

André decided to make the trip to England by plane. There was regular service now between Brussels and the Croydon airfield in London. The new Instone Air Line biplanes were roomy, fast—with speeds of one hundred miles an hour—and believed to be safer than the earlier planes, two of which had crashed on this same run only two years before.

Trevor met him at the airfield around noon and drove him directly to his father's great house in Kent. What Trevor had to tell André could be said very briefly, but the visit would be a good excuse to catch up on everything else. André and Trevor both had agreed that this house would be the ideal meeting place. They would be pulling into its graceful driveway at about two o'clock. As they were both anxious to take care of business, they had decided that they would get to that almost immediately. Later they would have a leisurely dinner and a quiet evening. André would fly back to Brussels the next morning.

The clock had just rung half-past-two when both men sat down in the imposing main living room. Like his father, Trevor loved this particular room, mainly because of the views it afforded both of his family's estate and of the Kentish countryside beyond.

They said very little about the war itself. What had happened was too dreadful to relive. Besides, nature's healing process had intervened, shrouding even the most painful recollections. It had also put a deceptively benign gloss on the memories of the few small, consoling things, like the warmth of a cup of coffee, or the rare and brief reprieves away from the front. Without mentioning this, both Trevor and André realized that it was best to leave these things alone.

Trevor was impressed with how well-informed André was; he was as aware of Germany's rearmament and preparations for war as Trevor was, at least up to a few months ago. They were both distressed by the Allies' perverse insistence on looking the other way.

"Hitler's now begun the production of aircraft," Trevor said. "Aircraft, for Christ's sake!"

This was news to André.

"And he has started war games—all over the country," Trevor continued. "People in Germany are bragging that their country will soon be at war."

"And the Allies remain indifferent."

"Hitler's about to test them."

“Where?”

Trevor got up, went over to the large window, and looked out. Immediately before them lay the garden. Beyond it, and separated from it by a very low hedge, a broad, perfectly groomed lawn stretched gently downward, stopping in the distance at a line of trees which ran along the banks of a small stream. Beyond that stream, the ground rose to a low crest, but the great height at which the house stood enabled Trevor to see over the top of the crest to the lands beyond and to the distant horizon in the direction of the Channel and, beyond it, of France and the Continent. As his mind traveled across the Channel, Trevor saw again the bloodied trenches, heard again his comrades' shouts at their anticipation of glory, remembered again their screams of agony and despair. As he looked at the gentle scene that now lay before him, Trevor knew that there could be no greater glory than the glory of peace, not the coward's peace of denial, but the peace for which their comrades had paid such a terrible price.

As certainly as he had ever known anything before, Trevor also knew that from beyond that horizon, beyond the Channel, and beyond France, the despot was at this moment preparing once more to violate that country's soil, and that this time he would strike across that Channel, and, bloodying England's own shores, would assault these very slopes. Unless he was stopped in time.

Trevor knew that André, like him, had long been concerned about the Rhineland. This was a fifty-kilometer-wide strip of land located inside Germany and running along the Rhine River, which separates Germany from France. After World War I, fearful that Germany might at some future time once again attempt to invade Belgium and France, the victorious Allies included in the Treaty of Versailles a provision making the Rhineland a buffer zone. The Treaty of Versailles forbade Germany from ever maintaining any military facilities or armed forces in that buffer zone, this despite the fact that the Rhineland remained in all other respects an integral part of Germany. To put teeth into this provision, the parties also entered into the Locarno Pact, which provided that if Germany ever did attempt to reoccupy the Rhineland with armed forces, the Allies were not only allowed, but also obligated, to march in and expel the German forces from the Rhineland. Trevor was still looking out the window when he spoke.

“Mr. Hitler has had his high command draw up plans for the reoccupation of the Rhineland.”

“How did you find that out?”

Trevor turned to face André.

“I can’t tell you. But I can also tell you that German troops are preparing for it at this moment.”

“Same question.”

“Same answer.”

André smiled at his friend’s discretion. “I thought so.” He then paused, growing serious at this news.

“I predict,” André said, “that the Allies will continue to display their same blind, suicidal indifference, and let him get away with it.”

Trevor had moved away from the window, and now sat down in a large armchair near André. He was looking straight at Laroche, and his face became more animated as he spoke.

“There’s a big difference,” Exenby said, “between building weapons and occupying forbidden territory with them.”

“The Allies will do nothing.”

Trevor’s voice rose. “You may be right. If they indeed do nothing, they will have missed the chance to stop Hitler while he’s still inside Germany. If they do nothing now, he will go on to the next step. And that...”

“...that will no longer be inside Germany.”

“Exactly. His next step will be to invade another country. If they let him do that, he will go on to the next step, and then the next, until it’s too late and there is another World War. But if they make a stand this time, I mean if they *fight*, there and then, they will stop him.”

“Isn’t it already too late for that?”

“André, it’s not too late.” Exenby was speaking vehemently now. “Hitler has been building weapons for some time, but he has only started conscription within the last few months. His total forces are still minuscule, a few tens of thousands of men at the most. But France alone has an army of more than half a million men, not counting its reserves, an enormous superiority over the Germans. Plus there’s France’s massive tank forces and artillery, of which Germany has very little. And that’s only France. If you add Britain and the others...”

He left the sentence unfinished.

“So the big question remains, will the Allies strike back at him?”

“It’s the only question. Because Hitler is no fool. He is well aware of how powerful we are, and how weak he still is. His plan to reoccupy the Rhineland is nothing but one colossal gamble. If we fight, he’ll just retreat.”

“I still think it would take a miracle for the Allies to decide to fight.”

“I am working on that miracle. And in the event that it should happen, then Hitler’s whole system could collapse.”

“If it does happen, that would surprise me, but it would be great news.”

For a few minutes neither of them spoke. André stood up.

“In any case,” Laroche said, “before I leave, I want one more favor from you.”

“You shall have it.”

“I think you know how dangerous the work is that my contacts in Germany are doing.” Exenby nodded. “But it’s proof that there are Germans who abhor what Hitler is doing, brave Germans who are risking their lives. How soon do you expect that Hitler will give the order to reoccupy?”

“It will not come for several more months.”

“Is your information that precise?”

“Yes. I am very close to the center of things. And I will know when it’s imminent.”

“That’s what my contacts will need to know.”

“When it is actually about to happen, and I say ‘*when*,’ not ‘*if*,’ I will be one of the first to know. And I will let you know, immediately. Can you have someone contact me?”

“Raoul Maartens...”

“Your old corporal!”

“You remembered! Yes. He is actually the one with the

contacts.

He and I work together like this.” André held up his index and middle fingers, twisted together. “I’ll ask Raoul to get in touch with you for the arrangements.”

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That had been in October 1935. It was now early in 1936. Trevor, through Raoul, had kept André informed all along. During the rest of 1935, things had remained essentially the same. But after the start of the new year the situation began to change. In early January, Hitler moved four divisions up to the edge of the demilitarized zone. The French and the British spent the rest of the month, and into February, “consulting” over it.

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