



**RICHARD KNIGHT** in

# WINGS OF THE EMERALD

by **DONALD E. KEYHOE**

*Through those blood-red skies that hung like the hand of Doom over war-wracked Spain, there swooped a winged, incarnate devil—a greedy ghoulish man called “The Hawk.” Sparing neither Rebel nor Loyalist, this eerie fiend struck without warning. Wretched Iberia herself was his victim; ruthlessly he pounced upon her, and from her defenseless form his merciless talons tore priceless treasures. And now those bony claws clutched the gleaming “Green Madonna”—sought to wrench from that brilliant jewel a secret known only to Death.*

## CHAPTER I BLACK ARROW

**I**N A GRAY OLD TURRETED BUILDING, high up on the left bank of the River Nervion, two men were waiting—waiting to commit a murder. The room in which they bided their time was at the very top of the northwest turret, and through an opening in the thick stone walls of this medieval tower the stricken city of Bilbao could be seen, with the tall houses and narrow streets of the Old Town sprawling in orderless array over the hilly foreground.

Across the river which divided the Old Town from the modern part of Bilbao, a dozen buildings were still burning from the Insurgent air raid of the preceding night. Smoke, mingled with mist from lowering clouds, made a pall over this Pittsburgh of Spain, but along the docks and above the river the air was clearer.

One of the men stood at a wedge-shaped opening in the side of the turret, and through a pair of binoculars he intently watched a vessel which was moored in mid-stream about a mile away. His companion, the shorter of the two and darker of face, sat idly polishing the telescopic sights of a powerful rifle held across his knees. Both men were dressed in soiled overalls and wore dark berets on their heads. They could have passed easily as members of the

Popular Front, though neither was connected with the warring factions in Spain.

"Anything yet?" the man with the rifle inquired. He spoke German with deep guttural.

The other man swung around, thin lips drawn into a snarl. He spoke with wrathful contempt.

"How many times do I have to tell you to speak Spanish, you fool?"

The rifleman scowled; his answering voice was tense. "Some day, Max, you call me a fool once too often." His black eyes flamed up at the pale gray ones of the man called Max.

Max looked down at the fingers suddenly gripped around the rifle, then forced a crooked grin.

"*Muy bien*, Hermann—I apologize. But forget you're an Austrian until we're out of Spain. If a Red heard you speaking German, it would be our finish."

"What risk is there?" grunted Hermann. "The whole building is deserted since the Insurgent gunners started taking their range on this hill."

"True, the risk is small," admitted Max, "but some one might come up here. If it should happen, take the silencer off your rifle and remember we are merely inspecting the building to see where machine-guns can be mounted to hold off Franco's men."

He turned back to the opening and lifted the glasses. The vessel he had been watching was moored so that it lay almost broadside toward him. Close by the ship, three floats about fifty feet long had been anchored. Two seaplanes were secured at each float, so that a flight of six lay there within a hundred feet of the vessel. Two of the planes had just landed. Mechanics were covering the engines from the mist, while the pilots waited for a boat to take them to the vessel's starboard gangway.

MAX now turned his glasses on the ship itself. He knew its history well. It was the S.S. *Antona*, originally a coastal passenger ship—one of the few of its tonnage built to navigate this far up the Nervion. Forced to remain at Bilbao by the Insurgent blockade, she had been converted into a prison ship for Nationalist hostages. Franco's bombers had carefully avoided the vessel, for several hundred of their sympathizers were on board—some of them important citizens. And now, Red strategists in Bilbao were turning this to account. Jamming the hostages still tighter below decks, they had moved a number of seaplane pilots and mechanics aboard, mooring their planes as close as possible to the *Antona*. Franco's airmen, already ordered to avoid the

ship, might discover the seaplanes—converted Russian fighters—but it would be impossible to destroy them without hitting the vessel also.

"What now?" Hermann growled in Spanish, as Max abruptly turned.

"The motor gig is putting away from the *Antona*, with Major Villar aboard. You won't have much longer to wait."

Hermann stood up, carefully laid his rifle on the chair, and stepped to the opening. Max was focusing the binoculars on a dock toward which the gig was heading.

"There they are!" he said tensely. "Colonel Torio, with two pilots and two guards—they have just come from that big car with the pennant."

Hermann took the glasses, inspected the group on the dock.

"Torio—yes, I recognize those mustaches from the picture you showed me. But we'll have to wait till they're closer."

"Why?" demanded Max. "You said the gun was accurate up to three miles."

"Yes, but it's too dangerous with them moving around and standing that close," grunted the other. "And this mist makes it worse. Wait until they reach the *Antona's* gangway. They'll probably let him step out first."

"And meantime," snapped Max, "he will have told everything to Major Villar."

"With all those others in earshot?" scoffed Hermann. "No, my friend, not with everything that is at stake. He'll wait until he and Villar are safely alone."

"Very well," muttered Max. He took back the glasses, but as he refocused them he gave a start.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he whispered.

"Speak Spanish, fool!" Hermann mocked him. "What is it?"

"The tall pilot—the one on Torio's left—he is Richard Knight, the American secret agent!"

"But you said Knight has dark hair, and the tall man is blond," objected Hermann.

"He's wearing a wig," snapped Max, "or else he's dyed his hair. More likely it's the latter. The man must have nerves of ice. If Torio recognizes him, it's his finish."

"Are you certain it's Knight?" demanded the Austrian.

"Positive! I saw him often enough there at Arganda before he wrecked the plans of that Four Faces outfit. One side of his face is partly covered with adhesive

tape where he was cut during the Arganda fight, and he's standing so that side is toward Torio. The Colonel was looking at him a moment ago, and he took off his helmet—must have been afraid Torio might remember him, or he wouldn't have showed that blond hair so quickly."

Hermann moved closer to the opening, took his rifle with him.

"Two to silence, then," he said grimly.

"Not yet," said Max, without lowering the glasses. "We'll let him learn what he can, and then follow him."

"That's not for us to decide," growled Hermann. "You'd better get down to the other room and ask for orders."

"*He* has gone," said Max, with a peculiar emphasis on the pronoun. "Besides that, I distinctly remember he said we'd follow that scheme if Knight and the others showed up."

"Then you knew they were back in Spain?" exclaimed Hermann.

"No, but we suspected it. After they ruined the Four Faces' plot to start a world war with that trick at Gibraltar, Knight and Doyle and the girl were rushed somewhere on a British destroyer. We didn't get any clue until two days ago, then we heard from Lefoix, at Bordeaux. The three of them were landed at midnight, there at Bordeaux, in a boat from the destroyer. Lefoix recognized Benita Navarre from the photographs we sent him, but they got away from him somehow and he didn't pick up the trail until two days later. Knight and the ex-Marine, Doyle, left the girl under the care of the American vice-consul's wife, then they disappeared."

"Knight has worked fast, with only three or four days' start," muttered the Austrian. "How did he manage to get back into the Loyalist air force, I wonder?"

"I don't know, but the important thing is that he's back here after the Green Madonna. I had a feeling they'd try to recover that emerald, the imbeciles! It saved their lives when the Navarre girl bribed those guards at Arganda with it. This time, it may be a different story!"

Hermann looked at Max's taut face. "You think they know the secret?"

"No, or they'd never have come back after the stone. They'd be making for the United States as fast as they could go."

"Especially the girl," said Hermann. "What's happening now?"

"The boat is almost to the dock. Torio is saying something to Knight, and a third pilot seems to be trying to listen without their noticing. He must have been beyond that packing-crate by—"

Max stiffened as though an electric current had shot through him. "Sacred name! Look! Hermann—quick!"

The Austrian seized the binoculars and trained them on the newcomer. He jumped, almost dropped the glasses. For a moment the two men stared at each other.

"*Du Lieber Gott!*" said Hermann. "What now?"

Max retrieved the glasses, hastily turned them toward the dock.

"Be ready!" he grated. "Be ready to aim as you never aimed before!"

Hermann lifted the rifle, placed it in the opening. As the boat swung out from the dock he followed it, his right eye glued to the cup of the telescope sight. Slowly, the front-sight moved over the faces of the distant men. Hardly breathing, he trained it on one figure. Perspiration rolled down his face as he crouched there, waiting . . .

ALL the way in from the Sandica air field, Richard Knight had avoided the test he knew was inevitable. By riding in the front seat with the guard who acted as driver, he had managed to postpone coming face to face with Colonel Torio. But now, as they stood on the dock waiting for the gig from the *Antona*, he knew that the test was at hand.

He had feared this moment ever since Major Villar, C.O. of the seaplane unit and also in charge of the prison-ship, had ordered him and two other pilots of the new seaplane defense-force to meet the ship in which Colonel Torio was being flown from Madrid, and to escort the Colonel from Sandica to the docks.

He had for the second time joined the Loyalist air force, this time under a false name. It had been his hope to learn through Loyalist Intelligence what had happened to the Green Madonna after Benita had used it to save the three of them at Arganda. But he had never dreamed of running into the Chief of Intelligence, hollow-faced Juan Torio, who had once seen him at the Arganda field, near Madrid.

As the gig from the *Antona* neared the docks, Torio broke off a conversation with the Polish volunteer-pilot who stood on his right.

"Where is Count Brasov?" he said, turning suddenly to Knight. "I haven't seen him since we left the car."

Knight kept the taped side of his face turned as he looked around.

"He must be near, Colonel," he said, in the uncertain Spanish he had affected since reaching Bilbao. "Shall I look for him?"

"No, I merely wished to ask him what Roumania's unofficial attitude is toward us, in case—"

Torio abruptly paused, one hand fingering his huge mustache while his eyes probed at Knight. "Surely, *señor*, I have seen you before?"

Knight made the drizzle an excuse to take off his helmet. As he shook the water from it, he answered Torio.

"Perhaps in England, *Señor* Colonel. I was a lieutenant in the Royal Air Force Reserve until recently."

"No, I have never been in England. It must have been somewhere else. What is your name, *teniente*?"

"Earl Gordon," replied Knight. Thank Heaven, he told himself, the British had agreed to cover any inquiries on that name, in return for his work in the Gibraltar affair!

Torio shook his head, directed a puzzled look at Knight's dyed hair.

"The name, too, is unfamiliar, but perhaps I shall eventually remember where it was."

"There is Count Brasov now," Knight said. He stepped a little to one side as the Roumanian count limped toward them past a big packing-case. Brasov, well-known as a sportsman pilot, had volunteered his services two or three months before, at the same time donating to the cause a small Dornier-Wahl amphibian which had now been converted into a bomber. Knight had met him the day before.

Brasov would have been almost as tall as Knight, but for the limp which took two or three inches from his height. He was fair-skinned, with light blue eyes and tawny hair, but a hint of arrogance about his mouth kept him from being handsome. In spite of his infirmity, he was reputed to be a brilliant pilot. Knight had not seen him fly. Torio's pilot had landed their ship ahead of time, just as Knight and Brasov were about to take off in Russian-made fighters at Sandica.

Resting on his cane, Brasov halted and leaned against the end of a packing-case.

"Did I hear my name mentioned?" he asked, looking from Knight to Torio.

"*Si*, Count Brasov," said the Loyalist colonel, "I would like a few words with you about your country's opinion of the war."

Brasov inclined his head.

"At your service—but please forget my title. I have already learned that a dead count is the only one they consider a good count here in Bilbao."

Torio glanced at the two guards, who were regarding Brasov with a surly stare.

"You are one of us at heart," he replied. "What you have done proves that. But there is the boat—we shall have to have our talk later on."

THE roaring voice of Major Villar now came up from the gig, and the group on the dock started down the steps to the boat-landing. Knight followed back of Pletski, the Polish volunteer, who had been stolidly listening to the conversation. Pedro Villar, bare-headed, stood in the stern-sheets and gave a gruff welcome to Torio as the hollow-faced colonel came down to the landing. He was huge, for a Spaniard, and his voice roared up from his barrel-like chest. His lips were thick, his black hair tangled and greasy. With his hook nose and the ugly cicatrix he bore on one cheek, he reminded Knight of an old-time pirate. All the man needed was a black patch over one eye, or a wooden leg, to complete the picture.

"Jump in, *Comarade!*" Villar bellowed, ignoring the Colonel's rank. "I am anxious to hear just why we are so honored by Madrid."

Torio ignored the Major's sneering laugh. Before answering, he waited until Knight and the others had entered and the boat had started. Then he spoke carefully:

"As the radio message indicated, Major Villar, my business with you is strictly private. I suppose you have a cabin where we can talk unheard?"

"A score of them," retorted Villar. "When they put me in charge of the *Antona*, it didn't take me long to get those damned aristocrats below deck with the rest of the rats! All except a few that tried to resist," he added sourly, rubbing the freshly healed scar on his cheek.

"What happened to those few?" asked Torio sourly. "They're at the bottom of the *Nervion*," said Villar with an ugly grin.

"Murdering those hostages was uncalled for," Torio said coldly. "If that becomes known, it will cause reprisals on Franco's side and lose sympathy for us in friendly countries." Villar's face purpled.

"You attend to your own business, *Comarade!*" he snarled. "I'll attend to mine!"

The two men glared at each other. Pletski looked

on stolidly, but Knight saw an expression of dry amusement on Count Brasov's face. There was silence for a few moments as the gig sped toward the *Antona*. Torio stared at the seaplanes as they came into view, then he turned abruptly to the Roumanian.

"Tell me, Count Brasov, have you seen any unusual planes during recent patrols?"

"I don't understand," said Brasov. "There are the Fiats, the Heinkels, and Capronis—sometimes Junkers—"

"No, no! I refer to a lone plane. One which on close inspection proves to be other than what it appears at first. On the sides are painted—" Torio stopped short as he saw the two guards and one of the boatmen staring at him. "Never mind, I shall explain when we get on board."

The gig slowed, and then with engine reversed came in to the prison ship's starboard gangway. Brasov stood up with the others, but as the boat thudded against the gangway buffers his cane slipped and he fell to his knees. Knight quickly bent to help him up.

Suddenly from behind them came a strangled groan. Knight whirled, went tense with consternation. Pletski, the Polish volunteer, was crumpling in a heap at Torio's feet!

For an instant, Knight thought Torio had knocked the man down, then he saw the horror on the Colonel's face.

"*Por Dios!*" Torio cried out hoarsely. "He has been shot!"

Sickened, Knight saw where a bullet had drilled through Pletski's temple and out the other side of his head, leaving a ghastly hole. Villar, after a frightened look, flung a wild gaze toward the *Antona*.

"That bullet was meant for me! One of those rats must be loose!"

"No, *commandante*," broke in one of the boatmen. "He was facing this way—the bullet came from across the water."

"A Rebel spy—a sniper!" howled a guard. He dashed up the gangway ladder in a panic. All but Knight and Brasov raced after him. Knight helped the Roumanian to the platform at the foot of the steps, but Brasov shook him off impatiently.

"I need no assistance. Take care of yourself." When they reached the deck, Villar was shouting for men with binoculars to search the left shore for some sign of the sniper. The two machine-gun crews stationed on the starboard side to repel Insurgent air attacks had abandoned their guns and were hastily seeking

shelter. Into the clamor came a sudden new note. Knight turned swiftly as he heard the harsh roar of diving planes. The droning bellow of engines swelled into a deafening cacophony, and through that furious roaring he heard the sharp clatter of machine-guns.

"It's a Rebel raid!" yelled a seaman.

"Man those guns!" Villar flung at the two crews. "Torio! You'd better get your precious skin under cover!"

The Madrid colonel seemed frozen in his tracks. Knight followed his staring eyes, and saw two ships which had just pitched out of the low-hanging clouds. One was a Fiat, spinning madly, a mass of flame. The other ship was diving at terrific speed, but as the pilot saw the river so close beneath he pulled up hurriedly. The plane was a low-wing fighter with a pointed, bulletlike nose. At first glance Knight thought it was a Russian 2KB-19—a craft of the same type the Soviet had sent to Spain and from some of which the seaplanes had been converted.

Then he saw that the pilot's enclosed cockpit was nearer the nose and was really streamlined back to the fin, in spite of an attempt which had been made to camouflage its lines with dark paint. The same attempt had been made to change the profile from the front of the cockpit forward, so that it would appear flatter. As the ship flashed by, he had a glimpse of something like a black streak painted on one side.

Torio suddenly came out of his trance, clutched Villar by the arm.

"In Heaven's name, get your planes into the air! That man must be forced down alive!"

Villar gave him a startled look, spun around to Knight and Brasov.

"Go ahead, you two! I'll send the others after you!"

Torio's eyes blazed as Knight and the Roumanian turned toward the gangway.

"Ten thousand *pesetas*, if you bring me 'Black Arrow' alive! Kill him, and you'll face a firing squad!"

## CHAPTER II THE CORPSE UNDER THE PAINTING

**T**HREE MECHANICS RAN DOWN the ladder as Knight and Brasov reached the gig, and two boatmen followed, under the lash of Villar's tongue.

"To Number Three float," the first mechanic said

hastily to the coxswain. "Those two new planes were just tested, and the motors will be warm."

Knight looked sharply at Brasov, as the Roumanian fastened his helmet and snapped his goggles into place.

"Who's this 'Black Arrow'?" he demanded.

"I never heard of him before," returned the count.

"But ten thousand *pesetas* are not to be despised."

The screeching roar of hurtling ships prevented further words. Another Fiat had plunged out of the mist, and was diving with guns flaming, upon the mystery ship. Two streaks of fire jetted from the Fiat's cowl, but the strange plane below whipped up in a furious zoom, barely grazing the *Antona's* rail. From its cowl and wing-roots, four guns blazed at the zooming Italian ship. The Fiat staggered as smoking steel burned and crashed through its wings, but with a desperate chandelle the pilot finally drove it into the low clouds.

The camouflaged ship now wheeled back toward the nearest seaplane float, but a blast from one of the *Antona's* machine guns forced him to a quick turn.

A Heinkel and two more Fiats were diving from the murk as Knight and Brasov climbed onto their float. Tracers from the *Antona's* guns smoked overhead, and bullets from both sides pelted the water. Knight dashed to the ship on his right, while a mechanic helped Brasov into the pit of the other. A plump little mech swung on Knight's inertia-starter crank, and in a moment, as the secret agent engaged the clutch, the Russian-built Rolls Royce Kestrel thundered into life. The lines were hurriedly cast off, and in a few seconds Knight had the ship on the step, its twin pontoons hissing through the water.

SOMETHING flashed down through the drizzle, and tracer trackers pierced the water in front of the speeding seaplane. Knight jerked the stick, pulled the ship up into a climbing turn so tight that the left wingtip kissed the water. The Heinkel shot by, and a twin-mount spat fire through a port which had been cut in the rear of its cabin.

Knight yanked the charging handles of the cowl Brownings, tripped the two guns. With his seaplane screaming around in a vertical bank, not twenty feet from the water, he ripped a burst through the Heinkel's tail. A return blast from the Heinkel's gunner baptised the new ship and left a crooked path of bullet-holes along the right wing. Knight snapped out of the turn, dived under the Heinkel, and risked a fusillade from its nose-guns in a furious zoom past its

wingtip. The Insurgent pilot cut loose, but the seaplane was out of his range in a twinkling. Knight flipped around as the ship bored into the murky clouds. The Heinkel pilot had kicked away, was going back after the mystery plane, and the two Fiats were diving down through the drizzle.

Count Brasov's "Russky"—as the converted 2KB-19's had been dubbed by Loyalist pilots—was streaking across the Nervion on the verge of taking off. Knight saw another Heinkel join the two Fiats to charge down at it. Grimly, he shoved the controls forward. It had been his intention to keep out of battle when he rejoined the Loyalist air force. Only by a miracle had he and the others been able to preserve American neutrality in the Gibraltar affair. But he could not idly watch Brasov die, outnumbered three to one.

The wind screamed past his partly opened cockpit cover. He bent lower over the stick, for there was no time to latch the "green-house" shut. His fast-moving fingers charged the wing-root guns, Brownings like those under the engine cowl. The wing-guns were mounted to tilt up and down through an angle of sixty degrees from horizontal, for ground-strafting at low altitudes. He shifted his hand from the throttle to the tilting lever on the left of the instrument board.

One of the Fiat pilots saw him coming and pulled up with a frantic signal to his mate. Knight crashed out a ten-round burst, and the first sesquiplane rolled madly aside with the top of its rudder shot off. Brasov was now in the air, with tracers from the Heinkel and the second Fiat crisscrossing almost at his cockpit. The Heinkel rear-gunner suddenly spied the diving Russky, and two blobs of red flame glowed through the mist. Knight booted the rudder, and his seaplane leaped a hundred feet sidewise. With a swift pull at the tilting lever, he jerked the spouting wing-guns down at the second Fiat.

Like a giant knife, the Browning barrage slashed through the Fiat's tail. The fuselage broke in two, and the front half plunged into the river, carrying the pilot with it. Knight saw the man reappear in the water and struggle toward the shore.

Brasov, freed from attack momentarily, pulled up in a steep climb. To Knight's astonishment, the Roumanian made no effort to come to his aid, but raced after the mystery fighter. The Fiat with the bullet-torn rudder had come again into the fray, and as it pitched back at Knight he saw that only the balance-section had been shot away, leaving the rudder still working.

As the Fiat's guns opened fire, two phosphorous lines also lanced from the now zooming Heinkel. Knight back-sticked, corkscrewed through a storm of Insurgent bullets. His cockpit enclosure was gone, only its ragged edges remaining, and he found both of his Russky's metal wings were drilled in a dozen places when he leveled out. He flung a quick glance about the misty sky.

Brasov was in hot pursuit of the unknown pilot, who was darting from side to side in an effort to shake him off. Two more Russky seaplanes were being started, under protection of machine-gun and A-A fire from the *Antona*. The Heinkel and the Fiat swerved hastily from their attempted strafe of the men on the float, and went thundering after Brasov and his quarry.

The mist was thickening and Knight could now only see the *Antona* by straining his eyes, but suddenly he noticed that the A-A guns were blazing in a new direction. Three Heinkels had dropped out of the clouds at a point farther down the river. A signal flare rocketed across the dripping sky from the first Heinkel, bursting into four red stars. Instantly, the trio of ships swept back across the Nervion.

Knight was on the point of being caught between the two groups. He climbed at full gun until he knew he was hidden from the Insurgent pilots. He was about to level out again, keeping in the edge of the dripping clouds, when still another ship hurtled into view through the mists. It was a 2KB-19, from the Sandica field. But for a frantic zoom, he would have crashed it head-on. Knight's seaplane shot up at a terrific speed, gaining a thousand feet before he could flatten it again. He emerged on the edge of a clearer space, a sort of pocket in the fog.

Two ships were whirling after each other, almost in the center of this space. Knight recognized Brasov's plane and saw that the other was the mystery ship. The Roumanian was holding his fire, except for short bursts now and then when the other man tried to plunge off and escape in the clouds. Knight climbed a trifle higher, banking to keep the two ships in view.

It was his first clear glimpse of the pilot and plane which had so startled Torio. Circling parallel, he now made out that it was a Supermarine "Spitfire" low-wing fighter, one of the newest British Royal Air Force ships. It had been camouflaged rather crudely, he could now see, with the obvious intention of making it pass for a 2KB-19 at some distance or in a gloomy sky.

The tail group, similar to that of the Russian ship, had been painted with the Loyalist colors, and on the side of the fuselage was a huge black arrow.

The Spitfire had been hit in a dozen places. There was a hole a foot in diameter out near the right wing-tip, and a smaller one midway on the left wing. The entire wing structure was vibrating furiously, and Knight realized this was why the pilot was forced to keep his speed reduced. Ordinarily, the twelve-in-line Merlin would have made it an easy master of the Russian seaplane, for he knew the Spitfire had been clocked at three hundred or more, while the Russky's top was but two hundred and thirty on pontoons.

Through the transparent enclosure of the arrow-marked ship, Knight saw a pale, blood-streaked face. The man threw a frightened look upward as Knight's plane inched closer. The secret agent's brows drew together under his goggles. There was something vaguely familiar about that desperate face. But he had no time to recall where he had seen the man; for the Spitfire pilot, apparently expecting attack from this new direction, made a wild attempt to reverse into the fog. Knight was kept busy following him.

Brasov sent a burst smoking into his left wing-tip, and the Spitfire pilot pulled up in frenzied haste. Knight kicked to the right, and the zooming ship missed him narrowly. Brasov, seeing the other seaplane for the first time, had to make a fast roll to avoid collision.

KNIGHT'S maneuver had placed him in a dangerous position, and the man in the Spitfire instantly took the advantage. Whirling tightly, with Knight's ship blocking Brasov's fire, he tripped all four of his guns.

With a crash, the seaplane's prop disintegrated. In the split second before Knight snapped the switch, the Kestrel revved up to a deafening shriek. A jagged section of engine cowling, cut away by the burst, whipped back over his head and struck the tail. The seaplane yawed crazily, fell off, and started to spin. Knight let it go for a quarter of a turn, with the Spitfire's bullets still smoking past his head. Then the murk closed about him and he centered the controls. The nose went down, but the ship continued to spin. He shoved the opposite rudder, managed to bring it out.

The plane had barely ceased to whirl when it emerged in the drizzly sky under the clouds. Knight's jaw dropped. He had fallen into the middle of a furious dog-fight. All but one of the remaining Loyalist seaplanes were in the air, along with three 2KB-19's which had evidently been hurriedly summoned from

Sandica, ten miles away. Against these six Loyalist planes, there were now five Fiats and two Heinkels. One of the other two Heinkels had crashed into the river, and the other was not to be seen.

Knight's headlong plunge sent two Fiats and a Heinkel scattering to right and left, but as the two-seater pilot saw Knight's helplessness he dived for a quick attack. A Loyalist pilot pitched down after the Insurgent ship, and a brief battle between him and the Heinkel rear-gunner ensued. The Heinkel's rear guns abruptly ceased to blaze, and the Loyalist pilot triumphantly lifted his tracer torrent forward over the ship. Black smoke puffed from the two-seater, and it was suddenly an inferno. Knight swerved as it came plummeting down through the rain. With a heartfelt gesture of thanks to the man who had saved him, he pointed his crippled seaplane toward its float.

He was within five hundred feet of the water when the mysterious "Black Arrow" dived from the clouds, Brasov close on his tail. With a quick turn, the man in the Hawker raced past the stern of the *Antona*. One of the Fiats detached itself from the dogfight and charged in toward the Spitfire. Caught between the Fiat and Brasov's ship, the Spitfire pilot shot back into the fog clouds, which by now were almost down to the taller hills of the Old Town.

It seemed only a few seconds to Knight; for he had barely leveled off, when the Supermarine Spitfire reappeared. This time the Spitfire was in a tight spin, and he knew at first glance that it would never come out. He landed, felt the seaplane grate against the float, but his eyes were riveted on the arrow-marked ship.

A fraction of a second before it struck he saw that the shattered enclosure was pushed back and the cockpit was empty.

Then the Spitfire crashed with an ear-splitting roar. The two mechanics on the seaplane float quickly secured Knight's ship as he climbed out. He stared up into the murk, and in a moment he saw what he had expected.

A figure was swaying down from the clouds at the end of parachute shrouds. A second later he could see the chute itself, tilted to spill the air as the Spitfire pilot frantically slipped to one side. The reason for the slip was instantly apparent—for Brasov came plunging down with his guns pounding.

"*Madre de Dios!*" howled one of the mechanics. "The fool is firing this way!"

Brasov's bullets were drilling into the water less than a hundred yards distant, and the telltale splashes

were leaping toward the float. One of the mechanics dived into the river and swam toward the *Antona's* gangway. Knight and the other man were about to follow when Brasov abruptly changed direction.

The Fiat which had broken off from the dogfight darted around toward the man in the chute. Brasov cut between them, forcing the pilot into a hasty turn. Another Fiat came charging to aid the first. The Roumanian whipped into a tight split, raked the second plane from tail to cockpit. The riddled Fiat went up steeply, fell off, then dived headlong into the Nervion.

A motor dory from the *Antona* had almost reached the float where Knight and the mechanic waited. Just as it touched, the man in the chute released the shrouds on one side and started to slip the other way. Knight sprang into the boat, hustling the mechanic with him.

"Around to the port side!" he snapped at the coxswain. "He's going to drop in near that side of the ship!"

Brasov's plane screamed down toward the *Antona*, then banked steeply. The pilot of the first Fiat made no attempt to head him off, but suddenly began to strafe the gunners on the vessel's deck. The dory sped past the second seaplane float, where Knight saw the only Russky which had not taken off. The reason was quite plain now. The pilot and a mechanic both lay crumpled upon the float, victims of Insurgent guns. All but one of the seaplane's lines had been cast off, and the inertia-wheel crank was in place where the mechanic had put it just as bullets struck him down.

AS THE dory swung around the bow of the *Antona*, Knight heard a faint crash through the steady roar of guns and motors. Brasov had landed, and his ship had collided with the port gangway. In a second, Knight realized it was his accident; for the Roumanian count snatched his cane from the cockpit, hooked it on the gangway rail to pull the broken wing closer, and then crawled across the wing to the platform. Hobbling up the steps, he disappeared.

"Look aft!" Knight's mechanic burst out. "The parachute is hooked on the mainmast!"

It was true. The chute, shrouds now dangling, had caught just below the peak and had collapsed about the rigging. From the way the shrouds were blowing, Knight knew that the Spitfire pilot had unfastened the harness and was free.

The dory slowed near the wrecked seaplane, and

Knight scrambled over it to the gangway. There was a lull in the firing, but as he reached the deck a machine gun clattered fiercely. He jumped back down the steps as bullets cracked and snarled over his head. Above the harsh pounding of the gun he heard screams from the deck, then the louder screech of the Fiat drowned the rest. The Italian ship roared past, twisting around to rake the decks again. As it thundered diagonally across the stern, Knight cautiously lifted his head.

A gory shambles met his eyes. The A-A and machine-gun crews of the *Antona* lay dead or dying about their weapons, and a Loyalist officer, shot through the chest, was trying to crawl along the deck to shelter. Splintered wood and battered metal testified to the fury of the Fiat's guns.

The Fiat was zooming. Knight ran up to the deck, crossed to the starboard side. He was ramming a fresh clip in a machine gun for use if the Insurgent pilot returned for another strafe, when Torio's voice sounded frantically from amidships.

"Stop him! Don't let him escape!"

Knight turned swiftly. The Spitfire pilot was almost at the rail beyond the after lifeboat. Count Brasov, hobbling only a few feet behind, was raising his cane for a blow at the other man's head.

The heavy stick flashed down, but missed, and Brasov fell to the deck. The Spitfire pilot spun around, an empty trench-knife scabbard swinging at his belt. He kicked savagely at the prostrate man, then whirled and leaped to the rail.

Knight had started to dash aft; Torio was also running as fast as he could, but he was still a hundred feet from the man when he dived. Torio wheeled, fuming, as Knight reached him.

"Get back to the machine gun! Wreck that seaplane before he can get away!"

Knight flung a look over the side. The fugitive had pulled himself onto the float where the dead men lay and was almost to the seaplane's cockpit.

"Too late!" he said to Torio. "If I fire on the ship, I'll kill him."

"No! He must be taken alive!" moaned the colonel.

"There's a dory on the other side. If we hurry—" Knight broke off as the Fiat came roaring back. "Look out! We're going to be strafed again!"

The Fiat's guns were already hammering. With an oath, Torio dived for a companionway. Brasov had regained his feet, and he hurriedly limped for shelter. Knight joined them and for a minute they huddled half-way between decks. The roar of the Fiat

and clatter of its guns cut off all attempts at speech. Suddenly, the sound of other ships swelled the din, and bullets ceased to thud into the deck above them. Knight risked a quick glance.

"It's another flight from Sandica!" he exclaimed.

Torio and Brasov followed him up the ladder. Three more 2KB-19's and four Curtiss fighters had turned the tide of battle. The Heinkels and Fiats were fleeing, but the Spitfire pilot had also made good his escape, for the Russky was lifting from the river and was being followed by the Fiat which had strafed the *Antona*. Torio swore furiously as the seaplane was swallowed up in the mists.

"Two of the 2KB's are also following it," said Knight.

"They'll probably lose it in this mist," rasped the hollow-faced colonel. "To think he was practically in my hands, and I let him get away again!"

BRASOV scowled into the dripping sky. "If it hadn't been for that Fiat, I'd have had the man! One of Villar's guards nearly had him trapped, but the Fiat pilot shot him down. 'Black Arrow' ducked into the aft salon. I went in there, but he must have doubled back through the stern passage. The next thing I saw, he was making for the rail."

Torio nodded sourly.

"You did your best, and I shall not forget it." He was silent a moment, gazing into the drizzle. "One good point," he muttered half to himself, "with a seaplane he will have fewer places to alight."

"Whoever he is, he won't go far," said Brasov.

"Neither one of those ships at Number Two float had been refueled. All he has is a small reserve tank—good for little more than half an hour."

"Are you sure of that?" Torio asked tensely.

"Quite," replied the Roumanian. "I heard the pilots arguing with the mechanics this morning; the men said it was raining and there was no need to fuel the ship when no one was going to fly it."

"Quick!" said Torio. "I must see a map at once!"

"There is one in Major Villar's cabin, aft on this deck," said Count Brasov. "But we shall have to find him first; he always keeps the cabin locked."

"He is probably hiding in there now," Torio said in a contemptuous voice. "I saw him scuttle in that direction when the strafe began. Come along, both of you. I think I shall need your help in this affair."

They went toward the de luxe staterooms near the stern, the most sumptuous of which Villar had chosen

for his quarters. Torio unemotionally stepped over the body of a sailor who had been killed in the battle, and rapped at the door which Brasov indicated. There was no answer. He called out Villar's name, irritably, then tried the knob and opened the door.

Knight saw him start back. Just inside the door lay a bloody trench-knife, its blade pointing into the unlighted cabin. In the gray gloom, the blood looked black, making the knife like a dark, shining arrow pointing mutely to some sinister thing within.

"A light!" Torio said hoarsely. "Where is the switch?"

Knight and Brasov, staring down at the weapon, did not answer. The Colonel felt along the inside wall, and suddenly the cabin lights went on. He stepped over the knife, halted with a gasp. Knight, following close behind, also stopped, with a cold chill of horror going up his spine.

The body of Pedro Villar lay stretched upon the floor, almost covered by a weird old painting in oils. Only his feet, and his hands—the latter curled into talons by the agony of death—were visible from under the painting, but Knight knew it was the brutal master of the prison ship.

Blood was flowing from a spot underneath the painting. As Knight saw where that red stream seemed to lead, the painted picture took on a hideous meaning.

It was a scene in some ancient castle, with tapestries and high walls of decorated masonry in the background. At the right stood a woman in richly adorned robes, and before her a small, stone pillar like the base of a sun dial. A golden tray rested on this stone, and upon the tray was a man's head. The eyes were still open, as though the man had just been beheaded, and the woman was looking down at the head with a strange expression in which both loathing and triumph were mixed.

For several moments neither Knight nor Torio moved. The Colonel had turned a sickly color, but nevertheless he bent down and lifted one corner of the painting. He dropped it with a shudder, and when he turned around his face was ghastly.

"Is he . . . ?" Knight did not finish his question.

"Yes," Torio whispered. "Villar has been beheaded!"

## CHAPTER III THE HAWK'S HAZARD

**F**OR A MOMENT there was no sound save the faint rumble of distant guns. Brasov stared down at the covered corpse.

"But why?" he muttered. "And what's the meaning of this horrible painting?"

Torio shook his head. He had a dazed expression.

"I don't know . . . I must have been wrong. This is apparently a murder of vengeance, and yet . . ."

He started to close the door as foot-steps sounded, but Brasov intervened.

"It's Captain Renega—he's senior officer now that Villar is dead, and he'll have to know."

Renega came puffing into the room, a stout, pompous little man whom the revolution had raised to a post of importance. One look at the covered corpse, with the blood streaming from under the painting, and he turned to flee.

"Wait, you idiot!" Torio said harshly. "We didn't kill him—it was that devil who dropped on board with the parachute."

"That's right, *capitaine*," said Brasov. "This is Colonel Torio, from Madrid. He came to confer with Villar, as you know."

Renega nodded speechlessly, his eyes averted from the dead Spaniard. Torio, seeing a few sailors and gunners approaching, took command of the situation.

"Put a guard at this door," he said in a low tone to Brasov, as he motioned the others outside and turned the key in the lock. "Then meet us in this next cabin."

The Roumanian beckoned to one of the crew, and Knight followed Torio and Renega into an adjoining stateroom. The portly captain regained his composure as they left the corpse behind.

"I'm in command now," he said pompously. "And I demand an explanation of this matter."

"I'll tell you as much as I know," snapped Torio. He wheeled as Brasov entered, and waited till the door was closed. "But first, tell me if those seaplanes of yours have radio sets installed?"

"Three of them have receivers, and one has a two-way apparatus," replied Renega. "Both of those following that stolen plane have receivers, if that is what you mean."

"Call your ship's operator and have him call those

planes," directed Torio. "Tell the pilots they will split a reward of fifty thousand *pesetas* if they force that fugitive down in our lines, alive. Twenty thousand if they are unable to force him down but see where he lands and bring me the information at once."

As Renega stepped to the stateroom phone, Brasov looked dryly at Torio.

"The 'Black Arrow' seems to become of increasing value, Colonel."

Torio scowled, gave Renega a final instruction.

"Also broadcast word through this area that the pilot is not to be killed if forced down, and the ship is not to be touched. Secret papers of value to our cause may be hidden in the plane, or their location may be known only to the pilot."

Captain Renega repeated the directions. He was about to hang up when a message was apparently repeated to him by the ship's operator. He flushed, sputtered a brief reply, and turned to Colonel Torio.

"General Huera is in a rage over the bombing of the Santurce docks an hour ago. This is the second time the Rebels have made a perfect approach to key positions in spite of the fog. Huera ordered all the seaplanes sent up to be ready in case there is another attack."

"That can wait," grated Torio. "The way the fog has closed in now your pilots would crash into the hills."

Renega wiped his perspiring face.

"That's what I can't understand—how the Rebels can fly so well in this weather while we cannot. Huera will probably have my head if—" he broke off, shuddering. "That damned picture! Was—was Villar—"

"Yes, his head was cut off with that trench knife you saw on the floor. It's incredible—it doesn't fit the rest at all. But it must have some connection."

"Perhaps if you began at the beginning," Brasov said suavely, "it might help us."

"I will," snapped the Madrid Colonel. "But this affair involves papers of grave importance—papers that might ruin us if we don't recover them. I must pledge you three to absolute secrecy before I go further."

He looked searchingly from one to another, and all three men nodded.

"The papers represent a secret agreement between three factions of the Popular Front," he went on. "The agreement was designed to promote unity, so that we can drive Franco and his hirelings out of Spain. After victory, the conditions named in the agreement would,

of course, be modified by necessity. But as they stand, it would now appear that the new premier has pledged himself and his cabinet to avoid absolute Communism in the new republic. Naturally, this would infuriate Russia, which desires a pattern of Soviet rule. As you all know, she has been our chief source of airplanes and ammunition. It might lose us France's help, also; for they have enough Communists in the Chamber of Deputies to turn her against us."

"And these papers have been stolen?" exclaimed Renega in alarm.

"They have," retorted Torio. "They were stolen by a man we believe to be an international spy, who called himself Paul Greuze while in our service. He volunteered as a pilot and was attached to our squadron at Arganda, near Madrid."

KNIGHT barely hid a start. With the mention of that name, he had suddenly remembered the identity of the Spitfire pilot. It was Greuze, whom he had met at Madrid.

"How he learned of the secret papers, I don't know," Torio continued. "But during an Insurgent attack one night about a week ago, he took advantage of the confusion to escape with the plane you saw today—the one marked with a black arrow. A few hours later, the loss of the papers was discovered, and then we learned Greuze had been seen near the place where they were hidden. On investigation, we found he was a notorious spy. He can sell those papers to one of several nations—and they would be used to turn Russia against us. It could mean the end for the Loyalist government!"

Captain Renega had an expression of dismay on his plump face, and Brasov nodded with a sympathetic look. Knight forced himself to match the Roumanian's manner, but within him suspicion was burning fiercely. Something about Torio's story did not ring true. The recent attack on Arganda, exactly one week past, had not been by Insurgents but by hired pilots of the "Four Faces" for the purpose of capturing Benita, Doyle, and himself to preserve their plot against Gibraltar. The part about the Spitfire, he knew, might be true. There had been such a ship in Spain—a model built under English licenses by the Hispano-Suiza company, which had also turned out some modified Furies. This lone Spitfire had been fitted with special equipment, including ultra high-frequency radio apparatus, and it had been in one of the hangars on the night of the attack. Greuze might have escaped

in it, but he had never seemed a very brilliant man, and if he really had been an international spy he had concealed the fact quite well.

“But after his escape?” Renega was insisting.

“He was followed by one of our pilots, who forced him down that night, but unfortunately in Rebel territory.” Torio paused, absently tugged at his mustache. “We made a search at dawn, but Greuze had evidently landed safely and hidden his ship somewhere. There were woods nearby. We landed two spies in an isolated place and they tried to locate the Spitfire. They failed, but we heard three days ago through another source that Greuze had taken off next day and attempted to land for fuel at a small Rebel field in the province of Navarre. It seems he knew, from being stationed a few days here at Bilbao, that the Rebels had captured one of your Russian planes intact and had painted a black arrow on it to mark it as a captured ship.”

Brasov snapped his fingers.

“Ah, now I remember! It was forced down near Vitoria, by some of the Italian ‘Black Arrow’ brigade. I should have guessed the reason for that arrow on the Spitfire, but the camouflage puzzled me.”

“It was obviously an attempt to make it look like the captured plane,” said Torio. “Greuze almost succeeded, by landing after dusk—but some one knew the difference and under gunfire he barely escaped. When we learned of this, we knew he must now be very short of fuel and probably not far away from there, in Navarre province. I knew he would make another desperate effort to get enough fuel to take him out of Spain. I suspected he might try at Santander or at your Sandica field—and that is why I came here, to warn you to be on guard so he could be trapped alive.”

AS TORIO finished, Brasov slowly shook his head. “There is something very strange about this. Your opinion is that he flew here, knowing about the seaplanes and intending to escape in one of them?”

“That’s what I thought at first,” Torio replied. “But Villar’s murder changes everything. So far as I know, Greuze never knew Villar. He would have no reason to kill him, and this is a crime of passion. The man who killed Villar must have planned it carefully, with the idea of beheading him and leaving that painting as a symbol of revenge. He took a desperate chance, dropping on board by parachute. But for that air battle, he wouldn’t have escaped. Yet neither side was helping him—the Rebels seemed to be after him, too.”

“One Fiat was aiding him,” Brasov said thoughtfully. “But you’re right. It doesn’t make sense. Even if we grant the Insurgents a reason—say that they might have learned about the secret agreement and were after it—that doesn’t explain why Villar was killed or why the painting was left.”

“Especially a painting of that value,” muttered Torio.

“Then you know something of art?” said Brasov in a surprised voice.

Torio looked annoyed for a moment.

“I was an official of the Prado Museum, at Madrid, for ten years before the revolution. I happen to know that this is one of the lost paintings of Ribera—the *Spaniard of Jativa*, which title he usually added to his signature. He came from Jativa, the cradle of the Borgia family, and he revelled in hideous and revolting subjects—though a few are different. He painted *St. John the Baptist in the Desert*, and *The Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew* who was flayed to death. We have heard rumors of this other painting, but it must have been hidden somewhere all these years. Ribera died in 1656.”

“The painting must have some significance,” Captain Renega put in. “Maybe we could tell something if we looked—I mean if it were brought in here,” he hastily amended his suggestion.

“Perhaps,” grunted Torio. He looked at Brasov. “Will you bring it in?”

Brasov went out, and the colonel turned suddenly to Knight.

“When you were fighting with the Spitfire, did you get a good look at the pilot’s face?”

“No, it was too much smeared with blood,” lied Knight.

“Colonel,” Renega said importantly, “. I just this second remembered something about the way the British used to mark their prison ships and their convicts years ago. They used small black arrows on the ships, and they branded their convicts’ hands with the arrow mark.”

“Is that right?” Torio asked Knight curtly.

Just in time, Knight recalled his supposed English blood.

“Yes, *Señor* Colonel, that is true.”

“And this is a prison ship,” Torio said half to himself. “Yes, it could be a connection. And that painting—there might be a woman involved. A prisoner Villar might have killed, or has there been any case like that?”

"We have had some women prisoners," evaded Renega.

"The lost painting was rumored to be the head of John the Baptist," mused Torio. "But in the glance I had, the woman didn't look like the usual depicting of Salome, or Herodias either. It might have been Judith, with the head of Holophernes—a different version from the one by Botticelli. Holophernes was a tyrant, and that would fit Villar."

He turned as Brasov reentered with the painting. One side still dripped blood, and the Roumanian held it at arm's length as he limped into the cabin. He laid it down on the floor and faced the three men with an odd, excited expression.

"I found something else which 'Black Arrow' must have dropped—purposely or accidentally."

He laid a torn clipping and a glossy photograph on the table. Knight started, the picture was of Benita Navarre!

In that first moment of amazement, he thought he had betrayed himself, but Torio's outbursts took the others' attention.

"*La Navarre!*" the colonel shouted. "Then I was right! This pilot was Greuze, and he—"

"What is it?" exclaimed Renega, as Torio abruptly stopped.

"I have made a mistake, after all," mumbled the Colonel. "This is more mixed than before. 'Black Arrow' must have been one of the two other fugitives who escaped that night at Arganda—one of the two Americans who were with this girl."

"I don't understand," said the plump captain. "This photograph is called 'The Girl from Lost Valley.' What could they mean by—" his voice dwindled off. Knight saw his eyes flash over the newspaper description of the famous "Green Madonna" emerald and back to the news photo of Benita in the picturesque in which Doyle and he had rescued her from that desolate valley in the Rockies.

"This girl, *Señorita Navarre*," Torio began hastily, "was one of a lost Spanish community whose ancestors were trapped in an almost inaccessible valley, about a hundred years ago. It happened in the *Estados Unidos*, where this group of Spaniards had gone to seek gold. An earthquake closed the only exit to the valley; and until airmen discovered the place, the descendants of the first community were living in the style and custom of 1850 and in almost complete ignorance of the modern world."

"Look!" said Renega in a hushed voice. "It says this

emerald is worth half a million dollars! If the *señorita* is still in Spain—"

"She's not," snapped Torio. "She's either in England or on her way back to the United States. She escaped that night at Arganda, I tell you, in a plane piloted by one of two Americans, the one known as Richard Knight, or the former Marine Corps officer named Doyle, who is usually with him."

"Do you know these two?" asked Brasov.

"Not Doyle. But I saw Knight at Arganda. He is a tall man, with dark blue eyes and—" Torio stopped, and Knight felt a freezing sensation. For an interval that seemed minutes, the Madrid Colonel stared at him, then a light of triumph shot into his eyes.

"*Diablo!* So that is where I saw you! Renega, arrest this man!"

RENEGA fumblingly snatched out a pistol. Knight made no move; he had already decided on his course if Torio should recognize him.

"B-but I don't understand," stuttered Renega. "What has he done?"

"Done? You imbecile, this man is Richard Knight—the one I just told you about! He's dyed his hair, and that adhesive plaster kept me from recognizing him until just now."

Renega gaped at Knight, and Brasov stared at him with a look of incredulity.

"Are you certain, Colonel Torio? Pilot Gordon has credentials from England—I saw him present them to Villar."

"A trick!" snarled Torio. Then a quick light came into his eyes. "Where is the other man?"

"Other man?" faltered Renega.

"The one who came with Knight," raged Torio. "Doyle—his accomplice."

"*Señor Gordon* reported alone," said Brasov. "I haven't seen him speaking to anyone else."

Torio scowled at Knight.

"Doyle must have taken the girl—perhaps to England, or the United States. And Knight decided to try this alone. But wait—the man who killed Villar—he might be Doyle. The report about their escaping together and being at Gibraltar might have been a mistake. Doyle might have seized the Spitfire that night, and Greuze might have been one of the pilots who burned in the hangar fire."

He stopped, and Knight took the first opportunity to speak.

"You have made a mistake, Colonel Torio. I am Earl

Gordon, as I told you. If you will cable Royal Air Force headquarters in London—”

“So you’ve arranged it with them?” sneered Torio. He spun around to Brasov. “Take his pistol and hold his arms! Renega, keep your gun trained on him!”

The two men obeyed, and Torio reached up his hand to Knight’s face. With a sudden jerk, he tore away the adhesive strips. Knight winced, but did not make a sound. Torio motioned for Brasov to pull Knight nearer the light, for a closer inspection of his hair. A moment’s silence, then he laughed harshly.

“Very excellent work, *Señor* Knight! But the roots of your hair are dark already. And with that plaster removed, I know you anywhere. I see now why you kept that side of your face turned toward me.”

Knight made no answer. Renega and Brasov looked curiously from him to Torio.

“Why should he return and volunteer again after one close escape?” asked the portly captain.

Knight caught the crafty look in Torio’s eyes, as the Madrid Colonel answered.

“It was not clear before, Knight’s motive for first entering our air force. I can see now that he is a member of a group of clever thieves headed by a man known as the ‘Hawk.’ They have been operating in Spain, and Knight and Doyle must have been in league with them. It is the only explanation of this painting and these photographs.”

Renega looked more befuddled than ever. Torio made an impatient gesture.

“Greuze, I can see now, was also a member of the ‘Hawk’s’ group. The Hawk may even be Knight himself! The two were probably working together at Arganda and Madrid—Knight must have planned the theft of the secret agreement. Perhaps Greuze—if it was he in that plane today—was going to slip it to Knight in some way.”

“*Si, si!*” exclaimed. Renega, enthusiastic once the idea had been implanted. “I thought it was strange that he could not down that plane when he was so close. And then when he scrambled on board so fast—he was trying to save the other man then.”

Knight, now fully convinced that Torio was playing a role for some purpose, waited silently while the three men discussed the situation.

“I’ve heard of the ‘Hawk,’” Brasov said thoughtfully, “but I thought he confined himself to stealing works of art. And the chief of Roumanian state police once told me that it was a very small group, not more than a dozen or so, and made up of Europeans.”

“How could he know?” Torio said rudely. “We have been after them for years, before and since the revolution. In that time, we learned only two things: That one of the gang is named Hermann Stell and that he is an Austrian, and also that the ‘Hawk’ uses airplanes to smuggle his stolen goods across international borders.

Renega was looking down at the news clipping again. When he glanced up, his fat face held a shrewd expression.

“Does the ‘Hawk’ also steal jewels?”

TORIO shrugged. “He probably would if he had the chance. In the months that I have been trying to catch him, since the revolution, he has confined himself to the theft of valued paintings. In the first confusion of the war, you will remember that our people sacked monasteries and convents and homes of the aristocrats. A fortune in paintings disappeared, and we have proof that the ‘Hawk’ was at work even there at the first. Sometimes he or his men were part of a mob—sometimes he bought a priceless painting for a song, from some poor wretch who had taken it and did not know its value.”

There was a brief silence. Renega licked his lips, spoke in an oily voice.

“I have a feeling, Colonel Torio, that you are holding something back. If you want our cooperation, you had better trust us with the entire story.”

“Are you threatening me?” snarled Torio, his face suddenly aflame.

Renega cowered, but the greedy look was still in his eyes.

“Only advising you, comrade,” he whined. “After all, you are in the Basque country now—not Madrid or Valencia.”

Torio glared at him, then slowly nodded. “*Muy bien*, I will tell you the rest. I need help, as you say. But if you try to trick me—” he broke off as loud voices sounded outside the cabin. In a second, some one rapped at the door. Renega opened it a few inches and through the aperture Knight saw the dripping figure of a young pilot, apparently Italian, in the grasp of a burly guard, also another man whose arm alone was visible.

“This is the pilot of the Rebel plane which was first shot down,” announced the guard. “He was trying to escape, along the shore, and this stranded British sailor caught him for us.”

“Take him below,” ordered Renega, but Torio intervened.

“No, he may have important information. I want to see him.”

The door was opened wider, and the wretched pilot was pushed into the cabin. Knight’s eyes passed over him, then on to the unkempt merchant seaman who held his left arm. Only years of practice saved him from showing his astonishment as he saw the twisted, broken nose and homely face of that sailor.

It was Doyle!

## CHAPTER IV FLIGHT OF FURY

**H**E HAD LEFT DOYLE back at Bordeaux, keeping secret guard over Benita and watching for any sign of the Four Faces’ agents. But here he was, with a three day stubble on his chin and a lump under one eye which testified to a recent fight.

Doyle’s mouth opened as he saw Knight, but he covered the break with a roaring report to the uniformed Captain Renega.

“Yus, sir—Joe Binks’ th’ nyme, and ‘ere’s yer prisoner. Give me quite a narsty one, ‘e did, but I collared him, just th’ syme.”

Knight held his breath, as Doyle poured forth this none-too-practiced imitation of Cockney dialect. But the Spaniards and Brasov did not notice, and he silently thanked Heaven that the Italian held the others’ attention. The pilot was young, not more than twenty, and he was making a manifest effort to hide his terror and put up a brave front. Torio reached out and gripped his dripping jacket.

“What do you know about that ‘Black Arrow’ plane, and the man who flew it?” he rasped in Italian.

The pilot did not answer. Torio shook him fiercely and repeated the question.

“I know nothing, pig!” flamed the young Italian.

Torio struck him a furious blow in the face, kicked him as he toppled to the floor.

“Wait, wait!” cried Renega. “I want to learn how they are able to fly in this fog!”

But Torio’s kick had reduced the prisoner to unconsciousness.

“Take him below,” the Colonel ordered the staring guard. “Confine him separately from the rest—and take this one, too!”

He pointed at Knight. The guard stepped outside

and shouted for some one to help him, and two more of the crew appeared. Torio indicated Knight.

“Lock this fellow in a stateroom on the deck below, and keep an armed guard at the door with orders to shoot him if he tries to escape.”

Knight caught a quick glance from Doyle as he was taken out. The two Loyalist sailors shoved him down the nearest companionway, and forward through a passage lined by stateroom doors, while Doyle and the burly guard carried the unconscious Italian.

The Italian was placed in one of the staterooms, and Knight was locked into one diagonally across the passageway. Doyle’s booming voice and those of the Spaniards were audible for a few seconds, then Knight heard all but his guard leave. He turned on the light, made a hasty inspection. There was no connecting-door to another stateroom, so the passage door was the only way out. By swinging onto the upper berth, he could see through the tiny transom. The big Spaniard had remained on guard; he could glimpse the man walking back and forth.

He sat down on the lower berth and tried to clear some of the riddle. Doyle’s presence was disturbing, even though it meant he had a friend on board; for he knew Doyle would not have left Benita unless something unusual had occurred. But the main puzzle was that of Torio and Greuze. He was positive that the unknown sniper had intended to kill Torio, not Pletski or Villar. Torio had been the nearest, and his face had mirrored the belief that the bullet was intended for him.

But for the killing of Villar and the symbolical painting, Knight could have found a logical explanation for the actions of both Greuze and Torio. For Benita had lost the Green Madonna on that very night when Greuze was supposed to have fled with the secret agreement. She had used it to bribe the two men who were watching the guard-house where Doyle and he were held captive. A Spanish woman, one of the Red Carmens, had raised the alarm, and the Four Faces’ pilots had attacked the station a moment later. In the battle which had followed, the emerald had disappeared. It was possible that Greuze had seized it and escaped, and that Torio’s story of a secret agreement was a lie.

Knight frowned. Torio’s motive, then, would be simply the recovering of the emerald. If he was intending to make off with it, double-crossing his government, that might explain his actions and his manner, and yet the personal danger and the

ultimate result seemed hardly worth it. If he were caught at the attempt, the Loyalist government would have him shot. Even if he succeeded and escaped to another country with the emerald, it would not bring anywhere near its value in a forced sale. He would be branded a traitor, and would have vengeful Spaniards on his trail as soon as the truth became known. Only a much greater stake would seem to justify the risk.

BUT would the government itself go to such lengths, during one of the most desperate chapters of the civil war, when the emerald's loan or forced sale value would add only a few hundred thousand to their coffers, and that only after an undoubted delay? It did not seem likely, yet Knight had a feeling that this whole puzzle revolved about the Green Madonna.

"Was it possible that there was some secret connected with it which neither he nor Benita knew? He sat up, as a half-forgotten memory came to him. When Benita had first shown him the carved emerald, she had hinted at some tradition, some story connected with it. In the excitement of the events which led to Lost Valley and her final rescue, he had forgotten about it, though he had learned some of the details of her history. Her great-grandfather, the Duke Medina de Navarre, had fled from Spain—the province of Navarre—about the year 1840. De Navarre had had some difference with the king, but what it was Knight had never learned. Benita had been reticent about it, and he had made no effort to break her silence.

He mulled over the problem for a while longer, then returned to the more serious matter of his present situation. Doyle was his only hope, and the odds would be strongly against them even if Doyle freed him from the stateroom. He could not rely on United States intervention. If he had been an ordinary citizen instead of a secret agent, there might have been such a chance. But now they would not dare try to help him, for fear of international entanglements. Also, he had acted on his own, without requesting permission from Washington, which was another black mark against him.

The minutes dragged by, and he knew it must be near dark when a clamor of bells and whistles sounded faintly from both shores of the Nervion. In a little while the *Antona's* siren joined in with a raucous blast, and the excited voices of the crew were added to the din.

"*Que es eso?*" he heard the big guard bawl at some one.

The answer was indistinct, but Knight was electrified to hear a stifled yell outside, followed by unmistakable sounds of a struggle. Something thudded against the door, and a moment later it was hastily unlocked. The guard tumbled in and sprawled headlong on the deck, and Doyle leaped in after him with an automatic clutched in his fist.

"Did you kill him?" exclaimed Knight.

Doyle grinned.

"No, just a tap on the bean—but I'll bet he'll know the Marines have landed when he wakes up."

Knight peered out, saw the passage was empty. He hurriedly closed the door.

"What's happened? What's all the row?"

"General Mola—the Insurgent general—is dead," explained Doyle. "Plane hit a mountain, killed him, two Staff officers, and two German pilots."

Knight whistled. No wonder the Basques were celebrating. Mola was the strongest man Franco had put into the field, and he had threatened to turn Bilbao into a cemetery.

"We've got to get off this tub," Doyle said anxiously, "and we'd better start movin'."

Knight bent to take the unconscious guard's pistol. "Hold it," he said as Doyle started to open the door. "First, I want to know why you left Bordeaux. Where's Benita?"

Doyle's homely face sobered.

"Brace yourself, Dick. She's gone—kidnaped!"

"Kidnaped?" groaned Knight. "I told you to guard her!"

"I did my best," said Doyle, "but they pulled a fast one. Two birds dressed like French police stopped us on the way to Marseilles. That vice-consul had given Benita a temporary passport, you remember—but it wasn't quite according to Hoyle. Anyway, the two Frog cops climbed in to ride to the nearest station, or whatever they call 'em in France. Then one of 'em slugged me. We had a helluva row and I drilled one bird, but the other pushed me out of the car. I followed as soon as I could grab a machine, and I found they went to a field close by. They'd just taken off in a plane of some kind when I got there. It was dark and I couldn't tell what kind it was, but they headed for the Spanish border. I knew I had to reach you, so I beat it back to St. Jean de Luz and signed on one of those Limey food-boats that were runnin' the blockade. They'd had some desertions—so I didn't have any trouble getting away with it. We got in early this morning, and I jumped ship pronto.

"I remembered you were going to try to get into this seaplane outfit, so I hung around all day on that dock on the New Town side. I was there when you came out of that car, but I couldn't dope out an excuse for gettin' on board here till the Fiat pilot came swimmin' ashore."

KNIGHT had listened tensely and now his mind leaped back to the photograph and the clipping found in Villar's cabin.

"Is it dark yet?" he asked swiftly.

"No, it's still a little gray. But it'll be dark in about fifteen minutes, I think."

"I've a plan," Knight said rapidly. "But we can't try it until it's dark. Something that's happened here gives me an idea where we might be able to find Benita—or at least a clue to where she is."

"Shoot," said Doyle.

"It's hooked up with the Green Madonna," said Knight. He explained hurriedly about Torio, about Villar's murder and the other incidents, then continued, "I think I know how those Insurgent planes have been able to fly so accurately in this weather. It's been too good to be accidental"

"Mola's pilots didn't seem to have the right dope," grunted Doyle.

"There'd be a mistake now and then, naturally," said Knight. "My idea is that they're using a blind-flying triangulation system, with two control points that give bearings to the pilots like the method Pan American uses on the Clippers in flying the Pacific."

"What makes you think that?" demanded Doyle.

"That Spitfire was fitted with special radio equipment for micro-wave and ultra high-frequency as well as the usual bands. Greuze flew here through the fog, evidently aiming for this spot—and he hit it. I think he was calling us and asking for his position, pretending to be one of those Insurgent planes. I've a hunch they were coming to strafe Bilbao when they sighted his ship. Maybe he fired on them, or maybe they had orders to go after him because of that trick he tried to pull with the camouflaged ship. Anyway, I'll bet Greuze was using some kind of 'beam' or a radio-triangulation system, which he could have stumbled on easily with his special equipment. He was short of fuel, so he had to put down near here, probably in 'Navarre, as it's the nearest place not filled with troops of one side or the other. I'm going to find one of those Insurgent control points and make them kick through with all the position reports they made from

the time Greuze disappeared and for half an hour or so afterward. And when I find him, I'll sweat the truth out of him about Benita."

Doyle sat down heavily on the edge of the lower berth.

"Boy, when you go screwy you shoot the works! How the devil do we find these control points? And if we find 'em, just what keeps the boys from fillin' us full of lead?"

"Usually, only two or three men are posted at those stations," said Knight. "We'll have to chance that. Finding them will be easy enough. The first time we call in for bearings, we'll get the courses to both of them, or three if they have that many stations."

"And what do we call 'em with?" asked Doyle sarcastically.

"With the ultra high-frequency set in Count Brasov's amphibian," said Knight. "He donated a Dornier Wahl to the Basques, and I heard the mechs talking about it. It has about the same equipment as the Spitfire had. The ship has just been repaired—I think it was shot up in a fight—and it's moored about sixty yards off the port side of the ship here."

"So we dive over the side and swim, eh?"

"From a freight hatch on the port side," said Knight. "They leave a small one open for hauling provisions aboard—and for tossing chained prisoners overboard, now and then."

Doyle swore under his breath.

"Let's get going!"

Knight took the guard's gun and thrust it tightly under his belt, then he looked out cautiously and finally stepped into the passage.

There was no one in sight. With Doyle at his heels, he ran forward along the passage and descended the first ladder to the deck below. The clamor of whistles and bells was lessening, but most of the crew seemed still to be on the top deck. Knight led the way to the freight compartment forward of amidships. He and Doyle ducked into a side passage as an oiler appeared ahead. A few seconds later they had reached the opened cargo hatch.

The Dornier Wahl showed as only a blur out in the darkened night. Doyle stripped off his coat, and Knight was doing the same when the ship's alarm siren shrieked forth a wild note. As it died for a second, an infuriated voice sounded from somewhere not far aft

"That's Torio!" cried Knight. "He's found out we've broken loose!"

Doyle dived without further delay, and Knight

followed with a clean plunge into the river. Apparently the alarm had not spread at once to the upper decks, for no one came to the rail as they swam hastily to the plane. Doyle was a few yards ahead, and he pulled himself up on the sponson as Knight neared the amphibian. Suddenly he crouched on the stub wing.

"Holy smoke!" he yelled down at Knight. "There's somebody in this bus already!"

THE starboard door burst open at the same moment, and a man's head protruded. Doyle swung as he leaped up, and the man went crashing back into the ship. The husky ex-Marine hurtled after him, and Knight hauled himself onto the sponson.

He could dimly see three men beside Doyle, one of them up in the pilots' compartment. A streak of fire jetted in the darkness, and a bullet tore through the side of the cabin just above Knight's head. He snatched the gun from his belt and sprang into the ship. One of the two men struggling with Doyle was about to smash a fire extinguisher down on Doyle's head. Knight whipped his pistol into the man's face, and he tottered back with a howl.

An electric starter whined up forward, and a motor sputtered loudly. Simultaneously, a searchlight from the *Antona* flickered toward the plane. The man at the controls ducked swiftly, but Knight saw his face. It was Brasov!

Doyle and the third man were on the floor between the passenger seats. The one Knight had struck, a short, dark-faced fellow, was picking himself up, blood streaming down his cheek. Knight lashed out with a left hook, and dropped him in the aisle. Both motors of the Dornier were thundering now, and blinding lights were stabbing at the plane from the *Antona*.

As Knight whirled to help Doyle, the plane surged forward, grazing a small boat secured to the mooring buoy. Brasov had released the mooring shackle of the plane. That quick start was all that saved them from death, for a furious crackle sounded above the roar of the motors, and a machine gun sent a torrent of lead into the water just aft the tail. Brasov kicked the rudder, sent the Dornier plowing across the bow of the vessel, out of range for an instant.

The abrupt swerve threw Knight against a seat and rolled Doyle off the assailant he had partly subdued. The man, pale eyes blazing, snatched at a gun he had dropped. Doyle made a grab at it, but missed. His antagonist seized the gun and aimed. Just in time, Knight drove his foot into the man's elbow.

The gun roared, and the shot crashed forward in Brasov's direction. The Roumanian jerked around at the wheel, pumped a shot at Knight. The secret agent dived into the aisle, and Brasov, apparently thinking he had killed or wounded him, whirled back to the controls.

Doyle had knocked the other man's pistol from his grasp, and now had a strangle-hold on his throat. Knight cast a quick look at the dark-faced man. He was obviously unconscious. As the Dornier lifted from the river, amid a vicious pounding of Loyalist guns, Knight jumped to his feet and sprang into the forward compartment. Brasov's head jerked around, and his arrogant face went ghastly in the glare of the twisting searchlights.

"Keep away!" he screamed. "You fool, you'll make me crash!"

Knight slid into the co-pilot's seat. Brasov pulled up into a sharp turn, evaded a pointing searchlight. As the ship plunged into comparative gloom, he flung his right hand toward the gun he had laid at his side. Knight's fist thudded hard on his jaw, and he sprawled limply in the chair.

Machine-gun tracers lanced up through the darkness, and another searchlight joined the first, probing for the Dornier. Knight swiftly eased Brasov out of his seat, took the controls as the Roumanian sagged into the cabin doorway. A hasty glance backward showed Doyle on his feet, gun in hand.

The man Doyle had fought was standing in the aisle, swaying as though about to faint, and the dark-faced one was still crumpled up.

A burst of machine-gun fire from a new direction made Knight turn hurriedly. To his consternation, a Russky was racing in along a light beam. It was impossible for a pilot to have reached the seaplane floats so soon after the alarm; Torio must have had some scheme in mind concerning the plane, and perhaps the Dornier, too, though the furtive manner of Brasov and his men hinted at something else.

ANOTHER fusillade suddenly hammered out from the Russky's guns, and slugs gouged the side of the cabin. Knight pulled into a tight chandelle. A dazzling glare blinded him for a second as both of the *Antona's* searchlights spotted the Dornier. He kicked out of it, lost one of the lights. But the seaplane was charging down the other beam with cowl guns flaming.

"*Sacre Dieu!*" Doyle's prisoner screeched. "Let me use the guns!"



CHAPTER V  
THE CREST OF NAVARRE

A louder clatter added itself to the din, and the Russky swerved violently. Knight shot a look back, saw the pale-eyed man kneeling at the starboard side with a sub-machine gun thrust through a broken window. Doyle stood guard over the man as he poured another burst into the converted 2KB-19.

The seaplane stood on its tail, vanished in the gloom. Knight renversed, guessing the pilot's intent. With its four guns roaring, the Russky reappeared, pitching back at terrific speed. But for Knight's maneuver, the Dornier would have been riddled.

He hauled the controls back, and the amphibian moaned up into the night. With a violent twist, the Russky came out of its dive and zoomed after them. For a split-second, it was under the sights of the crouching gunner aft. The sub-machine gun cut loose with a furious pound, and its yellow tracers smoked across the seaplane's cowl.

By the glare of the shifting lights, Knight saw the transparent enclosure rip to fragments. A clawing hand showed above the rim of the cockpit, and he shivered as he saw the ruin that had been the pilot's face. Then the fighter dipped onto its nose and plummeted into the river.

Knight climbed steeply. And before the renewed fury of the *Antona's* gunners could touch them, the Dornier was swallowed up in the low fog-clouds. Knowing that rugged hills lurked treacherously in the murk ready to trap them, he hurriedly scanned the mass of glowing instrument dials before him. With a quick glance at the compass, he set a course which would take them well to the east of Mt. Santa Maria and the Inchoortas Range.

Five minutes passed, with the motors still at full speed and the ship climbing fast. With a feeling of relief, he eased the throttles back to cruising, and switched on the gyro-pilot. The altimeter showed they were above the highest mountains, and the gyro could fly the ship safely while he helped Doyle tie up Brasov and the others.

He turned—and suddenly went rigid. For a flashlight was probing into his face, and below it a gun was aimed at his heart!

**"T**HANK you, Mr. Knight," came Brasov's voice. "An excellent bit of work—but I'll relieve you now."

Knight silently cursed himself for being too sure he had knocked out the Roumanian. In the same moment he noticed that the man was standing straight and was not using his cane. Brasov's supposed infirmity was obviously pretended. The Roumanian spoke sharply over his shoulder.

"Max, come up here as soon as you finish with that dumb ox."

In a few moments the man with the pale eyes appeared, several bruises and cuts testifying to his battle with Doyle. He stared angrily at Knight.

"Take his belt and tie his hands behind him," ordered Brasov.

"Why don't we shoot him—and the other one, too?" demanded Max.

"Because I intend to use them," Brasov said icily. "Do as you're told!"

Max sullenly obeyed, securing Knight's wrists tightly behind his back.

"Drop him here in the aisle," ordered Brasov, "where I can keep an eye on him."

Max gave Knight a shove, and the secret agent stumbled to his knees. "Lie down on your stomach," snapped his captor.

Knight swore under his breath, They were taking no chances of his working his hands loose, unseen.

"Sure the other one is safe?" said Brasov, turning the flashlight.

"I've got his hands tied and he's belted into the seat," growled Max.

The light rested a moment on Doyle. His head had dropped forward, and Knight saw where he had been slugged above the left ear. A thin red trickle ran down his stubbled face and onto his wet trousers.

"He won't trouble us," Brasov said grimly. He flicked the light toward the dark-faced man. Knight twisted his head a trifle farther and saw that the man had recovered his senses and was sitting up groggily.

"Well, Hermann, a lot of help you were," Brasov said coldly.

Hermann's gaze shifted from Brasov to Knight, and

his lips twisted into a snarl. He started to lunge from his seat, but sank back with a groan and held his head. Brasov turned to Max.

"Watch the prisoners. I'll take the controls."

He jumped into the left-hand seat, and Max, after another inspection of Knight's bonds, sat down in a nearby chair. After a few minutes Hermann got to his feet and unsteadily made his way forward. He paused, kicked Knight savagely, and clambered into the seat beside Brasov. Knight, gritting his teeth against the pain in his ribs, heard him muttering in German.

"I know what I'm doing," Brasov snapped back in the same tongue.

"*Ja, Herr Graf,*" Hermann mumbled, "but even with the bearing signals there must be danger of hitting a mountain—as did General Mola's plane."

"There are no mountains this high in Spain," Brasov retorted. "What has happened to your nerves?"

"I think it was the strain of this afternoon," Knight heard the other man answer. "I was afraid I might hit you instead of Torio—"

"I pretended to fall, and gave you a good chance," Brasov said irritably. "If you had shot him instead of that poor wretch Pletski, we wouldn't have had all this trouble."

"You think everything will be all right now?" Hermann asked in an anxious voice.

"Why not?" returned Brasov. "According to the last code signal Max caught at our Old Town rendezvous, Kraur has caught Greuze. The girl is already there, and between her and these two we ought to ferret out the truth."

Knight stiffened. Brasov's reference must have been to Benita!

"And if the rest goes as I expect," Brasov continued calmly, "I can reappear tomorrow night within the Basque lines at Santander or Santica with some wild story of being forced down on the mission Torio just gave me. I'll tell him I had to hide in the mountains and that I just managed to sneak through the Rebel lines."

"But why go to all that trouble, if we succeed tonight?" inquired Hermann. "Why not make for Roumania tonight, with us?"

"I still have to protect the name of Count Brasov," came the reply. "Torio hasn't the slightest idea of the truth, though I had a bad moment when he started talking about the 'Hawk' and his gang."

HERMANN chuckled, though a trifle nervously,

and Knight suddenly realized the meaning of the Roumanian's words. Brasov was the Hawk. Under the shield of Roumanian nobility, he had organized this group of thieves and cut-throats. Max and Hermann and the unknown Kraur were simply members of his gang.

The discovery let a bright light into the dark riddle of Villar's death. But it did not help in the present situation.

Once or twice, as the Dornier roared on through the misty clouds, Knight tried to twist his hands free, but each time the attempt brought a snarl from Max, and he finally gave up.

They had been in the air about twenty-five minutes, he estimated, when Brasov throttled the motors and started down in a careful glide. A minute later he heard the motors rev up, evidently in a signal. There was a brief interval.

"*Ja, Kraur hears us!*" exclaimed Hermann, and Knight surmised he had put on a radio headset. "He says we are to the west of him . . . now we seem to be closer . . . southwest . . . now due south!"

"We're breaking through," said Brasov. "Switch on the wingtip lights and give me the headset."

After that, there was only the intermittent roar of the motors as Brasov followed directions from the man on the ground. A glow came back into the cabin as the Roumanian turned on the landing-lights in the nose.

"Pump down the wheels!" he snapped at Hermann.

"I thought we were going to land in the little lake," grunted the Austrian as he obeyed.

"Too hard to see the surface with these lights," retorted Brasov. "And the seaplane is probably tied up to the platform."

Knight felt the ship level off, rumble to a halt. Brasov turned it and taxied back, swung around into the wind, and switched off the motors. He turned off all the lights at once, but a faint luminance appeared outside as men hurried to the side of the cabin.

Hermann and Max hauled Knight to his feet at Brasov's command, and he was marched outside. There were four men near the door, three of them dressed in Insurgent uniform. The other, a somber, unsmiling man, wore German uniform devoid of the Nazi insignia. Knight saw his eyes clash with Brasov's.

"Well?" demanded the Roumanian.

"Gruze is dead," said the German. "We gave him a false position and tricked him into flying this way. Donnet forced him down near the lake. He crashed

and was dead when I reached him. But I found the emerald."

"I assumed that much from your code signal," Brasov said coldly. He made a curt gesture to the other men. "There is another prisoner inside. Bring him out."

The three went into the ship, and Brasov looked back grimly at the German.

"Kraur, an hour ago I would have shot you dead if I had been close enough! You've endangered our lives and our whole plan."

"If you mean Mola's crash," said Kraur stiffly, "it was not my fault. I sent them bearings when they asked for them. They must have miscalculated, or their altimeter may have been wrong."

"Then you didn't interrupt their signals to flash us those two codes?" snapped Brasov.

"Only a few seconds—" began Kraur.

Brasov cut him off with an oath. "You blundering imbecile! With ships flying three miles a minute, it would take only a few seconds! If the Insurgent experts were listening in at Vitoria—"

"But they weren't," protested Kraur. "They called us by the land wire, to check our emergency beam, and I told them we had given the signals regularly, as requested. They think it was a faulty altimeter."

"It is still dangerous," muttered Brasov. "But we'll end our stay here as quickly as possible."

Kraur held a lantern, partly hooded, and he raised it for a close look at Knight's face and at Doyle's when the latter was brought out.

"*Grosser Hhnmel!*" he said. "How did you find these two?"

"I'll tell you on the way in," answered Brasov. Then, as he briskly led the way, he made a rapid explanation, beginning with Torio's arrival at Sandica. Knight listened, but kept his eyes open as he and Doyle were marched along behind the two. He caught a vague glimmer of water down a gradual slope at his left, and he saw a Russky drawn up on the shore. A little farther on they had to deviate to pass a bullet-scarred Fiat. It came to him then that the pilot who had strafed the *Antona's* decks while Greuze escaped had been an accomplice of Brasov, temporarily with the Insurgents. Probably the Russky pilot was one of Brasov's men, too.

THE Roumanian's next words confirmed his first surmise. "Donnet did good work, keeping those Reds below decks while I dealt with Greuze. But for him, the jig would have been up."

"I still do not understand," said Kraur. "Why did Greuze want to land on the vessel?"

"He didn't want to, you thick-headed fool! He was trying to drop beside one of the seaplane floats, and the wind hooked his chute on the mast. I rammed my ship into the gangway and got on board while Donnet was riddling the gunners. Greuze untangled himself and dropped to the after deck just before I reached the spot. When he saw me he jerked out his trench-knife. I had my sword cane, and I pulled the blade before he could touch me. I disarmed him in a second and was offering him his life for the emerald when that damned butcher Villar came out of his cabin where he'd been hiding.

"He'd heard me, and I had to finish him. I slit his throat and he fell back inside. It was only a moment, but Greuze dived into a passage and I lost him. I knew Villar might be discovered any second, and I had to throw Torio off the truth if I could. I had that Ribera painting rolled up inside the cane, and it came out an inch or two when I drew the sword. It gave me an idea and I lopped off Senor Villar's head, tossed the painting over him, and wiped my blade on Greuze's trench-knife, leaving it by the body. Donnet came back, raking the vessel amidships, and Greuze had to double back. I saw Torio and tins meddling American, Knight, and knew the only chance left was to let Greuze escape and get him later. I made a pass at him which fooled the others, and Donnet kept the decks clear while Greuze made off with the seaplane. You know the rest."

"That was fast thinking," Kraur said, with a gruff admiration. "Even if it didn't throw Torio clear off the track about Greuze."

"The main thing was to clear me of any connection with the murder," retorted Brasov. "At that, I was afraid he might begin to suspect me, since Greuze had no possible motive. So when Torio sent me back to get the painting I pretended to have found a clipping and a photograph of *Señorita* Navarre. I knew it would start a train of thought that would lead to his recognizing Knight; he had already come close to it on the deck. And I knew that discovery would keep him busy for a while."

The Roumanian glanced back at Knight with a mocking smile.

"You have done me several good turns, you and that ruffian friend of yours. One was in bringing *Señorita* Navarre and the 'Green Madonna' to Spain. And the latest is to put yourselves so kindly in my

hands when I was regretting that I had to steal off without you. You see, I may need your help—if the *señorita* continues to be obstinate.”

Knight set his jaw to keep from an angry reply. Kraur looked back dubiously in the light of his lantern. “They may not know any more than she does about it.”

“Nonsense!” Brasov said irritably.

“The secret must have been handed down from one Navarre to another, even in that God-forsaken valley. The girl must know. She may have fooled you, but she won’t keep the truth from me very long.”

They had come to a gloomy old structure, one wing of which had tumbled to pieces. Knight guessed from what he could see that it must have been, an imposing castle in bygone years. Brasov turned to Kraur as they went along its dilapidated stone terrace.

“Where is the girl now?”

“Locked up in the old portrait room. I was going to confront her with the emerald when we heard your ship. If you take my advice, you’ll take a lash to her. She’ll talk then!”

“Perhaps you’re right,” said Brasov. “We’ll soon know the answer.”

Kraur opened a massive wooden door which squeaked mournfully on its hinges, and they entered a shadowy hall. They passed through a huge chamber, evidently a pretentious drawing room in some almost forgotten past. A Diesel engine throbbed in one corner, driving a small dynamo from which cables led across the floor to a switchboard and then on through a doorway into another hall. A man sat in a chair, smoking, watching the instruments on the board now and then. He spoke to Brasov, looked hard at the prisoners.

The group went into the second hall, and Kraur paused before a door into which a crest had been carded. The carving was battered, and the dust of years filled its scrolls and niches, but Knight felt a shock as he saw it. For it was a duplicate of the Navarre crest which had been emblazoned on the old brass-bound chests he had first seen in Lost Valley. With a growing amazement, it came to him that this ancient, crumbling castle had once been the home of Benita’s ancestors.

Kraur produced a key and unfastened a modern padlock which had been placed on the door. Pushing the door open, he stepped inside and lifted his lantern. A frightened look came into his face.

“She’s gone!” he whispered. “The easement window is open—she must have jumped to the rocks!”

## CHAPTER VI THE LOST THRONE OF SANCHO I

**A** COLD hand seemed to touch Knight’s heart as he heard Kraur’s words. He jerked free of Hermann’s grasp, sprang into the room. The only furnishings were an old, blackened table and two chairs. Portraits of men and women—Spanish grandees and jeweled women dressed in costumes of one to three centuries past—adorned the walls. There was no other door, but at the farther end of the chamber was a wide casement, and the window stood significantly open.

With Hermann snarling at his heels and the others racing after him, he ran to the window. Only darkness showed beneath, but as Kraur reached the spot with his lantern, Knight saw a precipitous descent to a narrow stream at least a hundred feet below. Hermann and Max hauled him back before he had more than that glimpse, but he heard Kraur exclaim: “Look! There is her scarf on a rock! She fell at the steepest point.”

“She may still be alive!” rasped Brasov. “Get down there as fast as you can! Search along the bank of the stream!”

Kraur dashed out with two of the men. Brasov turned on his flashlight as the glow of Kraur’s lantern faded.

“Tie these two back to back,” he snarled at Max and Hermann. “Then get down there and help in the search!”

In a few seconds, Knight and Doyle were on the floor, bound together with a stout rope which one of the men hastily produced from another room.

“Wait!” snapped Brasov, as the men started to leave. “Who has the emerald?”

“Donnet,” answered the one who had been with Kraur. “He’s been studying the letters, up in the radio room.”

“Tell him to come down here! Then join the others!”

The man hurried out, and Knight heard the rest running through the passage. As the echo of their footsteps died out, Brasov walked to the window and peered out. Knight watched him turn the flashlight across the rocky slope beneath, then a fierce pull at his

bonds jerked his head around. Doyle was trying to free his hands, but in a few moments it was obvious that it was useless.

Knight lay there in the grip of a cold despair. Even if Benita had escaped death in her fall, she would probably be badly injured, and there was the added chance of her being drowned if she had fallen into the stream. He looked unseeingly about the room, then suddenly his attention was caught by one of the life-size portraits painted on the walls.

It was the picture of a young woman attired in Spanish court costume of many years past. Her dark hair bore a jeweled coronet. She was seated upon a great throne-like chair, and in one hand was what appeared to be a scepter. He stared at the face in fascination. But for a different arrangement of the hair and perhaps an imperious look about the mouth, it might have been Benita!

Here was further proof that this was the ancient home of the Navarre line. That imperious young woman was obviously one of Benita's ancestors. His eyes passed over the scepter again, and this time he saw what he had missed before.

The jewel depicted at the tip, which was fastened by a gold mounting, was a blazing emerald. Even before Brasov turned and his flashlight partly illumined the wall, Knight knew that the stone in the scepter had been the Green Madonna.

"You seem startled by the portrait, Mr. Knight," Brasov said with a calculated sneer. "But I may as well tell you that your acting is wasted on me."

Knight did not reply. Brasov stepped closer to him, but the entrance of another man interrupted whatever he had been about to say. The newcomer carried an electric lantern like Kraur's. He was wearing the uniform of an Insurgent pilot, and Knight knew this must be Donnet, the man who had strafed the decks of the *Antona* to let Greuze escape.

"What's happened?" Donnet said, looking from the prisoners to the open window.

"Our pretty little bird has flown," snapped Brasov. "However, these two may make up for her loss—if she killed herself in that jump. Where is the emerald?"

Donnet took a chamois pouch from his pocket, carefully laid the stone on the table. Knight caught only a glimpse of its carved surface as Donnet put it down, but he saw the greedy light that came into Brasov's eyes. Donnet handed the Roumanian a powerful magnifying glass and moved his lantern nearer.

"I can't make head nor tail of those marks," he said disgustedly. "I don't believe they're anything but scratches from the clasps that held it to the scepter."

"And I tell you it's the key," returned Brasov harshly. "I certainly spent enough time digging into its history—The marks were put on there by order of Medina, the last duke, and he was insistent that they be exactly as he indicated. It's all in Juan Ferrara's memoirs of his fifty years as jeweler to the Spanish nobility. It took me the best part of a year to find that old book after I heard about the Navarre girl and the emerald being discovered in America. But it was worth it. This stone is the key to the secret."

"Besides being worth almost a hundred thousand pounds in itself," said Donnet, with a grin.

BOTH men turned as a raised voice sounded from somewhere in the old castle. Donnet went to the door and shouted an answer.

"It's Fenton," he said, turning to Brasov. "He says he needs help to transmit bearings; the Insurgent bombers are about to take off from Vitoria."

"Then it's come?" demanded Brasov.

"I forgot you didn't know," said Donnet. "Yes, they've finally ordered the big bombing raid on Bilbao. Thirty big Junkers and all the Heinkels they have are massed at Vitoria. I think Bilbao is doomed."

"I knew it was coming soon," muttered Brasov. "But I thought perhaps Mola's hitting a mountain today might make them worry about their radio guiding system."

"They're convinced it was the fault of the altimeter. Fenton was talking to the German experts at Vitoria, pretending to be Captain Schmidt, and he told me they want to wipe out the effect of Mola's death by smashing at Bilbao tonight. They're carrying enough incendiary bombs to set the whole place afire if they place them right."

"Then it's a good thing I left there," Brasov said with a mirthless smile. "Go on up and help Fenton, and be doubly careful not to make any slip. It would be fatal if they found we'd captured their radiomen and were using the place as our base."

Donnet disappeared and Brasov turned back to the table. He held the Green Madonna to the light, scrutinized it intently through the magnifying glass. A frown crept into his face, and after another inspection he looked over the edge of the table at the two prisoners.

"Mr. Knight, you're a fairly intelligent man—in

spite of certain errors you've made. I take it you would like to live?"

Knight looked up at him silently. Brasov went on: "I'll offer you your life—and that of your ugly assistant—for the secret. I could probably let Hermann beat it out of you, but we've no time to waste."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Knight said dully. He watched Brasov's lips tighten into a flat line.

"You expect me to believe that *Señorita* Navarre came to Spain just for an adventure?"

"I don't care what you believe," Knight told him grimly. "But you've forced an innocent girl to kill herself, and if there's a God in Heaven you'll pay for it!"

"If she is dead, it is an unfortunate mistake," said Brasov. "All I wanted was the lost paintings and the other treasure which Medina couldn't take when he fled to America. She would have been freed, once we found where they are hidden."

"You're lying, Brasov. Your men wouldn't have brought her back to Spain just for that. They could have tortured the truth out of her at some hide-out in France."

Brasov's mouth curled into an ugly smile.

"I thought so. You do know the story. Now perhaps we can get down to—" he stopped, went to the window as shouts were audible above the gurgle of the stream below. Knight heard him call down to Kraur and his men, but he could not catch the reply. Brasov returned in a few moments, a triumphant glitter in his eyes.

"Rest your mind, Mr. Knight. They have found your friend the *señorita*. By a miracle, she was only scratched and bruised."

"Thank heaven," Knight said fervently.

"It is fortunate for all of us," smirked Brasov. "For now I can speak plainly. Either I learn the secret in the next thirty minutes, or I shall have Donnet deliver Benita de la Navarre to General Franco, or I'll deliver her myself to the Reds with full proof of her identity as pretender to the throne!"

Knight's jaw dropped.

"Pretender to the—you're crazy!"

Brasov gazed down at him for almost half a minute.

"So she didn't tell you, after all," he muttered. A worried look came into his eyes, then he shook his head. "No, she must have known. They would have passed the story from father to son or daughter."

"Don't pay any attention to th' big stiff," growled Doyle. "He's trying to pull a fast one, Dick."

KNIGHT did not speak, but a new fear began to creep over him. Benita's silence on certain points of her history, her first eagerness to visit Spain after being rescued from Lost Valley, and her curious reticence about the Duke de Medina's flight from Navarre—all these began to take on a new significance. He remembered one reference to trouble with the king—followed by a sudden change of the subject.

"Look at these portraits," Brasov said curtly. He waved his hand about the room. "A fortune in themselves, if they could only be removed from these specially prepared walls. Unfortunately the material is so old it comes to pieces if you try to scrape it loose. But they prove what I say, especially that portrait of the Marquesa which is so like her. Your *señorita* is rightfully the Princess de la Navarre. The Duke de Medina should rightfully have been the King of Spain, as Alfonso and several others well know. The first historic King of Navarre was Sancho el Mayor, and he established the Navarrese line of kings of Castile, Leon, and Aragon. The male line of Sancho IV was thought to have ended in 1230—but his son had made a secret marriage and there was a child. By the time this was found out, the nobles had chosen the Count of Champagne, a French nephew of Sandro VII, to take up the rule, and they concealed the truth. But Medina, in 1883, found absolute documentary proof of his claim, and if he had had a little time to organize his followers, he'd have upset the throne and ruled all of Spain. Someone betrayed his plans to the King and he had to flee."

"Even if it's true," said Knight, "that's ancient history. Benita Navarre is an American citizen—she has no intention of meddling in Spain."

"Could you make the Reds believe that?" demanded Brasov. "Would the Insurgents believe it? Franco has had the backing of former King Alfonso's private fortune, and Alfonso wouldn't stand for your princess coming onto the scene. Franco would have her executed in short order to remove that threat, and the Reds would execute her gladly because she's of the royal line. So you see, Mr. Knight, it would be wiser to give up the missing paintings and the rest of Medina's treasure—unless you wish to see your pretty friend riddled with bullets."

While Brasov spoke, Knight was thinking desperately. From the elapsed time, it was evidently several minutes' distance from the castle around to the bed of the stream. If Doyle and he could get free before Kraur and the others returned with Benita . . .

"What proof do I have you'll keep your word?" he hastily asked Brasov.

"My solemn word," said the Roumanian.

Knight knew he was lying, that there was some darker plan in the man's criminal mind. But he pretended to believe.

"Then untie me," he said, "and I'll show you where the things are hidden."

"You will tell me now," replied Brasov. "If I find you've told the truth, then you'll be released."

Knight hid his disappointment. Perhaps if he could get Brasov out of the room, Doyle and he might still get free in time to arm themselves for a fight.

"All right," he snapped, "let me see the emerald, and I'll show you what the marks mean."

Brasov turned around to the table. He had left the flashlight lying there by his gun, its beam pointed so that it fell upon the two prisoners. He shifted the light, and as he did so a thin, rectangular shadow appeared on the wall a few yards away. Knight stared at it, went taut as he realized what it was. The shadow was caused by an opening in the wall!

A huge stone, on which was painted a portrait of a priest with a Bible, was slowly pivoting outward. A dark recess was gradually uncovered, and to his amazement Benita's face appeared around the pivoting stone!

Stupefaction held him spellbound, and he was barely able to drag his eyes away from her as Brasov, who had not seen her, stepped forward with the flashlight and the emerald. Knight held his breath as from the corner of his eye he saw Benita steal behind the Roumanian. Guessing her intention, he spoke quickly to Brasov, in a loud tone that would drown any sound she made.

"Put the light down, here, so I can see the marks."

Brasov laid the flashlight on the floor, and held the Green Madonna in its glow.

"Don't move!" Benita's voice instantly came from the shadows.

A stunned look shot into Brasov's eyes. He tensed as though to spring to his feet, but Benita came swiftly around in front of him. She had picked up Brasov's pistol, and her face held a fierce determination.

"Holy cats!" Doyle said hoarsely. "Where did you pop up from?"

Benita's dark eyes did not leave Brasov's face.

"Release them!" she said. "And do not make the noise, or I kill you!"

BRASOV was measuring the distance with his eyes, to risk a leap, but Benita's finger ominously took up the trigger slack. Brasov turned white.

"Don't shoot! I'll untie them!"

His hands were shaking as he set to work. Knight was the first one free. He jumped up, and took the Green Madonna. Benita quickly handed him the gun, and he kept Brasov covered until Doyle was unfastened, then made Brasov face the wall.

"Thank heaven, *querida*, you're all right!" he said to Benita. "We were afraid—"

"I know, Deek," she said, and she shivered as she looked toward the window. "I did almost fall when I throw out my scarf to fool them while I hide in the wall."

Doyle glowered at Brasov's back.

"Pretty smart, you rat! Thought we'd believe they had her, so we'd spill th' dope."

"If you three are wise," Brasov said without turning, "you will surrender to me. Otherwise my men will kill you!"

"Keep still," snapped Knight. "Benita, how much do you know about this building?"

"Only so little, except this room. When I see the portrait of the marquesa that is so much like me, I remember what my father tell me to do with the Green Madonna if ever I escape from Lost Valley and return to Spain and the old castle. When the emerald is held here and in the same position as thees Madonna—" she pointed to the emerald in the painted scepter—"a certain mark will point to a secret lock to push. So I think in my mind, how do the marks go on the real Madonna, and I see the long mark would point that way to the picture of the priest with the Bible. So I push all around on it, and the Bible it moves in a little way, and the stone she turns. After that is when I think of throwing my scarf to fool these men who have kidnap me."

"Where does that opening lead?" Knight asked hurriedly.

"I do not know, Deek. She is so dark, I do not go down the steps, for I have no light."

Knight prodded Brasov ahead of him, and Doyle and Benita followed to where they could look into the aperture. Doyle held the flashlight and tilted it down the steps. Part of a gloomy room, long and extremely narrow, was revealed below. Old paintings were hung on both walls, seemingly untouched by the years during which they had been hidden in this sealed tomb. Doyle moved the torch, and gasped, for its rays

had fallen on a throne chair of carved gold, the arms and back of which were studded with jewels.

Brasov groaned as his eyes fell on the chair.

"The lost throne of Sancho the First! It's worth a million pounds! And those first two paintings are Goyas!"

Knight held the gun hard against the Roumanian's back. "Doyle, take the light and see if there's any exit from that room," he said.

Doyle ran down the steps, came back in a few seconds, goggle-eyed.

"No sign of any door, but there must be forty paintings down there, and some more chairs with jewels all over 'em."

"Forget that," Knight said sharply. "If we get out of here with our lives we'll be lucky."

He started for the hall, forcing Brasov ahead. The others followed behind. "We'll make a dash for the amphibian," he said to Doyle in an undertone. "If we can get there before Kraur and his men come back—"

"You're too late!" Brasov said triumphantly, as voices sounded from the direction of the main entrance. "Now will you give up?"

"No!" rasped Knight. "Doyle, you and Benita get back into that portrait room—hide in the wall behind the picture. Count off sixty seconds, and then come out and run for the Dornier! I'll decoy them upstairs and then follow you with the Fiat. Make for France as soon as you're clear."

Benita tried to protest, but Doyle hurried her back into the room. Knight whirled Brasov toward a stairway at the opposite end of the hall. Behind them, the voices became louder. Knight rammed his gun into Brasov's ribs.

"Yell for help!"

Brasov cursed him through set teeth, but made no outcry. Knight gave his arm a savage twist and Brasov let out a howl of pain.

"Kraur!" screamed Brasov. "Kill this fool! The prisoners—"

Knight's arm, swiftly locked about Brasov's neck, cut off the rest. Half-dragging the man, he went up the steps as fast as he could. He could hear Kraur and the others charging into the hall, and he knew that his ruse was successful. The coast would soon be clear for Benita and Doyle.

The upper floor was in darkness, but just as he reached it with the half-strangled Roumanian he heard voices to the left of the stairway. He whirled Brasov into the first doorway he saw, and pushed him against

the wall. He had kicked the door partly shut, but through a two-inch aperture he saw some one dash by with a light.

"Where did they go?" came Kraur's fierce voice.

"Who—what's wrong?" Knight heard Donnet reply.

"The two Americans! They got loose somehow, and took Brasov with them!"

"They didn't come up here!" exclaimed Donnet. "I came out as soon as I heard you yelling."

Kraur swore furiously. "They had to come up here, or we'd have seen them below. They must have gone down this other hall!"

Knight heard the men race into the other hallway. With his gun against Brasov's ribs, he waited tautly in the darkness. Suddenly his ears caught a droning thunder. He listened as it swelled in volume.

Judging from the roar, half a dozen ships must be swooping down toward the castle!

## CHAPTER VII JEWELS—AND DEATH

**H**E FELT Brasov stiffen, and took his hand from the Roumanian's throat. The man burst into a frantic plea before Knight could ask a question.

"Let me go, you fool! Torio's caught up with us—we'll all be killed if we don't move fast!"

"You're lying!" snapped Knight. "Those are more of your men!"

"It's Torio, I tell you!" Brasov cried hoarsely. "I thought I'd fooled him, but I see now he meant to trick me. He sent me off to Santander so he could come here—he knew about this castle and the paintings. He must have suspected that I was the Hawk and that we had Greuze trapped."

"Kraur!" Donnet's voice howled, out in the hallway. "Kraur—where are you?"

Knight flicked his eyes sidewise toward the door. Brasov, with a vicious lunge, threw him off balance and he tumbled to the floor. His finger jerked the trigger as he fell, but the bullet crashed into the wall.

As he scrambled to his feet he heard a smashing sound, as of a chair knocked over somewhere in the room, then a door banged. He leaped to the other door and looked up and down the hall. There was no sign of Brasov, but he saw Donnet hurry into a room thirty feet to the left of the stairway. He dashed after him,

a sudden mad plan in mind. As he plunged into the room he saw a man with close-cropped hair frantically turning the dials of a radio receiver. Donnet had sprung to the window, through which a brilliant glare was shining. A look of terror flashed into the eyes of the man at the radio as he saw Knight, and he snatched a gun from his table. Knight's pistol blasted, and the man fell with a bullet through his left side. Donnet spun around, froze at sight of the smoking pistol.

"My Lord, don't shoot!" he groaned.

"The direct wire to Vitoria—which is it?" Knight rasped.

Donnet pointed a trembling hand toward one of three telephones. "The center one, but—what are you going to do?"

Knight seized the phone, keeping Donnet covered. Above the thunder of engines outside, he heard a clipped German voice in the receiver.

"Captain Schmidt? What is it now?"

"We're being attacked by a dozen Red planes," Knight fired back swiftly in German. "They're landing men to wreck the station!"

"*Mein Gott!*" groaned the other man. "*We can't lose that control point! Twenty planes are in the air already!*"

"Flash them word to fly here as fast as they can!" snarled Knight. "There's still time to fight off these devils!"

As he flung down the phone he stepped around the desk. Donnet had turned deathly pale.

"You madman!" he moaned. "You've signed your own death-warrant! If the Reds don't get us now, the others will!"

"How far to Vitoria?" Knight snapped.

"Thirty kilometers—less than eight minutes for those ships!"

Machine guns chattered with sudden fury somewhere on the ground below. Knight cast a quick look through the window. A 2KB-19, one of the Sandica ships, was diving under a flare which had been dropped. He saw tracers shoot down steeply, saw two more fighters plunge to attack the gunners on the ground. Farther out, he saw an artificial lake which long ago had been created by damming of a mountain stream. Beyond its rocky slopes loomed darkly, and he could see where the overflow water ran over the dam and fell precipitously into a narrow gorge. It was this overflow stream which ran by the other side of the castle and into which Benita was supposed to have fallen. He looked anxiously along the level ground by the side of the lake, but the spot where the Dornier

had landed was hidden by the crumbling right wing of the castle.

The improvised radio room was lighted electrically, from the power line which operated the transmitter. Without warning, these lights abruptly went out, evidently from a switch being pulled down on the Diesel-dynamo switchboard. Knight whirled, thinking a third person had come into the room and turned off the lights, and Donnet made a desperate plunge for the gun the dead man had dropped.

Knight kicked it out of his reach just in time, and Donnet dived into the half-darkened hallway. There was an instant when Knight could have shot him down, but instead he swiftly picked up the other pistol and ran out toward the stairway. The only light came through the doorway of the radio room, from another flare which a Loyalist pilot had dropped, but as he reached the lower floor he saw a faint glow from the portrait room.

He ran to the entrance, just in time to see Brasov run frenziedly to the secret opening, a flashlight in his hand, and disappear down the steps. He dashed into the room, took a hasty look down into the treasure vault. Brasov was hammering wildly at the jeweled back of the golden throne chair. There was no sign of Doyle or Benita.

KNIGHT raced back through the lower hall, found the entrance through which Doyle and he had been brought. A 2KB with insignia of the Eussian volunteers was howling down, guns blazing, and his heart leaped into his throat as he saw that the Dornier was its target.

He ran madly around the massive stone balustrade, to where he had seen a machine gun flaming. Hermann and Kraur were stretched out dead beside the weapon, and a third man lay dying a few yards away. He threw himself down at the breach, rammed in a clip from a box on the ground.

The engine of the Dornier had been started, and he saw the plane ground-loop crazily as the 2KB swooped toward it. The fighter's bullets missed the pivoting ship by inches, and the Russian pilot zoomed furiously for another dive. Knight elevated his gun, clamped the trigger as the 2KB screamed down. The Eussian skidded as Knight's tracers ripped through his wings, then kicked around savagely.

Cupro nickel and lead slugs smashed into the stone wall back of Knight. He whipped his spouting gun straight toward the plunging ship. There was a muffled crash, and the plane's winking guns went

black. The 2KB flipped onto its back, struck with a deafening roar. Knight sprang up, ran at top speed for the Dornier. The other engine was started now, and suddenly he saw Benita at the broken cabin window, her face white in the dazzling light of the flares. Doyle had swung into the wind, but as he saw Knight he jerked the throttles.

Three 2KB's came screeching down the sky. The first had opened fire, and its deadly smoking tracer lines were leaping toward Knight when six Heinkels hurtled out of the night!

The three fighters zoomed frantically to get from under the Heinkels, and Knight saw two more of the 2KB's lance in at the Insurgent ships. Off to one side, circling out of the brighter glare of the flares, was a Bellanca cabin ship—one he recognized as a Loyalist staff plane which was usually kept at Sandica. This, he swiftly guessed, must be the one from which Torio was directing operations against Brasov.

Benita had thrown open the cabin door of the Dornier, and Doyle was standing up in the cockpit, watching him run to the ship. He was almost at the door when a bullet drilled the side of the plane. He spun around, saw Donnet dashing from a small entrance in the left wing of the castle. He pumped a shot at the man, Donnet threw himself flat, but jumped up again and raced to the Russky seaplane which was drawn up on the edge of the lake a hundred feet away.

Almost simultaneously, Brasov appeared from the entrance Knight had just quitted. He was carrying a bundle in his arms, and Knight saw that he had torn down several paintings and hastily crammed them together. Something shone through a jagged tear in one of the paintings, and Knight caught the yellow gleam of gold.

Brasov started toward the Dornier, abruptly changed his course and ran toward the Fiat which Donnet had flown. Knight wasted no more time in watching, but sprang into the Dornier and locked the door. Doyle instantly opened the throttles, and the ship leaped ahead. Knight caught Benita's arm and helped her into a seat.

"Fasten your belt—we may be in for some rough flying!"

IN THE fury of the battle overhead, no one seemed to be watching the amphibian, but it had not rolled more than twenty yards when the two Insurgent Fiats plunged down to cut it off. Knight snatched up the

machine gun which Max had used in the escape from Bilbao. The first Fiat's guns were nearly centered on them when he opened fire. The pilot kicked aside, and Knight's burst gorged his wing as he zoomed. Suddenly the Dornier swerved, and there came a grinding jolt. The ship stopped at a steep angle on the bank of the lake, one side of the landing gear smashed by that sudden turn.

"I had to do it, Dick!" Doyle groaned as Knight reached the cockpit. "That Fiat would've finished us if I hadn't turned."

"See if you can retract the other wheel," Knight said tensely. "I'm going to try to pull her into the water!"

He opened the throttles as the unbroken wheel came up into its niche. The Dornier jerked ahead, its keel grinding on the ground. Then it struck the wet earth at the edge of the lake and plunged into the water. Knight braced himself against the drag of the landing gear, and grudgingly the ship came up onto its step.

The Russky was skimming across the bright-lit surface ahead of them; and as it took to the air, the two Insurgent Fiats pitched down again. Knight lifted the Dornier from the water, banked tightly as he saw a rocky wall ahead. Brasov had started the other Fiat, was taking off over the lake.

A Heinkel came tumbling down in flames; and staring above it, Knight saw Torio's men fighting a desperate battle against increasing odds. Two huge Junkers had arrived on the scene, with four Fiats as escorts, and from the giant flying fortresses the Insurgent gunners poured a murderous hail down into the Loyalist ships.

The Bellanca, caught between three Heinkels, was turning and twisting madly, guns blazing from both its windows. One of the Heinkels went up on its tail, whipstalled and plummeted headlong into the lake. The Bellanca whirled to escape from the other two ships, but the escort of Fiats came after it. Tracers stabbed the Loyalist staff plane from four directions; and with its wings shorn off and tail riddled, it shrieked down to a splintering crash.

Knight banked over the water, making for the zone of darkness beyond the glare. He could dimly see a narrow pass with lowering clouds above it. If they could get through there, and zoom into the clouds . . .

A spinning ship whirled down almost in the Dornier's path, and he turned hastily. It was the seaplane Donnet had taken, and after it came a Fiat, guns raking the helpless pilot. Knight jumped as he

saw the tawny hair of the man in the cockpit. It was Brasov—Brasov attacking his own pilot!

For a second he thought the man had gone mad, then he suddenly realized Brasov's grim purpose. He was trying to make the Insurgents think he was one of them, that his Fiat was one of the squadron from Vitoria.

The seaplane came partly out of its spin, fell off again and struck the ground. Brasov instantly reversed, plunged in at the Dornier. Knight hauled the wheel-yoke back, and Brasov's tracers shot under the Dornier's bow. A machine gun rattled, back in the cabin. Benita was desperately trying to drive off the Fiat.

Doyle jumped out of his seat and ran back to help her. A Heinkel and two more Fiats were charging down at the Dornier, and Knight groaned as he saw them. But for Brasov, they would have made the pass. A vengeful fury burned through his veins, but he fought it back and banked for a last attempt to break through.

THE Dornier was in a tight turn, with tracers smoking at it from both sides, when a loud concussion shook the sky. He shot a look upward. The last Loyalist pilot had crashed head-on into one of the mighty Junkers, and the bomber was plunging down on fire.

With a daring born of despair, Knight hurled the Dornier directly under the falling ship. Their three Insurgent attackers had whipped to right and left to avoid the flaming monster. He shoved the wheel forward, shielded his eyes against the blaze and heat swiftly descending above him. The Dornier was a hundred feet under the Junkers, and diving steeply, when a burst ripped through the top of the pilot's compartment. Brasov had followed them under the flamer, either to escape from the Insurgents, or for a bloody vengeance.

With an unspoken prayer, Knight pulled into a chandelle, Brasov streaking up after him. For a terrible instant, he thought the falling Junkers would strike the Dornier's tail. A scorching heat made him gasp for breath, then the blazing mass hurtled by. He twisted around in his seat to look for Brasov.

The Fiat's tail was on fire! At his left and above, the Fiat was wallowing through the sky, while the Roumanian frenziedly fought his way out of the cockpit. Knight saw the bundle Brasov hugged tightly in one arm, as he leaped into space. His chute opened, billowed whitely in flame-lit sky—then hooked on the Fiat's wing!

A look of horror came into Brasov's upturned face. Clutching the bundle, he tugged wildly at the shrouds with his other hand. A painting slipped from his grasp, and another. He snatched at something, and Knight saw a piece of crested gold paneling torn from the back of the ancient throne-chair. Its clustered jewels sparkled bright in the light of the flames.

Fire leaped from the Fiat's tail to the wing, puffed out at the chute. There was a split-second when Brasov might have freed the silk if he had jerked with both hands. Then the tangled white expanse blazed up, and Brasov dropped away. Knight had one final glimpse of his horrified face, of the gleaming, useless thing he still dazedly grasped.

A terrific explosion rocked the ground below, and geysers of flame shot up, hiding Brasov from view. The Junkers had crashed beside the old castle, and its detonating bombs had almost completed the ruin of that ancient stronghold. The Insurgent planes were climbing madly away from the showers of blazing debris, and with a swift turn Knight sent the Dornier thundering into the pass. In a few seconds, the amphibian was zooming into the clouds; and as Knight drew a long breath and looked back, all he saw was a crimson glare through the mist. It faded swiftly and the Dornier flew in a welcome shroud of darkness.

Climbing high into the flame-tinted sky, Knight set a course for a barren spot he knew on the western coast of France.

\* \* \* \*

IT WAS a peaceful scene at a little sidewalk cafe, along one of the less frequented streets of Bordeaux. Dick Knight laid down the newspaper he had just bought from a vendor, and glanced across the table at Benita and Doyle.

"It seems," he said pleasantly, "that the French Coast Guard stumbled on a mystery. They found an abandoned and badly-shot-up Dornier, bearing Spanish government insignia, not far from Dieppe last night."

Doyle finished his third brandy, put down his glass with a grin.

"Somebody must've got tired of the war and took a run-out powder."

Benita's piquant face clouded.

"Me, I would like one of thees runouts, too. When we go home, Deek?"

"Pronto," he told her. "And what's more, young lady, you'd better stick close to Washington for a while,

where General Brett can take care of you. There are still some people who might know the truth about you, and thus want you out of the way.”

To his surprise, she did not argue.

“For thees once, Deek, I let you be boss. I think maybe I do not be a spy any more, no?”

“A swell idea,” said Knight.

Doyle grinned owlishly at Benita.

“I still can’t believe it, baby. Here you might’ve been th’ queen of Spain. But say, I gotta quit callin’ you ‘baby’! You’re a princess an’ we’ve gotta be dignified.”

“Pooh!” said Benita. “You heard what Deek said—that is the ancient history. I am nothing but the damn Yankee, no?”

