



DUAL CONTROL

by E.W. GHESS

*One pilot passed to the tune of tapping drums, another fell with crimson flame to mark his end.
But behind the Front was a strange rendezvous for the ghosts that walked the war night.*

TWENTY MILES TO THE EAST, British soldiers labored to bolster the trenches of Lens against the long-awaited Hindenburg break-through. But on this field there was no scurrying. Here, British soldiers stood immovable, in silence, in a square, two ranks deep, and their eyes looked out dully upon the four men who stood in the center.

One had no cap upon his head. To him another was reading:

“... and the court-martial has found you guilty, Martin Plale, and the decision held forth by your judges has been made in faith with God and King. You are no longer an officer. . . .”

The drone of his words was swallowed by the

fateful sound of drums, and the hatless one hung his head.

His hands hung loosely from his sides. His breath came slowly, catching midway, as the speaker, the paper pocketed, sheared one after another the buttons from his tunic. The pips on his shoulder straps were clipped away. A silver cross was pulled from his breast.

The drums rumbled on. Sweat rolled down the faces of the men who made up the square. Each was thanking his stars that he was not Martin Hale.

“About turn!”

Martin Hale wheeled alone.

“Forward, march! . . . Left, right; left, right; left, right. . . .”

And a man was being drummed out of the service. Martin Hale, with his head lowered, was taking step after step. All the rest were left behind, the men who still served, while the drums rolled like the rhythmic patter of rain.

"I'm glad he ain't me."

"I'm glad."

He was far away, but the shadow of the tragic thing still fell upon the men who stood there. They were dismissed, but some lingered. In little groups of two's and three's they stood about the landing field.

"They tell me Martin Hale was a Yank."

"I rather think he is. It's a bit hard on one of our blighters. Isn't so hard on a Yankee."

"They tell me he was a posh pilot."

"I don't know quite."

"Well, he ain't getting the M.C. of the King for nothing, I'll tell you that."

MARTIN HALE became a man without a country.

He had been found guilty of desertion. He had been found guilty of insubordination. England's back was against the wall, and few men were thinking wisely then. Their ears were stuffed with misfortune. They hardly heard the plea of compassion for Martin Hale. English justice was done.

Two weeks passed. Within a room at the house at 237 Rue Caborn, Paris, sat a man whose hair was gray, whose eyes glowed dully. About his mouth was the semblance of a smile. It was always there. It was the single thing which gave countenance to the gracious manner of Colonel John Hays.

The door opened. An orderly came in. "A young man to see you, sir. He said his name is Martin Hale."

Colonel Hays showed his pleasure. "Tell him to come in."

The orderly left. Martin Hale came in. He was young, not more than twenty. He was thin. His shoulders stooped slightly. His face was hollow just under the cheekbones. He was nervous.

Colonel Hays got up from his seat. "Well, well—" Suddenly the smile fell away from his face. "Your uniform! What are you doing in civilians?"

"I've been cashiered."

"Cashiered! No!"

"I am."

Colonel Hays shook his head in bewilderment.

"What was the trouble, Martin?"

Hale sighed.

"Plenty, I guess. But not as bad as they made it.

Overstayed leave a week. When they came for me I wouldn't go. I didn't want to go."

"Family know about it?"

"No."

"They'll learn."

"Not if I don't tell them."

"But, Martin, you can't live in France now. What can you do? Why you'll starve."

"I'm getting used to that."

Colonel Hays' eyes moved over the face of the boy. "Why you look starved!"

"I came to you, Colonel, because I didn't know where else to go. I walked back—got to Paris last night."

"You can stay here. I'll keep you as long as I can. What then?"

"I don't know. I only wanted to get here because I knew you'd be friendly."

Colonel Hays walked across the floor, rang the bell. The orderly came in.

"Take Mr. Hale to the mess. He's been on Special Service. I think he's hungry."

"Yes, sir."

Martin Hale looked at him gratefully. Special Service! A grim smile came to his face. But some reason had to be given. Men in dirty civilian clothes couldn't often come into the office of Colonel Hays.

He left with the orderly, crossed the square at the side of the house. He ate ravenously.

Half an hour later he returned.

THE Colonel sat behind his desk. His head raised slowly.

"The last word I got from your father," he said, "was that you had got five Huns and the Military Cross."

"Yes."

"What possessed the English to cashier you for what you did?"

"There was a fight, an argument about coming back. A mess. It got into the London papers. Something had to be done about it I guess."

The Colonel leaned forward and talked. Martin Hale listened intently. Colonel Hays concluded:

"Nobody knows about it but this office. It happened only yesterday. His name was Hammond. He landed in a forest north of Paris and nothing was found but a few burned struts. Everything else went up in smoke."

"Yes."

“He was flying for Issoudun, and no one knew him there. I don’t see any reason why he shouldn’t continue to go.

“Was he an American?”

“I’ve got his card here. He was born in Fort Worth, Texas.”

“But I don’t know very much about the American Army.”

“You don’t have to know much. Just use your head.”

A smile flashed over Martin Hale’s face. “Do you mean it, Colonel?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll get away with it. I know I can. I must have been crazy when I did the other thing. Say, I’ll be glad!”

“We’ll see about clothing tomorrow.”

“An American officer! Lieutenant again! Sounds funny.”

That evening Martin Hale spent fully a half hour before the mirror. It took time to mimic the salute of an American. It took time to bring his shoulders up to their proper place again; to stand straight, to return the sparkle to his eyes.

When he left Colonel Hays the following day he was no longer Martin Hale, a man without a country. He was Jerrald Hammond, first lieutenant in the American Air Service. He had papers in his pocket to prove it. No one should know. No one would ever know that Hammond was other than alive. There were but two who knew the truth. Neither of them would ever tell.

“And remember, Martin, Whatever happens, I must never be implicated in this until I tell you.”

“You never will, Colonel.”

“There is no reason why anything should happen. Yet things might.”

“Don’t worry.”

They shook hands and Hale walked away, thanking his stars for the service that had just been done for him. The misery through which he had passed seemed just a dream. It was over. Already he was a different man. Over and over he repeated the name of Hammond.

“Hammond. . . Hammond. My name is Hammond. Jerrald Hammond.”

He had to become accustomed to that name. He would.

At the corner an American private saluted. Hale’s hand went up to the peak of his hat. It was difficult saluting as Americans salute. A year of the British customs could not be disregarded in a day.

CHAPTER II THE LETTER

S QUAT PLANES SAT before the hangars at Issoudun. The stench of burnt gasoline hung low over the field.

Clouds hovered low, threateningly. There was no flying.

A lieutenant walked up and down before hangar number two. Within men labored with wires and struts. A plumb line hung from the upper wing of a plane. The craft’s tail was securely placed at the proper height upon a hundred-gallon barrel. A man stood before it looking.

“A little out. Just a little. Take up on that turnbuckle some.”

A man came from between the hangars. A few paces before the lieutenant he saluted.

“Lieutenant Hammond, sir?”

“Yes.”

“Your bags came in. I put them in your quarters.”

“Bags? But I have all of my bags. I—”

“But they are for Lieutenant Jerrald Hammond, sir.”

“Oh, yes. Yes. I remember now.”

“I thought you would like them in your quarters. I left them there.”

“Thank you. I didn’t expect them so soon.”

The man saluted and walked away. The lieutenant’s eyes trailed after him. A look of perplexity still lingered on his face. Upsetting, his getting baggage. It took him some moments to reconcile himself to the incident. For the moment he had almost forgotten the singular circumstance succeeding his coming to Issoudun.

Involuntarily he turned away and walked toward his quarters. Two suitcases lay upon the floor.

As he stood staring at them a second thing caught his eye. It was a letter, a rather large letter. A faint odor of perfume pervaded the air. It became stronger as he stood there.

There was a knock upon the door. It was opened.

“Hello, Hammond. I picked up that letter over at the mess. Smelled sweet. Thought you might like to get it. Looked at the postmark. France. Is she French?”

Again that singular confusion overcame Hammond.

“Why . . . why, yes.”

“Ah, don’t get uneasy about the letter. French babies always send letters. They write you to death.”

Jansen had known Hammond for three days. He had met him as flyers do. A moment’s talk, and they became friends. Jansen was a small, clear-eyed little fellow with a bronzed face and a great chest. He never lost an opportunity of talking about women. He liked them, liked them more than they had ever liked him.

“Well, why don’t you open it?”

“But—”

“What the hell! Who is the baby anyway?”

Hammond fingered the letter between nervous fingers. He had to open it. He felt forced to do so. His fingers tore open the end. He extracted its contents. He had thought not to read. He had to.

MON CHER AMI:

Why did you not come? I have much of interest for you. Some of our plans have fallen through, but it makes little difference. You ask me if I love you. I shall tell you some day. Some day, maybe the next time I see you.

But you must come, for I cannot speak with a pen. I know you must have had trouble before. Whether you do or not, you must tell me the nature of it. It may affect me as much as it does you.

Remember to see me!

NACHA.

“Her name is Nacha. I met her in Paris.”

Jansen whistled.

“Nacha Rama! Is that the one?”

“Yes.”

HAMMOND never fully understood why he said what he did. He didn’t know who Nacha Rama was. He had said yes without thought. He tried to cover himself up.

“I was in Paris long before I took my first flight. They gave me leave. I had time on my hands in Paris. One evening I went to Maxim’s. You know Maxim’s.

“Well Nacha was sitting up at a table. She started speaking. Later we had dinner together. Nacha’s nice. Very nice. Beautiful.”

Jansen nodded, bright-eyed. “Beautiful! Why she is wonderful! Saw her dance one night. You’re lucky to have Nacha writing letters to you. I’ve got a picture of her hanging up over my bunk. Come in and look at it.” Hammond followed him out through the door, down the corridor and into the next cubicle.

“Look!”

A picture of a girl had been dipped from the rotogravure section of a paper and was stuck to the

wall. She was in a dancing costume. Her hands were on her hips, her eyes wide in oriental allure. Something about them made Hammond think of the perfume of the letter. Haunting eyes. . . . Something unutterable about them.

“Does she look like that?” asked Jansen.

Hammond started.

“Yes.”

Hammond walked back to his room and sat down.

She couldn’t be the same girl. She couldn’t be. As he thought, his eyes fell upon the envelope which still lay upon the table. He picked it up and slowly he turned it over. Upon the back of it was a name.

Nacha Rama.

Later, after he heard Jansen walk down the hall, he went back to the picture. For many minutes he looked. Even after he returned the eyes continued to haunt him.

NEXT day Hammond went up for his first dual. The instructor spoke a few words about what to do. He was a thin, lean-nosed instructor who thought men who had not been up at the Front were less than trash, he made his sentiments known to Hammond the first two minutes they were together.

“Keep your hand away from that damned stick until I tell you to take it. You don’t look as if you’ll ever make a flyer to me anyway. And if you ever get a Hun, it’ll be by your damned good luck and because some son of a Hun was too damned tired to shoot.”

Hammond crawled in and they took off. There was a feeling of resentment still lingering in his heart when he saw the trees and the hangars pass. He waited patiently for his instructor to tell him to take the stick. Finally he saw the two hands thrown upward. That was the signal.

Hammond took control. For ten minutes he did the smoothest bit of flying he had ever done. He took care not to make a mistake.

When they landed the instructor looked at him silently.

“Say, where the hell did you learn to fly anyway?”

“Oh, just back in the States.”

“Yeah, and I think you’re a liar.”

“Look at my papers.”

“I looked at them. Fifteen hours, eh? If you haven’t three hundred solo I’m a cross-eyed Hun.”

“Fifteen,” Hammond corrected.

“Oh, hell!”

The instructor walked over to the hangar, but Hammond followed him.

"Say!" he called. "I'd like to take a shot at these Spads."

"Take 'em. Any time. I'd like to look on, anyway."

That afternoon Hammond took his first hop on Spads from Field Number Eight. His instructor watched him as he took off, and caught his breath. He strode up and down in front of his hangar, muttering.

"That fool will kill himself. He'll kill himself!"

But Hammond didn't kill himself. He was quite whole when he landed. He got out smiling and walked up to his furious instructor.

"Nice planes, these Spads. Fast, and safe."

"Think so? You'll break your damned neck. Wait and see."

HAMMOND returned to his quarters. The letter from Nacha still lay on the table. The aroma of perfume suffused the air, bringing back to his memory the girl in the picture pasted over Jansen's bed. He sat down, to read the letter again. Strange, that letter. . . . "Plans have fallen through . . . you must tell me."

Hammond caught himself wondering what sort of person the real Hammond was. His eyes fell to the bags.

Surely, if he were going to continue this subterfuge, it would be necessary to know as much about Hammond as possible. Possibly the contents of the bags would lend some intelligence in the matter.

He bent over. His fingers touched the leather covering, stole over to the latches. They snapped open. The force of its contents bulged up. Letters. Letters. Books. A folder with three pictures.

Two of them were Nacha, with a thin covering of silk draped over her body. Those haunting eyes could not be mistaken. They were the eyes of Nacha. The third was a picture of a simple girl with a lovely smile. A wistful face. Small eyes that looked clean, somehow.

Hammond passed his hand through the strange and motley contents. A Colt and several packages of shells. Some of the books had German titles. There was a half-written letter on the first page of a pad.

MY DARLING N:

I feel that I shouldn't go on with this. I don't want to, but something keeps me from doing what I want to do. I only wish that I hadn't fallen in love with you. Why can't you tell me the answer to what I told you? I think and think and think. There is no solution for my worries. If there were I wouldn't want them. Please for the

The letter stopped abruptly. Whatever the writer had hoped to write had been left undone. It was confusing.

Jansen interrupted him again. He didn't knock. The door was open, and he came in.

"How's the little friend of Nacha?" he asked.

"Shut up!"

"Don't get sore."

"I'm not."

Jansen sat down, fingered his brown chin between his hands, lighted a cigarette, and blew a great cloud of smoke out into the room.

"Ever notice anything funny about Nacha?" he asked.

"No. . . . Why?"

"I don't know. They say funny things about her, that's all."

"What?"

"That she's mixed up with Germany, somehow. But what the hell difference does that make? She's a damned good-looking woman. What more do you want?"

Hammond never answered. Jansen continued looking at the bag.

"Hell of a lot of junk you have there."

"Stuff I picked up."

Jansen arose, snubbed his cigarette in the tray.

"Guess I'm going."

HAMMOND heard him walk to his room and close the door. The silence of a flying field at night fell over everything. It was intense. Outside beyond the window a black night had fallen. For some minutes Hammond felt a decided sense of loneliness. Long since he had forgotten the bag and its contents.

He must have dozed a moment, for suddenly, he heard a distinct movement at the door.

He half raised himself. As he did, his eyes fell upon something white which had been pushed under the door.

"Jansen!" he called. "Jansen!"

No answer. He opened the door. Lying on the floorboard was a letter, and in the air emerged the aroma of perfume. He stooped and picked up the letter. After a quick glance at it, he ran down the corridor.

Breathless, his heart beating, he looked out on the cluster of houses. Once he thought the prism of light from a window had caught the silhouette of a retreating figure. He wasn't sure.

A door opened back of him. It was Jansen. He had a lamp in his hand, the light flooded his face.

"Did you call me?"

"Me? I call you?"

"I could have sworn that someone called my name."

"Hearing things, old man."

"No."

He came nearer. The light fell upon Hammond's sunken face. Hammond tried to draw away. He felt his eyes close and open involuntarily.

"What the hell's wrong, Hammond?"

"Nothing."

"You look white as hell."

"It isn't anything. I thought I heard someone call, too." He was still holding the letter in his hand. The odor seemed stronger than ever.

"Still carrying the letter?"

"What?"

"The letter."

"Yes. I was reading it again when I heard someone call."

Jansen looked at him curiously. Took a step backward, and then turned.

"Well, if you hear any more things, make sure what it is. You give me the creeps. I can stand anything but Fokkers and ghosts."

He walked back to his room, followed by the searching eyes of Hammond. Once Jansen closed the door behind him, Hammond went into his room. He tore open the letter. Its message was simple, and in the same long script as the first:

I must see you.

There was no signature. There was no heading. Nothing.

CHAPTER III THE FRONT

HAMMOND WALKED BACK from the flying field the next morning with the knowledge of two things. He was to become a member of the new Thirty-sixth Squadron which had been formed for immediate service upon the Front. That was as it should be.

But the letter of the night before troubled him.

Once within his quarters, he wrote to Colonel Sidney Hays, 237 Rue Caborn, Paris.

He posted the letter and was returning from the mess when an orderly stopped him.

"The C.O. would like to speak to you, sir."

"What about?"

"Don't know, sir."

Hammond studied the ground for a moment.

"I'll be there in a moment."

The orderly walked away. Hammond picked his way among the shacks until he came upon the office of the commandant. The door was open, and he walked in. Johnson, the officer in command, was looking at some maps as he entered. Johnson was no more than thirty-five. He was fat, jovial.

"Well, old fellow, what's your trouble?" he asked.

"My name's Hammond. You sent for me."

"Oh, yes."

Johnson walked behind the desk fingered some papers, and then looked up.

"Funny, Hammond. Damnedest war I ever heard of. Some of the things that happen are beyond me. . . . Nice tunic you got there. Where did you get it?"

"Paris."

"Who made it?"

"English tailors. Taylor and Son."

"Nice-looking. Looks English. Like pockets like that."

"Yes."

"But that's away from the question, Lieutenant. Two nights ago the M.P.s picked up in Paris a man who said he was Jerrald Hammond from Texas. He had a few papers in his pockets at the time, and it was only after continued questioning that he gave the name. Did you lose any papers while you were in Paris?"

"Yes."

"What were they? Do you remember?"

"A letter or so. I don't think it was any more than that."

"This fellow had an identification card. He had a tag on his wrist, too."

"Funny."

"He finally said he had cracked up in the forest to the north of Paris, and was spending a week or so in Paris before he reported. He thought it was coming to him. . . . But he's got more than that coming to him."

"He's crazy as hell."

"He's got a damned good chance of being shot."

The fingers of Hammond's right hand tightened. They loosened slowly, one after another.

"Well, don't worry, my boy," Johnson said. "That red-eyed instructor of yours tells me you're about the wildest man he's ever had. Crazy duck, he is, but a good instructor."

“Not bad.”

“That’s all. I just wanted to tell you. I thought you might have some information that might help us out.”

“Nothing.”

“That’s all. Say, you’re going out with the Thirty-sixth, aren’t you?”

“Yes.”

“She goes out tomorrow.”

For the first time since Hammond entered the office he felt he had control of himself. A faint smile flashed over his face. The color came back to his face.

“They can’t go out too soon for me.”

“That’s the spirit.”

Hammond carelessly walked around the field. A vague, inscrutable fear seemed to follow him from hangar to hangar. Planes stood upon the line that morning, a dozen Spads that were going out with the Thirty-sixth. There were more within the hangars. All the night before they had worked to condition them. They would also work the next night.

Jansen passed a short distance away. “Jansen!” called Hammond.

Jansen turned and came back.

“Say, what the hell was wrong with you last night?” he asked.

“Nothing. Why?”

“Oh, nothing.”

“You’re going out with the Thirty-sixth, too, aren’t you, Jansen?”

“Yes. And the sooner we get over the lines, the better.”

“You said it.”

THE Thirty-sixth flew to the Front the next day. The outfit was quartered at Parce, thirty kilometers to the west of Lens.

Parce was a village of peasants. There was a great white house upon the hill to the west of the village. A single street connected the two. There were trees upon either side, most of the way.

Just at the edge of the village, upon that road, was an inn. It was called the White Swan, after a similar resort in England. Its proprietor was a very short Frenchman, with an exceedingly large paunch. The villagers called him “Uncle.” His face was red, his nose covered with little red veins. His cheeks were pock-marked.

Shortly after the beginning of the war, the Germans held Parce for three days. When they left, the second inn, Uncle’s only competitor, went up in flames. It was

a mysterious fire, and no one knew the reason for it. But since that time it had been whispered that Uncle had done the thing himself. But whatever the reason, the White Swan had become the only inn upon the road.

It was at the inn of the White Swan that several of the pilots were quartered after their arrival at the Front. It was seemingly safe there, for a distance of almost fifteen miles separated it and the Front. Occasionally, even during that troublesome period, wayfarers spent the night. Its rooms were large. Its wine had not deteriorated since the beginning of the war.

It was within two rooms of the White Swan that Jansen and Hammond made their new home. The field of the Thirty-sixth was three kilometers the other side of Parce, but a truck was always at the call of anyone who wished to make the trip.

For three days the Thirty-sixth made regular trips over the lines. Huns were seemingly scarce during that period, and in those three days not a man was lost. Everything had gone smoothly. The guns at the Front could barely be heard, and seldom did bombers pass in the night.

The third night at Parce was more quiet than usual. A quietness had settled softly and quickly with the night. Jansen and Hammond were within their room.

Jansen sat upon his bunk at one wall. Just back of him, pinned to the wall, was the picture of Nacha Rama. Jansen had torn it carefully away from its place over his bunk, and one of the first things he had done upon getting to his new quarters was to place it again upon the wall.

And now it was there, those strange haunting eyes looking out over the room. Jansen was bent low, smoking. Hammond walked the room, his eyes trailing along the floor as he walked.

“Quiet tonight,” he said. The lamp hanging from the rafters cast light upon his intent eyes, the sunken space under his cheek bones. “Too damned quiet. I like noise. Plenty of it.”

He walked the length of the room again. Suddenly he stopped. He stood listening. Jansen looked up.

“What’s that?”

“Sounds like a plane.”

“It’s late for a plane.”

“No, there is another noise.”

“The car from the field, I suppose.”

“High-powered. It must be going eighty. That isn’t from the field.”

The car must have been approaching the village, for

it soon slowed down, its klaxon going like mad. From the window Hammond could see the two single lights streaking over the road toward the White Swan. But a moment, and brakes jammed. The car came to a halt.

CHAPTER IV NACHA RAMA

HE HEARD THE VOICE of Uncle. Just a few words, not many. And then then, the voice of a woman. It was low and rather hoarse.

"Welcome," said Jansen. But no one heard. Hammond wasn't listening. His eyes were intent upon the cloaked figure of a woman who had gotten out of the car below, and was being ushered into the White Swan on the arm of Uncle.

"You'll pardon me," said Jansen. "I'm going below."
"Get out."

The door was slammed. Hammond could hear Jansen leaping down the steps two at a time. He was gone but a few moments when he retraced his steps in greater haste than he had gone down. The door was thrown open and Jansen stood looking at him.

"Say," he whispered. "You know who that was? You know?"

Hammond glanced up.

"No!" he snapped.

"Nacha Rama!"

"Nacha? No!"

Hammond turned away in confusion.

"What's the matter? Aren't you pleased?"

Before Hammond had time to answer a gentle knock sounded upon the door, which was slowly opened by the pockmarked Uncle, a fatuous smile lighting his pudgy face.

"A lady. A charming lady. She will speak wit' you."

He bent forward in the manner of a bow. When he came up his eyes were again fastened upon Hammond, who was still standing against the window. His right hand still clung to the sill. He stared out at the man, wondering, uncertain.

"Tell her to come up."

Uncle bowed again. The silly smile continued to drape over his florid face.

"Yes, *monsieur*."

He nearly stumbled as he backed away, but he caught himself.

"Hey, listen, Hammond," said Jansen. "I'll get out. You don't want me here."

Hammond was trying to think of an answer as he heard the door close gently, and he was left alone.

Twice he walked the length of the room. Twice he returned, and stood facing the door. Then he heard footsteps, soft, precise: one . . . two . . . three . . . Then came a knock, gentle, distinct. It was repeated.

"Come in," he called.

SHE came in. The light shone full upon her face. Her eyes, black, almost Oriental, dominated everything about her. A cloak was drawn tightly about her neck. A thin white hand showed at the shoulder.

As she stood there, a momentary perplexity possessed her. Then her eyes seemed to smile for a flickering moment, and she dropped the cloak lower. The whiteness of her face shone out in bold relief. Her nose was thin, tapered. Her lips were heavy. The lower one trembled before she spoke.

"Oh, I've made a mistake," she said calmly. She made a movement to turn away.

"Maybe I could help you."

She paused, fingering her cloak, which dropped lower and lower, exposing a tightly-fitted white gown. It was simple, low at the neck.

"The innkeeper told me this was the room of Jerrald Hammond. Does he live here also?"

"Yes," said Hammond, regaining some of his lost composure. "Yes. He lives here. . . . I am Jerrald Hammond."

"No," she said quietly, shaking her head. "No."

"Yes."

"Your name is Hammond? Jerrald Hammond?"

Hammond nodded, but he knew that she did not believe.

"Impossible!" she cried.

"Please sit down. You've traveled a long way, haven't you?"

"Are you telling me the truth?"

"Yes. Please sit down."

She surveyed the room, selected a chair, her fingers fumbling in a case which she carried, and she extracted a cigarette.

"Light?"

"Thank you, Mister Hammond." Her eyes were dancing. Her tongue was in her cheek. She puffed her cigarette. After a contemplative pause she spoke again.

"You know, I know Jerrald Hammond. I know him well."

"I'm sure he never met you before."

"No?"

Hammond looked at her with that rare consciousness a man has when he tries to impress, but feels that he is not convincing. He knew he was not convincing. He could see it in her face. He could see it in her eyes.

"Liar!" she said suddenly.

IT WAS like the sting of a wasp. She bent forward.

Hammond turned his back. He walked to the window. Second after second his gaze seemed to be attracted by something far out in the darkness, something unknowable, something that could not be seen by human eyes. But all of the time he was conscious of the eyes, those strange phantom eyes upon him, watching, too, not something unknowable, but a man.

He turned slowly. He knew what he would find when he turned. He knew she would be sitting there. He knew she would be waiting, waiting for some word to come from his lips.

"No . . . No. You are right. I don't know why I'm telling you. My name is not Hammond. It is Martin Hale. I am an American."

The sudden confidence puzzled her. She arose slowly from her chair, and walked over to him. Her hand fell upon his shoulder.

"What has happened?" she asked gently.

He turned away. "Oh, I don't know why I've told you! I've made a mess of my life."

"What is the matter?"

He hesitated, Then:

"Sit down," he said.

She dropped back into a chair, but continued to look at him.

"I was with the Royal Flying Corps. I got into a mess because I overstayed my leave. They tried to take me back. I got into a fight. They cashiered me. Shot me out. . . ."

"I got to Paris, damned near starved. The British don't care what they do to a man after they let him out. Anyway, I met a friend, who told me that a plane had been wrecked in the woods near Paris. Burned up. The pilot was supposed to have been burned to death. I took his place. The man whose place I took was Jerrald Hammond."

She paled suddenly. "Oh!"

"What's the matter?"

"Is he dead?"

"I don't know. I don't think so."

"Why don't you think so now?"

"They picked him up in Paris, I've heard."

Their eyes met. They were staring at each other, again. There was a mellow trace of understanding in her eyes, wistful, half confused. Her mouth opened as if to speak.

"Well, say it!" he shouted.

"People so seldom tell the truth. I don't know what to say."

He continued staring at her, wondering what she really thought. She couldn't mean that. Yet, she sat there like a little girl, staring wistfully at him, fingering her white frock, and all of the cunning he had thought was in her eyes was gone. Her eyes had become soft.

"You mustn't tell. You must not!" he insisted.

She sat musing, abstracted.

"No one ever asked me not to tell anything before. I don't think anyone ever trusted me."

"I don't. But I have to. I don't know why I told you what I have. I must be crazy!"

CHAPTER V THE CRASH

TWO DAYS PASSED. It was morning. For two days planes had swept across the field at intervals. Three times each day an hour for each flight. The Huns had come in droves.

Five of the invaders had gone down. Two were the victims of the man who was known as Jerrald Hammond. He was looked upon now as one who was greater than the rest. They had losses, too. Seven of the Thirty-sixth had gone down. They were all new to the Front when they came. They had done well.

On the morning of the third day there came a letter addressed to Lieutenant Jerrald Hammond:

I don't know what to tell you about the woman. I have seen her in Paris. All I can hope for is that you do your best, and that when the time for confidences come you'll have something behind you. Things go well otherwise. Your difficulty troubles me; I wish I might be able to help. Whatever happens, I'm always your friend.

Hays.

Hammond stuck the letter in his pocket. But a

second thought entered his mind. He took out the folded paper again. He struck a match. A little flame burst out and the letter was consumed.

The door opened. Jansen stood in the doorway looking at him.

"Love letter?" he asked. He walked over to his bed, removed his oil-covered coat and sat with his head between his hands. He became pensive and thoughtful.

"Quiet, isn't it?" said Hammond. "Tired as hell."

"Lousy jobs we've been on."

The flame burned his fingers. He dropped the charred letter upon the table and watched the lingering flame. When he looked up, Jansen was still staring at the flame.

"Where's Nacha?" he asked. "I haven't seen her for two days."

"She moved to the white house at the end of the street. She asked me to come this afternoon. You come along."

"Sure. I like to look at that woman."

"Who doesn't?" countered Hammond.

"What time?"

"Five."

"We hop at three-thirty," Jansen reminded him.

"I know it."

When Hammond looked at Jansen again he was lying back upon his bunk, eyes closed. He was sleeping.

AT TWENTY minutes before the hour of four, six planes from the Thirty-sixth took off on a westerly course through a clear sky.

As they turned to cross the lines a dozen Fokkers were sighted. Captain Simms, the flight leader, tried his best to outmaneuver them but failed.

The flights came together at nine thousand feet.

For five minutes the air was cluttered with steel and swooping planes. Hammond took every precaution, but the numbers were too great. A Fokker slipped suddenly out from behind. Its guns flashed. Hammond saw little holes appear in the right wing of his plane. Then a sharp pain came to his right shoulder. He rolled away to a place of safety.

Down below a Spad had been cornered by three Fokkers. It would have been easy for Hammond to hold off, to stay away. But a frantic impulse to help the weak threw him back into the conflict, into a whirling mass of planes. It was his rebellion against the studied exactness of an imposter. Only there, ten thousand feet in the air, could he be himself, could he help those who had weakened.

He knew he saved a man's life by a moment's jeopardy of his own. He had become a human target that another man might live. But the strain of that moment was too great. His guns shot a single long burst and then his finger relaxed. His lungs expanded like an accordion and then scarcely moved. He was growing dizzy, whirling, whirling. But it didn't matter.

He was spinning, spinning. The air was pressing against the side of his face, his head was bent forward, held between the crook of his elbow. His hand no longer touched the stick. The plane was a derelict, spinning down and down.

Something pulled him from his torpor as trees flashed up, green trees. His feet stiffened upon the rudder. He clutched the stick. The whirling ceased. The plane righted itself and followed on in a long dive, to be yanked upward as the green fields came up to meet him.

He was climbing now. Upward. The sky was clear again. His right arm wouldn't respond to the demands for movement. It lay upon the side of the cowl, flabby and useless. He glanced at the sun for direction, banked a little to straighten his direction.

He had but one thought. He must land. He must land safely.

Minute after minute passed. Far in the distance he could see a great white house upon a hill. Along to the left was a road with trees on either side. The crooked roof of the White Swan came into view, dully reflecting in vague tones the brown of its tile roof. Parce was over to the left, with her few streets laid out by the homeward steps of a drunken sailor.

Then everything was mixed together. The trees, the White Swan, the road, and the white house upon the hill. Everything was moving together, and only one thing seemed to hold itself out above all else.

The white house was still there. Not as a house, but as a white stone building, without windows, without doors. Everything else became nothing.

SOMEONE came running. Someone screamed. Hammond pulled himself from the smoking wreck, staggered and fell, pulled himself up again. His eyes were centered upon a white figure who ran toward him. He stood still, waiting.

A flash lighted the field. A crash. Hammond fell forward. He was still breathing and fingering the grass. As his head turned upward his eyes fell upon her. She had a look of terror in her eyes as she stood a few paces away. The flames behind him lighted her face.

She ran a few paces forward and helped him struggle upward. All force that Hammond had was centered in rising to his feet.

“Rama!” he said hoarsely.

“You’re bleeding!”

“Wounded.”

They struggled across the lawn. Once he stopped and turned. The flames from the plane subsided. They moved on. There was blood on her white frock, wet and glistening. Step after step they moved on.

“Does it hurt? . . . Does it hurt?” Hammond tried to answer. Words wouldn’t come to his lips. They walked up the steps. A man came out of the door. He wore a white collar. His vest was of black and white stripes. He was dressed in black.

Together they helped him up and through the door. They labored with him up the stairs and to a bed. Hammond held himself erect for a moment, he tried to smile. He couldn’t. He was swaying, swaying, until he fell upon the bed. It became wet beneath him. The coverlet had a red spot.

“Speak . . . speak!”

“Nacha!”

The man in the striped vest brought a basin of water and cut Hammond’s shirt from his shoulder. They bathed his wound. They held something to his nose.

His eyes opened again. It was cool there. His left shoulder was numb. Nacha was seated at his side. She was looking through her phantom eyes that seemed to grow larger, ever larger.

“How are you?”

“Fine.”

“Your shoulder?”

“Still there, I think.”

There came the sound of a car, which stopped before the entrance of the white house. In a moment the man with the striped vest came in with Jansen and a medical officer from the field.

“Saw your crash outside, young man. You’re lucky.”

“I’m all right,” said Hammond.

The medical officer removed the temporary bandages, bathed the wound with antiseptic, and wound yards of bandage about Hammond’s shoulder. Nacha and the brown-faced Jansen watched silently until he was done. Then Jansen walked over to the bed.

“How’s the boy?”

“All right.”

“You got another Hun. You’re getting to be a wonder.”

“I don’t know. I fired only once. Thought I’d missed.”

“Say, you don’t miss much,” Jansen grinned.

“You shouldn’t move away from here soon,” said the medical officer. “Possibly the lady will allow you to stay here for a few days.”

“He may stay as long as possible,” said Nacha.

Hammond smiled. Jansen was watching him closely. Finally he turned to the bed.

“I saw the beggar go down. I was behind you when you shot. You must have been hit before that. You acted as if you’d gone crazy. I knew something was wrong. That’s three for you since you’ve been here. You know it?”

“I think so.”

They stayed for half an hour longer. The man with the striped vest brought in some tea. They drank it without much conversation.

Once Nacha asked how things were on the Front, and if they thought the Germans would ever take Parce. No, they didn’t think so. But the Germans were very successful in their drive. Yes, very. But they’d be stopped soon. Sooner than they expected. The Yanks had retaken Belleau Woods. Great losses. But the Woods were taken. What was left of them.

Nacha kept her eyes upon Hammond most of the time. When she spoke her voice was low.

The medical officer arose. He would return the next day. If anything went wrong he should be notified.

Jansen went over to the bed.

“Lucky fool,” he said.

They left, then.

THE man with the striped vest brought dinner. Hammond ate sparingly. His head ached. Nacha came in to bid him good night. If he wanted anything, he could ring the bell. She stood a long time at the door without speaking; then she crossed the room and closed the window upon one side and pulled down the shade.

“You mustn’t catch cold,” she said.

“Thank you.”

She left Hammond staring at the ceiling. Finally his eyes closed. He was asleep. Afterward—he didn’t know how long afterwards it was—he awakened. It was quite dark in the room, and for some time he wondered where he was.

He listened. He could hear the purr of a motor. It was below, in front of the white house. A clock somewhere struck twice. Two o’clock. The purr of the motor continued for a long time. Then it stopped. His eyes closed, and he fell asleep.

Jansen came back the next day with the medical officer, and they spent an hour together, talking, all of them as they had before. Throughout the conversation Nacha sat twirling the corner of her lace handkerchief. She spoke often in that same soft, low manner which was hers. She seemed relieved when the two were gone.

"I hope you rested well," she said.

"Very. I think I ought to be able to get up soon."

"Stay in bed. It's good for you."

"But I must be going back soon. They may need me."

"Don't worry about that."

"Is this place yours?"

She glanced up quickly. "No. It belongs to a friend of mine. I've been using it for a long time."

"Then I'm your guest?"

"Yes."

"Isn't anybody else living here?"

"Just the man you have seen."

She came back no more that night. Food was brought, and long after that Hammond fell asleep. He must have turned over, for he was awakened with a decided pain in his left shoulder. He grew restless after that. An hour passed. When he looked at his watch it was five minutes to two.

As his hand dropped back to the bed, he heard a distant sound.

To his well-accustomed ear it could be identified with only one thing. Almost immediately the motor of the car in front of the house was started, drowning the first sound.

The clock struck two again. It was the hour that he had been awakened the night before. He struggled from his bed and walked to the first window. Through the blackness he could see the bulk of the car. He could see no one near it. It was too dark.

He turned to the second window, the one which Nacha had closed the day before. He pulled the shade far enough away to look out upon the field in back of the house. A flash of light caught his attention.

A black shadow hugged the ground. Hammond thought he saw figures move out there. He strained his eyes, but he wasn't sure. After a while the shadow passed across the ground. Along its side there was a slight, almost imperceptible glow. It was soon lost in the darkness. The motor of the car in front of the house became silent.

All became still, ominously still. Hammond walked back to the bed, and then turned and went to the door. He opened it slowly, just a few inches. As he stood there he heard the faint movement of footsteps upon

the stairs. Someone was walking up, step after step. Halfway up they came to a halt. After a prolonged pause, they continued.

A figure passed by, leaving in its wake the undeniable aroma of perfume.

CHAPTER VI HAMMOND

THINGS WENT ON AS USUAL the next day, except that Nacha did not come. When dinner was brought to him, he questioned the man in the striped vest.

"She went for a drive, sir. She may not come back tonight."

Hammond ate in silence. Halfway through the meal, a soldier was announced, and came to his room. He had a letter in his hand which had been sent to the outfit.

"Lieutenant Jansen sent it down, sir. It came today. He said he couldn't get over. Maybe tomorrow."

"Thank him anyway. Wait. I want you to deliver a note for me." He wrote a few hurried words on a slip of paper, and gave it to the man. He had gone before Hammond tore open the letter which Jansen had sent.

Under no circumstances reveal the conditions of our last meeting. It was a rash act, but I am and have been doing all within my power to clean it up. My best wishes.

HAYS.

Time hung heavily after that. The great white house upon the hill became as silent as a tomb. Only the insects that chirped out upon the lawn broke the silence.

Once he fell into a doze, but awakened. It was after twelve, yet he could hear no movement in the house. At last he turned and switched off the light.

For fully an hour he tossed, hoping to get some sleep. It was useless.

Then the distant noise of a moving car played upon his ears. The noise became louder and louder, until the car swung up to an abrupt stop before the house. From the moment the motor was switched off, he heard voices. Whoever were its occupants Hammond did not know. However, Nacha was among them, for he could hear her voice.

They entered the house. Minute after minute he listened to the mumbling of their voices. Then he heard Nacha scream.

"Don't go up there!"

Someone ran up the stairs. The door was thrown open, and silence followed. Hammond could hear the harsh breathing of a man, yet he made no move until the room flashed into light.

A man about Hammond's own age stood clinging to the knob of the door. His head was bent forward. His hair was uncombed and hanging over his eyes. The light fell hard upon his thin lips, and his vacant, roving eyes.

"My name's Hammond," he said suddenly.

HAMMOND stared at him.

"So is mine," he said finally. "You're a damned liar!" the other shouted.

"I'm not accustomed to be called that."

"You lie! You know damned well you lie!"

Hammond gestured calmly. "Sit down."

The man at the door was taken off his guard. His eyes fell upon the chair not far from the bed. He hesitated for a moment. Then he walked over and sat down.

"Cigarette?" Hammond invited. The newcomer hesitated, then took a cigarette.

"Light there on the table."

The intruder lighted up.

"Cool off," Hammond counseled.

The other raised himself from the chair and threw the cigarette to the floor. "What the hell are you doing to me anyway?" he growled.

"I've got a hole through my right side, but there's a gun under this pillow." Hammond pushed his hand under the pillow. He knew it would find nothing. But the gesture was convincing. "Sit down and let me talk to you."

"I'll stand."

"You know and I know that I'm not Jerrald Hammond. What's the trouble?"

"Plenty."

"You left a plane in the forest. You burnt it up. You wanted everybody to think you were dead. What changed your mind?"

"You liar!"

"You are a deserter. You know you are."

The man lost his confidence in himself, then. His eyes dropped to the floor. Finally he cupped his chin in the palms of his hands and sat staring at the floor.

"How do you know?" he asked.

"Guessed."

"You guessed it. You guessed it! And I was fool enough to admit it! I don't know what the hell is wrong with me!"

"Why did you come here?"

"I came to see Nacha. She's the reason. She's the reason I burnt the plane. I went back to Paris. But I missed her. And then they picked me up."

"How did you get out?"

"Strings. Somebody was trying to clear you. But I can prove who I am. I can!"

"You destroyed American property, Hammond. You don't want anybody to prove who you are."

The newcomer got up and walked around the room. His hands were deep in his pockets as he walked. Twice he cast a fleeting glance toward the bed, started to say something, hesitated, and was silent. He was at the opposite end of the room when Nacha knocked gently upon the door and came in. She was smiling and quite self-possessed.

"Good evening."

"Good evening."

The man gazed at her, but said nothing. Her eyes moved to the bed.

"How do you feel?" she asked.

"Not'bad. I think I can walk."

She cast a cursory glance at the man who stood with his back to the wall, the look of a beaten dog in his eyes.

"Don't stay here. Come away," she said to him.

She turned and walked out of the door. The intruder followed her slowly. Before he left the room he looked back toward the bed.

"If she makes a move, I'll kill her!"

WITH that he turned away. His faltering steps could be heard as they moved down the stairs. For a brief moment Hammond lay staring at the brilliant light.

Hammond? He was not Hammond any more. He was Martin Hale. He was Martin Hale who was drummed out of the flying ranks of the British Corps. He was Martin Hale who followed his own misfortune.

He was sitting, physically weak, and wondering at his own importance to act against the forces of circumstance, when he heard a scream.

He drew himself from the bed, and ran stumblingly to the door. Grasping the banister, he helped himself down to the great room of the white house.

Hammond, the real Hammond, thought Hale—stood facing him against the far wall. Nacha lay upon the floor, her hand about her throat.

To one side stood Uncle, keeper of the White Swan. His eyes were small, gleaming, and snake-like. His red face was livid and dotted with the white scars upon his pitted face. Within the grasp of a pudgy hand was a pistol.

“I said if she made a move . . .” began Hammond.

“Don’t shoot him, Uncle.”

Nacha arose slowly from the floor. Her breath came fast from, her half-open mouth.

“He choked me,” she explained to Martin Hale.

“What did you do to me!” retorted Hammond.

“He’s insane,” said Nacha. “He says I’m a spy. He says that he took messages across the lines for me. And when he has no plane, I have no more use for him.”

“It’s the truth,” hissed Hammond.

“He says lies,” bellowed Uncle.

“Are you a spy, Nacha?” asked Martin Hale.

He stood calmly looking at her. Why he thought she would tell him the truth, he didn’t know. She looked petulantly at him, as if he were demanding something which confidences should never demand.

A faint smile flashed over his face. “I told you the truth about myself, Nacha. Tell me the truth.”

Uncle had lowered his pistol. He stood open-mouthed and surprised, his head hanging low over his great expanse of stomach.

“Yes,” she said simply, and with a forced smile. “I am a spy. I am a Hungarian. I am serving my country as best I can. Doesn’t it sound interesting?”

“Very,” said Hale.

“Ah, don’t be shocked. We should all know everything about everyone else. I am a spy. Hammond has flown messages across the Front for me. Uncle, there, has helped as best he could since he burned the inn across the street from the White Swan. Haven’t you, Uncle?”

“It is not true!” he lied.

“And you are an imposter. All of us could go to jail together, couldn’t we?”

A sense of repulsion filled Hale. He could have spat at the woman who stood before him. The corner of his mouth curled slightly with his feeling of contempt of her.

“Is that a threat?”

“No,” she said. “But a woman’s first thought is one of self-protection.”

“Then you think my mouth is closed?” demanded Hale.

“I think you are too clever for it to be other than closed.”

“You see,” whined the real Hammond. “You see what she is.” He still clung to the wall, like some vague shadow of remorse.

“There are cigarettes,” she said.

“Thanks,” said Hale.

He walked over and took a cigarette.

“And a light upon the table.”

He struck a match. Held it up.

“Let’s cool off,” he suggested.

HIS hand paused. Through the nebulous smoke which arose he could see her phantom eyes, liquid and mocking. Yet there was something else there. There was something strangely feminine, something of a woman who comes to grief with her best-laid plans.

“You were listening to our conversation?” Hale asked.

“I was standing at the door. We had to understand each other perfectly.”

“Possibly,” Hale said.

The match had almost burned to his fingertips. He raised the light and puffed slowly, watching her the while. A strange uncanny stillness had fallen again.

Uncle had lowered himself to a chair. His pudgy hand had loosened its grip, and he looked dully at the floor. Hammond had relaxed, his arms hung loosely from his shoulders. His shadow was like a jet silhouette plastered against the half-white wall. Nacha alone held her wits. She had walked across to the table, extracted a cigarette, when the clock at the end of the room made a strange little buzzing sound, and almost immediately it struck.

Once. . . . Twice.

She looked up quickly, threw away the unlighted cigarette. For the briefest part of a second she lost her composure. Her hand passed to her neck, and a frightened look came into her eyes.

“There isn’t any reason for starting the car tonight, Nacha. I know the sound of a plane when I hear one,” said Hale.

Almost at the instant, the man with the striped vest came in. She muttered something to him. He bowed and left.

“There are others who don’t know the sound,” she said. “And the car’s lights must be lighted. Just a pleasant signal, one which doesn’t cause offense.” She smiled.

Immediately the motor of the car was started. A

few moments elapsed, and above the violent purr there was another sound, a sound from something high above the trees along the road, the White Swan, and the great white house upon the hill.

The sound came closer and closer, circling as it came. Nacha stood at the window. Hale walked up behind her and stood watching out over the great expanse of yard.

In the distance, a tiny flame could be distinguished, the fluttering of an exhaust.

Slowly it settled, then moved forward. When it came to a halt, Nacha turned and ran out through the door.

It seemed long before she returned, but she was not alone.

CHAPTER VII FLIGHT

THE DOOR THROUGH WHICH Nacha had vanished was opened again, and she came in, followed by a lank, black-eyed man in the gray-green uniform opened at the neck. In his right hand he held his helmet and goggles.

He seemed to be taken aback, for he paused at the door, his gaze passing from one to the other of the occupants of the room.

"It's all right," said Nacha. "You've seen all of them before but the man in the pajamas, Mister Hale. *Herr Luckner*."

Herr Luckner bowed. Hale nodded from his position at the window.

"There are cigarettes on the table," said Hale to Luckner, "and a light."

Nacha cast a vicious glance toward Hale.

"He has no time to smoke," she said.

Luckner nodded to Hammond and Uncle. Uncle rose from his chair, a subservient smile flooding his florid face. He became suddenly conscious of the pistol which he still held in his right hand. He made a clumsy effort to hide it behind his back.

"*Herr Luckner* is one of the most clever of all German intelligence men. He outwits them all," said Nacha.

The German smiled at the courting of his vanity.

"Thank you, Madam," he said. "But I must be going at once."

"Everything has been placed in the plane," said Nacha.

"Then, if you permit me, I shall go."

He bowed again.

Some movement beyond the window caught Hale's eye. He looked intently, strained his eyes.

A figure moved out there.

He turned back, wondering if anyone were conscious of his action. Yet the shadow may have been the man with the striped vest. She had said that everything had been placed in the plane. "Good evening, Mister Hale. I hope that we shall see each other again," said Luckner.

"We shall, *Herr Luckner*," he said.

The curtains at the far end of the room moved ever so slightly. Slowly a single hand clutched one for the briefest of a moment.

The man with the striped vest appeared.

His face was white, ghost-like. There was terror in his eyes, a struggling within his soul over which he had no power. Some psychic knowledge of his presence caused Nacha to whirl and face him.

"The house," he said, struggling to whisper the words, "is surrounded." Her breath caught. Her hand flashed to her open mouth.

"The lights!" she hissed.

He was gone. There was a flash of light through the window, and as suddenly, the room went black.

HALE leaped to the place where he had last seen Nacha. His hands were outstretched, but met nothing. Someone was pounding upon the door. He walked further on and stumbled over a chair in the darkness. Figures crossed and recrossed.

A whisper sounded.

"*Heiliger Gott!*"

The voice of Uncle. Heaven alone knew where he was, or what was passing through his fevered brain. He must have fallen to the floor, for the sound of his voice was from there.

The window crashed, and the falling glass followed it. A light flashed, Then everything was in darkness again. The sounds of voices were everywhere now.

Hale had passed to another room, and then another. As he walked a frenzy possessed him. His heart beat madly. His tongue passed over dry lips. He didn't know why he moved, until he stopped, halted by the scent of heavy perfume.

Something moved in front of him. His hand went out and clutched at the thing.

A short gasp.

“Nacha!” he whispered.

She clutched his hand. “Shh!”

He followed her blindly. They moved through another door. They passed down steps. Hale thought they were endless. It grew damp as they walked down. There was the odor of earth.

The far-off sound of struggle and voices was lost. The silence came again. Only the movement of their feet over the damp stones beneath. They were walking straight, now. Nacha still clung to his hand, gripping it with, her thin damp fingers as she led him on. Finally they came to stairs again, and went up. The air grew warmer, less damp as they climbed. At last they stopped.

Nacha fumbled at a door, which creaked as it opened.

Over to the east there was a small moon. Back at the white house all seemed quiet. Only a short distance in front of them stood a plane silhouetted in the darkness. The motor still ticked over, prepared for a quick leave taking.

For a moment she turned toward the house, then to Hale.

“Ah!” she gasped.

“What is it?”

“You? . . . Not—?”

“No . . . Hale.”

She grasped his arm.

“But you can fly. Come, we will get to Germany. We will be safe.”

Hale followed blindly. She still clung to his hand as they ran the short distance to the plane. She crawled into the second pit as one accustomed to the venture. Hale helped himself over the side. After a moment’s fingering, he pulled back the throttle.

A GREAT roar broke the silence.

The plane moved forward, ever gaining speed, until the wheels parted from the earth, and the plane soared into the night sky.

The white house on the hill was left in darkness. A few distant and flickering lights marked the village of Parce. Far in the east the first faint trace of dawn stretched over the sky.

Minutes flew by. Several times Hale glanced back at the strange woman who sat in the pit behind him. He thought he could see her great eyes as he first had seen them, haunting him with their vagueness. He wondered what she thought. . . . His right shoulder was numb. He had almost forgotten about it until then.

The east had become a little lighter, but it was still black beneath when Hale pointed the nose toward a solitary spot upon which he thought he might land. The plane dropped quickly. The black earth came up to meet it. The wheels touched, bounced high and settled. The plane stopped rolling as Hale switched off the motor.

He turned. Nacha was looking at him, and there was a dull smile upon her lips. She stretched herself and arose. Slowly and with much effort she dropped herself to the earth.

“We’re fortunate to get away. They were stupid not to find the plane.”

“What shall I do here, Nacha?”

“Oh, they’ll take care of you somehow.”

He smiled. “Somehow? How do you mean?”

“If they don’t believe the story they’ll keep you safe until the end of the war. I’ll come to see you often. I want to see you again, truly I do.” He felt her hand upon his arm, a slight pressure. “It’s better than facing the thing back there.”

“And where will you go now?”

“Find soldiers. I won’t have any trouble. It will be easy for me.”

“I don’t think I’ll like a prison camp, Nacha.”

“What else!” She grew suddenly fiery. “What else can you expect over here?”

“Over here? . . . Do you know where you are, Nacha? You’re still in France!”

She clutched his arm with all of the power in her tapered fingers.

“France!” she gasped.

“France,” he said quietly.

She whirled as if she half expected to find danger at her elbow. Her wide staring eyes gazed fearfully at the trees, dim in the half-dawn, that flanked the field.

Then she faced him. The wild light in her eyes made him think of a trapped animal, turning at bay. Even as he looked, the light faded and her eyes dulled. Her shoulders drooped.

“You have tricked me,” she said.

It was not an accusation. Rather it was a plain, simple statement of the situation which had suddenly forced itself upon her quickened brain.

Hale slowly produced a pack of cigarettes, offered one to the girl, who accepted it listlessly, and lighted hers and his own. Then he spoke deliberately.

“No,” he said. “I haven’t done any-thing yet—except to get us both away from that mix-up.”

“But—you were going to fly me to Germany!”

Hale shook his head.

"I made no promises," he reminded her.

She spoke wistfully. "You would do nothing for me?"

"I would do whatever is best for you," he assured her. "But you must understand that I could never leave you free to work more harm."

She shivered.

"Never!" she cried. "No more! I can do no more! Not—not against you."

He looked long into her eyes with a cool and level stare. She met his eyes squarely.

Finally he nodded.

"Come," he told her. "Let us be going."

In silence she followed him to the side of the plane and climbed into the rear pit.

COLONEL HAYS, Commander of the American Secret Service in France, pushed himself slowly away from the desk. Scarcely three weeks had passed since he had spoken to the man before him. It seemed incredible that things had worked out as well as they had.

His forehead knitted for the first time since Martin Hale had reported to him that evening three short weeks before. "Well, and what happened then?"

"Why, I finally dropped her in Germany. I couldn't do anything else. I couldn't. Her pleas were too much,

and she was so grateful. Colonel, you should have seen the look in her eyes when I told her she was in Germany and she could go where she wanted to go. She—"

The Colonel raised his hand for silence.

"You should have held her."

"What for? They would have shot her. I couldn't think of it."

"They would have shot her," agreed the Colonel.

"Listen, Colonel. She learned her lesson. We don't have to worry about her any more."

"Possibly you're right. We got Luckner and that madman they call 'Uncle,' and I'll do my best to keep Hammond from losing his head. He shouldn't, poor fellow. Just a mix-up with a woman."

"Not just a woman, Colonel. Nacha Rama was something more than that."

"Yes, I know." He grunted, and twirling his thumbs, "as for you, Hale—It'll take me about five minutes to straighten you out with this service, just about five minutes. . . . Yes, yes, a fine job. . . . You know that fellow Jansen was one of our boys, too. Intelligence Service. He'd have given his life to have caught that gang cold the way you did. . . . Yes, would have given his life."

But Martin Hale wasn't listening.