



"Air-men do not escape. When a man is miles in the air he still belongs to Germany."

Frau Bobel lost no time in trying to ferret from Commander Hopkirch what he thought about the Captain. With her customary astuteness she contrived to meet the Commander in a little beer-room at the hotel.

They chatted idly for awhile.

"What a pity a great air-man can never smoke cigarettes," she said. "It is so much easier to talk to a man when he is smoking. Airmen are—so superior."

He smiled. What was her game?

"You know—Pleigman, who is so often in company with Captain Clock?"

"Quite well. Enough maybe. Why?"

"You are so different from him. Yet you are like him. Both of you are somehow the symbol of what is trying to escape from the powers. He—poor thing, has no way out but in his pen; and he cannot even publish what he writes. You—"

"Air-men do not escape," he cut in. "When a man is miles in the air he still belongs to Germany."

"But when he is far into the foe's country—?"

"The foe is beneath him, not behind."

"You have been—over Paris and London?"

"I have never dropped bombs on those places. I am not a bomb-dropper. I am a scout."

"Ja, ja. And you can fly from Berlin to—say Hamburg or Heligoland—and back in a night, easily?"

"That would not be hard."

"You have—done it already?"

"More than once. Yes."

"And may do so again, perhaps?"

"One never knows what journey—or when."

"Ah!" she said in that confidingly sentimental way she had, when flirting with uncertainties. "I should think it would be a great test of one's patriotism to be an air-man. You air-men of all countries have such camaraderie. Different from soldiers or sailors, perhaps."

"Odd. So Captain Kluck has told me."

Now she had got him on the tack.

"I am sure nature intended the Captain to be an air-man," she said. "He has the air-man's daring and uplift. Did he ever strike you so?"

"He would have been—one of the best."

"You have talked to him about the air?"

"Oh, quite often. We have agreed upon some things. Of course he is theoretical and—"

The door suddenly opened. A head popped in.

"Excuse me," said the voice.

It was Major Hanslick. Frau Bobel rose.

"There is no excuse," she snapped. "If you have any business with Commander Hopkirch more important than mine—please transact it!"

She left the room.

XVI.

EDITOR PLEIGMAN—"representative of millions" as he said—was terribly upset by the bulletins from the air. Two nights later he sought out Clock at the hotel.

"I feel earthquakes coming," he said. "The hotel is trembling like a ship in a storm. The whole city is vibrating. It is the minds of the people acting upon the walls, upon the wires—"

"Take a seidlitz powder," advised Clock. "The best time to be hysterical is when something really happens. Suppose the Kaiser came down the Unter den Linden and everybody was to—"

"Sh! There are powers greater than Kaisers," he whispered.

"Oh, really? What are they?"

"Mass emotions," replied Pleigman, rubbing the place where his stomach had a right to be. "The volcanic element in a nation. Germany is suffering. The people as yet believe that it is because of the enemy. The bulletins from the air have translated their symptoms into fear. Hitherto Berlin has been suffering but not afraid. Fear only will break the spell of conformity to the powers. Whenever the people realize that the forces operating against Germany are infinitely greater than all the power in Berlin—whenever they realize that there is a psychology of a united world greater than the brain of Germany—"

"You'll be strung up," said Clock.

"That will no longer matter. I have been thinking for others. I understand the masses. They do not understand me. Man," he said, huskily, as he peered over into a gathering mass of moving old clothes among the leaves of the Thiergarten. "I should not like to be the wearer of an iron cross whenever the people are roused. Nein!"

Suddenly he noticed a thing about the Captain that he was sure had never happened before. The Captain was writing; not slowly as he had been in the habit of doing, but furiously—and his crooked stiff arm was lying normally on the paper.

"Herr Captain," inquired the editor, "what may you be writing?"

Clock turned sharply.

"Is there anything else you'd like just now better than to know what I'm writing?"

"Nothing, Herr Captain. Nothing."

"And if I leave this with you—at the psychological moment—sealed in an envelope, will you deliver it to Frau Bobel in this hotel with my compliments? You see the postmen may be out of business and—"

On this point Pleigman became violently argumentative. Postmen were the implicit servants of the State. How could they cease to operate unless an earthquake should happen?

"No armies can ever reach us; no naval guns can ever strike us; no air-fleets can even bomb us against such a concourse of aircraft as guards Berlin—"

"Remember the news bombs, Pleigman."

"Ja. But the authorities will never again permit so thick a cloud to gather over the city. There never had been known such a cloud over Berlin before."

"Well, if you don't want to deliver this I'll have to trust it to the mails."

"Read it to me," said the editor. "When I know what it is, I swear to be your servant. But you are not—leaving Germany? You cannot escape. You are not one to commit suicide. And unless you are a traitor, Germany will never put you to death."

"Pleigman," said the Captain slowly, as he lighted his pipe, "whenever the big show strikes in Berlin, when the hour really comes that you've been drooling about, to me, it won't matter very much to some people whether they get faced up with one thing or another. I'm taking no chances, spilling no secrets about myself. All I want is for the Secret Service of Berlin to know what's in these papers I'm writing here. And as you're the kind of contorting humanity that will wriggle through any emergency, I can trust you, if I can anybody, to get it over. Now then if it's a go—listen."

"Herr Captain," said Pleigman mournfully, "I have read you many of my writings which I never could publish. It will be only fair to you—"

"Not at all," snapped Clock. "You are to regard this as a damned great favor. Understand?"

"Read on, Herr Captain."

XVII.

Captain Clock Reads.

THE fateful summer arrives, when for the first time in history great armies, a great navy and the armada of the air are co-ordinated under supreme high command for the disruption of Germany. In this the hugest of all war dramas for the first time land, water and air are a unit. Such concentration was never before possible. Against overwhelmingly superior Allied armies the Boche has withdrawn to his own soil. There with men and gun odds against him he has dug in for home defence. The British grand fleet is still maintaining the blockade with no targets to aim at and with Heligoland and Kiel still inaccessible. The armada of the air

opens the way and breaks the combined deadlock of sea and land forces. The air force takes the initiative. Therein lies the limitless new power that can be set loose. With the cloud armada as a main army in the centre, the land armies become the right wing, the navy the left. The brain directing the great drama is at the headquarters of the land army. The strength of this new co-ordination is in effect the irresistible force, because it works simultaneously upon all the great defensives of the enemy.

Acting on the offensive, we could pick our own time and place. Air battles merely delayed the time. On the appointed day code signals were flashed to the North Sea. Berlin—must be stabbed. The brain of the Beast must send its contortions clean over Germany.

Midnight, by a prearranged signal flashed all along the base line of aerodromes the grand fleet rises in sections and forms up as per rehearsal in the clouds. In fifteen minutes thousands of aircraft in squadrons, each flagshipged by a Handley-Page or a Caproni, are beginning the wedge-like drive across Germany, carrying bombs enough to rupture a city; forming a fantail that reaches for leagues, a veritable cloud of aeroplanes. The course of this armada is as inevitable as a storm, and much more mysterious.

That night the long line of the trenches, with its millions of inhabitants, was awake. All the land armies heard the sound of the wing-storm going over. Allied flares were shot all along the line. The Boches answered with flares. But no army can stop that armada of the air. From Konigsberg to Metz and on down to Vienna and beyond, the subjugated slaves of Mittel-Europa were expecting the invasion. Their war lords know what to expect, because they themselves had planned just such a super-invasion of France, but were "beaten to it" by the Allies.

In the homes of millions the awe-stricken conjecture was passed. Hunland was one vast unit of expectation; such a cumulative state of mind as breeds panic when the hour has struck as surely as an east wind brews the rain. The people all gabbled strangely, chattering like natives on some foreign island; seeming to believe that the city which had presumed to make over-laws bigger than civilization, thus doing away with crime, must, therefore, be immune from attack. London, Paris, Rome, Washington, Ottawa, Melbourne, were all cities of obsolete law, of discarded "humanite," of discredited liberty. Berlin only was the sole incarnation of the world's new force. So long as Berlin kept her head Germany was safe.

XVIII.

PLEIGMAN was so absorbed in what the Captain had read of his narrative that he was in a cold sweat.

"You are—a prophet!" he mumbled. "And a traitor? You are in my—"

"Stow that. You have no power—not yet—except to do as I want you. When that is done, strike for liberty and all the rest."

Clock reached out and grabbed the editor, hoisting him with one arm like a big doll.

"Mein Gott! What an arm!" squeaked Pleigman, feeling like a weak rat in the whiskers of a large tom-cat.

"Look here, tribune of the people, I've got to see Commander Hopkirch—within an hour. It's now eight. He must be out of here by nine. He's not far from your build. Go to the Kaiserhoch Hotel and ask to see him. Give him—wait—"

Clock scrawled a note.

"Give him this. I've directed him to use your coat, hat, wig and spectacles and to leave you in his room till he gets back. That's all. Now go. I'll have

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"Ah! Three short greens—a red—and a green. His lights. Good!"