

# The Passing of a Throne

*A Powerful, Personal Narrative Concerning the Unparalleled Drama of the War*

CHAPTER LXV.—Continued.)

By FRED M. WHITE

THE speaker turned away, and strolled along the street. Vera was easier in her mind now. It was quite plain that Alonzo was not going to get away for many hours to come, and with any luck she would be up in the North in time to warn Rosslyn. She could go to bed with an easy mind, secure in the knowledge that she had struck a blow for freedom, and that the bold and adventurous career of Alonzo and Lady Loxton had reached its end.

Nevertheless she was down early the following morning, and eager to see the papers. They were practically filled with the story of the German raid, to the exclusion of everything else. In every case the plan of campaign was identical, in every case the attack had been made from some lonely spot near the various coast towns which had been selected by the German spies. It was the same at Brighton and Littlehampton, the same at Hastings and Eastbourne. The latter town had been quite a typical example. The lonely stretch of downs at the back of Willingdon Golf Club had afforded an ideal spot for the attack on the town. It had been no difficult matter to land the gunners at Pevensey, where they had made their way over the marshes to the high ground. Here also was a disused quarry, which had been fitfully worked by foreigners a few years ago, and subsequently abandoned. The scheme was ridiculously simple and easy, so easy that no suspicion had ever been aroused. The guns hidden there were somewhat of an old pattern, no doubt, but they were powerful enough to destroy an open town in a few hours.

And they had done damage enough in all consciousness. They had had a free hand for the best part of two hours or more before the troops training at Cooden Beach and Hastings were got on the way, and the high ground behind the town from Beachy Head away past Willingdon had been thoroughly scoured and the deadly battery unmasked. For the most part the German gunners had got away safely enough, leaving their guns and ammunition behind them, which they had done with a light heart, seeing that they had been successful beyond their wildest dreams. They had done their work successfully enough, and for once in a way Berlin would be able to tell the truth.

The papers there would be able to say that the invasion of England was an accomplished fact, and that batteries had been landed and planted on a score of positions commanding as many English towns. They would be able to say that the terror had come in the night, and that many a prosperous watering-place had been unmercifully shelled. They would say, of course, that the South of England had been destroyed, and that millions of terrified fugitives were fleeing towards London. London would be next, and for the first time in many months Berlin would have something to rejoice over.

Fortunately the loss of life was not great. Streets were injured here and there, and one or two hotels on the sea front badly damaged. In most cases the audacious Germans had got away, but they had had to leave everything behind them, so that there was no chance of a further raid taking place. Vera was still engaged over these details when Lady Loxton came gliding into the room.

"Oh, this is a nice thing," she said. "One thing I am thankful for is that I was not in Brighton last night. I see that the hotel Metropole is in ruins. I suppose it will be London's turn next. You may call me a coward if you like, but I am not going to stay here. I am going to the North. I should have gone early this morning, only those stupid people actually refused me a permit for the car. They told Alonzo, who kindly offered to drive me, that no permits will be is-

sued until after to-morrow. I suppose I shall have to stay till to-morrow afternoon. Are you staying, too?"

Vera was not sure. It would have been unwise to speak of her movements to this woman. All the same she knew exactly what she was going to do. She was leaving London by a fast train soon after lunch, and she hoped to meet Rosslyn at Filey somewhere about tea time. She shook Lady Loxton off, and went on hurriedly with her preparations for departure. As she anticipated, the trains were running as usual and she reached her destination.

Rosslyn was there on the platform awaiting her.

"We are going straight to Inchcliffe Castle," he said. "Come on, I have got a car waiting."

CHAPTER XLVI.

The Other Spider.

VERA asked no questions. She knew that the broad road of adventure lay before her, and that there was yet much to be done, but it was good to know that she was amongst friends, and that no longer would she have to make her way alone. It was a warm welcome that awaited her from Lady Inchcliffe, who in a way reminded Vera of Lady Loxton. She was small and fair and vivacious, always cheery and good-tempered, and absolutely devoid of brains. In fact, she was typically a musical comedy lady, to whose charms so many of the younger aristocracy have fallen victims during the last few years.

"I hear all sorts of wonderful things of you," she said, as she settled Vera down in a great chair before the hearth. "Now I want you to make yourself perfectly happy here, and do just as you like. You are one of the conspirators, I understand. I believe that all sorts of mysterious things are going on of which Inchcliffe tells me nothing. He says it is utterly impossible for me to keep a secret of any kind, and, really, he is quite right. People come and go in the middle of the night, and Mr. Hallett and his friends never seem to go to bed, and that is about all I know. So if I ask you any questions you don't want to answer don't do so. Now have some more tea."

Vera smiled at this unconventional reception. But all the same it made her easy in her mind, and later on, when Inchcliffe turned his wife unceremoniously out of the library with an intimation that she was not wanted, Vera did not feel in the least uncomfortable.

"You have just come straight from town haven't you?" Inchcliffe asked. "No more trouble there, I hope?"

"As a matter of fact, Miss Leroux knows all about it," Rosslyn said. "She had adventures thrilling enough for yellow covers. She saw the raid on Brighton from start to finish. Don't be shy, Vera. Tell these people all about it."

Vera stammered out the history of her wonderful trip. It did not occur to her that she had done anything calling for marvellous courage and resolution, and her cheeks crimsoned as she listened to the chorus of praise from her listeners.

"It was just good luck," she said. "Mr. Hallett put me on the track, and after that fortune favoured me in the most extraordinary way. Absolutely nothing went wrong. Now do tell me what's going on here, and how I can help. It's so dreadfully lonely working by oneself. I think I can be useful."

"You can be of the greatest possible assistance," Hallett said. "Now listen to what I have to say."

In a few words Hallett explained the course of events during the last day or two. He had managed to de-

cipher the code of the window curtains with the aid of the catalogue, and now had the whole thing at his fingers' ends. It was no part of his scheme to take the conspirators single-handed, for he preferred, if possible, to capture the whole of them at one fell swoop.

"We have contrived for the moment to put them entirely off their guard," he said. "They think the arrangements have broken down for the time being, and that there is reason for delay. We know that there are several hostile fishing smacks hanging about in the bay outside waiting for orders, and we know that these boats are connected with the laying of mines. We have every reason to believe that the mines are not on board the boats. That would be a rather dangerous proceeding in case of a search. But the mines are somewhere handy where they can be taken on board at a moment's notice, and it is this hiding place that we want to discover. If we can put our hands on those and the crews of the fishing boats at the same time, then I think we can break up this gang altogether."

"Where can I help?" Vera asked.

"I was just coming to that," Hallett went on. "I am going to ask you to be good enough to spend most of to-morrow mastering the cipher of the window curtains. I will give you the key and I have no doubt you will learn the whole thing in the course of the day. You see our great difficulty has been to change the letters on the curtains in the same neat way as they have been altered hitherto. I have used tiny spots of gum, but what we want is a woman who is quick and neat with a needle."

"I make all my own blouses," Vera smiled.

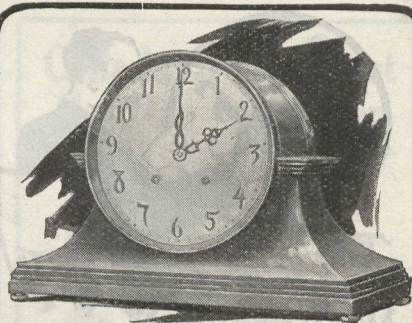
"Excellent," Hallett exclaimed. "I was quite sure you would be most useful. You will be able to make all the necessary changes without the slightest trace of clumsiness. Now I am laying a little trap for these people to-morrow night and I shan't be able to spare one of my friends here to work the signals from the house on the cliff. They will have to be changed from time to time at certain specified hours, and this is the task that I propose to put in your hands, Miss Vera. I know you won't shrink from it."

"I don't think I shall," Vera said quietly. "Now let me clearly understand. You are going to give me a series of messages to tack on the window curtains and these things are to be altered and changed according to a time-table. The lights will go up and down as I am doing my work. Shall I be alone in the house?"

"Not altogether," Hallett explained. "One of my trusted subordinates and his wife are in the house acting as caretakers. They don't know much, though they are both old hands at the game. It won't interfere with you unless something quite unexpected happens, some unforeseen danger and all that sort of thing. My man is a resolute fellow, quite capable of using a revolver. Of course, no one about has the least notion of what has happened. People are under the impression that Blair Allison and his wife have gone abroad on business and the servants are having a holiday."

THERE was no more to be said or done for the moment and Vera went away wearily to bed. She was utterly tired out with the toil and excitement of the last eight-and-forty hours and only too ready to rest. But she was up betimes in the morning and hard at work with the cipher directly after breakfast. All this sort of thing was child's play to her, so that by lunch time she had the whole thing by heart and was quite capable of working the secret code without any reference to the ingenious catalogue.

"Splendid," Hallett said. "The way



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