

THE SPY NET

by ARED WHITE

CHAPTER 17

Farnham had barely finished his breakfast when Za arrived, a few minutes before eight o'clock, with him a stranger whom he introduced as Monsieur Bolin. Farnham was puzzled by something vaguely familiar in the name.

"The gentleman," said Monsieur Za, "whose name is most important when appended to a check for many, many Swiss francs."

Za's words supplied Farnham's memory. The name that had appeared on the check for forty-two thousand francs, Farnham's losses at poker with Abbas Hilmi, Bolin's name. Farnham's attention was attracted by the name; it was an unusual name, well-formed, aquiline, strong of feature, with boring, cynical black eyes, and an almost leering smile that seemed to be indelibly stamped on his features.

Farnham arranged chairs for them with an effort at nonchalance that failed to cover his uneasiness.

"Your letters are ready for the mails," said Za, opening a leather briefcase and laying out a small pile of neatly typed missives, each written on a large white sheet of paper under the letterhead of the Beau Rivage. "When you have signed them, we have a matter of much interest to you."

Farnham took the letters to the desk, inspected them minutely, took his head in perplexity, and signed and sealed them. Then he placed the sealed letters in an inner pocket of his coat and turned to his visitors.

"It may prove of interest to you, dear captain, to know that you are leaving Switzerland immediately," said Za, with a repetition of his catlike smile.

"What do you mean?" Farnham demanded bluntly, looking uneasily from one to the other.

"An officer of your army has been sent to relieve you, a Captain Fox Elton of your engineers," said Za. "He brings orders to your legation at Berne sending you back to Paris for duty."

As Farnham sat staring blankly at him, Za took a typed copy of Elton's orders from his pocket. There was a softening of the taut lines about the American's mouth, a quick light in his eyes as he read.

"Back to Paris, eh?" he commented, without looking up. "I have heard nothing of this and have no such orders."

"Ah, but the idea, it is most pleasant, yes," leered Za. "Well, my captain, the orders are authentic enough. The feline smile expanded in self-satisfaction. "Monsieur Za is in a position to know what goes on in Switzerland. Your captain he arrived only last night at Annemasse, and hurries on to Lausanne, where he takes the train for Berne. Your orders, my captain, already are they in the hands of your American charge d'affaires."

"Well, what of it?" said Farnham blandly. He gave a dry smile. "I can't say that it's going to be very painful to leave this place for Paris, eh?"

"Blin, monsieur," rejoined Za. "But whether you leave Switzerland, it depends on much more than your orders. It is upon that matter Monsieur Bolin and I have called to see you this morning."

Farnham sat erect and his eyes snapped.

"Don't get the idea, because of what happened," he blazed. "I'm going to tolerate any further interference in my private and official affairs."

Za gave an indifferent shrug and turned to his associate. Bolin took from his pocketbook the cancelled check for forty-two thousand francs, Farnham's receipt for the check, and one of the letters to Paris that Farnham had signed the day before. He held them before Farnham's puzzled eyes for a moment and returned them to his pocketbook.

"These are to refresh monsieur's memory," said Bolin, fixing Farnham with his taunting eyes and speaking in a crisp, incisive voice. "Now let us put aside all pretense and speak with the utmost frankness, monsieur, since in no other way can we arrive at a conclusion."

"Say what you have to say," said

Farnham coldly. "But see to it that you do not impose too far upon my patience."

"First, monsieur," said Bolin serenely, "let me test your patience by saying bluntly that the documents I just presented are proof conclusive that you are in the pay of the Imperial German secret service."

Farnham sprang to his feet in a surge of passion and shook a warning fist at Bolin and Za.

"So this is blackmail!" he raged. "Out of my room this instant, you worthless scoundrels, or I'll march you to the gendarmes."

The two looked back at him with easy amusement, wholly unmoved by his outbreak.

"Please calm yourself, monsieur," said Bolin softly. "You are far too intelligent a man to wish an American court martial—with an American firing squad at the end of the trail."

The masterly assurance in which Bolin said this caught Farnham and cooled his passion. His hand went slowly back to his side. He stood through several moments of tense indecision, then sat down, the muscles of his face working convulsively.

"Well?" he demanded.

"Bravo, monsieur," Bolin beamed. "Now that you have your wits, let me make clear the force of what I've said. Foremost, the check is notoriously, as you would put it, the check of the Imperial German government. But, as Monsieur Za is an accredited attaché of the Austrian legation, and I am officially attached to the German legation, no harm can come to us, as you must see. You will hardly deny that you presented the check at the Swiss bank, nor will you deny your signature to certain letters to France, the precise nature of which might interest either an American or French military court."

"But you forget that I paid the money to Abbas Hilmi, and can prove how I came to owe it," Farnham protested stoutly.

Bolin very deliberately cut the end from a cigar and lighted it.

"Quite to the contrary, my dear captain," said Bolin, "you can prove nothing. His Highness would testify that he had never in his life laid eyes upon you, whereas it would become the very unhappy duty of Monsieur Za and me to give our version of why you were paid forty-two thousand Swiss francs—out of the secret funds of our government, monsieur!"

Farnham sat looking at Bolin for a long time out of stark eyes, the blood gone from his face, his mouth taut and drawn. His whole appearance was that of a man who has found himself suddenly, deftly trapped, beyond the hope of escape. He did not thrust about or fly into a rage. The two secret agents watched the working of his features breathlessly, with glittering eyes. Bolin's right hand rested in his coat pocket, ready to meet possible violence with fire, since there was no knowing how the victim might react to the trap.

In the end Farnham's head dropped forward on his breast, and token of surrender. Bolin and Za exchanged triumphant looks. Their victory was complete. The victim had yielded to the inevitable. Bolin proceeded to strengthen the fetters. For the better part of an hour he spoke, a few sentences at a time, arguing the futility of resistance. They were giving Farnham his only chance. He must do as he was told. They would ask

but little of him, nothing but that he receive and send the letters at Paris. He need not know any more than he had known heretofore what those letters meant. He could write them in his own way, put them in the American official mail when they had been typed. He might even have them censored by his commanding officer at Paris.

The American nodded a broken acquiescence, without looking up at them.

Trapped

"I appear to be in your power, messieurs," Farnham muttered weakly.

"Then, monsieur, we will come to a full understanding," said Bolin. "What is to be done should be done thoroughly, so as to lead to no possible later dispute or distrust. Come!"

The dispirited Farnham merely sat slumped in his chair, without animation or interest. Monsieur Za placed the dispatch case on the American's knees, a highly embossed linen sheet on its top. Farnham's listless eyes saw incoherently that it was done in German, a German secret oath.

"In the noble pigment of the Imperial German secret service!" exclaimed Bolin. He took Farnham's dressing gown and shirt to the sleeve, and gave a quick stab of a lancet in the bare vein. Farnham did not flinch at the prick. Za gathered the red globule from the tiny wound into the pen and placed it in the American's hands. Slowly, and with fingers that trembled, Farnham wrote his name to the oath in his own blood.

"Blen, monsieur," exclaimed Bolin. "The pact it is complete. But please to remember, monsieur, that each month of your faithful service you shall receive the pay of ten thousand francs."

He paused impressively and added in a voice of warning:

"But at the first treachery, your life is not worth the one centime, not even if you should hide in the desert of Sahara!"

CHAPTER 18

Under A Periscope

Upon being left alone by the two gloating agents of the Imperial German secret service, Captain Farnham sat without moving for the better part of an hour, his face covered by his hands, until he was aroused from his thoughts by an attendant with a telegram. He accepted the message lifelessly, motioned the messenger out of the room, and sat staring at the message some time before he tore it open. The telegram was from the American legation at Berne and directed tersely:

"But at the first treachery, your life is not worth the one centime, not even if you should hide in the desert of Sahara!"

The sheet of flimsy fluttered from his fingers and he sank back into his despairing pose. Another half hour slipped by, in which he might have been a man asleep. Then he sprang suddenly to his feet, paced the floor of his room excitedly for several minutes, and paused in a certain tragic indecision before his locked trunk. Presently he took from its recesses a small automatic pistol and stood gazing at it morbidly as it lay in the palm of his hand.

Reflexively placing the weapon on the walnut writing desk, he sat down, took up a pen, dipped it several times nervously and began a painstaking message, which he wrote down with great difficulty, a word or two at a time.

At a rap at his door, he covered the pistol hurriedly with several sheets of paper and responded. At the door was Mademoiselle Le Rivet, her face very pale, her large blue eyes staring and fearful. She entered the room quickly, as Farnham stood in speechless gaping.

"Monsieur, pardon the intrusion," she gasped. "But I must speak with you a moment."

Farnham drew himself together and bowed stiffly.

"Certainly, mademoiselle," he said icily. "But, really, I am certain you will be pleased to know"

"Please don't!" she pleaded against the bitter reproach in his voice.

"I was merely going to say," Farnham concluded reluctantly, "that your associates have done their work so well that there is really nothing left for you to say."

"But, monsieur, you have frightened me," she cried.

She crossed the room swiftly, snatched the covering from the pistol and held it behind her while she took up the sheet of paper upon which Farnham had been writing. There were only a few words, scrawled, almost illegible, but Mademoiselle Le Rivet reeled as she confirmed their meaning.

Dear mother—Please forgive me, but there is no other way. You must always believe—

Mademoiselle faced him with a poignant anguish in her eyes.

"So you really meant to destroy yourself, monsieur," she said in a low, vibrant voice.

"You will pardon me, Mademoiselle Le Rivet," Farnham responded in the same uncompromising voice, "but do you not think it a bit bizarre for you to rush into my apartment, seize my private correspondence, and read it before my eyes?" His voice softened disagreeably. "Even a spy should have some regard for a victim's privacy—when he is present, at least."

Mademoiselle winced visibly.

"But, monsieur," she rallied, "was I to stand by and see you take your life?"

"Ah," taunted Farnham, "then you have eyes that see through walls, or was it that your eyes were glued to my keyhole?"

"I will tell you, monsieur," she cried. "I was left behind to watch your actions. Monsieur Bolin was uneasy, and with good reason, that—that you might harm yourself. For what seemed like many hours, monsieur, I have stood with my eyes at the scope, in the apartment next to yours, and when I saw your purpose, I came in."

"That was very gracious of you, indeed," Farnham saidardonically. "And now that you have explained this great honor so beautifully, mademoiselle, may I trouble you to replace my—ah—personal property and accept my profound adieu?"

Mademoiselle Le Rivet drew herself together and her eyes snapped sudden defiance.

"I will not go, monsieur," she said, "not until you have heard all that I have to say to you."

Farnham seated himself with an annoyed shrug and lighted a cigarette.

"Very well, then, mademoiselle," he replied. "Then I suppose I am compelled to listen, in hope that you will not prolong this intrusion unnecessarily."

"You were about to take the easy way out of an unpleasant situation, monsieur," she charged, now more fully possessed and striving to speak calmly. "But it is my duty to warn you that the door is closed too, in that direction."

"I had thought," sneered Farnham, "that a man's soul and his honor were his own affair. Am I

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to understand that Germans claim the gates of hell as well, mademoiselle Le Rivet?"

"Yes, monsieur," she replied grimly. "If you put it that way. But it is not that you leave some one very dear behind?"

"An unnecessary question. I would say to one who has cried into my private letters even before the ink was dry."

"Then what you would do is most impossible!" she exclaimed. Her hands were locked behind her back, her chin was thrust forward in her struggle to bolster her courage through the interview. "Death would not save you from the disgrace; it would only bring dishonor upon your name and the name of those you love. The reason for your death would be given out to the Swiss, a version in which you would have no word."

Farnham sat staring at her, a new horror in his eyes.

"So that's what you came here for?" he accused. "To tell me that the German Imperial secret service claims me body and soul?"

"But it is not of my doing, monsieur," she cried. "I am only doing my duty by warning you."

"A pleasant lot," Farnham laughed bitterly. "I can vaguely understand why you should trap me, if you had only done it fairly, but it is a fiend lower than the devil that would cast dishonor into the graves of those whom he has driven to death."

The blood was gone from her face again and Mademoiselle Le Rivet was making a supreme struggle to contain herself. Farnham caught this struggle unmistakably, and there came back into his mind her reticence at that first spring-

ing of the trap at von Kulm's chateau. He knew now that it must not have been mere reticence but revolt, that today she was cast in a role that flooded her with horror. Farnham thought he could picture Senora Quiraza gloating at his tragedy, but he wondered if the Spanish woman would have had the courage to face him alone after what had happened.

"You must remember the war, monsieur," Mademoiselle Le Rivet replied in a dry, thin voice that lacked conviction. "There is not you alone to consider, but so many who must be forced to serve our cause that we must find a way to discourage those who would escape too easily."

"The devil himself would blush at such a profession," rejoined Farnham.

"Perhaps, monsieur."

The words dropped from her parted lips, almost an acceptance of what he had charged. Mademoiselle Le Rivet had lost the struggle with herself, and sank in a chair, her eyes staring and haunted.

"But is there not another place where we can speak of these things?" she pleaded. She cast a frightened look about, and added with evident restraint, "Perhaps you would see matters as I see them, if I could but have a breath of—of fresh air while I am convincing you."

There was a note in her voice that conveyed a meaning beyond her words, a wish to be alone, where the walls might not have ears, where she would be free to unleash her unspoken thought. Farnham caught her meaning and did not temporize.

They left the hotel and walked together across the quay. Farnham's hands thrust deep in the pockets of his coat, his head thrust dejectedly forward, but with a pulse that was rising to the swift change in mademoiselle's attitude. At the boat landing she engaged a rowboat and motioned Farnham to the oars. In a few minutes they were well out of hearing of the quay.

"The lake alone is deaf in Geneva," she broke the silence. "On shore there are long ears and sharp eyes everywhere—one dares hardly think. But I must ask, monsieur, that you hear me with more patience, will you not?"

"I am listening, mademoiselle," he said crisply.

"So you will understand my action, monsieur," she said. "Let me say that I am in the service of my country, just as you are in the service of yours. Nor do I serve for pay, nor for glory, since what I do is for the Fatherland—the only way I can help after what has happened."

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Real Estate	34,944.86
Bonds	281,930.68
United States Securities	\$384,231.25
Cash	157,271.80
	\$1,420,384.92

LIABILITIES

Capital Stock	\$ 100,000.00
Surplus	30,000.00
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