

# SPICY ADVENTURE STORIES



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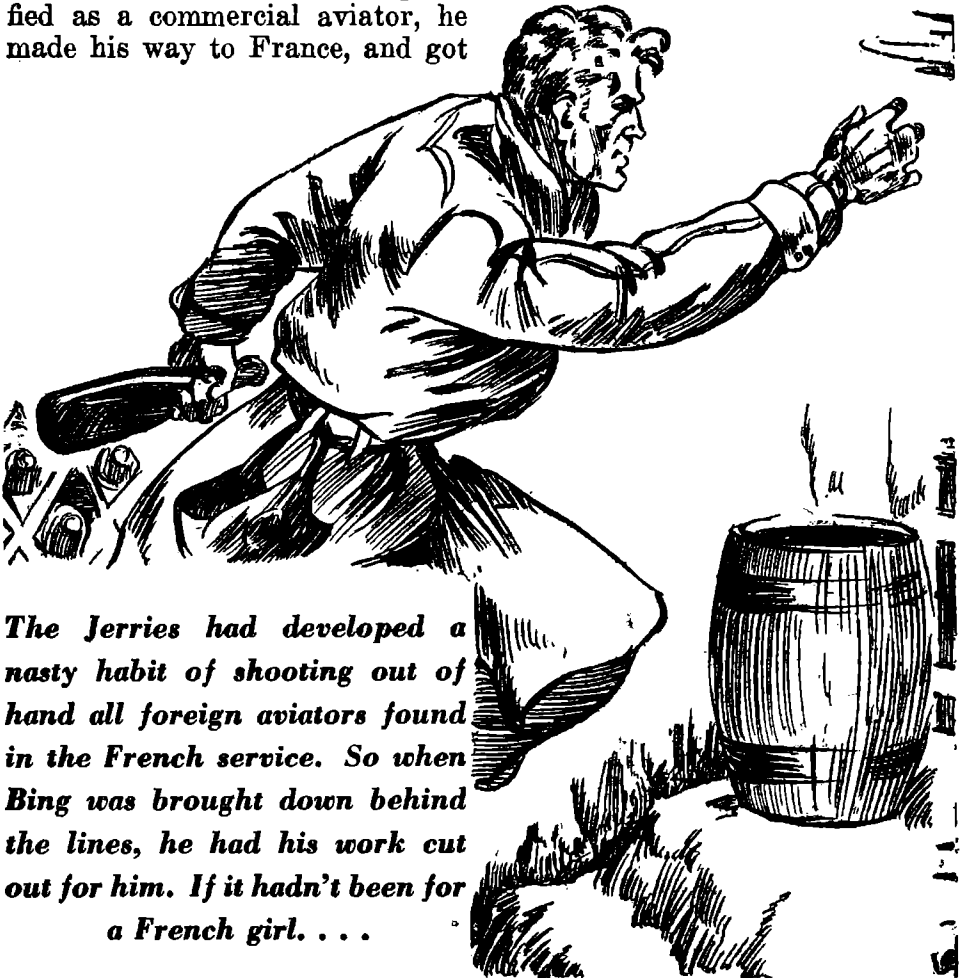
# ● HOSTAGE

“**B**ING” WALSH thought he had learned French at school. True, that was some years ago, but, if you asked him the past definite tense of almost any verb, he could dig into his memory and produce it after after fifteen seconds. Unfortunately conversation goes faster than that. Besides, the pronunciation of the words had always bothered him.

So, when, because he had qualified as a commercial aviator, he made his way to France, and got

accepted as a pilot in the air force, Bing found he couldn't understand any more than the traditional English tommy, with his 'na poo" and "promenade." He could only fulfil his duties with the aid of an interpreter.

Being a first-class pilot, and having an American crate, Bing did very well. He was on reconnaissance duty when he cracked up. It was an anti-aircraft gun that sent



*The Jerries had developed a nasty habit of shooting out of hand all foreign aviators found in the French service. So when Bing was brought down behind the lines, he had his work cut out for him. If it hadn't been for a French girl. . . .*

# OF BATTLE

By **HUGH SPEER**

The bottle burst like a bomb  
in the soldier's face.



him down in a dizzy swirl, and few men except Bing would have succeeded in making the sort of landing he did.

Few men would have had the luck to be thrown fifty feet from the wreck, into a muddy stream, just when twilight rendered him immune against the storm of bullets that whipped its surface.

With his last failing strength, Bing swam, doubled back, inched along the bank into an almost impenetrable mass of furze, and then passed out.

**I**T WAS the something on his mind that brought him back to consciousness. He remembered that he had to hurry back to Headquarters with a piece of appalling news. The Jerries were on the west side of the Maginot Line, and pouring into the Champagne region. The Line was definitely turned. The gun that had shot him down must belong to an advanced detachment.

Bing sat up, cursing the prickles of the furze. He pulled two or three dozen spikes out of the more tender parts of his anatomy, then felt himself. No bones seemed to be broken, though he had wrenched a knee and shoulder. He got upon his feet. He appeared to be absolutely alone. Not a light anywhere in the vast stillness, which was broken only by the constant, throbbing mutter of the guns, miles away.

It was fully eighty miles back to Headquarters, and Headquarters might not be there any longer. Bing whistled through his teeth. The Jerries had developed a nasty habit of shooting out of hand—all

foreign aviators in the French service. There had been little Chapman, and Whitey Cook, for instance. There seemed nothing to do but to strike westward on foot, traveling by night and hiding up by day—not an impossible feat in sparsely settled France.

"It's a hell of a hike," Bing told himself. But it was better to try it than to be stood up against a wall.

Luckily Bing still had his automatic and several clips. He took his bearings by the pole star and hobbled across the fields.

Suddenly a field on his right blazed with light. Instantly Bing dropped for cover. A moment later he heard the roar of airplane engines overhead, and then he understood. This was a flying-field, and it was being lit up for the incoming ships. It wasn't more than a mile away. But was it occupied by the French or by Jerry?

No way of finding out, except by exploration. The detachment that had shot him down might be only a flying column, might have retreated. On the other hand . . .

On the right, the great chalk cliffs of the Champagne country formed a continuous barrier. On the left were the vast, deserted fields. Bing moved cautiously forward, automatic in hand.

Then suddenly a harsh command rang out, and a patrol of half-a-dozen men leaped out from among some trees.

**B**ING fired and toppled three of them, fired until his weapon was empty. By a miracle, none of the Germans' bullets touched him. He was borne down, stunned by a

kick in the temple, dragged to his feet, still half unconscious, heard himself mumbling.

"*Fliegender Engelsmann*" — or something like that, Bing heard. His captors had spotted his flying togs, of course, and his mumbblings had betrayed the fact that he was not a Frenchman. Prodded painfully by bayonets, he stumbled on and on, until he saw a field of subdued lights, and the dim outlines of tents in front of him.

And, still half-conscious, he found himself facing a peculiarly ferocious-looking, middle-aged German of considerable rank, to judge from the decorations on his uniform. A colonel—"Herr Oberst" they addressed him. But of the gabble that followed Bing could make nothing.

He dropped to the ground outside, guarded by four Germans, who drew their thumbs across their throats in a language that could have been understood universally. Bing felt too sick to care.

Presently men began entering the tent. Candles were lit. Bing was prodded to his feet again and inside. There the guards halted him. He found himself facing the Oberst and two younger officers, who were seated behind a table.

With his red face and hanging jowls, and two yellowing eye-teeth that protruded when he grinned, the Oberst resembled nothing so much as an African wart-hog, an animal whose personal endowments are more than matched by his unpleasant disposition.

Trying to maintain his balance, Bing listened to the meaningless conversation. It was about himself—that much was evident. Also

he could guess the tenor of it. But Bing didn't seem to care. That kick in the temple had temporarily robbed him of the zest for living.

After a while one of the younger officers addressed him in perfect English:

"You are an English aviator flying in French uniform? You are aware of the laws regarding the adoption of a uniform not of your country?"

"Hell, no," said Bing, "I'm an American."

"That is too bad. But cheer up, old chap. You won't be an American much longer. You'll be a fine fresh corpse."

"Okay, go to it," answered Bing.

Another exchange of German. "Stand to attention," rasped the English-speaking officer. "Herr Oberst—?"

And he translated the colonel's words sentence by sentence:

"To be shot for espionage, in accordance with the laws of war," was the conclusion.

"We're not going to keep you in suspense, my dear fellow," said the young officer. "Ten minutes. If you want any message sent to anybody—"

"Don't trouble about me," said Bing.

THEY marched him out of the tent, cleaned out his pockets, and stood him against a tree. From there, in the light of a quarter-moon, Bing could dimly see the flying-field, with the planes drawn up in orderly rows, and the faint outlines of the tents on either side. In those ten minutes Bing had time to think of a number of things, but the only thing that worried him

was that he had been such a damn' fool.

It couldn't have been more than fifteen minutes when shouts came out of the darkness. Bing was prodded forward again, into the subdued light that came from the field. On to the wall of an immense hangar, with an unpleasant-looking chalk parallelogram on the wall. Bing didn't have to be told that he was expected to stand exactly inside this.

There was a still more unpleasant-looking short trench, almost at his feet. It was a deep trench—so deep that Bing was quite startled when a man with a pickaxe leaped out of it.

About fifteen yards away a dozen riflemen were standing. The *Oberst* stepped forward. He began reading something, and Bing wasn't in the least interested. His mind went back to a girl he had known in Brooklyn. He wished he'd stayed in Brooklyn instead of coming to France, even if it would have meant marrying her.

Suddenly there sounded the roar of airplanes overhead, and the floodlights went on.

Then everything was blotted out in the roar and smoke of a bomb that dropped squarely between Bing and his executioners. It was a French bomber—probably two or three of them.

Flung to the ground by the shock, Bing picked himself up. An immense smoking crater was hollowed out in front of him. Three or four men, or what had been men, lay about it. The riflemen had disappeared.

Something told Bing that this was the time to go on being an

American. The floodlights had gone out. Everywhere sounded yells of panic. The bombers were roaring overhead, and another bomb dropped among the tents.

Bending almost double, Bing scurried for the nearest clump of trees. He was just free of the field when he collided with a colossal body, bent as double as he was. The shock hurled them both to the ground.

Bing recognized the *Oberst*. He got his fingers inside the collar of his tunic and hoisted him to his feet. He planted his foot twice on a prominent projection, and the *Oberst* yelled. Then Bing knocked him down, bent, and took away his automatic, fired one shot in the air, and decided that it was loaded. Ten cartridges to the clip, he guessed. That would be good enough.

"Good-bye, wart-hog. Sorry I can't stay any longer," said Bing.

Without waiting for the colonel's response, he dashed into the thick of the trees, passed through them, and gained the stubby fields again. Behind him he heard riot and confusion, but he guessed that he wasn't being followed.

The bombing had ceased, but the air was filled with roaring planes. The Germans had evidently taken off to look for their assailants. Bing ran a little further, and reckoned he was free—provided he didn't run into any more patrols.

**T**HEN suddenly, half-a-mile further on, a farm-house, dark and somber, suddenly appeared beyond the crest of a low hill. Unoccupied, doubtless—yet there might be someone there. Bing made his way toward it. He had pretty well re-

covered from the kick in the temple, and he was conscious that he hadn't eaten since early morning. It wouldn't take more than a couple of minutes to snatch a lump of meat and a loaf of bread.

The windows were shuttered, the door was locked. Bing walked around it, through the vineyards,



It was a mile across the field.  
He followed her in silence.

between vines heavy with leaves. He tried the back door. No better luck. He was turning away when he saw a glimmer of white moving through the dark.

He called to it—in French. Evidently Bing's French was terrifying, for it raced, with a patter of bare feet, toward the barn. Bing started after it, and heard a low cry—a woman's cry.

Bing's curiosity was piqued.

Perhaps it wasn't quite etiquette to run after a bare-footed girl at night when she obviously preferred to be alone but, that was what Bing did. Suddenly the figure tripped and fell near the entrance of the barn, and Bing, stooping over it, discovered that it was a young girl.

"I'm not going to hurt you," he explained. "I'm an American in the French service. I—I—" That pesky past definite tense refused to come when called upon. "I am being shot down in my plane. The Jerries are shooting me. I am escaping," Bing explained.

As the girl seemed paralyzed with fear, Bing stooped and picked her up in his arms. She was small and soft and warm, and one hand closed easily over a little bare foot. She struggled, crying softly.

"American! American!" said Bing, slapping his chest. "*Vive la France!*"

"*Vous êtes Américain?*" Hope was in the girl's voice.

"*Fight pour la France. Fly. Vous comprenez.*" Bing flapped his arms. "Machine busted. My name is Bing."

The girl began laughing hysterically. "*Moi, Marguerite,*" she said.

"*Les damn' Allemands* over there. Hungry." Bing pointed to his throat and stomach.

The girl understood. She seized him by the hand and began running with him toward the house. Fumbling in her bosom, she produced a key.

**I**T IS one of the strange phenomena of nature, but a young man and a girl have less difficulty in understanding each other's language, however ignorant of it, than two

learned male linguists. In the dark kitchen, eating cold soup and drinking cold coffee, Bing seemed to understand everything that the girl was telling him.

Annette, whom Bing supposed to be the hired girl, had run away. And Marguerite's father was away, fighting for France. And her mother was dead. And she was alone. She had thought he was a German, and had tried to escape him.

Only the day before, the French had evacuated the flying field, and the Germans had occupied it. Marguerite had been hiding most of the time. She was afraid they had caught Annette. Tears rolled down the girl's cheeks.

"They won't harm her," Bing tried to say, but he couldn't make it. After all, plenty of farm girls must have been captured by the Germans, and—well, they wouldn't be killed. He tried to reassure Marguerite.

"And they tried to shoot you?"

"Yeah. I got away," said Bing. Pantomime explained it perfectly.

"I must hide you."

"No hurry. Bing wiped away Marguerite's tears, and then reached forward and drew her upon his knee.

"*Mais, monsieur, je suis honnête femme,*" the girl protested. However, she didn't resist him very hard. Instead, she tucked her little bare feet around a rung of the kitchen chair, and put up her mouth to be kissed. Bing had never had kisses like those before. He wanted to go on kissing her for ever.

Under the thin white blouse, her breasts were those of an adolescent girl, but there was a fire in her



kisses that made Bing's heart beat quickly. Marguerite twined her strong young arms around Bing's neck and sighed deeply.

Bing realized that he must put a check on himself. Only he didn't know how to do it. What saved him was a sudden hammering at the front door, and the sound of a thick Teutonic voice that sounded quite familiar:

"Open the door! Open immediately!"

The girl leaped to her feet with an exclamation of fear. "It is the officer!" she whispered. "Quick! I must take you away, before he breaks in. Not a word! Follow me!"

Bing understood only from her gestures. But in another moment Marguerite had noiselessly opened the kitchen door, and he followed her through the trees beside the house, while the knocks grew thunderous, and the hoarse voice filled the night with its angry shouts.

**I**T WAS a mile across the fields to where the great chalk cliffs rose like a rampart against the sky. There was now the continuous rumble of vehicles along the road, shouting of sentries; again the flying-field was flood-lit as planes came roaring down. But Bing and Marguerite were at the edge of the cliffs now, creeping through the dense undergrowth, until the girl pointed ahead and stopped.

Bing saw what looked like the mouth of a little cave. It didn't look too inviting in the darkness. But, with Marguerite, he would have gone anywhere. She said something that he didn't understand, and led the way inside, then

stretched out her hand to guide Bing through that darkness.

Bing could feel, with his other hand, that they were in a tunnel. Somehow Marguerite managed to convey to him that there were steps beneath his feet. They went down—twenty steps, then along a pitch-dark passage again, then twenty-four steps. It was near the freezing-point at this low level.

On again, turning two or three times. Then suddenly the girl stopped. Bing could no longer feel the tunnel wall. Marguerite left him. Her voice came back, followed by deep echoes from the interior:

"Wait, Beeng, till I make a light."

There came the flare of a match, the monstrous silhouette of the girl, flung on the rock wall. Another and another light sprang out. Marguerite was lighting candles, a dozen or more, at intervals of a few feet.

Bing looked about him in bewilderment. He was in a rock cavern, about as large as a big room, with passages radiating from it in all directions. But the cavern seemed to have been finished by man, for the floor was smooth, the walls roughly hewn, and lined with something that looked like wooden shelves, except that they contained innumerable tiny compartments.

From the front of each protruded the neck of a bottle. Suddenly Bing understood. He was in the famous caves in which the champagne is left to mature. They stretched for miles underground, and there was champagne and to spare for the entire German army.

Bang! With a noise like the ex-

plosion of a miniature bomb, one of the bottles exploded in a shower of glass. The girl's ringing laugh echoed through the cave.

"Come, Beeng!"

A short distance away there was a little stock of food, canned goods, stale bread. Water gushed from a faucet.

"My father works here. The Germans cannot find the way." Bing understood that, more by telepathy than from the words. Marguerite put her hands on Bing's shoulders. He drew her close to him.

"I love you, darling."

"*Ah, je t'aimerai toujours.*" Her lips were warm on his. Her soft breasts were tensed against him. Suddenly she released herself, and with a finger uplifted in warning, disappeared down one of the passages.

**I**T WASN'T until some twenty minutes had gone by that Bing became alarmed. Then he began calling her name, and his voice came echoing back in mocking tones. At last he started down the passage in search of her, candle in hand.

He had not gone more than a few yards when he saw that the search must be fruitless. The whole interiors of the cliff was a honeycomb of passages, a maze that none but those long accustomed to it could hope to understand. And all along the walls, on either side of him, were the bottles of fermenting champagne.

Now and again a bottle would explode, and the echoes came rolling toward him. Bing stopped. If he went any further he knew he could

never find his way back. He would be lost, he might wander for ever without finding his way to the outside. He almost lost the way trying to find the place he had started from. He sat down, waiting, cursing the confounded cold, flapping his arms for warmth. Hours seemed to pass—or were they minutes? What was Marguerite doing? Why hadn't she returned?

It was the pop of a bottle close beside him that gave Bing his idea. He drew a bottle from its receptacle and broke off the top against the wall. That champagne was like nectar, in spite of its half-fermented state. Bing tried another. One more, and he didn't feel so cold. He didn't care so much. Marguerite would be back soon, and, anyway. . . .

Light footsteps along one of the passages. She was back, standing stock still, looking at him as if in surprise, as if she wondered why he still was there. She must have been back to the farm-house, for she had changed the black skirt and white waist for a cheap and rather startling red dress, whose sheer material showed the contours of her breasts and sides. She had put on shoes and stockings.

Bing couldn't understand a word of the babble that broke from her lips.

But the wine was swimming in his head, and he didn't care about anything, except that Marguerite was back.

When he took her in his arms, she struggled more strenuously than before. Then suddenly her head fell on his shoulder, and she raised her lips to his. The former kisses had been instinct with pas-



He was so weak he would have fallen if she hadn't held him.

sion, but these were devastating.

She tore herself away with a laugh and drew a bottle from the wall. Bing broke it and held the jagged top to her lips. Marguerite didn't flinch until it was empty. Then Bing had another.

After that everything was jumbled. He was conscious of the grip of her white arms, and the warmth and perfume of her. The red dress hung like a torn banner about her snow-white breasts and shoulders. Yet even then something seemed to have gone out of his feeling for Marguerite — something he couldn't explain. And he was conscious of a faint sense of disgust, or, at least, disillusionment, when at length he drew the red dress about her and fastened it upon one shoulder.

AN ECHO of voices somewhere in the caverns. Guttural voices, shouting, their sound re-echoed a score of times as the walls tossed back the waves. The tramp of heavy boots upon the stone flooring. Bing leaped to his feet, clutching his pistol.

Most of the candles had burned out. It was almost dark in the cavern, and Bing stood there, trying to find out where the Germans were. At one moment they seemed upon the point of entering; the next, their footsteps seemed to be receding.

Something flitted past him like a red ghost. It was the girl. She was going again without warning. She might never return. Bing couldn't make head or tail of it.

He called to her. He grabbed at her. But she was gone into the darkness of the corridor, and Bing, stumbling after her, ran head on into a projecting ledge.

It was fortunate that he didn't strike himself upon the injured temple. The ledge was round and smooth. It stunned him for a moment, but he got dizzily upon his feet, and, feeling his skull, assured himself that it wasn't broken. Only, Marguerite was gone.

Bing stood stock still. He heard the trampling and the voices close to him. Apparently they were at the end of the passage. It was impossible to tell how many men were there, owing to the blending of the sounds. Bing stood still, trying to clear his brain.

Marguerite's second disappearance was a complete mystery to him. And somehow she hadn't been the same when she came back. Something beautiful had gone out

of their relationship, and Bing didn't know what it was. He felt now, as if he never wanted to see her again. He only wanted to get out of those damned caverns.

Then suddenly he saw her, peering at him from the passage, beckoning him mysteriously. He sprang toward her, and her tantalizing laugh went echoing through the cavern.

He saw her running ahead of him. Then the little light vanished. But he heard her call again, and followed, like a man distraught.

Then of a sudden a gleam of light appeared. Another moment, and it became a brilliant shaft, projected from an acetylene lamp that fell with stunning daze upon Bing's eyes.

The passage had abruptly ended in another cavern, with the same lining of compartments filled with bottles. Standing within it were the *Oberst* and two German soldiers. And Marguerite was standing beside the officer, her hand upon his shoulder, looking defiantly at Bing.

"*Voilà le sale cochon Américain. Tuez-le!*" she screamed.

THE "American pig" had had plenty of experience with women, but he had never encountered quite such treachery before. He had known Marguerite only for a few brief hours, but she had saved his life, and her cold-blooded demand for his death didn't quite make sense to Bing. But the *Oberst* was plainly very drunk, no doubt upon the same good wine that was still bubbling in Bing's veins. He had a pistol in his hand, but his coordinations didn't seem very good.

As for the soldiers, they were

bringing up their rifles, but all that takes time. And Bing was quick on the draw. He had the *Oberst* covered before the officer could complete his own draw.

The *Oberst* yelled and leaped back into the shadows behind the stand on which the lamp stood. Bing weaved, and, as the nearest of the two soldiers got his rifle into position, sent a bullet crashing through his body.

The man dropped groaning. The second man turned to flee. Bing snapped his pistol again—and discovered that it hadn't a full clip of cartridges, as he had supposed. It hadn't another live cartridge in it.

All this was a matter of about a second and a half. Then the *Oberst's* pistol roared through the cave, and Bing was spun half around by the shock of the heavy bullet against his left shoulder. .

Voices from the passage at the further end of the cave. Teutonic voices. Oh, Bing was finished. He knew that perfectly well. But he was going down fighting.

"*Tuez-le!*" shrieked the girl again, clutching the colonel by the arm.

All this a matter of about a second more. A lot besides happened in that second. For one thing, the *Oberst's* pistol cracked again. It was unfortunate that the officer's hand was unsteady, due to the good champagne, for that slug caught the girl through the heart as she clung to his arm. She plunged like a diver to the floor and died without a struggle.

**B**ING went berserk then. To his last minute of life he would re-

member that scene. The soldier with the rifle, taking aim from the corridor behind him. Three or four more, also with rifles, coming in at the other end of the cave, and stopping, uncertain, perhaps even horrified at the body of the dead girl on the floor, and the little pool of blood beneath her. The *Oberst*, swaying drunkenly, and staggering forward to finish Bing with another slug.

The *Oberst* fired twice in succession. The first slug whizzed past Bing's head. The second struck the acetylene lamp and extinguished it instantly.

All this might have taken another second and a half, but the rhythm of time had changed, and it seemed more like half-an-hour that Bing had been in the cave.

Bing staggered back and drew two champagne bottles from the wall. He hurled one with his right, and it burst like a little bomb in the face of the soldier who was taking aim from the corridor. At the same time the rifle roared, and the slug traversed the cavern and struck down one of the men who were coming on from the other side.

The second bottle caught the *Oberst* squarely on the forehead, and he dropped with a yell, slashed and gashed by the broken glass, and blinded by the sizzling wine.

The next instant it was dark. But already Bing had two more bottles in his hands. The cave re-echoed with the roar of rifles, and the bullets chipped fragments from the walls, but Bing wasn't hit. He hurled his bottles across the cave, heard them burst with the sound of hand-grenades, and turned and

(Continued on page 106)

# Hostage of Battle

[Continued from page 41]

ran past the blinded soldier who had fired at him first. Down the corridor, staggering into the darkness, his left arm growing numb. It wasn't just that he wanted to live. He wanted to have a few minutes to reason things out, to understand why Marguerite had turned against him.

If she hadn't saved him—if she hadn't all but given herself to him it might all have been different. Were all women like that?

He felt the blood dripping from his shoulder. He knew his strength was going fast. But he was going to live long enough to make a comeback.

Probably it was the wine rather than the loss of blood that was making him light-headed. He groped through the dark toward the wall, and found the ever-ready bottle, knocked off the head, and drank. Another. He drew in a deep breath. He felt better now, though, even in the darkness, he felt that the passage was heaving and swaying like a ship at sea.

He was going to live—but he didn't know how. He didn't know any way out of the subterranean passages. He leaned against the wall, and heard his voice going out in obscene blasphemies.

"Beeng! Beeng!"

That was insanity, of course. But a hand was on his arm, an arm was about his neck, his face was pulled down, and two warm lips were pressed against his. Bing stood in incredulous wonder. If

Marguerite was still alive, then they were both in a new life, a life after death.

"Beeng, come with me! There is no time to lose. There is a quicker way out of the vaults."

Bing only vaguely understood this, but something that the girl thrust into his hand brought him suddenly to the realization that he couldn't be dead after all. At least, he didn't believe that there were revolvers in heaven—or wherever else he might have been. And she was tugging at his arm, and guiding him along the pitch-dark corridor.

"Come quick! He is in the vaults, and he may discover the way here. He has men with him!"

Bing hadn't the faintest idea of his location, but he yielded to the girl. He was conscious of turning down one passage after another. And suddenly a gleam of light appeared in front of him.

**I**T WAS only a pencil. It wasn't the acetylene lamp, of course, but a big flashlight that somebody seemed to have dropped or placed on the floor. It illuminated only a narrow circle just above the stones.

Marguerite stopped suddenly. Feet came into view. A raucous voice was bellowing curses in German. The feet tripped, and a body fell face downward. Bing recognized the *Oberst*. He was evidently drunk, and he seemed to have hurt himself, for he writhed and twisted in the effort to regain stability,

while the curses flowed more profusely from his lips.

"Kill him! Quick!" whispered Marguerite; and Bing understood that. But he'd have to give the *Oberst* a chance to rise and draw.

Marguerite would have run forward again, but Bing pushed her behind him and preceded her toward the cavern. In the seconds that intervened before his irruption Bing saw the dead man on the floor—then the body of the dead girl. He thought he was growing crazy. Why, Marguerite was behind him! He leaped into the cavern, to find himself face to face with two riflemen, whose weapons rang out simultaneously.

The slugs whizzed past Bing's ear. But he was in darkness, and they were vainly illumined by the light of the fallen flash. Bing's revolver roared twice, and the rifles clattered to the stones. One man pitched forward with a groan, and lay motionless; the second sat down, screaming and pleading for his life.

Marguerite darted past Bing with a wild cry and flung herself upon her knees, beside the dead girl, moaning softly. The *Oberst* yelled, and got upon one knee.

Bing deftly relieved him of his pistol, jerked him to his feet. "Shut up!" he shouted.

Marguerite was looking up at him. "Annette," she moaned. "My sister. I went to look for her, to save her. She'd dead, Beeng. What shall I do?"

Suddenly she sprang to her feet. "Come, Beeng. I shall show you the way out. But kill him! Kill him!" She pointed to the *Oberst*.

A better thought had come to

Bing. "I'm going to do something better than that," he said. "I'm following the Boche custom. I'm going to take him as a hostage."

The *Oberst*, who evidently understood, broke into a flood of voluble German. Of course Bing didn't understand, but he did catch the words "*tausend reichsmarks*."

"Sorry, old man, but I don't want your polluted money," he said. "You cracked up my plane, and you're going to provide me with another to get back to my headquarters—understand?" He prodded the *Oberst* in the belly with the muzzle of his revolver. Then he glanced swiftly back. The wounded man was inching toward one of the rifles. Bing picked them up and hurled them into the darkness of the passage.

"Okay, *Oberst*," he said. "This lady will lead the way. Go ahead. No, wait a minute."

He handed Marguerite the revolver. "Belly-shoot him if he starts acting up," he said. "Understand?"

Marguerite understood, and the hand that held the revolver was perfectly steady.

**I**T TOOK barely a minute for Bing to strip the uniform off one of the dead men, to divest himself of his flying togs, and to put it on. And it was almost dark, so there was no shock to Marguerite's modesty.

Her sister! That was why he had felt that their relationship was not the same, even when he held her in his arms. That explained Annette's treachery, and, dreadful though her death was, Bing felt a

thrill of exultation that Marguerite hadn't played him false.

"Okay, darling," he said, taking the revolver from the girl, and prodding the stupefied *Oberst* again. "Follow the lady," he ordered, picking up the flash and putting it in Marguerite's hand. "Quick march!"

How had Marguerite ever learned the secret of those endless tunnels in the chalk cliffs, even if her father had been employed there? Right turn, left turn, straight ahead, cave after cave, and everywhere the champagne bottles protruding from the walls. Then, at last, a gleam of moonlight in the distance. It brightened, and Marguerite squeezed out of what was hardly bigger than a fox-hole.

In the distance was the dull, subdued glow of the German camp.

The *Oberst* chattered. He was saying "*tausend reichsmarks*" again, but there was a word before the "*tausend*" that Bing didn't get. He was intrigued. He wished he had learned the German numerals at school.

"Shut up, I told you! And listen! You're going to get us a plane, you understand? And you're coming with us—just a short distance. Then I'll drop you. No, no, not out of the plane. Just set you down, *comprenez?*—I mean *verstehen?*"

A threatening gesture with the revolver reduced the *Oberst* to silence. Bing called to Marguerite to walk beside him. He followed close upon the *Oberst's* heels. They were nearing the camp when two sentries sprang up with a challenge.

That was Bing's supreme moment, but the *Oberst's* growl si-



lenced them into respectful presentation of rifles. Bing knew he was safe then. When they had gone a little farther, he stopped his prisoner.

"This is far enough. Call those men and tell them to have a plane brought here—with just one pilot," he said. He dug his revolver muzzle deep into the *Oberst's* ribs, and the *Oberst* obeyed.

**I**T ALL seemed incredible, Bing thought afterward. No doubt the *Oberst* was brave enough in battle, but it takes something more than ordinary courage to face swift and imminent death by belly-shooting, especially when you are three parts drunk. At any rate, the officer had obeyed Bing's commands minutely. And they three stood alone beside the big pursuit-ship. The pilot had walked back, stifling his curiosity, and never dreaming what the situation was. The sentries had resumed their station. Bing watched the *Oberst* enter, with a muffled protest, and handed Marguerite the revolver after she had taken her place behind him.

But it didn't look as if the *Oberst* was going to make any trouble. His chief fear seemed to be that he would be, as Bing had phrased it, "dropped."

Bing set down the plane some dozen miles away. The officer tore off his safety-belt, leaped from the cockpit, and disappeared in the darkness. Bing flew on again.

He was striking for headquarters. It must be somewhere in the unoccupied part of France, and how was he to know that an armistice was on the point of being arranged, and that his flying days

were over for a while.

Then for the first time Marguerite saw the bloodstains upon his shoulder, and leaned forward with a cry that was drowned by the engines. She clutched at him, pointing.

Yes, Bing was feeling pretty much shot up. He had lost a good deal of blood. But he was well out of the danger zone by now, and already the east was tinged with the pink of dawn. He sought out a recess in a patch of woodland, and set the plane down.

He was quite weak when he staggered out; he would have slumped to the ground if Marguerite hadn't held him.

But the pine needles were soft, and they were alone together, and, after Marguerite had finished trying to bind up Bing's wound, he put his uninjured arm around her.

She couldn't explain to him about Annette, but he could reconstruct that picture. Her twin, of course, taken away by the *Oberst*, or gone to the German camp voluntarily, like so many French country girls, maddened by loneliness. It didn't matter much, now that Bing had Marguerite.

Her lap was so soft and comfortable for his head. He must sleep awhile—so, with her arms about him. He'd be feeling fine when he awoke.

"What are you laughing at, Beeng?" she whispered.

"I was wondering what my value is," said Bing. "I wish I knew how much the *Oberst* was offering me."

She didn't understand that, of course, but she understood the coinage of love, which is the same everywhere.