.

Their instructions to a woman—or a girl—who is commanded to make an impression upon a man inform that a girl in dealing with a weak character progresses most certainly and fastest by agreeing and complying ; but when one has to do with a man of strong character, opposition and challenge to him bring the surest result.

Of course that is not an exclusively German discovery ; and to act in accordance with it, one is not obliged to be truly a German spy and to know it from the tutorings of a German psychologist. Indeed, one does not have to know it at all ; one need merely be a young girl, thoughtful and honest, as well as impulsive and of quick but deep passions, who admires and cares so very much for a young man who has talked serious things with her, that she can-

not just say yes to his yes and no to his no, but must try at once to work out the difference between them.

Not to know it is hard on that girl, particularly when she is setting out upon an adventure which at once cuts her off from everyone whom she has known.

Ruth had no companion at all. She had to write to her own mother in Onarga, of course; and, after buying with cash an order for two thousand dollars, she sent it to her mother with a letter saying that she was assigned to a most wonderful work which was taking her abroad. She was not yet free to discuss the details; but her mother must trust her and know that she was doing a right and wise thing; and her mother must say nothing about it to anyone at all. It might keep her away for two years or more; so the people who were paying her expenses had forwarded her this money for home. Ruth wished her mother to send for her clothes and her trunk from the boarding house; Ruth would not need them. And if any inquiry came for Ruth from Hilton Brothers or elsewhere, Ruth had gone East to take a position. There was no use writing her at the old addresses; she would send an address later.

She knew her mother; and she knew that her mother was sure enough of her so that she would do as asked and not worry too much.

So upon that same afternoon, Ruth packed up Cynthia Gail's things; and she wrote to Cynthia Gail's parents and to Second Lieutenant George Byrne at Camp Grant, signing the name below the writing as Cynthia Gail had signed it upon her passport.

That passport was ceasing to be a mere possession and

was soon to be put to use; so Ruth practiced long in signing the name. The description of Cynthia Gail as checked on the passport was almost faultless for herself; height, five feet six and a half inches; weight, 118 pounds; face, oval; eyes, blue; hair, yellow; and so with all the rest. The photograph of Cynthia Gail was pasted upon the passport and upon it was stamped the seal of the United States, as well as a red-ink stamping which went over the edge of the photograph upon the paper of the passport. It was very possible, Ruth thought, that the German girl for whom this passport was intended would have removed that picture of Cynthia Gail and substituted one of herself; to do that required an emboss seal of the United States, besides the rubber stamp of the red ink. Ruth did not doubt that the Germans possessed replicas of these and also the skill to forge the substitution. But she possessed neither.

Moreover, the photograph of Cynthia Gail seemed to Ruth even more like herself than it had at first. The difference was really more in expression than in the features themselves; and Ruth, consciously or unconsciously, had become more like that girl in the picture. She had, also, the identical dress in which the picture was taken. She determined to wear that when she presented the passport and risk the outcome. Her advantage so far had been that no one had particular reason to suspect her; she had fitted herself into the relations already arranged to take Cynthia Gail to France and they seemed capable, of their own momentum, to carry her on.

Hubert Lennon “looked by” again later in the afternoon and she asked him to tell his aunt that she was going

away. He was much concerned and insistent upon doing what he could to aid her.

“Do you know when you’ll be sailing?” he asked.

“I hope next week,” she said.

“Could you possibly go on the *Ribot*?”

“Why on the *Ribot*?”

“Gerry Hull’s just got word that he’s to join again on the other side,” Hubert said, “so he’ll be going back next week on the *Ribot*, he thinks.”

Ruth checked just in time a “Yes, I know.”

“I’m going to try to get across with him,” Hubert added. Ruth felt liking again for this young man who always put his friend before himself.

“That’s good. I hope surely I can get on the *Ribot*.”

“Aunt Emilie knows people in New York who’ll help arrange it for you, if I ask ’em. You’ll let me?”

“Please!” Ruth accepted eagerly. She wanted exceedingly to know one other thing; but she delayed asking and then made the query as casual as she could.

“Lady Agnes stays in Chicago a while?”

Hubert colored as this question ended for him his pretense with himself that she wanted to be on the *Ribot* because of him.

“No; she’s going when Gerry goes. She plans to be on the *Ribot* too. They always intended to return at the same time.”

“Of course,” Ruth said. What wild fancies she followed!

Hubert went off; but returned to take her to the train. He brought with him letters from his aunt—credentials of Ruth as Cynthia Gail to powerful people who did not

know Cynthia Gail, and who were asked to further her desires in every way.

Thus, at the end of seven days, Ruth Alden sailed for the first time away from her native land upon the *Ribot* for Bordeaux to become—in the reports of the American authorities who approved and passed her on—a worker in the devastated districts of France; to become, in whatever report the agents of Hohenzollernism in America made to their superiors, a dependable and resourceful spy for Germany; to become—in the resolution she swore to herself and to the soul of Cynthia Gail and the prayers she prayed—an emissary for her cause and her country into the land of the enemy who would know no mercy to such as herself.

## CHAPTER VI

### “WE’RE FIGHTING”

**T**HERE is a thrill upon awaking on your first morning on board a ship at sea which all the German U-boats under the ocean can scarcely increase. You may imagine all you please what it may be; and it will amaze you with something more. Ruth Alden had imagined; and her first forenoon on shipboard was filled with surprises.

She had gone aboard from the New York quay at nine the evening before, as she had been warned to do; she had looked into her cabin—a small, square white compartment with two bunks, upper and lower, an unupholstered seat, a washbowl with a looking glass beside the porthole and with a sort of built-in bureau with four drawers, above which was posted conspicuously the rules to be observed in emergencies. These were printed in French and English and were illustrated by drawings of exactly how to adjust the life-preservers to be found under all berths. Someone, whose handbaggage bore the initials “M. W.” and who evidently was to share the cabin with her, had been in before her and gone out. Ruth saw that the steward disposed her cabin baggage beside M. W.’s; she shut herself in a moment after the steward had gone, touching the pillow of her bunk, reading the rules again, trying the water-taps. She stood with

shut eyes, breathing deliciously the strange, scrubbed, salty smells of a deep-water boat; she opened the door and went out to the deck with the darkness of the Hudson on one hand; upon the other, the myriad-lighted majesty of New York.

She was standing there at the rail gazing up at the marvelous city when Hubert Lennon found her. He merely wanted to make sure she was aboard. Gerry Hull and Captain Lescault—he was the French officer who had spoken at Mrs. Corliss’—and an English captain, Forraker, of the same party, were aboard now; Lady Agnes and the Englishwomen with whom she traveled also were aboard, Hubert said.

He was glad to find that Cynthia was all right; but he said that a nasty sea was running outside; the *Ribot* might go out at any time. Hubert thought Cynthia had better go to bed and get all the sleep she could.

Ruth went below, not with any idea of sleeping, but to avoid meeting Gerry Hull just yet. That she was aboard the *Ribot* under orders did not undo the fact that she was here for the conscious purpose of furthering her acquaintance with him. He must guess that, she thought—he from whom she had heard nothing at all since that afternoon at Mrs. Corliss’.

Ruth was ready for bed when someone put a key in the cabin door, but knocked before turning it, and a girl’s pleasant voice inquired, “All right to come in?”

“All right,” Ruth said, covering up in bed.

A dark-haired, dark-eyed girl of twenty-six or seven entered. “I’m Milicent Wetherell,” she introduced her-

self. "I'm from St. Louis; I'm going to Paris for work in a *vestiaire*."

Ruth sat up and put out her hand; she liked this girl on sight. "I'm Ru——Cynthia Gail of Decatur, Illinois," she caught herself swiftly. It was the first time in the eight days that she had been Cynthia that she had made even so much of a slip; but Milicent Wetherell did not notice it.

Milicent went to bed and turned out the light. The boat did not move; and after indefinite hours of lying still in the dark, Ruth dropped to sleep. When she awoke it was daylight; the ship was swaying, falling, rising; the tremor of engines shook it. They were at sea.

The waves were higher than any Ruth had encountered before, but they were slower and smoother too—not nearly so jumpy and choppy as the Lake Michigan surf in a strong wind. The big steamer rose and rolled to them far more steadily than the vessels upon which Ruth had voyaged on holidays on the lake. Milicent Wetherell, in the lower berth, lay miserably awake with no desire whatever to get up; but Ruth let the stewardess lead her to the bath; she dressed and found the way to the dining-saloon. She was supplied, along with a number designating her "abandon ship" place in starboard lifeboat No. 7, a numeral for a seat at a table.

At this hour of half after nine, there were perhaps fifty men at breakfast and just five other women or girls; four men were seated at the table to which Ruth was led—Captain Forraker one of them. He arose as she approached. Possibly he remembered her, Ruth thought, from an introduction at Mrs. Corliss'; much more prob-

ably Hubert Lennon—who undoubtedly had had her placed at this table—had reminded Captain Forraker about her. His three table-companions arose and Captain Forraker presented them to her; they were all English—two young officers and one older man, in rank a colonel, who had been about some ordnance inspection work in America. Ruth sat down; they sat down and resumed their talk; and Ruth got the first of her morning amaze-ments. She was in a foreign land, already; she was not just on the way there, though still in sight of Long Island. She was now in Europe, with Europeans thinking and talking, not as guests of America, but as Europeans at home again.

Ruth had been brought up, as a good American, to believe her country the greatest in the world; and, implicitly, she believed it. She recognized that sons and daughters of other nations likewise were reared to believe their native land the best and their people the noblest; but she never had been able to quite believe that they really could think so. They must make an exception, down deep in their consciousness, for America, she was sure; however loyal they might be to their own institutions and to their own fellows, they must admire more highly the American ideals of freedom and democracy, and they must consider that the people who lived by and for those ideals were potentially, at least, the greatest.

It was a momentous experience, therefore, to hear her country discussed—not in an unfriendly way or even with prejudice, but by open-minded foreigners trying to inform one another of the facts about America as they had found them; America was a huge but quite untried quantity;

its institutions and ideals seemed to them interesting, but on the whole not nearly so good as their own; certainly there was no suggestion of their endowing Americans with superior battle abilities, therefore. The nation—that nation founded more than a hundred and forty years ago which was to Ruth the basis of all being—was to them simply an experiment of which no one could yet tell the outcome.

They did not say that, of course; they said nothing at all to which she could take the slightest exception. They simply brought to her the brevity and unconvincingness of a century of independent existence in the perspective of a thousand; their national thought started not with 1776 but with the Conquest or, even earlier, when the Roman legions abandoned Britain and King Arthur reigned.

When they spoke of their homes, as they did once, and Ruth found opportunity to inquire of one of them how long he had had his home in Sussex, he told her:

“The present house goes back to 1582.”

It rather made her gasp. No wonder that a man of a family which had occupied the “present” house since before the Pilgrims sailed, looked upon America as an unproved venture.

“They’re in it to the end now, I consider,” this man commented later to his companion when they returned to the discussion of America and the war.

“Quite so, probably,” the other said. “The South went to absolute exhaustion in their Civil War.”

“Absolutely,” the Sussex man agreed. “North probably would have too, if necessary.”

They were estimating American will and endurance, not by pretty faiths and protestations, but by what Americans, in their short history, had actually shown.

“But this is foreign war, of course;” the colonel qualified the judgment dubiously.

The man whose “present” house went back to 1582 nodded thoughtfully.

Ruth received all this eagerly; it could not in the least shake her own confidence in her people; but it gave her better comprehension of the ideas which Gerry Hull had gained from his association with Europeans. And this morning, when she was certain to meet him, she wished — oh she wished to an incredible degree — to understand him more fully than before. She learned from a remark of Captain Forraker’s that Gerry Hull and Lady Agnes had breakfasted early and had gone out on deck. Ruth had intended to go on deck after breakfast; but now she changed her mind. She went to the saloon; and hardly was she there, when Gerry Hull and Lady Agnes came in from the cold.

They were laughing together at something which had happened without. Ruth saw them before either of them noticed her; and her heart halted in the excitement of expectancy during the instant Gerry Hull’s glance went about the saloon. He saw her; nodded to her and looked at once to Lady Agnes, who immediately advanced to Ruth, greeting her cordially and with perfect recollection of having talked with her at Mrs. Corliss’. Upon this French ship bound for Europe, the English girl was at home as the Englishmen at the breakfast table had been; she felt herself, in a sense, a hostess of Ruth.

"You've been about the ship yet, Miss Gail?" Gerry Hull asked.

"Only a little last night," Ruth said.

"Come out on deck then," he invited her. "Done for just now, Agnes?" he asked.

"Just now," Agnes said. "But I know you're not. Go on!" she bid, smiling at him as his eyes came to hers.

Ruth saw it as she started away to her cabin for her coat. There had been some concern—not much, but some—in Agnes Ertyle's look that first time she discovered Gerry Hull and Ruth together; there was no suggestion of concern now.

"Hub's sick, poor chap," Gerry told Ruth when she came out and they set off side by side up the promenade deck against the cold, winter wind. "He wanted me to tell you that's why he couldn't look you up this morning."

Had Hub—her loyal, self-derogatory Hub—therefore arranged with his friend to give her this attention, Ruth wondered. Not that Gerry Hull offered himself perfunctorily; he was altogether too well bred for that. He held out his hand to her as the wind threatened to sweep her from her feet; she locked arms with him and together they struggled forward to the bow where a spray shield protected them and they turned to each other and rested.

"Pretty good out here, isn't it?" he asked, drawing deep breaths of the cold, salt air, his dark cheeks glowing.

"Glorious!" Ruth cried. "I never——" she checked herself quickly, almost forgetting.

"Crossed in winter before?"

"No."

“Neither’ve I—in real winter weather; except when coming home this last time.”

Ruth glanced up at him and caught his eyes pondering her. He had meant merely to be courteous to her when meeting her on shipboard; but too much had passed between them, in their brief, tempestuous first meeting. He was feeling that as well as she! The gage which she had thrown before him was not to be ignored. However certainly he may have thought that he would be merely polite to this girl who had—he deemed—insulted his comrades and himself, however determinedly he had planned to chat with her about wind and weather, he wanted to really talk with her now! And however firmly Ruth had decided to avoid any word which could possibly offend him, still she found herself replying:

“Then you think of Chicago as your home?”

“Of course; why not?”

She turned her back more squarely to the wind and gazed down the length of the deck, hesitating.

“I might as well own up, Miss Gail,” he said to her suddenly. “I’m still mad.”

“At me?”

“At you. For a while I was so mad that I didn’t want to see you or think of you,” he admitted with the frankness which had enabled him to ask her, directly, how she happened to be at Mrs. Corliss’. “But that didn’t seem to do me any good. So I called up your hotel——”

“You did? When?”

“After you were gone—about two days after. They had no address for you and Hub had none. I asked him.”

Ruth trembled with joyous excitement.

"I wanted to tell you better what I meant," he went on. "And to find out more from you."

"About?"

"What we'd been arguing. I told you that day I'd never had a chance to talk over affairs with an American like you; and I hadn't later.

"You see," he explained after a moment of thought, "it seemed to me that the other people I met at home — or most of them, anyway — went into the war as a sort of social event. I don't mean that they made light of it; they didn't. They were heart and soul in the cause; and a good many of them did a lot of real work. But they didn't react to any — original ideas, as far as I could make out. They imported their opinions and sympathies. And the ones who were hottest to have America in the war weren't the people who'd been most of their lives in America; but the ones who'd been in England or France. I told you that day that what they said was just what I'd been hearing on the other side."

In spite of the canvas shield, it was very cold where they were standing. Gerry moved a bit as he talked; and Ruth stepped with him, letting him lead her to a door which he opened, to discover a little writing room or card room which happened to be deserted just then. He motioned to her to precede him; and when she sat down upon one of the upholstered chairs fixed before a table, he took the place opposite, tossing his cap away and loosening his coat. She unbuttoned her coat and pulled off her heavy gloves. She had made no reply, and he seemed to expect none, but to be satisfied with her waiting.

“I suppose you’re thinking that’s the way I got my opinions too,” he said. “But it’s not quite true. I wasn’t trying to be English or French or foreign in any way. I was proud—not ashamed—to be American. Why, at school in England they used to have a regular game to get me started bragging about America and Chicago and our West. I liked the people over there; but I liked our people better. Grandfather—well, he seemed to me about the greatest sort of man possible; and his friends and father’s friends who used to come to look me up at Harrow once in a while—some of ’em were pretty raw and uncouth, but I liked to show ’em off! I did. They’d all done something themselves; and most of ’em were still doing things—big things—and putting in eight or ten hours a day in their offices. They weren’t gentlemen at all in the sense that my friends at Harrow knew English gentlemen; but I said they were the real thing. America—my country—was made up of men who really did things!

“Then the war came and showed us up! I tell you, Miss Gail, I couldn’t believe it at first. It seemed to me that the news couldn’t be getting across to America; or that lies only were reaching you. Then the American newspapers came to France and everyone could see that we knew and stayed out!”

“Last week,” Ruth said, “and yesterday; and before I met you this morning, I knew how to tell you what I tried to that day at Mrs. Corliss’. I’ve thought more about that, I’m sure, than anything else recently; but now—” she gazed across the little table at him and shook her head—“it’s no use. It’s not anything one can argue, I

guess. It's just faith and feeling—faith in our own people, Lieutenant Hull!”

She saw, as he watched her, that she was disappointing him and that he had been hoping that, somehow, she could resolve the doubts of his own people which possessed him; she saw—as she had observed at Mrs. Corliss'—that his eyes lingered upon her face, upon her hands, as though he liked her; but her stubbornness in upholding those people whom she would not even try to explain, offended him again. He glanced out the port above her.

“We're picking up a cruiser escort,” he said suddenly. “Let's go out and look her over.”

So they were on deck in the cold and wind again. And during the rest of that day, and upon the following days, almost every hour brought her into some sort of association with him on the decks, in the lounge, or in the writing rooms, during the morning; luncheon at the same table. Then the afternoon, as the morning, would be made up of hours when she would be sitting in the warm, bright saloon with her French war-study book before her and she would be carefully rehearsing “*Masque respirateur*—respirator; *lunettes*—goggles; *nauge de gaz*—gas fumes . . . .” when she would hear his quick, impulsive step or his clear, pleasant voice speaking to someone and Ruth would get *combat animé* and *combat dé cousu* hopelessly mixed. She would go out to walk the deck again with Hubert—who was apologetically up and about when the seas were smoother—or with Captain Lescault or Captain Forraker or with “1582” (as she called to herself the Sussex officer and once came near calling him that aloud), when she would come around the corner of

a cabin and almost run into Agnes Ertyle and Gerry Hull going about the deck in the other direction; or she would pass them, seated close together and with Lady Agnes all bundled up in steamer rugs, and Ruth would see them suddenly stop talking when she and her escort came close, and they would look away at the sea as though they had been just looking at the water all the time.

He would sit down beside Ruth, too; and he would take her around and around the deck, tramping glowing, spray-splattered miles with him. They talked a lot; but now they never really said anything to each other. And it seemed to Ruth that each throb of those ceaseless engines, which thrust them ever nearer and nearer to France, made what she felt and believed more outrageous to him.

One afternoon, when the wireless happened to be tuned to catch the wavelength of messages sweeping over the seas from some powerful sending station in Germany, they picked up the enemy’s boasts for the day; and among them was the announcement that the famous American “ace,” sergeant pilot Paul Crosby, had been shot down and killed by a German flyer on the Lorraine front. It chanced that Gerry Hull and Agnes Ertyle were in the main saloon near where Ruth also was when some busy-body, who had heard this news, brought it to Gerry Hull and asked him if he had known Paul Crosby.

Ruth knew that Gerry Hull and Paul Crosby had joined the French flying forces together; they had flown in the same escadrille for more than a year. She did not turn about, as others were doing, to watch Gerry Hull when he got this news; but she could not help hearing his simple

and quiet reply, which brought tears to her eyes as no sob or protestation of grief could; and she could not help seeing him as he passed before her on his way out alone to the deck.

She dreamed that night about being torpedoed; in the dream, the boat was the *Ribot*; and upon the vessel there were—as almost always there are in dreams—a perfectly impossible company. Besides those who actually were on board, there were Sam Hilton and Lieutenant George Byrne and “Aunt Emilie” and Aunt Cynthia Gifford Grange and the woman in gray and a great many others—so many, indeed, that there were not boats enough on the *Ribot* to take off all the company as the ship sank. So Gerry Hull, after putting Lady Agnes in a boat and kissing her good-bye, himself stepped back to go down with the ship; and so, when all the boats were gone, he found Ruth beside him; for she had known that he would not try to save himself and she had hidden to stay with him. His arms were about her as the water rose to them and—she awoke.

Their U-boat really came; but with results disconcertingly different. January, 1918—if you can remember clearly back to days so strange and distant—was a month when America was sending across men by tens rather than by hundreds of thousands and convoying them very, very carefully; there were not so many destroyers as soon there were; the U-boats had not yet raided far out into the Atlantic—so fast and well-armed ships like the *Ribot*, which were not transports, were allowed to proceed a certain part of the way across unconvoyed, keeping merely to certain “lanes” on courses prescribed by wireless.

The *Ribot*, Ruth knew, was on one of these lanes and soon would be “picked up” by the destroyers and shepherded by them into a convoy for passage through the zone of greatest danger. In fact, Ruth and Milicent Wetherell, who also had awakened early upon this particular morning, were looking out of their port over a gray and misty sea to discover whether they might have been picked up during the night and now were in a convoy. But they saw no sign of any other vessel, though the mist, which was patchy and floating low, let them look a mile or more away. There was no smoke in sight—nothing but gray clouds and the frayed fog and the sea swelling oilily up and slipping down against the side of the ship.

Then, about a hundred yards away from the side and rather far forward, a spout of spray squirted suddenly straight up into the air. It showered over toward the ship and splashed down.

“That’s a shot,” Ruth said, “at us.”

“Where’s the U-boat?” Milicent asked her; and they both pressed closer to the port to look out. They had heard no sound of the gun, or they did not distinguish it from the noises of the ship. Ruth was shaking with excitement; she could feel Milicent shaking too. Another spout of spray, still forward but a good deal closer, spurted up; and this time they heard—or thought they heard—the sound of the gun which had fired that shell at them. The roar of their own guns—one forward and one aft—buffeted them violently.

“We’re fighting!” Ruth cried.

“Can you see anything?” Milicent demanded.

“Not a thing. Let’s get dressed!”

Gongs were beating throughout the ship; and the guns on deck were going, “*Twumm! twumm! twumm!*” Ruth could hear, in the intervals, the voices of stewards calling to passengers in the companionways between the cabins. A tremendous shock, stifling and deafening, hurled Ruth against the bunk; hurled Milicent upon her. They clung together, coughing and gasping for breath.

“Hit us!” Ruth said; she might have shouted; she might have whispered; she did not know which.

“That’s just powder fumes; not gas,” Milicent made herself understood.

“No; not *nauge de gaz*,” Ruth agreed. They were hearing each other quite normally; and they laughed at each other—at the French lesson phrase, rather. They had learned the phrases together, drilled each other and taken the lessons so seriously; and the lessons seemed so silly now.

“They must have hurt someone,” Ruth said. For the first time she consciously thought of Gerry Hull; probably subconsciously she had been thinking of him all the time. “He wasn’t hit,” she was saying to herself confidently now. “That shell struck us forward; his cabin’s aft and on the other side; so he couldn’t have been hurt—unless he’d come to this side to get Lady Agnes.”

Another shell exploded in the ship—aft somewhere and lower. It didn’t knock Ruth down or stifle her with fumes as the other had. Someone was beating at her door and she opened it—Milicent and she had got into their clothes. Ruth saw Hubert Lennon in the passage.

“You’re safe!” he cried out to her with mighty relief. He had pulled trousers and coat over his pajamas; he had shoes, unlaced, upon his bare feet. He was without his glasses and his nearsighted eyes blinked big and blankly; he had on a life-jacket, of the sort under all berths; but he bore in his hands a complete life-suit with big boots into which one stepped and which had a bag top to go up about the neck.

“Put this on!” he thrust it at Ruth.

“We’re not sinking,” she replied. “Oh, thank you; thank you—but we aren’t torpedoed—not yet. They’re just firing and we’re fighting—” indeed she was shouting to be heard after the noise of their guns—“we must have people hurt.”

“We’ve a lot—a lot hurt,” Hubert said.

Other shells were striking the ship; and Ruth went by him into a passage confused with smoke and stumbly from things strewn under her feet; a cabin door hung open and beyond the door, the side of the ship gaped suddenly to the sea. The sides of the gap were jagged and split and splintered wood; a ripped mattress, bedding, a man’s coat and shirt, a woman’s clothing lay strewn all about; the bedding smouldered and from under it a hand projected—a man’s hand. It clasped and opened convulsively; Ruth stopped and grasped the hand; it caught hers very tight and, still holding and held by it, Ruth with her other hand cleared the bedding from off the man’s face. She recognized him at once; he was an oldish, gentle but fearless little man—an American who had been a missionary in Turkey; he and his wife, who had worked with him, had been to America to raise money

for Armenian relief and had been on their way back together to their perilous post.

“Mattie?” the little man was asking anxiously of Ruth as he looked up at her. “Mattie?”

Mattie, Ruth knew, must have been his wife; and she turned back the bedding beyond him.

“She’s gone,” Ruth told him, mercifully thrusting him back as he tried to turn about. “She’s gone where you are going.”

The little missionary’s eyes closed. “The order for all moneys is in my pocket. Luke VI, 27,” his lips murmured. “Luke VI, 27 and 35.”

The hand which again was holding Ruth’s and which had been so strong the instant before, was quiet now. “The sixth chapter of the gospel according to St. Luke and the twenty-seventh verse,” the little man’s voice murmured, “But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies.”

Ruth covered his face decently with the sheet; and, rising, she grasped the jagged edges of the hole blown by the German shell in the side of the ship; and she stared out it. A mile and a half away; two miles or more perhaps — she could not tell — but at any rate just where the fringe of the mist stopped sight, she saw a long, low shape scudding over the swell of the sea; puffs of haze of a different quality hung over it, cleared and hung again. Ruth understood that these were the gases from guns firing — the guns which had sent that shell which had slain in their beds the little Armenian missionary and his wife, the guns which were sending the shells now bursting aboard the *Ribot* further below and more astern.

Ruth gazed at the U-boat aghast with fury — fury and loathing beyond any feeling which she could have imagined. She had supposed she had known full loathing when she learned of the first deeds done in Termonde and Louvain; then she had thought, when the Germans sank the *Lusitania*, that it was utterly impossible for her to detest fellow-men more than those responsible. But now she knew that any passion previously stirred within her was only the weak and vacuous reaction to a tale which was told. She had viewed her first dead slain by a fellow-man; and amazing, all overwhelming instincts — an urge to kill, kill in return, kill in punishment, kill in revenge — possessed her. She had not meant to kill before. She had thought of saving life — saving the Belgians from more barbarities, saving the lives of those at sea; she had thought of her task ahead, and of the risks she was to run, as saving the lives of American and British and French soldiers. For the first time she thought of herself as an instrument to kill — kill Germans, many, many Germans; all that she could.

Someone had come into the wreck of that cabin behind her now. A steward, probably; or perhaps Hubert Lennon, who had found her again. She did not turn but continued to stare at the U-boat, her hands clinging to the jagged hole made by its shell. A man’s hand caught her shoulder and a voice spoke to her — Gerry Hull’s voice.

“Come with me,” he was saying to her. “You cannot stay here; come to a safer place.”

“A safer place!” she repeated to him. “How can we help to kill them on that boat?” she cried to him.

He was undoing her fingers, by main strength, from

their clutch at the jagged iron of the shell hole. He was very calm and quiet and strong; and he was controlling her as though she were a child.

"They're four thousand yards off," he said to her. "That one there and another on the other side. It's just begun to fire."

Some of the shells which had been striking, Ruth realized now, had burst on the other side of the *Ribot*.

"Yes," she said.

"We've signaled we're attacked," he told her. He had both her hands free; and he bound her arms to her body with his arms. "We've an answer, and destroyers are coming. But they can't get up before an hour or two; so we've a long fight on. You must come below."

He was half carrying her, ignominiously; and it came to Ruth that, before seeking her, he had gone to Agnes Ertyle; but she had not delayed him because she was used to being under fire, used to seeing those slain by fellow-men; used to knowing what she could and could not do.

"I'll go where — I should," Ruth promised, looking up at him; and he released her.

He pointed her toward a companionway where steps had led downward a few minutes before; but now they were broken and smoke at that moment was beginning to pour up. He turned and led her off to the right; but a shell struck before them there and hurled them back with the shock of its detonation. It skewed around a sheet of steel which had been a partition wall between two cabins; it blew down doors and strewed débris of all sorts down upon them. Another shell, striking aft, choked and closed escape in the other direction. Gerry Hull threw himself

against the sheet of thin steel which the shell so swiftly and easily had spread over the passage; but all his strength could not budge it. He turned back to Ruth and looked her over.

“All right?” he asked her.

“You are too?”

He turned from her and gazed through the side of the ship. “They’ve got our range pretty well, I should say. They’re still firing both their guns, and we don’t seem to be hitting much.”

He tried again to bend back the sheet of steel which penned them in the passage, but with effort as vain as before.

“I guess we stay here for a while,” he said when he desisted. “If we don’t get help and it looks like we’re going to sink, we can always dive through there into the sea.”

A shell smashed in below and a few rods forward and burst with terrific detonation.

“Huns seem to like this part of the ship,” he said when the shock was past.

“That started something burning just below,” Ruth said.

Throughout the ship again, between the concussion of the striking shells and the firing of the *Ribot’s* guns, alarm gongs were going.

A woman screamed; men’s shouts came in answer. The rush of the *Ribot* through the water, which had been swift and steady since the start of the fight, suddenly swerved and the ship veered off to the right.

“What’s that?” Ruth said.

“We may be zigzagging to dodge torpedoes,” Gerry Hull said. “Or it may be that our helm is shot away and we can’t steer; or we may be changing course to charge a sub in close.”

— A detonation closer than any before quite stunned Ruth for seconds or minutes or longer—she did not know. Only when she came to herself slowly, she was alone behind the sheet of steel. Gerry Hull was gone.

## CHAPTER VII

“ONE OF OUR OWN!”

**T**HE deck floor just beyond her, where he had been, was gone; or rather—as she saw now through the smoke—it slanted steeply down like a chute into a chasm of indefinite depth from which the heavy, stifling smoke was pouring. A draft sucked the smoke out of the shattered side of the ship over the sea and gave Ruth cleaner air to breathe for seconds at a time. Gerry Hull must have been hurled into that chasm when that last detonation blew away the floor; or else he must have flung himself into the sea.

Ruth called his name, shouting first into the smoke column and then, creeping down to the shell hole in the side, she thrust her head out and gazed at the sea. Wreckage from the upper deck—wooden chairs, bits of canvas—swept backwards; she saw no one swimming. The splash of the waves dashed upon her, the ship was rushing onward, but not so swiftly as before, and with a distinct change in the thrust of the engines and with a strange sensation of strain on the ship. Only one engine was going, Ruth decided—the port engine; it was being forced faster and faster to do the work of both and the rudder was pulled against the swerve of the port screw to keep the vessel from swinging in a circle.

The guns on deck were firing steadily, it seemed; but

the German submarine, which Ruth could see and which had begun to drop behind when the *Ribot* was racing with both engines, was drawing up abreast again with both its big rifles firing. But the *Ribot's* guns, if they had not yet hit that U-boat, at least had driven her away; for, though she came up abreast, the German kept farther off than before; and while Ruth watched, she heard a sudden, wild cheer from the deck; French shells had gone home somewhere on that U-boat or upon the other which Ruth could not see.

Smoke continued to sweep by Ruth, engulfing her for long moments, but the fire was far enough below not to immediately threaten her. So for the minute she was as safe as she could be anywhere upon that long flank of the ship at which the U-boats were firing. At any instant, a shell might obliterate her; but she could not influence that by any thought or action of her own. So she thought no more about it. She could possibly influence the fate of Gerry Hull. He had been flung down that chute of the deck floor, she thought; the shell might have killed him; it might only have wounded or stunned him. In that case, he must be lying helpless down there where the flames were. She took long breaths of sea air and crept back and called again into the smoke; she thought she heard a man's cry in response; Gerry Hull's voice. She returned to the hole in the side of the ship and let the waves drench her face and her hair; she caught up her skirt and soaked it in the splash of the sea.

The firing of the guns was keeping up all this time; the shock of shells bursting aboard the ship also continued. But the tug and thrust of the single engine had stopped;

the vessel vibrated only at the firing of its own guns or at the detonation of a German shell.

Ruth took a towel which she found at her hand — she was in the wreck of someone’s cabin — and, after soaking it, she bound it about her head and crept back through the smoke to where the steel chute of the floor slanted sheer.

She dropped and fell upon a heap of sharp, shattered things which cut her ankles and stumbled her over on hands and knees upon débris, not flaming itself, but warm from a fire which burned lower. She lifted the towel from her eyes to try to see; but the smoke blinded her; she could not breathe; and she bound the towel again and crawled off the heap of smoldering things upon a linoleum. She heard a moan; but she could not find anyone in the smoke, though she called thickly several times. A current of air was sweeping over the floor and, following it, she came to a huge rent in the ship’s side where water washed in and out as the vessel rolled. The water had ceased to move from bow to stern; the vessel was merely drifting. A man floated, face downward, upon a wave which washed him almost to the ship’s side. Ruth reached out to seize him; she touched his shoulder — a blue-clad shoulder, the uniform of the French; but she could get no hold; the sea drew him slowly away.

“Gerry Hull! Gerry!” she called, as though that form in the French coat, with head under the water, could hear. The next wash brought it back toward the ship; but also drifted it farther to the stern. Now Ruth found among the rubbish washing at her feet a floating thing — a life-jacket. She thrust her arms in it and when the waves washed that blue-clad form nearer the next time, she

leaped into the sea and swam toward it and got grasp of a sleeve and struggled back toward the ship.

The vessel's side towered above her, mighty and menacing; it swung away from her, showing a long steep slant to the gray sky; it swung back and tilted over as though to crush her; wreckage slipped from off its topmost tier and splashed into the sea beside her. She could see the cloud of gun gases puff out and clear; then the flash of firing again. All the time she was thrashing with one arm to swim in the wash beside the vessel and drag the blue-clad form. That form was heavier now; and, as her clutch numbed, it slipped from her and sank. She spun about and tried to dive, groping with her hands below the surface; but the form was gone.

"Gerry Hull!" she cried out. "I had Gerry Hull—here!"

A coil of rope struck the water near her; men yelled to her to seize it; but she groped below the water until, exhausted from the cold, she looped the rope about her and they pulled her up.

"Lieutenant Gerry Hull was in the water there," she cried to them who took her in their arms. "Lieutenant Gerry Hull is"—she shouted to the next man who took her when, looking up, she saw his face.

Silence—a marvelous stilling of the guns which had been resounding from fore and aft; a miraculous stopping of the frightful shock of the shells which had been bursting in the ship—enveloped Ruth. She did not know at first whether it was because some of her senses were gone; she could see Gerry Hull's face, feel his arms holding her and the rhythm of his body as he stepped, carrying her;

she could hear his voice and the voices of others close by; but all other sound and reverberation had ceased.

“I was separated from you,” Gerry Hull was explaining to her. “I was coming back to try and get you out.”

“I went down the way you fell,” she replied to him. “Then I saw a man in the sea. I thought he was you. I tried to get him.”

She was silent for a few moments while he carried her; the miracle of stillness continued; but it was a great effort for her to speak.

“I would have done it for anyone.”

“I know you would,” he said to her.

“You’ve seen Hubert?” she asked.

“He’s not among the hurt,” Gerry answered.

She was quite certain now that the stillness had continued so long that it could not be merely the interval between firing or between the arrival of German shells.

“What is it?” she asked him.

“What is what, Cynthia Gail?”

He called her whole name, as he knew it, as she had been calling his. “We’re not fighting,” she said. “We haven’t surrendered or—are we sinking?”

“A destroyer’s come in sight,” he said. “It’s fighting one of the Huns. Listen!” He halted for an instant to let her hear the distant sound of guns.

“I hear it,” she said.

“We hit that U-boat, we think, so that it can’t submerge and has to keep fighting on the surface. The other’s submerged.”

He brought her down a stairway into some large compartment, evidently below the water line; it seemed to have

been a dining saloon for the steerage when the *Ribot* had been regularly in the passenger trade; or perhaps it had been crews' quarters. Now it was a hospital; cots had been laid out and those who had been injured by the shell fire had been brought there. They were a great many, it seemed to Ruth—thirty or forty. She had never seen so many suffering people, so many bandages, so much blood before. The ship's surgeon was moving among them; women were there—quiet, calm, competent women. One had direction of the others and Ruth gazed at her for moments before she recognized Agnes Ertyle with her beautiful, sweet eyes become maturely stern and, at the same time, marvelously compassionate. If Ruth were a man, she must love that girl, she thought; love her now as never before. Ruth looked up to Gerry Hull to see his face when he spoke to Lady Agnes; he evidently witnessed no new marvel in her. He had seen her like this before, undoubtedly; that was why he loved her.

“I'm not hurt,” Ruth said, ashamed of herself for having been brought to this place among so many who had been terribly wounded. “I've just been in the water; I'm wet, that's all.” She moved to release herself from Gerry's hold.

“She went into the sea to save a man,” Gerry told Agnes Ertyle.

“Let me go to the cabin,” Ruth said, as she stood a little dizzily.

Lady Agnes grasped her hand. “If your cabin's been wrecked, go to mine—number twenty-six—and take any of my things,” she invited. “Get dry and warm at once.”

She motioned to someone who gave Ruth hot, strong tea to drink. Gerry turned with Ruth and led her up the stairs down which he had just carried her; he saw her to the door of her cabin, which had not been wrecked; he saw that a stewardess was there to aid her. Then he went.

The stewardess helped Ruth undress and rubbed her and put on warm and heavy things. Milicent Wetherell came to the cabin; she had escaped uninjured, and she aided also.

The rifles on the *Ribot's* deck rang out suddenly; they fired twice; again twice; and were still. Ruth had on warm, dry clothes now; and she ran out with Milicent Wetherell to the deck. While the *Ribot* had been under shell fire, passengers had been kept from the decks; but now that the sole danger was from torpedoes, the decks had become the safest place.

The gun crews had seen — Ruth was told — what they thought was a periscope and had fired. There was nothing in sight now near the *Ribot* but the wreckage which had fallen during the fight. Far off to the right, the U-boat which had continued to run on the surface, had withdrawn beyond the range of the *Ribot's* guns and was fleeing away to the south, fighting as it fled. The morning light had quite cleared the mist from the surface of the ocean and Ruth could see the low line of the German boat obscuring itself with gun-gases as its rifles fired. But its shells no longer burst aboard the passenger vessel or spurted up spray from the sea alongside. Far, far to the east and north appeared a speck — a gray, sea-colored speck, sheathing itself in the sparkling white of foam

every second or so, casting the sheath of seaspray aside and rushing on gray and dun again—the bow of the destroyer coming up. She was coming up very fast—with a marvelous, leaping swiftness which sent the blood tingling through Ruth.

The destroyer seemed hurled through the water, so fast she came; it seemed impossible that engines, turning screws, could send a ship on as that vessel dashed; she seemed to advance hundreds of yards at a leap, hurling the spray high before her and screened by it for a flash; and when she thrust through the foam and cut clear away from it, she was larger and clearer and nearer. And, as she came, she fought. Her guns were going—one, two, three of them! Ruth could see the gossamer of their gases as they puffed forward and were swept backward; she could hear on the wind the resound of the quick firers. Steadily, rhythmically, relentlessly they rang, beating over the sea like great bells booming in vengeance for the *Ribot's* dead.

Ruth felt lifted up, glorified as by nothing she had ever known before. She turned to the man who had come up beside her; he was Gerry Hull and, as he looked over the sea at the destroyer, she saw the blood burning red, paling, and burning bright again in his face.

“What ship is that?” Ruth cried to him. “Do you know whether it’s English or French or our own?”

“It’s the *Starke!*” Gerry Hull replied. “The *U. S. S. Starke*, she reported herself to us! She made thirty-one knots the hour on her builder’s trial two years ago; but she promised us to make the forty miles to us in an hour and ten minutes! And she’s beating that, if I know speed.

God,” he appealed in reverent wonder, “look at her come!”

“The *United States Ship Starke!*” Ruth cried. “One of our own!”

A wild, wanton, incredible phrase ran through her; “the shame of being an American.” And, as she recalled it, she saw that Gerry Hull recollected it too; and the hot color on his cheeks deepened and his eyes, when they met hers, looked quickly away.

“They’re wonderful, those fellows,” he admitted to her aloud. He spoke, then, not to her, but to the destroyer. “But why couldn’t you come three years ago?”

A cry rose simultaneously from a lookout forward upon the *Ribot* and from another man in the top. A periscope had appeared; and the guns at once were going again at it. The radio, in the cabin amidships, was snapping a warning to the *Starke*. The *Ribot’s* guns and the splash of their shells into the sea gave the direction to Ruth and to Gerry Hull; and they saw, for a flash, a spar moving just above the water and hurling a froth before it, trailing a wake behind. Indeed, it was probably only the froth and the wake which they made out at all certainly; but that was discernible; and it moved, not toward them, but aslant to them and pointed toward the course of the American destroyer as it came up.

“They’re trying to get the *Starke!*” Gerry Hull interpreted this to Ruth. “The Huns are leaving us for later; they know they’ve got to get the *Starke* or the *Starke* will get their other boat.”

“The *Starke* saw them!” Ruth cried, as the guns on the destroyer, which had been firing at the fleeing U-boat



to the south, tore up the sea where the *Ribot's* shells were splashing.

"The torpedo's started by this time," Gerry Hull said. "Two of 'em, probably, if the Huns had two left."

Others about Ruth on the deck of the *Ribot* realized that; and the commander of the *Starke* recognized it too. Ruth saw the leaping form of the destroyer veer suddenly and point straight at the spot in the sea where the U-boat had thrust up its periscope. This presented the narrow beam of the destroyer, instead of its length, for the torpedo's target; but still Ruth held breath as on the *Starke* came.

Gerry Hull had thrust his wrist from his sleeve and, as they stood waiting, he glanced down again and again to his watch. "Passing—past!" he muttered to himself while he counted the time. "The torpedoes have missed," he announced positively to Ruth at last.

The commander of the *Starke* evidently thought so too; for the length of his boat began to show again. His guns had ceased firing; and the *Ribot's* rifles also were silent. The destroyer, veering still farther to the right, was dashing now almost at right angles to its former course.

"They're going to cross the course of the Hun," Gerry Hull explained this also to Ruth, "and give'em an 'ashcan,' I suppose—a depth charge, you know," he added.

"I know," Ruth said. She had read, at least, of the tremendous bombs, filled with the new explosive "T. N. T.," which the U-boat hunters carried and which they dropped with fuse fixed to burst far below the surface. One of these bombs, in size and shape near enough to "ashcans" to win the nickname, was powerful enough—



she knew — to wreck an undersea craft if the charge burst close by.

The *Starke* was still leaping on with its length showing to the *Ribot* when two hundred yards or more astern the destroyer, a great geyser of water leaped into the air fifty — a hundred feet; and while the column of water still seemed to mushroom up and up, a tremendous shock battered the *Ribot*.

Someone shouted out in French while another called in English, “Depth charge dropped from the destroyer!”

“There was one ‘ashcan,’” Gerry Hull murmured. “Now for another!”

For the *Starke*, as soon as the charge had detonated, had put her helm about and was circling back with marvelous swiftness to cross again the spot in the sea where she had dropped the great bomb.

Men were below that spot of sea, Ruth knew — German men, fifty or eighty or a hundred of them, perhaps. They were young men, mostly, not unlike — in their physical appearance, at least — German-born boys whom she had known at home in Onarga or in Chicago. Some of that crew might, conceivably, even be cousins of those boys. They had mothers and sisters in homes at Hamburg or Dresden or Munich or perhaps in that delightful toy town of Nuremberg, which she knew and had loved from pictures and stories; or some of them came, perhaps, from the Black Forest — from those quaint, lovely homely woodland cottages which Howard Pyle and Grimm had taught her to love when she was a child. They were helpless down there below the sea at this moment, perhaps, with the seams of their boat opened by that tremendous

shock which had battered even the *Ribot* so far away; water might be coming in upon them, suffocating them, drowning them there like rats in a trap. The vision flowed before Ruth's eyes for an instant with horror; then she saw them, not choking and fighting each other for escape which none could find, but crouching safe and smiling in their boat, stealing away swiftly and undamaged to wait chance to rise again to try another torpedo at the *Starke* or to surprise with gunfire, at the next dawn, another vessel like the *Ribot* and murder more people in their beds and fill the space below decks with the dead and the agonized dying.

"Get 'em!" Gerry Hull, close beside her, was praying. "Oh, get 'em now! Get 'em!"

No reaction to weakness had come to him; years ago, he had passed beyond that; and Ruth, at once, had recovered.

"Get 'em!" Aloud, without being conscious of it, she echoed his ejaculation; and astern of the *Starke*, as the few minutes before, another great geyser of seawater arose; another titanic blow, disseminating through the water, beat upon the *Ribot*. The *Starke* was turning about short, again; but when she rushed back over her wake, this time she dropped no other depth charge; she slowed a little instead, and circled while she examined carefully the surface of the sea. Then suddenly she straightened her course away to the south; she buried her bow in a wave; with the rush of her propellers, foam churned at her stern; she was at full speed after the U-boat which she first had engaged and which, during this interlude, had run quite out of sight to the south or had sunk

or submerged. While she pursued, her radio was reporting to the *Ribot*; and the *Ribot's* rasped in return.

Oil in convincing quantities had come to the surface where the *Starke* had dropped its charge. Of course, the Germans often pumped oil out of their U-boats, when no damage had been done, for the purpose of deceiving the hunters and making them think they had destroyed a U-boat when they had not. But the officers of the *Starke* had been satisfied with their findings; they would follow up the other U-boat and then return. They understood that only two U-boats had appeared to the *Ribot*; if another came or if either of the two reappeared, the *Starke* would return instantly.

No third enemy came; and neither of the others reappeared. In fact, the *Starke* failed to find any further trace of the U-boat which, for a time, had fought upon the surface and then run away. Either the gunfire of the *Ribot* or of the *Starke* had so damaged it that it suddenly sank, leaving no survivors; or — as the men aboard the *Ribot* seemed to think was more likely — the crew succeeded in repairing the damage done so that it was able to submerge and escape. In this case, it might venture another attack, by torpedo, upon the drifting *Ribot*; so the *Starke*, after abandoning the search, put herself beside the *Ribot*. An American officer came aboard, bringing with him a surgeon to aid in care of the *Ribot's* wounded; he brought also mechanics to assist the engine crew of the *Ribot* in repairs and he supplied, from his own crew, men to take the places of the *Ribot's* crew who had been killed.

Ruth watched the young lieutenant — he was few years

older than Gerry Hull or herself — as he went about his business with the officers of the *Ribot*. If any shame for recreancy of his country had ever stirred him, it had left no mark; he was confident and competent — not proud but quite sure of himself and of his service. She looked for Gerry Hull to see whether he observed this one of their people; she looked to see whether Captain Forraker and “1582” also saw him. And she found that “1582” was the first to make opportunity to meet the American officer and compliment him.

“You chaps might have been blowing up U-boats for a thousand years!”

The pounding and hammering in the engine rooms was resulting in thrust again from the port engine. The *Ribot* started under steam and ran through an area of water all iridescent with floating oil. Bits of wood and cloth scraps floated in the oil — bits which men scooped up to preserve for proof that the depth charges, which the *Starke* had dropped there, had burst and destroyed a German submarine.

Gerry Hull had gone below to look into the hospital again. Ruth had offered to aid there but, having no experience, she was not accepted. So Hubert Lennon found her on deck and went to the rail with her while they watched the recovery of these relics from the sea. It had been his first experience, as well as hers, with the frightful mercilessness of modern battle; he had been made sick — a little — by what he had seen. He could not conceal it; his sensitive, weak eyes were big; he was very pale; his hand was unsteady as he lit a cigarette.

“Queer — isn’t it? — queer that they should want to

do what they've done below and we have no feeling at all about them.” He was gazing down at the oil, shimmering all colors of the rainbow as the waves flickered it against the light.

“You've none at all?” Ruth asked, looking up at him.

“I had none at the time we were after them; but I'm afraid,” he confessed with that honesty which Ruth had learned to expect from him, “the idea of them gets to me now. Not that I wouldn't kill them all again! Oh, I'd kill! I've dreamt sometimes of being surrounded by 'em and having a machine gun and mowing Germans down—mowing 'em down till there wasn't one left. But it always seemed such an inadequate thing to do. It ought to be possible to do more—I don't mean torture them physically, of course; but to make them innocuous somehow and let them live and think about what they've done. There couldn't be anything more terrible than that.”

“We've succeeded in doing that sometimes,” Ruth said. “We've taken prisoners even from their U-boats; but they don't seem to be troubled much with remorse. It would be different for you and for men like you; but that's because you couldn't do what they've done.”

“Sometimes I feel that I could do them. So I guess it's a good thing I'm going to be an ambulance driver. To fight them and keep fighting fair and clean yourself—well it must take more stuff than I've got.”

Ruth did not know quite what to make of this confession. Constantly, since that first day when he called for her at the hotel in Chicago, he had been paying his peculiar sort of court to her—peculiar, particularly, in that he

never obtruded himself when anyone else offered and he never failed to admit anything against himself.

"It was fine of you, Hubert," she said, "to come right for me when the fight began."

"I thought we were sinking; that's how much sense I had," he returned. "Gerry, now, knew just what to do."

"He didn't come for me first, Hubert."

"Maybe not; but you wished he had; I'm glad," he went on quickly before she could rejoin, "that this has taught Gerry a few things."

It was evident from his manner that he meant "things" in relation to her; and that puzzled her, for she could not feel any alteration in Gerry Hull's manner at all. To be sure, she had gone into the sea to try to rescue one whom she thought was he; Gerry Hull knew this. But that was not the sort of thing which could undo the opposition between them. Yet it was plain, upon succeeding days, that Hubert had discerned a fact; she had become again a person of real concern to Gerry Hull.

She dated the start of that rehabilitation of herself not with her adventure in the sea or with the moment when he carried her in his arms; but with that instant when they stood together watching the *U. S. S. Starke* come up. That rehabilitation proceeded fast the next days when, after the *Ribot* had repaired both engines, the *Starke* brought the ship into a convoy—a fleet of some thirty merchant vessels of all sorts and under a dozen flags, belligerent and neutral, guarded and directed by a flotilla of American destroyers, with the senior American officer in command of all the convoy.

British trawlers joined them soon, adding their protec-

tion; two of the destroyers sent up balloons which they towed; and now, by day, British and French dirigible balloons and British and French and, yes, American sea-plane pilots appeared. And no submarine, in those waters supposed to be infested with U-boats, once showed a periscope. By day and night, the patrol and protection of those American destroyers proved perfect. So by that protection they came at last to France.

Gerry sought out Ruth upon the last morning when they would be on shipboard. It was a smiling, sunny day, warm for that time in the year. In addition to the ships of the sea and air which recently had accompanied them constantly, strange little business-like boats approached, airplanes from the land spied upon them; and as they drew near to the port, Ruth got amazing sight of the multifold activities of even this still distant threshold to war.

“You’re going to Paris right away?” Gerry asked.

“As soon as I can get through.”

“We’ll get a train that’ll probably bring us in at night. If you’ve not made arrangements ahead——”

“I have, thanks; rather Hubert’s offered to see to me; besides his aunt gave me letters to cousins of hers who’ve been living in Paris for years. They’re Mr. and Mrs. Gregory Mayhew; they’ve an apartment on the Avenue Kléber. I’m to go there my first night anyway.”

“That’s good. I’ve heard of the Mayhews; they’ve done a lot all during the war. Then can I look you up at the Mayhews’ when I’m in Paris? I hope for service right away, of course; but Paris is close for our leave always.”

"Oh, I'll not stay at the Mayhews' or on Avenue Kléber! I'm to find a room with Milicent Wetherell."

"So you'll carry out your Latin Quarter plan! That's better! But you'll leave the address, anyway, at the Mayhews'?"

"Yes," Ruth promised.

She took the opportunity to ask him many practical, matter-of-fact items which she needed to know—particularly about the examinations to be made upon arrival in France.

"My passport's almost ruined, you see," she explained to him.

"Why? What's happened?"

Ruth colored. "I always carried it with me; so it got soaked in the sea the other day."

Color came to his face too; that had happened when she went into the water to get him, of course. She would not have reminded him of it but that she knew she well might need help no less influential than his to pass the gateway to France.

"Of course," he said. "How's it spoiled?"

"My picture on it, mostly."

"Oh; that'll be all right! You'll just have to have another picture taken in France and have them paste it on. I'll tell 'em about it and see you through, of course."

Accordingly Ruth went to her cabin and, after bolting the door against even Milicent Wetherell, she got out her passport which really had been wet by the sea but not soaked so badly that the picture was useless. Indeed, the picture was still plain enough so that a French intelligence officer might make out that it was not Ruth. So she

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soaked it again in water until that danger was past; then she dried it and took it with her to present at the port.

"I've told Agnes Ertyle all about your passport," Gerry Hull said to her when she came on deck again, "so she'll help you out if they put the women through first. They have to be awfully careful in France these days about spies, you see—especially now—spies from America."

## CHAPTER VIII

### FRANCE

**F**EAR—so Ruth was finding out—is a most complicated and perplexing sensation. What she had learned about fear, upon those infrequent occasions when causes of alarm approached that queer, humdrum, almost forgotten girl who used to work for Sam Hilton, had made it appear a simple emotion to bring about a rational reaction. One fear differed from another chiefly in degrees of effect; you might be a little afraid of something—like having your skirt caught in an elevator door when the car started up too crowded; having a rough looking man suddenly accost you when you were hurrying back to Ontario Street late in a winter evening, caused more alarm; and there were other occurrences which had frightened still more. The amount of fear you felt—and the force of the corresponding reaction—seemed generally proportional to the danger threatening you; but now Ruth had been through an adventure—battle—which had menaced her life to a far greater degree than any previous experience; and she had not been afraid, in the old sense of fear. Emotions had tortured her—emotions far more violent and furious than ever she had suffered; but fear for her life had not been chief among them. Committed to battle, as she had been by the mere fact of her presence aboard the *Ribot*, the instant realiza-

tion that nothing she could do could save her had amazingly freed her from fear.

Fear, then, was not made up just of a dread of death. Now that the *Ribot* was safely in from the Bay of Biscay, had passed the Phare de Cordouan and was running down the broad, flat estuary of the Gironde river to Bordeaux, securely situated sixty long miles inland, Ruth was in no danger of death at all. If at that city, whose roofs and chimneys were just coming into sight, the French examiners found out how she had obtained her passport, how she had duped and tricked people to aid her in arriving here, and if they arrested her, therefore, upon the charge of being a German spy, they would be making her life safe; her punishment probably would not go beyond imprisonment for the duration of the war; it would prevent her wild plan of going into Germany, where court-martials did not simply imprison spies. Yet Ruth was afraid this morning as she had never been before; far, far more afraid than when she had been in battle.

That meant, obviously, that she was far more afraid of failing to do that which she was determined upon than she was afraid of dying. Less than three weeks earlier, when Ruth Alden was drawing up quit-claims and deeds for Sam Hilton in Chicago, such a recognition of the fact in regard to oneself would have seemed — even if spoken only to self — ostentatious and theatrical; but now to make the fate of yourself nothing, the performing of your part in the great scheme everything, was the simple and accepted code of almost everyone about her.

Exactly when Ruth had begun to accept this code for herself, she did not know. Once or twice in her twenty-two

years she had encountered emergencies when one person or two—or very, very few, at most—acted without regard to consequence to themselves; but always they did this for the saving of more serious catastrophe to a greater number of persons who were present; so that even upon those occasions the highest purpose was plain self-preservation. But now Ruth had become a member of a society not chiefly charged with preserving itself—whose spirit, indeed, was disregard of self. She had come from a society in which the discovery that a certain project was not “safe” and would lead one to certain destruction was enough to immediately end that project, into a hemisphere where the certainty of death made no difference and was simply not to be discussed.

It was not from fear of punishment, therefore, that Ruth’s heart was fluttering as the *Ribot* drew up to the docks at Bordeaux; it was from terror at thought of no longer being permitted to be one of such a company as that upon this ship.

Men were directing the passengers to arrange themselves for presentation of their credentials to the French authorities; and Ruth found Lady Agnes taking her place beside her. The English girl was well known and, after merely formal inquiry and the signing of a few papers, she was passed on. She made a statement for Ruth of the reasons for Ruth’s passport being in bad condition; and she mentioned what she knew about Ruth. The Frenchmen attended politely, but they did not, therefore, take chances. They examined her passport far more carefully than they had Agnes Ertyle’s; but Ruth had so ruined the picture that identification by it was impossible. The sea

water also had helped to blur the signature so that her "Cynthia Gail" which they made her sign, and which they compared with the name upon the passport, escaped open challenge. Then there were questions.

The man who asked them referred to cards in an index box which, evidently, had come across upon the *Ribot*; for his inquiries referred largely to questions which had been asked Ruth upon the other side. She, fortunately, had had sense enough to have written down for herself the answers which she had given at New York; she had rehearsed them again and again; so now she did not fail to give similar replies. Then there were other inquiries—sudden, startling ones, which gave her consternation; for they seemed based upon some knowledge of the real Cynthia Gail which Ruth did not have. But she had to answer; so she did so as steadily as possible and as intelligently as she could.

The examiner gazed more keenly at her now; he halted his examination to confer in whispers with an associate; he made careful notation upon a card. A clerk brought in a cablegram, which the examiner carefully read. Had the body of Cynthia Gail been identified in Chicago? Had her family found out the fraud which Ruth had been playing upon them; or had other discovery been made so that the French knew that she was an impostor?

The man looked up from the cablegram.

"You have been in France before?" he challenged.

Ruth had thought of being asked that question. She had told Gerry Hull at Mrs. Corliss' that she had been in France—or at least she had let him suppose so when he said that, of course, she had been in Paris. She did

not know at all whether Cynthia Gail had or not; but that statement to Gerry Hull — which he might have repeated — committed her.

“Not since the war began,” she answered.

“Previous to then?”

“Yes.”

“Upon how many occasions?”

“Once,” Ruth said.

“When was that?”

Ruth had figured out several occasions when Cynthia Gail might have come abroad — if she really ever had done so. “The summer of 1913.”

“When did you land?”

“Late in June; I don’t recall the exact date.” She fixed June, as she supposed Cynthia Gail would have come during summer vacation.

“Where did you land?”

“Dieppe. I crossed from New York on the *Adriatic* of the White Star Line to Plymouth for England first; then I crossed to France by Newhaven-Dieppe.” She had picked up a good deal on board the *Ribot*, you see.

“Visiting what places in France?”

“I spent most of my time in Paris; I was with my parents. We stayed at the Hotel Regina.” Gerry Hull had said he supposed she had been at the Regina or the Continental.

The readiness of these answers seemed to somewhat reassure the examiner.

“You have friends in France?”

“Only acquaintances such as one makes traveling; no one whom I could now place. I’ve letters to Mr. and Mrs.

Gregory Mayhew, of Avenue Kléber. I did not know them when I was in France before."

The examiner made notations on his card.

"Report at your first opportunity, if you please, to your consul general at Paris and obtain a passport in place of this!" He was writing upon her passport now and handing it back to her! Whatever reservation of judgment he had made in regard to her; whatever orders he might give to watch her pending verification of her facts, he was passing her on and permitting her to go with the others to take the afternoon train to Paris!

She saw to customs and let Hubert order the transfer of her luggage; then she was free upon the streets of her first foreign city. Not for long; because the train for Paris left soon. But Hubert hired a queer old cab, driven by a white-haired, Gallicly garrulous man, who quickly understood that they were less interested in the wide magnificence of the modern city than in the labyrinths of the old town with its white, huddled houses facing quaint, gayly painted shops about irregular squares, and looming at one another over the narrowest of mediaeval streets.

They halted the cab and walked down the delightful defiles. Ruth had to remember, in her raptures, that she was supposed to have been in France before; but there were moments when Hubert left her—he understood that she wanted to experience some of this alone—when the incredible wonder that she was abroad overwhelmed her. She had cabled, of course, to Cynthia Gail's parents in Decatur; but she wanted to cable her own mother to tell her where she was, and to buy the pretty, picturesque postal cards, and send them to her sisters; she wanted to

write some of the wonder to all her friends; she would have included even a card to Sam Hilton. But all that was impossible.

Then the sight of French soldiers on the narrow streets and the many, many French women in mourning—mothers and widows—returned her to the grim, terrible business which had brought her here. She rejoined Hubert where he had been waiting for her at the end of a twisty, shadowy little street; he had bought a French newspaper; and when she came beside him, he glanced up at her gravely.

“They’ve sunk a transport with American troops, Cynthia,” he said.

“Where? How many of our soldiers—?” she cried.

“The *Tuscania* to the north of Ireland; torpedoed when we were at sea. Two or three hundred of our men are missing; they don’t know exactly how many yet.”

The news had reached the others of the *Ribot’s* passengers, who were taking the same train for Paris that afternoon. Ruth shared a compartment in the little European-gauged cars, with Milicent Wetherell and two French women; but the train was a “corridor train,” as Ruth learned to say, and the occupants of the different compartments could visit one another much as they might in the larger American cars. There was news of recent air raids upon Paris—one raid had been most deadly and destructive; there was news of various sorts from the French and British fronts—a little news also from the short American sectors; for it was announced that the Americans had taken over a new portion of the line in Lorraine. But the report of the successful attack

of the U-boats upon the *Tuscania* overshadowed all other news.

It was not alone the loss of the hundreds of American soldiers; it was the ugly threat that, where the U-boats at last had succeeded in sinking a transport out of a convoy, they might succeed again and, as the Germans had been boasting, they might — they just possibly might cut that bridge of ships really beginning this month to bring America over the seas. Ruth thrilled with discovery at how these people here in France had come to count upon the arrival of her people. She talked not only with the acquaintances from the *Ribot*, but Milicent and she practiced their French upon the polite and patient ladies from Bordeaux.

Ruth thus found that these French women were relieved that the *Tuscania* was not an American ship and had not been under convoy of American destroyers when it was lost.

“They have the most appalling faith in us!” Ruth reported this to Gerry when he stopped to speak with her during the afternoon. “They think we can do anything; that we cannot fail!”

“That’s their way,” he warned. “We’re the new ally. The British must have done wonders to get off all but two hundred men from a crowded transport going down in a heavy sea.”

“I don’t mean that we could have done more,” Ruth said, “or that we could have saved the *Tuscania*; I’m just glad people can believe so in us. But it puts upon us an awful responsibility to make good.”

“It does,” Gerry agreed, laconically, and went on.

The train pulled into Poitiers — Poitiers of the battle of the Black Prince in her *Green's English History*! It ran on to Tours! Now the names of even the little towns, as they neared Paris, were familiarly full of legend and romance.

Hubert Lennon "looked by" in the evening, as he often had during the day; and, as Milicent was visiting elsewhere just then, he sat down beside Ruth.

She observed at once that something was troubling him — not a matter which had affected him suddenly, but rather an uncertainty which seemed to have been progressing for some time. He remained beside her silent for several minutes while they looked out at the lights of the little French hamlets. Finally he asked her in quite an ordinary tone, so that the French women could not suspect any challenge:

"You remember motoring down this way to Blois and Tours, and then that run down the valley of the Loire?"

Ruth startled a little straighter and gazed out at the darkness without answering. If Gerry Hull had asked her such a question she would have bluffed the answer boldly; but Hubert had interrogated her for a purpose; and he knew something of what Cynthia Gail had done and had not done. Suddenly it dawned upon Ruth that that time, nine years earlier, when Hubert had last seen Cynthia Gail, was not in Chicago, as she had supposed, but here in France.

"Yes, I remember," she replied weakly and without looking about.

"Your father and mother were with you, and my father — he was alive then — and I; and who else was along?"

he questioned, as though quite casually, but Ruth knew that this was a test.

“I—don’t remember,” she faltered. She doubted whether Cynthia Gail had been with him on any such trip; the whole question might merely be a catch; well, if he suspected her and wanted to catch her, certainly he had her. Her progress from the moment of her appearance as Cynthia Gail had been made possible—she recognized—because of his unsuspecting acceptance of her. That had won for her championship in more powerful quarters which, in turn, had gained her favor more influential still; yet the whole pyramid of that favor balanced on the point of Hubert’s original acceptance.

So she sat in the dark awaiting what this strange friend of hers should determine to do.

The French women in the opposite seats conversed between themselves. The train was drawing into Paris, they said. The rapid rattle of railroad joints and cross-tracks confirmed this to Ruth, as well as the more frequent noise of engines passing; she could see, too, low shaded signal lights. But the environs of Paris had become more black than the villages of the south; this was from danger of repetition of the severe air raids of which Ruth had heard at Bordeaux.

The train stopped; not at a station, nor did guards open the doors. Everything was black without; the few lights, which Ruth had been viewing, either had not been necessary thereabouts, or else they had been extinguished; and, with the stilling of the train noise, a weird, wailing moan rose through the night air.

“A siren!” Hubert said to Ruth. The French women,

too, had recognized the warning of a raid. A blast of a horn blew a loud staccato *alerte*; and the siren—it evidently was on some fast-driven car—diminished in the distance, wailing. Far off, but approaching closer, sounded deep, rolling reverberations; not like guns—Ruth knew guns now; nor yet like shells such as had burst on board the *Ribot*. They were aerial torpedoes, of tremendous violence, detonating in Paris buildings or upon the city streets. Guns were going now; and their shells were smashing high in the air.

Ruth could see the flash of their break against the gleaming stars of the clear, cold sky; she could see rockets and glaring flares. The sound of the guns and the smash of the shells in the sky redoubled; a mighty flash lit the ground a half mile or more away across the railroad yards; it threw in brilliant silhouette for a second, roofs, trees, chimneys against a crimson inferno of flame.

Hubert had the window open; and Ruth and the French women were kneeling side by side to look out and up. They could see little lights in the sky now; they could hear, between the smash of shells, the hum of airplane motors and the rattle of brief bursts of machine-gun fire.

Airplanes of defense were up there fighting the Germans—French piloted those machines. But there might be Americans fighting there, too. Ruth had read that once or twice American pilots had been among those honored with the defense of Paris. She did not know whether it was true; she had meant to ask Gerry Hull.

A few yards away in another compartment of another car—probably in the compartment where Lady Agnes sat—Ruth knew that he was kneeling before a window

also gazing out; and she knew that the helpless impulse which stirred her with desire to be out there above to fly and fight was surging through him a thousand times intensified. She could feel even Hubert Lennon twist and sway at struggle with that impulse; how much more was Gerry Hull's lithe, powerful body—that strong, rhythmically moving form which had carried her—straining now to join his comrades there above and to strike.

A flare of flame, not sharp and jagged like the burst of shells, nor yet the streak of a rocket, nor like the glaring spot of a signal light, wavered across the stars. Something clouded it—smoke. It flung free from the smoke and dived, flaring bigger and brighter, trailing behind it a streamer of black which blanketed both rockets beyond and the stars; it dived on, burning.

Ruth's heart throbbed like a hammer in her throat. "*Chute d'un aéroplane!*" the French women cried.

"Fall of an airplane!"

It had been hit! The gasoline tank had ignited; it was going down in flames. Whether friend or foe, no one on the train could know. Cries reached Ruth from other compartments in the car. Everyone was seeing it as it dropped down now faster and faster, its head burning whiter; its streamer of smoke longer and broader before the stars. The line of roofs and chimneys off to the south, which had shown in glaring silhouette, sucked it from sight. It had crashed; and a shudder shocked through Ruth as she pictured the pilot. She wanted Gerry Hull beside her to know that he was safe; her hand groped in the dark, without her will. It encountered Hubert's and found his trembling and cold.

"They're going away, I think," he said to reassure her.

The detonations of the torpedoes dropped upon the city surely were less; the guns diminished their fire; the flashes in the sky were farther away; and the hum of the airplane motors and the bursts of machine-gun fire no longer were to be heard.

A bugle from somewhere blew a none-too-confident "All clear." The train moved on and drew after midnight into the darkened Gare du Quai-d'Orsay.

It composed for Ruth a far different entrance to Paris than any she had dreamed—the dark, almost deserted railroad station as a center of an expanse vague and doubtful under the starlit city haze. A man who repeated, "Mees Seenthya Gaiil" and "Meester Huber' Lennon," in patient, respectful intoning, stood at the gates from the train. He had a car, toward which he escorted Ruth and Milicent (who, Ruth insisted, must not try to find a place for herself that night) and Hubert.

Several of the *Ribot's* men came and said good-bye to Ruth and Milicent again and made last memoranda of how they could later be located. Gerry Hull appeared and, in her brief moment with him, Ruth marveled at the change in him. The air raid and the view of his comrades fighting again and, too, this nearness of his return to duty had banished all boyishness from him; a simple sternness suddenly had returned him to a maturity which made her wonder how she ever could have assumed to scold and correct him as once she had.

He saw that Ruth and Milicent passed the formalities at the *gare*. He ascertained that they had a vehicle; he

brought to Ruth Lady Agnes' farewell and offer of assistance at any time. Then, saluting, he said good-bye and they drove off.

Their car was keeping along the Quai-d'Orsay at first with the Seine glinting below on the right. They passed a bridge.

"Pont de Solférino," Hubert said.

They turned across the next bridge—"Pont de la Concorde!"

That brought to Ruth's right the Garden of the Tuileries! They were in the Place de la Concorde; they turned into the Champs-Élysées! It was little more than a vague wideness of speeding shadows; but Ruth's blood was warm and racing. Hubert spoke to her, and when she replied she knew that if he had questioned before whether she had been previously in Paris he could not wonder now. But he spoke to her as if she had, calling names of the places quietly to Milicent rather than to her.

The car swerved into the Place de l'Étoile.

"The Arc-de-Triomphe!" Hubert cried. Ruth bent and saw its looming bulk; they were upon the Avenue Kléber now and the car soon was halting.

A single light burned in the hallway of a building of apartments handsomer than any Ruth ever had seen; a door upon a second floor opened and an American man and woman welcomed "Cynthia Gail" as Ruth had never been welcomed anywhere in her life. These hospitable people—they were Aunt Emilie's cousins, the Mayhews—welcomed Hubert, too, of course, and Milicent.

Ruth lay that night in a beautiful bed of gold and blue—the most grateful, the most excited, the most humble

and insignificant-feeling girl in all France. When she had started out upon this adventure in America she had seemed to herself to be seizing an opportunity ordained for her by fate and entrusted to her as the instrument for a great deed; now the fact that she was here, and had come with an idea that she could greatly do, seemed the most assuming conceit in the world.

The next morning when she went out upon the avenues in the uniform, which now she was to wear constantly, the pettiness of her part reimpressed itself with every square she passed as she witnessed the throngs of soldiers—of a dozen races, of innumerable nations—gathered for the war. She went with Hubert to the American consulate, where she applied for a new passport to replace the ruined one; then, proceeding alone to the office where Cynthia Gail was to report, she accepted gladly the simple, routine duties assigned her.

That same day she and Milicent found a room in a *pension* upon the Rue des Saints Pères, where Hubert and Mrs. Mayhew called upon her the next evening. But if Gerry Hull had inquired for her at the Mayhew's, his inquiry resulted in no visit to the Rue des Saints Pères. Lieutenant Gerry Hull was transferred—so Ruth read in a *Matin* of the next week—to the American forces and was flying now under his own flag. And with his return to duty it seemed that he must have lost concern for a girl satisfied to do half-clerical, half-charity relief work among refugees in Paris.

Of course Ruth did not think of herself as merely doing such work; she considered herself as waiting for further instructions from the Germans.

The orders which she had received from the spy in Chicago had directed her to take up this work of Cynthia Gail's; and only by following these orders could she hope to carry out her plan.

She found far more talk of German agents, and far more certainty of their activities, in Paris than she had heard about in Chicago. The difference was that while in Chicago the presence and the activities of German spies was extraordinary, here it was the everpresent and accepted thing—like the arrival of trains of wounded from the front and air raids upon clear nights. She learned that the Germans undertook no important enterprise without information from their agents in France; she learned that, as in America, these agents were constantly being taken. It was plain to her, therefore, that they could scarcely have any rigid organization or any routine method of reports or intercommunication. They must operate by creating or seizing sudden opportunities.

During the noon hour upon a day in the middle of February, Ruth left the relief rooms, where she had been working, to wander in the winter sunlight by Notre Dame, where bells were ringing for some special mass. She went in and stood in the nave, listening to the chants, when she observed a gentleman of about fifty, evidently a Parisian, go to a pew beyond her and kneel down. She noticed him because she had seen him at least twice before when she was coming out of her office, and he had observed her with keener glance than gentlemen of his apparent station were accustomed to bestow.

She went from the cathedral after a few minutes and wandered up the Rue St. Jacques toward the Sorbonne,

when the same man suddenly appeared about a corner and—a rather gusty wind was blowing—his hat left his head and blew toward Ruth. She stooped quickly and picked it up.

He thanked her effusively in French and, observing that she was an American in uniform, he extended compliments upon the participation of America, which made it impossible for Ruth to go on at once. Suddenly, and without change in his tone, he inquired her name.

“Cynthia Gail,” she gave it, without thinking anything in particular.

“From what city?” he inquired.

“Decatur, Illinois.”

“You are to make effort at once to leave Paris to go to the district of Roisel. Never mind the Americans; there will be few there. Observe British dispositions; of their Fifth Army; their headquarters; what forces in reserve present; what movements indicating a lengthening of their front. Return here after two weeks; not later than three. It is the wonder of America, observe!” he proceeded in the same tone as a man went by, “that it saves not only my country, my civilization, but even, for me, my hat! I thank you again, Mademoiselle. *Bon jour!*” He bowed and was off.

## CHAPTER IX

### TO PICARDY

**R**UTH stood galvanized for a second. The man, beyond doubt, was a German agent; he had addressed her as a spy. There was no other possible explanation.

When the woman at Mrs. Corliss' had disclosed herself as an enemy, Ruth had balanced the harm the woman might do to America against the harm she, herself, might do Germany, and Ruth had decided, rightly or wrongly, to remain quiet. Now she could not do so. A German spy in Chicago was a distant, only indirectly dangerous person; a spy in Paris did most direct things — such as setting colored lights at the bottoms of chimneys to guide the great black-crossed *Gothas* which bombed Paris by night, blowing down those buildings in the ruins of which Ruth had seen men frantically digging by the early morning light; they did things such as . . . . Ruth did not delay to catalog in that flash the acts of Germans in Paris. She knew that man must be arrested at whatever cost to herself.

She started after him down the Rue St. Jacques in the first spur of this impulse. Fortunately, after leaving her, he did not gaze back, but proceeded alertly along the street. A man and a woman spoke to him; he bowed. Another passerby bowed to him with the deference shown a gentle-

man of importance and position. And Ruth slowed her pursuit and followed a little distance behind him. He turned to the Boulevard St. Michel, where others bowed to him, crossed the boulevard and went into the Ecole de Médecine.

Ruth halted a man who had spoken to him and inquired, please, the name of the gentleman who had just passed. The Frenchman informed politely, "Monsieur de Trevenac."

"The entire name, please?" Ruth pressed.

"Monsieur Louis de Trevenac," the name was repeated as of one well known. Ruth proceeded to the door of the Ecole de Médecine, where inquiry confirmed the name; M. de Trevenac had just entered.

Ruth abandoned the pursuit. She was shaking with excitement under her trim, khaki uniform and cape; but coolness had come to her—coolness and that calm, competent thought which always succeeded the irresponsible impulse with her. The German agent, M. Louis de Trevenac, was not trying to escape from Paris; his business, undoubtedly, was to remain here, and not in hiding, but prominent and well known. If she accused him to a gendarme the alarm would go at once to his confederates; it would be the stupidest and clumsiest action she could take. Now that she knew him, she could move most effectively by indirection; she need not betray herself at all, either to the French or to the Germans.

She returned across the Seine and went to her work while she thought it out. She could accomplish her purpose partly, perhaps, through Hubert Lennon. She might accomplish it more safely through the aid of other men

whom she now knew; or through Mr. Mayhew. But she could accomplish it best through Gerry Hull.

Accordingly she telephoned to Hubert that afternoon to meet her at the *pension* as soon as possible; and when he came, she asked him if he knew where Gerry Hull was.

He was in Paris, Hubert had to confess; he had been in Paris for two days.

Ruth could not help coloring. "I need to see him, Hubert. Tell me where I can find him and I shall go there."

"I'll see that he comes here," Hubert offered, a little belligerently.

"Perhaps that is better," Ruth accepted. Her orders from the Germans had been to cultivate her acquaintance with Gerry Hull; yet, if they were watching her now, it was better to have them see him come to her. "But you must get him at once," she said.

Hubert succeeded within the hour, for it was not yet five in the afternoon when Gerry Hull appeared on the Rue des Saints Pères, found the little *pension* and rang. Ruth had him ushered into a small private parlor, where she and Milicent entertained; she saw him there alone.

He did not pretend that he had been about to call upon her when she summoned him; nor did he apologize for not having called before. He was glad to see her, particularly when it became plain that she had sent for him for help in an emergency.

"I have received information, which I am quite sure is reliable," she said to him after she had closed the door and

they sat down, "but which I wish to have used anonymously, if it is at all possible."

"Information against someone?" he asked.

"Against a man who goes by the name of Louis de Trevenac," she said in a low voice. The placards all about Paris warning, *Be on guard! Enemy ears listen!* influenced her even behind the closed doors.

Gerry Hull started. Not greatly, for he had been in France long enough to hear accusations — false or true — against almost anyone.

"You know him?" Ruth asked.

"He is well known," Gerry said. "I've heard of him."

"I am absolutely certain that he is a German spy."

"How do you know?"

"If I wanted to tell how I know, I would not have sent for you. It was not easy," Ruth said with a gentle sweetness which caught him with a flush. "I thought it was possible that you would know a method of starting inquiry regarding one without having to give details of the cause of your suspicion."

Gerry nodded. "That's possible."

"Then please do that in regard to M. Louis de Trevenac. At once!"

He regarded her, conscious of having to make an effort to consider what she asked without feeling for her. The attraction to her which instantly had given him curiosity about her that first time they met — attraction not merely to her warm, glowing vitality, but to the purpose which imbued her and to the challenge of her eager, honest mind — was swaying him. He got for a moment, and quite without his will, the feeling of her lithe, round little form

warm against him, though she was drenched by the sea, that time he carried her. He banished that deliberately by recalling the offense she had given him of the criticism, as he had taken it and as he still took it, of his comrades, and of himself, and of the great beliefs for which and in which he lived.

He could not possibly question the whole loyalty of this girl; he was not even considering that as he gazed at her. He really was watching the pretty, alluring, all unconscious pulsations of color in the clear, soft skin of her cheek and temple; he was watching the blue of her eyes under her brown brows; watching the tiny tremblings of her slender, well-shaped hands; and—as Sam Hilton used to do—he was watching the hues of light glint in her hair as she moved her head.

“I can try that, Miss Gail,” he said at last. “If there’s nothing found out, there will be no particular concern for the source of suspicion; but if what you say’s true, I may have to ask you a good deal more.”

He left it thus when he went away a little later; for, though he would have liked to stay, she did not wish him to, insisting that he must proceed against Louis de Trevenac at once.

He did so; with results which brought him back to her at the end of the second day.

“What else do you know in connection with De Trevenac?” he demanded of her as soon as they were alone.

“You’re satisfied that he’s a spy?”

“The French found,” Gerry said, “a most astonishing lot of things. They’ve mopped up about twenty more

besides De Trevenac—twenty they'd never even looked into. How did you know about him?"

The discoveries had brought Gerry to her almost in awe; and there surged through her an impulse to tell him how she knew and all about herself—to end to him and with him the long, every-waking-minute, every-sleeping-minute strain of being an impostor, of facing exposure, of playing a part. She had not let herself feel how that strain pulled upon her, how lonely and frightened she was at times, how ill it made her—sick physically as well as sick at heart—to write her cheerful, newsy letters to Cynthia Gail's parents, and to read the letters written by mother and father to Cynthia, and to which she must again reply; to write to the little boy in Decatur as his sister would write; to write also—and in ways this was the hardest—to the man who had loved Cynthia Gail and who, believing that Cynthia was alive and she was Cynthia, was pouring out his love to her in letters to which also she must reply and either make him think that the girl whom he loved, and who had loved him, still lived, and would not forgive him a single hasty word, or else that she lived, and still loved him, and would be his in his arms again.

For a moment the impulse almost overmastered Ruth; but then she had the better of it. If she told even this man who might trust her—might, but how could she be sure?—she put the direction of her fate in other hands. If she had told him about herself at Mrs. Corliss' or upon the boat, he would have prevented her from proceeding alone as she had; he would have believed her unable to best accomplish things by herself, or he would have

thought the risk too great; or some obstacle would have arisen to prevent her doing that not inconsiderable thing she already had done.

If she was willing to give up now — to relieve herself of further risk and become merely what she seemed, an ordinary girl worker, in France — why she could tell him. But if she was to go ahead into the greater hazards of which she dreamed, she must go of herself.

“I could tell you,” Ruth said, gazing up at Gerry, “that when I was on the street I happened to overhear a conversation which made me sure that he was a spy.”

“But it would not be the truth.”

“No; not quite.”

“I knew so.”

She looked down and he saw her suddenly shiver. He put a hand quickly upon her and then the other hand; he held her by her slender shoulders, her round arms quivering under his fingers. His pulses leaped with warm, thrusting waves which seemed to start in his hands holding her and to shake his whole body.

“What is it?” he asked.

She raised a hand and gently with her fingers, released one hand of his from her shoulder; he removed the other.

“What have we done with De Trevenac and the rest?”

“They’re in a safe place for further investigation; nothing else, yet.”

“But we’re going to?”

“Give ’em a trial, of course; and then shoot some of ’em anyway.”

“Monsieur de Trevenac?”

“Him pretty surely.”

A shudder jerked her shoulders together in a spasm; he wanted to still her under his hands; but he did not. He knew why she asked particularly about De Trevenac; she had seen him, heard his voice, perhaps; she could picture him standing blindfolded to be shot—upon her information. He would be her first slain.

Gerry had been a bit more brutal in his way of telling her than he had intended; indeed, now he did not understand himself. He had acted upon instinct to torment, rather than spare her, to see how she took it.

She raised her head proudly. She's beautiful, he thought. The poise of that well-shaped head always was pretty; her shoulders, even under the khaki, were pretty; they were well-formed, firm shoulders. His gaze had dropped to them from her eyes; but now went back to her blue eyes again.

“Did you ever see—before—a man you had to kill?” she asked.

“A few times,” he said.

“The first man you killed?”

“The first man I ever was certain that I killed was when I was in the foreign legion,” he said. “We were advancing, using bayonets. The Huns weren't expecting an offensive there; it was the first year after they'd failed in France and were using their best troops in Russia. We found a Landsturm regiment against us—middle-aged men, married mostly, I suppose; fathers. I saw the face of one a second or so before I put my bayonet through him. A couple of times since, maneuvering for position in the air, I've got a good glimpse at chaps I was lucky

enough to shoot down afterwards. I'd rather have not, you know," he confessed.

"I know," Ruth said. "But we're going to kill them—kill men, men, and more men! We have to. I'll not be too soft, don't fear! I've been all this month among women—girls and children, too—from the departments they've overrun! Not that they've told me much which I didn't believe before; but—well, getting it direct is different."

"Yes."

He was thinking, she knew, of their initial encounter; was she so pleased and proud of the tardiness of America now?

"I found out a remarkable thing from some Belgians," she said, half in answer to this unspoken challenge. "They told me that after the Germans took complete possession of their country and forbade them to wear Belgian colors or even rosette symbols, they took to wearing American colors. We were neutral then; and the Germans didn't dare stop it; so they all wore, as their symbol of defiance, our flag!"

"That was when everyone thought always that we must come in," he rejoined. He was not thinking about what she was saying, but of her. "You've had more in your mind all along than just coming here to do relief work," he announced his thought aloud to her.

"Yes, I had."

"Can I ask what it is?"

"I can't tell you."

"But you've been doing some of it?"

"Some."

“You’re going to keep at it?”

“If you’ll let me.”

“You mean by not making you tell how you found out about De Trevenac and by keeping you out of that?”

She nodded.

“But you must tell me anything else of that sort you know.”

“I don’t know anything more of that sort except this: he had orders to see that someone be sent to the vicinity of Roisel to observe particularly dispositions of the British Fifth Army—their reserve strength and whether there were signs that they will extend their front.”

“That’s absolutely all?”

“Absolutely all—except that I think that was a particularly imperative order.”

“They’d be sending people all along that front,” Gerry said. “We know they’re to try an offensive where the armies join; the only doubt is when. I say, I’ll report for you that you just overheard something on the street; and I’ll try to get past with it. If I can’t, you’ll see me here soon again; and soon anyway, if you don’t mind, please.”

“I wouldn’t mind,” Ruth said simply, “but I’ll not be here. I’m leaving Paris in the morning.”

“Ho! Where to?”

“I applied day before yesterday for field work and got it; so I’m going to Picardy.”

“That’s no address. What part?”

“Roisel.”

“Hmm!”

Was he evolving—she wondered—the fact that De

Trevenac's order to someone to go to Roisel had been delivered to her?

Gerry had not got that far. He was thinking that this strange girl, so unlike any other one whom he had known well, was evidently determined to watch for herself the outcome about Roisel. He was thinking, too, that Roisel was decidedly an inconvenient place for him to visit. To be sure, it was in that direction that Agnes Ertyle would be at work, for the hospital units, to which she was attached, were caring for casualties from the Fifth Army; but till she would be about that part of Picardy, he would have no errands likely to take him there. And he wished that he had; or that this girl would soon again be where he could see her.

The days when he could be free from duty were few and brief now; and with the swift onset of spring they were certain to be fewer. For tremendous movements — the most stupendous in all human history — were clearly imminent; men, and women too, were certain to be called upon to die in number beyond all past calculation.

Gerry Hull did not think of himself as one of those certain to die; neither did he think of himself as one likely to live. Long ago he had attained that new imbue-ment of being, independent of all estimates of continuance of self, which was content with disposing of the present hours as best might be. So he had been spending his hours, whenever possible, with Agnes Ertyle; his next distant day was to be with her. And heretofore there had been no other desire to disturb him.

Now he was conscious — not of any inclination to spend an hour away from Agnes when he might possibly be with

her — but only of concern for this blue-eyed, light-haired, warm, ardent girl from among his own people.

“I don’t know what else you’re doing, Cynthia Gail,” he said both names as he had that time he had carried her, “but I suppose it’s dangerous. That’s all right,” he added hastily, “if the danger’s necessary; if it’s not — well, it’s foolishness, you know. I wouldn’t ask you to stop doing anything which could catch us another haul like De Trevenac; but that may be more than a deadly game.” He held out his hand to her and, when she placed hers in his, he held her fingers firmly. “Don’t be foolish, please !”

“Don’t you!” she pleaded to him in return; and the sudden broaching of the passion which had been below astounded her as much as it dumfounded him. “You take no regard for yourself — none, none at all!”

“That’s — newspaper nonsense,” he managed. He released her hand, but her grasp held him now and he could not break it except violently.

“It’s not! I’ve talked to men who know you, who’ve flown with you! They all say the same thing; and they all love you for it; you’ve no regard for yourself, numbers against you or anything when you’ve something you’ve determined to do! You do it! Oh, I wouldn’t have you not — I wouldn’t want you different. But the same need now doesn’t exist!”

Her fingers had slipped from him and they stood back a bit, both breathing hard and very flushed as they faced each other.

“We’re outnumbered in France this spring as never before,” he informed her soberly. “It’s not generally —

discussed; but, since Russia's absolutely out, that's the fact."

"I know," she said. "But what I meant was that you, and just a few others, aren't the only Americans here now. Oh, I've been able to understand why you've flown and fought as you have, why your friends are almost all fallen now and you, only by the grace of our God, are left! I think I understood some of your feeling even before I knew you and heard you speak. You and your friends whom you thought I insulted—you, for a while, had to do the fighting for all America; a score or so of you had to do, you felt, for a hundred million of us who wouldn't come in! But we're coming now; a good many of us are here!"

"Many?" he repeated. "A couple of hundred thousand among millions. And the German millions are almost ready to strike! Forgive me, I didn't mean to scold you ever again for America; but—oh, you'll see! The husbands, and fathers, and the boys of France, the husbands, and fathers, and the boys of England taking the blow again, giving themselves to the guns to save us all while our young men watch!"

She gazed up at him, but stayed silent now. Terror seized her that she had done only harm, that she had stirred him to greater regardlessness. His anger against her people, whom she defended, had—as at that first time—banished his feeling for her. When he gave her his hand again, he barely touched her fingers; and he was gone.

Returning that night to his squadron at the front, he wrote her an apology; but, after reading it over, tore it

up. His squadron was stationed far to the east and south of Roisel; and there was at that time nothing in the military situation to give him greater concern for that particular sector. Yet when news arrived he scanned it quickly for report of operations about Roisel. However, though he twice got leave of a day, he did not on either occasion penetrate farther into Picardy than the little city where Lady Agnes now lived.

All along the front, from Switzerland to the sea, the calm continued; but few on either side of that line held illusions as to the nature of that calm. Then, as all the world knows, suddenly upon a morning the storm broke.

Gerry Hull received the bulletins which came over the military wire which brought him also his orders. These orders were for his squadron at once to move and report for service at the earliest possible moment at a certain point in Picardy—which orders, as orders usually go, were unexplained except as the news bulletins gave them meaning.

The news, however, left no loopholes for doubt. The great German assault, which had begun the morning before, already had developed a complete break-through of the British front. The Germans, in one tremendous dash, had overrun the first lines of defense, the second, and the third; they were advancing now in open country with only remnants of an army before them; and the center of this huge wave of the enemy advance was what had been the French village of Roisel.

## CHAPTER X

### THE GREAT ATTACK

**T**HE English guns began it.

To the world the great battle started with the German onslaught of the morning of that Thursday, the twenty-first of March; but to Ruth, the beginning was with the English guns—the guns of the evening before, rolling and resounding over the Picardy plain.

The night seemed to have embarked upon stillness in its earlier hours. The “line”—that dim, neighboring bulwark descending from the far indefiniteness of the North Sea to approach close to the little hamlet of Mirevaux, to seem indeed to point into Mirevaux but for a twist which turned it away and deflected it, sweeping southward, and east, and south again toward the farther fastness of the Alps—the line had been absolutely quiet. A great many airplanes had been up during the afternoon, Ruth had observed as she gazed toward the line from Mirevaux; their wings had specked the sky of the twilight. When the afterglow was gone and the moon held the heavens, little colored lights flashed frequently before the stars of the east, marking where many night-flying pilots plied on their errands; but these signals seemed at first not to be for the guns. The moon illumined a drowsy Mirevaux, war-ravaged, but rewon, and dreaming itself secure again behind that barrier of earth, and men, and

guns, and gas, and airplanes over the slopes of the east which the English held.

And not alone Mirevaux so dreamed. Many persons of far wider information than the French peasants and without the French folks' love of their own home farms to influence them, also imagined Mirevaux quite safe—the hard-headed and quite practical, though impulsive persons who made up a certain American committee for the restoration of war-ravaged lands, had moved, and seconded, and decreed in committee meeting that Mirevaux was definitely and finally removed from the zone of invasion and, therefore, that the committee's representative in Mirevaux should be authorized to expend for temporary and permanent restoration so many thousands of francs a month.

It was the useful expenditure of these sums which had brought Ruth Alden, as assistant and associate to Mrs. Gregory Mayhew, to Mirevaux from Roisel in the first week of March and which, upon the quiet moonlit evening of that Wednesday, the twentieth, detained Ruth at the cottage of old Grand'mère Bergues, who with her grandchildren—Victor and *petite* Marie—had outstayed the German occupation of Mirevaux from August of the first year of the war to the great retreat of February, 1917, when the enemy went back to the Hindenburg line, destroying unremovable property and devastating orchard and farm.

Grand'mère Bergues stood at the door of the little cottage which, last autumn, had been restored as well as obtainable materials permitted. The moon shone down upon what had been an orchard; but the Germans, before

their retreat, had systematically sawed through the trunk of each tree till the tree fell. The French, as quickly as possible, had regrafted the top upon the stump and thus had saved a great many trees; and the new buds upon them, showing that these had survived the winter and would bloom and fruit again, brought to Grand'mère Bergues a sense of triumph over the Boche.

Grand'mère Bergues needed all the triumph she could feel. Her son, Laurent, lay in one of those white-crossed graves of the defenders of Douaumont at Verdun; her own daughter Mathilde, who had married a merchant of Carnières, which was beyond Cambrai, had not been heard of since the first year of the war. Laurent's wife — well, she had been a young and beautiful woman and Grand'mère Bergues either told nothing of what had been her fate when the Germans came or else she told it again and again in abandon.

"They bound me to the bedpost; and one said — he was a pink-faced pig, with the pink — ugh! — all about his head through his closecropped hair — he said, 'Remove her.'

"'No; it is better to let her see. But keep her quiet!'

"So they stuffed in my mouth . . . ."

Ruth well knew the frightful facts; she knew that, three years ago, there had been little Laurent — a baby — too.

"These things," said Grand'mère Bergues, "you did not believe at first."

"No," Ruth said, "we did not."

"It is not to be wondered at," the old woman said simply. "The wonderful fact is that now you arrive!"

She trudged along beside Ruth through the ruin of the orchard and halted with her hand upon the bough of an apple tree which was one of those that the French had grafted and saved.

“I saw them cut this down; they measure so many centimeters from the ground; they start to saw; they cut so far through; they stop; it is destroyed! Ah, but I shall pluck apples this August, oh, beast pigs, brutes below all others!” she apostrophized quite calmly. “How may those who have the form of men be such fools, too?” she asked Ruth. “When they are here—those who bound me to the bed and their comrades—they say that they would be the friends of France. The English, they say, are our enemies; we shall see! Well, the English are about us now as they have been; and look, I have come of my own will away from Victor and Marie, leaving them alone, sleeping. Such danger now! And you, Mademoiselle, you are younger and as beautiful even as my Laurent’s wife—you go on, quite safe, unaccompanied.”

Ruth proceeded quite safely, indeed; but not unaccompanied for long. The English, as Grand’mère Bergues said, were all about—a regiment was lying in reserve just then beyond Mirevaux; and a certain young lieutenant, who had been one of the guests at a tea at Mrs. Mayhew’s cottage a week ago, was awaiting Ruth upon the road. His name was Haddon-Staples; but he was so like “1582” of the *Ribot* that Ruth had dubbed him to herself “1583” and she appreciated him hugely.

Hardly had he caught step with her when the guns began—the English guns.

The firing was heavy — no heavier, perhaps, than Ruth often had heard at night during the days near Mirevaux, but tonight it seemed to Ruth to have a more intense, more nervous quality.

“Box barrage, sounds like,” Haddon-Staples volunteered when Ruth stopped to study the direction of the action. “Not much on, I should say. Trench raid for information, probably.”

“When do you suppose they’ll attack?”

They, of course, were the Germans. “Oh, any time. That’s what we’re out for a bit of a line on tonight — naturally. Sooner they try it, the better, don’t you think?”

“You’re — we’re all ready for them?” Ruth asked.

“Ready as may be,” the Englishman returned politely. “They’ve rather the advantage of us, you know — numerically. A good bit of a farm here again, isn’t there?” he shifted the subject, gazing over the level, planted fields.

Ruth talked with him about other things; but her thought remained with those English guns firing and firing, with the English gunners serving them, with the English infantry raiding “for information” or lying in wait for the certain-coming attack of an enemy having a recognized advantage — numerically. The reason that the enemy possessed that advantage was, she knew, that America was not yet in force on the battle line. But for that tardiness, she had not yet heard one word of censure from Englishmen or from the French.

The guns were still going when she went to bed at half-past ten — the English guns with the German guns attempting only ordinary reply. So Ruth slept until a

quaking of the ground and a sudden, tremendous new impact of sound sat her up in the darkness, awake. She gazed at her watch; it was half-past four. German guns now were sending the monstrous missiles whose detonation shook the land; it was the English guns which attempted the reply. Ruth went to her window and gazed out in the dark toward the lines until the gray of dawn discovered a thin gray mist over the ground—a mist of the sort making for surprises of attacking forces upon the forces defending; and that frightful fire of the German guns meant that, this morning at last, the Germans were attacking.

Ruth dressed as Mrs. Mayhew and everyone else in the house was dressing. The thunder of the guns, the never-ceasing concussion of the bursting shells rolled louder and nearer.

“That must be the start of their offensive,” Mrs. Mayhew said. “Let them try; they’ll never get through!”

“No,” Ruth said; and she believed it. She thought of the German attacks upon Ypres in the early years of the war; of their failure at Verdun last year and the slow progress of the allies when they had been on the offensive—the French in Champagne and the English on the Somme. The others also believed it.

“What will you be about today, dear?” Mrs. Mayhew asked Ruth.

“Oh!”—Ruth needed the moment of the exclamation to recollect. “I’m going to Aubigny to see that our last lot of portable houses got there all right and that the people know how to put them up.”

“Then come with me; I’m going to Ham,” Mrs. May-

hew offered, and during the morning, quite as usual, they drove off together in Mrs. Mayhew's car about their business of helping rehouse and shelter and refurnish the peasants of Picardy.

While they rode in the bright morning sunshine — for the mist was cleared now — guns, English guns emplaced far behind the lines and whose presence they had never suspected before, thundered out; their concussion added to the trembling of the ground; and through the air swept sounds — swift, shrill, and ominous — not heard on the days before.

“Shells?” Mrs. Mayhew asked.

Ruth nodded. She had heard the shriek of the shells which had missed the *Ribot* and passed over. “Shells, I think,” she said. They were passing peasants on the road now — families of peasants or such relics of families as the war had left; some, who had a horse, drove a wagon heaped high with the new household goods which they had gained since the invasion; some pushed barrows; others bore bundles only.

Ruth, who was driving, halted the car again and again.

“Where are you going?” she asked.

“We do not know,” the peasants answered.

Ruth drove on into the little city of Ham, where ambulances bearing the English wounded were arriving in an endless line from the front. Mrs. Mayhew had seen wounded men — many, many of them — in the Paris hospitals; Ruth too had seen wounded — almost two score of people variously hurt aboard the *Ribot*. But here they came, not as *blessés* arrived in Paris, but from the battle field and, not by scores, but by hundreds, by thousands!

Ruth went sick when she saw them. She thought of Hubert, her gentle-minded, sensitive Hubert, now helping to handle men so hurt. She thought of Agnes Ertyle when she saw English women, as well as English men, receiving the forms from the ambulances at the great casualty clearing stations where new rows of tents hastily were going up. She thought, of course, of Gerry Hull. She believed that he was far removed from this zone of battle; but she did not yet know — no one yet knew — how far the fighting front was extending. He might be flying at this moment over a front most heavily involved; she knew that he would wish to be; and how he would fight — fight as never before and without regard of himself to check disaster due, as he would believe, to the tardiness of his country.

She saw a boy in the uniform of the Royal Flying Corps lying upon a stretcher in the sunshine; he was smoking, but he took his cigarette from his lips to smile at her as she gazed down at him.

British troops — strong, young, uninjured men — marching in battalions; English guns and ammunition lorries; more English infantry and guns poured into the streets of the city, passed through them and on to the front and more came. The wounded from the front and the French folk from the farms and villages passed on their way to the rear; but no one else came back.

“The line is steadying itself; it’s holding,” the rumor ran in Ham during the afternoon. “The Boche gained at first — everyone on the offensive gains at first — but now we’re holding them; we’re slaughtering them as they come on.” Then more alarming reports spread.

“They’ve overrun the first lines at points; but the others are holding or are sure to—the Boche are doing better than at Verdun.” Then that was denied. “They’re not doing so well. We’re holding them now. They’re coming on. They’re driving us back.”

Not even the wounded and the refugees, still streaming from the front, brought reliable report; the battle was too immense for that. And into the battle, English reinforcements steadily went forward. So Ruth was sure only that the great battle, which the world had been awaiting, was begun; she could know nothing of the true fortune of that first tremendous day. She was finding, however, that Mrs. Mayhew and she could not go about their work of restoration. They turned their car upon the road and, inviting refugees, they carried the peasants swift miles along the roads which they had been trudging; let them off ten miles or so to the rear and returned for more.

But they urged no one to flee; they simply assisted those already in flight and who would not be turned back. And that evening, which was more quiet than the evening before—or at least it seemed so in comparison to the day—they returned to Mirevaux. The worst was past, they believed; the line, the English and the French line which for more than three years had stood and held against the Germans, had reformed and reestablished itself after the first shake of the tremendous onslaught.

And so it still seemed to those in Mirevaux that next morning of Friday when, after breakfast, Ruth discussed again with Mrs. Mayhew what she would do that day. They were agreeing that they should be calm and show confidence and go about their work as usual, when they

heard the hoofs of a galloping horse upon the road. The rider pulled up short before their cottage and Ruth, running to the door, saw "1583" — the English officer who had waited for her upon the road from Grand'mère Bergues' the night before last.

"They've broken through!" he called to Ruth.

"Through!" Ruth cried. "The Germans!"

"We can't hold them! They're coming on! Fifty thousand of them! They've broken through — through! We couldn't hold them!"

Ruth recoiled upon the door. Mrs. Mayhew was beside her, calling out to the officer; but he, having given the alarm to that house, was going on. Ruth gazed vacantly over the smooth, replowed, replanted French fields and the rows of grafted orchard trees toward Grand'mère Bergues'; and her mind gave her, in a flash, vision of the broken dam of the English line with the German flood bursting through; and before that flood she saw again the refugees of yesterday in flight; she saw Grand'mère Bergues with *petite* Marie and Victor caught again, perhaps; she saw the wounded on the roads and in the tents of the clearing stations, cut off by the Germans and taken; she saw the English troops — the strong, young men whom she had witnessed marching to the front yesterday — battling bravely, desperately, but shot down, bayoneted and overrun.

"They've broken through. We couldn't hold them! They're coming on!"

Ruth gazed from the ground to the sky and she saw — not in her fancy but visually above her now — airplanes, allied airplanes flying in squadrons from the rear toward

that front which she could not see but where, she knew, the line on the ground was broken and gone and where the Germans, who were "coming on," must be pouring through. And her mind showed her in the pilot's seat of one of those airplanes—or in one just like them somewhere on that broken front—Gerry Hull. Vividly she fancied his face as he flew to fight and to make up, as well as one man might, for the millions of his people who should have been yesterday and today upon that broken battle line where the enemy, at last, had broken through!

Ruth could not know then all that a break "through" meant; no one could know; for in all the fighting in France, no army had broken "through" before. She could know only that upon her, as an American quite as much as Gerry Hull, was the charge to do her uttermost.

But what was she to do?

Gerry, arriving that morning at the airdrome to which he had been ordered, possessed the advantage over her of no uncertainty but of definite assignment to duty.

During his training and his service with the French, he had piloted many sorts of machines. He had flown the reconnaissance and photographic biplanes with duty merely to bring back information of the enemy's movements; he had flown the bombing machines entrusted with destruction, by aerial torpedo, of batteries, and ammunition dumps behind the enemy's front; he had flown the "artillery machines"—the biplanes with wireless by which he, or his observer, signaled to the French batteries the fall of their shots and guided the guns to the true targets; he had flown, as all the world knew, the swift-darting *avions de chasse*—the airplanes of pursuit—the Nieuports and

the Spads in which, as combat pilot, he had dueled ten thousand feet up in the sky with the German combat pilots and shot some twenty of them down. And it was while he was still in the French service that the flying men began to form new squadrons for strange service distinct from mere bomb-dropping, from guiding guns or sending back information or from fighting other airplanes. Pilots of these squadrons started to attack, by bomb and machine guns, the enemy infantry and artillery and horse. They had special, new "ships" made for them — one-seater or two-seater biplanes mounting two or three machine guns and built to stand the strain of diving down from a height and "flattening out" suddenly only a few yards from the ground while the pilot with his machine guns raked the ranks of troops over which he flew.

It was in one of these new raiding airplanes, accordingly, and as leader of a flight that Gerry Hull was going to battle this day. The field, from which he had arisen, had been far back of the English lines — so far back, indeed, that it still was secure as Gerry guided his flight of six machines up into the clear spring sunshine. His was one of the single-seaters; he was alone, therefore, as he led on to the north and east; and he was glad this morning to be alone. The exaltation which almost always pervaded him as he rose into the sky with his motor running powerfully and true, possessed him at its most this morning; it brought to him, together with the never-dulling wonder of his endowment of wings and his multiplied strength therefrom, a despite of fate which made him reckless yet calm.

His altimeter told that he had climbed to some four

thousand feet and content with that height and flying level, he glanced about and saw that the machines which followed him were flattening out too and in position. He gazed at his mapboard where was displayed chart of the land below with notation of the battle line—such battle line as still existed—corrected up to the last hour by photographs and visual observations made by other pilots that morning. It was the strip of ravaged and restored land over which he was flying; clearly he could see the cross-streaked spots of the cities; on his right, Ham; on his left, Péronne and Roisel. Roads spider-webbed about them; tiny villages clustered. Immediately below he could see even, decent patches of planted fields, gardens, meadows; he could make out, too, more minute objects—the peasants' cottages and their trees, the tiny roofs of the new portable houses supplied by the Americans.

He could see the specks which were people upon the roads, gathered in groups moving together; where the specks formed into a long, ordered line, he knew that they were troops and moving toward the battle, probably. He himself was flying so fast that the direction of the slow movement upon the roads could not appear; but he could guess that the irregular series of specks were refugees in flight. Shells were smashing beside them—shrapnel, high explosive, and gas. He could recognize easily the puff of the shrapnel distinct from the burst of the high explosive shells. He could not distinguish the gas shells; but he knew that the Germans were using them, deluging with gas the zone behind the battle to a depth unknown before.

He gazed forward to the ground where the German

infantry now was advancing — ground sloping so slightly hereabouts that, but for the shadows, it would have seemed flat. But the morning sun of March was still circling low, making all bright a strip where shells, in enormous number, erupted; just short of this strip, the sunlight ceased sharply in a shadow which did not move; the bright strip therefore was the eastern slope of a hill and the shadow was its western descent — a slope where, at this moment, the English must be attempting a stand.

Gerry gazed to the right to try to find and, with his eyes, follow the line which ran from this hill; but he could discover none; he glanced to the left and failed there also to discern support for the English soldiers on the hill. Surely there must have been support of some sort thereabouts; but the Germans had overwhelmed or swept it back. Germans — German infantry in mass, Germans deployed, German guns engaged and German guns moving forward followed by their trains — Germans possessed the ground before that sunlit slope and on its right and left.

He looked farther away to the south and to the north; and he could witness the truth which already he had been told. The "line," in the sense in which one had known the line for three years, was swept away — first, second, third, and all supporting systems of defense; attempts to form new lines behind the old had failed. Open field battle, swift and Napoleonic, was established; for this battle the Germans had gathered men by the hundred thousands, guns by the thousand while the English here had — well the remnants of brigades and divisions which here and there held to the slope of a hill.

Gerry wondered, as he gazed down, whether these men on the nearest slope knew that — already half surrounded — there was no support behind them. He was steering lower as he neared them, drawing to himself a shell or two from some German anti-aircraft gun which he did not trouble to try to place. Airplanes appeared all about him now, above, before, behind, and on both sides; but they were, most of them, English or French; here and there he glimpsed a German machine; but none of these approached him to attack. For if the ground that morning was the Germans', the air was the allies'; it was only from the air, from him and his flight of five machines trailing behind him and from other similar flights of fighting airplanes likewise arriving, that any help could reach those English about to be attacked.

For the storm of German shells, which a few seconds before had been sweeping the slope, lifted suddenly; before the hill and from the flank, specks which were German storm troops moved forward; and Gerry, turning his head, saw that the other machines followed him in position. In signal to them, he rocked his ship a little. Steadying again, he leaned forward and saw that his machine guns were ready; softly he touched the release levers of his bombs. His hands went back to his controls and, gazing below at the German ranks again, he put the nose of his machine down and dived.

Ordinarily, during the tremendous seconds of the drop, he could see nothing but the spot of earth at which his eyes were focused, leaping up and up at him; ordinarily, sensation stopped with the feeling of fall and the rush of that seeming suck of destruction. But now his senses

took in many things. His eyes never lost the swelling specks of gray which were becoming German storm troops leaping to the attack; but his eyes took in, too, the file of forms in English brown lying waiting over the crest of the hill.

They were scattered and few — very, very few, he saw; fewer even than he had feared when he gazed down upon them from two thousand feet higher. He had counted the forms of the dead among the holders of the hill; he could not, in that flash of vision, see that the many, many were dead; he could see only that, as he dropped down above them, few of the forms were moving. They were drawing together in little groups with bayonets flashing in the sunshine, drawing together in tens and scores and half hundreds for last desperate defense of the hill against the thousands coming to take it.

The puffing jets of German machine-gun fire, enfilading the hill from the right and from the left, shone over the ground in the morning sunshine where German machine gunners had worked their way about to fire in front of their charging troops; Gerry saw no such jets from the hill, though the charging men in gray must be in plain sight and within point-blank range at that instant from the English on the hill. The English were short of ammunition, that meant.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE RESISTANCE

**B**UT the English were going to fight.

This knowledge came to Gerry through the rush and suck of the final yards of his three thousand foot fall; mechanically, automatically his hands were tugging at his controls, his feet braced firm on his rudder bar as he began to bring his machine out of the fall. He had come down at terrific speed with his motor only partly shut off; he had no time, and no need, to watch his speed indicator; he knew well enough when he was on edge of the breaking strain which his wings and wires could stand. He slanted more directly toward the Germans and he was very low above the ground; still half falling, half flying—and at greater speed than ever he could have flown—he hurled himself at them, flattening out at perhaps fifty feet from the earth.

He knew—not from anything which he consciously saw nor from any conscious reckoning but by the automatism of realization and the reflex from it which guided and coordinated his mind, nerve, and muscle in these terrific instants of attack—he knew that German machine gunners were firing at him; he knew that German riflemen in the ranks which he was charging were giving him bursts of bullets as fast as they could fire; and his fingers which so tenderly had touched the release levers of his bombs,

pulled them positively now; with his other hand, which held to the control stick, he had gathered the lanyard which governed his machine gun; he had adjusted it so that the slightest tug would get the guns going; he gave that tug and the reassuring, familiar *jet-jet* of his guns firing through his airscrew combined with the burst of his bombs below and behind.

His fingers went from his bomb levers to his throttle to open it wider; the detonations which had followed him, ceased; his hand flew back to his lever and the bursts began again. All the time his hand on the control stick kept tension on the gun lanyards; ceaselessly those jets from his machine gun projected through the whorl of his airscrew.

He was killing men. He could see them, not as he killed them, but some infinitesimal of a second before; very possibly, indeed, the bullets out of those jets of his machine guns already had pierced the white flashes under the helmets which were faces of Germans gazing up at him or had riddled through the gray bulks of their bodies. But blood had not time to spot to the surface; the shock of the bullets, even when they immediately killed, had not time to dissolve the tautness of those bodies and relax them and let them down before Gerry was flown over them and was gone. He had taken position, when high in the sky a few seconds earlier, so as to sweep the length of the waves of the Germans charging; and though the swiftness of this sweep forbade him from seeing the results, he knew that with his machine guns alone he was taking off many; and though he could not now look back at all, he knew that his bombs,

dropped from so close, must be killing many, many more.

The Germans attested to that; they scattered and scurried before him; he had no row of gray forms for his target now; to save his cartridges, he had to stop that steady pull on his lanyard; he pursued groups, firing short bursts of bullets till they broke and scattered again. He was not fighting alone, of course; the machines in his flight all had followed him down. He outflew the men on the ground and, rising while he turned, he got view of the field over which he had swept; two of his machines which had followed him, were rising already; the others were still flying low, attacking with machine guns and bombs; and below them, that line of the German attack was halted and broken. He could see spaces where his bombs had exploded or where the machine-gun fire from the airplanes had been most effective and gray-clad forms strewed the ground; between these spots, German officers were reforming ranks and getting men together again. Gerry opened his throttle wide and, circling, climbed a little more; and then, he dove again and gave it to these gathering men.

Gave them machine-gun fire alone, now; for his bombs were gone. He could see the work of the bombs better, and sight of that work brought him grim exultation. He was glad that this morning he was no mere duelist of the sky, darting and feinting and dashing in, spinning about and diving high in the heavens to shoot down just one enemy; here he had led an attack which had killed or disabled hundreds. This was no day to glory in single combat.

He had overflowed again the men on the ground and, climbing once more, he got view of the crest of the slope. It was gray! Gray-clad men were swarming all over it; gray—Germans! Brown men battled them; bayonets glinted in the sun; the brown men dropped; gray men toppled, too; but there were more of the gray all about. How they had got up there, Gerry could not tell; they might be some of those in the waves at which he had fired and who had gone on; they might be a different battalion which had charged in from the flank. They were there; they had taken the hill; they were slaying the last of the English. Gerry saw the swirls of the brown and gray where a few survivors, surrounded, were fighting hand to hand to the last. He forced down the nose of his machine and dropped at them; he let go one burst of bullets into the gray; let go another and now, as he pulled on his lanyard, the airscrew before him whirled clear; the jets did not project through it; his machine guns were silent; their ammunition was spent.

He had a mad impulse, when he realized this, to swerve lower and make himself and his machine a mighty projectile to scythe those German heads with the edges of his wings; he could kill—he was calculating, in one of those flashes which consume no reckonable time, the number of gray men he could hope to kill. Ten or a dozen, at most; and he had just slain—and therefore again that day might slay—a hundred. But that instinct did not decide him. Among the gray men, in the only groups upon which he could thus drop, were brown men, so with his free hand he pulled out his automatic pistol and, as he

flew barely above the helmets of the men in the mêlée, he emptied the magazine.

English soldiers glanced up at him; ten feet below him were English boys, doomed, surrounded but fighting. It struck shame through Gerry the next moment when he was rising clear and safe that a few seconds before he could have been almost within hand reach of those English boys fighting to the end on the ground; that, indeed, he had for a moment fought with them and then he had deserted them to their death while he had flown free. He looked back, half banking his machine about; but already the battle upon that hill crest was over; the last of the English were killed. Gerry could return only to avenge them; and the way to avenge was with refilled bomb racks and machine-gun magazines.

That dive to the top of the hill had separated him from the other machines in his flight except one which was following him on his return to the airdrome for ammunition and bombs. Gerry, gazing down, found disorganization more visible than when he had flown to the front. He could see the English troops, whom he had viewed advancing upon the roads, spreading out and forming a line of resistance; but he could better realize how few these English were for the needs of this mighty emergency. They were taking positions, not with any possible hope of holding them against the German masses but only with determination to fight to delay the enemy a little as Gerry had just seen some of them fight.

He sighted his field and he swooped down upon it, leaping out as soon as he stopped. He saw that, as he had suspected, rifle or machine-gun bullets had gone through

his wings; but they had not pierced spars or struts; his wires were tight. While men refilled his bomb racks and magazines and gave him fuel, he reported what he had seen and received new orders.

His superiors recognized that the disaster, instead of lessening, was growing greater each hour. Powerful French and English reserves were on the way but they were still distant; meanwhile the local reserves were being used up. The English were gathering together and throwing in anyone and everyone to try to delay the German advance; there were kilometers where only this scratch army offered resistance — sutlers, supply men, and cooks armed with rifles and machine guns fighting beside Chinese coolies impressed into a fighting line.

Gerry passed a word with an English pilot whom he knew well and who was just back from over another part of the battle field.

“Hello, Hull! Your people rather getting into it over my way!”

“Who? How?” Gerry called.

“One of your engineer regiments were working behind the lines; line came back on ’em. They grabbed guns and went in and gave it to the Huns! Should have seen ’em. Can yet; they’re keeping at it.”

The blood tingled hotter in Gerry’s veins; his people were fighting! His countrymen, other than the few who from the first had been fighting in the foreign legion or scattered in Canadian regiments or here and there in the flying forces, were having part in this battle! No great part, at that; and only an accidental part. Simply a regiment of American engineers, who had been on construc-

tion work for the British Fifth Army, had thrown down their shovels and tools, grabbed guns, and gone in.

“You’ve some good girls—some awfully good girls out that way, too!” the English pilot cried.

Gerry was in his seat and starting his motor so he just heard that; he rose from the field and for several moments all his conscious attention was given to catching proper formation with the machines returning along with him to the battle; but subconsciously his mind was going to those girls, the American girls—those “awfully good” girls out that way. He did not know what they might be doing this day—what it was which won from the English pilot the praise in his voice. Gerry had known that American girls had been out “that way,” he had known about the Smith College girls, particularly—the score or so who called themselves the Smith College Relief Unit and who, he understood, had been supplying the poor peasants and looking after old people and children and doing all sorts of practical and useful things in little villages about Nesle and Ham. He did not know any of those girls; but he did know Cynthia Gail; and now, as he found himself in flight formation and flying evenly, thought of her emerged more vividly than it had previously upon that morning.

When the news had reached him far away on the evening before that the Germans had broken through in that neighborhood where she was, he had visualized her in his fears as a helpless victim before the enemy’s advance. The instincts she had stirred in him were to hurry him to her protection; that morning as he had looked down upon the refugees on the roads, mentally he had put her among the multitude fleeing and to be defended. But the shout of

the English pilot had made Gerry think of her as one of those protecting—not precisely a combatant, perhaps, but certainly no mere non-combatant.

Of course the English pilot had not mentioned Cynthia Gail; but Gerry knew that if American girls were proving themselves that morning, Cynthia Gail was one of them. He had been able, in vivid moments, to see Agnes Ertyle; for he knew exactly what she would be doing; but his imagination had failed to bring before him Cynthia Gail. In the subconscious considerations which through the violence of his physical actions dwelt on such ideas, this failure had seemed proof that Agnes Ertyle alone stirred the deepest within him; but now those visions of the unseen which came quite unbidden and which he could not control showed him again and again the smooth-skinned, well-formed face with the blue, brave eyes under thoughtful brows, and the slender, rounded figure of the girl whom he knew as Cynthia Gail. And whereas previously he had merely included her among the many in peril, now dismay for her particularly throbbed through him.

Her words when they last were together—"A score or so of you felt you had to do the fighting for a hundred million of us; but you haven't now, for we're coming; a good many of us are here"—no longer seemed a mere appeal to him to spare himself; it told him that she was among those on the ground endeavoring to govern the fate of this day.

He sighted, before and below, a road where German guns were being rushed forward; dove down upon them, leading his flight again and bombed the guns, machine-

gunned the artillerymen; he bombed a supply train of motor lorries; he flew over and machine-gunned two motor cars with German officers and saw one of the cars overturn. But German combat pilots were appearing in force all about; Gerry gazed up and saw a big, black-crossed two-seater accompanied by two single-seaters maneuvering to dive down upon him.

He swerved off, therefore, and fled. For a moment he longed for his swift-darting little Spad instead of this heavier ship which bore bombs in addition to machine guns. But the Spads of his comrades and English combat machines appeared; and the German pilots above did not dare to dive. They circled, awaiting reinforcement which swiftly came—triplane Fokkers mostly, Gerry thought. As he watched them, he forgot all about the ground; for the French and the English pilots, ten thousand feet above him, were starting an attack. He circled and climbed a few thousand feet; he knew that with his heavy raiding machine, he could not join that battle. But heavy German airplanes—for observation, for photographic work, or to guide the advancing German guns—were appearing in the lower levels and slipping forward under the protection of the Fokkers and the Albatrosses. Gerry went for one of these and turned it back; he went for another—a two-seater—and he saw the German machine gunner fall forward; he saw the pilot's hooded head drop; he saw flame flash from the gasoline tank; the two-seater tumbled and went down.

He dared not follow it with his eyes even for the short seconds of its fall; machines from the battle above were coming down where he was. A Fokker dropped, turning

over and over to escape a Spad which came down on its tail and got it anyway; now a Spad streaked past in flame. A two-seater—a German machine marked by the big black crosses under its wings—glided slowly down in a volplane. Gerry circled up to it, approaching from the side with the lanyard of his machine guns ready; but the German pilot raised an arm to signal helplessness. His gunner was dead across his guns; his engine was gone; he had kept control enough only to glide; and he was gliding, Gerry saw, with the sun on his right. That meant he was making for German-held ground. He came beside the gliding two-seater, therefore, and signaled to the west. The German obeyed and, while Gerry followed, he glided to the field in the west and landed.

Gerry came down beside him and took the pilot prisoner; together they lifted the body of the German observer from his seat and laid him on the ground. Gerry possessed himself of the German's maps and papers.

The German pilot, who was about Gerry's own age, had been a little dazed from the fight in the sky; but Gerry discovered that his willingness to surrender and the fact that he had made no attempt to destroy his own machine upon landing was from belief that they had come down upon ground already gained by the Germans. Whether or not that was true, at least it appeared to be ground already abandoned by the English. Certainly no considerable English force existed between that position and the Germans whom Gerry had seen advancing two miles away. No batteries were in action nearby; the airplanes seemed to be standing in an oasis of battle. There was a road a couple of hundred yards to the south, and,

seeing travel upon it, Gerry took his prisoner in that direction.

He found refugees upon the road—patient, pitiful families of French peasants in flight, aiding one another and bearing poor bundles of their most precious possessions. The sight brought Gerry back to his first days of the war and to the feelings of the boy he had been in August, 1914, when he rushed across the channel from England to offer himself to the Red Cross in France and when he met the first refugees fleeing before von Klück's army out of Belgium and Normandy. He had seen nothing like this in France since then; and the years of war had not calloused him to these consequences. Indeed, they had brought to him more terrible realizations than the horror-struck boy of 1914 had been able to imagine. So these again were to be visited upon France! And because his people had watched for almost three years, had kept safely out!

His prisoner now turned to Gerry and spoke to him in French.

"It appears," he corrected the error he had made when Gerry had taken him, "that you are not my prisoner yet."

"No," Gerry said. "Not yet."

A Ford truck passed the farm wains and the miserable column of marchers. The driver, Gerry saw, was in khaki and was a girl. She observed him and drew up.

"Hello," she hailed alertly, taking in the situation at a glance. "Do you want to get rid of your prisoner?"

She was American—one of those "awfully good" girls of whom the English had told him! And, seeing her and hearing her voice, he knew what the English pilot

had meant; and a bit of pride—tingling, burning pride for his people—flared up where the moment before had been only condemnation and despair. For this girl was no mere driver; she was in charge of the French—a cool, clear-headed competent commander of these foreign peasants from a village evacuated under her direction. She had, lying in the hay upon the floor of the truck, children injured by shell fire and English wounded whom she had found by the road. She had been under fire; and, as soon as she could get these people a little farther to the rear, she was going back under fire to guide away more people. She was entirely unheroic about it; why, that was the best thing she could do this day. Did he know something better for her to do?

“No,” Gerry said. “Are there many more American girls here?” he asked, gazing toward the German advance.

“We’re each—or two of us together are taking a village to get the people out,” the girl said; and she named, at Gerry’s request, some of the girls and some of the villages.

“Do you know Cynthia Gail?” he asked.

“She was going back, the last I heard of her, to Mirevaux.”

Gerry jerked. “Mirevaux must be taken now.”

“I heard guns that way. That’s all I know,” the girl said. She raced her engine; Gerry knew she must go on. He left his prisoner in charge of a wounded English soldier who was able to walk and he returned to the machines in the middle of the field. The captured German airplane was too damaged to remove; so he set it afire and mounted in his own.

The battle in the sky had moved off somewhere else long ago; neither in the air nor upon the ground was there engagement near him. He was without bombs but he still had machine-gun ammunition; he directed his course as he rose into the air toward the hamlet of Mirevaux.

He could see it clearly from a few hundred feet in the sky—see shells, which must be from German guns, smashing on a hillside on the south and shells, which must be from an English battery, breaking about Mirevaux. These told that the Germans indeed were in the village and some force of English were maintaining themselves on the hill. He observed a road west of Mirevaux upon which appeared such a procession as that to which he had entrusted his prisoner. The English position, which the Germans were shelling, flanked this road and partially protected it; but Gerry could observe strong detachments, which must be German patrols, working about the English to the northwest and toward the road.

The English could not see them; nor could the refugees on the road catch sight of them. Gerry sighted a small, black motor car moving with the processions. Another American girl was driving that, probably; or at least an American girl was somewhere down there—a girl with even, blue eyes which looked honestly and thoughtfully into one's, a girl with glorious hair which one liked to watch in the sunlight and which tempted one to touch it, a girl with soft, round little shoulders which he had grasped, a girl who had gone into the sea for him, and whom he had carried, warm in his arms.

A couple of German 77s began puffing shrapnel up about Gerry; for he was flying low and toward them.

But he went lower and nearer and directly at that patrol. Gerry could see that they were working nearer the road, with plenty of time to intercept that procession from Mirevaux; and, though he gave those German guns a perfect target for a few seconds, he dove down upon the patrol. They were Jaegers, he thought, as he began to machine-gun them—the sort whom the Germans liked to put in their advance parties and who had made their first record in Belgium. Gerry thought of those Jaegers, with the blood fury of battle hot on them, intercepting that blue-eyed girl; and when he had overflowed them, he swung back and gave it to them again.

One of the machine guns which had been firing at him from the ground or some of the shrapnel from the German 77s had got him, now; for his ship was drooping on the left; the wings had lost their lift. When he had overflowed the patrol the second time and tried to turn back, he could not get around; his controls failed. The best he could do was to half pull up into the wind and, picking a fairly flat place below, to come down crashing that drooping left wing, crashing the undercarriage, crashing struts and spars and tangling himself in wires and bracing cables but missing, somehow, being hurled upon the engine. He was alive and not very much hurt, though enmeshed helplessly in the maze of the wreck; and the German gunners of the 77s either guessed he might be alive or it was their habit to make sure of every allied airplane which crashed within range, for a shell smashed thirty yards up the slope beyond him.

Gerry, unable to extricate himself, crouched below the engine and the sheathing of the fuselage; a second shell

smashed closer; a third followed. Gerry felt blood flowing inside his clothes and he knew that he had been hit. But now the German gunner was satisfied or had other targets for his shells; at any rate, the shells ceased. Gerry was about a mile away from the gun, he figured; he had flown perhaps half a mile beyond the Jaeger patrols when he came down. The road, upon which he had seen the travel, ran just on the other side of a slope upon which he lay; he could see a stretch of it before it passed behind the rise of ground and he noticed a black motor car—possibly the same which he had seen from overhead a few minutes before—drive toward him. He saw the car halt and a khaki-clad figure get down from the driver's seat; it was a skirted figure and small beside the car; it was a girl!

The German gunner, who had been giving Gerry attention, also saw the car; and, evidently, he had the range of that visible stretch of the road. A shell smashed close; and Gerry saw the girl leap back to her seat and run the car on while a second shell followed it. The rise hid the car from Gerry and, also, from the German gunners, for again the shelling shifted.

The next shell smashed on the other side of the slope where the road again came into sight; the car had not yet reached that part of the road, so Gerry knew that the German artillerymen were merely "registering" the road to be ready when the car should run into the open. But the car did not appear; instead, the girl crept about the side of the slope and advanced toward Gerry. She had lost her hat and the sun glowed and glinted upon glorious yellow hair. The pointer of the 77 did not see her or he

disregarded her while he waited for the car to appear on the registered stretch of the road; but a machine gunner with the Jaegers got sight and opened upon the slope. Gerry could see the spurt of the bullets in the dry dust of the planted field; the girl instantly recognized she was fired at and she sprang sidewise and came forward.

“Go back!” Gerry called. “Keep away!”

She stumbled and rolled and Gerry gasped, sure that she was hit; but she regained her feet instantly and, crouching, ran in behind him. Her hands — those slender, soft but strong little hands which he had first touched in Mrs. Corliss’ conservatory weeks ago — grasped him and held him.

“Keep down,” Gerry begged of her. “Keep down behind the engine!”

“You!” she murmured to him. “I thought when I saw you in the air and when you fought them so, that it might be you! Where are you hurt; oh, how much?”

“Not much; I don’t know where, exactly. Keep down behind the engine, Cynthia!”

She was not hurt at all, he saw; and though the tangle of wires enmeshed his legs, he was able to turn about and seize her and press her down lower. For the machine gunner was spraying the wreck of the airplane now. She was working with her strong little hands, trying to untwist and unloop the wires to get him free when Gerry heard the motor noises of an airplane, descending. He gazed up and saw a German machine swooping a thousand feet above the ground. The pilot passed over them and, diving, came back five hundred feet lower; he took another look, circled and returned barely a hundred yards

up. This time he would fire, Gerry knew; and it was impossible to find shield at the same time against the flying machine gun and the gun of the Jaegers. Gerry dragged his automatic from his holster and aimed, not with any hope of hitting the German machine, but merely to fire back when fired upon. But he could not twist himself far enough.

"Give me the pistol," he heard Cynthia say; and, as the German flyer came upon them with his machine gun jetting, he let her hand take the pistol; and while he lay enmeshed, helpless, he heard her firing.

The machine-gun bullets from above splattered past them; the pilot had overflowed. The girl had emptied the magazine of Gerry's pistol and she demanded of him more cartridges. He took his pistol; reloaded it and now, when she reclaimed it, she crouched beside him and shot through a wooden strut and the wires which had been locking his legs in the wreckage. He pulled himself free.

"Now let's get out of here!" he bid.

"You're all right?" she asked.

He was testing his legs. "All right," he assured.

The Jaeger machine gunner had interrupted his fire; and the airplane, which had attacked, was far away at this moment.

"I heard you were about here, Cynthia," Gerry said. "That's why—when I had the chance—I came this way."

She made no reply as she watched the road to the rear upon which the refugees were appearing. A shell burst before them.

"I have to go to them!" Ruth cried.

“They’ll scatter; see; they’re doing it!” Gerry said, as the French ran separately through the fields till the rise of ground guarded them. “But we’d better skip now!”

He had removed his maps from his machine; warning her, he lit a match and ignited the wreckage. The flame, bursting from the gasoline, fed upon the varnished wing fabric, clouding up dense and heavy smoke which drifted with the breeze and screened them as they arose and, crouching, ran. The German machine gunner evidently looked upon the fire as the result of his shots and suspected no flight behind the smoke. The flyer, who had attacked, likewise seemed to see the fire as the result of his bullets. He turned away to other targets.

Gerry got Ruth, unhurt, to the crest of the slope; they slipped over it and for the moment were safe. The car which Ruth had driven stood in the road.

## CHAPTER XII

“HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN?”

**T**HE French peasants, who had been fired upon and had gained the protection of the slope, gathered about them.

“Beyond, also, the road is open to fire,” Gerry informed them in French; and he directed them to proceed in little groups and by the fields away from the road.

“Monsieur le Lieutenant is wounded,” an old man observed solicitously.

“Barely at all,” Gerry denied; but swayed as he said so.

“Your car must go by the road,” Gerry said to Ruth. “You go with them in the fields; I will take it on for a bit.”

He meant to relieve her for the run over the exposed stretch. He tried to step up to the driver’s seat; but his leg would not bear his weight and he fell backward and would have gone to the ground had Ruth not caught him.

“That’s simply a knee twist from being bent under my ship,” he asserted. “That shrap hardly scratched me,” he referred to the red spot on his side where her fingers were feeling.

“Help me lift Monsieur le Lieutenant,” Ruth bid the old peasant. Gerry tried again to climb alone; but his leg had quite given away. As they lifted, he pulled himself into the seat and took the wheel.

“You need both feet for the pedals,” Ruth reminded him, simply; and he moved over without further protest and let her drive. The car was a covered Ford truck and Gerry, gazing back, saw an old French woman, a child, and two men, who had been injured, lying upon the bedding over the floor. The car was coming to the section of road which the German gunner had registered and Gerry turned about and watched Ruth while she drove.

He had never seen her doing anything like this before; and the sight of her small, white hands, so steady and firm on the wheel, her little, slender, booted feet upon the pedals sent a thrill tingling through him. He was a little dizzy for a moment and he closed his eyes, clutching to the side of his seat. A shell smashed twenty yards before them; parts of it hit the car. The shock of it startled Gerry up; but the girl beside him was not hit nor frightened. Swiftly she swerved the car to dodge the hole in the road where the gravel was still slipping and settling; the next shell was behind and while they fled now, the shells all were behind and farther and farther back till they ceased.

Ruth halted her car and waited for her charges to gather on the road; all of them appeared; none of them had been hurt. The damage done by the German fire totaled a front wheel much bent and the radiator ruined.

“We’ll have to run hot,” Ruth said. “We can get on, if we go slowly.”

Gerry attempted to get down to walk; but his twisted left knee would not bear him at all. His idea had been to return at once, somehow, to the battle, as soon as this girl who had come to him was in some sort of safety.

He had planned wildly, to attempt to join the English fighting to the south of Mirevaux. He couldn't do that now; but, with strength enough in his leg to move a rudder bar, he could fly and fight again as soon as he could procure another “ship.” The only way he could reach the rear and another airplane was to continue with these refugees and with this girl.

It was strange that when he had been fighting and had been far from her, he had felt more strongly about her than he did now—more about her as a girl, that was, in relation to him as a man. He was close beside her with her body swaying against his when the car careened in the pits and ruts of the road. He kept observing her—the play of color in her smooth skin in the flush of her excitement, the steady, blue eyes alert upon the road, her full, red little lips pressing tight together after speaking with him and drawing tiny lines of strain at the corners of her mouth. He noticed pretty things about her which he had not before—the trimness of her ankles even under her heavy boots, the ease with which that slender, well-formed little body exerted its strength, the way her hair at her temples went into ringlets when effort and anxiety moistened her forehead. But he noticed these as though to remember them later; his thought seemed to store them and save them for feeling at another time; he was almost aware of going through an experience with her which could affect him, fully, only afterwards. In the same manner that subconsciously he had thought about her when all his conscious thought was absorbed in flying and fighting, now his eyes only observed her; his soul was blent in the battle.

He and she, and the rest, were going back—back, kilometer after kilometer and yet encountering no strong force of English or French in position to hold that land; and he knew that if that depth of front was being abandoned as far away to the right and as far away to the left as he could see, resistance must have broken down over a much greater front. Indeed, Gerry had himself observed from his airplane something of the length of the line where the allies were retreating; but he had not been able, when in the air, and passing in a few seconds over a kilometer, to feel the disaster as now he felt it in the swaying seat of the half-wrecked truck creeping along at the head of a column of refugees. This land which the Germans were again overrunning in a day was the strip which the English had freed the year before only through the long, murderous months of the “blood baths” of the Somme.

“Do you remember an English officer on the *Ribot*,” Ruth was asking of him, “whom I called ‘1582?’”

“He’s about here?” Gerry inquired.

“No; but several of his sort are—one particularly, a Lieutenant Haddon-Staples; I called him, to myself, ‘1583.’”

“What do you think of his sort now?” Gerry asked, confidently.

Ruth’s eyes filled suddenly so that she had to raise a hand from the driving-wheel to dash away the wetness which blurred the road.

“They’re the most wonderful sportsmen in the world!” Ruth said. “They don’t care about odds against them; or at least they don’t complain. Oh, that’s not the word;

complaint is about as far from their attitude as anything you can think of.”

“I know,” Gerry said.

“They don’t even—criticize. They just accept the odds, whatever they are; and go in with all of themselves as though they had a chance to hold and win and come out alive! They know they haven’t; but you’d never guess it from them; and there’s none of that ‘We who are about to die salute you’ idea in them either. They’re sportsmen and gentlemen!”

“I know how they make you feel,” Gerry said, watching her keenly again; the road thereabouts was bad and she couldn’t even glance around to him. “Rather, you know now how they made me feel, I think.”

She made no reply; so he went on. “If they’d say things out to us; if they had criticized us and damned us and told us we were lying down behind them, it wouldn’t be so rotten hard to see them. But they don’t. They just go in as you say; they feel they’ve a fight on which is their fight and they’re going to fight it whether anyone else thinks it worth while to fight it or not or whether they have any chance for winning.”

Ruth winked swiftly again to clear her eyes; and Gerry, watching her, wondered what particular experience his general praise had called up. He did not ask; but she told him.

“‘1583’ was just that sort of man, Gerry,” she said, using his name for the first time as simply as he had spoken hers when she had crouched behind the shield of his engine with him.

“He’s killed?” Gerry asked.

"I don't know; but it's certain—yes, he's killed," she replied.

"You—cared for him, Cynthia?"

"He was about here—I mean about Mirevaux—as long as I've been. That was only two weeks—'a fortnight,' as he'd say in his funny, English way—but now it seems——"

"I know," Gerry said.

"He was with his battalion which was lying in reserve. He and some of the others didn't have a lot to do evenings so they'd drop in pretty often at the cottage Mrs. Mayhew and I had where there was one of those little, portable organs with three octaves and we'd play their songs sometimes and ours—like *Good King Wenceslaus* and *Clementine*."

"Did you play?" Gerry interrupted.

"Sometimes; and sometimes he would; and we'd all sing,

*In the cabin, in the cañon,  
Excavating for a mine;  
Dwelt a miner, forty-niner—*

All the English liked that sort best with *Wait for the Wagon*, you know."

"Yes."

It was a minute or two before she continued; she was speaking of evenings none of them older than two weeks and one of them only the night before last; but they formed part of an experience irrevocable now and of an epoch past.

"They knew pretty well what was going to happen to

them—that they would have to be thrown in some day without a chance. But they talked about coming to America after the war—the mining camps of Nevada and California, the Grand Cañon, Niagara Falls, and Mammoth Cave appealed to them, particularly. I asked ‘1583’ once—I knew him best,” Ruth said; and when she repeated the nickname for him it was with the wistful fondness with which only such a name may be said, “if he didn’t want to go back home to England and Suffolkshire after the war. He said, ‘I’m eager to stay a bit with the pater and the mater, naturally.’” She was imitating his voice; and Gerry saw that it made her cry; but she went on. “‘But I can’t stay there, you know.’”

“I asked, why.

“‘My friends,’ he said. ‘I’ve not one now. You fancy you’re attached to a place; but you find, you know, you’ve cared for more than that.’ Then he changed the subject the way the English always do when you come to something they feel. He was with me the evening this battle began; and he knew what was coming. I didn’t see him again till this morning—early this morning,” she repeated as though unable to believe the shortness of the time. “He rode over to warn us; and then, a little later when I was getting my first party of people out of Mirevaux, I passed him with some more men just like him going to the firing. He knew he was going to be killed for he’d told us the Germans had broken through; and we couldn’t hold them. But he wasn’t thinking about that when he saw me. He just watched me as I was working to get my people in order and, as he rode past, he called out, ‘Good old America!’ That to me—one girl getting

peasants out of a village while he and his handful of soldiers were going—there!” Ruth gestured back toward the battle. “Oh, I wanted to be a million men for him—for them! ‘Good old America!’ he said. I saw him, or men whom I think he was with, holding a hill a couple of miles east an hour later; they were one to ten or one to twenty; I don’t know what the odds were against them; but they stayed on top of that hill. I tell you I saw them—stay on top of that hill.”

“I know,” Gerry said. “I’ve seen them stay on top of a hill. I know how it is to want to be, for them, a million men!”

Ruth’s hands on the steering-wheel went bloodless from pressure. “Our million is coming; thank God, it’s coming! And I believe—I must believe that somehow it still is right and best that we couldn’t come before.” She gazed back over the land where the Germans were advancing; and where the English soldiers were “staying.”

“How could this happen, this break-through?” she asked. “It wasn’t just superior numbers; they’ve had that and, at other times, we’ve had superiority before; but no one ever advanced like this.”

“They showed an entirely new attack,” Gerry said. “New infantry formation; new arms—in infantry cannon; then there was the mist. And our intelligence people must have fallen down, too, while theirs gave them everything they wanted. We didn’t know at all what they were going to do, but they must have known everything about our strength, or lack of strength, here.”

He saw her hands whiten again with their grasp of the

wheel and the little lines deepen under her tight-drawn lips. She had stiffened as though he had accused her; and while he was wondering why, she glanced up at him.

“Then part of this —” her gaze had gone again to the fields being abandoned — “is my fault, Gerry.”

That was all she said; but instantly he thought of her accusation of De Trevenac and what she had told him in the little parlor on the Rue des Saints Pères; and he was so certain that she was thinking of it also that he asked:

“You mean you didn’t tell me all you knew about De Trevenac?”

“No; I told you everything I knew! Oh, I wouldn’t have held back any of that. I mean, I haven’t done all I might; you see, I never imagined anything like this could happen.”

“What might you have done, Cynthia?” he asked. He had said to her that time in the parlor on the Rue des Saints Pères that she had come to do more than mere relief work; but he had not consistently thought of her as engaged in that more daring work against which he had warned her.

“I got so wrapt up in the work at Mirevaux,” she said, avoiding direct answer. “I thought it was all right to let myself just do that for a while.”

“Whereas?” he challenged.

She leaned forward and turned the ignition switch, stopping the motor which had been laboring and grinding grievously. “It must cool off,” she said, leaping down upon the ground. She went about to the back of the truck and Gerry heard her speaking in French to the passengers behind him.

“Grand’mère Bergues,” she said when she returned beside Gerry, “lost for a moment her twig of the tree. I had to find it for her.”

“Her twig of what tree?” Gerry asked.

“I forgot you didn’t know,” and Ruth told him of Grand’mère Bergues’ tree. “When I convinced her at last,” Ruth added, “that the Boche had broken through and were coming again, she had a stroke; but even so she would not let us carry her until I had brought her a twig of the tree—a twig which was green, and budding, and had sap, though last year the Boche called that tree destroyed. That now must be her triumph.”

Ruth restarted the motor and, when they proceeded, Gerry sat without inquiring again of what dangerous, indefinite business this girl was going to do. While he watched her driving, a queer, pulling sensation pulsed in his breast; it associated itself with a vision of a young Englishman, who now undoubtedly was dead, standing behind this girl while she played a little organ with three octaves and they all sang. This was not jealousy, exactly; it was simply recognition of a sort of fellowship which she could share which he would have liked to have discovered himself. It suggested not something more than he had had with Agnes Ertyle; but something quite different and which he liked. He tried to imagine Agnes playing, and singing *Clementine*, and *Wait for the Wagon*; and—he couldn’t. He tried to imagine her crying because someone had called to her, “Good old England”; and he couldn’t. Agnes cried over some things—children who were brought to her and badly wounded boys who died. But Agnes could have told him

all that Cynthia had without any emotion at all. Agnes would have told it quite differently, of course.

They were coming in sight of a flying field. “Let me off here, please,” Gerry asked when they were opposite it.

When Ruth stopped the car Gerry called for one of the old Frenchmen to give him a shoulder and he stepped down. “You don’t need much leg muscle to fly,” he assured Ruth when she observed him anxiously. “If I can’t steal a ship over there, at least they’ll take care of me.” He hesitated, looking up at her, unable simply to thank her for what she had done.

“Where are you going?” he asked. During their drive they had discussed various destinations for their party; but could decide upon none. The final halting place must depend upon the military situation, and nothing was more unsettled than that. But Gerry was not referring now to the halting place of the whole party; he knew that during the last minutes she had formed determinations which would take her as soon as possible to her other tasks; and she accepted that in her answer.

“I’m going to Montdidier—unless it seems better to make for Amiens; then to Paris as soon as I can.”

“I see.” He gazed away and up in the air where machines with the tri-color circle of the allies were flying; and hastily he offered Ruth his hand. “Good-bye, Cynthia,” he said.

“Good-bye, Gerry.”

“Cynthia, when you’re in Paris you’ll stay there?”

“I don’t know.”

“If you do, where’ll you be?”

“Milicent’s kept our room in the *pension* on the Rue des Saints Pères. I’ll be with her again, I think.”

“All right! Look out for yourself!”

“You try to, too!”

She kept the car standing a few seconds longer watching him while, with his arm about the old man’s shoulder, he hobbled toward the flying field. Several minutes later, when she was far down the road, she gazed back, and saw a combat biplane rise from the field with what seemed to be particular impatience, and she imagined that he was piloting that machine. She had passed now from the zone of the broken front, where all the effort was to throw men—any number and any sort of men—across the path of the victorious German advance to the region of retreat, where every sinew and every sense was strained in the attempt to get men, and guns, and supplies out of the area of envelopment by the enemy. And dreadful and appalling as it had been to witness men—too few men and unsupported—moving forward to immolate themselves in hopeless effort to stay that German advance, yet it had not been so terrible to Ruth as this sight and sound of retreat. For the sound—the beat of feet upon the road, the ceaseless tramp of retreating men, the rumble of guns and combat trains going back, then the beat, beat, beat of the retreat—continued into the darkness, when Ruth no longer could see the road from the little house where she rested. All through the night it continued till it seemed to Ruth, not something human, but a cataclysm of nature flowing before a more mighty catastrophe which no one and nothing could stop.

Whenever she awoke she heard it; and through the dreams which harassed the heavy periods of her stupor of exhaustion which served that night for sleep, that beat of the feet throbbed and throbbed.

Ruth reached Montdidier at noon of the next day. It was at Montdidier, accordingly, that she first learned the true magnitude of the disaster and first heard openly spoken what had been said only in part before; and that was that the fate of France and of the allied cause depended now upon the Americans. If they could not quickly arrive in great force and if, having arrived, they proved unable to fight on even terms with the Germans, all was lost. France would not yet give up, in any case; England would hold on; but, without America, they were beaten.

And during that day, and through the next, and the next, while Ruth was unable to leave Montdidier, the disaster grew until it was known that the British Fifth Army, as an organized force, had ceased to exist and the Germans, in this single great stroke, had advanced thirty-five miles and claimed the capture of thirteen hundred guns and ninety thousand men.

On Monday, as the Germans yet advanced and moved on Montdidier, Ruth was in a column of refugees again; she was obliged to abandon her determined task for the duty of the moment offered to her hands. She got to Compiègne and there was delayed. Roye, Noyon, Montdidier all now were taken; and the wounded from that southern flank of the salient which thrust west toward Amiens were coming back upon Compiègne; and no man yet could say that the disaster was halted.

But Foch had come to the command.

Ruth had tried to learn from men who had returned from the region where she had left Gerry Hull, what his fate might have been. She knew that he had been flying and fighting again, for she read in one of the bulletins which was being issued, that he had been cited in the orders of the day for Monday; but she learned nothing at all about him after that until the day after the announcement that all allied armies were to be under the supreme command of General Foch. It was Friday, eight days after that first Thursday morning of mist, and surprise, and catastrophe; and still the Germans fought their way forward; but for two days now the French had arrived, and were present in force from Noyon to Moreuil, and for two days the gap between the British and the French, which the German break-through had opened, had been closed.

Gerry upon that day was detailed with a squadron whose airdrome had been moved beyond Ribecourt; he had been flying daily, and had fought an engagement that morning, and after returning from his afternoon reconnaissance over Noyon he had been ordered to rest, as the situation was becoming sufficiently stabilized to end the long strain of his too constant flights. Accordingly, he left late in the afternoon for Compiègne to look for the field hospital where Agnes Ertyle would be at work. The original site of her tents had been far within the zone which the Germans had retaken; and Gerry had heard that she had done wonders during the moving of the wounded.

He found her on duty, as he knew she would be; she

was a trifle thinner than before, perhaps; her cool, firm hand clasped his just a bit tensely; her calm, observant eyes were slightly brighter; but she was in complete control of herself, as she always was, quite unconfused—even when two nurses came at the same time for emergency directions—and quite efficient.

After a while she was able to give him a little time alone; and they sat in a tent and talked. Gerry had not seen her or heard from her since the beginning of the battle, and he found her almost overwhelmed with the completeness of the British defeat and the destruction of the Fifth Army. She herself knew and her father, who was dead, had been a close friend of the commanding officers who were held responsible for the disaster; and together with the shock of the defeat, went sympathy for them. They were being removed; and even the English commander-in-chief no longer had supreme command of his own men.

“It’s the greatest thing the allies have yet done—one command,” Gerry said. “We ought to have had it long ago; if we had, the Boche never would have done what they just have. When you had your own army and your own command, and the French had theirs, you each kept your own reserve; and, of course, Ludendorf knew it. Haig expected an attack upon his part of the front, so he had to keep his reserve to himself on his part of the line to be ready for it; the French looked for an attack on their sectors, so they kept their reserves to themselves; so wherever Ludendorf struck with all his reserves, he knew he’d meet only half of ours and that it would take five days—as it did—for the other half to come up.

Now one commander-in-chief, like Foch, can stop all that."

"I can believe it was necessary and, therefore, best," Lady Agnes said. "Yet I can't stop being sorry—not merely for our general officers, but for our men, too. Poor chaps who come to me; they've fought so finely for England; and now the Boche are boasting they've whipped them and beaten England. They everyone of them are so eager to get well, and go back, and have at them again, and rather show the Boche that they've not—rather show them that England will have them! Now we'll not be under our own command; yet we'll be fighting just the same for England; the Boche shall find that England will have them!"

"You'll have them!" Gerry assured. "And far quicker than you could have before."

Lady Agnes observed him, a little puzzled. "You used to say 'we' when you spoke of us," she said gently.

Gerry flushed. "I was in your army then," he replied.

"You're fighting with us now—wonderfully, Gerry."

"Yes; but technically you see, Agnes, I'm with my own forces."

He said "my own" with a tone of distinction which surprised himself. His own forces, except for a few comrade pilots, and for those engineers who had grabbed rifles, and got into this battle, and except for those girls—those "awfully good" girls of Picardy—still were only in training in France or holding down quiet sectors in Lorraine. But Gerry had been in one of those sectors which had not been so noted for its tranquillity after "his own" forces had arrived.

However, he was not thinking of those forces just then; he was recalling an American girl who had come to him across open ground in the sunlight and under machine-gun fire. For a moment he visualized her as she stumbled and rolled forward, when he thought she was hit; then he saw her close beside him with the sun on her glorious hair and her eyes all anxious for him. Words of hers came to him when Lady Agnes was speaking again her regret that the English could not have kept their own command.

“Oh, I don’t know how to say it!” that American girl’s words repeated themselves to Gerry; she was in a yellow dress now, with bare arms and neck, and quite warm and flushed with her intentness to explain to him something he could not understand at all. “But at first France was fighting as France and for France against Germany; and England, for England, was doing the same. And America couldn’t do that — I mean fight for America. She couldn’t join with allies who were fighting for themselves, or even for each other. The side of the allies had to become more than that before we could go in; and it is and we’re in!”

Gerry was understanding that better, now. This unification of the command, and the yielding of the British was their greatest earnest of that change which Cynthia Gail had felt before, and gloried in, and which Agnes Ertyle accepted but yet deplored.

More wounded came streaming back from the battle and Lady Agnes returned to duty immediately. “That Miss Gail, who was on the *Ribot* with us, was in Compiègne the other day,” Agnes told him when he was say-

ing good-bye. "She's doing marvels in sorting out refugees, I hear."

Gerry had been wondering often during the last days about what might have happened to Cynthia; and he had inquired of several people. But he had not thought that Lady Agnes might know.

"She was working at a relief headquarters on Rue Solférino, near the Place de l'Hôtel de Ville."

Gerry wandered into Compiègne, finding the Rue Solférino, which was the main street of the city, more crowded and congested than ever before. From the throng before the doors, Gerry quickly located the quarters near the Hôtel de Ville where Cynthia Gail had been working and, forcing a way in, he spied a yellow head bent over a little boy and he heard a gentle, sweet voice speaking, in newly learned French, interrogations about where the child last had seen his mother, whether he had aunt or uncle and so on. Gerry went farther in and made himself known; and when the girl looked up and saw him, an older American woman—Mrs. Mayhew—looked up, and she observed not only Gerry but the girl also.

"Hello," Ruth said. It was a poor word to encompass all she was feeling at that moment, which was, first, joy and relief that he was safe; next, that he had come there to seek her. But the word did, as it many, many times had done before; and he used the same to encompass what he felt. "Have you had anything to eat tonight?" he added after his greeting. He suspected not.

"I'll have supper later, thanks," Ruth said.

“You will not,” Mrs. Mayhew put in. “You can come back after supper, if you must; but you go out now. Take her with you, Gerry.”

Which was a command which Gerry obeyed. So they sat together at a little table in a café, much crowded, and very noisy, and where they supped in haste; for there was a great multitude to be served. But they were very light-hearted.

“You’ve heard the great news about our army?” Ruth asked.

“That we’re going to be under the command of General Foch like the English?”

“Better than that,” Ruth said. “General Pershing has offered all our forces to the French to use in any way they wish. He’s offered to break up our brigades, or even our regiments and companies, and let the French and English brigade our regiments with them, or take our men as individuals into their ranks, or use us any way they want, which will help to win. They’re not to think about us — our pride — at all. They’re just to take us — in any way to help.”

“No,” said Gerry. “I hadn’t heard that.”

“It’s just announced,” Ruth told him. “I’d just heard. He did it under the instructions and with the approval of our government. I think — I think it’s the finest, most unselfish offer a nation ever made! All we have in any way that’s best for the cause!”

Gerry sat back while hot rills of prickling blood tingled to his temples. “I think so, too, Cynthia,” he said. And again that evening words of hers, spoken long ago, seized him. “Oh, I don’t know how or when it will appear;

but I know that before long you will be prouder to be an American than you ever dreamed you could be!"

Part of that pride was coming to him, then, incredible as it would have seemed to him even a few days ago, when in the midst of disaster unparalleled and due to the tardiness of his country. For, though his country had not come in till so late, now it was offering itself in a spirit unknown in national relations before.

When they had finished their supper, he brought her back to her work and himself returned to his airdrome. The next day Ruth found a chance to journey to Paris.

For information—accurate, dependable word of German intentions and German preparations for the next attack—was the paramount essential now. This first assault at last was stopped; but only after tremendous catastrophe; and the Germans still possessed superiority in physical strength as great as before. And they owned, even more than before, confidence in themselves, while the allies' at least had been shaken. The Germans kept also, undoubtedly, the same powers of secrecy which had enabled them to launch their tremendous onslaught as a surprise to the allies, while they themselves accurately had reckoned the allied strength and dispositions.

Ruth did not hope, by herself, to change all that. The wild dreams of the girl who had taken up the bold enterprise offered her in Chicago, had become tempered by experience, which let her know the limits within which one person might work in this war; but the probability that she would be unable to do greatly only increased her will to do whatever she could.

Thus she returned to Paris to endeavor to encounter

again the enemy agents who would send her through Switzerland into Germany. As she knew nothing of them, she must depend upon their seeking her; so she went at once to her old room in the *pension* upon the Rue des Saints Pères. Arriving late in the afternoon, she found Milicent home from work—a Milicent who put arms about her and cried over her in relief that she was safe. Then Milicent brought her a cablegram.

“This came while you were gone, dear. I opened it and tried to forward it to you.”

Ruth went white and her heart halted with fear. Had something happened at home—to her mother or to her sisters?

“What is it?”

“Your brother’s badly wounded. He’s here in a hospital, Cynthia!”

“My brother!” Ruth cried. It had come to her as Cynthia Gail, of course. She had thought, when nearing the *pension*, that probably she would find an accumulation of mail to which, as Cynthia, she must reply. But she had been Cynthia so long now that she had almost ceased to fear an emergency. Her brother, of course, was Charles Gail, who had quarreled with his father and of whom nothing had been heard for four years.

Ruth took the message and learned that Charles had been with the Canadians since the start of the war; he had enlisted under an assumed name; but when wounded and brought to Paris, he had given his real name and asked that his parents be informed. The information had reached them; so his father had cabled Cynthia to try to see Charles before he died.

"I told Lieutenant Byrne about it," Milicent said to Ruth.

"Lieutenant Byrne?"

"Why, yes; wasn't that right? He called here for you last week; and several times since. He said he was engaged to you; why— isn't he?"

"Yes, he was. That's all right," Ruth said.

"So he's been about to see your brother."

"How is he? Charles, I mean, of course."

"He was still living yesterday."

"Lieutenant Byrne is still here?"

"As far as I know, he is."

## CHAPTER XIII

### BYRNE ARRIVES

**R**UTH turned, without asking more, and went into the room which had been hers, and shut herself in alone. She dared not inquire anything further, or permit anything more to be asked of her; she dared not let Milicent see her until she had time to think.

Milicent and she long ago had given to one another those intimate confidences about their personal affairs which girls, who share the same rooms, usually exchange; but Ruth's confidences, of course, had detailed the family situation of Cynthia Gail. Accordingly, Ruth knew that Milicent had believed that the boy, whose picture was the third in the portfolio of Cynthia's family, which Ruth always had kept upon the dresser, was Ruth's brother. Milicent would believe, therefore, that it was this sudden discovery of her brother dying in a Paris hospital which had shocked Ruth into need for being alone just now.

Indeed, feeling for that boy, whose picture she had carried for so long, and about whom she had written so many times to his parents, and who was mentioned in some loving manner in almost everyone of those letters which Ruth had received from Decatur, had its part in the tumult of sensations oversweeping her. But dominant in that tumult was the knowledge that his discovery — and, even more certainly, the arrival of George Byrne —

meant extinction of Ruth as Cynthia Gail; meant annihilation of her projects and her plans; meant, perhaps, destruction of her even as Ruth Alden.

Ruth had not ceased to realize, during the tremendous events of these last weeks, that at any moment someone might appear to betray her; and she had kept some calculation of the probable consequence. When she had first embraced this wild enterprise, which fate had seemed to proffer, she had entered upon considerable risks; if caught, she would have the difficult burden of proof, when she was taking the enemy's money and using a passport supplied by the enemy and following—outwardly, at least—the enemy's instructions, that she was not actually acting for the enemy. But if she had been betrayed during the first days, it would have been possible to show how the true Cynthia Gail met her death and to show that she—Ruth Alden—could have had no hand in that. But now more than two months had passed since that day in Chicago when Ruth Alden took on her present identity—more than two months since the body of Cynthia Gail, still unrecognized, must have been cremated or laid away in some nameless grave. Therefore, the former possibility no longer existed.

Horror at her position, if she suddenly faced one of Cynthia Gail's family, sometimes startled Ruth up wide-awake in bed at night. She had not been able to think what to do in such case as that; her mind had simply balked before it; and every added week with its letters subscribed by those forged "Thias" to Cynthia's father, and those intimate endearments to Cynthia's mother, and those letters about love to George Byrne—well, every

day had made it more and more impossible to prepare for the sometime inevitable confession.

For confession to Cynthia's family must come if Ruth lived; but only—she prayed—after the war and after she had done such service that Cynthia's people could at least partially understand why she had tricked them. The best end of all, perhaps—and perhaps the most probable—was that Ruth should be killed; she would die, then, as Cynthia, and no one would challenge the dead. That was how Ruth dismissed the matter when the terror within clamored for answer. But she could not so dismiss it now.

Impulse seized her to flee and to hide. But, in the France of the war, she could not easily do that; nor could she slip off from Cynthia's identity and name without complete disaster. Anywhere she went—even if she desired to take lodgings in a different zone in Paris, or indeed if she was to dwell elsewhere in the same zone—she must present Cynthia's passport and continue as Cynthia. And other, and more conclusive reasons, controlled her.

Her sole justification for having become Cynthia Gail was her belief that she could go into Germany by aid of the German agents who would know her as Cynthia Gail. They could find her only if she went about Cynthia Gail's work and lived at the lodgings here.

Ruth was getting herself together during these moments of realization. She opened the bedroom door and called in Milicent.

Charles Gail had been gassed. Milicent had not seen him, but Lieutenant Byrne had visited him and repeated

to Milicent that he was not sure whether Charles knew him. Ruth scarcely could bear thought of visiting Charles Gail and pretending that she was Cynthia; but it was evident that he was so weak that he would suspect nothing.

The chance of George Byrne betraying her was greater. He had been in Paris, Milicent said, upon some special duty of indefinite duration. Every time he had called he had left messages with Milicent and had assumed that he might not be able to return to the Rue des Saints Pères.

"He was here the day we got the news that Mirevaux was taken," Milicent said. "We tried in every way to get word of you. He was almost crazy, dear. He loves you; don't you ever doubt that!"

Ruth made no reply, though Milicent waited, watching her.

"I didn't say anything to him about Gerry Hull, dear."

"I've written him about meeting Gerry," Ruth said, simply. "I'll start for the hospital now, Mil."

"You'll let me go with you, Cynthia?"

"Thanks; but it's not—I think I'd rather not."

Milicent gazed at her, a little surprised and hurt, but she made no further offer.

Ruth went out on the Rue des Saints Pères alone; a start of panic seized her as she gazed up and down the little street—panic that from a neighboring doorway, or about one of the corners, George Byrne might suddenly appear and speak to her.

The late spring afternoon was clear and warm; and that part of Paris was quiet, when from Ruth's right and ahead of her came the resound and the concussion of a heavy explosion. Ruth gazed up, instinctively, to find the

German airplane from which a torpedo might have dropped; but she saw only the faint, dragon-fly forms of the French sentinel machines which constantly stood guard over Paris. They circled and spun in and out monotonously, as usual, and undisturbed at their watch; and, with a start, Ruth suddenly remembered. From beyond the German lines in the forest of Saint Gobain, Paris was being bombarded by some new monster of Krupp's; the explosion where a haze of débris dust was hanging over the roofs a half mile or more away had been the burst of a shell from that gun. Since the start of the German assault the Germans had been sending these random shells to strike and kill at every half hour for several hours upon almost every day. So Paris had learned to recognize them; Paris had become accustomed to them; Parisians shrugged when they struck. But Ruth did not.

The studied brutality of that German gun, more than sixty miles away, dispatching its unaimed shells to do methodical, indiscriminate murder in the city, was the sort of thing Ruth needed at that moment to steady her to what lay before her. She was setting herself to this, as to the rest, to help stop forever deeds like the firing of that gun. She hastened on more resolutely; the gun fired again, its monstrous, random shell falling in quite another quarter. Presenting herself at the doors of the hospital, she ascertained that Sergeant Charles Gail, who had originally been enrolled in a Canadian battalion under another name, was still living. Consultation with a nurse evoked the further information that he was conscious at the present minute, but desperately weak; he had been asking many times for his friends or word of his people;

it was therefore permissible — indeed, it was desirable — that his sister see him.

Ruth followed the nurse between the long rows of beds where boys and men lay until the nurse halted beside a boy whose wide-open eyes gazed up, unmoving, at the ceiling; he was very thin and yellow, but his brows yet held some of the boldness, in the set of his chin was still some of the high spirit of defiance of the picture in the portfolio — the boy who had quarreled with his father four years ago and who had run away to the war.

“Here is your sister,” the nurse told him gently in French.

“My sister?” he repeated the French words while his eyes sought and found Ruth. A tinge of color came to his cheek; with an effort a hand lifted from the coverlet.

“Hello, Cynth,” he said. “They said — you were — here.”

Ruth bent and kissed his forehead. “All right, Cynth,” he murmured when she withdrew a little. “You can do that again.”

Ruth did it again and sat down beside him. His hand was in hers; and whenever she relaxed her tight grasp of it he stirred impatiently. He did not know she was not his sister. His eyes rested upon hers, but vacantly; he was too exhausted to observe critically; his sister had come, they said; and if she was not exactly as he remembered her, why he had not seen her for four years; a great deal had happened to her, and even more had happened to him. Her lips were soft and warm as his sister’s always had been; her hands were very gentle, and it was awfully good to have her there.

Ruth was full of joy that she had dared to come; for she was, to this boy, his sister.

“Tell me—about—home,” he begged her.

“I’ve brought all my letters,” she said; and opening them with one hand—for he would not have her lose grasp of him—she read the home news until the nurse returned and, nodding, let Ruth know she must go.

He could not follow in his mind the simple events related in the letters; but he liked to hear the sentences about home objects, and the names of the people he had loved, and who loved him.

“You’ll—come back—tomorrow, Cynth?” he pleaded.

Ruth promised and kissed him again and departed.

It was quite dark now on the streets with only the sound of the evening bustle. The long-range German gun had ceased firing; but the dim lights beside doorways proved that on this clear, still night the people of Paris realized the danger of air raids. Ruth was hurrying along, thinking of the boy she had left and of his comrades in the long rows of beds; from them her thoughts flew back to the battle, to “1583” and his English on the hill, to Grand’mère Bergues’ farm, and to Gerry Hull; she thought of the German soldiers she had seen with him and of her errand to their land. Almost before she realized it, she was turning into the little street of the Holy Fathers when a man, approaching out of the shadows, suddenly halted before her and cried out:

“Cynthia!”

The glow of light was behind him, so she could not make out his face; but she knew that only one stranger,

recognizing her as Cynthia, could have cried out to her like that; so she spoke his name instantly, instinctively, before she thought.

Her voice either was like Cynthia's or, in his rush of feeling, George Byrne did not notice a difference. He had come before her and was seizing her hands; his fingers, after their first grasp, moved up her arms. "Cynthia; my own Cynthia," he murmured her name. At first he had held her in the glow of the light the better to see her; but now he carried her back with him into the shadow; and his arms were around her; he was crushing her against him, kissing her lips, her cheeks, her lips again, her hands from which he stripped the gloves.

She strained to compress her repulse of him. He was not rough nor sensuous; he simply was possessing himself of her in full passion of love. If she were Cynthia, who loved this man, she would have clung in his embrace in the abandonment of joy. Ruth tried to think of that and control herself not to repel him; but she could not. Reflexes, beyond her obedience, opposed him.

Ever since Milicent had informed her that he was in Paris, Ruth had been forming plans for every contingency of their meeting; but this encounter had introduced elements different from any expectations. If this visit to the street of the Holy Fathers was to be his last one before leaving Paris, then perhaps she had better keep him out upon the street in the dark and play at being Cynthia until she could dismiss him. She must feel—or at least she must betray—no recoil of outrage at his taking her into his arms. He had had that right with Cynthia Gail. Though he and Cynthia had quarreled—and Ruth had

never mended that quarrel—yet Cynthia and he had loved. Too much had passed between them to put them finally apart. And now, as Ruth felt his arms enfolding her, his lips on hers, and his breath whispering to her his passionate love, she knew that Cynthia could not have forbidden this.

He took Ruth's struggle as meant to tempt his strength and he laughed joyously as, very gently, he overpowered her. She tried to cease to struggle; she tried to laugh as Cynthia would have laughed; but she could not. "Don't!" she found herself resisting. "Don't!"

"Oh! I hurt you, dearest?"

"Yes," she said; though he had not. And remorsefully and with anxious endearments, he let her go.

"You've heard about Charles?" he asked.

"I've just come from him."

"He's—the same?"

"Yes."

She stood gasping against the wall of a building, entirely in the shadow herself, with the little light which reached them showing her his face. Ruth liked that face; and she liked the girl whom she played at being—that Cynthia whose identity she was carrying on, but about whom she yet knew so little—for having loved this man. George Byrne had been clean-living; he was strong and eager, but gentle, too. He had high thoughts and resolute ideals. These he had told her in those letters which had come; but Ruth had not embodied them in him till now. She was recovering from the offense of having anyone's arms but Gerry's about her. She was not conscious of thinking of Gerry that way; only, his arms had been

about her, he had held her; and, because of that, what she had just undergone had been more difficult to bear.

"I love you; you love me, Cynthia?" Byrne was begging of her now.

"Of course I do," she said.

"There's not someone else, then? Tell me, Cynthia!"

"No—no one else," she breathed. What could she say? She was not speaking for herself; but for Cynthia; and now she was absolutely sure that, for Cynthia, there could have been no one else. But she could not deceive him.

"My God!" he gasped the realization to himself, drawing back a little farther from her. "Then that's—that's been the matter all the time."

"All what time?" she asked.

"Since you met Gerry Hull in Chicago."

He meant, of course, since the girl who had loved him had died; but he did not know that. He had felt a change in the letters which had come to him which he could not explain as merely the result of their quarrel. Another man seemed to him the only possible explanation.

Someone opened a door behind them; and Ruth withdrew from the shaft of light. "We can't stay here, George," she said.

She thought that now he was noticing a difference in her voice; but if he did, evidently he put it down as only part of her alteration toward him.

"Where can we go?" he asked her.

"Not back to the *pension*," Ruth said.

"No; no! Can't you stay out with me here? We can walk."

“Yes.”

He faced down the street of the Holy Fathers away from the *pension*; she came beside him. He took her hand and for a moment held it as, undoubtedly, he and Cynthia had done when walking in darkened streets together; but after a few steps he released her.

“Your hand’s thinner, Cynthia.”

“I suppose so.”

“You’re a little thinner all over. I can’t see you well; but you felt that way,” he said a little sadly, referring to his embrace which she had broken. “You’ve been overdoing, of course.”

She made no reply; and for several seconds he offered nothing more but went on, gazing down at her. “You’ve been fine, Cynthia, in getting those people out.” He spoke of what he had heard of her work in the retreat. “I knew ten days ago you were in it; but I couldn’t go to you! I tried to; I tried to get into the fight. We all tried—our men; but they didn’t want us. Except Gerry Hull, of course, and a few like him.”

He said this so completely without bitterness—with envy, only—that Ruth felt more warmly for him. “It’s Gerry Hull, isn’t it, Cynthia?” he demanded directly.

“Yes,” she admitted now. Denial had become wholly impossible; moreover, by telling the truth—or that much of the truth which had to do with Gerry Hull—she might send George Byrne away. It was a cruel wrong to him, and to the girl who was dead; but the wrong already was done. Ruth merely was beginning herself to reap some of the fruits of her deception.

“You love him?” Byrne inquired of her inevasively.

“Yes.”

“He loves you?”

“I don’t know.”

“What’s he said to you?”

“Nothing—about loving me.”

“But he loves you, all right; he must, if he knows you!” Byrne returned in pitiful loyalty to his Cynthia. “How much has gone on between you?” he demanded.

Ruth related to him much about her meetings with Gerry, while they walked side by side about the Paris streets. A dozen times she was on the point of breaking down and telling him all the truth; when his hand reached toward hers, instinctively, and suddenly pulled away; when they passed a light and, venturing to gaze up, she saw his face as he looked down at her; when he asked her questions or offered short, hoarse interjections, she almost cried out to him that she was a fraud; the girl he had loved, and who she was saying had turned from him, was dead and had been dead all that time during which he had felt the difference; she had never met Gerry Hull at all.

“What are you stopping for?” he asked her at one of these times. “Thinking about the Sangamon River?”

That was the Illinois river which flowed close by Cynthia Gail’s home. And Ruth knew from his voice that by the river Cynthia and he first had known love.

“Yes,” Ruth said; but now her courage completely failed her.

“What did you say to me, then; oh, what did we both say, Cynthia?”

This was no test or challenge of Ruth; it was simply a cry from his heart.

*How do I love thee? Let me count the ways,  
I love thee to the depth and height . . . .*

He was starting to quote something which they used to repeat together.

“Go on, Cynthia!” he charged.

“I can’t,” Ruth cried.

“You can’t—after you found it and taught it to me? ‘*I love thee with the breath, smiles, tears, of all my life,*’” he quoted bitterly to her. “Let me look at you better, Cynthia!”

They were passing a light and he drew her closer to it.

“What has happened to you?” he whispered to her aghast when he had searched her through and through with his eyes. Then, “*Who are you?*”

He had made, he realized, some frightful mistake; how he could have come to make it, he did not know. “You’re not Cynthia Gail!” he cried. For an instant, that discovery was enough for him. The agony which he had been suffering this last half hour was not real; the girl whom he had found on the street never had been his; they had both been going about only in some grotesque error.

“No; I’m not Cynthia Gail,” Ruth told him.

“Then where is she?” he demanded. “Where is my Cynthia?” His hands were upon Ruth and he shook her a little in the passion of his demand. He could not even

begin to suspect the truth; but— from sight of her now— fear flicked him. If this girl was not Cynthia——

“How are you so like her?” he put his challenge aloud. “Why did you pretend to be her? Why? You tell me why!”

“I’ll tell you,” Ruth said. “But not here.”

“Where?”

“We must find some place where we can talk undisturbed; where we can have a long talk.”

“Take me to her, first. That’s all I care about. I don’t care about you—or why you did that. I don’t care, I say. Take me to Cynthia; or I’ll go there.”

He started away toward the Rue des Saints Pères and the *pension*; so Ruth swiftly caught his sleeve.

“You can’t go to her!” Ruth gasped to him. “She’s not there. Believe me, you can’t find her!”

“Why not?”

“She’s—we must find some place, Mr. Byrne!”

“She’s—what? Killed? Killed, you were going to say?”

“Yes; she’s been killed.”

“In Picardy, you mean? Where? How? Why, she was at her rooms two hours ago. Miss Wetherell told me; or was she lying to me?”

“I was at the rooms two hours ago,” Ruth said. “Miss Wetherell knows me as Cynthia Gail. I’ve been Cynthia Gail since January.”

“What do you mean? How?”

“Cynthia Gail died in January, Mr. Byrne.”

“What? How? Where?”

“She was killed—in Chicago.”

“That’s a lie! Why, I’ve been hearing from her myself.”

“You’ve been hearing from me. I’m Cynthia Gail, I tell you. I’ve been Cynthia Gail since January.”

He caught another glimpse of her face; and his impetuosity to start to the Rue des Saints Pères collapsed, pitifully. “Where shall we go?” he asked.

Ruth gazed about, uncertainly; she had not attended to their direction; and now she found herself in a strange, narrow street of tiny shops and apartments, interrupted a half square ahead by a chasm of ruins and strewn débris, where one of those random shells from the German long-range gun, or a bomb dropped from a night-raiding Gotha recently had struck. The destruction had been done sufficiently long ago, however, for the curiosity of the neighborhood to have been already satisfied and for all treasures to have been removed. The ruin was fenced off, therefore, and was unguarded. Ruth gazed into the shell of the building and Byrne, glancing in also, saw that in the rear were apartments half wrecked and deserted, but which offered sanctuary from the street.

## CHAPTER XIV

### FULL CONFESSION

“**N**O ONE will be likely to come in here,” Ruth said and stepped into the house.

Byrne followed her without comment, quite indifferent to their surroundings. When Ruth spoke to him again about the house, he replied vacantly; his mind was not here, but with Cynthia Gail, where he had last seen her in Chicago that Sunday night in January when they had parted. What had thereafter happened to her was the first matter to him.

Ruth, exploring the ruin, came upon a room which seemed to have been put in some sort of order, so far as she could see from the dim light which came through the doorway.

“Give me a match,” she asked Byrne; he took a match-box from his pocket and, striking a light, he held it while they peered about. There was a fixture protruding from the wall, but no light resulted when Ruth turned the switch. Byrne’s match went out; he struck several others before their search discovered a bit of a candle in an old sconce in a corner. Byrne lit it, and Ruth closed the door which led into what had been a hallway. She returned to Byrne, who had remained in the corner where the candle diffused its light. There was a built-in bench there beside an old fireplace, a couple of old chairs and a table.

"Let's sit down," Ruth said.

"You sit down," Byrne bid. "I'll —" he did not finish his sentence; but he remained standing, hands behind him, staring down at her as she seated herself upon the bench.

"Now," he said to her.

His lips pressed tight and Ruth could see that he jerked with short spasms of emotion which shuddered his shoulders suddenly together and shook his whole body.

Ruth had desired the light instinctively, with no conscious reason; the same instinct which made her need to see him before she could go on, probably affected him; but with him had been the idea that the light would banish the illusion which overswept him again and again that this girl still was his Cynthia. But the faint, flickering illumination from the candle had failed to do that; it seemed, on the contrary, at times to restore and strengthen the illusion. A better light might have served him more faithfully; and if he brought her close to the candle and scrutinized her again as he had under the light of the street, he would see surely that she was someone else. But here, Ruth realized, she was falling into the postures of the girl who was dead.

"Cynthia!" Byrne whispered again to her.

"What I know about Cynthia Gail," Ruth said to him gently then, "is this." And she told, almost without interruption from him, how Cynthia had met her death. Ruth did not explain how she had learned her facts; for a while the facts themselves were overwhelming enough. He made sure that he could learn nothing more from her before he challenged her as to how she knew.

“You read this in a newspaper, you said?”

“Yes; in all the Chicago newspapers,” Ruth replied. “I read the accounts in all to find out everything which was known about her.”

“Wait now! You said no one knew her; she was not identified.”

“No; she was not.”

“Then you saw her? You identified her?”

“No; I never saw her.”

“Then how do you know it was Cynthia? See here; what are you holding from me? How do you know she’s dead at all?”

“The Germans told me. The Germans said that she was the girl who was killed in that wreck.”

“The Germans? What Germans? What do you mean?”

“A German—I don’t know who—but some German identified her from her passport and took the passport.”

“Why? How do you know that? How did you get into her affairs, anyway?”

“Because I was like her,” Ruth said. “I happened to be so very like her that——”

“That what?” He was standing over her now, shaking, controlling himself by intervals of effort; and Ruth faltered, huddling back a little farther from him and gazing up at him aghast. She had determined, a few minutes earlier, that there had become no alternative for her but to confess to him the entire truth; but the truth which she had to tell had become an incredible thing, as the truth—the exact truth of the circumstances which fix fates—has a way of becoming.

Desperately her mind groped for a way to arrange the events of that truth in a way to make him believe; but each moment of delay only made her task more impossible. He had roused from the suspicion, which had begun to inflame him when they were yet on the street, to a certainty that the girl whom he loved had been foully dealt by.

“That what?” he demanded again.

So Ruth told him about herself, and the first meeting with Gerry Hull, and the pencil boxes, and the beggar on State Street. She did not proceed without interruptions now; he challenged and catechized her. If he had refused her whole story, it would not have been so bad; but he was believing part of it—the part which fitted his passions. He believed that the Germans had found the body of Cynthia Gail, and he believed more than that. He believed that they had killed her, and he cried out to Ruth to tell him when, and how. He believed that the Germans, having killed Cynthia, had tried to make use of her identity and her passport; and that they had succeeded! His hands were upon Ruth once more, holding her sternly and firmly.

“I put you under arrest,” he said to her hoarsely, “as accessory in the murder of Cynthia Gail and as a German spy.”

And yet, as he held her there before him in the dim light of the tallow wick in the sconce upon the wall, she seemed to him, for flashes of time, to be the girl he accused her of having killed.

“Cynthia; where are you?” he pleaded with her once as though, within Ruth, was the soul of his love whom

he could call to come out and take possession of this living form.

Then he had her under arrest again. "Come with me!" he commanded, and he thrust her toward the door. But now Ruth fought against him.

"No; we must stay here!"

"Why?"

"Till you will believe in me!"

"Then we'll never leave here. Will you come, or must I take you?"

"Leave me alone just a minute."

"So you can get away?"

"No; just you stay here. I'll go back there," Ruth tossed toward the corner where she had sat. "There's no way out. Only—let go of me!"

He did so, watching her suspiciously. She dropped into her seat in the corner under the candle. "I've told you why I did this," she said.

"And you didn't fool me."

"I've no proof of anything I've told you," Ruth went on, "only because, if you'll think about it, you'll see I couldn't carry proof."

"I should say not."

"But I've done something since I've been here which proves what I am."

"What? Helping refugees out of Picardy? What does that prove—except that you've nerve?"

"Nothing," Ruth admitted. "If I was a German agent, I might have done that. I wasn't thinking of that."

"What of, then?"

She was thinking about her exposure of De Trevenac; but, though now it was known that Louis de Trevenac had been proved a spy, had been tried and punished, no explanation had been given as to how he had been caught. Those who tried him had not known, perhaps; only Gerry knew.

“Gerry Hull will tell you,” Ruth replied. “I don’t ask you to take my word about myself anymore; I ask you only, before you accuse me, to send for him.”

“Gerry Hull!” Byrne iterated, approaching her closely again and gazing down hostilely. For an instant he had not been able to disassociate Gerry Hull from himself as a rival for Cynthia Gail. “So he knows all about you, does he?”

“No; he thinks I am Cynthia Gail; but——”

“What?”

“He knows—he must know that, whoever I am, I’m loyal! So send for him, or go and speak to him before you do anything more; that’s all I ask. Oh, I know this has been horrible for you, Mr. Byrne.” For the first time Ruth was losing control of herself. “But do you suppose it’s been easy for me? And do you suppose I’ve done it for myself or for any adventure to see the war or just to come here? I’ve done it to go into Germany! Oh, you won’t stop me now! For if you leave me alone—don’t you see—I may get into Germany tomorrow or this week or anyway before the next big attack can come! What do I count, what do you count, what can the memory of Cynthia Gail count in comparison with what I may do if I can go on into Germany? What——”

“Don’t cry!” Byrne forbade her hoarsely, seizing her

shoulder and shaking her almost roughly. "My God, Cynthia," he begged, "don't cry."

He had called her by that name again; and Ruth knew that, not her appeal, but her semblance in her emotion to Cynthia, had overcome him for the moment.

"I'm not going to cry," Ruth said. "But——"

He stopped her brusquely. He seemed afraid, indeed, to let her go on. "Whether I've got to bring you to the army authorities and give you over at once under arrest," he said coldly, "is up to you. If you agree to go with me quietly—and keep your agreement—I'll take you along myself."

"Where?" Ruth asked.

"I know some people, whom I can trust and who can take you in charge till I can talk to Hull. He's the only reference you care to give?"

"Yes," she said.

"If he stands for you, that won't mean anything to me, I might as well tell you," Byrne returned. "You've probably got him fooled; you could do it, all right, I guess."

"Then what's the use in your sending for him?"

"Oh; you think now there's none? It was your idea, not mine."

"I'll go with you quietly to your friends," Ruth decided, ending this argument. "I'll understand that you're going to communicate with Gerry Hull about me."

She arose and Byrne seized her arm firmly. He blew out the candle and, still clasping her, he groped his way to the door. Some one stepped in the rubbish on the other side. They had been conscious, during their stay

in the room, that many people had passed outside; once or twice, perhaps, a passer-by might have paused to gaze at the ruin; but Ruth had heard no one enter the house. Byrne had heard no one; for his grasp on Ruth's arm tightened with a start of surprise as he realized that the someone who now suddenly moved on the other side of the door must have come there moments before.

Byrne stepped back, drawing Ruth with him, and thrusting her a little behind him. The person on the other side of the door was a watchman, perhaps, or the owner of this house or a neighbor investigating to what use these ruined rooms were now being put. Byrne, thinking thus, spoke loudly in labored French, "I am an American officer, with a companion, who has looked in here."

"Very well," came in French and in a man's voice from the other side of the door. Byrne advanced to the door and opened it, therefore, and was going through when a bludgeon beat down upon him. Byrne reeled back, raising his left arm to shield off another blow; he tried to strike back with his left arm and grapple his assailant; but with his right, he still held to Ruth as though she would seize this chance to escape; and yet, at the same time, Ruth felt that he was protecting her with his body before hers.

"Let me go!" she jerked to be free. "I'll—help you!"

He did not mean to let her go when she struggled free; he was still trying to hold to her and also fight the man who was beating at him. But her getting free, let him close with his assailant and grapple with him. They spun about and went down, rolling over and over in the débris.

Ruth grabbed up a bit of iron pipe from among the wreckage on the floor; and she bent over trying to strike at the man with the bludgeon.

“Help!” she called out. “*Secours!*”

She knew now that the man who had waited outside was no mere defender of the house; the treachery and the violence of his attack could not be explained by concern for safety of that ruin. Ruth could not think who the man might be or what was his object except that he was fighting to kill, as he struck and fought with Byrne on the floor. And Byrne, knowing it, was fighting to kill him, too.

“*Secours!*” Ruth screamed for help again and with her bit of iron, she struck—whom, she did not know. But they rolled away and pounded each other only a few moments more before one overcome the other. One leaped up while the other lay on the floor; the one who had leaped up, crouched down and bludgeoned the other again; so that Ruth knew that Byrne was the one who lay still. She screamed out again for help while she flung herself at the man who was bending over. But he turned about and caught her arms and held her firmly. He bent his head to hers and whispered to her while he held her.

“*Weg!*” The whisper warned her. It was German, “Away!” And the rest that he said was in German. “I have him for you struck dead! Careful, now! Away to Switzerland!”

He dropped Ruth and fled; she went after him, breathless, trying to cry out; but her cries were weak and unheard. He ran through the rear of the house into a narrow alley down which he disappeared; she went to the

end of the alley, crying out. But the man was gone. She stopped running at last and ceased to call out. She stood, swaying so that she caught to a railing before a house to steady herself. The words of the whisper ran on her lips. "I have him for you struck dead!"

They gave her explanation of the attack which, like the words of De Trevenac to her, permitted only one possible meaning. The man who had waited in the ruined house must have been one of the German agents in Paris whom Ruth had returned to meet. Evidently, while Byrne had been inquiring for her, the Germans too had been vigilant; they had awaited her return either to get her report of what she had seen in Picardy or to assign her to another task or—she could not know why they awaited her; but certainly they had. One of them had learned that afternoon that she had returned; he was seeking her, perhaps, when Byrne found her. Perhaps he had known the peril to her from Byrne; perhaps he merely had learned, from whatever he had overheard of their talk in that ruined room, that Byrne accused her of being a German spy; and so he had taken his chance to strike, for her, Byrne dead.

The horror of this realization sickened her; the German murderer "for her" had made good his escape; and it would be useless to report him now. She would be able to offer no description of him; and to report that a large man, who was a German spy, had been about that part of Paris this evening would be idle. But she must return at once to Byrne who might not be dead. So she steadied herself and hastened down the street seeking the ruined house.

It was a part of Paris quite unfamiliar to her; and, as she had not observed where she and Byrne had wandered, she passed a square or two without better placing herself; and then, inquiring of a passer-by, where was a ruined house, she obtained directions which seemed to be correct; but arriving at the ruin, she found it was not the one which Byrne and she had entered. Consequently it was many minutes before she found the ruined house which gave her no doubt of its identity. For people were gathered about it; and Ruth, approaching these, learned that a monstrous attack had been made upon an American infantry officer who, when first found, was believed to have been killed; but the surgeon who had arrived and had removed him, said this was not so. Robbery, some said, had been the motive of the crime; for the officer had much money in his pocket; but the murderer had not time to remove it. Others, who claimed to have heard a girl's voice, believed there might have been more personal reasons; why had a man and a girl been in those rooms that night?

Ruth breathed her thankfulness that Byrne was not dead; and she withdrew. Since Byrne had been taken away, she could do nothing for him; and she would simply destroy herself by giving herself up to the authorities. If Byrne lived and regained consciousness, undoubtedly he would inform against her.

But though she would not give herself up, certainly she would not try to escape if Byrne accused her; she would return to her room and go about her work while she awaited consequences.

None followed her that night. She admitted to Militant, when questioned, that she had met Lieutenant Byrne

upon the street and they had walked together; Ruth said also that she had seen her brother. Milicent evidently ascribed her agitation to a quarrel with Byrne.

Ruth lay awake most of that night. The morning paper which Milicent and she read contained no mention, amid the tremendous news from the front, of the attack upon an American officer in a ruined house; and no consequences threatened Ruth that morning. She planned for a while to try to trace Byrne and learn whether he had regained consciousness; then she abandoned that purpose. She was satisfied, from one of those instincts which baffle question, that Byrne lived; and it would be only a question of time before he must accuse her.

Yet she might have time enough to leave Paris and France — to get away into Switzerland and into Germany. For the fact that a German had for her attempted to strike her accuser dead was final proof that the Germans had not connected her with the betrayal of De Trevenac; they believed that she had been in Picardy all this time on account of orders given her by De Trevenac.

It was possible, of course, that the German who had struck for her and whom she had pursued, would now himself suspect her. Yet her flight after him might have seemed to him only her ruse to escape. What he had last said to her, she must receive as her orders from the Germans in Paris. "Away to Switzerland!"

That concurred with the sentence of instruction given upon that page which she had received with her passport that cold January morning in Chicago. . . . "You will report in person, via Switzerland; apply for passport to Lucerne."

At this moment when, for the cause of her country and its allies, she had determined that she must make the attempt to go on to Germany, the Germans were ready to have her. And that was easy to understand; she had spent weeks going about freely behind the newly formed English and French lines which bagged back about the immense salient which the Germans had thrust toward Amiens; she was supposed, as a German, to have ready report about the strength of those lines as seen from the rear, of the strength of the support, the morale of soldiers and civilians and the thousand other details which the enemy desired to know.

So Ruth went early that morning to the United States Consul General with her passport which long ago had been substituted for that ruined passport of Cynthia Gail's; and she offered it for *visé*, asking permission to leave Paris and France for a visit to the neutral country of Switzerland, and, more particularly, to Lucerne. She stated that the object of her journey was rest and recuperation; she knew that, not infrequently in the recent months, American girls who had been working near the war zones had been permitted vacations in Switzerland; but she found that times were different now. She encountered no expressed suspicion and no discourtesy; she simply was informed that in the present crisis it was impossible to act immediately upon such requests. Her application would be filed and passed upon in due time; and a clerk questioned Ruth concerning the war service which she had rendered which was supposed to have so exhausted her that she desired rest in Switzerland.

Ruth, hot with shame, perforce related what she had

been through in the retreat. She was quite aware when she went away and returned to her work that her application for permission to go to Switzerland would be the most damning evidence against her, when Byrne should bring his accusation; and now, having made application, she could do nothing but wait where she was. However, she heard nothing from Byrne or from the authorities upon that day nor upon the succeeding days of the week during which she worked, as she had when she first came to Paris, in the offices of the relief society; upon almost every afternoon she visited Charles Gail who was slowly sinking.

After three days and then after a wait of three more, she revisited the consulate and inquired about her *permission* for Switzerland; but she got no satisfaction either time. But when at last the week wore out and she met no interference with her ordinary comings and goings, she was beginning to doubt her beliefs that George Byrne lived; he must have died, she thought, and without having been able to communicate his knowledge of her to anyone. Then one night she was returning to the Rue des Saints Pères a little later than usual; the mild, April afternoon had dimmed to twilight and, as she passed the point where George Byrne had encountered her, fears possessed her again; they lessened only to increase once more, as they now had formed a habit of doing, when she approached the *pension*.

“Letters for me, Fanchette?” she said to the daughter of her landlady who was at the door when Ruth came in.

“No letters, Mademoiselle; but Monsieur le Lieutenant!”

Ruth stopped stark. Many Messieurs les Lieutenants and men of other ranks called at the *pension* for Milicent or for Ruth, just for an evening's entertainment; but such did not appear at this hour.

"He is in the salon, Mademoiselle."

Ruth went in. If it was George Byrne, at least then he was alive and now strong again. The lamp in the little salon had been lit; and a tall, uniformed figure arose from beside it.

"Hello, Cynthia," a familiar voice greeted Gerry Hull's voice!

Ruth retreated a little and held to the door to support her in her relaxation of relief. A hundred times during this terrible week, Ruth had wanted to send for him.

"I'm so glad to see you, Gerry."

"That's good." His tall, lithe self was beside her; his strong, steady fingers grasped her arm and gently supported her when she let go the door. He closed the door and led her to a chair where the light of the lamp would fall full upon her. "Sit down there," he commanded kindly; and, when she obeyed, he seated himself opposite pulling his chair closer the better to observe her but at the same time bringing himself under the light.

He had changed a great deal since last she saw him, Ruth thought. No; she corrected herself, not so much since she had parted from him after the retreat from Picardy; but he had altered greatly since last he sat opposite her in this little salon at that time they talked together about De Trevenac. The boy he had been when she first saw him on the streets of Chicago; the boy he had been when he had spoken at Mrs. Corliss', had

been maturing with marvelous swiftness in these last weeks into a man. His eyes showed it—his fine, impulsive, determined eyes, no less resolute and not less impatient, really, but somehow a little more tolerant and understanding than they had been. His lips showed it—thinner a trifle and a trifle more drawn and straight though they seemed to smile quite as easily. His whole bearing betrayed, not so much an abandonment of creeds he had lived by, as a doubt of their total sufficiency and the unsettledness which comes to one beginning to grasp something new.

“You’ve changed a good deal,” Ruth offered audibly.

“I was thinking that about you,” Gerry said.

“I guess—I guess we’ve changed some—together.”

“I guess so.”

She sat without response. Someone neared the door and Ruth roused and, forgetting Gerry for an instant, she listened in covert alarm in a manner which had become so habitual to her these last days that she was not aware of it until he noticed it. The step passed the door; and Ruth settled back.

“Well, Cynthia,” Gerry asked her directly then, “what have you been up to?”

“What do you mean?”

“I was going to come to Paris to see you next week,” Gerry said. “But something particular came up yesterday to make me manage this today. I shouldn’t tell you, I suppose; in fact I know I shouldn’t. The intelligence people have been poking about inquiring about you.”

Ruth felt herself growing pale but she asked steadily enough,

"Where?"

"Where I was for one place."

"They asked you about me?"

He nodded. "They asked Agnes Ertyle, too."

"Why?"

"That's what I came here to find out. What're you up to now?"

He knew nothing, Ruth was sure, about George Byrne. Whatever knowledge was in the hands of those who questioned him, he knew nothing more than the fact of the inquiry.

"It's because I've applied for permission to go to Switzerland, I suppose," Ruth said.

"To go where?" he questioned.

She repeated it.

He bent closer quickly.

"Why in the world are you going there?"

"To rest up."

"You? That's what you told the Embassy people, I suppose."

"Yes."

"Well, did they believe it?"

"I don't know."

"I hope you didn't expect me to. Look at me, Cynthia Gail. Why are you traveling to Switzerland; you have to tell me the truth of what you intend to do!"

## CHAPTER XV

### GERRY'S PROBLEM

**R**UTH had told that truth, perforce, to George Byrne with the result that he had condemned her; and, when meeting this condemnation, she had said that Gerry must know that she was loyal. But did she know that now?

Questions crowded upon her which, she knew, must come to him. She had betrayed De Trevenac; but it was a known principle of the German-spy organization that, at certain times and under certain circumstances, one agent would betray another. The Germans punished some of their spies in this way; in other cases, when a man was to be discarded who had ceased to be useful, another spy had been appointed to betray him for the advantage that the betrayal would bring to the informer.

Immediately after that betrayal, Ruth had gone to the precise districts concerning which the Germans had desired information preceding and during their attack and where results proved that spies must have been numerous and unsuspected. Gerry had commented upon this to Ruth during their retreat from Mirevaux; and when she replied, he had realized again that she was not in France doing "just relief work." He had asked what else she was doing; she had evaded answer. Would he believe

her answer now or only that part of it which George Byrne had believed?

She arose and went to the door and saw that it was firmly closed.

“Do you remember, Gerry,” she asked when she returned “that first time we talked together in Mrs. Corliss’ conservatory, that I said I woke up that morning trying to imagine myself knowing you—without the slightest hope that I ever could?”

“I remember you said something like that, Cynthia.”

“Did you ever wonder how that might be? I mean that I should have been invited to Mrs. Corliss’ and that same morning not imagine that I could meet you?”

“I suppose I thought Mrs. Corliss hadn’t called you till late,” Gerry said.

“She never called me, myself, at all. A girl—a strange girl, whom I had never seen—a girl named Cynthia Gail had been asked. But she had died before that day; so I came in her place.”

Gerry drew a little nearer intently. “Because your names were the same; you were related to her?”

“No; I wasn’t related to her at all; and our names were entirely different.”

“But you——”

“Took her name, yes, I did.”

“And her passport?” He was thinking now, Ruth knew, of her ruined passport and how he had advised her about having a new picture put on it and how it had been, not by her own credentials but by his requesting Agnes Ertyle to vouch for her, that she had been accepted in France.

“Yes; I took her passport and her identity—everything she had and was, Gerry. I became on noon of that day Cynthia Gail. That forenoon, I was Ruth Alden working for a real estate firm named Hilton Brothers in Chicago for twenty-five dollars a week. I wanted to tell you that—oh I wanted so much to tell you all about myself that afternoon when you asked how I happened to be at Mrs. Corliss’ and could think and say such different things from the other people there.”

“Why didn’t you?”

She confused him, at first, as she had George Byrne; and she made Gerry suspicious, too, but with an impersonal challenge and distrust quite distinct from what Byrne’s had been. The real Cynthia Gail, of course, had meant nothing to Gerry; he had known her only as Ruth had come to him. What he was concerned for was the cause for which and in which he had lived for four years—the cause which was protected and secured by passports and credentials and authentic identities and which was threatened by those who forged passports and appeared in the allied lines under names other than their own.

“I dared trust no one then—you almost last of all.”

“With what?”

“The great plan which I dreamed I might carry out alone—a plan of going into Germany, Gerry, as a spy for America!”

“Ah! So that’s the idea in Switzerland!”

“Yes. The chance came to me that morning within a few minutes after I spoke to you in the motor car on the street. You remember that?”

"Of course."

"I was almost crazy to get into the war; and I couldn't find any way; then . . ."

She told him, much as she had told Byrne, about the German who had played the beggar and who had stopped her; of the disclosures in her room; of her going to the hotel and finding Hubert waiting; and then, after she had gone to Mrs. Corliss' and met Gerry, how the German woman had ordered her to take the *Ribot*.

"The rest about me, I guess you know now, Gerry."

He made no answer as he had made no challenge except a question or two to bring out some point more clearly. For a while, as she made her confession, he had remained seated opposite her and gazing at her with increasing confusion and distress; then, unable to remain quiet, he had leaped to his feet.

"Go on," he had bid when she halted. "I'm listening." And she knew that he was not only listening but feeling too as he paced to and fro before her on the other side of the lamp staring down at the floor for long seconds, glancing at her, then staring away again.

"Hush!" he had warned her once when someone passed the door; she had waited and he had stood listening for the step to die away.

"All right now," he had told her.

That was all that he had said; but his tone had told of fear of anyone else hearing what she was confessing to him; and then there beat back upon him realization that the chief threat to her must be from himself.

"I knew you were up to something, Ruth," he murmured under his breath. "Ruth," he repeated her name,

“Ruth Alden! That fits you better somehow; and what you’ve been doing fits you better, too. But—” he realized suddenly that this was acknowledging belief in her—belief beyond his right to have faith in this girl who once on the boat had tried to save his life and who, upon the battle field, had saved him and at frightful risk to herself. But he was not thinking chiefly of that; he was thinking of their intimacies from the first and particularly of that day when, after she had saved him from the wreck of his machine, they had driven away from the battle together.

“Only two things have happened to me since I went on board the *Ribot* which you don’t know all about,” she was adding, “and which had any connection with the secret I was keeping from you. One was my meeting with De Trevenac. He stopped me on the street, supposing I was a German agent. He gave me the orders which I told you he gave to someone else.”

“I was supposing,” Gerry replied, “that the entire truth about De Trevenac was something like that.”

“You know the entire truth about him now,” Ruth said. “What I told you before I specifically said was not the entire truth.”

Gerry winced a little as he turned toward her. “Don’t think I’m holding that against you—if you’re Ruth Alden, as you say. Only if you’re German——”

“German!” Ruth refused the word with a gasp. “Gerry, you can’t believe that.”

“What was the other episode?” he asked quickly; and now she told him about George Byrne; of her attempt to continue to deceive him; of his mistaking her for his love;

then his discovery of the truth and their talk in the ruined house; of Byrne's accusation and arrest of her; of the irruption of the German and his attack; his repetition of the order to her to go to Switzerland; and of her waiting since.

"I told him when he accused me and I could not make him believe, that you would know about me, Gerry!" she cried. "I thought everything would be all right if only I could get you! And oh—oh I've wanted you to come ever since!"

She did not mean to say that, he saw; it was not possible that this cry was planned and practiced for effect. It burst so unbidden, so unguarded from her breast; and seized upon him like her hand—her small, soft, strong little hand—closing upon his heart. It told to him a thousand times better than all the words she had just said, of her loneliness and fears and dreads fought out all by herself in her wild, solitary, desperate adventure. And Gerry, gazing down at her, did not ask himself again whether he believed. Instead he saw her once more as first he had seen her at Mrs. Corliss', and his heart compressed as never it had before as he thought of her, a little office girl making twenty-five dollars a week, coming to that big, rich house not knowing who or what she would meet there and standing up so singly and alone for her country and her faith; he saw her again as she was on the *Ribot*, surrounded by new terrors and with perils to her increasing day by day and playing her part so well; and now passions and sensations which he had fought and had tried to put off, overwhelmed him again. He felt her, wet and small with all her clothing clinging to her

as he had taken her from a sailor's arms and she, looking up at him, had tried so bravely and defiantly to deny what her cries had just confessed to all the ship — that she was his; she had gone into the sea for him. He saw and heard and felt her hands upon him again as he lay helpless under the wreck of his airplane and she worked beside him, coolly and well, though machine-gun bullets were striking all about her; and she had freed him. The sensation of their ride together returned while he had been almost helpless in the seat of the truck watching her drive and listening while she talked to him of another man whom she had liked — the English officer, who had been killed, "1583."

As Gerry had envied that other man his comradeship with this girl, now jealousy rose for the man who, for the wanton moments of his tragic mistake, had possessed himself of her. She had not wished it; she had submitted to his arms, to his kisses only perforce. She had said, indeed, that she had not quite succeeded in submitting; and Gerry found himself rejoicing in that. But another man had held her; another had kissed her in full passion; and Gerry was dazed to find now how he felt at that.

He had known that she had been his almost from the first; but he had not known that he had wanted her his until he had had to think of her as having been someone else's.

He gazed down at her now, little, sweet, more beautiful than she had ever seemed to him before, and alone in danger; and his arms hungered to hold her; his face burned with blood running hot to press warm lips against hers. He wanted to feel with her all that any other man

had felt; and she — she would not put him off. But instead, he had to judge her. So he stood away, his hands behind his back, one hand locked tight on the other wrist.

“Well,” he said, “I’m here; what do you want me to do?”

“You’ll do it for me, Gerry?”

“What?”

“Help me to Switzerland.”

“Still as Cynthia Gail, of course.”

“Yes.”

“Then you turn into — whom?”

“The German girl whom they will take into Germany.”

“I suppose so. But who is she? Where does she come from? What is her name?”

“I don’t know.”

“What?”

“She came from Chicago, I suppose.”

“You suppose; and you don’t know even her name and intend to try to be her!”

“It’s possible, Gerry; oh it’s possible, truly. You see I don’t believe the Germans here in Paris, or those who’ll meet me in Switzerland, know who I’m supposed to be.”

“What do you think they’ll know?”

“That the girl who’s here going under the name of Cynthia Gail, and doing the work I’m doing, is really one of themselves and that she’ll appear in Lucerne. Those are the essentials; and so far as I’ve been able to observe the German-spy system — and you see I’ve been a part of it for a while——”

“Yes; I see.”

“— it seems pretty well reduced to communicating just

essentials. Of course I've prepared a German-American name and identity for myself. If they really know anything in Germany about the girl whom their Chicago people sent here, they'll have me; but if they don't, I'll get on. That's the part I've really been preparing myself for all these months, Gerry; just being Cynthia Gail here was — nothing."

He felt himself jerk and recoil at that. Had she been playing a part with him all this time as well as to others; had this being his been only a rôle which she had acted?

"I see," he said to her curtly.

"Oh, not nothing to me, Gerry, in the things I've had to do when I wrote Cynthia's mother and father and when I had to write George Byrne and when I've been seeing her brother. I meant that deceiving Hubert and his aunt and her friends here and the rest and you, Gerry, was —" she did not finish.

"Quite simple," he completed for her with relief. So the deception with him had not been hard because, in what would have been hard, she had not deceived him. "Where's Hubert?" Gerry questioned now.

"I don't know. I don't think he's in Paris, now."

"You haven't heard from him recently?"

"He sent me several postals when I was at Mirevaux; I've not heard from him since."

"Then he knows nothing whatever about this?"

"He doesn't know that George Byrne found me, Gerry; but he knows I'm not Cynthia Gail."

"Ah! So you told him some time ago, did you?" Jealousy of Hubert now leaped in him; Hubert had known of her what he could not know.

"I didn't tell him; or I didn't mean to, Gerry," Ruth explained. "He knew about me — that is, about Cynthia Gail, of course — and he asked me questions on the train coming here from Bordeaux which I had to answer and answered wrongly."

"Oh; he caught you, then; he told you so!"

"He caught me, Gerry; but he didn't tell me so," Ruth corrected. "I didn't know at all that I'd given him answers which he knew were false until I found out some family facts from Charles Gail here the other day. Hubert must have known I wasn't Cynthia, but ——"

"What?"

"I guess he trusted to me, myself, that I could not be against our cause."

She had not attempted to make a rebuke of that reply; but Gerry felt it.

"Hub hadn't been put in my position, Ruth," he defended himself. "He hadn't been made responsible for you — in France."

"I think that he felt himself wholly responsible for me, Gerry," Ruth replied, coloring warmly as she thought of the complete loyalty of her strange friend. "Only he felt willing to accept the responsibility."

"But he did not know what you were doing!" Gerry protested. "He did not know that you were accused as a spy!"

"No," Ruth said; then, "So I am accused, Gerry?"

"Byrne accused you, you said. Inquiries certainly have been made; that puts another problem up to a man."

"Yes," she said. But he knew, as he gazed down at

her, that she was thinking that Hubert would have trusted her just the same.

Was she manipulating him now, Gerry wondered? Was it possible that this girl had been playing with and utilizing him in what had just passed? Had George Byrne come and had all happened which she had told him or was it conceivable that she had contrived the whole story, or distorted it for effect upon him to anticipate accusation against her from other quarters? Had Hubert really found out about her; or was that too invented for the sake of flicking him into blind espousal of her plans? Flashes of such sort fought with every natural reaction to remembrance of his own close comradeship with her. Impossible; impossible! his impulses iterated to him. But his four years in France had taught him that the impossible in relations, in understandings, in faiths and associations between man and man and man and woman had ceased to exist. In this realization, at least, his situation was truly distinct from Hubert's. He believed in her; at least, he wished to tear his hands apart from their clench together behind him; he longed to extend them to her; he burned at thought of lifting her again and feeling her weight in his arms; and when he looked at her lips, it fired flame to his; yet——

“I don't flatter myself that I can control the report which is being compiled about you, Ruth Alden,” he said. “What I have said, and may say, will only be a part of the data which will determine what's to be done with you. For you realize, now, that one thing or the other's to be done.”

“I realize that, Gerry,” she said.

“You know that in one case they must arrest you and try you — by court-martial.”

“Yes.”

“I may — I don’t know! God help you and me, Ruth Alden, I don’t know yet — I may have to give part of the evidence which will accuse you! But though I do — and after I’ve done it — you must know that I’ll be fighting for you, believing in spite of facts which I may be bound to witness, that you somehow are all right. I’ll be trying to save you. I suppose that sounds mad to you; but it’s true.”

“It doesn’t sound mad to me.”

“In the other case,” he went on, “in case I can decide honestly with myself that you cannot possibly be doing anything one jot to threaten our cause, and in case Byrne has died or does not speak, then probably you will be passed on to Switzerland and you’ll try to go into Germany.”

Ruth waited without reply.

“Do you see what you’re putting up to me? You’re making me either accuse you to the French and cause you to be imprisoned and tried; or, if I believe and let them believe that you’re American, I must know that I’m sending you on into Germany to face a German firing squad. For they’ll shoot you down, as they did Edith Cavell, when they catch you; and they’ll catch you! You haven’t a chance and you know it! So give it up — give it up, I say! Go tomorrow and cancel your request; go home or stay here and work only as you have been doing.”

“And when I’m taking my train of refugees out of the villages in the next zone where they strike, know again

that I might have done some bit to prevent it and—I was afraid? What can you think of me? Do you think I could have done all that I've told you I have just for the sake of working here in Paris? Do you think I could see death come to so many and care how it comes to me?"

"It's not just death," Gerry said, quivering as he gazed down at her. "If I could be sure they'd just kill you, it might be easier to leave your affairs to you. Who owns the right to refuse another his way to die? But you're a girl. At first when they may think you one of themselves, you may be safe; but then they'll discover you. A man—or what passes in Germany for a man—probably will find you out. He——"

Gerry could say no more; for a moment his resistance to himself broke and his hands seized her. "They shan't!" he denied to her fiercely. "They shan't!"

Gently she raised a hand and, as she had upon that occasion before, she loosened the grasp of his fingers.

"You're not to think about what could happen to me; you must think only of what I may do, Gerry," she said.

He released her, as he had before; but this time he caught the fingers which opposed his; he bent quickly and, carrying her hand to his lips, he kissed it.

He drew back from her then; and she closed her other hand over the fingers which he had kissed and, so holding, she stood gazing up at him under lashes wet with tears.

"I'm going now," he said abruptly. "What I'll have to do about you—I don't know. I suppose you realize that since you've applied for *permission* for Switzerland, and since I've been questioned about you, probably you are under special observation. So whatever you think I

may be doing about you, you'd better not attempt to move for the present."

"I don't expect to make any move at all—unless I receive my *permission* for Switzerland," Ruth said.

"All right." He turned away and looked for his cap in the corner where he had left it; then he came back and briefly said good night.

Out upon the street with the darkness enveloping him, misgivings tormented him again. The little, dim Rue des Saints Pères was quiet and almost deserted; all Paris seemed hushed. The spring warmth of the evening which, in another year, would have brought stir and gladness which would have thronged the avenues with folk upon idle, joyous errands tonight brought only oppression. Paris, Gerry knew, denied danger; yet Paris and, with Paris, all of France; and, with France, all Europe; and, with Europe, America and the rest of the world lay menaced that April night as they had not been since the September of the Marne.

For in the great bulge in the battle line which the enemy had thrust between Amiens and Paris, the Germans had established firmly their positions and there they rested, while to the north beyond Arras they were striking their second tremendous blow and had overrun Armentières and were rushing on toward Calais and the Channel.

Gerry strode on with consciousness of these events almost physically pressing upon him. In their presence, what was he with his prejudices and passions, what was that girl who had seared his lips when he pressed them against her fingers so that still for many moments afterwards his lips burned and tingled? If she was a German

spy who had been deluding and playing with him, to permit her to proceed now might work further catastrophe incalculable; whereas were she what he believed—yes; he believed—she could do no good but must merely destroy herself if allowed to go on. Had he any choice but to take the only action which could prevent her?

Ruth had waited alone in the little parlor after he had gone, with her left hand clasped protectingly over the fingers which he had kissed; protectingly she kept that clasp while, standing at the window, she had watched his figure disappear in the darkness of the street of the Holy Fathers. Her fingers were hot like his lips; and while that heat still was strong, she brought her hand to her cheek and pressed it there.

That night nothing else occurred; nor upon the next day and night, nor during the following week did Ruth hear from Gerry as to what he had done about her; and she encountered nothing to indicate his decision until, calling again about her request for travel in Switzerland, suddenly she found permission granted, whereupon she took the first train for the east of France and the next morning passed the border into Switzerland. Accordingly it was in the shadow of Mount Pilatus that she read in a Bern newspaper that three days previously the American ace, Gerry Hull, had been shot down while flying over the German lines; but that his companions in the flight, who had returned, reported that, though falling in enemy territory, he seemed to have succeeded in making some sort of a landing; so it was possible that he was not killed but might be a prisoner in the hands of the Germans.

## CHAPTER XVI

### INTO GERMANY

**T**HE little Republic of Switzerland, always one of the most interesting spots in the world, became during this war a most amazing and anomalous country. Completely surrounded by four great powers at war—and itself peopled by citizens each speaking the tongue of one or another of its neighbors and each allied by blood with one or with two or with three, or, perhaps, with all—the Swiss Confederation suffered a complex of passions, sympathies, and prejudices quite beyond possible parallel elsewhere. And, as everyone knows, the Swiss Republic during the four years of the war, successfully persisted in peace.

Peace! What a strange condition in which to live, Ruth wondered with herself as she encountered the astonishments on every hand when she had crossed the border. She had been in a country at war for not quite three months—unless you nominated America from April, 1917, to January, 1918, a nation at war. Ruth did not. As she thought of her life before she took ship for France, the date of America's declaration of a state of war with the Imperial German government was not fixed in the fiber of her feelings as were many other days before the date of that declaration—the September 6 of the Marne, the May 7 of the *Lusitania*, the glorious weeks of

the defense of Verdun. The war declaration of April 6, 1917, seemed now to Ruth but a sort of official notification of the intentions of the American people which since then had only continued to develop. That home country which she had left in the last days of January was not nearly so different from its peace-time self as war-time France had proved distinct from war-time America.

Certainly Ruth's life had run on almost unchanged by the American declaration of war, save for the strengthening of her futile, stifled passions. But that day in January, which had embarked her for France, had ushered her into a realm which demanded dealings in realities which swiftly had made all before seem illusory and phantasmagorical.

The feeling of dreamland incredulity that she, Ruth Alden, could actually be experiencing those gloriously exciting days upon the *Ribot* and following her arrival in France had been supplanted by sensations which made it seem that these last weeks had been the only real ones in her life. When she thought of her old self—of that strange, shadowy, almost substanceless girl who used to work in a Madison Street real estate office for Sam Hilton—it was her life in Chicago which had become incredible. She did not, therefore, forget her own home; on the contrary, her work which had been largely the gathering together of scattered family groups and the attempt to reestablish homes, had made her dwell with particular poignancy upon memories of the little house in Onarga where her mother and her sisters dwelt. Regularly Ruth had addressed a letter to her mother and dropped it in a post-box; she had dared tell nothing of herself or of her

work or give any address by which anyone could trace her. She simply endeavored to send to her mother assurance that she was well and in France. Obviously she could not receive reply from her mother; indeed, Ruth could have no knowledge that any of her letters ever reached home. She experienced the dreads which every loving person feels when no news can come; such experience was only part of the common lot there in France; but it helped to remove her life at home further into the past.

Switzerland, strangely and without warning, had undone much that France and the battle zone had worked within Ruth; the inevitable relaxing of the strain of work in a country at war had returned Ruth to earlier emotions. What was she, Ruth Alden, doing here alone in the Alps? She was standing, as one in a dream, upon the quay before the splendid hotels of Lucerne and gazing over the blue, wonderful, mountain-mirroring waters of the Lac des Quatre Cantons. Off to the southwest, grand and rugged against the azure sky, rose the snow-capped peaks of Pilatus; to the east, glistening and more smiling under the spring sun, lay the Rigi. The beauty and wonder of it was beyond anything which Ruth Alden could have known. Who was she that she was there?

Then a boy came by with newspapers and she bought a German newspaper and one printed in French at Bern. It was this one which informed her, when she glanced down its columns, that Gerry Hull had been shot down, and, strangely—and mercifully, perhaps—this knowledge came not to the girl who, during the past months had been his friend, his close comrade during days most

recent; it seemed to come, somehow, only to a girl who lay awake early in the morning in a shabby room at an Ontario Street boarding house, a girl who day-dreamed about impossible happenings such as knowing Gerry Hull, but who soon must stir to go down to breakfast at the disorderly table in the ill-lit room below and then catch a crowded car for Sam Hilton's office.

Such was the work of peace and Pilatus and the Rigi and the images upon the lake. War—war which had become the only reality, the sole basis of being—miraculously had vanished. She passed through throngs speaking German and by other groups conversing in French; these stood side by side, neither one prisoner to the other; they had no apparent hostility or animosity. These people, in part at least, were German and French; but there beyond the border—Ruth gazed in the direction of Alsace—men of such sorts sprang at one another with bayonets; and Gerry Hull had been shot down.

Ruth searched the German newspaper for further word of him; she looked up a news-stand and bought several papers, both French and German. In some she discovered the same brief announcement of the fate of the American pilot; but no further information. But it was certain that he was dead or a prisoner—wounded, probably, or at least injured by the crash of his airplane in the “some sort of a landing” which he had succeeded in making. It had been “some sort of a landing” which he had made that time he was shot down when she had gone to him and helped him free. Tales of German treatment of their prisoners—tales which she could not doubt, having been told her by men who themselves had suffered

—recurred to her and brought her out of this pleasant, peaceful Lethe from realities in which Lucerne, for a few hours, had let her live. Tension returned; and, with the tension, grief but not tears; instead, that determination imbued her which she had witnessed often enough in others, when loss of their own was made known to them. Gerry Hull, she thus knew, was her own; and as she had seen men and women in France giving themselves for the general cause, and for one particular, personal vengeance, too, so Ruth thought of her errand into Germany no longer as solely to gather information for the army but to find and free Gerry Hull, if he was a prisoner; and if he was killed, then to take some special, personal vengeance for him.

She had come to Lucerne — ostensibly — to rest and to recuperate; and Mrs. Mayhew had given her letters to friends who were staying at one of the large hotels. Ruth had registered at the same hotel and a Mrs. Folwell, an American, had taken Ruth under her chaperonage. Ruth's name, upon the hotel register, of course stood as Cynthia Gail; and as Miss Gail, she met other guests in the hotel, which was one of those known as an "allied hotel" in the row of splendid buildings upon the water front devoted to the great Swiss peace and war *industrie des étrangers*. The majority of its guests, that is, designated themselves as English or French, Italian or American — whatever in fact they might be. The minority laid claim to neutral status — Norwegian, Danish, Hollandish, Swedish, Spanish. But everyone recognized that in this hotel, as in all the others, the Germans and Austrians possessed representatives among the guests as well as among the servants.

“It is the best procedure,” Mrs. Folwell said half seriously to Ruth upon her arrival, “to lay out all your correspondence upon your table when you leave the room so that it may be examined, in your absence, with the least possible disturbance. They will see it anyway.”

Ruth was quite willing. Indeed, she was desirous of advertising, as quickly as possible, the presence of “Cynthia Gail.” She had taken the trouble to learn a simple device, employing ordinary toilet powder and pin perforations through sheets of paper, which would disclose whether the pages of a letter had been disturbed. Accordingly she prepared her letters, and, merely locking them in her bureau drawer, she left them in her room. Returning some hours later, and unlocking the drawer, she found all her letters apparently undisturbed; but the powder and the perforation proved competent to evidence that secret examination had been made.

Of course examination might have been at the hands of allied agents; for Ruth did not imagine that the Germans and Austrians alone concerned themselves with war-time visitors to Switzerland; but she felt sure that the Germans had made their search also.

After breakfast the next morning Ruth met a man of twenty-eight or thirty—tall, reddish-haired, and with small gray eyes by name Christian Wessels, known as a Norwegian gentleman who had made himself agreeable to the Americans at the hotel. He was an ardent admirer of American policies and could repeat verbatim the statement of American war aims given by President Wilson to Congress three months before. He was a young man of culture, having graduated from the Swedish University of

Upsala and was now corresponding with the University of Copenhagen. He proved to be a man of cosmopolitan acquaintance who had visited London, New York, San Francisco. He spoke English perfectly; and he nursed profound, personal antipathy to Germany as his family fortunes had suffered enormously through the torpedoing of Norwegian ships; moreover, he himself had been traveling from England to Bergen when his ship was destroyed and he had been exposed to winter weather in an open boat for five days before being picked up. He was only now recuperating from the effects of that exposure, meanwhile carrying on certain economic studies to guide trade relations after the war.

His method of recuperation, Ruth observed, was to eat as heavily and as often as occasions permitted; he was a sleek, sensuous young man, ease-loving and, by his own account, a connoisseur of the arts. He talked informatively about painting, as about politics. Ruth did not like him; but when she encountered him as she was wandering about alone gazing at the quaint houses in the interior of the old town, she could not be too rude to him when he offered himself as a guide.

“You have seen the Kapellbrücke, Miss Gail?”

“Yes; of course,” Ruth said.

“And the historical paintings? You understand them?”

“Yes,” Ruth asserted again.

“To what do they refer?”

“I don’t know,” Ruth admitted, and accompanied him, in no wise offended, back to the old bridge over the Reuss; then to the Mühlenbrücke with its Dance of Death; next he took her away to the Glacier Garden.

While they had been in the town with many people close by, his manner to Ruth had not been unusually offensive; but when they were away alone, he became more familiar and he took to uncovert appraisal of her face and figure.

“You are younger than I had expected,” he commented to her, apropos of nothing which had gone before but his too steady scrutiny of her face and her figure.

“I did not know that you expected anything in regard to me,” Ruth said. “Mrs. Folwell did not know I was coming until I arrived.”

“Ah! But your orders were given you—the thirtieth of last month, were they not?”

Ruth stiffened. The thirtieth of last month was the day upon which she had arrived in Paris from Compiègne, the day upon which she had visited Charles Gail and, upon her return to the Rue des Saints Pères, had met George Byrne. Only one order had been given her that day; and that order had been given by the German who struck down Byrne. No one else had known about that order but herself and the German; she had told Gerry and he might have told it to the French authorities. But she could not associate this sleek, sensuously unpleasant person, going by the name of Wessels, with anyone whom Gerry could have informed. She readily could connect him with the German who had for her attempted to strike Byrne dead; and she had been awaiting—impatiently awaiting—the German agent here at Lucerne who must accost her.

“Yes; the thirtieth,” Ruth said.

“Then why did you not come sooner?”

"I applied at once for permission," Ruth defended herself. "It was delayed."

"Ah! Then you had much difficulty?"

"Delay," Ruth repeated. "That was all; though I may have been investigated."

"You used Hull again to help you, I suppose."

"Yes, I used Hull," Ruth said.

Her heart was palpitating feverishly and the compression in her throat almost choked her while she fought for outward calm. She was a German girl, she must remember; she had come from her great peril; she had passed it; this was relief and refuge with one of her own before whom, at last, she could freely speak; for—though she dared not yet fully act upon the conviction—she no longer doubted at all that this Wessels was the enemy agent who was to control her henceforth. How much did he know about her, or about the girl she was supposed to be? He knew that she had been ordered here on the thirtieth of last month; he knew that she had at times "used" Gerry Hull.

"We have him now, you know," Wessels said, watching her with his disagreeable, close scrutiny.

"He's captured?" Ruth said. She had remembered that she must have no real concern for the fate of an enemy pilot whom she had "used."

"Dead or captured; anyway, we have him," Wessels assured. He had continued to speak to her in English, though no one was near them; and if anyone did overhear, the German tongue certainly would arouse no comment in Lucerne. "Mecklen seems to have only half-done your other flame."

In his conversation at the hotel he had affected the use of slang to display his complete familiarity with English, Ruth had noticed; and she caught his meaning instantly. Her other flame was George Byrne, of course; Mecklen, who had "only half-done" him, must be the German of the ruined house.

"Byrne did not die?" Ruth asked.

"Who's Byrne?" Wessels returned. "The American infantry lieutenant?"

"Yes."

"No; he did not die. Mecklen shut his mouth; but any day now it may open. When you did not come, I thought it had."

"His mouth opened?"

"Yes; we had better walk, perhaps. There are many more places of great interest. I shall show them to you."

He pointed Ruth ahead of him down a narrow way; and when she proceeded obediently, he followed.

She welcomed the few moments offered for consideration. So George Byrne had not died! That was a weight from her heart; and Wessels had only fragmentary facts about her, however he had received them. He knew that she had had another "flame," an American infantry lieutenant; but Wessels had not known his name.

"You were lucky to get here," Wessels offered, coming up beside her when the way widened. Their direction was farther out from the city and they continued to be quite alone. "But it cooks your chance to go back."

"To France, you mean?"

"Where else?"

She had thought of the possibility of being dispatched

from Switzerland not into Germany, but back to France. If someone was to meet her at Lucerne who could take complete report upon the matters which she had been supposed to observe, the logical action would be to return her to work again behind the allied lines. Her original instructions, received in Chicago, had only implied—they had not directly stated—that she was to go on into Germany; but she had clung to the belief that she would go on. And now the failure of Mecklen to fully do his work with Byrne had settled that doubt for Ruth; for with Byrne alive and likely at any day to “open his mouth,” obviously the Germans would not order her into the hands of the French.

“We may use you in Russia or Greece; but not France for the present, or even Italy,” Wessels said. “But first you can visit home, if you like.”

He meant the Fatherland, home of the girl whom he believed Ruth to be; and Ruth knew that she had come to the crisis. If the fragmentary facts which had been forwarded to this man comprised any account of the girl whom the Germans in Chicago had meant to locate and whom they had failed to find when they entrusted their mission to Ruth, she was stopped now. If not . . . .

“I’d like to look in at the old home,” Ruth said.

“Where is it? What town?”

“My grandfather lived near Losheim.”

“Where is that?”

“It is a tiny town beyond Saarlouis; near the Hoch Wald.”

“Oh, yes; I know. What is your name?”

“Luise Brun,” Ruth said. There was a German girl

of that name who had lived in Onarga; Ruth had gone to high school with her and had known her well. During the early days of the war, Luise had told Ruth about her relatives in Germany—her grandfather, who had lived near Losheim until he died the winter before, and her two cousins, both of whom had been killed fighting. Ruth did not resemble Luise Brun in any way; and she did not imagine that she could go to Losheim and pass for Luise; but when questioned about herself, she had far more detailed knowledge of Luise's connections to borrow for her own use than she had had of Cynthia Gail's.

Wessels, however, appeared less interested in Ruth's German relatives than in herself. "You have been in America most of your life?" he asked.

"When I was a baby I was brought to Losheim and again when I was a little girl," Ruth said. "My father and mother never forgot the Fatherland."

"Of course not," Wessels accepted, impatient of this loyal protestation and desirous to return to the more personal. "I was saying you are much like an American girl. American girls, I must admit, attract me."

He began speaking to her suddenly in German; and Ruth replied in German as best she could, conscious that her accent was far from perfect.

It appeared to pass with him, however, as the sort of pronunciation to be expected from a girl reared in America.

"How old are you now, Luise?" he questioned familiarly.

"Twenty-five."

"Yet *eines mädchen*, I warrant."

"I am not married, Herr Baron," Ruth assured, employing the address to one of title. Either he was a possessor of baronial rank and pleased with the recognition of the fact, or the assignment of the rank was gratifying and he did not correct her.

"And in America you have no sweetheart of your own—other than your 'flames?'"

He spoke the slang word in English, referring to Byrne and to Gerry Hull, with both of whom, as he believed, she had merely played.

"No one, Herr Baron," Ruth denied, but colored warmly. He took this flush for confession that she was hiding an attachment; and he laughed.

"No matter, Luise; he is not here."

He was indulgently more familiar with her—a *von* something or other, admitting pleasure with the daughter of a man of no rank who had emigrated to America. Ruth brought up the business between them to halt further acceleration of this familiarity.

"I am to make my report to you, Herr Baron?"

"Report? Ah, yes! No; of course not. Why should you make report here now? It is simply trouble to record and transmit it. You are not going back to France, I said, did I not?"

"Yes."

"Then the report will be tomorrow."

"Where, Herr Baron?"

"Where I take you to—headquarters."

Ruth went weak and gasped in spite of herself. She had thought that she was prepared to meet any fate; but now she knew that she had built upon encountering her

risks more gradually. To be taken to "headquarters" — *das Hauptquartier* — tomorrow! And, though Gerry had warned her, and she had said that she had recognized and accepted every sort of danger, still she had not reckoned upon such a companion as this man for her journey.

"Ha, Luise! What is the matter?"

"When do we start, Herr Baron?"

"The sooner the better; surely you are ready?"

"Surely; I was thinking—" she groped for excuse and could think of nothing better than, "What way do we go?"

"By Basel and Freiburg."

"What time, if you please, Herr Baron?"

"At eight o'clock the train is."

"I would like to return now to the hotel, then."

He complied and, conversing on ordinary topics in English, they reentered the town.

She had no arrangements to make. Wessels was to see to all necessary details. She could pack her traveling bags in a few minutes; and she dared not write to anyone of the matters now upon her mind. She desired to return to the hotel only to be alone; and, as soon as she had parted from Wessels, she shut herself in her room.

Long ago—a period passed in incalculable terms of time—she had determined, locked alone in a room, to undertake proceeding into Germany. Her purpose from the first, and her promise to the soul of Cynthia Gail—the vindication which she had whispered to strengthen herself when she was writing to Cynthia's parents, and George Byrne, and when she was receiving their letters,

trading upon Cynthia's mother's friends—was that she was to go into Germany.

It must be at tremendous risk to herself; but she always had recognized that; she had said to Gerry that she accepted certain death—and worse than death—if first she might have her chance to do something. Well, she might have her chance. At any rate, there was nothing to be done but go ahead without futilely calculating who Wessels actually was, what he truly believed about her, what he meant to do. Here was her chance to enter Germany.

An hour later she descended to dinner with Mrs. Folwell, and noticed Wessels dining at his usual table in another part of the room. Ruth informed Mrs. Folwell after dinner that she was starting that evening for Basel; it was then almost train time and, after having her luggage brought down, she went alone to the train.

Wessels also was at the train, but he halted only a moment beside her to give her an envelope with tickets and other necessary papers. Ruth entered a compartment shared by two women—German women or German-speaking Swiss, both of middle age, both suspicious of the stranger and both uneasily absorbed with their own affairs. No one else entered; the guard locked the door and the train proceeded swiftly, and with much screeching of its whistle, through darkened valleys, through pitch-black, roaring tunnels, out upon slopes, down into valleys again.

Late at night the two women slept. Ruth tried to recline in a corner; and repeatedly endeavored to relax in sleep; but each time, just before the dissolution of slum-

ber, she started up stiff and strained. Dawn had not come when the women awoke and the train pulled into Basel. It was still dark when, after the halt at the city, all doors again were opened and everyone ordered to leave the cars. This was the German border.

Ruth stepped out with the others and rendered up her luggage. She was aligning herself with the women awaiting the ordeal of the German examination, when Wessels appeared with a porter, who was bearing Ruth's bags. He passed without halting or speaking to her; but a moment later a German official touched her arm and, pointing her to go on, he escorted her past the doors before which the others were in line for examination. He brought her to the train which was standing on the German side and showed her to an empty compartment, where her luggage lay in the racks. Ruth sat in the compartment watching the people—men and women—as they issued from the depot of examination; they went to different cars of the waiting train; but when anyone attempted to enter the compartment where Ruth sat, a guard forbade until Wessels reappeared, got in, and told the guard to lock the door.

Immediately the train started.

“Welcome to the Fatherland, *Liebchen!*” said Wessels, drawing close beside Ruth as the car gathered speed and rushed deeper into Germany.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE ROAD TO LAUENGRATZ

RUTH moved from him and to the end of the seat. He laughed and again edged up to her.

“Where are we bound?” Ruth asked.

“That’s up to you.”

“How?”

“I send you one place, if you cut up; a more pleasant one, if you do not.”

“What are the two places?”

“The first I may leave to your heated imagination; the other—it is quite pretty, I assure you. Particularly in the spring, with all nature budding to increase. I own it—in the Schwarzwald, near Biberach. You know the Schwarzwald?”

“No,” Ruth said.

“Indeed; it is not so far from Losheim.”

He put a taunt into his tone—confident, mocking railery; and Ruth knew that he had discovered her; she recognized that from the very first, probably, he had known about her and that she had never deceived him. Whether he had received information prior to her appearance that she was not to be trusted, or whether she had betrayed herself to him, she could not know; and now it scarcely mattered. The fact was that he was aware that she was not of the Germans and that he had brought

her into Germany with power to punish her as might appeal to him.

"Then you do not know Lauengratz?" he went on.

"No," Ruth said.

"You do not call me Herr Baron now, *Liebchen*," he reproached, patting her face.

Ruth made no reply but the futile movement of slipping to the cushions opposite, where he permitted her to sit alone, contenting himself by leaning back and smirking at her.

He continued to speak to her in English, except for his native *liebchens*, to show off his perfect familiarity with her language. For he entirely abandoned all pretense of believing her anything but American. Near Lauengratz, he informed her, was his favorite estate, where, when he wished, even the war would not unpleasantly intrude; he trusted that she would have the good sense to wish to visit Lauengratz.

Dawn was brightening, and Wessels—Ruth did not yet know his true name—switched off the lights in the compartment, lifted the curtains and motioned to the right and ahead, where, along the length of Baden, lay the wooded hills of his Schwarzwald—the Black Forest. The gray light, sweeping over the sky, showed Ruth the wooded slopes reaching down toward the Rhine, which had formed the Swiss-German boundary at Basel, but which now flowed almost due north between the German grand duchy of Baden and the German Imperial Territory of Alsace, within the western edge of which now ran the French and American battle line.

Four railroads, Ruth knew, reached from Basel into

Germany — one west of the Rhine to Mühlhausen; one almost due east and up the river valley to the Rhinefall; one northeast to Tedtnau; the other north and parallel with the Rhine to Freiburg and Karlsruhe. The train evidently was traveling this last road with the Rhine valley dimly in sight to the west. There had come to Ruth the wholly irrational sensation that Germany, when at last seen, must appear a land distinct from all others; but nothing in this quiet countryside, which was disclosing itself to greater and greater distance under the brightening dawn, was particularly alarming or peculiar. She viewed a fair and beautiful land of forest, and farm, and tiny, neat villages very like the Swiss, and with not so many soldiers in evidence about them as Ruth had noticed upon the Swiss side of the frontier.

Perhaps it was the appearance of this fair, quiet countryside which spared Ruth from complete dismay; perhaps, deep within her, she had always realized that her venture must prove inevitably fatal, and this realization now controlled her reactions as well as her conscious thought; perhaps she was one of those whom despair amazingly arms with coolness and resource.

“I will go with you to Lauengratz,” Ruth replied.

“That’s good!” He patted the seat beside him. “Come back here now.”

Ruth recognized that she must obey or he would seize her; so she returned to the other seat and suffered his arm about her.

“You do not recall me, *Liebchen?*” he asked indulgently.

He referred, obviously, to some encounter previous to

their very recent meetings in Lucerne. Ruth could recollect no such occasion, but she feared to admit it lest she offend his vanity. And, indeed, now that he suggested that they had met before, his features became to her, not familiar, but it seemed that she had seen him before.

“Didn’t I see you in Paris, Herr Baron?” she ventured boldly.

“In Paris precisely,” he confirmed, boastfully.

“I would have placed you, if I had thought about the possibility of your having been in Paris,” Ruth explained.

“Ah! Why should I not have been there? A Norwegian gentleman, shipwrecked from a vessel torpedoed by the horrid Huns!” He laughed, self-flatteringly, and squeezed Ruth tighter. “A kiss, *Liebchen!* I swear, if you are a loyal girl, surely you’ll say I deserve a kiss!”

He bent his head to take his reward; and Ruth, unable fully to oppose him, contented herself with turning her cheek, avoiding touch of his lips upon hers. It satisfied him, or he was in such excellent humor with himself that he let it content him for the moment.

The loathing which his embrace stirred within her and the helpless fury for repulse of him called clear images from Ruth’s subconsciousness.

“About two weeks ago—” she began.

“A week ago Thursday, *Liebchen.*”

“You brought a child for clothing to the relief rooms where I was working. I waited upon you.”

“And following your excellent explanation of your wonderful work, *Liebchen*, I gave you—” He halted to permit her to recount his generosity.

“Two hundred francs, Herr Baron.”

“Ah! You do recollect. That deserves a kiss from me!” he cried, as though she had given the other. Accordingly, he rewarded her as before. “You remember the next time?”

“It was not there,” Ruth said vaguely. “It was upon the street.”

“Quite so. The Boulevard Madeleine. There was a widow — a refugee — who halted you ——”

Ruth remembered and took up the account. “She stopped me to try to sell a bracelet, a family treasure ——”

“Which you admired, I saw, *Liebchen*.”

“It was beautiful, but quite beyond my means to buy — at any fair price for the poor woman,” Ruth explained.

“So I purchased it!” He went into a pocket and produced the bracelet. “Put it on, *Liebchen*!” he bid, himself slipping it over her hand. “Now another kiss for that!”

He took it.

“I did not know you were honoring me with your attentions all that time, Herr Baron.”

“Oh, no trouble, *Liebchen*; a pleasure, I assure you. Besides, with more than your prettiness you piqued curiosity. You see, I received word in Paris when I am there before — a few months ago — that we can confidently employ one who will appear as Cynthia Gail. The word came from Chicago, I may tell you, quite roundabout and with some difficulty. Before we learn more about you — well, Mecklen took it upon himself to do you a little turn, it seems.”

Ruth merely nodded, waiting.

“Then a correction arrives from America, laying bare

an extraordinary circumstance, *Liebchen*. Our people in Chicago sent us in January one Mathilde Igel, and now they have ascertained beyond any possible doubt that two days before they dispatched Mathilde to Paris, she has been interned in America. Who, then, have our Chicago people sent to us and advised us to employ—who is this Cynthia Gail? You would not need to be pretty to pique curiosity now, would you, *Liebchen*?”

He petted her with mocking protectiveness as he spoke; and Ruth, recoiling, at least had gained from him explanation of much about which she had been uncertain. The Germans in Chicago, plainly, had made such a mistake as she had supposed and had been long in discovering it; longer, perhaps, in communicating knowledge of it to Paris. But it had arrived in time to destroy her. Herr Baron gratuitously continued his explanation.

“So I took it upon me, myself, to have a squint at our Cynthia and I got my good look at you, *Liebchen*! What a pretty girl—how do you Americans say it? A dazzler; indeed, a dazzler! What a needless pity to add you to the total of destruction, already too great—you so young and innocent and maidenly? I have never been in favor of women’s intrusion in war; no, it is man’s business. For women, the solacing of those who fight—whether with sword or by their wits behind the enemy’s lines! Not so, *Liebchen*?”

It was broad daylight—a sunny, mild morning amid wooded hills and vales with clear, rushing streams, with the Rhine Valley lost now to the west as the railroad swept more closely to the Black Forest. The train was slowing and, as it came to halt before a little countryside station,

Wessels took his arm from about Ruth and refrained, for a few moments, from petting her; he went so far, indeed, as to sit a little away from her so that anyone glancing into the compartment would see merely a man and a girl traveling together. Mad impulses had overwhelmed Ruth when she felt the train to be slowing—impulses that she must be able to appeal to whoever might be at the station to free her from this man; but sight of those upon the platform instantly had cooled her. They were soldiers—oxlike, servile soldiery who leaped forward when, from a compartment ahead, a German officer signaled them for attention; or they were peasant women and old men, only more unobtrusive and submissive than the soldiers. Appeal to them against one of their “gentlemen” and one who, too, undoubtedly was an officer! The idea was lunacy; her sole chance was to do nothing to offend this man while he flattered himself and boasted indulgently.

The train proceeded.

He put his arm about Ruth again. “So I took upon myself the responsibility of saving you, *Liebchen!* You have yet done us no harm, I say; you mean us harm, of course. But you have not yet had the opportunity.”

Ruth caught breath. He did not know, then, of her betrayal of De Trevenac? Or was he merely playing with her in this as in the rest?

“What is it, *Liebchen?*” he asked.

“Nothing.”

“So I say to myself, I can let her go on and blunder across our border in some way and, of course, surely be shot; or I may take a little trouble about her myself and

spare her. You do not make yourself overthankful, *Liebchen*."

"I am trying to, Herr Baron."

"A kiss, darling, to your better success!" He gave it. "Now I will have you compose yourself. A few more kilometers and the next stop is ours. Lauengratz is not upon the railroad; it is not so modern, nor is my family so new as that."

He gazed out complacently while the train ran the few kilometers swiftly. It drew into a tiny woodland station of the sort which Ruth had frequently observed—a depot with switch tracks serving no visible community, but with a traveled highway reaching back from it toward a town hidden within the hills. No one waited here but the station master and a man in the uniform of a military driver, who stood near a large touring car. He was gazing at the train windows and, seeing Wessels, he saluted. He came forward as the train stopped and, when the compartment door was opened, he took Wessels' traveling bag.

"Those in the racks, too," Wessels directed curtly in German. Those were Ruth's; and she shrank back into the corner of the seat as the man obediently took them down. Wessels stepped out upon the platform and turned to Ruth.

No one else was leaving the train at that station; indeed, the door of no other compartment opened. There was no one to whom Ruth might appeal, even if appeal were possible. Wessels stood patiently in the doorway; behind him rose quiet, beautiful woodland.

"Come," he commanded Ruth, stretching a hand toward her.

She arose, neglecting his hand, and stepped from the train. The guard closed the door behind her; immediately the train departed. The station master—an old and shrunken man—approached, abjectedly, to inquire whether Hauptmann von Forstner had desires. Herr Hauptmann disclaimed any which he required the station master to satisfy; and the old man retired swiftly to the kiosk at the farther end of the platform.

The driver, who had finished securing the luggage behind his car, opened the door of the tonneau and waited there at attention.

“Welcome to Lauengratz, *gnädiges Fräulein*.” Von Forstner dropped the insulting *liebchens* to employ his term of respectful and gallant address; and before the soldier-servant he refrained from accents of too evident irony. Ruth’s position must be perfectly plain to the man, she thought; but it pleased the master to pretend that he concealed it.

She made no reply; she merely stood a moment longer gazing about her to get her bearings. She had no conscious plan except that she recognized that she was to be taken into some sort of duress from which she must attempt to escape; and if she succeeded she would require memory of landmarks and directions. Von Forstner’s eyes narrowed as he watched her and divined what was passing through her mind; but he pretended that he did not.

“Have I not said it was beautiful here?” he asked.

“It is very beautiful,” Ruth replied and, as he motioned to her, she preceded him into the car and sat upon the rear seat with him.

The car, which was fairly new and in good condition, drove off rapidly. It evidenced to Ruth either that reports of the scarcity of motor cars in Germany had been exaggerated or that Captain von Forstner was a person of sufficient importance to possess a most excellent vehicle from the vanishing supply. It followed a narrow but excellent road through forest for half a mile; it ran out beside cleared land, farm, and meadows, where a few cattle were grazing. A dozen men were working in a field — big, slow-moving laborers.

Von Forstner observed that Ruth gazed at them. "Russians," he explained to her. "Some of my prisoners."

He spoke as if he had taken them personally. "I have had, at various times, also French and English and Canadians; and I expect some Americans soon. I have asked for some; but they have not appeared against us frequently enough yet for us to have a great many."

"Still we have already not a few of you," Ruth returned quietly. Her situation scarcely could become worse, no matter what she now said; and, as it turned out, von Forstner was amused at this defiance.

"If they are much like the Canadians they will not be much good anyway," he said.

"For fighting or farm work, you mean?"

Von Forstner hesitated just a trifle before he returned, "They can stand nothing; they die too easily."

The car was past the fields where the Russians toiled and was skirting woodlands again; when fields opened once more quite different figures appeared — figures of women and of a familiarity which sent the blood choking

in Ruth's throat. They were French women and girls, or perhaps Belgians of the sort whom she had seen tilling free, French farms; but these were captives — slaves. And seeing them, Ruth understood with a flaming leap of realization what von Forstner had meant about the Russians. They were captives also, and slaves; but they had never known freedom.

But to see these women slaves!

Von Forstner himself betrayed especial interest in them. He spoke sharply to the driver, who halted the car and signaled for the nearest of the slaves to approach.

“Where are you from?” he questioned them in French. They named various places in the invaded lands; most of them had been but recently deported and had arrived during von Forstner's absence. Two of the group, which numbered eight, were very young — girls of sixteen or seventeen, Ruth thought. They gazed up at Ruth with wide, agonized eyes and then gazed down upon the ground. Ruth glanced to von Forstner and caught him estimating them — their faces, their figures, as he had estimated her own. She caught him glancing from them to herself now, comparing them; and her loathing, and detestation of him and of all that he was, and which he represented suddenly became dynamic.

He did not see that; but one of the French girls, who had glanced up at her again, did see; and the girl looked quickly down at once as though fearing to betray it. But Ruth saw her thin hands clenching at her sides and crumpling the rags of her skirt; and from this Ruth was first aware that her own hands had clenched and through her pulled a new tension.

"Go on," von Forstner ordered his driver.

The car sped along the turning road into woods; the road followed a stream which rushed down a tiny valley thirty or forty feet below. At times the turns gave glimpses far ahead and in one of these glimpses Ruth saw a large house which must be the *Landgut* — or the manor — of this German country-place.

"See! We are almost home, *Liebchen!*" Von Forstner pointed it out to her when it was clearer and nearer at the next turn. He had his hand upon Ruth again; and the confident lust of his fingers set hot blood humming dizzily, madly in Ruth's brain. The driver, as though responding to the impatience of his master, sent the car spinning in and out upon the turns of the road beside the brook. In two or three minutes more — not longer — the car would reach the house. Now the car was rushing out upon a reach of road abruptly above the stream and with a turn ahead sharper, perhaps, than most. In spite of the speed the driver easily could make the turn if unimpeded; but if interfered with at all . . . .

The plan barely was in Ruth's brain before she acted upon it. Accordingly, there was no chance for von Forstner to prevent it; nor for the driver to oppose her. She sprang from her seat, seized the driver's right arm and shoulder, as he should have been turning the steering-wheel sharply; and, for the necessary fraction of a second, she kept the car straight ahead and off the road over the turn.

When a motor car is going over, crouch down; do not try to leap out. So a racing driver, who had been driving military cars in France, had drilled into Ruth when he

was advising her how to run the roads back of the battle lines. Thus as the car went over she sprang back and knelt on the floor between the seats.

The driver fought for an instant, foolishly, to bring the car back onto the road; then he flung himself forward and down in front of his seat. Von Forstner, who had grabbed at Ruth too late, had been held standing up when the car turned over. He tried to get down. Ruth could feel him—she could not look up—as he tumbled half upon her, half beside her. She heard him scream—a frightful, hoarse man's scream of mad rage as he saw he was caught. Then the car was all the way over; it crushed, scraped, slid, swung, turned over; was on its wheels for a flash; at least air and light were above again; it pounded, smashed, and slid through brush, against small trees; and was over once more. It ground and skewed in soft soil, horribly; cold water splashed below it. It settled, sucking, and stopped.

The sound of water washing against metal; for a moment the hiss of the water on the hot engine; then only the gurgle and rush of the little brook.

Ruth lay upon her back in the stream with the floor of the car above her; below her was von Forstner's form, and about him were the snapped ribs of the top with the fabric like a black shroud.

At first he was alive and his face was not under water; for he shouted frantic oaths, threats, appeals for help. Wildly he cursed Ruth; his back was broken, he said. He seemed to struggle at first, not so much to free himself as to grasp and choke her. Then the back of the car dammed the water and it rose above his face. He coughed

and thrashed to lift himself; he begged Ruth to help him; and, turning as far about as she could, she tried to lift his head with her hands, but she could not. The water covered him; and, after a few moments, he was quite still.

The dam at the back of the car, which had caused the pool to rise that high, failed to hold the water much higher; it ran out of the sides of the car before it covered Ruth. It soaked her through; and the weight of the machine held her quite helpless. But she had air and could breathe.

From the forward seat came no sound and no movement. The driver either had been flung out in one of the tumbles of the car or, like his master, he had been killed under it. Ruth could only wonder which.

But someone was coming down the embankment from the road now; more than one person; several. Ruth could hear their movements through the underbrush. Now they talked together—timidly, it seemed, and at a little distance. Now they approached, still timidly and talking.

These were men's voices, but strange in intonations and in language. It was not German, or French, or any tongue with which Ruth was at all familiar. It must be Russian. The timid men were Russians—some of the slaves!

One of them touched the car and, kneeling, peered under it.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE MESSAGE IN CIPHER

**R**UTH could see dull eyes in a big, stupid face. The man said something with the inflection of a question. She could not make out the words, but obviously he was asking if anyone was alive under the car. So Ruth answered. The face disappeared; and she heard consultation. Soon several men tramped in the water and thrust timbers under the side of the car and tilted it. Large, rough hands reached under and caught Ruth and pulled her out.

She sank limp when the hands released her, gently enough, and laid her upon the sloping bank above the stream. The man who had rescued her had four companions, all of them Russians. They engaged themselves immediately in dragging out Captain von Forstner and then exploring under the car. But they found no one else. Ruth discovered the driver lying a rod or so beyond her and farther up the slope. Plainly he had been thrown out and the car had crushed him. The Russians had seen him before they had come to the car, and when Ruth made signs to them to go to the man they shook their heads, repeating a sentence which meant — she had no doubt — that the man was dead. They repeated the same words about von Forstner.

Ruth struggled up, dizzily, to find herself battered and

with muscles bruised and strained; but she had escaped without broken bones or disabling injury. A German soldier, armed with a rifle, joined the group of Russians about Ruth. Evidently he was a guard who had been at some distance when the car went from the road.

“You are much injured, *gnädiges Fräulein?*” the soldier asked her solicitously and respectfully.

“Only a little,” Ruth replied, collecting strength again and regaining clearness of thought.

When the Russians first had come to her aid she had thought of them as helping her, as an American against the Germans; but now she was cool enough to realize how absurd that idea was. These peasant slaves were not moved by any political emotions and, if they had been, they were incapable of recognizing her as an American and the possessor of any particular sympathy for them. She was to them a lady—a companion of a master who undoubtedly had mistreated them; but when they had found that master helpless they had been below any instincts of revenge upon him. They had considered his misfortune a lucky chance given them to perform some service which could win them favor, and now that the master was dead they sought that favor from the mistress.

And much the same considerations governed the German guard. It was plain from his manner of address to her that he could not have witnessed the accident to the car, or at least he could not have observed that she had caused it. She was to him a friend of Hauptmann von Forstner, who had passed riding beside Herr Hauptmann—a lady, of the class of persons with whom Herr Hauptmann associated and whose authority at all times and

in all matters the private soldier was accustomed to accept.

The authority which Ruth thus possessed was extremely local, of course; its realms might not run beyond the little leafy valley of the brook, and it surely was temporary; but locally and for the instant it was hers.

“You desire, *gnädiges Fräulein*,” the soldier asked her, “that I stay here and send one of them,” he indicated the Russians, “with word to the manor or that I go?”

“You go,” Ruth directed, struggling up to her feet. “I am quite strong again and you can do nothing for Herr Hauptmann.”

“No, *gnädiges Fräulein*, I can do nothing for Herr Hauptmann,” the soldier agreed. Of himself he was doubtful whether he should yet leave his *gnädiges Fräulein*, but he had been commanded, so he went.

The Russians had withdrawn a little; and after the German soldier was gone Ruth stood alone, gazing down at von Forstner's body. She had killed von Forstner and his servant. She had killed them in self-defense and by an act which might have destroyed her as well as them, yet horror shrank her as she saw them lying dead — horror which first had seized her at the idea of individually dealing in death that day long ago when she stood with Gerry in the parlor of the *pension* upon the Rue des Saints Pères, and when he had told her that the French had taken Louis de Trevenac upon her information, and were to execute him.

If she had killed these men solely to save herself, she must cast herself down beside them. But she had not! That sudden, mad deed which she had just performed —

and in the consequences of which she was just beginning to be involved—sprang not from self-defense. It was not sense of escape from personal violation which at this moment chiefly swayed her; it was a sensation of requital, in petty part, for the savageries of that sweep through Belgium of which she had heard four years ago; requital for the *Lusitania*; for Poland and Serbia; for the bombing of Paris and for that long-range gun whose shells she had seen bursting; for Grand'mère Bergues' daughter and for the other refugees upon the Mirevaux road; for the French girls and women in slavery only a mile from here; for . . . .

She raised her hands to her hair, which was wet, as she was wet all over; she arranged her hair and her clothing as decently as she could. A motor car was coming upon the road from the manor. It stopped directly above, and the soldier and a man in civilian clothes got out; the driver of the car remained in his seat and maneuvered to turn the car about in the narrow road.

The man in civilian clothes, who came down the slope toward the stream, was forty or forty-five years old, Ruth thought. He was a large man, florid-faced and mustached, with the bearing not of servant but of a subordinate—an overseer of some sort, Ruth guessed, or perhaps a resident manager of the estate.

“Good morning, *gnädiges Fräulein*,” he saluted Ruth, breathless from his haste and agitation. “I am Dittman,” he made himself known. “What a terrible accident has occurred! Herr Hauptmann is dead, they say; and Josef, too!” He gave barely a glance toward the body of the chauffeur, but knelt at once beside von Forstner's.

"They are both dead," Ruth said quietly. It was plain that von Forstner had been Dittman's master and that Dittman, for the moment at least, accepted Ruth as a friend of von Forstner's, as the soldier had.

"What shall I order done?" Dittman appealed to Ruth, rising.

"Take Hauptmann von Forstner's body to the house, of course," Ruth directed. "Who is at the house?" she inquired.

"Besides the servants, this morning only Herr Adler."

"Who is Herr Adler?"

"Why, he is Hauptmann von Forstner's secretary."

"Then why did he not himself come at once?"

"Word arrived that Herr Hauptmann was dead," Dittman explained. "Herr Adler did not think that you would require him here, *gnädiges Fräulein*. Since Herr Hauptmann was dead it was more necessary than ever for Herr Adler to remain at the house. Oberst-Lieutenant von Fallenbosch communicates by telephone at this time in the morning; immediately he must be informed."

"Of course," Ruth said.

She was aware that Dittman was observing her more and more curiously, not so much because of her questions and of her ignorance of the household affairs of Captain von Forstner, she thought, as because of her accent. Dittman apparently was not surprised that the lady companion of his master did not know about Adler; and even the fact that she spoke German with an undisguisable foreign accent did not stir suspicion, but only curiosity. Ruth apparently had taken the right tone with this puffing under-

ling by offering no explanations whatever about herself and by demanding them of others.

“You are wet, *gnädiges Fräulein*,” he reminded her solicitously. “I brought the motor car for you. If you will proceed I shall see to all things for Herr Hauptmann.”

“Hauptmann von Forstner carried upon himself certain papers for which I now must be responsible,” Ruth returned to Dittman.

“Ah, yes; of course, *gnädiges Fräulein*.”

“You may obtain them for me.”

Dittman knelt again, obediently, and carefully and methodically went through von Forstner's pockets. A few minutes before, when Ruth had been alone but for the Russian slaves, she had realized that she ought to obtain the papers in those pockets, but her revulsion at making the search had halted her. Now that proved altogether fortunate. Her fate here hung upon little things; and one of those trifles which supported her, undoubtedly, was that she had waited for this Dittman before allowing disturbance of any of von Forstner's effects.

Dittman gathered together everything from the pockets—money, keys, penknife, cigarette case, revolver, and memorandum book, besides two thick packets of folded papers; and he offered all to Ruth, who accepted only the packets and the memorandum book. Dittman assisted her to climb the slope to the waiting car.

“My bags, Dittman,” Ruth said to her escort when she was seated. They had been held fairly well away from the water by the position of the wrecked car; and there was more than a chance that the leather had kept dry some of the clothing within. Ruth did not know what lay

before her but she could meet it better in fresh garments. Dittman ordered one of the Russians to bring up her bags and place them in the car.

As it sped away to the south Ruth sat back alone in the rear seat. Evidently she had been expected at the manor house; from the border or, perhaps, from Basel or from Lucerne Captain von Forstner had warned his household that he was bringing her with him. Had he described to his inferiors the relationship of his companion to him? Almost surely he had not. If they had arrived together, in the manner planned by von Forstner, his servants swiftly enough could have arrived at their own conclusions; but now that von Forstner was dead—accidentally, as all believed—matters lay so that his servants might judge the nature of her association with their master by the manner in which Ruth bore herself.

Oberst-Lieutenant von Fallenbosch, who communicated by telephone at this time in the morning, suggested perilous complications, but perils were all about her now, in any case. The bold course upon which she was embarked was—if you thought about it—safer, in reality, than any other.

So Ruth steadied herself as the car, clearing the woods, ran beside open acres to a huge and old German manor house set baldly upon a slope above the stream. A man was walking upon the terrace before the door; he sighted the car and started quickly to meet it, but as the car sped up he returned to the terrace and stood upon the lower step at the edge of the drive. He was a short, broadly built but nervous little man, upwards of thirty, spectacled, and with thick hair cropped somewhat after the military

fashion; but he was not in uniform and his bearing was that of student or professional man, rather than of the military.

When the car stopped he did not wait for the driver or one of the servants, who now had come out upon the terrace, but he himself opened the door and stood back quickly, staring at Ruth anxiously and rubbing together his fat red hands.

"Herr Adler?" Ruth asked as she stood up.

"Yes, *gnädiges Fräulein*. You have come from the captain?"

Her drenched condition was witness to the fact, and Ruth observed that, besides, his little eyes sought the packets of papers and the memorandum book which she held.

"I have come from America and more recently from France," Ruth said, stepping down. They were alone now as Adler walked with her across the terrace. "I have come from Lucerne with Captain von Forstner."

"Yes, *gnädiges Fräulein*, I know; I know. And he is dead, they tell me. It is true that he is dead?"

"He is dead," Ruth confirmed. And she saw that the fact of von Forstner's death bore far different consequences to Adler than to Dittman. The secretary was charged now with responsibilities which had been his master's; it was these, more than the physical accident of von Forstner's death, which overwhelmed and dismayed him. "But I have recovered his reports and personal memoranda," Ruth assured.

"Yes; yes. That is very fortunate."

"Which I shall go over with you as quickly as I can

change to dry clothes, Herr Adler," she continued. She did not know whether the secretary had been about to make demand for his master's papers; if he had, she had anticipated him. "Oberst-Lieutenant von Fallenbosch has telephoned?" Ruth asked.

"Ten minutes ago, *gnädiges Fräulein*."

"Of course you told him that Captain von Forstner is dead."

"Of course."

"Well, what is he to do?"

"He is coming here at once."

"That's good," Ruth managed, steadily enough. "Where was he when he telephoned?"

"At Offenburg, *gnädiges Fräulein*."

"Then he will arrive in about an hour?"

"At noon, he said. But first there is much," Adler's nervousness increased, "much to be made ready for him."

"I will not delay," Ruth promised.

They had entered the hall—a large, dark hall with a wide, black stairway rising at the side.

"I shall send your bags instantly to your room, *gnädiges Fräulein*," Adler assured. He halted, giving her over to a maid servant for guidance. "Show Fräulein Brun to her apartment," Adler ordered. "I shall send stimulant," he added.

So she was Fräulein Brun and she had been expected here! Captain von Forstner had sent word that he was bringing her and had ordered her apartment prepared; and his advices, even to Adler, had ended with that.

Ruth followed the maid into a bedroom and boudoir,

where, a moment later, her bags were brought. Examination proved that they had served to keep her packed clothing dry; and, with the maid's assistance, Ruth took off her soaked garments. The maid took down her hair and brushed it out to dry; another maid appeared with the stimulant which Adler had promised and also with hot broth and biscuit. Ruth took this gladly and felt stronger. She let herself relax, half-dressed, in a chair while the maid fanned and brushed her hair. From the window she saw a car coming to the manor with von Forstner's body; a few moments later she heard the feet of bearers pass her room door. They appeared to take him into apartments just beyond—those which had been his own, undoubtedly. Ruth instructed the maid to do her hair and she would finish dressing.

Dismissing the maid, she remained alone in the room. She had kept with her the papers which von Forstner had carried, and while she had been under observation she had refrained from examining them. Now she opened the packets and found that those papers which had lain inside were almost dry; and swiftly spreading them before her she saw that they appeared to be typewritten observations upon economic matters of the character which a neutral Norwegian gentleman might make. They must be, in fact—Ruth knew—cipher memoranda of very different matters; they would probably not contain any summaries, for von Forstner could carry all summaries in his head. He would have committed to writing only details and items—some of them petty, taken by themselves, but others of more importance. They would have to do with conditions in France, but while meant for German infor-

mation their contents must carry quite as important advices for the allies, for they would betray the particular locations with which the Germans were concerning themselves and thereby disclose the front of the next attack.

Ruth sorted the pages over swiftly and, finding that their texts fell under nine heads, she removed the twenty-eight pages which were under five of these heads; the other twenty-three pages she restored to the two packets. She thrust the removed pages under her corset; and, carrying the others in their wet packets, she left the room. Descending the wide, black stairs, she found Adler pacing the hallway as he had paced the terrace.

He led her into a large, high, dark paneled, mullion-windowed room where old armor and battle maces stood upon the black walls above modern office filing cases and with an ancient carved table topped with glass and desk blotter; before this was an ordinary swivel chair. Adler motioned Ruth to this as he put out his hand for the packets.

“The reports now, please, *gnädiges Fräulein!*” Adler asked. “A transcription immediately must be ready for Oberst-Lieutenant von Fallenbosch! He will not find it like talking with Hauptmann von Forstner; but we must do what we can!”

Ruth handed him the packets and she sat down in the swivel chair while, on the other side of the glass table top, Adler spread out the sheets. Their number appeared to satisfy him; at least he questioned nothing, but, having the pages in order, he unlocked a small, flat drawer and took out three paper stencils. The apertures through the paper differed, Ruth saw, with each stencil. Adler laid them in

order over the first three sheets, and, bending, read to himself the words which remained in sight under the stencils. Ruth could not see what he read nor the brief transcript he made with pencil upon a pad. He shifted the stencils to the next three sheets, read the result again, made his transcript, and again shifted.

Adler came to the end and gazed up at Ruth. The other women whom Hauptmann von Forstner had invited to Lauengratz and who had used those apartments above evidently had been of unquestionable loyalty, for the secretary, when he gazed up at this guest of his dead master, did not challenge her. He sought information to prepare himself for the visit of Oberst-Lieutenant von Fallenbosch, not half an hour away.

“Besides these, *gnädiges Fräulein*,” he appealed anxiously, “did Herr Hauptmann make no verbal mention of other matters?”

Ruth shook her head. “Personal matters between him and myself,” she said. “But he did not go into the reports of others with me at all. In fact, he would not even receive my report; since I was coming into Germany I could make it myself to Oberst-Lieutenant Fallenbosch. That would be safer, he said.”

This true recital threw Adler into gesturing despair. “Exactly; it is precisely what he would do! It is safest; it is most discreet to put nothing, or as little as possible, upon paper. That is always his obsession! So discreet! When I say to him it is not always safer he laughs or tells me to mind my own business! Discretion! It is because he is so obsessed by it that he directs our secret service for the district. ‘Have merely an ordered mind, a good

memory, Adler,' he always says to me, 'and nothing will be misplaced, nothing will get astray, nothing will be obtained by others.'

"'Yes, Herr Hauptmann,' I say, 'but suppose something happen to that ordered mind and that good memory! What then?' Ah! He laughs at me and pats me on the back so indulgently. But where is that ordered mind; where now is that memory to which the most important things may be committed? Well, he is away from the trouble," the secretary raged in his dismay. "He can hear nothing which Oberst-Lieutenant von Fallenbosch may say of him. But I—I will get it. . . . Yet you can make your report to him. At least, that much may be added. You have come from where, Fräulein Brun? Which front?" he beseeched hopefully.

"From Picardy," Ruth said. "I had the honor to be assigned to Roisel and to attach myself, particularly, to the British Fifth Army."

"Ah! I salute you, *gnädiges Fräulein*, and your comrades for the wonderful work you have done. But the importance of that is past, Fräulein Brun! Since then where have you been?"

"My duty, as I interpreted it, was to retreat with the British; so I was swept back with them to Compiègne. Since then, as I explained to Herr Hauptmann, passport difficulties detained me in Paris."

"Then all from Reims to Soissons is in Herr Hauptmann's ordered mind! It is, as all the most essential would be, in his 'good memory'! And, by the latest, today the report was to start to great headquarters!"

The secretary jerked about from Ruth and hurried

back and forth across the room, head down and clapping his hands loudly together in his despair; and Ruth, watching him, sat stark. The importance of the Picardy front was past, he had said — that front where, in the tremendous assaults of March, the Germans had thrust their great salient between Amiens and Paris and where all the allies were working, day and night, strengthening their lines against a new attack! The Flanders front, where still the German armies were hurling themselves toward the channel? Adler did not even mention that. The “most essential” was the front from Reims to Soissons, all quiet now and one which — so far as Ruth knew — the allies expected to remain quiet and where they yet were unprepared for a great attack.

But there the next tremendous assault must be coming; and it was so near that, by the latest, today report of conditions upon that front was to start to great headquarters! Well, whatever was written about that front Ruth had now in the papers folded tight against her body and what von Forstner had entrusted to his ordered mind was lost forever! Keenly she watched Adler while, still striking his hands together in his helplessness, he strode swiftly up and down.

He spun about to her suddenly, and for an instant Ruth believed he was about to challenge her. But the secretary could not yet reach suspicion of the comrade of his Herr Hauptmann and for whom Hauptmann von Forstner had instructed rooms to be made ready beside his own and who herself had completed the journey to Lauengratz alone and of her own will and bearing Herr Hauptmann's papers.

“You removed these yourself from Herr Hauptmann’s body?”

“No; Dittman procured them for me. I was somewhat injured myself, you see,” she explained her neglect. “And a little faint, at first.”

“Of course; of course! But Dittman is a thick skull! He might not have suspected where Herr Hauptmann might have concealed the most important memoranda!” Adler livened with hope. “And there were Russians, I understand, who first found you and dragged out Herr Hauptmann. They are mere brutes, incapable of understanding anything. Nevertheless they may have meddled. I shall send and see and at once myself examine the body of Herr Hauptmann!”

He turned about and gazed at his papers; he swept them together and into a drawer. The stencils, by which he had read the ciphers, went with them. “You will remain here, *gnädiges Fräulein*,” he half commanded, half requested, and he hastened from the room.

Ruth delayed only the instant necessary to make certain that he had gone upstairs. Suspicion which now turned upon Dittman and upon the Russians swiftly must approach her; moreover, the hour of arrival of Oberst-Lieutenant von Fallenbosch was almost here. By her stroke of boldness and of luck she had succeeded in temporarily overreaching the secretary whom she had found so unbalanced by the death of his superior. But she could not possibly hope to dupe von Fallenbosch. She must fail with him as miserably as she had failed with von Forstner. And to attempt with him and to fail involved, now, not only her own destruction but delivery into German hands

of that most essential information which she had intercepted, and loss to the allies of the knowledge of German plans.

She opened the drawer which Adler had just closed and she took out the sheets of von Forstner's reports and the stencils. She went out into the hall and, finding it empty, she passed quickly to a door on the side of the house which, she believed, was not commanded from the windows of the room where Captain von Forstner's body lay. In that direction, also, the forest lay nearer to the house; Ruth went out and walked toward the trees. An impulse to run almost controlled her, but she realized that she must be in sight of servants, who might not question her strolling out away from the house in the warm spring sunshine but who would immediately report anything which resembled flight. So she went slowly until she reached the forest; then she ran—wildly and breathlessly.

She found a path, well marked and much used and easy to run upon. Other paths, almost overgrown, opened into it here and there. Ruth ran by the first few of these; then, choosing arbitrarily, she took one of the disused ways which twisted north—she noticed—through denser thickets of budding oaks and beeches; it ascended, too, bending back and forth up a mountainside which brought the darker boughs of the black firs drooping about her while, underfoot, the ground alternately became stony bare and soft with velvety cushions of pine needles.

She stopped at last, exhausted and gasping; her pulses were pounding so in her head that she scarcely could hear, and the forest on every side limited sight. But so far as she could see and as well as she could hear there was no

alarm of anyone following her. It seemed absolutely still on the mountainside except for the movement of the noon breeze in the tree tops; now from somewhere far away and off to the right she heard the ring of an ax and, after a minute, the fall of a tree; now the sound of the ax again.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE UNDERGROUND RAILWAY

**R**UTH sank down upon the ground in a warm, sunny spot where the trees were more scant than they had been below. They were dense enough, however, to shield her from sight of anyone in the valley, while they permitted a view down the mountainside. Off to the west she could see a stretch of railroad; nearer she got a glimpse of a highway; she saw horsemen and several slower specks, which must be men on foot. Oberst-Lieutenant von Fallenbosch had arrived, Ruth believed, and Adler had started the pursuit after her. But as she thought of the maze of pathways through the forest she believed that she was safe for a while—unless a large number of the prisoners joined in the search and if Adler did not use dogs to track her.

But she could not make herself safer by farther aimless flight. Here seemed to be as secure a spot as she might find for the examination of the documents which she had procured; here was the place to plan. She laid out upon a rock the pages of von Forstner's report, and, placing the stencils, she studied them in series of three, as she had seen Adler do. These pages—those which Adler had read, together with those which she had kept concealed—told a plain, certain story. The Germans at the present moment were concerning themselves with the minutest

details of events before the Reims-Soissons line of the allies; other sectors, in comparison, were disregarded; before Reims and Soissons the enemy were maturing their great attack!

Ruth, having read, gathered together the pages and sat in the sun gazing away over the Rhine to the west. The feeling of fate — the touch of destiny — which had exalted and transformed her upon that cold January morning in Chicago quickened her again. Something beyond herself originally had sent her into this tremendous adventure, throughout which she had followed instinct — chance — fate — whatever you called it — rather than any conscious scheme. At the outset she had responded simply to impulse to serve; to get into Germany — how, she did not know; to do there — what, she had not known. At different times she had formed plans, of course, many plans; but as she thought back upon them now they seemed to her to have contemplated only details, as though she had recognized her incapacity, by conscious plan, to attain this consummation.

For she realized that this was consummation. This which she already had gained, and gained through acts and chances which she could not have foreseen, was all — indeed, more than all — she could have hoped to obtain through the vague, delayed ordeals which her fancy had formed for her. She had nothing more to attempt here in the enemy's land than escape and return to the allied lines; she had no right, indeed, to attempt more; for anything additional which she could gain would be of such slight value, in comparison with what she now had, that it could not justify her in heaping hazard upon the

risks which she must run in returning to the allied armies with the knowledge she possessed.

There was Gerry Hull, of course. He was in this land of the enemy somewhere—alive or dead. When she was entering Germany she had thought of herself as coming, somehow, to find and to aid him. But what she had gained meant that now she must abandon him.

She gazed toward the railroad and to the white streak of the road to Lauengratz, upon which, after a few minutes, a motor again passed; more horsemen appeared and more specks of walking men. But through the woods was silence; the axmen, whom she had heard before, began to fell other trees; and the steadiness of the sound brought Ruth reassurance. Whatever search was being made below had not yet disturbed the woodsmen near her. Yet she arose and crept a few hundred yards farther up the mountainside, and under heavier cover, before she dropped to the ground again.

She found herself more relaxed as the rowels of peril, which had goaded her mercilessly, ceased to incite fresh strength for farther flight. All her nerves and senses remained alert; but her body was exhausted and sore. She was hungry, too; and though nothing was farther from her thought than sleep, nevertheless she suffered the result not only of the strains of the morning, but also of her sleeplessness during the night. She was cold, having changed from her suit to a linen street dress which had been Cynthia Gail's, and she was without a hat; so she sought the sun once more and sat back to a tree and rested.

If recaptured—she thought of herself as having been

captured by von Forstner — she recognized that she would be shot. Therefore her recapture with von Forstner's reports upon her could not make her fate worse; and in any case she determined to preserve them as proof to the French — if she ever regained access to the French — that the information which she bore was authentic. She did up the papers and the stencils together and secreted them under her clothing.

She tried to imagine what Adler and Oberst-Lieutenant von Fallenbosch — who undoubtedly was now saying to Adler a good deal more than the secretary had dreaded — would expect her to do so that she could choose the opposite course. The alternatives, obviously, were effort to reach the Swiss frontier and in some way elude the border guards or to make for the Alsace front, where the French and the Americans were fighting.

This second allured her powerfully; but, to attempt it, meant leaving this friendly cover of the Black Forest — which would hide her almost to the Swiss frontier — and crossing west to the Rhine and across to the Rhine Canal, and almost the whole way across Alsace to the Vosges Mountains, where the opposing trenches twisted. She knew that behind the German fighting front she would encounter a military zone of many miles, much more difficult to penetrate than the civilian zone bounding the soldier-sentined barriers at the Swiss frontier. But, just beyond that zone in Alsace lay American battalions; above it would be flying American battleplanes.

Ruth closed her eyes and seemed to see them; one was fighting as she had seen Gerry Hull fight that morning near Mirevaux. It was he and he was being shot down!

She started up, blinking in the sunlight. He had been shot down again, in truth. This was Germany; and he was in Germany; the enemy had him—von Forstner's boasting voice was saying it—dead or a prisoner. She shuddered and closed her eyes to see, again, Gerry Hull's face. She seemed to be looking up at him; he was in blue-gray—his French uniform. Palms and roses were behind him. They were in Mrs. Corliss' conservatory together, their first time alone.

"You're not like anyone else here," he was saying to her. "That's why I needed to see you again. . . . What is it, Cynthia Gail?" A queer, warm little thrill went through her; she seemed to be still looking up at him, his arms were about her now; he was carrying her. They were upon the *Ribot* and she was telling him that she would have gone into the sea to get anyone—anyone at all. Now, "Ruth—Ruth Alden!" he was saying. Her own name; and he liked to repeat it. "They shan't!" he was holding her so fiercely. "They shan't!" Now he kissed her hand. Her fingers of her other hand closed gently over the hand he had kissed; so, in the sunlight at the base of a tree high upon the mountainside above Lauengratz in the Black Forest of Baden, at last she fell asleep.

Not soundly nor for extended periods; a score of times she stirred and started up at sounds made by the breeze or at the passage of some small forest animal. Once a human footfall aroused her; and she was amazed to learn how delicate her hearing had been made by alarm when she discovered how distant the man was. He bore an ax; and evidently he was a Russian or perhaps a French

captive; he passed upon a path far below without even looking up to where she hid in the trees. Nevertheless Ruth fled farther about the mountain before she dared rest again.

At nightfall she was awake and during the first hours of blackness she forced her way on in spite of the dismaying difficulties of wood travel in the dark. She fell repeatedly, even when she ventured upon a path, or she bruised herself upon boughs and stumbled into thickets. But she did not give up until the conviction came to her that she was hopelessly lost.

At best, she had been proceeding but blunderingly, attempting no particular course; merely endeavoring to keep to a definite direction. But now she did not know whether she had worked west of Lauengratz or had circled it to the east or south. She was cold, too; and hungry and quite exhausted. Twice she had crossed tiny brooks—or else the same brook twice—and she had cupped her hands to drink; thus, with nothing more than the cold mountain water to restore her, she lay down at last in a little hollow and slept.

The morning light gave her view over strange valleys with all the hills and mountain tops in new configuration. She stood up, stiff, and bruised, and weak; taking her direction from the sun, she started west, encountering cleared ground soon and a well-traveled road, which she dared not cross in the daylight. So she followed it north until a meeting road, with its cleared ground, halted her. At first she determined to wait until dark; but after a few hours of frightened waiting she risked the crossing in daylight and fled into the farther woods unseen. Again

that afternoon she came into the open to cross a north and south road. Early in the evening she crossed a railroad, which she believed to be the road from Freiburg to Karlsruhe.

She had seen many men, women, and children that day, as upon the previous day, passing on the roads, or busy about houses, or working in fields, or in the woodlands. Most of the people were Germans; but many, undoubtedly, were military prisoners or deported civilians. She had avoided all alike, not daring to approach any house or any person, though now she had been forty-eight hours without food except for the "stimulant" and the accompanying biscuit which Adler had sent her.

That night, however, she found the shelter of a shed where was straw and at least a little more warmth than under the trees. Refuge there involved more risk, she knew; but she had reached almost the end of her strength; and, lying in the straw and covering herself with it, she slept dreamlessly at first, and then to reassuring, pleasant dreams. She was in a *château* — one of those white-gray, beautiful, undamaged buildings which she had seen far behind the battle lines in France; she was lying in a beautiful, soft bed, much like that which had been hers at Mrs. Mayhew's apartment upon the Avenue Kléber. Then all shifted to a great hospital ward, like that in which she had visited Charles Gail; but she was in the same beautiful bed and an attendant — a man — had come to take her pulse.

She stirred, it had become so real; she could feel gentle, but firm, and very real fingers upon her wrist. Now a man's voice spoke, in French and soothingly. "It is well,

Mademoiselle, I do not mean harm to you. I am only Antoine Fayal, a Frenchman from Amagne in the department of Ardennes, Mademoiselle. I——”

Opening her eyes, Ruth saw a thin, hollow-cheeked, dark-haired man of middle age in the rags of blouse and trousers which had been, once, a French peasant's attire. He quickly withdrew his hand, which had been upon Ruth's wrist; and his bloodless lips smiled respectfully and reassuringly.

“I am French, Mademoiselle,” he begged in a whisper. “Believe me! One of the deported; a prisoner. My duty here, a woodsman! Happening by here, Mademoiselle, I discovered you; but I alone! No one else. You will pardon; but you were so white; you barely breathed. I did not believe you dead, Mademoiselle; but faint, perhaps. So I sought to ascertain!”

“I thank you!” Ruth whispered back, feeling for her papers. “Where are we?”

“This is part of the estate of Graf von Weddingen, Mademoiselle. We are very close to the Rhine. You are——” he coughed and altered his question before completing it. “It may be in my power to aid you, Mademoiselle?”

“I am an American,” Ruth said.

“Yes, Mademoiselle.”

“I have been trying to reach Alsace and the French and American lines.”

“You have done well so far, Mademoiselle,” Fayal said respectfully.

“How do you know?”

“I know that at noon yesterday, Mademoiselle, you

were twenty kilometers away. The whole countryside has been warned to find you; but you have come these twenty kilometers in spite of them."

He coughed and checked himself, a little guiltily, as she startled. "That is, Mademoiselle, if you are that American lady who had accompanied Hauptmann von Forstner."

"I am that one," Ruth admitted.

"Then, Mademoiselle, come immediately with me! No moment is to be lost!"

He went to the door of the shed and gazed cautiously about. Ruth arose and began brushing the straw from herself; sleep had restored her nerves, but not her strength, she found. She swayed when she stepped. She was completely at the mercy of this man, as she must have been in the power of whoever found her. But she did not distrust Fayal. His emaciation, his cough, and, more than those, his manner—the manner of a man who had been suffering indignities without letting himself become servile; and together with that, his concern and respect for a woman—seemed to Ruth beyond counterfeit.

"You require food, of course, Mademoiselle!" Fayal exclaimed in dismay. "And I have none!"

"I can follow you," Ruth assured.

"Then now, Mademoiselle!"

He stepped from the shed, and, motioning to her to imitate him, he slipped into the trees to the right. Evidently he considered her danger great; the peril to him, if caught aiding one who was attempting escape, must be as positive as her own; but the Frenchman was disregard-

ful of that. He gained a gully, and, returning, aided her in descending. Someone approached. "Lie flat!" Fayal whispered. She obeyed; and, while she lay, she heard German voices shouting and the sounds of search.

When they had moved far away, Fayal led her to a dugout entrance, concealed by brush and with last year's leaves scattered before it.

"Keep well back in there, Mademoiselle; until I come again for you!"

She went into a low and dark but fairly dry cavern under the hillside. She heard Fayal tossing about leaves to hide the entrance as before. Soon he was gone.

Many times during the day Ruth heard people passing through the woods. Once she was sure that a group of men were engaged in a search; but they failed to find the cavern. Only late in the afternoon someone, who stepped quickly and lightly—a child or a slight, active woman—ran close past the brush before the entrance, and, without halting, tossed a bundle into the bush.

Ruth had been obeying Fayal's injunction to stay well back in the cavern; now, venturing to the bush, she found a paper package, within which was a chunk of blackish, hard bread and two boiled turnips. She thought, as she saw this food, that it had been Fayal's perhaps; at least, it had been the ration of some prisoner or deported captive as ill fed, probably, as he. But she was ravenous; this had been given her, however little it could have been spared by the donor. She ate it all and was stronger.

Fayal did not return that day; but during the night someone visited the cavern, for, when morning came, she found food.

At night Fayal returned, and when he guided her out of the woods across fields and farms, she realized how essential were the precautions he had enjoined. He guided her half the night, and brought her to another concealment, where another French refugee took her in charge.

She had become a passenger, she found, upon one of the "underground railways" in operation to conduct escaped prisoners across the frontiers; Fayal, having brought her safely over his section, said his adieu.

"The next German attack is to come upon the French on the front between Reims and Soissons, remember, Fayal," Ruth enjoined upon the man when parting with him. "If I fail to get through, you must try to send the word."

"Yes, Mademoiselle. But you must not fail. Good fortune, Mademoiselle, adieu!"

"Good fortune, Fayal; a thousand thanks again; and — adieu!"

Her new conductor led her on a few more miles that night; she laid up during the day; at night proceeded under a new guide.

So she passed on from hiding place to hiding place, sometimes lying for days at a time — terrible, torturing delays, during which she dreamed of the Germans advancing over all that Reims-Soissons front and sweeping over the French armies as they had overwhelmed the British in Picardy. And she — she, if she might go on, could prevent them! Many times during the endless hours she lay alone waiting for her guide who did not appear, she crept out from her concealment, determined to force on; but

always she learned the futility of attempting to proceed alone.

She was following her sixth guide after Fayal, and it was upon the eleventh evening after her escape from Lauengratz, when suddenly she heard a rough challenge; German soldiers appeared across the path; others leaped up from the right and left; yet others were behind.

Her guide instantly recognized that he had led her into a trap; and he fought, wildly, to try to save her. She fought, too. But they bayoneted him, and, upon their bayonets, they bore him back upon her. A soldier seized her; overpowered her, brutally, and she struggled no longer with hope to fight free, but only to destroy the papers which she still carried. So they pinioned her arms; they half stripped her in searching her; they took her papers, and leaving her guide dead upon the ground, they hurried her with them to their commandant.

This officer instantly suspected her identity. For, in spite of her eleven nights of flight, she was not yet seventy miles from Lauengratz. Disposition of her evidently had been predetermined, pending her recapture; for the officer, after examining her again, dispatched her to a railroad train, under guard. They put her in manacles and, boarding a north-bound train, they took her to a town the name of which she could not learn. From the station they marched her to what appeared to be an old castle, where they at once confined her, alone, in a stone-walled cell.

It possessed a solitary, narrow slit of a window, high up under the ceiling; it boasted for furniture a cot, a chair and bowls. The Germans relieved her of the

manacles when they led her into this cell. Not long after she was left alone, light streaked in through the slit of a window; a hand, opening a panel in her door, thrust in a dipper of soup and a chunk of bread.

Ruth received the food, consumed it, and sank down upon her pallet. Her great venture thus had come to an end; her life was forfeit; and by all that she had dared and done, she had accomplished—nothing.

No; more than nothing. She had caused the arrest of De Trevenac and those taken with him; she had aided at least a little in the frightful labors of the retreat from Mirevaux. She had saved the life of Gerry Hull!

She never before had permitted herself to think that she had saved Gerry; without her he might have been able to free himself from under his machine. But now she let herself believe.

This gave her a share in the battles which he had fought over the advancing enemy lines. Yes; she had accomplished more than nothing. Yet how much less than she had dreamed! And all of her dream—or most of it—might actually have come true! She had possessed the German plan; indeed, she still possessed the knowledge of the front of the next assault and something of the detail of the enemy operations! She had committed it, verbally, to Fayal and to others of her guides; so it was possible that it might yet reach the allied lines. But she realized that, even though Fayal or one of the others sent the word through, it must completely lack authority; it must reach the French as merely a rumor—a trick of the enemy, perhaps; it could not be heeded.

She sat up with muscles all through her tugging taut.

It seemed that with her frantic strength, with her bare hands she must rend those stones and escape, not to save herself, but to return to the allied lines and tell them what she knew. But the coldness of the stones, when she touched them, shocked her to realizations.

Tomorrow—or perhaps even today—the enemy might take her out and kill her. And while death—her individual, personal annihilation—had become a matter of amazingly small account, yet the recognition that with death must come withdrawal, perhaps, even from knowledge of how the battle was going upon that line where the fate of all the world was at stake, where Britons and French fought as she had seen them fight, and where, at last, America was arriving—that crushed her down to her pallet and with despair quite overwhelmed her.

So she set herself to thinking of Gerry. He was alive, perhaps; a prisoner, therefore, and to be returned some day when the war was over, to marry Lady Agnes, while she . . . . Ruth did not shudder when she thought of herself dead.

Perhaps Gerry was dead; then she would be going at once to join him. And if they merely took her out and shot her today, or tomorrow, or some day soon, without doing anything more to her than that, she might find Gerry and rejoin him, much as she had been when he had known her and—yes—liked her. Without having suffered indignity, that was. These cold stones seemed at least to assure her of this. So she lay and thought of him while the slit of light crept slowly from left to right as the sun swung to the west and she listened for the step of those who would come to her cell.

## CHAPTER XX

### AN OFFICERS' PRISON

GERRY, when shot down over the German lines, had succeeded in making that "some sort of landing" which his comrades had reported.

There was an axiom, taught in the training camps to give confidence to cadets, which said that when a pilot once gets his wheels squarely on the ground, he will not be killed, though his machine may be badly smashed. Gerry, in his landing, had tested this axiom to its utmost; for he had had sufficient control of his ship, at the last, to put his wheels square to the ground; and though his machine was wholly wrecked, he was not killed. He was painfully shaken and battered; but so excellently was his ship planned to protect the pilot in a "crash," that he was not even seriously injured. Indeed, after the German soldiers dragged him out he was able to stand—and was quite able, so the German intelligence officers decided, to undergo an ordeal intended to make him divulge information.

This ordeal failed, as it failed with all brave men taken prisoners; and Gerry was given escort out of the zone of the armies and put upon a train for a German prison camp. With him were an American infantry lieutenant and two French officers.

The Germans held, at that time, nearly two million

prisoners of war, of which upwards of twenty thousand were officers; the men and non-commissioned officers—as Gerry had heard—were distributed in more than a hundred great camps, while for the officers there were about fifty prisons scattered all over the German states. These varied in character from sanatoria, newly erected high-school buildings, hotels, and vacated factories, to ancient brick and stone fortresses housing prisoners in their dark, damp casemates. The *offizier-gefangenenlager* to which Gerry and his three companions finally were taken proved to be one of the old fortress castles just east of the Rhine, in the grand duchy of Hesse; its name was Villinstein, and it housed at that time about five hundred officers and officers' servants. There Gerry and his three companions were welcomed, not alone for themselves, but for the news which they brought with them; and Gerry, being an aviator, found himself particularly welcome.

“For a flyin' man we've been a-waitin', Gerry, dear,” Captain O'Malley—formerly of the Irish Fusiliers—whispered and all but chanted into Gerry's ear soon after they became acquainted. All allied officer prisoners—as German official reports frequently complained—planned an escape; but some schemed more than others. And the heart, if not the soul, of the schemes of escape from Villinstein was the black-haired, dark-eyed, light-hearted Kerry man of twenty-four summers, who was back in the casemates with his fellows again after six weeks of “the solitary” in a dungeon as punishment for his last effort for liberty.

“'Tis this way,” O'Malley initiated Gerry immediately

into the order of those bound to break for freedom. They were standing alone at a corner of the castle, which gave view over the ground to the east. "Out there you see the first wire—'tis often charged with electricity at night—to catch us if we leap over these walls. Beyond you see the second entanglement of the same persuasion; after that—nothing at all! Do you see?"

Gerry admitted vision, as though the walls below them, the guards and the two wire barriers were merest trifles.

"We've been beyond many times," the Irishman motioned, unfolding his theory of immateriality of the apparent obstacles. "Many times."

"How?" Gerry inquired.

"By burrow, mostly. Now and then in other ways; but by tunnel is most certain. 'Tis harmless amusement for us, the enemy think; so they let us dig, though they know we're doing it, till we're ready to run out. Then they halt us and claim the reward. 'Tis arranged so."

Gerry nodded. He had heard long before, from escaped prisoners, that at certain camps the Germans made little attempt to prevent tunneling until the burrows were almost completed. The German system of rewards, by some peculiar psychology of the command, gave more credit to guards for "detecting" an escape than at first preventing it.

"This time 'twill be different!" O'Malley promised, smacking his lips.

"Why?"

"They don't know where we're burrowing."

"How many times before haven't they known?" Gerry asked cautiously.

“Many times,” O’Malley admitted. “But this time they don’t. We’re working at two they know about, of course; but the third—” he checked himself and looked about cautiously, then spoke more closely to Gerry’s ear. “’Tis well planned now. Ye’ve seen the tennis court in the courtyard?”

“Certainly,” Gerry said.

“Did ye note the fine new grandstand we built about it?”

He referred, obviously, to the tiers of steps, or seats, to accommodate the spectators at the match games for the championship of the camp which then were being played.

“Under the stands where they run up against the side of the canteen building,” O’Malley confided, “is a fine, empty space for hiding dirt which the Huns don’t yet inspect—that not yet being listed for inspection, nothing yet having happened beneath. So there we’re digging the true tunnel—besides the two that everyone knows about. Now that you’re here, we’ll use it. We’ve been only awaiting—while wishing nobody any hard luck—for a flying man. For we’ve been beyond the wire many times,” the Irishman repeated. “But now with you here, we’ll go farther.” And he gazed away to the east, where airplanes were circling in the clear sky.

They had risen from an airdrome about two miles distant from Villinsein, Gerry learned, where the Germans were training cadet flyers. O’Malley had managed to learn something of the arrangement of the airdrome and had observed the habits of the cadets; he had a wonderful plan by which the party of prisoners, who

should use the secret tunnel to get beyond the wire, should surprise the guards at the flying field and capture an airplane. Thus Gerry began his prison life with a plot for escape.

At times he took his turn digging in the tunnel; at times he was one of the crowd of spectators upon the stand about the tennis court, who stamped and applauded loudly whenever the men working below signaled for a little noise to mask their more audible activities; at times he himself took part in the play.

Every few days groups of prisoners were permitted to take a tramp in the neighborhood under the escort of a couple of German officers. To obtain this privilege, each prisoner was required to give his parole not to attempt to escape while on these expeditions; but as the parole bound no one after the return to the fortress, the prisoners gave it. Gerry in this way obtained a good view of the surroundings of Villinsein; and in one way or another he and the other officers picked up a good deal of news which otherwise would not have reached the prison.

It was in this manner that word reached the officer prisoners at Villinsein that an American girl, who had entered Germany by way of Switzerland in an attempt to obtain military information, had been captured and had been taken to the *schloss* belonging to von Fallenbosch, near Mannheim, fifty miles away. It was not known whether she had been executed or whether she still was living; indeed, it was not known whether she had been tried yet; or whether she was to be tried; and her identity—except that she was an American girl—also

was a mystery. That is, it was unknown to the prisoner who brought in the news and to the others to whom he told it; but it was not a mystery to Gerry. He knew that the girl was Ruth Alden—that she had gone on with her plan and been caught.

And the knowledge imbued him with furious dismay. He blamed himself as the cause of her being at the mercy of the enemy. He had seen no way past the dilemma which had confronted him in regard to her, except to make a negative report in regard to Ruth which—he had hoped—would both keep her free from trouble with the French authorities and prevent her gaining permission to leave France for Switzerland. He had learned, too late, that while he had accomplished the former end, he had failed in the latter. She had been allowed to proceed to Switzerland; then he was shot down and captured.

It had been impossible, therefore, for him to seek further information of her fate; but he had her in his mind almost constantly. When he was by himself, in such isolation as Villinsein afforded, his thoughts dwelt upon her. He liked to review, half dreamily as he sat in a corner of a casemate with a book, all his hours with her and recall—or imagine—how she looked that first time she had spoken to him. The days upon the *Ribot* had become, marvelously, days with her. Quite without his will—and certainly without his conscious intention—Agnes had less and less place in his recollections of the voyage. She was always there, of course; but his thought and his feelings did not of themselves restore to him hours with her. It was the same when he was talking over personal and home affairs with the men with whom he

became best acquainted — with O'Malley and a Canadian captain named Lownes; when the Irishman spoke of the girl waiting for him and when Lownes — who was married — told of his wife, Gerry mentioned Ruth; and — yes — he boasted a bit of her.

“I thought,” O'Malley said to him later, “that you were engaged to an English girl, the daughter of an earl or such.”

Gerry colored a little. “We've been good friends; that's all, Michael; never more than that. When we happened to go to America on the same boat, our papers over there tried to make more of it; and some of their stuff reached this side.”

This was true enough; but it left out of account the fact that, not long ago, Gerry had hoped himself some day to make “more of it”; and, later, he had not tried. Now, as he thought back he knew that Agnes had never loved him; and he had not loved her. This strange girl whom he had known at first as Cynthia, and then as Ruth Alden, had stirred in him not only doubts of the ideas by which he had lived; she had roused him to requirements of friendship — of love, let him admit it now — which he had not felt before. Their ride together away from Mirevaux, when he sat almost helpless and swaying at her side after she had saved his life, became to him the day of discovery of her and of himself. He could see her so clearly as her eyes blurred with tears when she told him about “1583;” and he knew that then he loved her. Their supper together at Compiègne became to him the happiest hour of his life. He had felt for her more strongly that evening of their last parting

in the *pension*; but then the shadow of her great venture was over them.

Everything which happened somehow reminded him of her. When he was out of the prison during the walks on parole and he passed groups of German civilians and overheard their remarks about America, he thought of her. The Germans were perfectly able to understand why France fought, and why England fought, and why Russia had fought; but why had America come in? Why was America making her tremendous effort? What was she to gain? Nothing—nothing material, that was. The enemy simply could not understand it except by imputing to America motives and aims which Gerry knew were not true. Thus from experience with the enemy he was beginning to appreciate that feeling which Ruth had possessed and tried to explain to him—feeling of the true nobility of his country. So, as he went on his walks in Germany, he was proud that his uniform marked him as an American. Prouder—yes, prouder than he could have been under any other coat!

He had intended to tell her so; but now she was taken and in the hands of the Germans! They would execute her; perhaps already they had! From such terrors there was no relief but work—work in the tunnel, by which he must escape, and then save her, or die trying.

A little more news arrived; the American girl was believed to be yet alive; that was four days ago.

“We must work faster,” O’Malley enjoined after hearing this; and Gerry, who had not yet said anything about his private fears, learned that others in the camp also planned to rescue the American girl under sentence at

the *schloss*. The camp — which in six months had not succeeded in getting one of their own number free — swore now to save the prisoner of von Fallenbosch. Such was the spirit of the *offizier-gefangenenlager* of Villin-stein.

So Gerry told O'Malley and Lownes about Ruth Alden; and together they laid their plans. Two days later the Irishman grasped Gerry's arm tightly.

"We wait, bye, only for a moon."

"You mean the bore's finished?"

"As near as may be till the night of use. You've the almanac; when will be the moon big enough to give you light to fly?"

"Fri — no, Thursday, Mike?"

"You'll be certain, bye; you'll not spoil all by impulsiveness."

"Thursday will be all right, if it's clear, Mike."

"Then pray, bye, for a dark evening."

"And a clear night!"

"Aye; a clear night — to find Mannheim!"

And Thursday evening came, overclouded, yet with a moon behind the clouds which shone bright and clear for minutes at a time, then, obscured, left all the land in blackness.

The digging parties of the last week had placed in the tunnel enough food from the officers' packages, which arrived regularly through Switzerland, to supply three days' rations for ten men; so that night the ten descended into the tunnel. They recognized it was possible that the guards knew about the tunnel and had permitted them to enter it that night only to catch them at the other end.

The test would come when taps was sounded and the German officer of the day, making his rounds of the barracks, would find ten men missing roll call.

Gerry then was lying on his face in the tunnel and passing back dirt which those in front of him excavated. Only by counting the drumming of his heart could he estimate the minutes passing, but he knew that the delay in the tunnel was longer than O'Malley had planned.

"Taps! Taps!" came the word from Lownes, at the prison end of the burrow, who had heard the German bugle blow. From forward, where O'Malley was digging, dirt kept coming back, and still more dirt. For the diggers had not dared to run the bore to the surface, nor, indeed, near enough to the surface so that a sentinel, treading above, would break through. At best, therefore, O'Malley, who was finishing the bore, had a fair amount left to do.

"The alarm! The alarm!"

Gerry, gasping in the stifling air of the burrow, could not hear the bugle or the bells; the warning was passed to him by the man at his heels; and Gerry passed the alarm on to the heels at his head. The Germans knew now that men were missing; the camp guards were out, the police dogs let loose; sentinels would fire, without challenge, at anyone sighted outside of the barracks.

But from past the heels at Gerry's head a fresh, cool current of air was moving. He drew deep breaths, and as the heels crawled from him he thrust upon his elbows and crept after. The bore was open; O'Malley was out upon the ground. The heels ahead of Gerry altered to a hand, which reached into the burrow, caught Gerry's arm, and dragged him out. Kneeling at the edge of the hole,

he thrust his arm down, caught someone, and pulled him out.

O'Malley was gone; the man whose hand had helped Gerry also had vanished. Gerry made no attempt to find or follow them as he crouched and ran; the plan was that all would scatter immediately. Machine guns were going; searchlights were sweeping the ground. Gerry fell flat when a beam swung at him, went over and caught some other poor devil. A field piece upon a platform on the edge of the camp opened upon the space a hundred yards beyond Gerry and shrapnel began smashing.

One good thing about shrapnel Gerry recognized; it spread smoke which screened the searchlight flares. Another feature was that it and the machine-gun fire was as hard on the police dogs as upon the fugitives. But that was like the Germans—when they were surprised—to let go everything at once.

Gerry jumped up and fled, taking his chances with the machine-gun bullets and with the shrapnel which burst all about at random; but he watched the searchlights and threw himself down when they threatened.

O'Malley had planned a surprise attack in force—if you can call ten unarmed men a force when attacking a German flying field. But Gerry knew that already the ten must be cut in two. Some of them probably never got out of the tunnel; the machine guns or the shrapnel surely must have accounted for one or two. He heard dogs give tongue as they were taught to do when they had caught prisoners.

The Irishman's plan, wild enough at best, had become hopeless. Gerry had offered no other plan, because he

had failed to form anything less mad. But now as he lay on the ground, while a searchlight streamed steadily above him, a plan offered itself.

This came from the clouds and from the moon shining through when, as now, the clouds split and parted — from the moon whose rising and shining full O'Malley and he had awaited. They had waited for the moon to furnish them light for their night flight in a German airplane after they got the machine. They had not thought of the moon as bringing them a "ship." But now, above the rattle of the machine guns and between the smashings of the shrapnel, Gerry heard motors in the air and he knew that night-flying Hun-birds were up. For their pilots, too, had been waiting for the moon for practice.

It is all very well to talk about night flying in the dark; but Gerry knew how difficult — almost impossible — is flight in actual darkness. When he had been in training for night flying, years ago at his French training field, he had waited so many weeks for the moon that now he jeered at himself, lying flat under the searchlight beam, for a fool not to have thought of German flyers being up tonight.

They were up — six or eight of them at least. He could see their signal lights when he could not hear their motors. They had come overhead when the lights at the prison blazed out and the guns got going. The machine guns and the shrapnel fire ceased; only the searchlights glared out over the fields beyond the prison wire. The moon went under the clouds again. Gerry knew he could dodge the searchlights; but now he made no attempt whatever to flee. Instead, he crept back toward the prison, and

between the beams of lights, which reached away to the south, almost parallel, and which swung back and forth slightly.

Except for those lights, all was black now; and Gerry knew how those searchlight beams must tempt some German cadet making his first night flight under the clouds. Gerry had been a cadet flying at night in the darkness with clouds closing overhead. He knew how strange and terrifying was the blackness of the ground; how welcome was any light giving view of a landing place. The airdrome, with its true landing lights, was two miles to the south; but what was direction, and what was a difference of two miles to a cadet coming down through the clouds, and "feeling" in the darkness for the ground? Gerry himself only a few months before, when caught by closing clouds, had come down in a field six miles from the one he sought. Indeed, French airmen flying at night had come down in German airdromes by mistake, as Germans had come down in French.

So Gerry lay in the blackness between the searchlight beams, accusing himself for dullness in not having known. If he had seen an escape before, and seen these searchlights shooting out over the fields, he might have realized how they imitated landing lights; but he had not; and O'Malley—if he lived—would be waiting for him by the flying field. No, not O'Malley. For the Irishman's voice whispered to him gently. O'Malley dragged himself up.

"Bye, you're hit, too?"

"No; I'm all right. You?"

"'Twas bad planned, all." The Irishman took blame

upon himself for the catastrophe which had befallen the others. "I doubt whether any of them——"

His lips lay to Gerry's ear; but Gerry turned his head.

"You can stand and fight a minute, O'Malley?"

"Arrah! You see them coming?"

"It's overhead, O'Malley; listen. One of them's trying to get down. Maybe there's two men in it."

"What do you mean I should hear?"

"The silence," Gerry said. "One of them just shut off above us."

"I'm affecting you, bye," said O'Malley. "But I know what you mean."

The silence to which Gerry referred was only comparative; the motor was shut off in the German airplane which was trying to "get down"; but the rush of the volplane kept the airscrew thrashing audibly. The sound passed a hundred yards overhead; it increased suddenly to a roar as the pilot opened his throttle; and Gerry knew that in volplaning down, the cadet had misjudged the ground and had switched on his engine to give him power to circle about and try for the landing again.

The roar returned; throttled down; the airscrew thrashed; black-crossed wings darted through the beams of a searchlight; the pilot got his wheels on the ground and his machine was bounding. Gerry was on his feet and running after it. O'Malley followed. The airplane rolled slowly through the second pencil of light and, as the pilot stepped from his seat, Gerry charged him from behind. Gerry tackled him and knocked him down; Gerry jerked out the German's automatic pistol.

"O'Malley?" Gerry challenged the figure which struggled up.

"Bye!"

"There was only one on board. I have him. Take his pistol ammunition, his helmet, and goggles."

"I have them, bye."

"Get aboard — in the forward seat pit!"

Gerry backed to the machine himself, holding the German covered. The prisoner dodged back and moved to wreck his machine. Gerry fired and the German fell.

Gerry jumped into the pilot's pit; the engine and the airscrew the German had left just turning over; Gerry opened wide, and felt his wheels rolling; an exultation of relief and triumph, rather than definite sense, told him that he was flying. Little lights set over dials before him informed of the accustomed details by strange scales and meters — his speed, his height, his direction of flight, and the revolutions his engine was making.

He gazed below at the ground lights from which he had risen; he turned about. The machine which he had captured, like most training machines, was big and heavy; its body could be arranged for two seats or for one. O'Malley had found the other pit; and though the machine had been balanced for pilot only, the trick of flying with weight forward was easy for Gerry.

He switched on the light above the mapboard and found spread before him a large detail map of the immediate vicinity. Below was a chart of smaller scale for use in case the pilot "flew out" of the first map and was lost. But Gerry was satisfied with the one already in position. It gave him Mannheim and — he bent closer to see clearly

upon the vibrating surface—the grounds and wood von Fallenbosch and also the speck of the *schloss*.

The feeling of boundless power, limitless recklessness to dare and do, which flight had first brought to him as a cadet years before, reclaimed him. Flight, that miraculous endowment, was his again. He passed to O'Malley the German pilot's hood; he protected his own eyes with the goggles, and, watching the ground to estimate the wind drift, he set his course by compass for Mannheim. What he was to do there he did not know; and he no longer attempted to form any plan. The event—inevitable and yet unforeseeable—which had brought him this ship had taught him tonight to cease to plan. He was flying, and content to let fate guide him. Somehow—he had no idea at all of how—but somehow this night he would find Ruth Alden and take her with him. Destiny—the confidence in the guidance of fate which comes to every soldier and, more than to any other, to the flying fighter of the sky—set him secure and happy in the certainty of this.

He had climbed above the clouds and was flying smoothly and serenely in the silver moonlight. He was flying solitarily, too; for if alarm had spread upon the ground to tell that escaped prisoners had taken a German machine, it had not yet communicated itself to a pilot in position to pursue. Behind him lay only the moonlight and the stars; below, the sheen of cloud tops, unearthly, divine; the sheen split and gaped in great chasms, through which the moonlight slanted down, lighting great spots of darkness separated by the glinting path of the Rhine. The river made his piloting simple; he had only to sight it

when the clouds cleared, and he must follow to Mannheim.

There was a machine gun set in the nacelle before O'Malley, and Gerry saw the Irishman working with it. O'Malley pulled the trigger, firing a few trial shots, and turned back to Gerry and grinned. The noise of the motor and the airscrew prevented Gerry from communicating any plan to his comrade, even if Gerry had one, but he knew that, in whatever happened, he could count upon O'Malley's complete recklessness and instant wit.

Lights were below — most of them a bit back from the river. That would be the city of Worms; a few more miles, and Gerry must decide what he was going to do. But for the moment the sensation of freedom and of flight together continued to intoxicate him. The Rhine wavered away to the east, straightened south; ahead — far ahead — lights. There was Mannheim.

But O'Malley, in the forward seat, had turned, and, with an arm, pointed him forward and above. And far ahead, and higher, Gerry spied dancing specks which caught the moonbeams — specks set in regular order across the sky and advancing in formation. An air squadron flying north!

Below it mighty crimson flashes leaped from the ground, and through the clatter of his motor Gerry heard the detonation of tremendous, thunderous charges. Now black spots of smoke floated before the flying specks, and from the ground guns spat fiery into action — German anti-aircraft guns replying to aerial torpedoes dropped from the sky.

Others besides the officer prisoners of Villinsein and

the German cadets of the nearby airdrome had waited for the moon that night. Allied pilots also had waited; and now, with the moon to favor and guide them, they had come to attack the chemical works and the munition factories of Mannheim! An allied air raid was on that night!

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE RAID ON THE SCHLOSS

GERRY'S feet thrust on the rudder bar, swinging his machine to meet them, while hot rills ran through his limbs, warming him against the chill of the night flight above the clouds. He had thought of the frontier as a hundred and fifty miles away—two hours' flight at best in this slow, heavy training "bus"—but here his friends were bringing it to him. His excitement prevented him from realizing instantly that to his friends he must appear an enemy—a black-crossed Hun-bird flying to fight them.

A covey of German pursuit planes, flushed up from some airdrome near the raided city, swooped upward in front of Gerry, climbing for the advantage of altitude before starting their attack upon the raiders. Gerry could see them clearly—triplane Fokkers mostly, of the swiftest, best-climbing, and best-armed type. Some of them saw him, but saw, too, that his machine was German. Probably the pilots wondered what that old "bus" was doing there, but no one investigated, while Gerry flew on.

The clouds had quite cleared below, but the city of Mannheim, speckled with lights a few minutes before, lay dark except where the great crimson bursts of the allied torpedoes erupted; where flames fanned from roofs of burning buildings; where the scintillant points of search-

lights glared into the sky. Rockets streaked above the black city; shells flared and flaked in the air; and the glory of battle grasped Gerry. Grasped O'Malley, too. He patted his machine gun and turned about in his seat, appealing to Gerry.

Above them the Fokkers and the other machines of the German defense were diving and engaging the raiders; a light caught the under wings of a plane and showed Gerry the tricolor circles of the allies. Before it sparks streaked—the illuminated tracer bullets streaming from the machine guns; and toward it, beyond it—now through it—other sparks streaked back. These were the tracer bullets of the German who was attacking; and Gerry, jerking back his elevator, tried to climb; but the big, lumbering training “bus” responded only slowly.

When he threw up the nose, bringing the forward machine gun to bear, O'Malley loosed a burst of bullets, though the target German plane was five hundred yards away. A range of that length was all right for machine-gun work on the ground, but in the air—with firing gun and with the target flying—it was sure waste. Gerry bent forward and pummeled O'Malley's back to tell him so. But the Irishman did not turn; while Gerry climbed, the raiders and the Germans dropped, bringing the battle nearer, and O'Malley had a target now at two hundred yards from which he would not be withheld.

The range still shortened, and bullets streaked down past Gerry. He gazed above and tried to dodge; O'Malley looked up; he saw the tricolor circle and did not reply. One of their own people, having sighted the black cross, was coming down upon them, taking them for German.

And at the same instant the far-off Fokker at which O'Malley had been firing realized that there was something wrong about this big, slow, black-crossed machine; the German swung upon it, his machine guns going. Gerry's engine went dead and he found himself automatically guiding the "bus" in a volplane which he was keeping as slow and as "flat" as possible as he glided below the battle and sought upon the ground for a place to land.

He examined his altimeter and learned that he was still up four thousand feet, and with the flat gliding angle of the wide-winged training biplane, he knew that he had a radius of more than two miles for the choice of his landing. The battle was still going on above Mannheim, as the allied bombers had swung back. A machine flashed into flame and started down, with its pilot evidently controlling it at first; then too much of the wing fabric was consumed and it dropped. Other machines, too, were leaving the battle; some of them seemed to be Germans damaged and withdrawing; others appeared to be all right—they had just spent their ammunition, perhaps. One got on the tail of Gerry's machine, looked him over, and then dropped past him.

Gerry was gliding north and west of the city, making for wide, open spaces shown on the map which he had been studying—the smooth spaces of the fields of the Schloss von Fallenbosch. Five hundred yards away through the moonlight, and at almost his same altitude, he saw another machine gliding, as he was, with engine shut off; the circle of their volplane swept them toward each other.

In the forward seat pit of the English machine—for

Gerry steered close enough not only to see the allied insignia but the distinctive details of the British bombing plane—the man who had been bomber and machine gunner was lying back with head dropped; and the pilot, too, had been hit. He seemed to be half fainting, only spurring himself up for a few seconds at a time to control his glide.

Gerry stood up as they glided side by side; he hoped that the Englishman could make out his uniform in the moonlight. He knew it was little likely that the other could hear his shout, yet he yelled: "I'm American; follow me!" And dropping back to his seat, Gerry set himself to selecting the best spot for his landing. Whether or not the English pilot saw or heard, he followed Gerry down. The clear moonlight displayed the ground bare and smooth; it was hard to guess just when to cease dropping and, turning straight into the wind, give your elevators that last little upturn which would permit landing on your wheels and rolling; but he did it, and, turning in his seat as the rolling slowed, he saw the English plane bounding upon the field; it leaped, threatened to topple, but came down on its wheels again. Gerry had his hand on O'Malley. Together they leaped down and ran to where the English biplane had halted.

The English pilot had regained strength; he had succeeded even in lifting the body of his bomber out of his machine; and, considering himself captured, he hastened to remove the top of his fuel tank in order to set fire to his ship. Gerry observed this and shouted:

"Don't do that! We're escaped prisoners! We're Irish and American. Don't!"

His voice carried; and the English pilot delayed with his match. If any German was near, he did not evidence his presence. If any of the enemy flyers had noticed the descent of the English biplane, probably they had seen the black-crossed machine following it down. So Gerry and the English pilot stood undisturbed, estimating each other in the moonlight. A machine-gun bullet had grazed the Englishman's head; but he was fast recovering from the shock. Gerry adjusted a first-aid bandage to stay the blood.

"Your ship's all right?" Gerry asked.

"Look at it."

"Looks all right; and bombs!" Gerry cried out, discovering a pair of bombs still hanging in the racks. "You came down with bombs on!"

"I was gone—part the time," the Englishman explained. "Thought I'd released 'em."

Gerry was not finding fault. Bombs he had; and, to take the place of the German training machine, here was a ship with engine undamaged, and which could fly again, and quite capable—after its bombs were used—of bearing three men and a girl. Wisely had Gerry determined that night not to try to guide fate. Events unforeseeable again had him in their grasp. He gazed half a mile away where the gray walls of the *schloss* shimmered in the moonlight.

"There's a girl in there," he said to the English pilot. "An American girl we're going to have out. Will you help us?"

"How?"

"Lay those last two eggs close to the castle," Gerry

motioned to the pair of bombs in the rack. "That will drive 'em all to the cellars; then keep circling above 'em, as if to lay more eggs to keep 'em there. O'Malley and I'll rush the castle."

"You two alone?" the Englishman asked.

"Alone?" Gerry laughed. "Lay your eggs, old hawk! Lay your eggs; and two's a crowd for that castle tonight! The only danger's getting lost in the halls! But in case someone shows, lend us your pistol — we have one. Then lay your eggs — close but not on; and keep flying above ten minutes more!"

The occupants of the Schloss von Fallenbosch all had been aroused many minutes earlier by the burst of the first bombs in the city. The detonations, followed immediately by the alarm and by the sound of the anti-aircraft guns replying, had sent the citizens of Mannheim scurrying to their cellars. The allied raiders never attacked intentionally the dwelling places of the city; their objectives were solely the chemical and munition works; but the German population — knowing how their own flyers bombed open cities indiscriminately — always expected similar assaults upon themselves. Moreover, they well knew the difficulties of identifying objectives from high in the air and the greater difficulty of confining attack to a limited area; then there were the machine-gun bullets from the aerial battle and the bits of shrapnel showering back upon the city.

But the *schloss* heretofore had been quite removed from attack; it was far enough from the city to be in small danger from the falling shells of the high angle guns. So Oberst-Lieutenant von Fallenbosch and his aids,

his wife and his servants, when roused merely went to their windows and watched the sky curiously and without idea of personal danger. If they thought at all about the prisoner confined in the cell in the old wing of the *schloss* it was to consider her quite securely held; she, too, was roused, undoubtedly, and listening to the sounds which told that pilots from the allied forces were fighting within a mile or two. But what could she hope from them?

Ruth, indeed, was aroused. This night was the first since she had been taken, upon which the allies had attacked at Mannheim; but she had recognized the distinctive sounds—distant but tremendous—which told of a raid. Her window was open but for its bars, and its height in the wall, instead of interfering, facilitated inspection of the sky.

It gave her view over only a limited quadrilateral, of course, but every few seconds something happened in that space—shells burst, or a searchlight swept across, or a rocket flared—more than enough to make her sure that a real attack was on. Once she had a glimpse of an airplane upon which a searchlight glared and about which shrapnel burst; that meant she had seen a French, or English, or an American machine!

To her, who was about to die, the sight was enormously exciting. Not that it brought her shadow of hope for herself. For the first five days following her capture she had been kept shut up in her cell, seeing only the man who brought her food and refused any right of access to anyone else.

At the end of the five days she had been led before a military court of three men—von Fallenbosch and two

other officers—who accused, tried, and sentenced her without permitting her any semblance of defense; she was led back and locked up again awaiting the day for the execution of the death penalty, which had been left to the discretion or the whim of Oberst-Lieutenant von Fallensch.

Her end might come, therefore, upon any day, or upon any hour, and without warning; it might not come for weeks or months; her execution might not, indeed, occur at all. But a more terrible suspense of sentence scarcely could be devised. Its purpose ostensibly was to make her disclose facts which the Germans believed that she knew. Of course they had held inquisition of her immediately upon capture and several times since, but without satisfactory result; so they kept her locked up. For reading matter she was supplied with German newspapers.

These proclaimed with constantly increasing boastfulness the complete triumph of the German arms. Everywhere the Germans had attacked, the allies had crumpled, fleeing in disorder, leaving guns by the hundred, prisoners by the tens of thousands. One more stroke and all would be over! Prince Ruprecht would be on the channel; the Crown Prince would be in Paris!

Ruth had seen German newspapers before and she had known of their blatant distortions of truth, but she had never seen anything like the vaunts of those days. These must have, she feared, much foundation in fact. Visions of catastrophe to the British Fifth Army, of the rout from the Hindenburg line almost to Amiens, and the terrors of the retreat haunted her in her solitary days. Was it possible that the English were completely crushed and that

the French were helpless? Possible that the American army, which now was admitted to have arrived in some force, had proved so utterly unfit for European warfare that the allies dared not send it into the battle line?

The few words spoken to her by the man who attended her boasted that such were the facts. She thought of that front from Soissons to Reims, where the French lay unaware, perhaps, that upon them was soon to come the final, overwhelming attack. It must be in the last stages of preparation, with the hundreds of thousands of reserve troops secretly concentrated by night marches; with the thousands of guns and millions of shells secreted and in place for another such surprise attack to be delivered in some amazing, unforeseen manner as that assault which two months ago swept over the plains of Picardy and broke the English line. Perhaps already the attack was begun; perhaps——

Such terrors held her when she lay sleepless or only half drowsing in the dark; they formed the background for more personal affrights visualizing her own friends—Hubert and Milicent and Mrs. Mayhew, French girls whom she had known, and many others. Most particularly her terror dwelt upon Gerry Hull. She had ventured to inquire of the Germans regarding his fate; at first they refused information, then they told her he was dead, next that he was a prisoner; and they even supplied her with a paragraph from one of their papers boasting of the fact and making capital of his capture.

He was in one of their camps, to be treated by the Germans—how? Her dismay would dwell with him; then, suddenly considering her own fate, she would sit up,

stark, and grasping tight to the sides of her cot. Her mother and her sisters in Onarga—would they ever know? Cynthia Gail's people—what, at last, would they learn?

A sudden resounding shock, accompanied by a dull rolling sound, vibrated through the air. A great gun was being tested somewhere nearby, Ruth thought. No; they would not do that at night. Then it was an explosion at the chemical works; something had gone wrong. The shocks and the sounds increased. Also they drew nearer. Now guns—small, staccato, barking guns—began firing; shells smashed high in the air. Ruth had dragged her chair below her window and was standing upon it. Ah! Now she could see the flashes and lights in the sky; an air raid was on. There within sight—not a mile off—and fighting, were allied machines! Transcendent exaltation intoxicated her.

*The bombs bursting in air!*

The stanza of the glorious song of her country sang in her soul with full understanding of its great feeling. An American prisoner long ago had written those wonderful words—written them, she remembered, when lying a captive upon an enemy vessel and when fearing for the fate of the fort manned by his people. But

*. . . the rocket's red glare,  
The bombs bursting in air,  
Gave proof through the night  
That our flag was still there.*

The burst of these bombs and the flash of these rockets brought the same leaping glory to Ruth. Not far away in France her flag yet flew high; her people yet battled, and boldly, defiantly, if they could send here over German soil such a squadron of the air to this attack. The bombs and the guns and the rockets continued.

Sometimes they swept closer; but swiftly they retreated. Now the motor clatter of a single airplane separated itself and became louder than all the distant sound. This sound seemed to circle and swoop over the *schloss*; and — Ruth swayed at the buffet of a tremendous shock; she caught at the wall to steady herself; but the wall, too, was quivering. A bomb had burst nearby; near enough, indeed, to destroy some of the building, for through the tremors of the detonation she heard the crash of falling walls, the yells and screams of terror.

Ruth, steadying herself, realized that this attack might mean her destruction; but defiant triumph filled her. The airplane which was circling the *schloss* was one of the allies; the booming clatter of its motor as it returned was completing the panic throughout the *schloss*. A new eruption vibrated the walls, blowing down stones, timbers; the fury of its detonation battered her. The next might bury her in the débris of these walls; but she sang — wildly, tauntingly she sang *The Star-Spangled Banner*.

The taunt brought no protest. Throughout the *schloss* now was silence. She did not believe that all, or, indeed, many of the occupants of the place had been killed. But she knew that all who were alive were hiding in the cellars.

The increasing roar of the airplane motor as the

machine swept back on its orbit of return struck through her pangs of awe at the possible imminence of her annihilation; but through them she sang, and this time the motor roar rose to its loudest and diminished without the shock of another bomb.

One had been dropped, perhaps, and had failed to explode, or the pilot had found himself not quite in the position he had desired. The diminuendo of his motor noise continued only for a few moments, however; it altered to a crescendo, warning of the approach. But now other sounds, closer and within the *schloss*, seized Ruth's attention.

Her name echoing in the stone halls—"Ruth! Ruth Alden! Where are you?"

Was she mad? Was this a wild fantasy of her excitement, a result of her long terror? Was this her failure to hold her reason at the approach of fate? It seemed to be not merely her name, but Gerry's voice. She could not answer, but she could sing—sing *The Star-Spangled Banner*—

*And the rocket's red glare,  
The bombs bursting in air——*

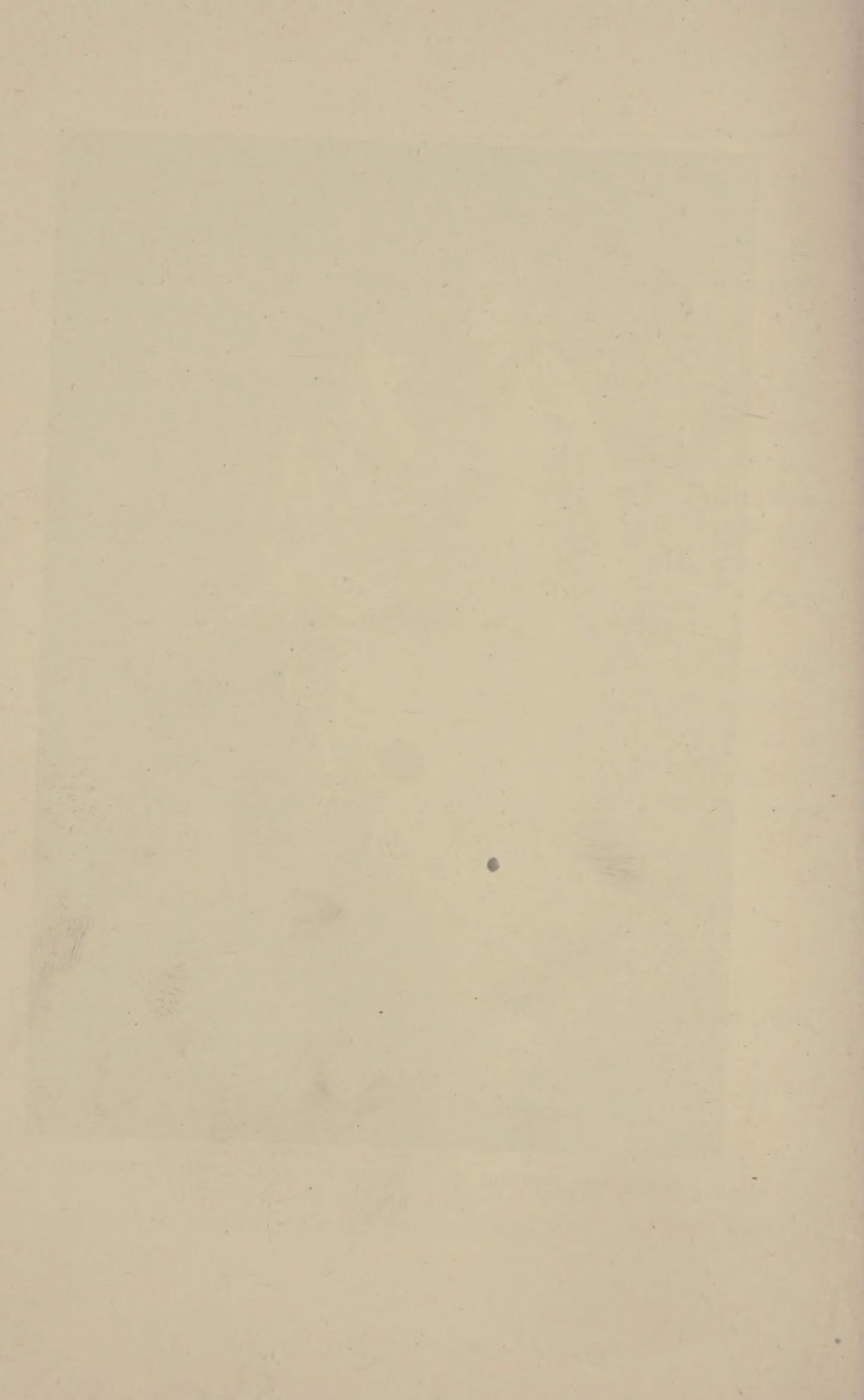
Her voice seemed to guide the voices without. "Ruth! Ruth Alden! Are you all right? We're here!"

"*Gave proof through the night,*" she sang, "*that the flag was still there——*"

Now voices—unmistakable voices—answered her; and she cried out to guide them. Gerry called to her, his voice wondrous with triumph and joy. He was there at



Gerry was there at the door of her cell; another man was with him; a friend



the door of her cell; another man was with him; a friend. They were working together with a bar to burst the lock; the friend laughed loudly and was not afraid. Gerry did not laugh; he spoke to her again and again, asking about her. She was well? She was unhurt?

Now they had the lock broken; the door open. Gerry seized her as she came out; he kissed her; he picked her up and started to carry her, while she cried to him that she was strong and could walk; could run; could do anything now. Anything!

The roar of the airplane continued overhead; and Ruth now knew the trick. It was keeping the Germans below while Gerry and his companion went through the *schloss*. Ruth did not yet have complete comprehension of the event; she supposed that Gerry must have escaped from Germany long before; that he had rejoined his squadron and had come from the allied lines with the raiders that night.

Now they were out of the *schloss* and Gerry was leading her over soft ground—a field brightly lit by the moon.

“Gerry, I’ve their plan!” Ruth cried to him. “On the front between Soissons and Reims; their next attack! I know it. . . .”

He no longer was leading her. He lifted her and bundled her against him, quite as he had done once so long before. An airplane was approaching; she could hear the loud crescendo of its motor; suddenly it ceased and she heard only the whir of the airscrew of a machine about to land.

Gerry was speaking to her, but for some reason she could not understand what he was saying; she could hear

his words, but they were separate sort of words without meaning. He and Mike were lifting her now and lowering her feet first into a pit—the seat pit of an airplane. Mike stepped down into the pit with her and supported her there. Gerry was gone from her now, but not far away. He was in the pilot's pit, or just behind it, with the pilot in front of him. The motor was roaring again; the machine was moving; it was rising. She was flying!

Far—far below, when she looked back, she saw a strange sheen, which was the moonlight on the ground, with a twisting, brighter strip dividing it.

“That,” she tried to say to the man holding her in his lap, “that's the Rhine?”

He tried very hard to hear her, and she supposed that the same thing must be the matter with him as was the trouble with her when Gerry spoke to her on the ground. Only slowly she realized that she could not even hear her own voice for the noise of the motor.

She looked back to the other pit and saw Gerry's face; he waved at her and she waved back; then she sank upon the shoulder of the man holding her, and she lost consciousness.

Many times while that English bombing biplane—weighted now by three men and a girl instead of by two men and bombs—made the journey to the allied lines, Ruth stirred to semi-wakefulness. The swaying and the rising and the falling of the airplane as it rode the currents of the air made it seem to Ruth that she was upon a ship at sea—upon the *Ribot*. At other times the motion seemed merely the buoyancy following the sinking of sensations in a dream. Afterwards she remembered sitting

up, wide-eyed and collected in mind, and gazing down upon the moonlit ground; but at the time these occasions gave no reaction.

She remembered that Gerry waved to her many times—every time she turned. Complete consciousness returned to her, however, only when she found herself no longer rising, and sinking, or swaying to right and left, with all sound overwhelmed by motor noises. She was upon a cot then; it was steady, and soft, and marvelously comfortable; and extremely kind people were caring for her—one of them an American girl.

Mrs. Mayhew was there, and George Byrne, and others, who identified her. Also, of course, there was Gerry. It was he who introduced to her two strange officers—one French and one American—and it was Gerry who said: "These are officers of our intelligence division, Ruth. Tell them what you can; then everyone will leave you alone to rest. Your work will be done."

So she told them, summoning all her strength to repeat everything correctly and in detail; and when she had finished she answered their questions for more than an hour. The next day again they questioned her. The attack upon the Soissons-Reims front was not yet begun, they told her. Did they believe her? she asked.

It was not the business of the intelligence officers to express either belief or incredulity; their task was simply to ascertain what she knew, or believed that she knew; to check her recital over with discovered facts about her; to add her reports to the others, both confirming and conflicting; and to pass the report on.

Ruth herself was passed on the next day and requisi-

tioned by other men. Then she was taken to Paris and was left, undisturbed by further examinations, to rest in a bed in a little private room at one of the hospitals. She could not quite determine, during those first days that she was detained there, whether she was in fact under a sort of observational arrest or whether the constant care which she received was solely to promote the return of her strength.

For a semi-collapse had come — collapse of only physical powers. Her mind was ceaselessly active — too active, the doctor told her. Sometimes at night she could not sleep, but demanded that she be allowed to rise, and dress, and go to the intelligence officers, or have them come to her, so she could tell them her whole story again in a way they must believe.

If she could only make them see how Adler had looked; if she could make them hear how his voice had sounded when he had spoken of that Soissons-Reims front, they would not doubt her at all. If she could speak with Gerry Hull again, perhaps he could help make them believe her. But Gerry Hull was with his squadron. Only women were about Ruth now, and doctors, and wounded men. So, day after day, she was kept in bed awaiting the attack which — as all the world knows — came on the twenty-seventh of May and against the French on the front from Soissons to Reims.

The day the great assault began Ruth demanded to get up, and — it seemed until that day that someone must have doubted her — at last she was permitted to do as she pleased. So she returned to the Rue des Saints Pères and to her old rooms with Milicent; she wore again the khaki

uniform which she had worn in Picardy; and, after reading the communiques that night, she applied for active duty as an ambulance driver.

That day the Germans had swept the French, in one single rush, from the Chemin des Dames; the enemy were over the Aisne. Back, back; everywhere the French, as the British in Picardy, were driven back, yielding guns by the hundred, prisoners by the tens of thousands. The Boche were over the Vesle now; they had Fismes. God! Again they were upon the Marne! Could nothing stop them? Still they were rushing onward, a broken army before them.

Ruth was in Paris, where talk of a sort which she had never heard in France before was upon everyone's lips. France had given all and the Germans yet advanced. Their guns hourly roared louder. Four years ago, to be sure, their guns were heard as plainly in the Paris streets; four years ago the German field gray had come even closer; four years ago the government had abandoned Paris and prepared, even though Paris were taken, to fight and fight. But that was four years ago and the French army was young and unspent; Britain, then, had barely begun to come in. France had gathered all her strength, and, in her mighty hour at the Marne, had hurled back the enemy, "saving" Paris!

What mockery was that memory this day! Here, after the four years and the spending of French and British strength, the Germans were at the gates again only more numerous and more confident than before.

Ruth stayed alone in her room during a lone afternoon writing to Cynthia Gail's father and mother a full con-

fession of all that she had done. Her whole enterprise, so hopefully taken up, had failed, she said. She related what she had tried to do; indeed, in defense of herself, she related how she had succeeded in entering Germany and in learning something of the German plan for the great drive which was now overwhelming the world; but she had failed to bring back any proof which was required to convince the army that the information she had gained was dependable. So she felt that she had played Cynthia Gail's part for no gain; she had no great achievement to offer Cynthia's parents in recompense for the wrong which she had done them.

She sealed and posted this, and now, at last, wrote to her own mother fully of what she had done. Again the despair of the day seized her. She wandered the streets where men—men who had not been in the fighting during the four years—were talking of the allies taking up a new line south of Paris and holding on there somehow until America was ready. But when such talk went about Ruth gazed at the eyes of the French who had been through the years of battle; and she knew that, if the Germans won now, the French could do no more.

Ever increasing streams of the wounded were flowing back into Paris; and through the capital began spreading the confusion of catastrophe nearby. The mighty emergency made demand upon the services of those refused only a few hours earlier; and Ruth left Paris that night upon the driving seat of a small ambulance. The next morning—it was the first of June—she was close to the guns and upon a road where was retreat.

Retreat? Well, two months ago in Picardy when the

English had gone back before the Germans, Ruth had heard such a concourse to the rear called retreat; so she tried to call this retreat—this dazed, unresisted departure of soldiers from before the enemy's advance. What made it worse, they were the French—the *poilus* whom she met. The French! When the British had been broken in Picardy and fell back, fighting so desperately, they had sacrificed themselves to stay the enemy until the arrival of the French! When the French had arrived the German advance was stopped; the French had been the saviors! But here the French were going back; and the British could not, in turn, come to save them.

These *poilus* did not expect it; they had ceased, indeed, to expect anything. For the first time, as the *poilus* looked at her, she saw the awfulness of hopelessness in their eyes. Four years they had fought from Maubeuge to the Marne; to the Aisne; in the Champagne they had attacked and gained; at Verdun they had stood alone; this year at Kemmel they had sacrificed themselves and held on only to meet at last, and in spite of all, the overwhelming disaster.

Ruth tried to cry a word or two of cheer when a man saw and saluted her; but her cry choked in her throat. These men were spent; they were fought out; beaten. And just behind them, at Château-Thierry, whence they had fled, was the Prussian guard coming on with these beaten men between them and Paris.

Ruth sat, half dizzy, half sick, at the wheel of the little car, forcing it forward by these beaten men when the road offered a chance. She was maneuvering toward a crossroad; and as she approached it she noticed the French

no longer trudging to the rear; they were halted now; and as Ruth passed them and reached the direct road to Château-Thierry she found them lined up beside the road, waiting. Officers were clearing the way farther down; and as someone halted Ruth's car she stood up and stared along the rise of ground to the south.

A sound was coming over, borne by the morning breeze—a sound of singing in loud, confident, boasting notes. Three notes, they were, three times repeated—the three notes which were blown on the bugles in Berlin when the kaiser or princes of the royal house were coming; three blatant, bragging notes which Ruth had learned a year before to mean, “Over there!”

*For the Yanks are coming; the Yanks are coming,  
The drums rum-tumming everywhere. . . .*

Ruth caught to the side of the ambulance and held on tight. American voices; thousands of them! American men; American soldiers singing! Americans coming into this battle—coming forward into this battle, singing! Swinging! She could see them now as they wound about the hill—see the sun flashing on their bayonets, and the fine, confident swing—the American swing—of their ranks as they approached.

*The Yanks are coming; the Yanks are coming . . .  
'And we won't go back till it's over, over here!*

Ruth leaped up and screamed aloud with joy.

“What is it, Mademoiselle?” one of the dazed poilus inquired.

“The Americans are coming! Our men are here! Our Americans! *The Yanks—the Yanks are coming!*” she shouted it in the rhythm of the song.

What had seized her that day upon the *Ribot* when she saw the *Starke* come up and Gerry told her it was American; what had thrilled through her that night she arrived in France; what had stirred throughout her that morning near Mirevaux when the English officer called out to her, “Good old America,” and she watched the English march off to die; what had come when the French at last arrived before Amiens; even that ecstasy of the bombs bursting over Mannheim when she had sung *The Star-Spangled Banner* and Gerry Hull had found her; all those together surged through her combined and intensified a thousand-fold.

And this came not to her alone. It had come, too, to the French—the French who had been falling back in flight—yes, in flight, one could say it now—knowing that the Americans were behind them, but expecting nothing of those Americans. Why they had expected nothing, they did not know. At this moment it was incredible that—only the instant before—they had been in total despair.

*The Yanks are coming; the Yanks are coming!*

They were marines who were coming; they were so close that Ruth could see their uniforms; American marines, who marched past her singing—swinging—on their way to kill and to die! For they were going to kill—and to die. They knew it; that was why they sang as

they did; that was why they were so sure — so boastfully, absolutely sure!

. . . . *send the word; send the word to beware!*

It was American; nothing else! No other men in the world could have gone by so absolutely sure of themselves, singing — swinging — like that. And oh, Ruth loved them! Her people; only a few, indeed, as men were reckoned in this war; but such men! Still singing — swinging — they swept by, drawing after them a vortex of the French, who, a few moments before, had been abandoning the battle. They were all past now, the Americans; oh, how few they had been to face the German army with Paris and all the fate of France behind them.

A few miles on — it could not have been farther — the Americans met the Germans; and what they did there in the woods near the tiny town of Meaux came to Ruth in wonderful fashion. The battle, which each hour — each moment through that terrible morning — had been steadily coming nearer and nearer; the battle ceased to approach. There was no doubt about it! The fighting, furious twice over and then more furious, simply could not get closer. Now the battle was going back! The marines — the American marines, sent in to stop the gap and hold the Paris road — had not merely delayed the Prussian advance; they had halted it and turned it back!

That night Ruth learned a little of the miracle of the American marines from one of the men who had fought. He had been brought back, badly wounded, and for a time, while her ambulance was held up, Ruth was able to administer to the man, and he talked to her.

“Three miles, we threw ’em back, Miss! Not much, three miles, but in the right direction. They asked us to delay ’em. Delay ’em; hell . . . excuse me, Miss.”

“Oh, that’s all right,” Ruth cried. “Oh, that’s fine! Say it again—our way!”

“That’s all they asked us; to delay ’em. I was right near Wise” — Wise was the lieutenant colonel — “when we got our orders. We was to get in touch with the Germans and hold up their advance as long as we could; and then retreat to a prepared position.

“‘Retreat?’ Wise yelled. ‘Retreat? Hell! We’ve just come!’ Well, Miss, we got in touch! Oh, we got in touch, all right; touched ’em with bayonets and butts. They couldn’t like it. Couldn’t quite believe at first; didn’t think it was true; so we had to prove it to ’em, you see. Three miles back toward Berlin; not much; but—you admit—in the right direction.”

“I admit it,” Ruth said; and—the boy was very badly hurt—she kissed him before she climbed back to her seat.

The next day, when she at last allowed herself to rest, she wrote a letter to Gerry. She had no idea where he was; so she addressed him in care of his old squadron. She had no definite notion of their present relations; what he had said, or what she herself had said, during and following their flight back to France, she simply did not know; for during that time she had dreamed extreme, incredible things, which, nevertheless, fastened themselves upon her with such reality that she could not now separate, with any certainty, the false from the true.

That he had come for her, boldly, recklessly; that he and a companion had succeeded in taking her from the *schloss* and bringing her back with them were facts which might be the foundation of—anything between Gerry and herself or of no more than had existed before.

Yet something—a good deal—had existed at the time they had parted on the Rue des Saints Pères before she went to Switzerland. That was quite a lot to return to, and the only safe feeling to assume in him was that which he had confessed to her there. So she wrote this day chiefly of the marvel which she had seen—the miracle of the arrival of the Americans, which, as the world already knew, had saved Paris.

She received reply from him after two weeks—a brief yet intimate note, telling her that her wonderful letter had welcomed him just ten minutes ago, when he had returned from a patrol. He had only a minute now; but he must reply at once.

I want to tell you, Ruth, that you have the right to feel that your work contributed to the arrival of our marines at the right moment, at the right place. You are familiar enough with war now to know that troop dispositions must be made far ahead. Your information was, of course, not the only warning to reach the general staff that the attack was to come where it did. But I am now permitted to tell you that your information was believed to be honest; therefore it had weight, and its weight was sufficient undoubtedly to make our command certain, a few hours earlier than they otherwise might have been certain, of the direction of the German attack; and, throughout the front, reserves were started to the threatened points a few hours sooner. Yours ever,

GERRY.

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The day after Ruth received this the Germans started their attack of the fifteenth of July; three days later the allied counter attack was striking in full force and the armies of the German Crown Prince were fighting for their lives against the French and Americans, to get back out of the Marne "pocket." Then, in the north, the English struck and won their greatest victories. It was August; September, and still, from Switzerland to the sea, the allies advanced; the Germans went back. And still from across the sea, three hundred thousand American soldiers arrived monthly.

## CHAPTER XXII

### “THE WAR’S OVER”

RUTH was working in a canteen with the American army now — or, rather, with one of the American armies. Her particular army occupied the bending front about the St. Mihiel salient, east of Verdun. Gerry — she heard of him frequently, but from him only when the chances of the mails brought letters along the lines of the shifting armies — Gerry was doing combat flying again with the American forces operating farthest to the west. She was close behind an active battle front again, as by secret night marches the American First Army with its tanks and artillery concentrated on the south side of the salient from Aprémont to Pont-à-Mousson.

Ruth went about glowing with the glory of the gathering of the fighting men of her people. Many times when she looked up at the approach of a tall, alert figure in pilot’s uniform, her heart halted with hope that Gerry had come among the flyers to aid in this operation; then she heard, with final definiteness, that he was still kept at his combat work farther west. The gathering of the army, however, brought Hubert Lennon.

Ruth had not seen him since March; and his manner of reappearance was characteristic. On the evening of the eleventh of September, the sense of the impending had reached the climax which forewarned of immediate

events; and the troops who were to go “over the top” at some near hour, and also the support divisions which were to follow, were being kept close to their commands. The canteen where Ruth was working was deserted long before the usual time, and Ruth was busy putting away dishes when someone entered and coughed, apologetically, to attract her attention. She glanced up to see a spare young man in the uniform of an ambulance driver and wearing thick spectacles. His face was in the shadow, with only his glasses glinting light until he took off his cap and said:

“Hello, Miss Alden.”

Ruth dropped the dish she was holding. “Hubert! I didn’t know how much I’ve needed to see you!” And she thrust both her hands across the counter and seized his hand and squeezed it.

He flushed ruddy under his brown weather-beatenness, and she held tighter to the hand he was timidly attempting to draw away—still her shy, self-effacing Hubert. By hailing her by her own name, he had informed her at once that he knew all about her; and he had not assumed to replace his former familiar “Cynthia” with “Ruth.”

“You—no one’s needed me,” he denied, more abashed by the warmth of his welcome.

“You frightened me about you at first, Hubert,” she scolded him, “when you went away and—except for a couple of postcards—you never sent me a word. Then I heard of you through other people——”

“Gerry?”

“Yes; Gerry or Mrs. Mayhew; and I found you were always all right.”

He winced, and she reproached herself for not remem-

bering how terribly sensitive he was about not being in the combat forces. "I certainly never expected you'd worry about me."

"But you've been wounded!" she cried, observing now as he shifted a little that he moved as do those who have been hurt in the hip. "Hubert, what was it and when?"

"Air raid; that's all. Might have got it in Paris—or London."

"Look at me; where and when?"

"Well, then, field hospital near Fismes early in August. I'm quite all right now."

Ruth's eyes suddenly suffused. She had heard about that field hospital and how the German flyers had bombed it again and again, strewing death pitilessly, and how the attendants upon the wounded had worked, reckless of themselves, in an inferno. "Hubert, you were there?"

"That was nothing to where you've been, I reckon."

"I've never thanked you," Ruth replied, remembering, "for not telling on me that time you caught me on the train from Bordeaux."

"How'd you know I caught you then?"

Ruth told him. He looked down. "I was pretty sure on the *Ribot* that you weren't Cynthia, Miss Alden," he said, "but I was absolutely sure I wasn't doing anything risky—to the country—in keeping still. By the way, I've a letter from Cynthia's people for you."

He reached into a pocket and Ruth studied him, wonderingly. "How long have you been here, Hubert?"

"Oh, three or four days."

"How long have you known where I was?"

He hesitated. "Why, almost all the time—except

during the retreat in March, and then when you were in Switzerland and in Germany—I’ve known fairly well where you were.”

“Why didn’t you come to me four days ago?”

“Didn’t have this till today.” He produced a letter postmarked Decatur, Illinois, and in the familiar handwriting of Cynthia Gail’s father. “You see, after Gerry brought you back and everything was out, I thought the only right thing—to you, Miss Alden, as well as to them—was to write Cynthia’s people. I knew you would, of course, but I thought you wouldn’t say, about yourself, what you should. So I did it. Here’s what they say.”

He handed the letter to her, and Ruth withdrew nearer a lamp to read it. They were still quite alone in the corner of the canteen, and as Ruth read the letter written by the father of the girl whose part she had played, tears of gratitude and joy blinded her—gratitude not alone to the noble-hearted man and woman in Decatur, but quite as much to the friend who had written of her to them with such understanding as to make possible this letter.

She came back to him with tears running down her cheeks and she seized his hand again. “Oh, Hubert, thank you; thank you! I don’t think anything ever made me so happy in all my life.”

“You know Byrne’s dead, do you?”

“No! Is he? He died from that——”

“Not from that, Miss Alden. He completely recovered. He was killed cleanly leading his platoon in the fighting on the Vesle. He had written Cynthia’s people about you forgiving you, you see.”

Hubert turned to the door and opened it and gazed out

through the dark about the hills and woods where that night the hundreds of thousands of Americans of the First Army lay. "Funny about us being back here, isn't it?" he said, with the reflective philosophy which he was likely to employ when dismissing one subject. "I've been thinking about it a lot these last days, seeing our fellows everywhere — so awful many of them. Everyone of 'em — or their fathers — came from this side first of all because they didn't like the way things were going in Europe, and they wanted to get away from it. But they couldn't get away from it by just leaving it. They had to come back after all to settle the trouble. That's an interesting idea, when you think of it, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Ruth. "Hubert——"

"How does Gerry feel about being an American now?"

"I've not talked with Gerry for more than three months."

"Being an American," Hubert mused, "being an American is some privilege these days — even if you only drive an ambulance. To be Gerry Hull now!" He gazed at Ruth, who looked away, but who could not stop color suffusing her face under his challenge. He glanced about the room and observed that they were quite alone.

"I've wondered a good bit recently, Miss Alden," he said in a queer, repressed matter-of-fact way, "whether you might prefer — or might not prefer — to have me tell you that I love you. You must know it, of course; and since it's a fact, sometimes it seemed that we might be better friends hereafter if I just told you that fact. You know I've not any silly idea that you could care for me. No; don't please!" he stopped her, when she attempted

to speak. “We’ll not arrive anywhere except by sticking to facts; we’re friends; may we ever be!”

“O, we will be, Hubert!”

“Then it is better that I’ve told you I love you.”

“But you mustn’t!”

“I can’t control that, Miss Alden.”

“Mayn’t I be Ruth even now?”

“Ruth, then; yes, I like that. Good night, Ruth.”

“You must go? But tomorrow you’ll——”

“Tomorrow no one knows where any one’ll be. But it’s been great to see you again.”

“And you, Hubert! Good night; good luck, and—thank you again a thousand times.”

He went; and on the morrow, as everyone knows, the American First Army went “over the top,” and at night the St. Mihiel salient, which had stuck like a Titanic thorn in the flank of France for four years, was wiped out; the American guns in the next days engaged the guns of the outer fortresses of Metz.

In the stream of casualties, which was the American cost of the victory, Hubert was swept to the rear. Ruth read his name cited in the orders of a certain day for extraordinary coolness and devotion in caring for the wounded under fire. He himself was wounded again severely, and Ruth tried to visit him at the hospital to which he was sent; but she was able only to learn that he was convalescing and had been transferred to the south of France.

She read, a little later, another familiar name—Sam Hilton. There might be other Sam Hiltons in the army; on the other hand, she was familiar enough with the

swiftness with which the draft had cleared out Class I in America, to be certain that the Sam Hilton for whom she had worked in January must now be somewhere in the American army, and the particular Sam Hilton who was mentioned was a corporal in an Illinois regiment which had been most heavily engaged in the desperate fighting in the forest of the Argonne. He was awarded — Ruth read — the military medal for extraordinary bravery under fire and for display of daring and initiative which enabled him to keep together a small command after the officers were killed and finally to outwit and capture a superior German force.

Somehow it sounded like Sam Hilton to Ruth. “He got in the army and got interested; that’s all,” she said to herself as she reread the details. “He wouldn’t let anyone bluff him; and — yes, that sounds just like Sam Hilton after he got interested.”

This was late in the fall; the Argonne then was cleared; and by a shift of the divisions who were pressing constantly after the retreating Germans, Ruth found herself in the last week of October attached to the American units fighting their way to Sedan. Infantrymen of the Illinois regiment, which possessed the decorated Sam Hilton, came into the canteen and Ruth asked about him. Everyone seemed to know him. Yes, he came from Chicago, and had been in the real estate business; he was in a battalion which recently had been heavily engaged again, but now was in reserve and resting nearby.

Ruth visited, upon the next afternoon, the little, just recaptured French village about which the battalion was billeted; and right on the main street she met — medal and

all—Sam Hilton. He was seated before a cottage and was very popular with and intent upon the villagers gathered about; so Ruth had a good look at him before he observed her. In his trim uniform and new chevrons—he was sergeant now—he never looked "classier" in his life.

He appeared to have appointed himself a committee of one to investigate the experiences of the inhabitants of that village during the four years of German occupation, and he had found an interpreter—a French boy of thirteen or fourteen—who was putting into rather precarious English the excited recitals of the peasants.

Ruth approached when one series of translation was coming to an end, and Sergeant Sam Hilton looked up and recognized her. "Why, hello; you here, too, Miss Alden?"

He had been long enough in France so that he was not really much amazed to encounter anyone. "Come here and listen to what the Huns been doing to these people, Miss Alden," he invited her, after she had replied to his greeting. "Say, do you know that's the way they been acting for four years? We're a fine bunch, I should say, letting that sort of stuff go on for three years and over before we stepped in. What was the matter with our government, anyway—not letting us know. I tell you——"

It took him many minutes to express properly his indignation at the tardiness of the American declaration of war. Yet certain features of the situation enormously perplexed him.

“What gets my goat,” he confessed, “is how we’re so blamed popular, Miss Alden. We Americans are well liked—awful well liked, ain’t we?”

“We certainly are,” Ruth agreed.

“We’re liked not just as well as the English, far as I can see, but better. Yes, better. That certainly gets my goat; out of it three years; in it, one; and not really in it all of one yet; and we’re—*top hole*. That’s a British expression, Miss Alden; means absolutely *it*.”

“Yes,” said Ruth; “I’ve heard it.”

“Well, we’re that; *top hole*. How does it happen? What’ve we done that others ain’t that makes them feel so about Americans over here?”

Ruth could not answer. She could only accept, at last, an invitation to lunch with him the first time they met again in any city where they had restaurants.

The perplexity which Sam Hilton felt was being shared by many and many another American in those days which swiftly were sweeping toward the end of the war; and not least among the perplexed was Gerry Hull.

That strange morning had arrived upon which battle was to be entered against the Germans, as usual, and to be continued until eleven o’clock; after eleven was to be truce. Gerry was on patrol that morning, flying a single-seater Spad in a formation which hovered high in the morning sky to protect the photographic machines and the fire-control airplanes which were going about their business as usual over the German lines, taking pictures of the ground, and, by wireless, guiding the fire of the American guns.

The American guns were going it, loud and fast, and

the German guns were replying; they might halt at eleven, but no love was being lost upon this last day.

About the middle of the morning German combat planes appeared. Gerry was among the first to sight them and dash forward. Seven or eight American machines followed him; and for the swift seconds of the first attack they kept somewhat to formation. Then all line was lost in a diving, tumbling, looping, climbing, side-slipping maelstrom of machines fighting three miles above the ground. Each pilot selected a particular antagonist, and Gerry found himself circling out of the mêlée while he maneuvered for position with a new triplane Fokker, whose pilot appeared to have taken deep dislike for him.

The German was a good flyer—an old hand in a new machine, Gerry thought. At any rate, Gerry could obtain neither the position directly above him or just behind him—"on the tail." They fired at each other several times passing, but that was no way to hit anything. Several times, of course, they got widely separated—once for an interval long enough to give Gerry chance to aid another American who was being pressed by two Germans, and to send one of the Germans down out of control. Then Gerry's particular enemy appeared and they were at it again.

Gerry climbed better now and got above him; Gerry dived, and the German, waiting just the right time, side-slipped and tumbled out from underneath. Gerry checked his dive and got about behind him. Gerry was coming upon him fast, behind, and just a trifle below—in almost perfect firing position—when he saw the German look back and hold up his hand. Gerry held his fire, and,

coming up closer, he saw the German jerk his hooded head and point groundward. Gerry gazed down upon a stark and silent land.

The spots of shells were gone. Where they had erupted and flung up great billows of sand, and where their smoke had puffed and floated, the surface lay bland and yellow under the morning sun. Truce had come—truce which the German pilot in the Fokker alongside signalized by wave of his hand. Gerry raised his hands from his gun lanyard, and, a little dazedly, waved back, and he let the German steer away. Gerry swung his own ship about, and, flying low over an anomalous land of man-specks walking all about in the open, he shut off his motor and came down in his airdrome.

Silence—except for voices and motor noises—silence! And nothing particular to do or to expect; nothing immediately threatening you; death no longer probable. Truce!

Gerry joined the celebrants; but soon he retreated to the refuge of his quarters, where he was alone. It was rather confounding suddenly to find yourself with the right to expect to live. To live! What amazing impatience this morning aroused. He had leave to depart in two hours to spend a week wherever he pleased; and while the minutes dallied and dragged, he reread the last letter he had received from Ruth, which had arrived four days ago. She had mentioned that she expected to be sent to Paris, so Gerry found place upon the Paris train; and, upon arriving in the city, he took a taxi to the Rue des Saints Pères.

The little French girl, who opened the door of the

familiar *pension*, said, yes, Mademoiselle Alden was in Paris and, also, at that moment actually in her room. Gerry entered the parlor and sat down; but he could not remain still while he waited. He arose and went about staring vacantly at the pictures upon the walls, seeing no one of them, but hearing every slightest sound in the house which might mean that Mademoiselle Alden was coming downstairs. He heard light footfalls upon the floor above, which, he decided, were hers as she moved about, dressing; and he wondered what dress she was putting on — the pretty yellow dress which she had worn at Mrs. Corliss' or the uniform she had worn upon the retreat from Mirevaux. He liked her in both; he didn't care which she wore, if she would only come.

He heard her step on the stair; he started to the door, impulsively. But the little French girl might be about; so he drew back to the center of the room and stood there until Ruth appeared. Then his arms went out to her and, regardless of who might hear, he rushed to her, calling her name.

She was small and slender and round and with her face almost white from some absurd uncertainty about him and with her eyes wide. She wore neither the beautiful yellow gown nor the uniform but a simple blue dress of the sort which girls wear in the morning when they go out, or in the afternoon, but which they do not put on particularly for an evening call. Gerry was not critical; he thought the dress mightily became her; but it made her bewilderingly demure.

"What is it, Ruth? You're not glad I came right to you?"

“Glad! Oh, Gerry, my soul’s been singing since I heard your voice down here and I knew that you’d come and you’re safe; and the war’s over!”

He had her in his arms, her slight, vibrant figure close to him, her eyes turned up to his. Gently—gently as upon that time when she disengaged his fingers from his clasp of her shoulders—she raised her hands and put them upon his breast and thrust him back. The touch of her hands and the tenderness of her strength sent rills of delight racing through him, but he did not understand them.

“Ruth, I love you; can’t you love me?”

“Love you!” Her eyes closed for a moment as though she no longer dared to look at him. Her resistance to him had relaxed; now she thrust back from him again; but he did not permit it. He overpowered her, drawing her against him. So she opened her eyes.

“The war’s over, Gerry.”

“Thank God, Ruth! . . . . I couldn’t let myself even dream of this before, dearest.”

“You mustn’t say that!”

“Why not?”

“We’ll all be going back soon, Gerry—those of us who’ve lived—back to what we’ve been before. That’s why I kept you waiting so long. I had to change to this.” She looked down at her dress and he released her a little to glance down also, wonderingly.

“Why? What about it, dear?”

“It’s my own—the only thing of mine you’ve ever seen me in; I used to wear this at the office where I worked. You know, I told you.”

“I wondered why I loved you more than ever before, Ruth. Oh, silly sweetheart! You think you’re going back to an office!” He laughed, delightedly.

“No; we must think the truth, Gerry. We’ve been moving in madness through the war, my love!”

“Ah! You’ve said that!”

“I didn’t mean it! We mustn’t imagine that everything’s to be changed for us just because we’ve met in war and——”

“And you’ve saved me, Ruth!”

“You saved me, too!”

“Oh, we shan’t argue that, dear. But about not being changed—well I’m changed incurably and forever, my love. I mean that! You’ve done most of the changing too. Did you think you’d made me an American only for duration of the war?”

“But Gerry, we must think. You’ll go home and have all your grandfather’s buildings and money and——”

“You’ll have all, too, and me besides, dear—if you want me? Do you suppose that all these months I haven’t been thinking, too? Do you suppose I’d want you for a wife only in war? I want you, Ruth—and I’ll need you even more, I think, to help me in the peace to come. But that’s not why I’m here. I want you—you—now and forever! Can I have you?”

“You have me,” Ruth said. “And I—I have you!”









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