

Le Queux William

Spies of the Kaiser: Plotting the Downfall of England



William Le Queux

**Spies of the Kaiser: Plotting
the Downfall of England**

«Public Domain»

Le Queux W.

Spies of the Kaiser: Plotting the Downfall of England / W. Le
Queux — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

CHAPTER I	8
CHAPTER II	18
CHAPTER III	28
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	36

Le Queux William Spies of the Kaiser: Plotting the Downfall of England

IF ENGLAND KNEW

No sane person can deny that England is in grave danger of invasion by Germany at a date not far distant.

This very serious fact I endeavoured to place vividly before the public in my recent forecast, *The Invasion of 1910*, the publication of which, in Germany and in England, aroused a storm of indignation against me.

The Government, it will be remembered, endeavoured to suppress its publication, because it contained many serious truths, which it was deemed best should be withheld from the public, and on its publication – in defiance of the statements in the House of Commons, and the pressure brought upon me by the Prime Minister – I was denounced as a panicmonger.

But have not certain of my warnings already been fulfilled?

I have no desire to create undue alarm. I am an Englishman, and, I hope, a patriot. What I have written in this present volume in the form of fiction is based upon serious facts within my own personal knowledge.

That German spies are actively at work in Great Britain is well known to the authorities. The number of agents of the German Secret Police at this moment working in our midst on behalf of the Intelligence Department in Berlin are believed to be over five thousand. To each agent – known as a "fixed-post" – is allotted the task of discovering some secret, or of noting in a certain district every detail which may be of advantage to the invader when he lands. This "fixed-agent" is, in turn, controlled by a travelling agent, who visits him regularly, allots the work, collects his reports, and makes monthly payments, the usual stipend varying from £10 to £30 per month, according to the social position of the spy and the work in which he or she may be engaged.

The spies themselves are not always German. They are often Belgians, Swiss, or Frenchmen employed in various trades and professions, and each being known in the Bureau of Secret Police by a number only, their monthly information being docketed under that particular number. Every six months an "inspection" is held, and monetary rewards made to those whose success has been most noteworthy.

The whole brigade of spies in England is controlled by a well-known member of the German Secret Police in London, from whom the travelling agents take their orders, and in turn transmit them to the "fixed-posts," who are scattered up and down the country.

As I write, I have before me a file of amazing documents, which plainly show the feverish activity with which this advance guard of our enemy is working to secure for their employers the most detailed information. These documents have already been placed before the Minister for War, who returned them without comment!

He is aware of the truth, and cannot deny it in face of these incriminating statements.

It is often said that the Germans do not require to pursue any system of espionage in England when they can purchase our Ordnance maps at a shilling each. But do these Ordnance maps show the number of horses and carts in a district, the stores of food and forage, the best way in which to destroy bridges, the lines of telegraph and telephone, and the places with which they communicate, and such-like matters of vital importance to the invader? Facts such as these, and many others, are

being daily conveyed by spies in their carefully prepared reports to Berlin, as well as the secrets of every detail of our armament, our defences, and our newest inventions.

During the last twelve months, aided by a well-known detective officer, I have made personal inquiry into the presence and work of these spies, an inquiry which has entailed a great amount of travelling, much watchfulness, and often considerable discomfort, for I have felt that, in the circumstances, some system of contra-espionage should be established, as has been done in France.

I have refrained from giving actual names and dates, for obvious reasons, and have therefore been compelled, even at risk of being again denounced as a scaremonger, to present the facts in the form of fiction – fiction which, I trust, will point its own patriotic moral.

Colonel Mark Lockwood, Member for Epping, sounded a very serious warning note in the middle of 1908 when he asked questions of the Minister for War, and afterwards of the Prime Minister, respecting the presence of German spies in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, and elsewhere. He pointed out that for the past two years these individuals, working upon a carefully prepared plan, had been sketching, photographing, and carefully making notes throughout the whole of East Anglia.

With truth, he declared that this organised system of espionage was for one reason alone, namely in preparation for a sudden raid upon our shores, for "the Day" – as it is known in Germany – the Day of the Invasion of England.

The replies given by His Majesty's Ministers were colourless, though they both actually confessed themselves unable to deal with the situation! Under our existing law it seems that a foreign spy is free to go hither and thither, and plot the downfall of England, while we, ostrich-like, bury our head in the sand at the sign of approaching danger.

The day has passed when one Englishman was worth ten foreigners. Modern science in warfare has altered all that. All the rifle-clubs in England could not stop one German battalion, because the German battalion is trained and disciplined in the art of war, while our rifle-clubs are neither disciplined nor trained. Were every able-bodied man in the kingdom to join a rifle-club we should be no nearer the problem of beating the German invaders if once they landed, than if the spectators in all the football matches held in Britain mobilised against a foreign foe. The Territorial idea is a delusion. Seaside camps for a fortnight a year are picnics, not soldiering. The art of navigation, the science of engineering, or the trade of carpentering cannot be learned in fourteen days annually – neither can the art of war.

In response, we have held up to us the strength of our Navy. But is it really what it is represented by our rulers to an already deluded public?

Only as recently as March 29, 1909, Sir Edward Grey, replying to Mr. Balfour's vote of censure in the House of Commons, was compelled to admit that —

"A new situation is created by the German programme. When it is completed, Germany, a great country close to our own shores, will have a fleet of thirty-three Dreadnoughts, and that fleet will be the most powerful which the world has ever yet seen. It imposes upon us the necessity of rebuilding the whole of our fleet. That is the situation."

Germany is our friend – for the moment. But Prince Buelow now admits that the Kaiser's telegram to President Kruger was no personal whim, but the outcome of national policy!

What may happen to-morrow?

WILLIAM LE QUEUX.

THE PERIL OF ENGLAND

WHO IS RIGHT?

SIR EDWARD GREY

In the House of Commons, March 29, 1909.

We have been informed verbally, but quite definitely, that Germany will not accelerate her naval programme of construction, and will not have thirteen ships of the *Dreadnought* type, including cruisers, till the end of 1912.

PRINCE BUELOW

In the Reichstag, March 29, 1909.

Great Britain has never made any proposals which the German Government regarded as a suitable basis for negotiations. Germany regards the question of limitation of armaments as outside the range of practical politics.

WHAT THE KAISER SAYS:

His Imperial Majesty the German Emperor declared: —

The prevailing sentiment among large sections of the middle and lower class of my own people is not friendly to England. — Daily Telegraph, October 28, 1908.

CHAPTER I

HOW THE PLANS OF ROSYTH WERE STOLEN

"But if the new plans for our naval base at Rosyth have already been secured by Germany, I don't see what we can do," I remarked. "What's the use of closing the stable-door after the horse has been stolen?"

"That's just what we generally do in England, my dear old Jack," replied my friend. "We still think, as in the days of Wellington, that one Englishman is worth ten foreigners. But remember the Boer War, and what our shameful ignorance cost us in men and money. Now, as I explained last night in London, the original plans of Rosyth leaked out some time ago, and were actually published in certain Continental papers. In consequence of this, fresh plans have been prepared and adopted by the Lords of the Admiralty. It is one of these which Reitmeyer informs my father is already in German hands."

"But is not Reitmeyer a German himself?" I asked.

"He's a naturalised Englishman," replied my friend Ray Raymond, drawing hard at his pipe as he stretched himself lazily before the fire of the inn-parlour. "It was he who gave the gov'nor a good deal of the information upon which he based those questions he asked in the House."

"The Government refused to admit that German spies are at work in England," I said.

"Yes, Jack. That's just why I'm down here on the Firth of Forth – in order to accomplish the task I've set myself, namely, to prove that German secret agents are at this moment actively at work amongst us. I intend to furnish proof of the gov'nor's statements, and by exposing the methods of these inquisitive gentry, compel the Government to introduce fresh legislation in order that the authorities may be able to deal with them. At present spies may work their will in England, and the law is powerless to prevent them."

I was standing with my back to the fire facing my friend, who, a barrister like myself, shared with me a set of rather dismal chambers in New Stone Buildings, Lincoln's Inn, though he had never had occasion to practise, as I unfortunately had.

As he sat, his long, thin legs outstretched towards the fire, he presented the appearance of the typical athletic young Englishman, aged about thirty, clean-shaven, clean-limbed, with an intelligent and slightly aquiline face, a pair of merry grey eyes, and light brown hair closely cropped. He was an all-round good fellow, even though his life had been cast in pleasant places. Eldest son of Sir Archibald Raymond, Bart., the well-known Cardiff coal-owner who sat for East Carmarthen, he had been with me at Balliol, we had read together, and though he now shared those dingy London chambers, he resided in a prettily furnished flat in Bruton Street, while I lived in rooms round in Guilford Street, Bloomsbury, in my lonely bachelordom.

He had been adopted as candidate for West Rutland at the next election, and his party predicted of him great things. But the long-wished-for General Election was still afar off, therefore, with commendable patriotism, he had taken up the burning question of German spies in England, which had been so lightly pooh-poohed by both the Prime Minister and the Minister for War. His intention was, if possible, to checkmate their activity, and at the same time reveal to the public the fool's paradise in which we are living now that "the Day" – as they call it in Germany – is fast approaching – the day of the invasion of Great Britain.

– Miles N.E. of Dockyard. Half-closed redoubt for infantry – Platforms for machine-guns at angles – Wrought-iron palisading at bottom of ditch.

G (in plan.) "Ferry Hills" Fort – Earth and concrete – Very deep ditches, flanked by counterscarp galleries and a stone caponier – Casemated – Probable

armament – Two 9.2-inch guns, six 7.5-inch guns – Wrought-iron fraise below counterscarp.

H (in plan). Evidently intended for use against torpedo-boats and destroyers – To mount ten 4-inch quick-firing guns – Wrought-iron palisading in ditch well covered from seaward – Gorge closed by stone wall (two tiers of loopholes for musketry), flanked by caponiers with machine-guns.

I. A large and formidable work armed with —

Portion of translation of the German spy's report upon the new naval base at Rosyth.

After Sir Archibald had put the questions in the House, the purport of which most readers will remember, he had been the recipient of many letters pointing out the presence of spies – letters which, if published, would have no doubt created a great sensation. Many of these statements Ray and I had, during the past two months, closely investigated on the spot, and what we had discovered held us both amazed and alarmed. Indeed, we had secured evidence that although spies were openly at work in certain of our eastern counties collecting all sorts of information which would be of incalculable importance to an invader, yet the chief constables of those counties had actually been instructed from head-quarters to close their eyes to the movements of inquisitive foreigners!

In the investigations upon which Ray Raymond had embarked with such enthusiasm, and which I am now permitted to chronicle in these pages, he had taken only two persons into his confidence – myself and Vera, the pretty, fair-haired daughter of Vice-Admiral Sir Charles Vallance, the Admiral-Superintendent of Portsmouth Dockyard, to whom he was engaged.

Indeed, from the first I suspected that it had been her influence that had roused him to action; she who had promised him her assistance, and who had pointed out how, by watching and unmasking the spies, he might render his King and country signal service.

At dusk that day we had, on arrival from King's Cross, left our baggage with the hall porter of the North British Hotel in Edinburgh, had travelled from the Waverley Station to Dalmeny, and descending the hundred or so steps to the comfortable Hawes Inn, at the water's edge, had dined there. Thence we had taken the old ferry-boat over to North Queensferry, on the opposite shore, where, in the rather bare parlour of the little Albert Hotel, directly beneath the giant arms of the Forth Bridge, we were resting and smoking.

Outside the November night was dark and squally with drizzling rain; within the warmth was cheerful, the fire throwing a red glow upon the old-fashioned mahogany sideboard with its profuse display of china and the two long tables covered with red cloths.

From my boyhood days, I, John James Jacox, barrister-at-law, had always been fond of detective work; therefore I realised that in the present inquiry before us there was wide scope for one's reasoning powers, as well as a great probability of excitement.

I was thoroughly wiping my gold pince-nez, utterly failing to discover Ray's reason in travelling to that spot now that it was admitted that the Germans had already outwitted us and secured a copy of at least one of the plans. Suddenly, glancing up at the cheap American clock on the mantelshelf, my friend declared that we ought to be moving and at once struggled into his coat and crushed on his soft felt hat. It then wanted a quarter to ten o'clock.

In ascending the short, steep hill in the semi-darkness, we passed the North Queensferry post office, beside which he stopped short to peer down the dark alley which separated it from the Roxburgh Hotel. I noticed that in this alley stood a short, stout telegraph-pole, carrying about sixty or so lines of wire which, coming overhead from the north, converged at that point into a cable, and crossed to the south beneath the mile-broad waters of the Forth.

Ray was apparently interested in them, for glancing overhead he saw another set of wires which, carried higher, crossed the street and ran away to the left. This road he followed, I walking at his side.

The way we took proved to be a winding one, which, instead of ascending the steep hill with its many quarries, from the summit of which the wonderful bridge runs forth, skirted the estuary westward past a number of small grey cottages, the gardens of some of which appeared to run down to the broad waters whence shone the flashing light of the Beamer and those of Dalmeny, the Bridge, and of South Queensferry.

The rain had ceased, and the moon, slowly struggling from behind a big bank of cloud, now produced a most picturesque effect of light and shadow.

The actions of Ray Raymond were, however, somewhat mysterious, for on passing each telegraph-pole he, by the aid of a small electric torch he carried in his pocket, examined it carefully at a distance of about six feet from the ground.

He must have thus minutely examined at least fifteen or sixteen when, at the sharp bend of the road, he apparently discovered something of which he was in search. The pole stood close beside the narrow pathway, and as he examined it with his magnifying-glass I also became curious. But all I distinguished were three small gimlet holes set in a triangle in the black tarred wood about four inches apart.

"Count the wires, Jack," he said. "I make them twenty-six. Am I correct?"

I counted, and found the number to be right.

Then for some moments he stood in thoughtful silence, gazing away over the wide view of St. Margaret's Hope spread before him.

Afterwards we moved forward. Passing along, he examined each of the other poles, until we descended the hill to the Ferry Toll, where the high road and wires branched off to the right to Dunfermline. Then, taking the left-hand road along the shore, where ran a line of telephone, we passed some wharves, gained the Limpet Ness, and for a further couple of miles skirted the moonlit waters, until, of a sudden, there came into view a long corrugated-iron building lying back from the road facing the Forth and fenced off by a high spiked-iron railing. The entrance was in the centre, with nine long windows on either side, while at a little distance further back lay a small bungalow, evidently the residence of the caretaker.

"This," exclaimed my friend without halting, "is the much-discussed Rosyth. These are the Admiralty offices, and from here the tracing of that plan was obtained."

"A rather lonely spot," I remarked.

"Over yonder, beyond that ruined castle out on the rocks, where Oliver Cromwell's mother was born, is the site of the new naval base. You'll get a better view from the other side of the hill," he said in a low voice.

"Who lives in the bungalow?" I inquired.

"Only the caretaker. The nearest house is on top of the hill, and is occupied by the second officer in charge of the works."

Continuing our way and passing over the hill, we skirted a wood, which I afterwards found to be Orchardhead Wood, passed a pair of lonely cottages on the right, until we reached a lane running down to the water's edge. Turning into this lane, we walked as far as a gate which commanded the great stretch of broad, level meadows and the wide bay beyond. Leaning over it, he said:

"This is where the new naval base is to be. Yonder, where you see the lights, is Bruce Haven."

"Tell me the facts regarding the stolen plan as far as is known," I said, leaning on the gate also and gazing away across the wide stretch of moonlit waters.

"The facts are curious," replied my friend. "As you know, I've been away from London a fortnight, and in those fourteen days I've not been idle. It seems that when the first plan leaked out and was published abroad, the Admiralty had two others prepared, and into both these a commission which came down here has, for several months, been busily at work investigating their feasibility. At last one of the schemes has been adopted. Tracings of it are kept in strictest secrecy in a safe in the offices down yonder, together with larger-scale tracings of the various docks, the submarine station,

repairing docks, patent slips, and defensive forts – some twenty-two documents in all. The details of the defensive forts are, of course, kept a profound secret. The safe has two keys, one kept by the superintendent of the works, Mr. Wilkinson, who lives over at Dunfermline, and the other by the first officer, Mr. Farrar, who resides in a house half a mile from the offices. The safe cannot be opened except by the two gentlemen being present together. The leakage could not come from within. None of the plans have ever been found to be missing and no suspicion attaches to anybody, yet there are two most curious facts. The first is that in July last a young clerk named Edwin Jephson, living with his mother in Netley Road, Shepherd's Bush, and employed by a firm of auctioneers in the City, was picked up in the Thames off Thorneycroft's at Chiswick. At the inquest, the girl to whom the young man was engaged testified to his strangeness of manner a few days previously; while his mother stated how, prior to his disappearance, he had been absent from home for four days, and on his return had seemed greatly perturbed, and had remarked: 'There'll be something in the papers about me before long.' On the body were found fourteen shillings in silver, some coppers, a few letters, and a folio of blue foolscap containing some writing in German which, on translation, proved to be certain details regarding a fortress. A verdict of suicide was returned; but the statement in German, placed by the police before the Admiralty, proved to be an exact copy of one of the documents preserved in the safe here, at Rosyth."

"Then the Admiralty cannot deny the leakage of the secret?" I remarked.

"No; but the mystery remains how it came into the young fellow's possession, and what he was about to do with it. As far as can be ascertained, he was a most exemplary young man, and had no connection whatever with any one in Admiralty employ," replied Ray; adding, "the second fact is the one alleged by Reitmeyer, who was, in confidence, shown a photograph of one of the larger plans."

"Then spies are, no doubt, at work here," I said.

"That cannot be denied," was his reply. "This neighbourhood opens up a wide field of investigation to the inquisitive gentry from the Fatherland. Knowledge of the secrets of the defences of the Firth of Forth would be of the utmost advantage to Germany in the event of an invasion. The local submarine defences and corps of submarine miners have been done away with, yet the entrance of the estuary is commanded by strong batteries upon the island of Inchkeith, opposite Leith; the Forth Bridge is defended by masked batteries at Dalmeny at the one end and at Carlingnose at the other, while upon Inchgarvie, the rock beneath the centre of the bridge, is a powerful battery of six-inch guns. The true strength of these defences, and the existence of others, are, of course, kept an absolute secret, but Germany is equally anxious to learn them, as she is to know exactly what our plans are regarding this new naval base and its fortifications."

"But if the new base were established, might not the Forth Bridge be blown into the water by the enemy, and our fleet bottled up by the wreckage?" I ventured to remark.

"That's just the point, Jack," my friend said; "whether the Rosyth works are carried out or not, the Germans would, without doubt, use their best endeavours to blow up the bridge; first in order to cut direct communication between north and south, and secondly, to prevent British ships using St. Margaret's Hope as a haven of refuge."

"And even in face of the document discovered upon the auctioneer's clerk, the Government deny the activity of spies!"

"Yes," said Ray in a hard voice. "A week ago I was up here, and examined the safe in the offices we've passed. I was only laughed at for my pains. I must admit, of course, that no document has ever been missing, and that the safe has not been tampered with in any way."

"A complete mystery."

"One which, my dear Jack, we must solve," he said, as we retraced our steps back to North Queensferry station, where we luckily caught a train back to Edinburgh.

Next morning we travelled again to Dalmeny, and in the grey mist hired a boat at the slippery landing-stage opposite the Hawes Inn. Refusing the assistance of the boatman, Ray took off his coat

and commenced to row to the opposite shore. His action surprised me, as we could easily have gone over by the steam ferry. It was high tide, and by degrees as we got into mid-stream he allowed the boat to drift towards one of the sets of four circular caissons in which the foundations of the gigantic bridge, with its bewildering masses of ironwork, were set.

Against one of them the boat drifted, and he placed his hand upon the masonry to prevent a collision. As he did so, his keen eyes discerned something which caused him to pull back and examine it more closely.

As he did so, a train rumbled high above us.

With curiosity I followed the direction of his gaze, but what I saw conveyed to me nothing. About two feet above high-water mark a stout iron staple had been fixed into the concrete. To it was attached a piece of thin wire rope descending into the water, apparently used by the bridge workmen to moor their boats.

Having carefully examined the staple, Ray rowed round to the other three caissons, a few feet distant, but there discovered nothing. Afterwards, with my assistance, he pulled back to the Dalmeny side, where, at the base of one of the high square brick piers of the shore end of the bridge, the third from the land, he found a similar staple driven. Then we returned to the pier and crossed to North Queensferry.

My friend's next move was to enter the post office and there write upon a yellow form a telegram in German addressed to a person in Berlin. This he handed to the pleasant-faced Scotch postmistress, who, on seeing it in a strange language, regarded him quickly.

Ray remarked that he supposed she did not often transmit messages in German, whereupon she said:

"Oh, yes. The German waiter up at the Golf Club sends them sometimes."

"Is he the only German you have in North Queensferry?" he inquired casually.

"I've never heard of any other, sir," replied the good woman, and then we both wished her good-day and left.

Our next action was to climb the Ferry Hill at the back of the post office, passing the station and Carlingnose Fort, until we reached the club-house of the Dunfermline Golf Club, which commands a fine prospect over the wide estuary eastward.

No one appeared to be playing that morning, but on entering the club we were approached by a fair-headed, rather smart-looking German waiter. His age was about thirty, his fair moustache well trained, and his hair closely cropped.

I made inquiry for an imaginary person, and by that means was enabled to engage the man in conversation. Ray, on his part, remarked that he would be staying in the neighbourhood for some time, and requested a list of members and terms of membership. In response, the waiter fetched him a book of rules, which he placed in his pocket.

"Well?" I asked, as we descended the hill.

"To me," my friend remarked, "there is only one suspicious fact about that man – his nationality."

The afternoon we spent out at the naval offices, where I was introduced to the Superintendent and the second officer, and where I stood by while my friend again examined the big green-painted safe, closely investigating its lock with the aid of his magnifying glass. It was apparent that those in charge regarded him as a harmless crank, for so confident were they that no spy had been able to get at the plans that no night watch had ever been kept upon the place.

Through five consecutive nights, unknown to the caretaker, who slept so peacefully in his bungalow, we, however, kept a vigilant watch upon the place. But in vain. Whatever information our friends the Germans wanted they seemed to have already obtained.

Ray Raymond, however, continued to display that quiet, methodical patience born of enthusiasm.

"I'm confident that something is afoot, and that there are spies in the neighbourhood," he would say.

Nearly a fortnight we spent, sometimes in Edinburgh, and at others idling about North Queensferry in the guise of English tourists, for the Forth Bridge is still an attraction to the sightseer.

Upon the German waiter at the Golf Club Ray was keeping a watchful eye. He had discovered his name to be Heinrich Klauber, and that before his engagement there he had been a waiter in the basement café of the Hôtel de l'Europe, in Leicester Square, London.

His movements were in no way suspicious. He lived at a small cottage nearly opposite the post office at North Queensferry with a widow named Macdonald, and he had fallen in love with a rather pretty dark-eyed girl named Elsie Robinson, who lived with her father in the grey High Street of Inverkeithing. As far as my observations went – and it often fell to my lot to watch his movements while Ray was absent – the German was hardworking, thrifty, and a pattern of all the virtues.

One evening, however, a curious incident occurred.

Ray had run up to London, leaving me to watch the German's movements. Klauber had returned to Mrs. Macdonald's about eight, but not until nearly eleven did he come forth again, and then instead of taking his usual road to Inverkeithing to meet the girl Robinson, he ascended the hill and struck across the golf-course until he had gained its highest point, which overlooked the waters of the Forth towards the sea.

So suddenly did he halt that I was compelled to throw myself into a bunker some distance away to escape detection. Then, as I watched, I saw him take from his pocket and light a small acetylene lamp, apparently a bicycle-lamp, with a green glass. He then placed it in such a position on the grass that it could be seen from far across the waters, and lighting a cigarette, he waited.

The light on the Oxcars was flashing white and red, while from distant Inchkeith streamed a white brilliance at regular intervals. But the light of Heinrich Klauber was certainly a signal. To whom?

He remained there about half an hour, but whether he received any answering signal I know not.

Next night and the next I went to the same spot, but he failed to put in an appearance. Then, in order to report to Ray, I joined the morning train from Perth to London.

On arrival at New Stone Buildings I telephoned to Bruton Street, but Chapman, his valet, told me that his master had slept there only one night, had received a visit from a respectably dressed middle-aged woman, and had gone away – to an unknown destination. Therefore I waited for a whole week in anxiety and suspense, until one morning I received a wire from him, despatched from Kirkcaldy, urging me to join him at once at the Station Hotel in Perth.

Next morning at nine o'clock I was seated on the side of his bed, telling him of the incident of the lamp.

"Ah!" he exclaimed after a pause. "My surmises are slowly proving correct, Jack. You must buy a bicycle-lamp down in the town and a piece of green glass. To-night you must go there at the same hour and show a similar light. The matter seems far more serious than I first expected. The enemy is no doubt here, in our midst. Take this. It may be handy before long," and he took from his kit-bag a new .32 Colt revolver.

By this, I saw that he had resolved upon some bold stroke.

That evening, after an early dinner at the hotel, we took train to North Queensferry, and on alighting at the station he sent me up to the golf-links to show a light for half an hour; promising to meet me later at a certain point on the road to Rosyth.

I gained the lonely spot on the golf-course and duly showed the light. Then I hastened to rejoin my friend at the point he indicated, and found him awaiting me behind some bushes.

Almost at the moment we met, a female figure came along beneath the shadow of a high wall. She was a poorly dressed girl, but the instant she addressed my friend I recognised by her refined voice that it was Vera, the dainty daughter of the Admiral Superintendent.

"Elsie is waiting down by the Ferry Barns," she said quickly, in a low whisper, after greeting me. "Heinrich has not kept his appointment with her."

"You have the note?" he asked. "Recollect what I told you concerning the man Hartmann."

"Yes," she replied. Then, addressing me, she said, "Take care of these people Mr. Jacox. They are utterly unscrupulous"; and she again disappeared into the darkness.

Ray and I turned and again walked back in the direction of Rosyth. But when we had gone a little distance he told me to approach the naval offices carefully, conceal myself in the bushes, and watch until he joined me. On no account was I to make any sign, whatever I might witness.

Though intensely cold the night was not very dark, therefore I was not long in establishing my position at a spot where I had a good view of the offices. Then I leaned upon a tree-trunk and waited in breathless expectation. I touched my father's old repeater which I carried and found it to be a quarter past midnight.

For over an hour I remained there, scarce daring to move a muscle.

Suddenly, however, upon the mud at the side of the road I heard soft footsteps, and a few moments later two figures loomed up from the shadow. But when about forty yards from the offices they halted, one of the men alone proceeding.

With great caution he climbed the spiked railing, and crossing rapidly to the main door of the offices he unlocked it with a key and entered, closing the door after him. As far as I could distinguish, the man wore a short beard, and was dressed in tweeds and a golf cap. Holding my breath, I saw the flashing of an electric torch within the building.

Fully twenty minutes elapsed before he reappeared, relocked the outside door, and clambering back over the railings, rejoined his waiting companion, both being lost next second in the darkness.

I longed to follow them, but Ray's instructions had been explicit – I was to wait until he arrived.

Half an hour later, hearing his low whistle, I emerged from my hiding-place to meet him and tell him what I had seen.

"Yes," he said, "I know. We have now no time to lose."

And together we hurried back over the road towards North Queensferry.

At the same spot where Vera had met us, we found her still in hiding. My friend whispered some words, whereupon she hurried on before us to the sharp bend in the road where stood the telegraph-pole which had attracted Ray on the night of our first arrival.

We drew back in the shadow, and as we did so I saw her halt and pull the bell beside a small gate in a high wall. Behind stood a white-washed cottage, with a good-sized garden at the rear. One end of the house abutted upon the pathway, and in it was one small window commanding a view of the road.

Vera, we saw, had some conversation with the old woman who answered her ring, and then went in, the gate being closed after her.

Together we waited for a considerable time, our impatience and apprehension increasing. All was silent, except for a dog-cart, in which we recognised Mr. Wilkinson driving home from the station.

"Curious that Vera doesn't return," Ray remarked at last, when we had waited nearly three-quarters of an hour. "We must investigate for ourselves. I hope nothing has happened to her."

And motioning me to follow, he very cautiously crept along the muddy path and tried the gate. It had been relocked.

We therefore scaled the wall without further ado, and, standing in the little front garden, we listened breathlessly at the door of the house.

"Get back there in the shadow, Jack," urged my friend; and, as soon as I was concealed, he passed his hand along the lintel of the door, where he found the bell-wire from the gate. This he pulled.

A few moments later the old woman reappeared at the door, passing out towards the gate, when, in an instant, Ray and I were within, and flinging open a door on the left of the narrow passage we found ourselves confronted by the exemplary waiter Klauber and a companion, whose short beard

and snub nose I recognised as those of the man who so calmly entered the naval offices a couple of hours before.

For them our sudden appearance was, no doubt, a dramatic surprise.

The elder man gave vent to a quick imprecation in German, while Klauber, of course, recognised us both.

In the room was a large camera with a flashlight apparatus, while pinned upon a screen before the camera was a big tracing of a plan of one of the chief defensive forts which the spies had that night secured from Rosyth, and which they were now in the act of photographing.

"A lady called upon you here an hour ago," exclaimed Ray. "Where is she?"

"No lady has called here," replied the bearded German in very good English, adding with marvellous coolness, "To what, pray, do we owe this unwarrantable intrusion?"

"To the fact that I recognise you as Josef Scholtz, secret agent of the German Naval Intelligence Department," answered my friend resolutely, closing the door and standing with his back to it. "We have met before. You were coming down the steps of a house in Pont Street, London, where lives a great friend of yours, Hermann Hartmann."

"Well?" asked the German, with feigned unconcern, and before we could prevent him he had torn the tracing from the screen, roughly folded it, and stuffed it into his pocket.

"Hand that to me," commanded my friend quickly.

But the spy only laughed in open defiance.

"You intended, no doubt, to replace that as you have done the others after photographing them. Only we've just spoilt your game," Raymond said. "Both Mr. Wilkinson and Mr. Farrar are, I see from the list, members of the Golf Club where you" – and he looked across to the waiter – "are employed. On one occasion, while Mr. Wilkinson was taking a bath after a game, and on another while Mr. Farrar was changing his coat and vest, you contrived to take wax impressions of both the safe keys and also that of the door of the offices. The keys were made in Glasgow, and by their means the plans of our new naval base and its proposed defences have been at your disposal."

"Well – there's no law against it!" cried Scholtz. "Let me pass."

"First give me that tracing," demanded my friend resolutely.

"Never. Do your worst!" the German replied, speaking with a more pronounced accent in his excitement, while at the same moment I saw that he held a revolver in his hand.

In an instant Ray drew his own weapon, but, instead of covering the spy, he pointed it at a small, strong wooden box upon the floor in the opposite corner of the room.

"Gott – no!" gasped the man, his face blanching as he realised Ray's intention. "For Heaven's sake don't. I – I –"

"Ah!" laughed my friend. "So it is as I thought. You two blackguards, with some of your friends, I expect, have been secretly preparing for the destruction of the Forth Bridge on 'the Day' – as you are so fond of calling it. The staples are already driven in, and the unsuspecting-looking wire ropes, attached to which the boxes of gun-cotton and other explosives are to be sunk between the four caissons, are all in readiness. The boat from a German merchant vessel off Leith, signalled at intervals by your assistant Klauber, has been bringing up box after box of that dangerous stuff and landing it at the bottom of this garden; so that within an hour of receiving the code-word from your chief, you would be able to wreck the whole bridge and blow it into the water!"

The spy endeavoured to pass, but seeing Ray's determined attitude, held back, and my friend compelled him to lay down his weapon.

"Jack," said my friend, "just see what's in that box."

I at once investigated it, and discovered within only innocent-looking tin boxes of English biscuits. The three tins at the top I lifted out and placed on the floor, but those below I found were filled with circular cakes of what looked like felt, about an inch in thickness, each with a hole through

it, and with a small cavity for the reception of the detonator. I showed it to Ray, pointing out that, packed with it, were several smaller tins, like boxes of cigarettes.

"Yes. I see!" he exclaimed as I opened one. "Those are the detonators, filled with fulminate of mercury."

"Let us pass!" cried both the spies.

"Not before you are searched shall you leave this house!" was the quick reply. "If you resist, I shall fire into one of those boxes of detonators, and blow you to atoms."

"And yourselves also!" remarked Klauber, his face pale as death.

"It will at least prevent our secrets falling into your hands, and at the same time bring the truth home to the British Government!" was my friend's unwavering answer.

Next moment both men made a dash towards the door, but I had drawn my weapon and was upon my guard. There was a flash, followed by a deafening report, as Ray fired at the box, aiming wide on purpose.

Then the two spies, seeing that they had to deal with a man who was a patriot to his heart's core, realised that their game was up.

Sullenly Scholtz put down his weapon, and I searched both men.

From the pocket of the exemplary waiter I drew forth a rough plan, together with some scribbled notes in German, which afterwards proved to be a description of the forts on Inchkeith, while from the pocket of Scholtz I secured the tracing he had stolen from Rosyth.

Then we allowed both the secret agents of the Kaiser to pass out, much to the consternation and alarm of the deaf old Scotchwoman, who had, at their request, posed as the occupier of the cottage, but who, in perfect ignorance of what was in progress, had acted as their housekeeper.

A swift examination of the premises revealed no trace of Vera. But we found in the cellar below the room where we had found the spies a great store of gun-cotton and other high explosives of German manufacture, intended for the wrecking of the bridge; while in an old battered portmanteau in one of the upstairs rooms we also found, all ready for conveyance to Germany, a quantity of prints from the photographic negatives in the room below – photographs of nearly the whole of the plans of Rosyth, and more especially of its proposed forts – which the men had been in the habit of abstracting at night and replacing in the safe before dawn.

Ray Raymond was in active search of something else besides, and at length discovered what he sought – two German military telegraph instruments, together with a complete and very ingenious arrangement for the tapping of wire.

"By Jove!" exclaimed my friend, who took a keen interest in all things electrical. "This will now come in very handy!"

And on going outside to the telegraph pole against the wall, he clambered up it and attached wires to two of the insulators. Then descending, he screwed a little brass box upon it into those same three holes in the black wood which had attracted him on the night of our arrival, and a moment later began manipulating the key.

"Good!" he exclaimed at last. "I've picked up Inverkeithing, and asked them to send the police over at once. We mustn't leave the place and risk the spies returning for any of their paraphernalia. The disappearance of Vera, however, worries me. I sent her here with a note purporting to come from the chief of the German Secret Service in England, Hermann Hartmann; but she has vanished, and we must, as soon as the police arrive, go in search of her."

So completely had we unmasked the spies that I stood puzzled and amazed.

Ray, noticing my attitude, made explanation.

"Several of my surmises in this case proved entirely correct," he said. "My first suspicion was aroused that if spies were about, they would probably prepare for tapping the telegraph lines, and, as you know, I soon discovered evidence of it. Then those staples in the foundations of the bridge gave me a further clue to the work in progress, a suspicion greatly strengthened by the signal light

shown by the man Klauber. The two men who held the safe keys being members of the Golf Club aroused a theory which proved the correct one, and on tracing back the career of the waiter I made a remarkable discovery which left no doubt as to his real profession. It seems that while employed at the Café de l'Europe in London, he lodged at the house of Mrs. Jephson, in Shepherd's Bush, and became extremely friendly with the widow's son. Now you'll remember that a few days before the poor fellow's death he was absent mysteriously, and on his return he told his mother in confidence that there would shortly be something in the papers about himself. Well, the truth is now quite plain. During his absence he evidently came up here. Young Jephson, who knew German, had found out that his German friend was a spy, and had no doubt secured the document afterwards found upon him as evidence. Klauber was ignorant of this, though he suspected that his secret was out. In deadly fear of exposure, he then plotted to silence the young Englishman, inducing him to walk along the towing-path between Hammersmith and Barnes, where he no doubt pushed him into the river. Indeed, I have found a witness who saw the two men together in King Street, Hammersmith, on the evening of the poor fellow's disappearance. The plan which Reitmeyer saw is, I find, fortunately one of the discarded ones."

"Extraordinary!" I declared, absorbed by what he had related. "But while you've wrested from Germany the secrets of some of our most important defences, you have, my dear Ray, temporarily lost the woman you love!"

"My first duty, Jack, is to my King and my country," he declared, sitting on the edge of the table in the spies' photographic studio. "I have tried to perform it to-night, and have, fortunately, exposed the German activity in our midst. When the police arrive to view this spies' nest, we must at once search for her who is always my confidante, and to whose woman's wits and foresight this success is in no small measure due."

CHAPTER II

THE SECRET OF THE SILENT SUBMARINE

"It's a most mysterious affair, no doubt," I remarked. "Has anything further been discovered?"

"Yes, Jack," replied my friend Ray Raymond, rolling a fresh cigarette between his fingers. "On investigation, the mystery grows more complicated, more remarkable, and – for us – much more interesting."

We were seated together in our dismal chambers in New Stone Buildings, Lincoln's Inn, one wet afternoon about six weeks after the Forth Bridge affair. With us, lolling in the shabby old easy chair beside the fire, sat Vera Vallance, in a big black hat, with her muff and coat thrown aside. Her disappearance at North Queensferry had been of only brief duration, for we had discovered her hiding at the bottom of the long garden, close to the water's edge, watching the landing of two small boxes from a boat. It appeared that the two men, Scholtz and Klauber, on receipt of the note purporting to come from their director, Hermann Hartmann, in London, had asked her to wait in an adjoining room while they wrote a reply. But from there she had slipped out, and concealed herself in the garden to wait and watch.

Half an hour ago she had come to my gloomy chambers with her fiancé, in order, as he explained, to consult with us. She was at present on a visit to her married sister who lived in Argyll Road, near Kensington High Street, hence they were daily in each other's company.

"You see, Jack, very little has been allowed to leak out to the papers," Ray exclaimed as he lit his cigarette and took up a position with his back to the fire. "As soon as I read of the discovery I ran down to Scotland Yard, saw Evans, and explained my theory. He was inclined to agree with me, and at once gave orders that no facts were to be given to the Press. Upon complete secrecy, our success now depends."

"I only know what I've read in the papers," I remarked.

"Tell us the whole facts, Ray," urged the pretty fair-haired girl, who sat with her veil raised and her long white gloves laid across her knees.

"Well, dear, they are briefly as follows," he replied, with an affectionate glance at her. "Last Thursday afternoon, on the arrival at 4.51 of a train from Guildford at Vauxhall, the ticket-collector discovered lying on the floor of a third-class compartment a middle-aged, respectably dressed man in an apparently dying condition. The police were called, and he was conveyed to St. Thomas's Hospital, where it was found that he was suffering from a severe fracture of the skull, the wound having been inflicted probably with a loaded stick or a life-preserver. There was a severe cut over the right eye and a great gash down the left cheek. The man was unconscious, and still remains so. The doctors have grave doubts whether, even if he recovers, his mind will not be permanently affected. In all probability he will never regain his right mind."

"Terrible!" ejaculated Vera.

"Yes. A case of attempted murder, no doubt," he said. "But what first attracted my notice was the statement that the man had been identified as Max Steinheim, a German hairdresser employed in a shop in New Bond Street, who had been missing for nearly two months. He resided in Hargwynne Street, Stockwell, and as he owed a considerable sum to his landlady, she had given notice to the police of his disappearance. It was she who had identified him in the hospital."

"That's as far as the information conveyed by the newspapers carries the affair," I remarked.

"Exactly. But we are able to proceed a little farther, to a matter which must be closely investigated," continued Raymond. "On the arrival of the train at Waterloo the compartment, which showed signs of a desperate struggle, was searched, and under the seat was discovered a small piece of paper tightly screwed up into a small ball as though somebody wished to get rid of it unobserved. Upon

it, in a distinctly foreign hand, and in violet ink – which, by the way, is seldom used by Englishmen – were traced some cryptic memoranda, a copy of which I have here," and he handed for our inspection a piece of paper which presented this appearance:

J 11864! 19505
Kingscliffe
12.15 train St. Pancras
M.R. Weldon and Corby 1 mile
Royal Pier 18
6.11
248 and 392
Harpur Street 2.30
? 8.88 M. 88
Elmar 39 X clock.

"You've endeavoured to decipher it, of course," I remarked, as both Vera and I gazed at the puzzling array of numerals and words.

"I have. For the past three days I've indeed done nothing else. Unfortunately the result is not very reassuring," he answered. "Deciphered by one of the little-known codes, the figures 19505 stand for 'January 24th,' which is four days before the murderous assault. Kingscliffe is the name of a village in Northamptonshire, on the North Western line between Peterborough and Rugby. The 12.15 from St. Pancras is a restaurant train for Derby, and takes passengers to Weldon and Corby station, by changing at Kettering, and the distance '1 mile' would bring the traveller to the village of Great Weldon."

"Royal Pier sounds like the name of a hotel," I remarked.

"No doubt. But there are a good many Royal Pier hotels in England, so there we are confronted with a difficulty. To what 6.11 refers I cannot conceive, while Harpur Street, which is off Theobalds Road, I visited yesterday, but I find there are no such numbers as 248 or 392. The next line is unintelligible, but if I read the last line aright it is an appointment made beneath the clock at Charing Cross Station at six."

I drew hard at my pipe. That strange document presented to me a very complicated puzzle.

"It seems to refer to some district in Northamptonshire, yet he was attacked coming up from Guildford, on the South Western line!" Vera remarked. "Is your only suspicion based upon the fact of the injured man's nationality, Ray?"

"That, combined with other circumstances," he replied. "As soon as I read the first announcement in the papers, I went down to Guildford and there ascertained that the injured man arrived at the Angel Hotel in a motor-car about one o'clock. The chauffeur remarked to the ostler that he had come up from the south coast, and after having a drink he started off on the return journey. Steinheim had luncheon upstairs, took his coffee and cigarette in the little room below, and idled about, telling the lady bookkeeper of the hotel that he was expecting a friend. The friend in question did not, however, arrive, therefore he walked down to the station, and left at 4.13 for London. A porter remembers seeing him alone in the compartment, and it seems quite certain that, on starting from Guildford, he was still alone. The train was an express, and timed not to stop anywhere from Guildford to Vauxhall, but, from the railway officials, I find that it was pulled up by signal about a mile from Esher, in which time he may have been joined by some one from the adjoining compartment."

"Then your theory is that the man who attacked this mysterious German got back again to his carriage, and alighted at Vauxhall," I said.

"I certainly think so, for the driver says that outside Clapham Junction the signals were against him, and he pulled up."

"It's a pity he has not sufficiently recovered to make any statement."

Ray smiled grimly.

"He would never do that, I think," he said. "It is to his advantage to conceal the facts, if my deductions prove correct."

"Are those all the known circumstances?" I inquired, much interested.

"There is one other. A week after the man's disappearance from Stockwell, his landlady received a letter bearing the postmark of Crawley in Sussex, telling her not to trouble on his account. He wrote: 'I am engaged upon an important mission, but shall return home within ten days, when I will pay all I owe you. Do not trouble after me. Burn this letter as soon as you have read it. – Max Steinheim.' The other fact I learned from the man's employer, an Englishman in New Bond Street. It appears that to the establishment there often came a stout, well-dressed, prosperous-looking German gentleman who waited for Steinheim to shave him, or cut his hair, and on such occasions it was noticed that they exchanged whispered words in their own tongue."

"Well?" asked Vera, looking up at her lover.

"The stout German's description tallies exactly with that of Hermann Hartmann."

"Ah! I see," I remarked. "You've certainly not been idle, Ray." And with my eyes fixed upon that puzzling array of figures and words, I added, "If we could only decipher the whole of these we might elucidate the truth."

"The injured man's knowledge of Hartmann, the crafty chief of the German Secret Service in London, is certainly suspicious," Vera remarked. "But cannot some information be gathered from the landlady at Hargwynne Street? He may have had visitors there."

"And if he did, they would speak in German, which the good lady could not understand," her lover replied thoughtfully, contemplating the end of his cigarette.

"There could be no harm in seeing the good lady," the girl remarked. "I'll go over to-morrow and have a chat with her."

"And in the meantime Jack and I will pursue another line of inquiry," remarked my friend.

Vera rose, a tall, fair-haired, and sweet-faced figure in black, and seating herself at the table, served us our tea. She was no stranger at our chambers, and as an Admiral's daughter, the question of German spies in England, which her lover had taken up so strongly, interested her most keenly. The Forth Bridge peril had already impressed a great and serious truth upon the Government, but Ray Raymond's success had only whetted his appetite for further exploration and discovery.

Therefore on the following morning I called at his chambers in Bruton Street – a tastefully furnished bachelor suite, the art green and blues of which were scarcely in keeping with his serious, earnest character – and together we drove in a taxi-cab to St. Thomas's Hospital, where, in the accident ward, we stood at the bedside of the mysterious Steinheim. His head was enveloped in surgical bandages, but during the night he had regained consciousness. To the questions we put to him, however, we obtained no satisfactory replies. His mind seemed to be a perfect blank as to what had occurred.

Ray read the copy of those cryptic figures upon the scrap of paper found in the railway carriage. When my friend pronounced the name of the station "Weldon and Corby," the invalid's big grey eyes started from his head as he exclaimed in German:

"Ah! Yes – yes. At Weldon. She was at Weldon!"

Who was "she"? In vain we tried to wring from him some reply to this question, but, alas! in vain.

Mention of Hermann Hartmann, the ingenious and fearless secret agent who controlled so cleverly the vast army of German spies spread over our smiling land of England, brought no responsive expression to the man's white, drawn face. It was indeed apparent that his intention was to hold back at all hazards the truth regarding the murderous attack upon him. Perhaps he himself was guilty of some offence, or perhaps he intended to hold his peace then and to retaliate at a moment when his assailant thought himself most secure.

He was a big, burly, strong-featured man, just the type of heavy-limbed German who might be expected to bear a murderous malice against any who did him injury.

"I feel more than ever convinced that Hartmann is at the bottom of the curious affair," Ray declared, as we walked together across Westminster Bridge and I crossed with him to the St. Stephen's Club, at the corner of the Embankment. "As far as I can discover, the man was always in possession of ample funds. Yet to his landlady he was careful never to reveal that he had money. There was, no doubt, some hidden reason for this, as well as for the letter he wrote to the woman after his departure."

"The mystery surrounding the affair grows more fascinating as we proceed," I declared.

"And if the deduction I have made this morning proves to be the correct one, Jack, the mystery will still increase. There's some very crooked business in progress, depend upon it."

That afternoon I had to make an application in the Chancery Court, therefore it was not until after dinner that I again sat in one of the green velvet chairs in his art-green sitting-room.

Contrary to his usual habit, he had not dressed, but still wore the brown tweed suit which he had had on in the morning.

"You've brought what I asked you over the 'phone?" he inquired, as soon as I entered.

"Yes," I replied, opening the well-worn leather brief bag which I carried, and displaying a dark lantern, a coil of strong silk rope, and a small but serviceable jemmy. All that burglarious outfit belonged to my friend.

"Right," he exclaimed, stroking his smooth-shaven chin. "Have a pipe. We'll leave here about ten. We are going to spend the night in Pont Street." And he pointed to a silver flask and a paper of sandwiches upon the sideboard. "Vera has seen the landlady in Stockwell, but can make nothing of her. She's as deaf as a post. She returned home to Portsmouth to-night."

We smoked together until ten, he consuming cigarette after cigarette in that quick, nervous manner which showed the volcano of excitement raging within him.

"I can't think why the mention of Weldon and Corby should have so excited our friend this morning. To me it seemed as though he retained rather bitter memories of the place."

"And there was a woman in the case, without a doubt."

"I think, Jack, I shall go down there and have a look round as soon as I have a chance. From the ordnance map this place seems quite a small one. The station is at Corby, while Little Weldon and Great Weldon are about a mile distant."

"There's just a chance, of course, that you might pick up something there," I remarked.

"And yet what I surmise leads me in entirely an opposite direction. There are no defences or secrets in Northamptonshire, remember."

Once more he took from his writing-table the piece of paper whereon was a copy of the strange array of figures found in the railway carriage at Waterloo. But at last he shook his head and laid it aside with a sigh. The mystery remained as complete as ever.

"There's a good deal that's suspicious about Hartmann. I suppose that's why we are going to Pont Street?" I remarked.

"Yes. As I've explained, he's believed to be a money-lender with an office in Cork Street, and is registered as such, in order that no one should be surprised at the constant callers at his house. He receives visits from all sorts and conditions of men – and women, but observation which I have placed upon the house has convinced me that the majority of these people are German agents of whom he is the guiding spirit and paymaster, and among whom he is all-powerful. Payment is made through him for all confidential services rendered to the Fatherland."

"And the police do not suspect it?"

"My dear fellow, have not the police received orders from our Government to close their eyes to the doings of these gentry? England is the paradise of the spy, and will remain so until we can bring pressure to bear to compel the introduction of fresh legislation against them."

Soon after half-past ten a taxi-cab deposited us in Sloane Street, and together we turned into Pont Street, walking leisurely past a medium-sized red-fronted house approached by a flight of steps leading to a deep portico. There was a light in the first-floor window of what was evidently the drawing-room but the rest of the house of the arch-spy of Germany was in darkness.

As we passed the house, my friend examined its highly respectable exterior. Then we passed on to the end of the thoroughfare, in order to attract no attention. A constable passed us, and in order to avoid being noticed we walked together for some distance. Presently, however, Ray turned back, and gaining the house adjoining Hartmann's, ran swiftly up the steps into the shadow of the portico, I following at his heels.

In a few seconds he had opened the door with a latch-key he carried in his hand, and next moment we were within the wide, echoing hall, for the house was empty, and to let.

"I called upon the agent, and had a look over this place a few days ago," he explained. "On that occasion, I had the key in my hand for a moment, and obtained an impression of it," and switching on his electric torch he showed the square hall with the flight of stairs ascending from it.

Gaining the big drawing-room, Ray crossed to the long French window on the left and gazed cautiously out upon the street below.

As he did so I noticed the figure of a man in a dark overcoat and felt hat cross from the opposite pavement and ascend the stairs of the house next door. Ray glanced at his watch, which he could see by the light of the street lamp outside. Noticing the time, he became reassured.

"You see, Jack, that from here runs a balcony leading to that of Hartmann's house. We must creep along it and try and get a peep of our friend at home. I've watched that drawing-room window for a long time, and I believe that he makes it his business room."

Carefully he unfastened the French window, and bending low so as to escape the observation of any person passing by, we both crept along the narrow balcony until, by swinging from one balustrade to the other, we found ourselves standing over Hartmann's portico.

Even from where we stood we could hear voices. Forward we crept again until we were outside the windows of the drawing-room, crouching so that no inquisitive policeman could detect us.

The blind of the window at which I listened did not fit well, therefore, through the small crack, I was enabled to peer within. The room was a large, well-furnished one with a fire burning brightly; near it stood a large roll-top writing-table at which sat a fat, flabby, sardonic-faced man of about fifty-five. He had grey eyes full of craft and cunning, a prominent nose, and a short-cropped grey beard. Ray whispered that it was the great Hartmann.

Near the fire, seated nervously on the extreme edge of a chair, was a respectably dressed man, a German evidently, with his hat in his hand. The man presented the appearance of a hard-working mechanic, and was obviously ill at ease.

We watched them in conversation, but could not distinguish one single word of what was said. All we could gather was that the fat man was overbearing in his manner, and that the visitor was most humble and subservient against his will.

For a full half-hour we watched, but unable to gather anything further, we were compelled to return to the house next door and regain the street, where for still twenty minutes longer we waited for the visitor's exit. When at last he came forth we followed him to the corner of Knightsbridge, opposite the Hyde Park Hotel, where he boarded a motor-bus, from which he eventually descended at the corner of Gray's Inn Road walking thence to a house in Harpur Street, Bloomsbury, where we later on discovered he lodged, under the name of Leon Karff.

The nature of the mission entrusted to this man, if one had actually been entrusted to him, was a mystery, yet it was a curious fact that "Harpur Street" appeared upon that scrap of paper which to us was such an enigma.

Next morning at six o'clock, I was already idling, at the corner of Harpur Street and Theobalds Road, but not until three hours later did the foreigner emerge and walk toward Holborn. Thence he

took a motor-bus back to Sloane Street, and calling upon Hartmann, spent another half an hour with him.

And afterwards he went straight home. It was then about noon, and having an engagement in Court, I was compelled to relinquish my vigil. But at a little after five Ray entered our chambers, exclaiming:

"As I expected! That man Karff has been to see Steinheim in the hospital. I was there awaiting him, believing that he might visit him. Apparently the injured man has given him certain instructions."

"About what?"

Ray shrugged his shoulders in blank ignorance. Then he said, "We have advanced one step toward the solution of the problem, my dear Jack. But we have not gone very far."

He took the copy of the cryptogram from my writing-table and again examined it. The figures "6.11" puzzled him. Many times he referred to them.

Four days passed, during which we kept strict observation upon Karff and followed him wherever he went. On the fifth day, Ray having spent all the morning watching him, to relieve him I walked along the Theobalds Road a few minutes before one and paused, as usual, before the oil shop at the corner. There was no sign of my friend, and though I waited through the whole of that cold afternoon and evening, continuing my wearisome vigil till midnight, yet he did not come.

Much surprised, I returned to New Stone Buildings, where I found a telegram from Ray, sent from Waterloo Station at three o'clock, telling me that all was right, and urging me to await further information.

This I did. For a whole week I possessed myself in patience, not knowing where Ray was or what had befallen him. That he was on the trail of a solution of the mystery was evident, but he sent me no word of his whereabouts.

It was apparent, however, that he was no longer in London.

Eleven days after his disappearance I one afternoon received another telegram, which had been handed in at Chichester, asking me to go at once to the Queen's Hotel at Southsea, where he would meet me at ten o'clock that night.

At the hour appointed I awaited him in my bedroom overlooking Southsea Common and the harbour, and at last he joined me. I saw by the serious expression upon his face that something unusual had happened.

"The fellow Karff has realised that I'm following him, Jack. Therefore you must take the matter up. He's in the service of a greengrocer in Queen Street, close to the Hard. I haven't yet discovered his game."

Thus there was left to me a very difficult matter, a mystery which I exerted every effort to unravel. For the next fortnight I watched the fellow incessantly, being relieved sometimes by the pretty daughter of the Admiral Superintendent, whose home was fortunately in the Dockyard. In all weathers and at all times we watched, but we failed to discover anything. Ray remained at the hotel impatient and inactive, and I must admit that more than once I was inclined to believe that he had been mistaken in his surmises. Leon Karff was, as far as we could discover, a hard-working foreigner, driven by force of circumstances into adopting the lowly calling of a greengrocer's assistant. His employer supplied with fruit and vegetables the officers' messes of several of the ships in the Dockyard, and on infrequent occasions he drove in the light cart with his master when on his rounds taking orders.

This round at last he was in the habit of making three times a week.

One Saturday morning, as I was idling along the Hard, I saw Karff and his master, a man named Mitchell, drive in past the policeman at the main gate. But though I waited for over three hours to watch their exit, they did not reappear.

Much surprised at this, I walked round to the Unicorn Gate, at Landport, where, on making judicious inquiries of the policeman on duty, I learnt that Mitchell had driven out – but alone! His

assistant, he said, had been sent back on foot with a message through the main gate just when the dockyard men or "maties," as they are called, were leaving work at midday.

Now having stood at that gate when the throngs had poured forth, I was quite certain he had not emerged. But I kept my own counsel, and returned to Southsea, deep in my own reflections.

On taking counsel with Ray, he at once telephoned to Vera at Admiralty House, and an hour later we all three discussed the situation, it being arranged that the Admiral's daughter should contrive to admit us to the Dockyard that night, when all was quiet, in order that we might institute a search for the missing German.

Therefore, just before half-past eleven, we halted before the small private door in the Dockyard wall, used by the Admiral-Superintendent and his household, and as the clock struck the door opened, revealing Vera. Next instant we were within the forbidden zone.

The night was frosty and a good deal too bright to suit our purpose. Vera gave some instructions to her lover, pointing to a row of long, dark sheds with sloping roofs on the opposite side of the Dockyard, saying:

"If he's inside, he's almost certain to be hidden somewhere near No. 4 shed. But be careful of the police; they are very watchful over yonder."

And after refastening the gate she disappeared into the darkness.

In the deep shadows we both crept noiselessly forward, negotiating in safety a pair of lock-gates in the open, and pursuing our way until in the vicinity of the shed which the Admiral's daughter had pointed out we discovered an old boiler, in which we both secreted ourselves.

Hardly had we crept inside when we heard the measured tramp of a policeman, who passed actually within a few feet of us. From the round hole in which we lay we could see Gosport – a pale row of lamps across the harbour.

We waited there, scarcely daring to whisper, until at last the clock struck one. If Karff was in the vicinity of that shed beside which we were secreted, he made no sign. All was silent. Once the shrill siren of a ship out at Spithead broke the quiet. Then its echoes died away.

"I really think we might have a careful look round," Ray suggested after a long silence.

With great care, therefore, we both emerged from our hiding-place, and keeping well within the shadows, passed round shed No. 4, which we found was completely closed in from view, its door being strongly barred and padlocked.

Unable to see anything, we decided to halt in the darkness behind a heap of scrap-iron and to listen for any sound of movement.

The cutting wind chilled us both to the marrow, for a white rime had gathered on the ground. The only sound we heard was that of the measured footsteps of another constable, which advanced and then died away again. There was, however, no sign of the German spy.

"To get in by the door yonder would be impossible. Therefore, he would try the roof," my companion remarked.

"You're right," I said. "You remain down here and watch while I try and get up above."

So I left him, and after considerable difficulty succeeded in gaining the roof of the shed adjoining, crouching in the gutter between the sloping roofs of the two sheds.

On each side of me sloped upwards skylights which lighted the interiors of the building-sheds, but all were thickly coated with a composition of dockyard dust and soot, which had been poured forth from many a warship's funnel as well as from the dozens of furnaces around. All was dark below; therefore I could see nothing.

I had been in my elevated position for fully twenty minutes before I was prompted to creep along to the further end of the gully, where, to my surprise, I saw that close to where I stood two panes of glass had been neatly removed and laid aside.

Through the hole I gazed down into the interior of the shed, when I was startled to see the small glow of an electric lamp in the hand of the man of whom we were in search.

He was standing beside the long, spindle-shaped hull of a new submarine boat which lay on a very elevated set of stocks on the far side of the shed. Another boat similar, but not so nearly complete, lay at the bottom of the dock alongside her.

As Karff with his electric lamp moved slowly and noiselessly along, carefully examining England's newest submarine, which rumour had said was the most silent and perfect craft of its kind, I was able to make out vaguely that, differing considerably from photographs of other submarines I had seen, the boat on the elevated stocks had a bow which ran out into a kind of snout, while instead of the usual small circular or oval conning-tower she had what looked like a long, narrow superstructure running along the greater part of her length. This, however, was much higher forward than aft. She seemed, too, to have a great number of propellers.

I watched the man Karff making some rapid memoranda, and so occupied was he with his work that he never looked upward. Had he done so, he would certainly have detected my head against the sky.

In a manner which showed him to be fully acquainted with the construction of submarine vessels, he moved to and fro, examining both boats. Then, after about half an hour's minute investigation, he seated himself upon a bench and with his little lamp shaded to throw no reflection he took out a piece of paper and leisurely made a rough sketch of England's newest war-craft, both side and horizontal views.

Leaving him thus occupied, I descended to Ray, and finding him secreted near the water's edge, described what I had discovered.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "So I was not mistaken in that cryptogram after all! We will allow the fellow to complete his work and then compel him to disgorge his notes. They will furnish us with very excellent evidence."

So we waited, keeping our eyes fixed upon the spot where he must descend, and hardly daring to breathe lest we should prematurely alarm him.

The Dockyard clock chimed three, but the spy had not emerged. After another half-hour of watchful silence I saw that Ray began to be anxious. At last the bell rang out four, and scarcely had the last sound died away when we were startled by a splash near us, and next moment discerned a man in white shirtsleeves swimming away.

"Why! That's him!" I gasped. "He's cut a way out of the side of the shed!"

But next moment a boat shot forth from the darkness pulled by a woman who had apparently been waiting close by. The woman was Vera!

In a moment we were both down the steps and pulling in the boat towards the swimming man, who, we saw, was being rapidly approached by a second boat which had also been in waiting until the chiming of the clock.

The spy was exerting every muscle to reach the boat, but we soon overtook him.

Ray called upon him in German to surrender, but he refused, and kept on. Quickly, however, we cut him off from the boat which he was trying to reach, while the rower, seeing the discovery of his friend, pulled away into the darkness.

For some time the spy struggled on, but at last, abandoned and exhausted, he was compelled to obey us and come aboard in order to save his life.

Half dead and helpless he submitted to our search, when in his belt, preserved in an oilskin pocket, we discovered the memoranda and the drawing which I had seen him prepare.

The man, sullen and half drowned, refused to make any statement, though he could speak English well and write it perfectly, as shown by the note on his plan of the new boat; therefore we landed him at the Stony Steps across at Gosport. Before we left him we gave him to understand that if he did not at once leave the country he would be arrested. Yet so absurd is our law that I doubt whether we could have given him in charge even though we had wished!

We rowed back across to the landing-stage at Portsmouth Harbour Station, and after we had seen Vera safely home we returned together to the "Queen's" at Southsea, where, in the secrecy of Ray's bedroom, we examined the spy's plan of the new submarine, and read his memoranda, which were in German, but which translated were as follows:

"Report by Leon Karff, late foreman-fitter at Kiel Dockyard, on Submarine 'F 2,' now building in Shed No. 4, Portsmouth Dockyard.

"This boat would appear to me to be of about 700 tons displacement when complete, possibly rather over. She is, as far as I am able to measure, about 180 feet long with an extreme beam a little forward of amidships of 20 feet. She is fitted with three propeller shafts with three small four-bladed propellers on each. As she is provided with what appear to me to be some kind of turbine engines, I imagine that the centre shaft is for going astern only. The propellers on this shaft seem to be attached in such a way that they could be 'feathered' by suitable gearing on board so as not to retard the vessel's way when going ahead. The engines of this boat are of a type which I have never before seen. I imagine that they are a combination of the new 'gas-producer' engine and the turbine system, the explosion of the combined gas and air being split up and passing into the turbine through a number of different channels simultaneously. This would be a very economical system if the necessary power can be obtained, and would be much safer for use below than petrol engines.

"The boat is evidently intended to operate a good deal in an 'awash' position, for there is fairly thick armour-plating over the greater part of the upper side of the bow, while the fore end of the superstructure is made of two 6-inch Krupp steel plates meeting at an acute angle, and so forming a kind of stem when the boat is moving in this way. The space enclosed between these two plates is evidently intended to be used as the conning-tower. Here there are a periscope, steering-wheel, voice-tubes, and everything necessary for the control of the vessel. There are two horizontal propellers or fans, which seem to be driven by electricity derived from an installation of accumulators, and which are certainly intended to secure horizontal immersion, so the vessel will not plunge or dive, but immerse herself horizontally by means of these propellers, which, by the way, work in vertical shafts running completely through the boat, one forward and the other aft, as was the case in the *Nordenfeldt*, *Waddington*, and other early submarines.

"Forward there is an air-lock and diving-chamber, as in the 'Lake' boats, so that divers can get in and out of the vessel whilst under water. It would also afford a means of escape for the crew in the case of accident. This is further provided for by a detachable boat or caisson at the after end of the superstructure capable of holding ten men, I should say, or possibly a dozen. There are also appliances which I suppose are telephone buoys for communicating with the surface. There are six torpedo tubes fitted, one forward, one aft, and the others two on either broadside. And there seems to be provision for six other torpedoes of the 18-inch type.

"There is a long rudder for ordinary steering, and four horizontal ones or planes which are placed abreast the horizontal screws and which, I imagine, act automatically in conjunction with them, as they seem to gear up with the shafts for these propellers. There is a big safety detachable weight which fits loosely into a recess amidships, and four broad wheels with ball bearings which do not fold up as in the 'Lake' boats, but always protrude nearly half their diameter. After all they would not obstruct her way when water-borne more than a keel – or very little more. They are quite independent and unconnected with the interior of the vessel, which

while resting on them would receive forward impetus from her propellers. In the 'awash' position she would offer a very small and almost invulnerable target."

"Well," I said, marvelling at what we had translated. "What induced you to believe that the cryptogram had any reference to the new submarine."

"Those figures '6.11' puzzled me greatly," he replied; "but at last I deciphered them as 'F. 2' – F being the sixth letter of the alphabet – the number of our newest and most formidable submarine, which was being kept such a strict secret by the Admiralty. 'Royal Pier' is the name of the hotel in which Steinheim stayed at Southsea, and 18 the number of his room. From facts I elucidated, it was made plain that Max Steinheim was about to embark upon the investigation, being in secret communication with Hartmann, and was to meet Karff at Charing Cross Station. This Steinheim had already, by an ingenious device, secured from a private of engineers named James Ward – whom I have seen – certain information regarding the new boom defences of Portsmouth Harbour. Ward, whose home is at Great Weldon, suddenly discovered to his horror that the man was a German spy, followed him to Guildford, attacked him in the train, and left him for dead. For that reason Steinheim has refused to make any statement to the police. When I saw Ward a week ago, he explained how innocently he had fallen into the trap which the cunning Steinheim had laid for him."

"The evidence you have here in black and white will surely prove convincing," I remarked. "You will go and see Steinheim again, I suppose? He is still in the hospital."

"No. We shall remain silent. To show our hand will only place Hartmann on the alert. To do that is needless. We have prevented the plan of our new submarine going to Germany, and for the present that is sufficient."

And my friend drew up the blind and gazed out upon the rosy dawn across the water.

CHAPTER III

THE BACK-DOOR OF ENGLAND

"Well, that's rather curious," I remarked, closing the door of the old oak-panelled smoking-room at Metfield Park, and returning to where my friend Ray Raymond was seated.

"Was anyone outside the door?" he asked, quickly on the alert.

"Mrs. Hill-Mason's German maid. You remember, Vera pointed her out yesterday."

"H'm! and she was listening – after every one else has gone to bed!" he remarked. "Yes, Jack, it's curious."

It was past one o'clock in the morning. Two months had passed since the affair down at Portsmouth, but we had not been inactive. We were sitting before the great open fireplace where the logs were blazing, after the rest of the men had taken their candles and retired, and had been exchanging confidences in ignorance of the fact that the door remained ajar. I had, however, detected the *frou-frou* of a woman's skirt, and creeping across to the door had seen the maid of one of the guests disappearing down the stone passage which led to the great hall now in darkness.

Metfield Park, three miles from Melton Constable, in Norfolk, the seat of the Jocelyns, was a fine old Tudor place in the centre of a splendid park, where the pheasant shooting was always excellent. Harry Jocelyn, the heir, had been with us at Balliol, hence Ray and I usually received invitations to the shooting parties. On this occasion, however, Vera Vallance with her aunt, Mrs. Mortimer, had been invited, much to Ray's satisfaction.

Among the party was a well-known naval officer, captain of a first-class cruiser, two military officers, and several smart women, for both Sir Herbert and Lady Jocelyn moved in a very smart set. Several of the ladies had joined us in the smoking-room for cigarettes, and the conversation around the fire had been mainly the usual society chatter, until at one o'clock every one had left for bed except our two selves.

Over the great fireplace were the arms of the Jocelyns carved in stone, with the date 1573, and in the corner near the window was a stand of armour upon which the dancing flames glinted ever and anon. Through the long uncurtained window shone the bright moon from over the park, and just as I reseated myself the stable clock chimed the half-hour.

We had been there four days, and the sport had been excellent. On the previous day Ray had excused himself on account of the bad weather, and had spent the hours mostly with Vera.

It was of how he had employed his time that he had been telling me when I had discovered the eavesdropper.

"I wonder why our conversation should prove so interesting to that maid?" he remarked thoughtfully, gazing into the fire. "She's rather good-looking for a German, isn't she?"

"Yes," I said. "But who is this Mrs. Hill-Mason? She seems a rather loud and buxom person, fond of the display of jewellery, dark, somewhat oleaginous, and devoted to bridge."

"Harry says his mother met her in Cairo last winter. She's one of the Somerset Masons – half-sister to the Countess of Thanet."

"Oh, she is known, then?"

"Of course. But we must get Vera to make some inquiry to-morrow as to where she obtained her maid," declared Ray. "The woman is interested in us, and we must discover the cause."

"Yes, I somehow mistrust her," I said. "I met her crossing the hall just before dinner, and I detected a curious look in her eyes as she glanced at me."

"Merely your fancy, Jack, old chap – because she's German," he laughed, stretching his long legs.

"Well, what you were telling me about Vera and her discovery has alarmed me," I said, tossing away the end of my cigar.

"Yes, she only returned last week from Emden, where she's been visiting her old German governess, who, it seems, is now married to an official in the construction department of the German Admiralty. From her friend she was able to learn a lot, which will, no doubt, cause our Lords of the Admiralty a bad quarter of an hour."

"What would the British public think if they were told the truth – that Germany is rapidly building a secret fleet?" I said.

"Why, my dear fellow, the public would simply say you were a liar," he laughed. "Every Englishman fancies himself top-dog, even though British diplomacy – apart from that of our excellent King – is the laughing-stock of the Powers. No," he added, "the truth is out. All yesterday I spent with Vera, preparing the information which she forwarded to the Admiralty to-night. I registered the letter for her at the village post office. The authorities owe her a very deep debt for succeeding in obtaining the information which our secret service has always failed to get. She, an admiral's daughter, is now able to furnish actual details of the ships now building in secret and where they are being constructed."

"A matter which will, no doubt, be considered very seriously by the Government," I said.

"Oh, I suppose they treat the whole thing lightly, as they always do. We invite invasion," he sighed as he rose, adding: "Let's turn in now. To-morrow we'll keep an eye upon that unusually inquisitive maid."

That night the eyes of the German maid haunted me. I could not rid myself of their recollection. Was it that this hunting down of German spies was getting on my nerves?

Next day we were shooting Starlings Wood, about five miles distant, but Ray having "cried off" one day, could not do so again. Therefore, at his suggestion, I made an excuse and remained at home with the ladies. The morning I spent walking through the park with Vera, a smart, sweet-faced little figure in her short tweed skirt and furs, with her bright and vivacious chatter. From her I learnt some further details concerning her visit to Emden.

"Ray is most excited about it, Mr. Jacox," she was saying. "Of course, I had to make my inquiries with great caution and discretion, but I managed to find out what I wanted, and I sent all the details to the Admiralty yesterday."

Then as we went along the wide beech avenue I told her of the curious incident in the smoking-room on the previous evening.

"Ray was telling me about it just before breakfast," she said, turning her splendid eyes to mine. "I have already made some inquiries of Mrs. Hill-Mason, and it appears that the maid Erna Stolberg was recommended to her by a friend when she was in Dresden last year. She's a most exemplary person, and has a number of friends in England. She was previously with a French *baronne*."

"Mrs. Hill-Mason often moves in a military set, doesn't she?" I remarked. "Somebody last night stated that she's the widow of a general, and is well known down at Aldershot."

"I believe so."

"If Mrs. Hill-Mason visits at the houses of military officers, as it seems she does, then this inquisitive maid would be afforded many opportunities for gathering information. I intend to watch her," I said.

"And so will I, Mr. Jacox," replied the admiral's daughter, drawing her astrachan collar tighter about her throat.

Half an hour later we drove in the wagonette out to the shooting-party in the woods, where a merry luncheon was served in a marquee. I, however, returned to the house before the rest of the party and haunted the servants' hall. With Williams the butler I was on friendly terms, and finding him in the great hall, began to make inquiries regarding the guests' servants.

"You've got a German woman among them, haven't you?" I remarked.

"Yes, sir," was his reply. "A rather funny one she is, I fancy. She goes out alone for walks after she's dressed her mistress for dinner, and is out sometimes till quite late. What she does wandering about in the dark nobody knows. But it ain't for me to say a word, sir; she's a visitor's maid."

I held my own counsel, but resolved to watch.

Tea in the great hall, over which Lady Jocelyn presided, proved the usual irresponsible function, but when I went to my room to dress for dinner I became convinced that certain papers in my suitcase had been turned over and investigated.

That night I did not go in to dinner. I heard the gong sound, and when the company had gone in, I put on thick boots, overcoat, and cap, and passed through the back way along the old wing of the house, through the smoking-room, and out upon the drive.

Behind some holly bushes where I could see any one leave by the great paved courtyard where the servants' entrance was situated, I concealed myself and waited in patience. The night was dark and overcast. The stable chimes had rung out half-past eight, but I still remained until, about twenty minutes later, footfalls sounded, and from out the arched entrance to the courtyard came a female figure in a close-fitting hat and long dark ulster.

She passed close by me, under the light of the lamp, and I saw it was the fair-haired woman for whom I was waiting.

Instead of walking straight down the avenue to the lodge-gates, she struck along a footpath which led for a mile across the park, first skirting the lake – the fishpond of the monks who lived there before the Dissolution; then, passing under the dark shadow of a spinney, led to a stile by which the high park wall could be negotiated and the main road to East Dereham reached.

As she went forward so I followed. I knew the path well. I watched her ascend the stile and cross the wall into the road. Then I crept up and peered over into the darkness. She had turned to the right, and I could discern her waiting at the roadside about thirty yards away.

From my place of concealment I could hear her slow footsteps as she idled up and down in the darkness, evidently waiting for some one.

I think about ten minutes passed when I heard the whir of a motor-car approaching, its big glaring headlamps shedding a stream of white brilliance over the muddy road. As it approached her it slowed down and stopped. Then I distinguished it to be a big Limousine, the occupant of which opened the door, and she entered with a word of greeting.

I stood peering into the darkness, in surprise and disappointment at not catching sight of the person with whom she was keeping these nightly appointments. As soon as the door had banged the driver drove across the road, backed, and turning, sped away in the direction he had come.

But while he was turning I had gained the road, advancing beneath the hedgerow in an endeavour to see the number of the car. But I was baffled. It was covered with mud.

Afterwards, much disappointed, and certainly hungry, I made my way back across the park to the Hall, where, after managing to get a snack from Williams, I joined the party at bridge.

That night the woman Stolberg returned at five minutes to eleven, and later, when Ray went upstairs with me, I described what I had seen.

Next night, instead of following her out, I waited at the spot at half-past ten, when, sure enough, the car returned ten minutes later and deposited her. The number plates, however, were obliterated by the mud both front and back – purposely it seemed to me. The man within shook her hand as she alighted, but I could not see his face. Was he some secret lover? Apparently she went no great distance each evening, going and coming from the direction of Holt.

On the following day I took several opportunities of watching the woman at close quarters. Her eyes were peculiarly set, very close together, her lips were thin, and her cheek-bones rather high. Otherwise she was not bad-looking. Mrs. Hill-Mason had, of course, no idea of her maid's nocturnal motor-rides.

Whether the woman had any suspicion that she was being watched I know not; but on the next night when Ray took a turn at keeping an eye upon her, she did not go out, but on the next she went, and Ray followed her to the park wall, but saw nothing more than I had done.

All this time, of course, Vera was greatly interested in the result of our observations. Through her own maid, Batson, she discovered the room occupied by the German, and to this I made my way, at considerable risk, one morning while the maid was busy attending upon her mistress. I had a good look through her belongings, finding in her trunk a small, flat tin box, japanned dark green, strong, and secured by a lock of well-known make. What, I wondered, did it contain?

Could I have but seen the number of the mysterious car I could have discovered the identity of her nocturnal visitor.

The same day that I discovered the tin box in her trunk, Mrs. Hill-Mason, however, returned to London, taking with her the mysterious Fräulein.

Three days more went by, and I was about to dismiss the affair as a combination of curious circumstances. Vera and her aunt had left to pay a visit in Worcestershire, and Ray I were due to go up to town that morning, when he entered my room, saying abruptly:

"I'm not going to London yet, Jack. I shall go over to Cromer instead."

"Cromer!" I echoed. "Hardly the time of year for the seaside."

That same grey chilly afternoon, in the grey falling light, we sat upon one of the seats of the pier at Cromer gazing seaward, towards where the German coast lay beyond the indistinct horizon. The place was deserted save for ourselves. On the cliff behind us stood the long red façade and many gables of the Hotel de Paris, where we had put up, while in the background rose the square old church tower, the landmark of mariners from Haisborough Gat to the Dowsing.

"There's just a chance of us falling upon something interesting about here," Ray was saying, as he pressed the tobacco into his pipe, and by the expression upon his keen clean-shaven face I saw that he had scented the presence of spies. "Has it never struck you," he went on, "that the east coast, where we now are is the most vulnerable spot in England, and the first objective of the Kaiser's army? Every soldier and sailor in Germany dreams of 'the Day' – the day when he will set foot upon this shore. For some years past our Intelligence Department has known of the German plans for our invasion. There are several, but in each one a dash, and a surprise landing along this coast of Norfolk and of Suffolk and Essex is the first step. Knowledge of this prompted Lord Roberts to resign his seat on the National Defence Committee and make those stirring speeches pointing out our country's peril."

"And what thanks did the country give him?" I interrupted. "People only laugh at him for his trouble!"

"Yes," said my friend bitterly, "the public are ignorant, therefore they do not heed. They talk glibly about the strength of our navy, forgetful that the German diplomacy is the cleverest and most cunning in the world. When 'the Day' dawns there will be no suspicion of war, and certainly no declaration of hostilities. Before we have realised that war is in the air, the enemy will have their feet firmly planted upon British soil."

"And if the enemy intend landing along this shore, it is certain that spies are active here, gathering all information likely to be of service to the invader."

"That's exactly why I've come here, my dear Jack," my friend said. "We know that our eastern counties have been divided into districts by the Germans, and in each one or more secret agents are busily at work taking notes of food supplies, forage, blacksmiths' shops, motor-cars for transport, the destruction of telegraphs and telephones, positions for artillery, and the best mode of advance south to London. One may rest assured that the ordnance map is being very much amplified just now."

That evening we spent idly in the hotel, and next day, hiring a motor-car, we drove through Runton to Sheringham and over the hills three miles further towards the back-door of England – the place neglected by those responsible for our defences, and by the public alike – Weybourne.

The road from Sheringham ran down a steep hill, called the Fox Hill, to the little village that lay cosily at some distance from the sea. Passing the church we turned sharply to the right, and in a few minutes found ourselves against a large front with a wide open beach beyond.

Having alighted, we walked along beside the surf for some distance, out of hearing of our chauffeur, when my friend exclaimed:

"Here is one of the spots which the Germans have chosen for landing. Look at it! Everything is in favour of a hostile force. That range of hills we've just come over at the back would be occupied by the landing force at once, and thus they would command the whole country from Kelling, which you see to the right, away south beyond Cromer, down to Baxton beyond Mundesley."

With my back to the long rolling breakers I gazed away landward at the long line of hills stretching in each direction. It was, indeed, an ideal spot for an enemy to effect a landing, with deep water right up to the land.

"Because of the confidence we have in our fleet and our wonderful diplomacy this place is no longer watched," Raymond remarked, standing beside me muffled in his motor-coat, for the wind was intensely cold. "Yet in days gone by, by reason of the facilities which nature has provided for the landing of hostile forces, it was carefully guarded whenever the invasion of England was believed to be imminent."

After we had strolled some distance along the beach, where the grey-green waters were breaking into foam, my friend suddenly halted and, taking a piece of paper from his pocket, stood with his back to the sea and made a sketch of the irregular contour of the blue hills facing him from the coastguard at Salthouse on the right to the rising ground behind Upper Sheringham on the left – the positions which are to be first occupied by the enemy in their attack upon us.

He made no explanation of the reason of his action, therefore I stood by watching in silence.

At last we returned to the car and drove inland to Weybourne village, a sleepy old-world little place from which the sea has receded. As we turned into the main road he ordered the man to pull up, and, descending, looked about him, first at the lines of telegraph-wire running beside the road, and then we both strolled through the village. My companion's eyes were everywhere. He appeared to be making mental notes of every feature of the obscure little place.

Just as we were returning to the car he suddenly halted, saying:

"You go on. A thought has just occurred to me." And, turning, he walked back to the small village post office situated next door to an inn, and was absent for nearly a quarter of an hour.

"As I suspected!" he remarked beneath his breath as he rejoined me. "That inn is kept by a German!"

Then we travelled along to Cley-next-the-Sea, and thence by way of Candlestick Hill and through the wooded country around Holt, back to Sheringham, where we lunched at the "Burlington."

His manner had changed. He had again become serious and thoughtful. A cycling map of the district which he had bought in Cromer that morning he brought out, and as we sat together in the smoking-room he spread it upon the table and began measuring distances with a slip of folded paper.

The car was at the door at four o'clock, and we were in the act of moving off, when by mere chance I looked up at the second floor of the hotel. What I saw caused me to hold my breath.

A face was at one of the windows watching us.

I nudged my friend, and cried, "Look!"

But when he raised his head it had gone. Indeed, the white face had only showed there for a single instant, yet it was a countenance that I too well remembered, it was unmistakable – that of Fräulein Stolberg!

I told Ray as we whirled along into the town. But he only grunted in surprise, and remarked that we were going to Beccles.

Why was that woman there instead of being with her mistress, who, we had ascertained, was now visiting at Cheltenham?

Our way lay first back to Cromer, where we joined the direct Norwich road by way of Aylsham, but about four miles after passing Cromer the road divided. The left-hand one ran to our destination, but at Ray's orders we took the right-hand one, and in the darkening twilight struck across a wide heath, which I afterwards learnt was called Roughton Heath, until we passed an old windmill, and entered the small crooked village of Roughton. We passed beyond the place for a quarter of a mile, and then descending, walked forward until we came to a good-sized, comfortable, old-fashioned house, probably of the days of Queen Anne, that lay behind a high red-brick wall.

Through the iron gates I noticed, as we paused, a wide lawn in front, with steps leading up to a portico, and behind a large orchard and meadow. The blinds were already down, but in several of the windows lights showed, and the place looked well kept up.

It differed but little from hundreds of other old-fashioned houses in the country, but it evidently held considerable attraction for Ray, because as we passed beyond the gates, and out of sight of any one in the house, he took out his electric torch and carefully examined the muddy roadway.

"See!" he exclaimed, pointing to tracks that ran in and out of the gateway. "The car's home is here!"

"What car?"

"The car which used to meet the German maid at Metfield," was his matter-of-fact reply. "For the present we know sufficient. We must look sharp if we are to be in Beccles before eight. If we're not there before, it will be of no use."

So we hurried back to our own car, and our driver, by taking a by-path, brought us out upon the main road again at Thorpe Market, and just after half-past seven we pulled up before the hotel in the old Suffolk market town of Beccles, under the shadow of the stumpy square old church tower.

The car was garaged, and after a drink we went forth for a walk along the quiet old-world streets, until suddenly upon a corner we came to the post office, a large old-fashioned two-storied house with steep tiled roof.

"Wait about here," my companion said; "a dark-haired man in a light grey overcoat and golf-cap will probably come to post a letter just before eight. He has a dark brown beard, and usually wears a white muffler. When he comes follow him, and see where he goes. He may know me, so I must keep out of sight."

Therefore I lit my pipe, and idled up and down, keeping the letter-box in view. In the window, directly above it, was a clock which showed it then to be a quarter to eight. I took a pretended interest in the small shops near, until about four minutes to the hour a closed motor-car swung round from the direction of the Public Hail, and pulled up before the post office.

From it two men alighted – one a youngish fair-haired man, and the other, dark-bearded and much older, wore a thick grey overcoat and a white muffler. He was the man of whom I was in search.

I entered the office directly after the pair, on pretence of buying stamps, but already the elder of the two had handed in a letter to be registered, the address of which I failed to discern.

Both seemed to be in a great hurry, for as soon as the receipt was written out they re-entered the car and drove back in the direction they had come, leaving me standing helpless on the opposite side of the road.

Immediately I returned to the hotel where Ray was waiting, and reported to him, whereupon he seized his hat, and walking with me back to the post office halted in the centre of the road examining the wheel-tracks, which were still quite plain upon the damp roadway.

Then, as he walked back, he said:

"Do you know, Jack, that this town Beccles has been decided upon by the Germans as the headquarters of the Army Corps which lands at Weybourne? It's a natural position, standing upon high ground and commanding the whole of the surrounding country. Signals made from that church tower yonder could be seen very far afield."

Then, as we sat together in the coffee-room of the hotel, eating a hasty meal, he remarked:

"We'll go back to Cromer to-night, but I shall go to town to-morrow. You'll wait till my return, won't you?"

So I was left alone for nearly a week; and on his return he announced that we must at once shift our quarters to Lowestoft. So south we went that same night, arriving at midnight, and putting up at the many-balconied Empire Hotel.

The town interested my companion not at all, but from there we went forth each day on long motor excursions, scouring the whole country as far south as Aldborough and as far west as Bury St. Edmunds. All the roads round Southwold, Bungay, Saxmundham, Stow Market, and many other towns we reconnoitred, apparently always with the same object – to discover wheel-tracks of a mysterious car.

The garages of every town Ray visited alone, but his inquiries always met with the same negative result.

Late one afternoon, however, when on the road between Wymondham and Diss, he suddenly shouted to the driver to stop, and jumping out, examined the track of wheels. The road, however, was hard at that spot, and it was some time before he could decide whether the car had travelled north or south.

"They've gone north!" he declared with satisfaction; therefore we continued to follow them towards Wymondham, where they had drawn up at the "Old Green Dragon," and gone forth again, striking into a by-road which led to Bracon Ash.

"Ha!" he cried, when he saw this, "so they're busy at work – that's plain!"

But by this time the light had faded, and much to our chagrin we were again compelled to give up the hunt, and find our way over by Hempnall, and so through Bungay back to Lowestoft.

Next day we were early back again at the spot, but heavy rain had unfortunately fallen all night, so the tracks had been obliterated.

After another week of unsuccessful journeying we were, one day, about half-way between Norwich going towards Aylsham, when my friend's keen eyes caught sight of a wheel-track coming out of a narrow by-road.

We halted, and descending he examined them minutely, declaring that they were what we were in search of, and quite fresh.

Therefore, considerably excited, we were soon upon the trail, following the car through Aylsham and North Walsham until, on the road that led towards the sea at Happisburgh, it suddenly turned into another byway.

Here Ray decided to pull up and follow on foot, which we did for nearly two miles, until we saw before us the railway line which runs between North Walsham and Yarmouth. We had left the road, for there, pulled up before us, was the car I had seen at Beccles, and on ahead were the two men, one of whom I recognised by his grey coat and white muffler.

They were beneath the railway bridge, carefully examining it.

"They're marking that down on their plan for destruction," remarked Ray between his teeth. "All these connections will be destroyed when they land. But, by heaven! we'll be even with them yet!"

We watched them in secret for a full half-hour, as they examined the railroad at several points, and when they had driven off we followed them along a road where ran six lines of telegraph into Happisburgh.

"Those wires," remarked Ray, "form one of the direct cables to Germany. They pass through Beccles, so you may rest assured that they've surveyed it well!"

At Happisburgh the tracks turned to the left, and thence again to the right to Walcot, but just as we were passing over a low hill we saw that the car on before us had stopped. The two men were photographing the country from Paston, inland towards Witton.

We drew up and watched their movements.

Then they went on, and we followed, parting company with their tracks at the cross-roads, they going westward, while we struck north, until we found ourselves once again in Cromer for the night.

That evening we made an amazing discovery at the hotel. Erna Stolberg was staying there alone under the name of Madame Hirsch! Ray first saw her seated in the reading-room, and called me. I peered in at the door and recognised her in a pale blue silk blouse and black net skirt, lying back in a chair reading an illustrated paper. She was evidently quite unsuspecting of our presence.

Ray was sorely puzzled. Next morning he sent a wire to Mrs. Hill-Mason's house in Charles Street, and before noon had received a reply from her at Bournemouth saying that Fräulein Stolberg had left her service a fortnight before.

"German spies are pretty active in East Anglia, old chap, as you've seen with your own eyes," he remarked to me.

In order that the woman should not notice us, we told the chauffeur to meet us out on the Norwich road, after which we travelled to quaint old Aylsham, where we idled away the day, spending the afternoon playing billiards at the "White Horse."

More than once during the day my companion examined the road outside for traces of wheel-tracks, but there were none like those of the car of those secret agents of Hermann Hartmann.

I noticed that Ray had brought with him a small brown brief-bag, an unusual thing for him to carry. But that morning he had placed it in the car with instructions to the chauffeur to move it on no account.

At four o'clock that afternoon he received a telegram, which he read through twice, and placed on the fire, remarking:

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.