

Jenkins Herbert George

John Dene of Toronto: A Comedy of Whitehall



Herbert Jenkins

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John Dene of Toronto: A Comedy of Whitehall

WHAT THIS STORY IS ABOUT

John Dene comes to England with a great invention, and the intention of gingering-up the Admiralty. His directness and unconventional methods bewilder and embarrass the officials at Whitehall, where, according to him, most of the jobs are held by those "whose great-grandfathers had a pleasant way of saying how-do-you-do to a prince."

Suddenly John Dene disappears, and the whole civilised world is amazed at an offer of £20,000 for news of him. Scotland Yard is disorganised by tons of letters and thousands of callers. Questions are asked in the House, the Government becomes anxious, only Department Z. retains its equanimity.

By the way, what did happen to John Dene of Toronto?

For list of books by the same author, see page 319.

CHAPTER I

THE COMING OF JOHN DENE

"Straight along, down the steps, bear to the left and you'll find the Admiralty on the opposite side of the way."

John Dene thanked the policeman, gave the cigar in his mouth a twist with his tongue, and walked along Lower Regent Street towards Waterloo Place.

At the bottom of the Duke of York's steps, he crossed the road, turned to the left and paused. Nowhere could he see an entrance sufficiently impressive to suggest the Admiralty. Just ahead was a dingy and unpretentious doorway with a policeman standing outside; but that he decided could not be the entrance to the Admiralty. As he gazed at it, a fair-haired girl came out of the doorway and walked towards him.

"Excuse me," said John Dene, lifting his hat, "but is that the Admiralty you've just come out of?"

There was an almost imperceptible stiffening in the girl's demeanour; but a glance at the homely figure of John Dene, with its ill-made clothes, reassured her.

"Yes, that is the Admiralty," she replied gravely in a voice that caused John Dene momentarily to forget the Admiralty and all its works.

"Much obliged," he said, again lifting his hat as she walked away; but instead of continuing on his way, John Dene stood watching the girl until she disappeared up the Duke of York's steps. Then once more twirling his cigar in his mouth and hunching his shoulders, he walked towards the doorway she had indicated.

"This the Admiralty?" he enquired of the policeman.

"Yes, sir," was the reply. "Did you want to see any one?"

John Dene looked at the man in surprise.

"Why should I be here if I didn't?" he asked. "I want to see the First Lord."

The man's manner underwent a change. "If you'll step inside, sir, you'll see an attendant."

John Dene stepped inside and repeated his request, this time to a frock-coated attendant.

"Have you an appointment?" enquired the man.

"No," responded John Dene indifferently.

The attendant hesitated. It was not customary for unknown callers to demand to see the First Lord without an appointment. After a momentary pause the man indicated a desk on which lay some printed slips.

"Will you please fill in your name, sir, and state your business."

"State my business," exclaimed John Dene, "not on your life."

"I'm afraid –" began the man.

"Never mind what you're afraid of," said John Dene, "just you take my name up to the First Lord. Here, I'll write it down." Seizing a pen he wrote his name, "John Dene of Toronto," and then underneath, "I've come three thousand miles to tell you something; perhaps it's worth three minutes of your time to listen."

"There, take that up and I'll wait," he said.

The attendant read the message, then beckoning to another frock-coated servitor, he handed him the paper, at the same time whispering some instructions. John Dene looked about him with interest. He was frankly disappointed. He had conceived the administrative buildings of the greatest navy in the world as something grand and impressive; yet here was the British Admiralty with an entrance that would compare unfavourably with a second-rate hotel in Toronto.

He turned suddenly and almost ran into a shifty-eyed little man in a grey tweed suit, who had entered the Admiralty a moment after him. The man apologised profusely as John Dene eyed him grimly. He had become aware of the man's interest in his colloquy with the attendant, and of the way in which he had endeavoured to catch sight of what was written on the slip of paper.

John Dene proceeded to stride up and down with short, jerky steps, twirling his unlit cigar round in his mouth.

"Excuse me, sir," said the attendant, approaching, "but smoking is not permitted."

"That so?" remarked John Dene without interest, as he continued to roll his cigar in his mouth.

"Your cigar, sir," continued the man.

"It's out." John Dene still continued to look about him.

The attendant retired nonplussed. The rule specifically referred to smoking, not to carrying unlit cigars in the mouth.

At the end of five minutes, the attendant who had taken up John Dene's name returned, and whispered to the doorkeeper.

"If you will follow the attendant, sir, he will take you to see Sir Lyster's secretary, Mr. Blair."

"Mr. – " began John Dene, then breaking off he followed the man up the stairs, and along a corridor, at the end of which another frock-coated man appeared from a room with a small glass door. He in turn took charge of the visitor, having received his whispered instructions from the second attendant. John Dene was then shown into a large room with a central table, and requested to take a seat. He was still engaged in gazing about him when a door at the further end of the room opened and there entered a fair man, with an obvious stoop, a monocle, a heavy drooping moustache, and the nose of a duke in a novelette.

"Mr. John Dene?" he asked, looking at the slip of paper in his hand.

"Sure," was the response, as John Dene continued to twirl the cigar in his mouth, with him always a sign either of thought or of irritation.

"You wish to see the First Lord?" continued the fair man. "I am his secretary. Will you give me some idea of your business?"

"No, I won't," was the blunt response.

Mr. Blair was momentarily disconcerted by the uncompromising nature of the retort, but quickly recovered himself.

"I am afraid Sir Lyster is very busy this morning," he said, diplomatically. "If you – "

"Look here," interrupted John Dene, "I've come three thousand miles to tell him something; if he hasn't time to listen, then I'll not waste my time; but before you decide to send me about my business, you just ring up the Agent-General for Can'da and ask who John Dene of T'ronto is; maybe you'll learn something."

"But will you not give me some idea – " began the secretary.

"No, I won't," was the obstinate reply. "Here," he cried with sudden inspiration, "give me some paper and a pen, and I'll write a note."

Mr. Blair sighed his relief; he was a man of peace. He quickly supplied the caller's demands. Slowly he indited his letter; then, taking a case from his pocket, he extracted an envelope which he enclosed with the letter in another envelope, and finally addressed it to "The First Lord of the Admiralty."

"Give him this," he said, turning to Mr. Blair, "and say I'm in a hurry."

Nothing but a long line of ancestors prevented Mr. Blair from gasping. Instead he took the note with a diplomatic smile.

"You wouldn't do for T'ronto," muttered John Dene as the First Lord's private secretary left the room. Two minutes later he returned.

"Sir Lyster will see you, Mr. Dene," he said with a smile. "Will you come this way? I'm sorry if – "

"Don't be sorry," said John Dene patiently; "you're just doing your job as best you can."

Whilst John Dene was being led by Mr. Blair to the First Lord's private room, Sir Lyster was re-reading the astonishing note that had been sent in to him, which ran:

"DEAR SIR, —

"I am John Dene of Toronto, I have come three thousand miles to tell you how to stop the German U-boats. If I do not succeed, you can give the enclosed £50,000 to the Red Cross.

"Yours faithfully,

"JOHN DENE."

Sir Lyster Grayne was a man for whom tradition had its uses; but he never allowed it to dictate to him. The letter that had just been brought in was, he decided, written by a man of strong individuality, and the amazing offer it contained, to forfeit fifty thousand pounds, impressed him. These were strange and strenuous days, when every suggestion or invention must be examined and deliberated upon. Sir Lyster Grayne prided himself upon his open-mindedness; incidentally he had a wholesome fear of questions being asked in the House.

As the door opened he rose and held out his hand. Sir Lyster always assumed a democratic air as a matter of political expediency.

"Mr. Dene," he murmured, as he motioned his visitor to a seat.

"Pleased to meet you," said John Dene as he shook hands, and then took the seat indicated. "Sorry to blow in on you like this," he continued, "but my business is important, and I've come three thousand miles about it."

"So I understand," said Sir Lyster quietly.

John Dene looked at him, and in that look summed him up as he had previously summed up his secretary. "You wouldn't do for T'ronto," was his unuttered verdict. John Dene "placed" a man irrevocably by determining whether or no he would do for Toronto.

"First of all," said Sir Lyster, "I think I will return this," handing to John Dene the envelope containing the cheque for fifty thousand pounds.

"I thought it would tickle you some," he remarked grimly as he replaced the cheque in his pocket-book; "but I'll cash in if I don't make good," he added. "You know anything about submarines?" he demanded; directness was John Dene's outstanding characteristic.

"Er — " began the First Lord.

"You don't," announced John Dene with conviction.

"I'm afraid — " began Sir Lyster.

"Then you'd better send for someone who does," was the uncompromising rejoinder.

Sir Lyster looked at his visitor in surprise, hesitated a moment, then pressing a button said, as Mr. Blair appeared:

"Will you ask Admiral Heyworth to come here immediately?" Mr. Blair retired. "Admiral Heyworth," explained Sir Lyster, "is the Admiralty authority on submarines."

John Dene nodded. There was a pause.

"Wouldn't you like to ring up the Agent-General for Can'da and find out who I am?" suggested John Dene.

"I don't think that is necessary, Mr. Dene," was the reply. "We will hear what you have to say first. Ha, Heyworth!" as the Admiral entered, "this is Mr. John Dene of Toronto, who has come to tell us something about a discovery of his."

Admiral Heyworth, a little bald-headed man with beetling brows and a humorous mouth, took the hand held out to him.

"Pleased to meet you," said John Dene, then without a pause he continued: "I want your promise that this is all between us three, that you won't go and breeze it about." He looked from Sir Lyster to Admiral Heyworth. Sir Lyster bowed, Admiral Heyworth said, "Certainly."

"Now," said John Dene, turning to the Admiral, "what's the greatest difficulty you're up against in submarine warfare?"

"Well," began Admiral Heyworth, "there are several. For instance – "

"There's only one that matters," broke in John Dene; "your boats are blind when submerged beyond the depth of their periscopes. That so?"

The Admiral nodded.

"Well," continued John Dene, "I want you to understand I'm not asking a red cent from anybody, and I won't accept one. What I'm going to tell you about has already cost me well over a million dollars, and if you look at me you'll see I'm not the man to put a million dollars into patent fly-catchers, or boots guaranteed to button themselves."

Sir Lyster and the Admiral exchanged puzzled glances, but said nothing.

"Suppose the Germans were able to sink a ship without even showing their periscopes?" John Dene looked directly at the Admiral.

"It would place us in a very precarious position," was the grave reply.

"Oh, shucks!" cried John Dene in disgust. "It would queer the whole outfit. You soldiers and sailors can never see beyond your own particular backyards. It would mighty soon finish the war." He almost shouted the words in the emphasis he gave them. "It would mean that troops couldn't be brought from America; it would mean that supplies couldn't be brought over here. It would mean good-bye to the whole sunflower-patch. Do you get me?" He looked from Sir Lyster to the Admiral.

"I think," said Sir Lyster, "that perhaps you exaggerate a lit – "

"I don't," said John Dene. "I know what I'm talking about. Now, why is the submarine blind? Because," he answered his own question, "no one has ever overcome the difficulty of the density of water. I have."

Admiral Heyworth started visibly, and Sir Lyster bent forward eagerly.

"You have!" cried Admiral Heyworth.

"Sure," was the self-complacent reply. "I've got a boat fitted with an apparatus that'll sink any ship that comes along, and she needn't show her periscope to do it either. What's more, she can see under water. If I don't deliver the goods" – John Dene rummaged in his pocket once more and produced the envelope containing the cheque – "here's fifty thousand pounds you can give to the Red Cross."

Sir Lyster and Admiral Heyworth gazed at each other wordless. John Dene sat back in his chair and chewed the end of his cigar. Sir Lyster fumbled for his eye-glass, and when he had found it, stuck it in his eye and gazed at John Dene as if he had been some marvellous being from another world. The Admiral said nothing and did nothing. He was visualising the possibilities arising out of such a discovery.

It was John Dene who broke in upon their thoughts.

"The Huns have got it coming," he remarked grimly.

"But – " began Admiral Heyworth.

"Listen," said John Dene. "I'm an electrical engineer. I'm worth more millions than you've got toes. I saw that under water the submarine is only a blind fish with a sting in its tail. Give it eyes and it becomes a real factor —*under water*." He paused, revolving his cigar in his mouth. His listeners nodded eagerly.

"Well," he continued, "I set to work to give her eyes. On the St. Lawrence River, just below Quebec, I've got a submarine that can see. Her search-lights – "

"But how have you done it?" broke in the Admiral.

"That," remarked John Dene drily, "is my funeral."

"We must put this before the Inventions Board," said Sir Lyster. "Let me see, this is Friday. Can you be here on Tuesday, Mr. Dene?"

"No!"

Sir Lyster started at the decision in John Dene's tone.

"Would Wednesday – "

"Look here," broke in John Dene, "I come from T'ronto, and in Can'da when we've got a good thing we freeze on to it. You've got to decide this thing within twenty-four hours, yes or no. Unless I cable to my agent in Washin'ton by noon to-morrow, he'll make the same offer I've made you to the States, and they'll be that eager to say 'Yep,' that they'll swallow their gum."

"But, Mr. Dene – " began Sir Lyster.

"I've been in this country fourteen hours," proceeded John Dene calmly, "and I can see that you all want gingering-up. Why the hell can't you decide on a thing at once, when you've got everything before you? If a man offers you a pedigree-pup for nothing, and you want a pedigree-pup, wouldn't you just hold out your hand?"

John Dene looked from one to the other.

"But this is not exactly a matter of a pedigree-pup," suggested Admiral Heyworth diplomatically. "It's a matter of – er – "

"I see you haven't got me," said John Dene with the air of a patient schoolmaster with a stupid pupil. "You," he addressed himself in particular to Sir Lyster, "have said in public that the most difficult spot in connexion with the submarine trouble is between the Shetlands and the Norwegian coast. You can't help the U-boats slipping through submerged. Suppose the *Destroyer*– that's the name of my boat – is sort of hanging around there, *with eyes* and some other little things she's got, what then?"

"Both Sir Lyster and I appreciate all you say," said the Admiral; "but, well, we are a little old fashioned perhaps in our methods here." He smiled deprecatingly.

"Well," said John Dene, rising, "you lose the odd trick, that's all; and," he added significantly as he took a step towards the door, "when it all comes out, you'll lose your jobs too."

"Really, Mr. Dene," protested Sir Lyster, flushing slightly.

John Dene swung round on his heel. "If you'd spent three years of your life and over a million dollars on a boat, and come three thousand miles to offer it to someone for nothing, and were told to wait till God knows which day what week, well, you'd be rattled too. In T'ronto we size up a man before he's had time to say he's pleased to meet us, and we'd buy a mountain quicker than you'd ask your neighbour to pass the marmalade at breakfast."

Whilst John Dene was speaking, Sir Lyster had been revolving the matter swiftly in his mind. He was impressed by his visitor's fearlessness. A self-made man himself, he admired independence and freedom of speech in others. He was not oblivious to the truth of John Dene's hint of what would happen if another nation, even an allied nation, were to acquire a valuable invention that had been declined by Great Britain. He remembered the Fokker scandal. He decided to temporise.

"If," continued John Dene, "I was asking for money, I'd understand; but I won't take a red cent, and more than that I go bail to the tune of a quarter of a million dollars that I deliver the goods."

He strode up and down the room, twirling his cigar, and flinging his short, sharp sentences at the two men, who, to his mind, stood as barriers to an Allied triumph.

"If you will sit down, Mr. Dene," said Sir Lyster suavely, "I'll explain."

John Dene hesitated for a moment, then humped himself into a chair, gazing moodily before him.

"We quite appreciate your – er – patriotism and public-spiritedness in – "

"Here, cut it out," broke in John Dene. "Do you want the *Destroyer* or don't you?"

Sir Lyster recoiled as if he had been struck. He had been First Lord too short a time for the gilt to be worn off his dignity. Seeing his Chief about to reply in a way that he suspected might end the interview, Admiral Heyworth interposed.

"May I suggest that under the circumstances we consult Mr. Llewellyn John?"

"That's bully," broke in John Dene without giving Sir Lyster a chance of replying. "They say he's got pep."

Bowing to the inevitable, Sir Lyster picked up the telephone-receiver.

"Get me through to the Prime Minister," he said.

The three men waited in silence for the response. As the bell rang, Sir Lyster swiftly raised the receiver to his ear.

"Yes, the Prime Minister. Sir Lyster Grayne speaking." There was a pause. "Grayne speaking, yes. Can I come round with Admiral Heyworth and an – er – inventor? It's very important." He listened for a moment, then added, "Yes, we'll come at once."

"Now, Mr. Dene," said Sir Lyster, as he rose and picked up his hat, "I hope we shall be able to – er – " He did not finish the sentence; but led the way to the door.

The three men walked across the Horse Guards Quadrangle towards Downing Street. The only words uttered were when Sir Lyster asked John Dene if he had seen the pelicans.

John Dene looked at him in amazement. He had heard that in British official circles it was considered bad taste to discuss the war except officially, and he decided that he was now discovering what was really the matter with the British Empire.

As the trio crossed the road to mount the steps leading to Downing Street, the girl passed of whom John Dene had asked the way. Her eyes widened slightly as she recognised John Dene's two companions; they widened still more when John Dene lifted his hat, followed a second later by Sir Lyster, whilst Admiral Heyworth saluted. In her surprise she nearly ran into a little shifty-eyed man, in a grey suit, who, with an elaborate flourish of his hat, hastened to apologise for her carelessness.

"That's the girl who showed me the way to your back-door," John Dene announced nonchalantly. Sir Lyster exchanged a rapid glance with the Admiral. "If I was running this show," continued John Dene, "I'd get that door enlarged a bit and splash some paint about;" and for the first time since they had met John Dene smiled up at Sir Lyster, a smile that entirely changed the sombre cast of his features.

On arriving at no. 10, Downing Street, the three callers were conducted straight into Mr. Llewellyn John's room. As they entered, he rose quickly from his table littered with papers, and with a smile greeted his colleagues. Sir Lyster then introduced John Dene.

Mr. Llewellyn John grasped John Dene's hand, and turned on him that bewilderingly sunny smile which Mr. Chappeldale had once said ought in itself to win the war.

"Sit down, Mr. Dene," said Mr. Llewellyn John, indicating a chair; "it's always a pleasure to meet any one from Canada. What should we have done without you Canadians?" he murmured half to himself.

"Mr. Dene tells us that he has solved the submarine problem," said Sir Lyster, as he and Admiral Heyworth seated themselves.

Instantly Mr. Llewellyn John became alert. The social smile vanished from his features, giving place to the look of a keen-witted Celt, eager to pounce upon something that would further his schemes. He turned to John Dene interrogatingly.

"Perhaps Mr. Dene will explain," suggested Sir Lyster.

"Sure," said John Dene, "your submarine isn't a submarine at all, it's a submersible. Under water it's useless, because it can't see. As well call a seal a fish. A submarine must be able to fight under water, and until it can it won't be any more a submarine than I'm a tunny fish."

Mr. Llewellyn John nodded in eager acquiescence.

"I've spent over a million dollars, and now I've got a boat that can see under water and fight under water and do a lot of other fancy tricks."

Mr. Llewellyn John sprang to his feet.

"You have. Tell me, where is it? This is wonderful, wonderful! It takes us a year forward."

"It's on the St. Lawrence River, just below Quebec," explained John Dene.

"And how long will it take to construct say a hundred?" asked Mr. Llewellyn John eagerly, dropping back into his chair.

"Longer than any of us are going to live," replied John Dene grimly.

Mr. Llewellyn John looked at his visitor in surprise. Sir Lyster and the Admiral exchanged meaning glances. The Prime Minister was experiencing what in Toronto were known as "John's snags."

"But if you've made one – " began Mr. Llewellyn John.

"There's only going to be one," announced John Dene grimly.

"But – "

"You can but like a he-goat," announced John Dene, "still there'll be only our *Destroyer*."

Sir Lyster smiled inwardly. His bruised dignity was recovering at the sight of the surprised look on the face of the Prime Minister at John Dene's comparison.

"Perhaps Mr. Dene will explain to us the difficulties," insinuated Sir Lyster.

"Sure," said John Dene; then turning to Admiral Heyworth, "What would happen if Germany got a submarine that could see and do fancy stunts?" he demanded.

"It might embarrass – " began the Admiral.

"Shucks!" cried John Dene, "it would bust us up. What about the American transports, food-ships, munitions and the rest of it. They'd be attacked all along the three thousand miles route, and would go down like neck-oil on a permit night. You get me?"

Suddenly Mr. Llewellyn John struck the table with his fist.

"You're right, Mr. Dene," he cried; "they might capture one and copy it. You remember the Gothas," he added, turning to Sir Lyster.

"Sure," was John Dene's laconic reply.

"But how can we be sure they will not capture the *Destroyer*?" enquired Sir Lyster.

"Because there'll be John Dene and a hundred-weight of high-explosive on board," said John Dene drily as he chewed at the end of his cigar.

"Then you propose – " began Admiral Heyworth.

"I'll put you wise. This is my offer. I'm willing to send U-boats to merry hell; but only on my own terms. I won't take a cent for my boat or anything else. It's my funeral. The *Destroyer* is now in Canada, with German spies buzzing around like flies over a dead rat. If you agree, I'll cable to my boys to bring the *Destroyer*, and it won't be done without some fancy shooting, I take it! You," turning to Admiral Heyworth, "will appoint an officer, two if you like, to come aboard and count the bag. I'll supply the crew, and you'll give me a commander's commission in the Navy. Now, is it a deal?"

"But – " began Sir Lyster.

"You make me tired," said John Dene wearily. "Is it or is it not a deal?" he enquired of Mr. Llewellyn John.

With an effort the Prime Minister seemed to gather himself together. He found the pace a little breathless, even for him.

"I think it might be arranged, Grayne," he said tactfully. "Mr. Dene knows his own invention and we might enrol his crew in the Navy; what do you think?" Mr. Llewellyn John abounded in tact.

"I take it that you understand navigation, Mr. Dene?" ventured the Admiral.

"Sure," was the reply. "You come a trip with me, and I'll show you navigation that'll make your hair stand on end. Sorry," he added a moment after, observing that Admiral Heyworth was almost aggressively bald.

"That's all right," laughed the Admiral; "they call me the coot."

"Well, is it a deal?" demanded John Dene, rising.

"It is," said Mr. Llewellyn John, "and a splendid deal for the British Empire, Mr. Dene," he added, holding out his hand. "It's a great privilege to meet a patriot such as you. Sir Lyster and Admiral Heyworth will settle all details to your entire satisfaction."

"If they do for me, I want you to give the command to Blake, then to Quinton, and so on, only to my own boys; is that agreed?"

"Do for you?" queried Mr. Llewellyn John.

"Huns, they're after me every hour of the day. There was a little chap even in your own building."

"We really must intern these Germans – " began Mr. Llewellyn John.

"You're barking up the wrong tree, over here," said John Dene with conviction. "You think a German spy's got a square head and says 'Ach himmel' and 'Ja wohl' on street-cars. It's the neutrals mostly, and sometimes the British," he added under his breath.

"In any case you will, I am sure, find that Sir Lyster will do whatever you want," said Mr. Llewellyn John as they walked towards the door.

For the second time that morning John Dene smiled as he left No. 110, Downing Street, with Sir Lyster and Admiral Heyworth, whilst Mr. Llewellyn John rang up the chief of Department Z.

CHAPTER II

JOHN DENE'S WAY

As Sir Lyster entered Mr. Blair's room, accompanied by John Dene and Admiral Heyworth, he was informed that Sir Bridgman North, the First Sea Lord, was anxious to see him.

"Ask him if he can step over now, Blair," said Sir Lyster, and the three men passed into the First Lord's room. Two minutes later Sir Bridgman North entered, and Sir Lyster introduced John Dene.

For a moment the two men eyed one another in mutual appraisement; the big, bluff Sea Lord, with his humorous blue eyes and ready laugh, and the keen, heavy-featured Canadian, as suspicious of a gold band as of a pickpocket.

"Pleased to meet you," said John Dene perfunctorily, as they shook hands. "Now you'd better give me a chance to work off my music;" and with that he seated himself.

Sir Bridgman exchanged an amused glance with Admiral Heyworth, as they too found chairs.

In a few words Sir Lyster explained the reason of John Dene's visit. Sir Bridgman listened with the keen interest of one to whom his profession is everything.

"Now, Mr. Dene," said Sir Lyster when he had finished, "perhaps you will continue."

In short, jerky sentences John Dene outlined his scheme of operations, the others listening intently. From time to time Sir Bridgman or Admiral Heyworth would interpolate a question upon some technical point, which was promptly and satisfactorily answered. John Dene seemed to have forgotten nothing.

For two hours the four sat discussing plans for a campaign that was once and for all to put an end to Germany's submarine hopes.

During those two hours the three Englishmen learned something of the man with whom they had to deal. Sir Bridgman's tact, cheery personality and understanding of how to handle men did much to improve the atmosphere, and gradually John Dene's irritation disappeared.

It was nearly three o'clock before all the arrangements were completed. John Dene was to receive a temporary commission as commander as soon as the King's signature could be obtained. The *Destroyer* was entered on the Navy List as H4, thus taking the place of a submarine that was "missing." John Dene had stipulated that she should be rated in some existing class, so that the secret of her existence might be preserved. In short, sharp sentences he had presented his demands, they were nothing less, and the others had acquiesced. By now they were all convinced that he was right, and that the greatest chance of success lay in "giving him his head," as Sir Bridgman North expressed it in a whisper to Sir Lyster.

A base was to be selected on some island in the North of Scotland, and fitted with wireless with aerials a hundred and fifty feet high, "to pick up all that's going," explained John Dene, conscious of the surprise of his hearers at a request for such a long-range plant. Here the *Destroyer* was to be based, and stores and fuel sufficient for six months accumulated. This was to be proceeded with at once.

"I shall want charts of the minefields," he said, "and full particulars as to patrol flotillas and the like."

Admiral Heyworth nodded comprehendingly.

"By the way," he said, "there's one thing I do not quite understand."

"Put a name to it," said John Dene tersely.

"How do you propose to keep at sea for any length of time without recharging your batteries?"

"We shall be lying doggo most of the time," was the reply.

"Then in all probability the U-boats will pass over you."

"We shan't be lying at the bottom of the sea, either," said John Dene.

"What!" exclaimed Admiral Heyworth, "but if your motor's cut off, you'll sink to the bed of the sea – the law of gravity."

"The *Destroyer* is fitted with buoyancy chambers, and she can generate a gas that will hold her suspended at any depth," he explained. "This gas can be liquefied in a few seconds. Her microphone will tell her when the U-boats are about; it's my own invention."

Sir Lyster looked from one to the other, unable to grasp such technicalities; but conscious that Admiral Heyworth seemed surprised at what he heard.

"It's up to you to see that none of your boys start dropping depth-charges around," said John Dene.

He went on to explain that he proposed a certain restricted area for operations, and that the Admiralty should issue instructions that no depth charges were to be dropped on any submarine within that area until further notice.

"There's one thing I must leave you to supply," said John Dene, as he leaned back in his chair smoking a cigar. John Dene chewed the end of a cigar during the period of negotiations, and smoked it when the deal was struck.

"And what is that?" asked Sir Bridgman.

"I shall want a 'mother' – "

"A mother!" ejaculated Sir Lyster, looking from John Dene to the First Sea Lord, who laughed loudly. Sir Lyster always felt that Sir Bridgman should have left his laugh on the quarter-deck when he relinquished active command.

"A 'mother,'" he explained, "is a kangaroo-ship, a dry-dock ship for salvage and repair of submarines. Yes, we'll fit you out."

Sir Lyster looked chagrined. He had found some difficulty in mastering naval technicalities. When war broke out he was directing a large dock from which vast numbers of troops were shipped to France. He had shown such administrative genius, that Mr. Llewellyn John had selected him for the post of First Lord of the Admiralty, with results that satisfied every one, even the Sea Lords.

John Dene then proceeded to indicate the nature of the alterations he would require made in the vessel, showing a remarkable knowledge of the British type of mother-ship.

"You ought either to be shot as a spy or made First Sea Lord," said Sir Bridgman, looking up from a diagram that John Dene had produced.

"The Hun'll try to do the shooting; and as for my becoming Sea Lord, I should be sorry for some of the plugs here."

John Dene's thoroughness impressed his three hearers. Everything had been foreseen, even the spot where the *Destroyer* was to be based. The small island of Auchinlech possessed a natural harbour of sufficient size for the mother-ship to enter, after which the entrance was to be guarded by a defensive boom as a safeguard against U-boats.

John Dene explained that a month or five weeks must elapse before the *Destroyer* would be ready for action. In about three weeks she could be at Auchinlech, crossing the Atlantic under her own power. Another week or ten days would be required for refitting and taking in stores.

"When you've delivered the goods you can quit, and I shall be pleased to see your boys again in four months."

John Dene regarded his listeners with the air of a man who had just thrown a bombshell and is conscious of the fact.

"Four months!" ejaculated Sir Lyster.

"Yep!" He uttered the monosyllable in a tone that convinced at least one of his listeners that expostulation would be useless.

"But," protested Sir Lyster, "how shall we know what is happening?"

"You won't," was the laconic reply.

"But – " began Sir Lyster again.

"If no one knows what is happening," interrupted John Dene, "no one can tell anyone else."

"Surely, Mr. Dene," said Sir Lyster with some asperity in his voice, "you do not suspect the War Cabinet, for instance, of divulging secrets of national importance."

"I don't suspect the War Cabinet of anything," was the dry retort, "not even of trying to win the war." John Dene looked straight into Sir Lyster's eyes.

There was an awkward pause.

"Who's going to guarantee that the War Cabinet doesn't talk in its sleep?" he continued. "I'm not out to take risks. If this country doesn't want my boat on my terms, then I shan't worry, although you may," he added as an afterthought. "No, sir," he banged his fist on the table vehemently. "This is the biggest thing that's come into the war so far, and I'm not going to have anyone monkeying about with my plans. I'm going to have a written document that I've got a free hand, otherwise I don't deal, that's understood."

"But – " began Sir Lyster once more.

"Excuse me, Grayne," broke in Sir Bridgman, "may I suggest that, as we are all keenly interested parties, Mr. Dene might give us his reasons."

"Sure," said John Dene without waiting for Sir Lyster's reply. "In Can'da a man gets a job because he's the man for that job, leastwise if he's not he's fired. Here I'll auction that half the big jobs are held by mutts whose granddad's had a pleasant way of saying how d'ye do to a prince. If any of them came around you'd have me skippin' like a scalded cat, and when I'm like that I'm liable to say things. I'm my own man and my own boss, and I take a man's size in most things. I'm too old to feel meek at the sight of gold bands. I want to feel kind to everybody, and I find I can do that in this country better when everybody keeps out of my way."

John Dene paused, and the others looked at each other, a little nonplussed how to respond to such directness.

"It's been in my head-fillin' quite a while to tell you this;" and John Dene suddenly smiled, one of those rare smiles that seemed to take the sting out of his words. "I'd be real sorry to hurt anybody's feelings," he added, "but we've got different notions of things in Can'da."

It was Sir Bridgman who eased the situation.

"If ever you want a second in command, I'm your man," he laughed. "Straight talk makes men friends, and if we do wrap things up a bit more here, we aren't so thin-skinned as not to be able to take it from the shoulder. What say you, Grayne?"

"Yes – certainly," said Sir Lyster with unconvincing hesitation.

"You were mentioning spies," said Admiral Heyworth.

"So would you if they'd plagued you as they've plagued me," said John Dene. "They've already stolen three sets of plans."

"Three sets of plans!" cried Sir Lyster, starting up in alarm.

John Dene nodded as he proceeded to relight the stump of his cigar. "One set in T'ronto, one on the steamer and the other from my room at the Ritzton."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Sir Lyster in alarm, "what is to be done?"

"Oh! I've got another three sets," said John Dene calmly.

Sir Lyster looked at him as if doubtful of his sanity.

"Don't you worry," said John Dene imperturbably, "one set of plans was of the U1, the first boat the Germans built, the second set was of the U2, and the third of the U9."

Sir Bridgman's laugh rang out as he thumped the table with his fist.

"Splendid!" he cried. Sir Lyster sank back into his chair with a sigh of relief.

"By the way, Dene," said Sir Bridgman casually, "suppose the *Destroyer* was – er – lost and you with her."

"I've arranged for a set of plans to be delivered to the First Lord, whoever he may be at the time," said John Dene.

"Good!" said Sir Bridgman. "You think of everything. We shall have you commanding the Grand Fleet before the war's over."

Sir Lyster said nothing. He did not quite relish the qualification "whoever he may be at the time."

"About the spies," he said after a pause. "I think it would be advisable to arrange for your protection."

"Not on your life!" cried John Dene with energy. "I don't want any policemen following me around. I've got my own – well," he added, "I've fixed things up all right, and if the worst comes to the worst, well there aren't many men in this country that can beat John Dene with a gun. Now it's up to me to make good on this proposition." He looked from one to the other, as if challenging contradiction. Finding there was none, he continued: "But there are a few things that I want before I can start in, and then you won't see me for dust. You get me?" He looked suddenly at Sir Lyster.

"We'll do everything in our power to help you, Mr. Dene," said Sir Lyster, reaching for a clean sheet of paper from the rack before him.

"Well, I've got it all figured out here," said John Dene, taking a paper from his jacket pocket. "First I want a written undertaking, signed by you," turning to Sir Lyster, "and Mr. Llewellyn John that I'm to have four months to run the *Destroyer* with no one butting in."

Sir Lyster nodded and made a note.

"Next," continued John Dene, "I want a mothership fully equipped with stores and fuel sufficient for four months."

Again Sir Lyster inclined his head and made a note.

"I'll give you a schedule of everything I'm likely to want. Then I want an undertaking that if anything happens to me the command goes to Blake and then to Quinton. If I don't get these things," he announced with decision, "I'll call a halt right here."

"I think you can depend upon Sir Lyster doing all you want, Mr. Dene," said Sir Bridgman; "and when you see the way he does it, perhaps you'll have a better opinion of the Admiralty."

Sir Lyster smiled slightly. He had already determined to show John Dene that nowhere in the world was there an organisation equal to that of the Admiralty Victualling and Stores Departments.

"You help John Dene and he's with you till the cows come to roost," was the response; "and now," he added shrewdly, "you'd better get the cables to work and find out something about me."

"Something about you!" queried Sir Lyster.

"You're not going to trust a man because he talks big, I'll gamble on that. Well, you'll learn a deal about John Dene, and now it's time you got a rustle on."

"In all probability our Intelligence Department knows all about you by now, Mr. Dene," said Sir Bridgman with a laugh. "It's supposed to be fairly up to date in most things."

"Well," said John Dene, as he leaned back in his chair, puffing vigorously at his cigar, "you've treated me better'n I expected, and you won't regret it. Remembering's my long suit. I don't want any honour or glory out of this stunt, I just want to get the job done. If there are any garters, or collars going around, you may have 'em, personally I don't wear 'em, – garters, I mean. A couple of rubber-bands are good enough for me."

Sir Bridgman laughed, Sir Lyster smiled indulgently, and Admiral Heyworth rose to go.

"There's only one thing more; I want a room here and someone to take down letters."

"I will tell my secretary to arrange everything," said Sir Lyster. "You have only to ask for what you require, Mr. Dene."

"Well, that's settled," said John Dene, rising. "Now it's up to me, and if the *Destroyer* doesn't give those Huns merry hell, then I'm green goods;" and with this enigmatical utterance he abruptly left the room, with a nod, and a "See you all in the morning."

As the door closed, the three men gazed at each other for a few seconds.

"An original character," said Sir Lyster indulgently. "Going, Heyworth?" he enquired, as Admiral Heyworth moved towards the door.

"Yes, I've hardly touched the day's work yet," was the reply.

"Never mind," said Sir Bridgman, "you've done the best day's work you're likely to do during this war."

"I think I agree with you," said Admiral Heyworth as he left the room.

"Well, Grayne, what do you think of our friend, John Dene?" inquired Sir Bridgman as he lighted a cigarette.

"He's rather abrupt," said Sir Lyster hesitatingly, "but I think he's a sterling character."

"You're right," said Sir Bridgman heartily. "I wish we had a dozen John Denes in the Service. When the colonies do produce a man they do the thing in style, and Canada has made no mistake about John Dene. He's going nearer to win the war than any other man in the Empire."

"Ah! your incurable enthusiasm," smiled Sir Lyster.

"What I like about him," remarked Sir Bridgman, "is that he never waits to be contradicted."

"He certainly does seem to take everything for granted," said Sir Lyster, with a note of complaint in his voice.

"The man who has all the cards generally does," said Sir Bridgman drily. "Dene will always get there, because he has no axe to grind, and the only thing he respects is brains. That is why he snubs us all so unmercifully," he added with the laugh that always made Sir Lyster wish he wouldn't.

"Now I want to consult you about a rather embarrassing question that's on the paper for Friday," said Sir Lyster.

Unconscious that he was forming the subject of discussion with the heads of the Admiralty, John Dene, on leaving the First Lord's room, turned to the right and walked quickly in the direction of the main staircase. As he reached a point where the corridor was intersected by another running at right angles, the sudden opening of a door on his left caused him to turn his head quickly. A moment later there was a feminine cry and a sound of broken crockery, and John Dene found himself gazing down at a broken teapot.

"Oh!"

He looked up from the steaming ruin of newly brewed tea into the violet eyes of the girl who had directed him to the Admiralty. He noticed the purity of her skin, the redness of her lips and the rebelliousness of her corn-coloured hair, which seeming to refuse all constraint clung about her head in little wanton tendrils.

"That's my fault," said John Dene, removing his hat. "I'm sorry."

"Yes; but our tea," said the girl in genuine consternation; "we're rationed, you know."

"Rationed?" said John Dene.

"Yes; we only get two ounces a week each," she said with a comical look of despair.

"Gee!" cried John Dene, then he asked suddenly: "What are you?"

The girl looked at him in surprise, a little stiffly.

"Can you type? Never mind about the tea."

"But I do mind about the tea." She found John Dene's manner disarming.

"I take it you're a stenographer. Now tell me your name. I'll see about the tea." He had whipped out a note-book and pencil. "Hurry, I've got a cable to send."

Seeing that she was reluctant to give her name, he continued: "Never mind about your name. Be in the First Lord's room to-morrow at eleven o'clock; I'll see you there;" and with that he turned quickly, resumed his hat and retraced his steps.

Without knocking, he pushed open the door of Mr. Blair's room, walked swiftly across and opened the door leading to that of the First Lord.

"Here!" he cried, "where can I buy a pound of tea?"

If John Dene had asked where he could borrow an ichthyosaurus, Sir Lyster and Sir Bridgman could not have gazed at him with more astonishment.

"You can't," said Sir Bridgman, at length, his eyes twinkling as he watched the expression on Sir Lyster's face.

"Can't!" cried John Dene.

"Tea's rationed – two ounces a week," explained Sir Bridgman.

"Anyhow I've got to buy a pound of tea. I've just smashed up the teapot of a girl in the corridor."

"I'm afraid it's impossible," said Sir Lyster with quiet dignity.

"Impossible!" said John Dene irritably. "Here am I giving more'n a million dollars to the country and I can't get a pound of tea. I'll see about that. She'll be here in this room to-morrow at eleven o'clock," and with that the door closed and John Dene disappeared.

"I've told a girl to be here at eleven o'clock to-morrow. She's going to be my secretary," he explained to Mr. Blair as he passed through his office.

Mr. Blair blinked his eyes vigorously. He had seen Sir Lyster and Admiral Heyworth leave the Admiralty with John Dene, he gathered that they had had a long interview with the Prime Minister, then they had returned again and, for two hours, had sat in consultation with the First Sea Lord. Now the amazing John Dene had made an appointment to meet some girl in the First Lord's room at eleven o'clock the next morning.

As John Dene left the Admiralty puffing clouds of blue content from his cigar, the shifty-eyed man, in a grey suit, who had been examining the Royal Marines statue, drew a white handkerchief with a flourish from his pocket and proceeded to blow his nose vigorously. The act seemed to pass unnoticed save by a young girl sitting on a neighbouring seat. She immediately appeared to become greatly interested in the movements of John Dene, whilst the man in the grey suit walked away in the direction of Birdcage Walk.

"Where's the tea?" was the cry with which Dorothy West was greeted as she entered the room she occupied with a number of other girls after her encounter with John Dene.

"It's in the corridor," she replied.

"Oh! go and get it, there's a dear; I'm simply parched," cried Marjorie Rogers, a pretty little brunette at the further corner.

"It's all gone," said Dorothy West; "a Hun just knocked it out of my hand. He smashed the teapot."

"Smashed the teapot!" cried several girls in chorus.

"Oh! Wessie," wailed the little brunette, "I shall die."

"Why did you let him do it?" asked a fair girl with white eyelashes and glasses.

"I didn't," said Dorothy; "he just barged into me and knocked the teapot out of my hand, and then made an assignation for eleven o'clock to-morrow in the First Lord's room."

"An assignation! The First Lord's room!" cried Miss Cunliffe, who by virtue of a flat chest, a pair of round glasses, and an uncompromising manner made an ideal supervisor. She was known as "Old Goggles." "What do you mean, Miss West?"

"Exactly what I say, Miss Cunliffe. He asked me if I was a stenographer, and then said that I was to see him at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning in the First Lord's room. What do you think I had better do?"

"Who is he? What is he? Do tell us, Wessie, dear," cried Marjorie Rogers excitedly.

"Well, I should think he's either a madman or else he's bought the Admiralty," said Dorothy West, her head on one side as if weighing her words before uttering them. "He's the man I saw this morning with Sir Lyster Grayne and Admiral Heyworth, going to call on the Prime Minister – at least, I suppose they were; they went up the steps into Downing Street. But ought I to go at eleven o'clock, Miss Cunliffe?" she queried.

"I'll make enquiries," said Miss Cunliffe. "I'll see Mr. Blair. Perhaps he's mad."

"But what are we going to do about our tea?" wailed Marjorie. "I'd sooner lose my character than my tea."

"Miss Rogers!" said Miss Cunliffe, whose conception of supervisorship was that she should oversee the decorum as well as the work of the other occupants of the room.

"I believe she did it on purpose," said she of the white eyelashes spitefully to a girl in a velvet blouse.

"You had better brew to-morrow's tea to-day, Miss West," said Miss Cunliffe.

"Yes, do, there's a darling," cried Marjorie. "I simply can't wait another five minutes. Why, I couldn't lick a stamp to save my life. Borrow No. 13's pot when they've finished with it, and pinch some of their tea, if you can," she added.

And Dorothy West went out to interview the guardian of No. 13's teapot.

CHAPTER III

DEPARTMENT Z

I

"Mr. Sage there? Very well, ask him to step in and see me as soon as he returns."

Colonel Walton replaced the telephone-receiver and continued to draw diagrams upon the blotting-pad before him, an occupation in which he had been engaged for the last quarter of an hour.

Since its creation two years before, he had been Chief of Department Z., the most secret section of the British Secret Service, with Malcolm Sage as his lieutenant.

Department Z. owed its inception to an inspiration on the part of Mr. Llewellyn John. He had conceived the idea of creating a secret service department, the working of which should be secret even from the Secret Service itself. Its primary object was that the Prime Minister and the War Cabinet might have a private means of obtaining such special information as it required. Department Z. was unhampered by rules and regulations, as devoid of conventions as an enterprising flapper.

In explaining his scheme to Mr. Thaw, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Llewellyn John had said, "Suppose I want to know what Chappeldale had for lunch yesterday, and don't like to ask him, how am I to find out? I want a Department that can tell me anything I want to know, and will be surprised at nothing."

With Mr. Llewellyn John to conceive a thing was to put it into practice. He did not make the mistake of placing Department Z. under the control of a regular secret service man.

"I'm tired of red-tape and traditions," he had remarked to Mr. Thaw. "If I go to the front, they won't let me speak to a man lower than a brigadier, whereas I want the point-of-view of the drummer-boy."

Mr. Llewellyn John had heard of Colonel Walton's exploits in India as head of the Burmah Police, had seen him, and in five minutes the first Chief of Department Z. was appointed. From the Ministry of Supply, Mr. Llewellyn John had plucked Malcolm Sage, whom he later described as "either a ferret turned dreamer, or a dreamer turned ferret," he was not quite sure which.

In discovering Malcolm Sage, Mr. Llewellyn John had achieved one of his greatest strokes of good fortune. When Minister of Supply his notice had been attracted to Sage, as the man who had been instrumental in bringing to light – that is official light, for the affair was never made public – the greatest contracts-scandal of the war. It was due entirely to his initiative and unobtrusive enquiries that a gigantic fraud, diabolical in its cleverness, had been discovered – a fraud that might have involved the country in the loss of millions.

Mr. Llewellyn John had recognised that this young accountant had done him a great service, perhaps saved him from a serious political set-back. Incidentally he discovered that Sage was a very uneasy person to have in a Government-department. Sage cared nothing for tradition, discipline, or bureaucracy. If they interfered with the proper performance of his duties, overboard they went. He was the most transferred man in Whitehall. No one seemed to want to keep him for longer than the period necessary for the formalities of his transfer.

"Uneasy lies the Head that has a Sage," was a phrase some wag had coined. If a man wanted to condemn another as too zealous, unnecessarily hard-working, or as a breaker of idols, he likened him to Sage.

The chief of the department from which Mr. Llewellyn John took Malcolm Sage when Department Z. was formed is said to have wept tears of joy at the news. For months he had striven to transfer his unconventional subordinate; but there was none who would have him. This unfortunate

chief of department had gone through life like a man wanting to sell a dog of dubious pedigree. In the Ministry he was known as Henry II, and Sage came to be referred to as Beckett.

In Department Z. Sage found his proper niche. Under Colonel Walton, a man of few words and great tact, he had found an ideal chief, one who understood how to handle men.

As John Dene had left 110, Downing Street, with Sir Lyster and Admiral Heyworth, Mr. Llewellyn John had rung up Colonel Walton and requested that full enquiries be made at once as to John Dene of Toronto, and a report submitted to him in the morning. That was all. He had given no indication of why he wanted to know, or what was John Dene's business in London.

Hardly a day of his life passed without Mr. Llewellyn John having cause to be thankful for the inspiration that had resulted in the founding of Department Z. Nothing seemed to come amiss, either to the Department or its officials. They never required an elaborate filling-up of forms, they never asked for further particulars as did other departments. They just got to work.

Mr. Llewellyn John had, once and for all, defined Department Z. when he said to Mr. Thaw, "If I were to ask Scotland Yard if Chappeldale had gone over to the Bolsheviks, or if Waytensee had become an Orangeman, they would send a man here, his pockets bulging with note-books. Department Z. would tell me all I wanted to know in a few hours."

In his first interview with Mr. Llewellyn John, previous to being appointed to Department Z., Malcolm Sage had bluntly criticised the Government's methods of dealing with the spy peril.

"You're all wrong, sir," he had said. "If you spot a spy, you arrest, imprison or deport him, according to the degree of his guilt. Any fool could do that," he had added quietly.

"And what would you do, Sage?" inquired Mr. Llewellyn John, who never took offence at the expression of any man's honest opinion, no matter how emphatically worded.

"I should watch him," was the laconic reply. "Just as was done before the war. You didn't arrest spies then, you just let them think they were safe."

For a few moments Mr. Llewellyn John had pondered the remark, and then asked for an explanation.

"If you arrest, shoot or intern a spy, another generally springs up in his place, and you have to start afresh to find him; he may do a lot of mischief before that comes about." Sage gazed meditatively at his finger-nails, a habit of his. "On the other hand," he continued, "if you know your man, you can watch him and generally find out what he's after. Better a known than an unknown danger," he had added oracularly.

"I'm afraid they wouldn't endorse that doctrine at Scotland Yard," smiled Mr. Llewellyn John.

"Scotland Yard is a place of promoted policemen," replied Sage, "regulation intellects in regulation boots."

Mr. Llewellyn John smiled. He always appreciated a phrase. "Then you would not arrest a burglar, but watch him," he said, glancing keenly at Sage.

"The cases are entirely different, sir," was the reply; "a burglar invariably works on his own, a spy is more frequently than not a cog of a machine and must be replaced. He seldom works entirely alone."

"Go on," Mr. Llewellyn John had said, seeing that Sage paused and was intently regarding his finger-nails of his right hand.

"Even when burglars work in gangs, there is no superior organisation to replace destroyed units," continued Sage. "With international secret service it is different; its casualties are made good as promptly as with a field army."

"I believe you're right," said Mr. Llewellyn John. "If you can convince Colonel Walton, then Department Z. can be run on those lines."

Malcolm Sage had found no difficulty in convincing his chief, a man of quiet demeanour, but unprejudiced mind. The result had been that Department Z. had not so far caused a single arrest,

although it had countered many clever schemes. Its motto was "The Day" when it could make a really historical haul.

The progress of Malcolm Sage had been remarkable. Colonel Walton had quickly seen that his subordinate could work only along his own lines, and in consequence he had given him his head. Sage, on his part, had discovered in his chief a man with a sound knowledge of human nature, generously spiced with the devil.

As Sage entered, Colonel Walton ceased his diagrams and looked up. Sage was as unlike the "sleuth hound" of fiction as it is possible for a man to be. At first glance he looked like the superintendent of a provincial Sunday-school. He was about thirty-five years of age, sandy, wore gold-rimmed glasses and possessed a conical head, prematurely bald. He had a sharp nose, steel-coloured eyes and large ears; but there was the set of his jaw which told of determination.

Seating himself in his customary place, Sage proceeded to pull at the inevitable briar, without which he was seldom seen. For a full minute there was silence. Colonel Walton deliberately lighted a cigar and leaned back to listen. He knew his man and refrained from asking questions.

"They're puzzled, chief" – Sage knocked the ashes from his pipe into the ash-tray on the table – "and they're getting jumpy," he added.

Colonel Walton nodded.

"Twice they've ransacked John Dene's room at the Ritzton and found nothing."

"Does he know?" enquired Colonel Walton.

Sage nodded.

"John Dene's a dark horse," he remarked with respect in his voice, "and the Huns can't make up their minds."

"To what?" enquired the chief.

"To give up the shadow for the substance," he remarked, as he pressed down the tobacco in his pipe. "They want the plans, and they want to prevent the boat from putting to sea."

Colonel Walton nodded comprehendingly.

"They'll probably try to scotch her on the way over; but they won't know her route. They'll be lying in wait, however, in full strength in home waters. He's a bad psychologist," added Sage, as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"Who?" enquired Colonel Walton.

"The Hun," replied Sage, as he sucked away contentedly at his pipe. "He's never content to go for a single issue, or he'd probably have got the Channel ports. He's not content with concentrating on John Dene and his boat, he's after the plans. That's where he'll fail. Smart chap, John Dene."

For some moments the two men smoked in silence, which was finally broken by Sage.

"They'll try to get hold of John Dene, unless he's very careful, and hold him to ransom, the price being the plans."

"Incidentally, Sage, where did you get all this from?" enquired Walton.

Sage gazed at his chief through his gold-rimmed spectacles. "About three hundred yards west of the Temple Station on the Underground."

Colonel Walton glanced across at his subordinate; but refrained from asking further questions. "Have you warned Dene?" he enquired instead.

"No use," replied Sage with conviction. "Might as well warn a fly."

Colonel Walton nodded understandingly. "Still," he remarked, "I think he ought to be told."

"Why not have a try yourself?" Sage looked up swiftly from the inevitable contemplation of his finger-nails.

For fully a minute Colonel Walton sat revolving the proposal in his mind. "I think I will," he said later.

"He'll treat you like a superannuated policeman," was the grim retort.

"The Skipper wants to see us at eleven," said Colonel Walton, looking at his watch and rising. The "Skipper" was the name by which Mr. Llewellyn John was known at Department Z. Names were rarely referred to, and very few documents were ever exchanged. Colonel Walton picked up his hat from a bookcase and, followed by Sage, who extracted a cap from his pocket, left the room and Department Z. and walked across to Downing Street.

As Colonel Walton and Malcolm Sage were shown into Mr. Llewellyn John's room, the Prime Minister gave instructions that he was not to be disturbed for a quarter of an hour.

"Was the John Dene Report what you wanted, sir?" enquired Colonel Walton, as he took the seat Mr. Llewellyn John indicated.

"Excellent," cried Mr. Llewellyn John; then with a smile he added, "I was able to tell Sir Lyster quite a lot of things this morning. The Admiralty report was not ready until late last night. It was not nearly so instructive."

The main facts of John Dene's career had not been difficult to obtain. His father had emigrated to Canada in the early eighties; but, possessing only the qualifications of a clerk, he had achieved neither fame nor fortune. He had died when John Dene was eight years old, and his wife had followed him within eighteen months. After a varied career John Dene had drifted to the States, where as a youth he had entered a large engineering firm, and was instantly singled out as an inventor in embryo.

Several fortunate speculations had formed the foundation of a small fortune of twenty thousand dollars, with which he returned to Toronto. From that point his career had been one continual progression of successes. Everything he touched seemed to turn to gold, until "John's luck" became a well-known phrase in financial circles.

Unlike most successful business-men, he devoted a large portion of his time to his hobby, electrical engineering, and when the war broke out he sought to turn this to practical and patriotic uses.

"And when may we expect Mr. Dene's new submarine over?" enquired Malcolm Sage casually.

"Mr. Dene's new submarine!" Mr. Llewellyn John's hands dropped to his sides as he gazed at Sage in blank amazement. "His new submarine," he repeated.

"Yes, sir."

"What on earth do you know about it?" demanded Mr. Llewellyn John, looking at Sage with a startled expression.

"John Dene has invented a submarine," proceeded the literal Sage, "with some novel features, including a searchlight that has overcome the opacity of water. The thing is lying on the St. Lawrence River just below Quebec. Yesterday he called to see Sir Lyster Grayne, who brought him here with Admiral Heyworth."

Mr. Llewellyn John gazed in bewilderment at Malcolm Sage, his eyes shifted to Colonel Walton and then back again to Sage.

"But," he began, "you're watching us, not the enemy. Did you know of this?" he turned to the chief of Department Z.

Colonel Walton shook his head. "I haven't seen Sage since you telephoned yesterday until a few minutes ago," he said.

"Where – how – ?" Mr. Llewellyn John paused.

"It's our business to know things, sir," was Sage's quiet reply.

"And yet you didn't report this to – " began Mr. Llewellyn John.

"It saves time telling you both at once," responded Sage, looking at his chief with a smile.

"Suppose you tell us how you found out," suggested Mr. Llewellyn John a little irritably.

"Does that matter, sir?" Sage looked up calmly from an earnest examination of the nail of his left forefinger.

For some moments Mr. Llewellyn John gazed across at Malcolm Sage, frowning heavily.

"Sage has his own methods," remarked Colonel Walton tactfully.

"Methods," cried Mr. Llewellyn John, his brow clearing, "it's a good job he didn't live in the Middle Ages, or else he'd have been burned. I'm not so sure that he ought not to be burned now." He turned on Sage that smile that never failed in its magical effect.

"There are one or two links missing," said Sage. "I want to know where and when the *Destroyer* will arrive, and what steps you are taking in regard to John Dene."

"All arrangements will be left in Mr. Dene's hands. He is – " Mr. Llewellyn John paused.

"A little self-willed," suggested Sage.

"Self-willed!" exclaimed Mr. Llewellyn John. "He is a dictator in embryo."

"He happens also to be a patriot," said Sage quietly.

"Wait until you meet him," said the Prime Minister grimly.

"I have met him," said Sage quietly. "I trod on his toe last night at 'Chu Chin Chow.' We had quite a pleasant little chat about it. I think that is all I need trouble you with, sir," he concluded.

"And we are to see the thing through?" interrogated Colonel Walton, as Mr. Llewellyn John rose. "There won't be any – "

"No one else knows anything about it except Sir Lyster, Sir Bridgman and Admiral Heyworth. By the way," Mr. Llewellyn John added, "our Canadian friend has an idea that our Secret Service is run by superannuated policemen in regulation boots."

"I know," said Sage, as he followed his chief towards the door.

"Good-bye," cried Mr. Llewellyn John. "I'm sure I shall have to send you to the Tower, Sage, before I've finished with you."

"Then I'll spend the time writing the History of Department Z., sir," was the quiet reply. The two men went out, and Mr. Llewellyn John rang for his secretary.

"You have rather – " began Colonel Walton, but he stopped short. Sage suddenly knocked him roughly with his elbow.

"I have never seen the Mons Star," he said. "Can we go round by Whitehall? The Horse Guards sentries, I believe, wear it."

The two men had reached the top of the steps leading down into St. James's Park. Without a moment's pause Sage turned quickly, and nearly cannoned into a pretty and stylishly dressed girl, who was walking close behind them. He lifted his hat and apologised, and he and Colonel Walton passed up Downing Street into Whitehall. For the rest of the walk back to St. James's Square, Sage chatted about medals.

Seated once more one on either side of Colonel Walton's table, Sage proceeded to light his pipe.

"Clever, wasn't it?" he asked. "She's fairly new, too."

"Who was she?"

"Vera Ellerton, employed as a Temporary Ministry typist," Sage replied drily.

"So that was it," remarked Colonel Walton, cutting the end of a cigar with great deliberation.

"She was following us on the chance of catching any odd remarks that might be useful. On the way back here two others picked us up on the relay system."

"Do you think she knew who we were?" enquired Colonel Walton.

"No, just an off chance. We were callers on the Skipper, and might let something drop. It's a regular thing, picking up the callers, generally when they've got some distance away though."

"They must have learned quite a deal about numismatics," said Colonel Walton drily.

"A constitutional government is a great obstacle to an efficient Secret Service, it imposes limitations," remarked Sage regretfully.

Colonel Walton looked across in the act of lighting his cigar.

"There are six hundred and seventy of them at Westminster. In war-time we require a system of the *lettre-de-cachê*. And now," said Sage, rising, "I think I'll get a couple of hours' sleep, I've been pretty busy. By the way," he said, with his hand upon the door-handle, "I think we might get the papers of that fellow on the Bergen boat, also a photograph, clothing, and full details of his appearance."

Colonel Walton nodded and Malcolm Sage took his departure.

II

"It's curious."

Malcolm Sage was seated at his table carefully studying several sheets of buff-coloured paper fastened together in the top left-hand corner with thin green cord. In a tray beside him lay a number of similar documents.

He glanced across at a small man with a dark moustache and determined chin sitting opposite. The man made a movement as if to speak, then apparently thinking better of it, remained silent.

"How many false calls did you say?" enquired Sage.

"Nine in five days, sir," was the response.

Malcolm Sage nodded his head several times, his eyes still fixed on the papers before him.

One of his first acts on being appointed to Department Z. was to give instructions, through the proper channels, that all telephone-operators were to be warned to report to their supervisors anything that struck them as unusual, no matter how trivial the incident might appear, carefully noting the numbers of the subscribers whose messages seemed out of the ordinary. This was quite apart from the special staff detailed to tap conversations, particularly call-box conversations throughout the Kingdom.

A bright young operator at the Streatham Exchange, coveting the reward of five pounds offered for any really useful information, had called attention to the curious fact that Mr. Montagu Naylor, of "The Cedars," Apthorpe Road, was constantly receiving wrong calls.

This operator's report had been considered of sufficient importance to send to Department Z. Instructions had been given for a complete record to be kept of all Mr. Montagu Naylor's calls, incoming and out-going. The first thing that struck Sage as significant was that all these false calls were made from public call-boxes. He gave instructions that at the Streatham Exchange they were to enquire of the exchanges from which the calls had come if any complaint had been made by those getting wrong numbers. The result showed that quite a number of people seemed content to pay threepence to be told that they were on to the wrong subscriber.

"What do you make of it, Thompson?" Malcolm Sage looked up in that sudden way of his, which many found so disconcerting.

Thompson shook his head. "I've had enquiries made at all the places given, and they seem quite all right, sir," was his reply. "It's funny," he added after a pause. "It began with short streets and small numbers, and then gradually took in the larger thoroughfares with bigger numbers."

"The calls have always come through in the same way?" queried Malcolm Sage. "First the number and then the street and no mention of the exchange."

"Yes, sir," was the response. "It's a bit of a puzzle," he added.

Malcolm Sage nodded. For some minutes they sat in silence, Sage staring with expressionless face at the papers before him. Suddenly with a swift movement he pushed them over towards Thompson.

"Get out a list of the whole range of numbers immediately, and bring it to me as soon as you can. Tell them to get me through to Smart at the Streatham Exchange."

"Very good, sir;" and the man took his departure.

A minute later the telephone bell rang.

Malcolm Sage took up the receiver. "That you, Smart?" he enquired, "re Z.18, in future transcribe figures in words exactly as spoken, thus double-one-three, one-hundred-and-thirteen, or one-one-three, as the case may be." He jammed the receiver back again on to the rest, and proceeded to gaze fixedly at the finger-nails of his left hand.

A quarter of an hour later Special Service Officer Thompson entered with a long list of figures, which he handed to Malcolm Sage.

"You've hit it, Thompson," said Sage, glancing swiftly down the list.

"Have I, sir?" said Thompson, not quite sure what it was he was supposed to have hit.

"They are – "

At that moment the telephone bell rang. Malcolm Sage put the receiver to his ear.

"Yes, Malcolm Sage, speaking," he said. There was a pause. "Yes." Another pause. "Good, continue to record in that manner;" and once more he replaced the receiver.

"Vanity, Thompson, is at the root of all error."

"Yes, sir," said Thompson dutifully.

"Those figures," continued Sage, "are times, not numbers."

With a quick indrawing of breath, which with Thompson always indicated excitement, he reached across for the list, his eyes glinting.

"That was Smart on the telephone, another call just come through, three-twenty Oxford Street, not three-two-o, but three-twenty. Make a note of it."

Thompson produced a note-book and hastily scribbled a memorandum.

"At three-twenty this afternoon you will probably find Mr. Montagu Naylor meeting somebody in Oxford Street. Have both followed. If by chance they don't turn up, have someone there at three-twenty every afternoon and morning for a week; it may be the second, third, fourth, or fifth day after the call for all we know, morning or evening."

"It's the old story, Thompson," said Sage, who never lost a chance of pointing the moral, "over confidence. Here's a fellow who has worked out a really original means of communication. Instead of running it for a few months and then dropping it, he carries on until someone tumbles to his game."

"Yes, sir," said Thompson respectfully. It was an understood thing at Department Z. that these little homilies should be listened to with deference.

"It's like a dog hiding a bone in a hat-box," continued Sage. "He's so pleased with himself that he imagines no one else can attain to such mental brilliancy. He makes no allowance for the chapter of accidents."

"That is so, sir."

"We mustn't get like that in Department Z., Thompson."

Thompson shook his head. Time after time Sage had impressed upon the staff of Department Z. that mentally they must be elastic. "It's only a fool who is blinded by his own vapour," he had said. He had pointed out the folly of endeavouring to fit a fact by an hypothesis.

"That's all," and Malcolm Sage became absorbed in the paper before him. As he closed the door behind him Thompson winked gravely at a print upon the wall of the corridor opposite. He was wondering how it was possible for one man to watch the whole of Oxford Street for a week.

CHAPTER IV

GINGERING-UP THE ADMIRALTY

"Boss in?"

Mr. Blair started violently; he had not heard John Dene enter his room.

"Er – yes, Mr. Dene," he replied, "I'll tell him." He half rose; but before he could complete the movement John Dene had opened the door communicating with Sir Lyster's private room.

Mr. Blair sank back in his chair. He was a man who assimilated innovation with difficulty. All his life he had been cradled in the lap of "as it was in the beginning." He was a vade-mecum on procedure and the courtesies of life, which made him extremely valuable to Sir Lyster. He was a gentle zephyr, whereas John Dene was something between a sudden draught and a cyclone.

Mr. Blair fixed his rather prominent blue eyes on the door that had closed behind John Dene. He disliked colonials. They always said what they meant, and went directly for what they wanted, all of which was in opposition to his standard of good-breeding.

As he continued to gaze at the door, it suddenly opened and John Dene's head appeared.

"Say," he cried, "if that yellow-headed girl comes, send her right in," and the door closed with a bang.

Inwardly Mr. Blair gasped; it was not customary for yellow-haired girls to be sent in to see the First Lord.

"The difference between this country and Can'da," remarked John Dene, as he planted upon Sir Lyster's table a large, shapeless-looking parcel, from which he proceeded to remove the wrapping, "is that here every one wants to know who your father was; but in Can'da they ask what can you do. I got that pound of tea," he added inconsequently.

"The pound of tea!" repeated Sir Lyster uncomprehendingly, as he watched John Dene endeavouring to extract a packet from his pocket with one hand, and undo the string of the parcel with the other.

"Yes, for that yellow-headed girl. I ran into her in the corridor and smashed her teapot yesterday. I promised I'd get her some more tea. Here it is;" and John Dene laid the package on the First Lord's table. "If she comes after I'm gone, you might give it to her. I told her to run in here and fetch it. This is the pot," he added, still struggling with the wrappings.

Presently he disinterred from a mass of paper wound round it in every conceivable way, a large white, pink and gold teapot.

Sir Lyster gazed from the teapot, terrifying in the crudeness of its shape and design, to John Dene and back again to the teapot.

"Like it?" asked John Dene, as he looked admiringly at his purchase. "Ought to cheer those girls up some."

Sir Lyster continued to gaze at the teapot as if fascinated.

"I told her to run in here and fetch it," continued John Dene, indicating the packet of tea. "She doesn't know about the pot," he added with self-satisfaction.

"In here," repeated Sir Lyster, unwilling to believe his ears.

"Sure," replied John Dene, his eyes still fixed admiringly upon the teapot, "at eleven o'clock. It's that now," he added, looking at his watch.

As he did so Mr. Blair entered and closed the door behind him. He was obviously embarrassed.

"A young person – " he began.

"Send her right in," cried John Dene.

Mr. Blair glanced uncertainly from Sir Lyster to John Dene, then back again to his chief. Seeing no contradiction in his eye, he turned and held open the door to admit Dorothy West.

"Ah! here you are," cried John Dene, rising and indicating that the girl should occupy his chair. "There's your pound of tea," pointing to the package lying before Sir Lyster, "and there's a new teapot for you," he added, indicating that object, which seemed to flaunt its pink and white and gold as if determined to brazen things out.

The girl looked at the teapot, at Sir Lyster and on to John Dene, and back to the teapot. Then she laughed. She had pretty teeth, John Dene decided.

"It's very kind of you," she said, "but there wasn't a pound of tea in the teapot you broke yesterday, and – and –"

"Never mind," said John Dene, "you can keep the rest. Now see here, I want someone to take down my letters. You're a stenographer?" he asked.

The girl nodded her head.

"Speeds?" enquired John Dene.

"A hundred and twenty –" was the response.

"Typing?"

"Sixty-five words –"

"You'll do," said John Dene with decision. "In future you'll do my work only. Nine o'clock, every morning."

The girl looked enquiringly at Sir Lyster, who coughed slightly.

"We will take up your references, Miss – er –"

"Oh! cut it out," said John Dene impatiently, "I don't want references."

"But," replied Sir Lyster, "this is work of a confidential nature."

"See here," cried John Dene. "I started life selling newspapers in T'ronto. I never had a reference, I never gave a reference and I never asked a reference, and the man who can get ahead of John Dene had better stay up all night for fear of missing the buzzer in the morning. That girl's straight, else she wouldn't be asked to do my letters," he added. "Now, don't you wait," he said to Dorothy, seeing she was embarrassed at his remark; "nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

"I think it will be necessary to take up references," began Sir Lyster as John Dene closed the door on Dorothy.

John Dene span round on his heel. "I run my business on Canadian lines, not on British," he cried. "If you're always going to be around telling me what to do, then I'll see this country to hell before they get my *Destroyer*. The man who deals with John Dene does so on his terms," and with that he left the room, closing the door with a bang behind him.

For a moment he stood gazing down at Mr. Blair. "Can you tell me," he asked slowly, "why the British Empire has not gone to blazes long ago?"

Mr. Blair gazed at him, mild surprise in his prominent eyes.

"I am afraid I don't – I cannot –" he began.

"Neither can I," said John Dene. "You're all just about as cute as dead weasels."

John Dene walked along the corridor and down the staircase in high dudgeon.

"Ha! Mr. Dene, what's happened?" enquired Sir Bridgman, who was mounting the stairs as John Dene descended.

"I've been wondering how it is the British Empire has hung together as long as it has," was the response.

"What have we been doing now?" enquired Sir Bridgman.

"It's my belief," remarked John Dene, "that in this country you wouldn't engage a janitor without his great-grandmother's birth-certificate."

"I'm afraid we are rather a prejudiced nation," said Sir Bridgman genially.

"I don't care a cousin Mary what you are," responded John Dene, "so long as you don't come up against me. I'm out to win this war; it doesn't matter to me a red cent who's got the most grandmothers,

and the sooner you tell the First Lord and that prize seal of his, the better we shall get on;" and John Dene abruptly continued on his way.

Sir Bridgman smiled as he slowly ascended the stairs.

"I suppose," he murmured, "we are in the process of being gingered-up."

The rest of the day John Dene devoted to sight-seeing and wandering about the streets, keenly interested in and critical of all he saw.

The next morning he was at the Admiralty a few minutes to nine, and was conducted by an attendant to the room that had been assigned to him. He gave a swift glance round and, apparently satisfied that it would suit his purpose, seated himself at the large pedestal table and took out his watch. As he did so, he noticed an envelope addressed to him lying on the table. Picking it up he tore off the end, extracted and read the note. Just as he had finished there came a tap at the door.

"Come," he called out.

The door opened and Dorothy West entered, looking very pretty and business-like with a notebook and pencil in her hand.

"Good morning," she said.

"Mornin', Miss West," he replied, gazing at her apparently without seeing her. He was obviously thinking of something else.

She seated herself beside his table and looked up, awaiting his signal to begin the day's work.

"There are some things in this country that get my goat," he remarked.

John Dene threw down the letter he was reading, twirled the cigar between his lips and snorted his impatience, as he jumped from his chair and proceeded to stride up and down the room.

"There are quite a lot that get mine," she remarked demurely, as she glanced up from her notebook.

"A lot that get yours," he repeated, coming to a standstill and looking down at her.

"Things that get my goat." There was the slightest possible pause between the "my" and the "goat."

Then John Dene smiled. In Toronto it was said that when John Dene smiled securities could always be trusted to mount at least a point.

"Well, listen to this." He picked up the letter again and read:

"DEAR MR. DENE, —

"Sir Lyster desires me to write and express it as his most urgent wish that you will pay special regard to your personal safety. He fears that you may be inclined to treat the matter too lightly, hence this letter.

"Yours truly,

"REGINALD BLAIR."

"If that chap hadn't such a dandy set of grandmothers and first cousins, he'd be picking up cigarette-stubs instead of wasting his time telling me what I knew a year ago."

"But he's only carrying out Sir Lyster's instructions," suggested Dorothy.

"There's something in that," he admitted grudgingly, "but if they're going to be always running around warning me of danger I know all about — " He broke off. "Why," he continued a moment later, "I was shot at on the steamer, nearly hustled into the docks at Liverpool, set on by toughs in Manchester and followed around as if I was a bell-mule. I tell you it gets my goat. This country wants gingering-up." John Dene continued his pacing of the room.

"Couldn't you wear a red beard and blue glasses and — "

"What's that?" John Dene span round and fixed his eyes on the girl.

"I mean disguise yourself," said Dorothy, dropping her eyes beneath his gaze.

"Why?" The interrogation was rapped out in such a tone as to cause the girl to shrink back slightly.

"They wouldn't know and then it wouldn't — " she hesitated.

"Wouldn't what?" he demanded.

"Get your goat," said Dorothy after a moment's hesitation.

He continued to gaze intently at Dorothy, who was absorbed in a blank page of her note-book.

"Here, take this down;" and he proceeded to dictate.

"MY DEAR MR. BLAIR, —

"I am in receipt of yours of to-day's date. Will you tell Sir Lyster that I have bought a machine-gun, a blue beard, false eyebrows, and Miss West and I are going to do bayonet drill every morning with a pillow.

"With kind regards,

"Yours sincerely."

For a few moments Dorothy sat regarding her book with knitted brows. "I don't think I should send that, if I were you, Mr. Dene," she said at length.

"Why not?" he demanded, unaccustomed to having his orders questioned.

"It sounds rather flippant, doesn't it?"

John Dene smiled grimly, and as he made no further comment, Dorothy struck out the letter from her note-book.

All through the morning John Dene threw off letters. The way in which he did his dictating reminded Dorothy of a retriever shaking the water from its coat after a swim. He hurled short, sharp sentences at her, as if anxious to be rid of them. Sometimes he would sit hunched up at his table, at others he would spring up and proceed feverishly to pace about the room.

As she filled page after page of her note-book, Dorothy wondered when she would have an opportunity of transcribing her notes. Hour after hour John Dene dictated, in short bursts, interspersed with varying pauses, during which he seemed to be deep in thought. Once Sir Bridgman looked in, and Dorothy had a space in which to breathe; but with the departure of the First Sea Lord the torrent jerked forth afresh.

At two o'clock Dorothy felt that she must either scream or faint. Her right hand seemed as if it would drop off. At last she suggested that even Admiralty typists required lunch. In a flash John Dene seemed to change into a human being, solicitous and self-reproachful.

"Too bad," he said, as he pulled out his watch. "Why, it's a quarter after two. You must be all used up. I'm sorry."

"And aren't you hungry as well, Mr. Dene?" she asked, as she closed her note-book and rose.

"Hungry!" he repeated as if she had asked him a surprising question. "I've no use for food when I'm hustling. Where do you go for lunch?"

"I go to a tea-shop," said Dorothy after a moment's hesitation.

"And what do you eat?" demanded John Dene, with the air of a cross-examining counsel.

"Oh, all sorts of things," she laughed; "buns and eggs and — and —"

"That's no good," was the uncompromising rejoinder.

"They're really quite nourishing," she said with a smile. At the Admiralty it was not customary for the chiefs to enquire what the typists ate.

"You'd better come with me and have a good meal," he said bluntly, reaching for his hat.

Dorothy flushed. The implication was too obvious to be overlooked. Drawing herself up slightly, and with her head a little thrown back, she declined.

"I'm afraid I have an engagement," she said coldly.

John Dene looked up, puzzled to account for her sudden hauteur. He watched her leave the room, and then, throwing down his hat, reseated himself at his table and once more became absorbed in his work.

Dorothy went to the Admiralty staff-restaurant and spent a week's lunch allowance upon her meal. It seemed to help her to regain her self-respect. When she returned to John Dene's room some forty minutes later, determined to get some of her notes typed before he returned, she found him still

sitting at his table. As she entered he took out his watch, looked at it and then up at her. Dorothy crimsoned as if discovered in some illicit act. She was angry with herself for her weakness and with John Dene – why, she could not have said.

"You've been hustling some," he remarked, as he returned the watch to his pocket.

"We've both been quick," said Dorothy, curious to know if John Dene had been to lunch.

"Oh, I stayed right here," he said, still gazing up at her.

Dorothy felt rebuked. He had evidently felt snubbed, she told herself, and it was her fault that he had remained at work.

"See here," said John Dene, "I can't breathe in this place. It's all gold braid and brass buttons. I'm going to rent my own offices, and have lunch sent in and we'll get some work done. You can get a rest or a walk about three. I don't like breaking off in the midst of things," he added, a little lamely, Dorothy thought.

"Very well, Mr. Dene," she said, as she resumed her seat.

"Do you mind? Say right out if you'd hate it." There was a suspicion of anxiety in his tone.

"I'm here to do whatever you wish," she said with dignity.

With a sudden movement John Dene sprang up and proceeded to pace up and down the room.

From time to time he glanced at Dorothy, who sat pencil and note-book ready for the flood of staccatoed sentences that usually accompanied these paces to and fro. At length he came to a standstill in the middle of the room, planted his feet wide apart as if to steady the resolution to which he had apparently come.

"Say, what's all this worth to you?" he blurted out.

Dorothy looked up in surprise, not grasping his meaning.

"Worth to me?" she queried, her head on one side, the tip of her pencil resting on her lower lip.

"Yes; what do they pay you?"

"Oh! I see. Thirty-five shillings a week and, if I become a permanent, a pension when I'm too old to enjoy it," she laughed. "That is if the Hun hasn't taken us over by then."

"That'll be about nine dollars a week," mumbled John Dene, twisting his cigar round between his lips. "Well, you're worth twenty dollars a week to me, so I'll make up the rest."

"I'm quite satisfied, thank you," she said, drawing herself up slightly.

"Well, I'm not," he blurted out. "You're going to work well for me, and you're going to be well paid."

"I'm afraid I cannot accept it," she said firmly, "although it's very kind of you," she added with a smile.

He regarded her in surprise. It was something new to him to find anyone refusing an increase in salary. His cigar twirled round with remarkable rapidity.

"I suppose I'm getting his goat," thought Dorothy, as she watched him from beneath lowered lashes.

"Why won't you take it?" he demanded.

"I'm afraid I cannot accept presents," she said with what she thought a disarming smile.

"Oh, shucks!" John Dene was annoyed.

"If the Admiralty thought I was worth more than thirty-five shillings a week, they would pay me more."

"Well, I'm not going to have anyone around that doesn't get a living wage," he announced explosively.

"Does that mean that I had better go?" she inquired calmly.

"No, it doesn't. You just stay right here till I get back," was the reply, and he opened the door and disappeared, leaving Dorothy with the conviction that someone was to suffer because, in John Dene's opinion, she was inadequately paid.

As she waited for John Dene's return, she could not keep her thoughts from what an extra forty-five shillings a week would mean to her. She could increase the number and quality of the little "surprises" she took home with her to the mother in whose life she bulked so largely. Peaches could be bought without the damning prefix "tinned"; salmon without the discouraging modification "Canadian"; eggs that had not long since forgotten what hen had laid them and when. She could take her more often to a theatre, or for a run in a taxi when she was tired. In short, a hundred and seventeen pounds a year would buy quite a lot of rose-leaves with which to colour her mother's life.

Whilst Dorothy was building castles in Spain upon a foundation of eleven dollars a week, John Dene walked briskly along the corridor leading to Sir Lyster's room. Mr. Blair was seated at his desk reading with calm deliberation and self-evident satisfaction a letter he had just written for Sir Lyster to one of his constituents. He had devoted much time and thought to the composition, as it was for publication, and he was determined that no one should find in it flaw or ambiguity. The morning had been one of flawless serenity, and he was looking forward to a pleasant lunch with some friends at the Berkeley.

"Here, what the hell do you mean by giving that girl only nine dollars a week?"

Suddenly the idyllic peaceful ness of his mood was shattered into a thousand fragments. John Dene had burst into the room with the force of a cyclone, and stood before him like an accusing fury.

"Nine dollars a week! What girl?" he stuttered, looking up weakly into John Dene's angry eyes. "I – I –"

"Miss West," was the retort. "She's getting nine dollars a week, less than I pay an office boy in T'ronto."

"But I – it's nothing to do with me," began Mr. Blair miserably. He had become mortally afraid of John Dene, and prayed for the time to come when the Hun submarine menace would be ended, and John Dene could return to Toronto, where no doubt he was understood and appreciated.

"Well, it ought to be," snapped John Dene, just as Sir Bridgman North came out of Sir Lyster's room.

"Good morning, Mr. Dene," he cried genially. "What are you doing to poor Blair?"

John Dene explained his grievance. "I'd pay the difference myself, just to make you all feel a bit small, only she won't take it from me."

"Well, I think I can promise that the matter shall be put right, and we'll make Blair take her out to lunch by way of apology, shall we?" he laughed.

"I'd like to see him ask her," said John Dene grimly. "That girl's a high-stepper, sir. Nine dollars a week!" he grumbled as he left the room to the manifest relief of Mr. Blair.

"You're being gingered-up, Blair," said Sir Bridgman; "in fact, we're all being gingered-up. It's a bit surprising at first; but it's a great game played slow. You'll get to like it in time, and it's all for the good of the British Empire."

Mr. Blair smiled weakly as Sir Bridgman left the room; but in his heart he wished it were possible to have a sentinel outside his door, with strict injunctions to bayonet John Dene without hesitation should he seek admittance.

"I've fixed it," announced John Dene, as he burst in upon Dorothy's day dream. "You'll get twenty dollars in future."

She looked up quickly. "You're very kind, Mr. Dene," she said, "but is it – is it – ?" she hesitated.

"It's a square deal. I told them you wouldn't take it from me, and that I wasn't going to have my secretary paid less than an office boy in T'ronto. I gingered 'em up some. Nine dollars a week for you!"

The tone in which the last sentence was uttered brought a slight flush to Dorothy's cheeks.

"Now you can get on," he announced, picking up his hat. "I'm going to find offices;" and he went out like a gust of wind.

Dorothy typed steadily on. Of one thing she had become convinced, that the position of secretary to John Dene of Toronto was not going to prove a rest-billet.

At a little after four Marjorie Rogers knocked at the door and, recognising Dorothy's "Come in," entered stealthily as if expecting someone to jump out at her.

"Where's the bear, Wessie?" she enquired, keeping a weather eye on the door in case John Dene should return.

"Gone out to buy bear-biscuits," laughed Dorothy, leaning back in her chair to get the kink out of her spine.

"Do you think he'll marry you?" enquired the little brunette romantically, as she perched herself upon John Dene's table and swung a pretty leg. "They don't usually, you know."

"He'll probably kill you if he catches you," said Dorothy.

"Oh, if he comes I'm here to ask if you would like some tea," was the airy reply.

"You angel!" cried Dorothy. "I should love it."

"Has he tried to kiss you yet?" demanded the girl, looking at Dorothy searchingly.

"Don't be ridiculous," cried Dorothy, conscious that she was flushing.

"I see he has," she said, regarding Dorothy judicially and nodding her head wisely.

Dorothy re-started typing. It was absurd, she decided, to endeavour to argue with this worldly child of Whitehall.

"They're all the same," continued Marjorie, lifting her skirt slightly and gazing with obvious approval at the symmetry of her leg. "You didn't let him, I hope," continued the girl. "You see, it makes it bad for others." Then a moment later she added, "It should be chocs. before kisses, and they've got to learn the ropes."

"And you, you little imp, have got to learn morals." Dorothy laughed in spite of herself at the quaint air of wisdom with which this girl of eighteen settled the ethics of Whitehall.

"What's the use of morals?" cried the girl. "I mean morals that get in the way of your having a good time. Of course I wouldn't – " She paused.

"Never mind what you wouldn't do, Brynhilda the Bold," said Dorothy, "but concentrate on the woulds, and bring me the tea you promised."

The girl slipped off the table and darted across the room, returning a few minutes later with a cup of tea and a few biscuits.

"I can't stop," she panted. "Old Goggles has been giving me the bird;" and with that she was gone.

It was a quarter to seven before John Dene returned. Without a word he threw his hat on the bookcase and seated himself at his table. For the next quarter of an hour he was absorbed in reading the lists and letters Dorothy had typed. At seven o'clock Dorothy placed the last list on the table before him.

"Is there anything more, Mr. Dene?" she enquired. She was conscious of feeling inexpressibly weary.

"Yes," said John Dene, without looking up. "You're coming out to have some dinner."

"I'm afraid I can't, thank you," she said. "My mother is waiting."

"Oh shucks!" he cried, looking up quickly.

"But it isn't!" she said wearily.

"Isn't what?" demanded John Dene.

"Shucks!" she said; then, seeing the absurdity of the thing, she laughed.

"We'll send your mother an express message or a wire. You look dead beat." He smiled and Dorothy capitulated. It would be nice, she told herself, not to have to go all the way to Chiswick before having anything to eat.

"But where are you taking me, Mr. Dene?" enquired Dorothy, as they turned from Waterloo Place into Pall Mall.

"To the Ritzton."

"But I'm – I'm – " she stopped dead.

"What's wrong?" he demanded, looking at her in surprise.

"I – I can't go there," she stammered. "I'm not dressed for – " She broke off lamely.

"That'll be all right," he said. "It's my hotel."

"It may be your hotel," said Dorothy, resuming the walk, "but I don't care to go there in a blouse and a skirt to be stared at."

"Who'll stare at you?"

"Not at me, at my clothes," she corrected.

"Then we'll go to the grill-room," he replied with inspiration.

"That might be – " She hesitated.

"You're not going home until you have something to eat," he announced with determination.

"You look all used up," he added.

Dorothy submitted to the inevitable, conscious of a feeling of content at having someone to decide things for her. Suddenly she remembered Marjorie Rogers' remarks. What was she doing? If any of the girls saw her they would – She had done the usual thing, sent a telegram to her mother to say she should be late, and was dining out with her chief on the first day – Oh! it was horrible.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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