

# HUTCH OF THE R.A.F. by PETER MUIR

## CHAPTER 10

"I say," the Captain fairly exploded. "You're an American!"

"Yes."

"Yes sir when you speak to me—that is, unless your curiosity about those very damp cells has been aroused."

"Yes, sir." The last thing that Hutch wanted was solitary confinement. If he escaped he must have Rusty with him.

"What are you doing—why are you fighting for England against our glorious Germany?"

Hutch didn't know how to answer this without placing himself in a most unfavorable position. For a moment he thought without saying anything.

"Well, come on. What are you afraid of, Herr American?"

There was a sneer in the way he pronounced American that made the flyer furious. He had never hated anyone so much in his life as he hated this sneering, bemocled Nazi.

"I was fighting for the English because I believe in freedom."

The German stiffened, got to his feet and paced the floor, all the while wiping his monocle industriously. Finally he spoke, and his voice was now soft, insinuating, hateful. "So. You believe in freedom. Well, well." Then he turned on David and his sharp face went livid with anger. In a raised voice he fairly shouted. "Your freedom is ended. Soon England will beg us on her knees for peace. And then, by Himmel, the Americans! Nazi Germany will dominate the world."

The man's no idiot, Hutch thought, merely a fanatic. He really seemed to believe what he was saying, and as he spoke on it was apparent that he had forgotten the presence of a second person in the room. It was as if he were practicing a speech to be delivered at a political rally.

"We, the great German folk, superior to all other folks, will dominate the world. The fools who think they can oppose the will of Adolf Hitler. The fools who think they can oppose our might. The English fools—the American fools! Ha!" Again he began pacing violently back and forth across the room. "We lost the battle of 1918, yes. But now we are a different Germany, a Germany strong, united, and led by Adolf Hitler. The battle of 1940 is a different matter. We will dominate the world."

Hutchinson coughed and the officer turned as if surprised. "Ah! I had forgotten you were here. You may go. I shall keep your papers."

As Hutch passed Rusty he was able to whisper, "No funny business. You'll get solitary confinement."

The chateau was a two story building around three sides of a square. Across the fourth side ran a high grille fence, and one passed over a very ancient drawbridge to enter. It had evidently been built in trouble—some times with a thought for defense. At present it made an excellent military prison, and as the two airmen were escorted inside both were thinking the same thing—that escape would be most difficult from such a place. The only windows gave onto the court, the outside walls being blank and solid.

At least they were to be allowed to remain together; and when they were finally left alone they began to look around the room to which they had been assigned.

"Looks as though we had company," Rusty observed. There were four cots in the room, and over two of them hung the belongings of French officers. On one military cap there was the single stripe of a second lieutenant, and on the other two stripes of a first lieutenant.

"At least they're young," Hutch said, after he had pointed this out to his friend.

The room was not large, and it was very sombre, no sunlight penetrating there at any time of the day. There were the four cots, and by each cot a kitchen chair. In the center of the room stood a bare table, over which hung a single electric bulb with no globe or shade. The floor was of large stones, worn away at places by the tread of feet over the centuries, and the only rug was a square, moth-eaten affair under the table. The walls were bare except where nails had been driven into them, to serve as clothes hooks, near the cots, and they had recently been whitewashed. Hutch said he believed the place had been temporarily arranged by the French as a hospital before the invasion.

"Let's look it over thoroughly," the American said, "before our room-mates return."

They went over the walls inch by inch, tapping with their knuckles until they were raw. But the walls seemed solid. "Just as well try and dig through the Rock of Gibraltar," Rusty remarked.

"Not much chance there, I'm afraid. We might have a look-see at the floor, although it looks about as solid as the

walls. These guys certainly built for the ages."

They searched over the floor as carefully as they had the walls, going under the cots, in the corners, everywhere, trying to find a stone that could be budged from its place, but with no luck. They were tightly wedged into their places and the dust of time had been packed about them like mortar.

Finally it was Rusty who whispered a low, long note of surprise. "Hutch!"

Hutch crawled over to where he was. He had removed the table and the rug. "Look," Rusty said, pointing to a large stone. "They've put the dust back, but it isn't packed down." He blew around the edges of another stone and nothing happened. He blew around the edges of this one and dust flew up into his face.

They were so absorbed by the discovery that they did not hear the door open, but continued to examine the stone. Finally a voice spoke. "Messieurs!"

They looked around, startled, to see two young Frenchmen, one short and stocky, the other tall, and lean, looking at them with angry expressions on their faces, standing in the doorway.

It was not until a week later that Wendy received the news of her brother's death and David's imprisonment. Arthur Stafford, as second in command of The Hornets, had reported the details of their battle over Brittany to the C. O. He had informed the War Office of the loss of three pilots, and they in turn passed on the news to the families of the lost men.

Hutch had given Lady Harrowsdale as one of the persons to be notified in case anything happened to him, wishing Wendy to learn of it through her mother and not directly.

Immediately on receipt of a telegram from Lord Harrowsdale, Wendy caught a train for The Downs. To say that she was crushed by this news would be gross understatement. She felt that a part of her had been killed, as her love for Philip, now that he was gone, was even greater than she had believed possible. Poor old blundering, happy, courageous Phil! Tears rolled down her cheeks as she sat there in the train thinking of him, remembering all his odd little ways. The thought that he would have preferred to die this way, fighting for his country, consoled her somewhat, and her mind turned to David Hutchinson. Regarding him she was amazed to find that she was not in the least downhearted. He was not dead, and that was everything. He was only a prisoner, and instinctively she felt that he was already working to escape. Perhaps he had even now escaped. She knew he would succeed and it would not have surprised her to see him come into the compartment, where she was seated, at that moment and say hello. Her confidence in his intelligence, courage, and daring was limitless.

How she loved him, how she wanted to see him again and feel herself melt into his strong embrace, pressing his hot lips hard against hers. Wendy sighed, forgetting for a moment the tragedy of her brother's death, forgetting even that her David was held in a German prison. She would speak plainly to her father about David.

The first maid, Norah, opened the door for Wendy when she arrived at the Downs and, at sight of her young mistress, the good woman broke into tears and began sobbing violently about "My poor Mister Philip." She had been a member of the household since the year of his birth, had seen both children grow up, and felt that they were her own, at least in part.

"Isn't it awful, Miss Wendy, I mean about the Germans killing my poor boy, and him so good and sweet? He wouldn't ha' hurt a fly, he was that kind." Again she went off into a fit of weeping. "My poor Mister Philip! My poor Mister Philip! So kind and sweet."

Wendy put her arm around the old servant and tried to comfort her, determining herself to show no emotion, although the effort nearly killed her. She, too, would have liked to weep and weep, and only by great force of character did she manage to set the example of fortitude which she felt was necessary.

"There, there, Norah! Don't cry any more. My brother would have preferred to die this way, fighting for his country, fighting for liberty."

The maid continued to sniff and murmur, "And him so young and so brave," until Wendy, exhausted from the effort of controlling her own feelings, changed the subject and moved into the library. It was tea time and she noticed a table in front of a blazing log fire, was set for four persons. The family had naturally expected her to come as soon as she

received their telegram, but—who was the fourth?

She put the question to Norah. "It's a foreign gentleman," she said. "Staying here, Miss Wendy, since yesterday. Her Ladyship told Peggy last night, while she was brushin' Her Ladyship's hair before bedtime, that he was a Dutch gentleman what had come to help catch the people what's doin' all the harm around here. They been blowing up things and settin' fire to things something awful this last few days, especially military things."

The maid's voice became confidential and dropped to what could be described as a stage whisper. "It ain't for us in the servants hall to say what we likes and what we don't like, Miss Wendy, and you'll forgive me if I tells you that we don't like this Count de Beers, which is what he calls himself. He's got a thin, nasty face that's all cut up with scars, and a sneakin' manner, and the gardener says he's seen lights during the night comin' from the Count's window when all ought to be blacked out. Beggin' your pardon, Miss Wendy, for bein' so bold."

Further conversation between the young mistress and Norah was ended by the arrival at that moment of Lord and Lady Harrowsdale. Their greeting of Wendy was affectionate, but, like herself, they refused to show any outward emotion. While they appeared very grave, their self-control was a perfect example of what people of courage, descended from long lines of patriots, should be.

"Where is the Count?" His Lordship addressed this question to Norah, after he had embraced his daughter. "Sir, he went off for a walk fifteen minutes ago," the maid answered. "Said he had a headache and needed air, your Lordship, and that he would be back in time to dress for dinner."

Wendy couldn't help wondering why the stranger had offered excuses, or given reasons to a servant for his comings and goings. This just wasn't done in England. However, instead of giving this further thought she shrugged her shoulders, guessed that it might be the custom in Holland, and suggested that it was time for tea.

Not until Norah had left the room

to fetch tea did the family speak of Philip and offer their mutual condolences. Their loss had hit both parents very hard, but of the two Lord Harrowsdale showed it outwardly even more than his wife. He spoke at some length of his ancestors, pointing out that Philip was the last male member, and that the family name would die with him.

"Well," he added, "it was in a great cause, the defense of England. And we have received word that he shot down two of the enemy before he died. Only one less than young Hutchinson. They paid us five for three, and Stafford thinks he got a sixth, but did not wait to see it hit the ground. I'll show you his letter, Wendy, after tea."

This was the first news Wendy had had of David's three victories, and she thought that this might be a good moment to broach the subject. She felt so proud of her lover, so boundlessly proud of his courage. Three of the enemy had gone down from his attack before they had been able to subdue him. Even her father must be swayed by his admiration for such bravery.

"Father," she said. It was not her habit to take the long road. Once she had made up her mind to go after a thing she took the straightest way, the shortest cut.

Lord Harrowsdale looked up from his tea. "Yes, Wendy."

"I want to marry David Hutchinson. He has asked me, but not as long as he is flying. I want your consent."

The old man knit his heavy eyebrows until they almost came together over his nose, and stirred the tea he was drinking for a very long moment before replying. When he did speak his voice was measured and steady; the voice, Wendy knew, that he used when he meant his word to be law, when he brooked no argument. "My dear daughter," he began. "Doubtless the young fellow is very fine and courageous. I shall not dispute that for a moment. But your mother and I have long since set our hearts on your marriage with an English gentleman of title. Especially now that I have no heir, and—"

A terrific explosion rent the air, leaving the sentence unfinished. The house shook to its very foundations as though in an earthquake, and several panes of glass crashed to the floor, shattered into bits.

Lord Harrowsdale was first to reach the window and look out, close-

ly followed by the two women. "My God!" he exclaimed. "It's the Baxter gunpowder works. We've doubled the guard in the last few days, but they've found a way."

About five miles to the west a great column of black smoke rose higher and higher, telling the story of disaster. "I must go at once. Will you drive me, Wendy?"

Father and daughter rushed out to the garage, and her Ladyship hurried across the golf links to the hospital. There would surely be some wounded brought in here for first aid treatment and she must be ready.

That night at dinner the subject of the explosion monopolized the conversation. Count de Beers, faultlessly attired in full evening dress, was very interested and most sympathetic. "How dreadful!" he said in his excellent English. "Over three hundred known dead, you say?"

"And seventy-seven so badly burned that many will die later," Her Ladyship answered.

To be continued

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### Lux Toilet Soap

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### LUX FLAKES

5-oz pkg 10c 12-oz pkg 23c	
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### RINSO

23-oz pkg 23c 9-oz pkg 9c	
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### SWAN SOAP

3 cks 17c 2 lge cks 19c	
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