see them in their green uniforms in the villages about Schlatz—appeared at the Lynx's elbow. He had a holster on his belt, and a lighted lantern dangled from his left hand. "Your papers, please!" he said in a stern, official voice.

There was an ominous pause. It was broken by a terrific report, so close at hand that it made my ears sing. Crying "Ah!" in a voice shrill with surprise, the gendarme toppled forward and fell. The car rocked with the impact of his body as it struck the running-board.

"Up with the barrier, quick, Moritz!" said a sleek voice at my side, and I saw the Doctor leaning forward with a smoking pistol in his hand. Hardly had he spoken, however, than, with tremendous roar, an orange flame streaked the darkness about us and, with a grunt, the Doctor collapsed in a heap at my feet.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE STORY OF MARSTON-GORE

A WHISTLE trilled clamorously. Without an instant's delay, Nigel was out of the car. By the glow of our lamps blazing on the lowered railway barrier I saw him on the road with his arms held out to me, behind him a low iron fence enclosing a fir plantation. It was only a fleeting glimpse, for in the same moment the head-lights were switched off, and the utter blackness of a moonless night in the open countryside dropped down upon the scene. Another shot went crashing out, and a piteous voice, shrill with fear, was screeching. "Nicht, schiessen!" as I sprang into Nigel's arms. He swung me clear of the railing and dropped me on my feet among the shrubs, then vaulted over himself.

He dived forward on his face and hands, and on all
fours began to worm his way between the low trees, I following. Neither of us looked back. A tremendous hubbub was going on about the stranded car.

The plantation was quite small. Thirty yards, and we emerged upon the fence on the farther side, the flat fields beyond. Nigel sprang over and helped me across. Lights were moving on the road we had left. An infuriated voice was crying: “This way! One went this way!” With a brief glance at the stars, Nigel grasped my hand, and we set off at a run across the open country.

That was a nightmare course in the dark. All about us was the flat plain, in which the dim outline of the hill, above which Cleves clambers to its ancient Schloss on the summit, was the only feature. Not a wood, not a valley, to hide us: I felt that we were as conspicuous as flies on a ceiling.

The going was terribly rough: over stubble with the ghostly shapes of corn-stooks all about; in and out of the sun-hardened furrows of vast vegetable gardens; across thistle pasturage. Everywhere were little irrigation channels, dry, for the most part, at this season, into which we continually stumbled. Twice we had to make a detour to avoid a village, and there were innumerable plantations, four-square and close-set with baby trees, similar to that which had screened our flight, which we went round, rather than again force a way between the prickly firs in the dark.

Neither of us had any breath to speak. We must have been going for a full hour, and the Eastern sky had already begun to lighten, when a dark mass loomed out of the dimness ahead. “The Reichswald!” said Nigel.

We paused for a breathing spell. Nigel looked up at the sky. Already it was possible to discern objects in our immediate vicinity. He shook his head sagely. “I daren’t risk it,” he remarked. “I’ve not approached the
THE STORY OF MARSTON-GORE

Reichswald from this side before, and I’ve got to pick up my bearings yet. I shall never manage it in the dark. This is an enormous forest, you know, more than forty miles square, and we can’t afford to lose our way. We shall have to go to ground for the day, that’s about the size of it. Never mind, my dear, our troubles are nearly over.” He jerked his head in a backward direction. “We’re well out of that mess, it seems to me. . . .”

“Oh, Nigel,” I said, “it was ghastly!”

He nodded moodily. “Your real German criminal is a murderous beast. However, we mustn’t complain. That gendarme was looking for us, you know. If the Doctor hadn’t pulled a gun . . . I’m sorry about the policeman, though: these gendarmes are mostly thundering good chaps. Of course there were two of ’em posted at the crossing. When one went down, t’other opened fire. And then, to judge by the row, others in reserve came on the scene. I wonder if the Lynx and Moritz got away? I hope to goodness they did. The Doctor and the bag of tools are quite enough to distract attention from us; but I wouldn’t bet on the discretion of the Lynx and his pal if they’ve fallen into the hands of the police . . . .”

“How much do they know about us?”

“Only what Lola told them, and she knows nothing, either. She simply gave them to understand, I gather, that I was in trouble and anxious to clear out of the country: they probably think that we’re deserters from military service. Clubfoot, of course, would guess the truth in the wink of an eye; but by the time the story reaches his ears we shall be in safety. . . .”

While he was speaking, we had resumed our weary trudge. The road we were now following presently became a cart-track striking across a fallow field to merge eventually in a black belt of trees. The track drove deep into the forest, debouching, at last, upon a mossy glade,
high-banked and dim, along which we went for perhaps a mile until we lighted upon another trail running right and left. We took the left-hand road, and when it ended, the left-hand turn again, travelling always with a left-hand slant or, as Nigel said, in a south-westerly direction.

Sunrise, which overtook us in that verdant place, was entrancing. Every leaf sparkled: the forest rang with the chorus of the birds; and the first shafts of light, falling between the solemn tree-trunks, spread a stencilled pattern of foliage on the spongy rides we tramped. There were strange rustlings in the undergrowth. A stoat skipped across the path; squirrels peeped, bright-eyed, from amongst the gnarled roots of the ancient oaks and beeches; and once we caught a glimpse of a dappled hind standing between the boles, with head uplifted warily. The soft air was impregnated with the forest fragrance, the clean smell of dry leaves, resin, and damp moss.

We were threading a track which seemed, by the coarse grass which had sprung up between the ruts, to be little used, when Nigel stayed me with a hand on my arm. "I heard a distant rattling sound." I looked in the direction to which he silently pointed, and saw a horse and cart slowly moving between the trees. They were a considerable distance away, and it was impossible to distinguish whether the figure at the horse's head, enveloped in a sort of long cloak, was a man or a woman.

In an instant we were behind the nearest trunk. Crouching there, we watched until the horse and cart had passed out of sight. Evidently we had not been seen. "But," Nigel declared, "it's a sign that it's time we went to earth." Accordingly, we left the path and made our way between the trees until the forest grew denser. Presently, we came upon a nook, a rough triangle formed by the enormous trunks of two fallen elms, where, it seemed, we might lie safely hid in the event of any further
interruption. There we flung ourselves down at full length side by side, our backs against the fallen tree, the blue sky overhead, and relaxed our exhausted limbs.

"Olivia," said Nigel suddenly, "are you asleep?"

I opened my eyes. The sun was high in the heavens. The forest was as still as a church. The very birds seemed drowsy with the heat; all except one, an obstinate fellow, who seemed so pleased with his imitation of two stones knocking together, that he kept on repeating it. I must have dozed. We had been talking about our plans. Nigel was still unfamiliar with his surroundings. His idea was that, in the noontide hour, when the charcoal burners, who, he said, were the only people we were likely to meet, were at their dinner, he would steal out and reconnoitre.

"No," I said in reply to his question, smiling at him affectionately. Somehow I was very happy to be thus alone with him in this world-forgotten spot. It was as though the hush of the woods drew us nearer together.

"I want to tell you a story," he went on, his blue eyes looking intently into mine, "and ask you a question."

I knew what was in his mind. I put my hand on his brown one. "Ask me the question first," I bade him.

He glanced aside. "I haven't the right... until you've heard the story."

"Isn't that for me to say?"

Once more his eyes sought mine. Behind his eagerly questioning regard I was conscious of the abject unhappiness which once before, that evening in the garret when I had taunted him with his past, I had discerned in his expression. "Nigel," I said, "you break my heart when you look like that. Oh, my dear, you're a very reluctant lover. Do you want me to ask you your question?"

For an instant his face shone. But almost at once his eyes clouded over again and he shook his head. "You
couldn't marry a man who 'd been in gaol?' His mouth was bitter.

"I'd marry you," I told him, and smiled into the troubled face on a level with my own, "that is, if I were asked."

"Do you mean that?" he demanded, so sternly that the smile left my lips.

I found it hard to answer when he gazed at me so intently. "Women have intuitive instincts about men, they say. I never believed you were a thief, Nigel. You mustn't think of the cruel things I said that night. I was worn out and cross and... and... well, I didn't understand about Ottilie then."

"My dear, I know that," he put in gently.

"But even if you were, I'd marry you just the same!"

He gripped my hand fiercely. "Olivia, is it true?"

I bowed my head. "Just as true," I whispered, "as what I told you last night. And what you told me."

"Oh, my dear," he muttered brokenly, "ever since I took up this work on my release from gaol I've never cared whether I came back from a mission alive. But this time, please God, we'll go home safely together. And now I'll tell you something I've never confided to a living soul."

He paused, and in the silence I heard the chatter of that industrious bird reverberating out of the tangled green about us above all manner of drowsy insect sounds.

"I didn't steal old Whirter's cup," he said at last.

"But, though I took the blame, my disgrace was the consequence of my own actions. Marston-Gore is my real name. I changed it to Druce, which was my mother's maiden name, when I came out of prison. I was a subaltern in the Indian Army. I didn't have much money, but I had a pretty good time; women, racing, polo, a bit of shooting; you know the sort of life. As long as I was
in India, I managed to keep my head above water; but I exchanged into a British regiment, and when I came home, gosh, it was a different story. It wasn’t long before I had to go to the Jews and raise money on some expectations of mine. Soon I was in fairly deep all round. The prosecution brought up these transactions at the trial; and they settled my hash all right. . . ."

He fell silent for a spell, tearing at the golden blooms of a head of gorse.

"There was a woman in it, of course," he resumed slowly. "I met her in India. Her husband was a box wallah—you know, an English merchant—not a bad sort, but much older than she was, and dull, and absorbed in his business. I’m not saying this to excuse myself, but just because it’s part of the story. It wasn’t the first affair of the kind I had had by any means. But with her it was different. She was quite young and very pretty, and, until we met, her life had been quiet. India’s a hotbed of the most ghastly snobbery; and anyway her husband hadn’t contrived to get into the amusing set. I took her round, got her asked out a bit and all that. And then . . . But I needn’t go into that.

"At any rate, when I left India, I persuaded her to follow me home. There was no scandal: the pretext was that her two small children had to go to school. I wanted to marry her, but she wouldn’t hear of it. She was fond of her children and afraid of losing them. She was always terrified of her husband finding out about us. . . ."

He broke off suddenly, his head raised, listening. "Did you hear that?" Out of the forest depths a bell tolled faintly. "I thought I heard it before; but I was only half awake at the time. There it is again!" Three more strokes came to us distantly on the warm air. Nigel glanced at his watch. "Twelve o’clock; it’s the Angelus. There must be a convent somewhere round here,"
Once more the bell sounded thrice. Then silence descended again, and Nigel resumed his story.

"She had a flat in Knightsbridge and went about a great deal. I was stationed out of London, but I was in town every week. It sometimes struck me that she must spend a lot of money; but her husband was pretty well off, and she had always seemed to have anything she wanted. And then one day, when I was with her at the flat, she produced this gold cup, and asked me to raise money on it for her. She was quite casual about it. She said she was overdrawn at the bank and didn't care to worry her husband: he hated her to exceed her allowance, she said. But she had to have £300 to settle some pressing debts. She didn't know how one raised money on anything: would I undertake the transaction as though it were for myself and hand her the proceeds?"

"Did she explain how the cup came into her possession?" I put in.

"That was the first thing I asked her, for, you see, I recognised the cup. Sir Charles Whirter was a rich old josser living down in Hampshire. She had met him somewhere, and he was very sweet on her. She had made him ask me down to his place with her for a couple of weekends, and I had seen this pot, an eighteenth-century French goblet and a lovely thing, in his collection. She told me he had given it to her. There was nothing unusual in that, for he was always making magnificent presents to women he liked. I told her she was a fool to accept such a valuable gift, but she laughed and said it was nothing to him; he had plenty more in his collection. To make a long story short, I did as she asked. My Jermyn Street Jew advanced me £300 on the pot."

"Had she stolen it?"

He nodded. "Unquestionably. But to me she held out to the end that old Whirter had given it to her."
"Didn't she come forward and say so at the trial?"
He made a little pause. "She went back to India before the case came on," he said.
"Oh, my dear..."
"I had no luck. It appeared that this cup was a unique specimen, a museum piece. My moneylender showed it about, and it was seen by a King Street dealer, who made inquiries. It was only then that old Whiter discovered his loss: you know the slack way some of these country-house collections are kept. I had spent two week-ends with him: he had shown me his collection himself: I had pledged the cup: I was in debt: naturally, I was arrested."
"And you never told them the truth?"
"How could I? When I was on bail, before the police court proceedings, I saw her, and she promised to explain everything to Sir Charles and get him to withdraw the prosecution. She didn't tell me that she had already booked her passage, and that by the time I appeared at Marlborough Street she would be on her way back to India. Without her no one would have believed my story, even if I had been willing to speak. But I felt in part responsible for her downfall. I had taken her away from her husband: I had persuaded her to come to England: I had contributed to the development of the abnormal traits that were in her. For she was just a thief, Olivia, a plain crook. I didn't know it then, but I found out afterwards. Things were missed at country houses where she had stayed: she narrowly avoided prosecution for swindling one of the big stores. Vivian Abbott knew a bit about her and tried to make me speak. But I could do nothing without her, and so I held my peace."
There was a moment's silence between us. Then,
"Nigel," I said, "what has become of her now?"
"She's dead."
"Did you ever see her again?"
He shook his head. "She never even wrote."
"Did you?"
"No. I let her go. Afterwards her husband divorced her over another man. Then she went to the devil altogether. She was killed last year with a Rumanian in a motor smash on the Grande Corniche."
I could not trust myself to look at him. "I hate myself when I think of what I said to you," I whispered.
"Oh, my dear, why couldn't you have told me then?"
His smile was wistful. "Because I'd buried the past. I learnt in prison to see Marston-Gore in his true light, and I wasn't very proud of him. I went into the Secret Service to try to make a new life for myself: that was Vivian's doing, God bless him! I was brought up in Germany, and, before I took this toss, I had been on one or two stunts for the Intelligence, following Divisional and Brigade manoeuvres on the quiet: you know, plain clothes and a push-bike. When I came out of prison, six months ago, it was Vivie—we were in India together before he went into the Intelligence, and he stuck to me through my trouble like a brick—who persuaded the old man to give me a chance. They tried me out on a couple of jobs in Germany—that's how I come to know this part of the country—and I didn't do too badly. I liked the work; it took my mind off myself—and I intended to make a career of it. I shall never get my commission back, of course, unless . . ."—his eyes shone—"unless war breaks out, and there's something worth while to do. Marston-Gore is dead and buried; but His Majesty might find a job of work for Druce." His arm went about me. "If you're still of the same mind, Olivia dear, I give you fair warning, you must be prepared to marry Druce."
I smiled at him happily. "You can call yourself Grundt for all the difference it makes to me," I answered.
He drew me to him. "Oh, sweetheart," he said, "you give me back my life. I never dreamed the world contained a woman who could make me forget the bitterness of the past. Olivia darling, tell me again that you care. . . ."

"Nigel," I whispered, "I think I loved you from that first day when I met you on the stairs at Bale's. . . ."

At that moment a dull, whirring noise, like the droning of some enormous insect, floated down to us from the patch of blue sky above our heads. We both looked aloft. High in the air an aeroplane, very white in the brilliant sunlight, soared majestically above the tree-tops.

CHAPTER XXXIV

"A FOOL, A FOOL, I MET A FOOL I' THE FOREST . . ."

We exchanged a glance. Nigel's face was perturbed. "I say," he murmured, "I don't like that. . . ."

"You don't think he's looking for us, do you?"

"I wonder. The nearest aeroplane station is Wesel, where there's a big garrison. Of course, with all these war rumours about, they may only be patrolling the frontier. Still . . . ."

Swiftly the machine passed out of sight. The note of the propeller grew fainter. Nigel jumped up and helped me to my feet. "Everything seems quiet," he said. "I'm going to have a prowl round. If this lad is looking for us, the sooner we get under cover the better. In the very heart of the forest, near a sort of ravine known as Charlemagne's Ride, there are some caves. We'd be quite snug there, if only I can pick up my bearings. . . ."

He broke off listening. The 'plane was no longer audible. He took me in his arms and kissed me. "Don't be anxious if I'm rather long away. There are two main roads