excused Brothlier Josef, who usually blows the organ for me," he whispered, "and you shall take his place. 'See, it is quite easy. . . ." His big hands laid hold of a shaft projecting from the side of the organ, and drove it rhythmically up and down, then he made me try. "We shan't require the organ until Benediction," he explained. "Kneel down there meanwhile. You can follow Compline in the English Prayer-Book I gave Brother Josef. Here. . . ." He placed an open book in my hand. "Don't come any farther than this: you might be seen from below. I'm going to light the candles. . . ."

He paddled away. A dull radiance illuminated the front of the gallery. Its reflected light glanced athwart the large print of the breviary, Latin and English, which lay open on the prie-dieu before me. In the choir a sonorous voice was intoning the opening of Compline. I started as my eye fell upon the English version of the Collect: its theme was so apposite to my plight:

"Brethren, be sober and watch. For your adversary the devil goeth about like a raging lion, seeking whom he may devour. Whom do ye, strong in faith, resist. But Thou, O Lord, have mercy on us!" The voice ended, and the rolling bass of the friars-struck the echoes from the dimness as they made response: "Deo gratias!"

And then, as another voice began to intone the Psalms, I heard a heavy, halting step on the flags of the chapel below. I glanced down. Half-way up the aisle, hat in hand, irresolute, Clubfoot stood, leaning on his stick.

CHAPTER XXXV

IN THE CAPUCHIN CHAPEL

It was only a momentary glimpse, for the next moment he had stepped out of my range of vision. As in a dream
I heard the Office out, through the stentorian chant of the Psalms, swinging, verse by verse, from one side to the other of the choir, and the rustling silence thereafter, on the lector intoning the Pater Noster, to the end. Then, somehow or other, I was at the bellows handle, filling Brother Josef’s lowly part, while before the altar, ablaze with light, vested ministers moved about the chancel, the smoke of incense eddied upward to the dark roof, and the organ pealed. And so to the close of Benediction when, to a soft tolling in the tower above me and the musical clash of altar bells in the sanctuary, the glittering monstrance was upraised in the solemn hush of heads bowed in adoration. Presently, while the organ softly played, the coped ministers filed out, a cowled cortège behind; sabots clattered on the flags as the little congregation dispersed; a friar silently extinguished the altar lights; and the chapel was once more dim and deserted. The organ ceased; and Pater Vedastus was at my side.

"Father," I whispered, "that man who entered during the service, did you notice him? He has come in search of me. . . ."

The Pater put a finger to his lips. "I guessed as much. Brother Hippolytus, our porter, fetched the Father Guardian out of the choir after Benediction. Our Most Reverend Father and the stranger are now talking together at the bottom of the chapel. Ps-st. . . ."

He raised a hand in warning, and I heard the scrape of feet within the tower. Without a word, Pater Vedastus moved swiftly to the back of the organ and, groping there, plucked open a low door framed between the soaring pipes. He signed to me to go inside: I crept through; and he closed the door after me.

My funk-hole was pitch-dark and reeking of dust and dry rot. I could not stand erect. The door was merely a means of access to the interior of the instrument, I
assumed, for the purpose of cleaning and repairs. As I crouched there I suddenly heard a voice, cool and authoritative, speaking within a foot of my head.

"Pater," it said, "this gentleman is from the Berlin police. He has come by aeroplane from Berlin in search of two fugitives from justice, a man and a girl, implicated in this dreadful affair at Cleves last night. You were working out of doors this afternoon. Did you remark any suspicious-looking strangers?"

A harsh voice now broke in, a well-remembered voice whose mere sound sent shivers of terror coursing along my spine. "They may have separated. When we were flying over this part of the forest in the early afternoon we observed two figures hiding in a thicket. On our return over the same spot only one was to be seen. That must have been the girl, for, at the Gendarmerie headquarters at Cleves just now, they told me that towards four o'clock this afternoon the man was sighted near Charlemagne's Ride on the far side of the forest. They lost track of him again, but they are quite positive that he was alone. The girl must still be in these parts. But for that damned fool of a pilot who lost me a good two hours by insisting on returning to Wesel to land, we'd have rounded her up by this. Have you seen anything of her, a tall, dark wench? Speak up, man, I'm in a hurry!"

There was a pause: then the deep tones of Pater Vedastus, cold and lifeless, made answer: "I have seen no woman, Herr!"

"You understand, of course"—the Father Superior, or whatever Pater Vedastus had called him, now intervened—"that no woman has access to our enclosure. . . ."

Clubfoot laughed stridently. "Possibly. But there's reason to believe that this woman is dressed as a man. . . ."

"You saw no man, Vedastus," the suave voice demanded, "who might have been a woman in disguise?"
Once more there was a pause. Then, "No, Reverend Father!" the monk made answer.

"The Community are assembled for the evening meal," said the Superior. "If you desire to question any of them..."

There was a moment's silence. I was trembling: would Clubfoot insist on searching the organ loft? But then I heard him grunt and say: "Take me to your refectory. But you'd better warn your Fathers that I'll stand for no lies..."

"In the house of St. Francis you'll hear nothing but the truth," the Superior replied with icy dignity; and it seemed to me that, on the other side of the partition, some one had heaved a deep sigh. "Are you coming, Vedastus?" the speaker added.

"With permission, Most Reverend Father," was the respectful answer, "I have our music to put away, and the lights to extinguish."

"Then lend me your taper. The stair is dark..." A heavy limp thumped the flooring; the footsteps died away.

After what appeared to be an eternity of waiting I saw a rim of light about the entrance to my hiding-place, and the door swung back. Pater Vedastus stood there, beckoning me out. He spoke no word, but led the way down the corkscrew steps and through a little lobby at the bottom into the twilight gloom of the church. There he stopped before me, his sleeves covering his hands, his eyes cast down.

I had expected reproaches, but he made none: "My daughter," he said, and his voice was sad and humble, "if you would save yourself, you will make for the frontier without delay. It is not three kilomètres from here by the forest track. By this your companion is far away, if he has not already been taken. I will give you the key
of the forest door by which Brother Josef admitted you. Do not fail to lock it behind you; you can push the key under it. Now pay attention to what I say! Opposite the forest door you will see a path leading through the woods. Five minutes’ walk along it will bring you to a road, the continuation of the road which runs past the monastery on the other side of the garden. Never mind about the road, but cross it and continue along the path. After about two kilometres it divides at a birch copse. Take the left-hand fork: it leads to a farmyard gate. The frontier line passes through this farm. Go through the yard, and when you have reached the farmhouse, you will be in Holland. The farmer, Jan van Rossum, a Dutchman, is a friend of mine. If you mention my name, he will give you a bed for the night. You can trust him; he has no tenderness for the Germans. But you must not start until it is certain that our lame visitor has left. Wait here for me a little, since we are no longer in the enclosure, and if any one should come, hide in the tower lobby.”

I dropped to my knees. “Father,” I whispered, “I have deceived you. But what is worse, I made you tell a lie for my sake. I can’t abuse your generosity any further unless you tell me I am forgiven.”

“Don’t kneel to me, my child,” he answered gently. “I stand in need of forgiveness far more than you. More than twenty years of my manhood I have passed in this peaceful retreat, priding myself on my freedom from the temptations of the world. But God in His Infinite Wisdom has seen fit to chasten my arrogance and self-complacency. He has decreed that in my old age I should cause our holy rule to be broken and lie to our Superior in Christ. I bear you no resentment, my daughter, for, had you told me the truth in the beginning—to my shame I confess it here, before the Blessed Sacrament—I doubt if I should have acted otherwise. . . .” He clasped his
hand together and, with head bowed down, pressed his lips upon his joined fingers. "As yet I have no contrition for what I did," he murmured brokenly. "Pray for me, my daughter, and perhaps God will hold it to my account that before I became a Capuchin in Germany, I was a naval officer." With that he drew his cowl before his eyes and vanished through the tower door.

The tears were streaming down my face as I rose from my knees. The conflict of emotion revealed in his outburst had touched me profoundly. I was distraught, too, with fears for Nigel, and oppressed by the prospect of attempting the flight across the frontier alone.

And then a figure, close-hooded, glided out from behind a pillar and stood at my side.

I had to make a tremendous effort not to scream. But at the same instant the cowl was dropped, and I found myself staring with incredulous eyes into a familiar face. Its cheerful grin was altogether out of keeping with the monkish robe. "Stout fellow, your friend," Nigel observed. "He gives me a good feel..."

"Nigel," I whispered, "I can hardly believe it's you. They said you were miles away..."

"So I was," he retorted, "and a devilish stiff run I had for it, to get back to where I left you. Towards Charlemagne's Ride the woods were fairly creeping with the greencoats. When I found you had gone, I started to prospect, and, after dodging another line of beaters, fetched up on the road which runs past the monastery. From behind a corn-stook I saw Clubfoot pass in a car, and it occurred to me that he might be better informed as to your whereabouts than I was. So I followed him until I reached the monastery and saw his car standing outside on the road. I nipped into the church..."—he pointed behind him—"by the public entrance. It was just before the service and, seeing that no one was about, I helped
myself to this habit which I found hanging on a hook in
the sacristy, and hid in one of the side-chapels. I've been
there ever since. Then, when you appeared . . .”
He broke off as a tall, cowled figure loomed up in the
sanctuary and genuflected before the altar. Swiftly Nigel
drew me back into the shadow under the organ gallery.
“ ‘It’s Father Vedastus,’” I said, and went to meet him.
As the Father came down the aisle I saw that a long
brown cloak hung over his arm, and that he carried a paper
package in his hands. On catching sight of the monkish
silhouette behind me, he stopped dead.
“ ‘Father,’” I cried softly, “it’s my friend. He’s found
me after all!” I looked round. Nigel approached.
“ ‘This is Nigel Druce,’” I explained.
Pater Vedastus was smiling. “So that’s where
Brother Antonius’s habit went to,” he remarked drily.
“The dear old man took it off to sweep out the sacristy.
He is telling everybody that the devil must have flown
away with it. But if, as I presume,” he went on, address-
ing Nigel, “you propose to accompany this lady across the
frontier, the habit will serve you well. The members of
the Community are familiar figures in this part of the
Reichswald, and in the robe of the Order you are less likely
to attract attention. See, I have brought a cloak for your
friend.” He handed me the cloak, hooded and of heavy
brown serge like his habit. “ ‘You can leave the things
with van Rossum,’” he suggested. “ ‘And here’”—he gave
Nigel the paper package—“I have put up such scraps of
meat and bread as I could find! I fear you must be
famished, both of you. . . .”
Nigel stowed the parcel away in his pocket. “ ‘We can
never thank you enough, sir,’” he said warmly.
The Capuchin sighed. “ ‘It must be nearly five-and-
twenty years since anybody called me ‘Sir,’” he observed
pensively. He handed me a great key which he drew from
his sleeve. "The key of the forest door," he announced. "The lame gentleman has taken his departure, the Community have retired for the night, and all seems quiet in the forest. I've explained to your friend," he continued, turning to Nigel, "exactly how to reach the frontier. I must warn you that, during the last few days, patrols of troops have been seen in the forest. But they keep mostly to the roads, and if you follow out my instructions, you should get across without great difficulty. Now be off with you, my children, and God speed you on your journey!"

Then Nigel spoke up: "You've gone the limit in helping us, sir," he declared, "but we've got to consider your position a little. This man, Grundt, who was here to-night, is a terrible enemy. We don't budge from here, Miss Dunbar and I, until you're safely back in your cell, with a good substantial alibi."

Pater Vedastus shook his head ruefully. "I'm afraid the rule of St. Francis takes no account of alibis," he rejoined. "I shall go to the Father Superior to-morrow and make a clean breast of the matter."

Nigel stuck out his chin. "That's your affair, sir. Grundt is mine. I shouldn't presume to interfere in your dealings with your spiritual skipper...."

The Pater started and gazed severely at the speaker. "So you were eavesdropping?"

"I'm afraid I couldn't help myself," Nigel replied.

The bearded face relaxed. "Then you will understand my interest," said the Father. "Tell me, is England going to fight?"

Nigel shrugged his shoulders. "This week-end should have decided it. The First Fleet, mobilised for manoeuvres was due to disperse. If the dispersal orders have been cancelled, I take it that the Cabinet intends to stand by France."
Pater Vedastus was strangely excited. "Have you read this morning's paper?" he demanded.

"I haven't seen a newspaper since Saturday."

"Hold that!" He thrust the taper he carried into Nigel's hand and, delving into a hidden pocket of his habit, dredged up a German newspaper. "I took morning Mass at Materborn village church to-day," he explained, "and the Küster—how do you say that? my English is so rusty; ah yes, the sacristan—gave me this paper."

He unfolded the journal and handed it to Nigel, pointing to a paragraph with his finger. In a hushed voice Nigel read out:

"'London. Sunday night. Official. Orders have been given to the First Fleet, now concentrated at Portland, not to disperse for manœuvre leave for the present. All ships of the Second Fleet are remaining at their home ports in proximity to their balance crews.'"

Nigel crushed the paper up in his hands. His hands were shaking and his face was pale with excitement. "Poor old Vivian!" he murmured. "So we pulled it off, after all!"

"You think it means war, then?" the friar inquired.

Nigel started out of a brown study. "Yes, unless Germany and Austria give way..."

Pater Vedastus sighed. "How excited the ward-rooms must be! Twenty-two years' service I had to my record with the Fleet when I heard the call of the religious life, and I never saw a shot fired in all that time." He relapsed into abstracted silence. "But you mustn't delay, my children," he said presently. "It's time you were off. I shall not forget you in my Masses, and you,"—almost for the first time since we had left the organ loft his eyes rested on my face—"remember, you promised to pray for me!"

Nigel was gazing intently at the Capuchin. His eyes
were very blue. "Father," he declared very earnestly, and I noticed that he no longer called him 'Sir.' "Father, this lady here has promised to marry me. Would you, that is to say . . ."—he stumbled over his words—"before we say good-bye to you, I want you to hear us exchange that promise—I have a special reason for asking—and perhaps give us your blessing, if you will. . . ."

I stared at him in wonder. I had never discerned any trace of religious feeling in him before. Besides, what could be the "special reason" of which he spoke?

He turned to me, "Olivia, you don't object?"

He was so eager that I let him have his way. "Not if it will make you happier, Nigel," I answered.

The Father's bass chimed in. "My son," he asked, "are either of you Catholics?"

"No," was the firm reply, "but I've set my heart on this. We haven't yet reached the end of our journey, and you will bless us, as the knights of old were blessed when they went forth to war. We shan't desecrate your blessing, shall we, Olivia?" He put his hand in mine and led me forward. "I, Nigel Druce, do solemnly promise to take you, Olivia Dunbar, as my wedded wife. Do you, Olivia, promise to take me for your husband?"

The scene was strangely impressive. The brooding silence of the little chapel draped itself about us. Above our heads the last rays of daylight kindled the colours in the stained-glass windows, but below all was sombre, and the friar's tall figure was blurred by the shadows of the aisle. I was moved in spite of myself, and it was in a husky voice that I responded: "Yes."

Then, hand in hand, we knelt. Raising his large hand aloft, the Capuchin made the sign of the Cross over us, and blessed us in a whisper:

"Benedicat vos Omnipotens Deus, Pater, et Filius, et Spiritus Sanctus. Amen."
THE BAFFLING OF THE BEAST

"And now, sir," said Nigel, as we rose up, "please go to your cell. We can find our way out alone."

"So be it," he replied. "May Almighty God have you two in His keeping! And ask Him in your prayers that I may be guided aright in the difficult times that stand before." Rather shyly he put out his hand, and Nigel grasped it. Then, with an abrupt motion, the Pater turned about, his sandals clacked softly on the flags of the nave, and the gloom of the sanctuary swallowed up the gaunt and lonely figure.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE BAFFLING OF THE BEAST

It was getting on for half-past nine when at length we stole forth from the chapel. The solemn hush of dusk rested over the monastery garden. The bats were twinkling to and fro, and in front of the little burial-ground the cypresses with their looped-up branches stood out like the furled umbrellas of some Eastern pageant against the greenly glowing sky. To any one who had observed the two hooded figures flit noiselessly along the twilit path to that inconspicuous door in the garden wall, we must have seemed like the wraiths of departed friars escaped from the tomb.

In the forest it was already quite dark, but we could distinguish the path opposite the gate snaking its way whitely under the trees. Nigel was moody and absorbed. I could see that something had upset him, although I found myself at a loss to fathom the cause of his depression. The news we had read in the paper surely proved that the copy of our precious report had reached London: whatever happened to us now, Nigel had, at any rate, fulfilled his mission, and I should have looked to find him exulting in our success.