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A CLUBFOOT OMNIBUS

THE CROUCHING BEAST

BY

VALENTINE WILLIAMS

H&S

LONDON

HODDER & STOUGHTON, LIMITED

The Publishers wish to express their thanks to Messrs. Herbert Jenkins, Ltd., who have very kindly given their permission for *The Man with the Clubfoot* and *The Return of Clubfoot* to be reprinted in this Omnibus.

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PREFACE

Mr. Dooley remarks in the course of one of his conversations with his friend Hinnessy that news is sin and sin news and that you can write all the news in a convent on the back of a postage stamp. The sage was merely expressing in his own way the discouraging but inescapable truth that evil makes livelier reading than good for the simple reason that the blameless life is static while ill-doing implies action. If as the Good Book tells us, the way of the transgressor is hard, for the purposes of fiction especially sensational fiction, it is incomparably better value than the way of the just. The descent to Avernus, from the reader's point of view, is considerably easier going than the primrose path.

Where authors congregate in the Elysian Fields it is no doubt a source of gratification to the late Dean Farrar to know that generations of schoolboys continue to devour *Eric or Little by Little*. I am afraid however, that the continued popularity of the good Dean's masterpiece reposes more upon the tribulations of the well-intentioned but unfortunate hero, and in particular, the fiendish machinations of Barker the bully, than the elevating sentiments of worthy Mr. Rose. The fact is that in fiction stained-glass heroes have a habit of staying put in their windows: it is the bad boys, the men of flesh and blood, that come to life—d'Artagnan and Tom Jones, Gil Blas, Figaro and Hajji Baba.

Particularly the villains—those, at least, of the more plausible variety—linger in the memory. We may not recall the intricate plot of *The Woman in White* but who can forget Count Fosco, with his light tenor voice and his canaries? Still the mere names of Fagin, Long John Silver, Dr. Nikola and Count Dracula send long shivers chasing down our spines, however the exploits in which they figure be blurred in the mind.

I wrote a book about a villain once—his name was *The Man with the Clubfoot*—and it changed my whole career. I think it was fated. Desperate characters were ever my meat. At a tender age, my mother used to tell me, she discovered her sweet little boy directing his sisters in a childish game of his imagining representing the police (with handkerchiefs realistically tied over their noses) exhuming the surplus wives whom the bigamous Mr. Deeming had interred under the kitchen floor.

When my father took me as a schoolboy to the Adelphi melodramas my delight was not the breezy and super-heroic Mr. Terriss but the villainous Mr. Abingdon, with his black moustache, nonchalant air and "faultless" evening dress. I remember thinking, when we studied "Hamlet" at school, that Shakespeare would have heightened the dramatic effect of the play by giving us more of the King, so gorgeously profligate, so resourcefully murder-minded. I always felt that

Conan Doyle's Moriarty is no more than a rat in the arras—Sherlock Holmes could only have gained in stature had the author bestowed on the shadowy figure of the impresario of crime some of the tender care he lavished upon the delineation of the harmless but necessary Watson.

When, in the midst of the World War, the spirit moved me to try my hand at writing a "thriller," one of the first conclusions I arrived at was that the surest and subtlest way to build up the hero's character was by creating a reasonably plausible villain. My hero was to be a quiet Englishman of the regular officer type—it seemed obvious to me that, the more ruthless his opponent could be made to appear, the more effective the hero's nonchalance and resolute abstention from heroics. The merit of the secret service setting with the Great War as a background was that in this field, as I knew from a fairly intimate acquaintance with the subject, there was absolutely no limit to the perilous situations to be contrived. Unconsciously, perhaps, *The Man With the Clubfoot* expressed the sense of bewilderment with which we all discovered that in war anything can happen—and frequently does.

A novel resembles a dream in being a thing of shreds and patches, a welter of impressions consciously or subconsciously absorbed. Actually my tale became for me an outlet of escape from the pent-up emotions of the battlefield, for I wrote it when convalescing from wounds received on the Somme. One might say that the shell which blew me sky-high and temporarily put an end to my military activities blew me into fiction, for, before joining up with the Irish Guards, I had spent all my working life in Fleet Street. I was propelled aloft, that sunny September afternoon, an experienced newspaper man and came down a budding novelist.

The Man With the Clubfoot embodies, as I discern in retrospect, some of the "battle dreams," that familiar symptom of shell concussion, which haunted my convalescence. The Somme was probably the greatest battle the world has ever seen: the carnage had no parallel in the annals of war: we ate and slept and fought among piles of corpses. The Guards Division attacked twice in ten days and I took part in both attacks. In the first I was knocked flat three times by shell-bursts but escaped injury: I had one orderly wounded and another killed at my side: I received a bullet through the heel of my boot and a second through the strap of my field glasses, but emerged unscathed as one of the two or three surviving officers of my battalion, to go over the top again in ten days' time.

Battle dreams are horrible. I had visions of Hindenburg, as gigantic as his wooden image reared in Berlin for patriots to knock nails into on behalf of war charities, striding at me over mountains of dead: I would fancy myself alone in a trench with walls a hundred feet high and raked with monster shells. But my most frequent nightmare, continually recurring, was to find myself in war-time Germany without papers of any kind and the whole of the secret police on my track.

When the time came for me to leave hospital and undergo three months' convalescence, I faced the world in a miserable and terrified frame of mind. It was then that a gracious Royal lady came to my aid. Princess Louise, Duchess of Argyll, who was a patroness of the Empire Hospital, Vincent Square, where I was a patient, offered me the use of Rhu Lodge, on her Rosneath estate in Dumbartonshire. In this charming retreat, lapped by the waters of the Gare Loch, I found peace. Violent exercise or any form of excitement was forbidden me. But after a crowded life as newspaper man and war correspondent I could not remain inactive. So, to occupy my mind, I resolved to write a "thriller."

Before the war I spent five years in Berlin as a newspaper correspondent. They were years when Anglo-German rivalry reached its most acute phase and a certain type of German was at little pains to conceal his true sentiments for Britain and the British. Once, in the press canteen of the Reichstag, an obscure German journalist, representative of a pan-German and, consequently, violently anti-British newspaper, tried to pick a quarrel with me. The incident was without importance, but I never forgot the berserk rage into which this cantankerous fellow worked himself. His blazing eyes, his screaming voice, his large paunch shaking with ire, came back to me when the character of Grundt, the master spy, was taking shape in my mind.

The clubfoot was an added touch. It seemed to me sound psychology to ally physical deformity with a warped mind, as Hugo did with Quasimodo and Dickens with Quilp: moreover, ever since I can remember, the particular form of disability associated with a monstrous boot has instinctively repelled me. For the rest, Dr. Grundt's personality is drawn from no one person but is an amalgam of the many different types of Prussian functionary with which I came in contact during my years in Germany under the Empire.

Although the reader may not appreciate it, actually a good deal of first-hand observation of German Court life has gone into the delineation of Dr. Adolf Grundt. That rather pathetic figure, William II, was absolute monarch and Supreme War Lord but largely for window-dressing purposes—in fact he was the tool of the Camarilla, the inner circle at Court. Wherever you have an autocracy, you find irresponsible advisers who, by a judicious admixture of flattery and wire-pulling, exert even greater influence over the march of events than the despot. At the height of the ex-Kaiser's reign, for instance, the most influential personage of the State, more powerful, even, than the Imperial Chancellor, was the head of the Emperor's Civil Cabinet, because he had the immediate ear of the sovereign. If William II did not have a personal secret service apart from the political police, he might well have had one. As things were in the entourage of the monarch, if Grundt did not exist, he should have been invented, as Voltaire said of God.

For myself, I set out to create a villain but must admit to having acquired a sneaking regard for the Herr Doktor in the process. He is ruthless, but he has plenty of courage: he can be diplomatic on occasion, but is full of character; and he has (or I like to consider that he has) a sense of humour. I am glad to know that many of my readers do not consider him a hundred per cent. rascal, but speak of him indulgently, nay, even affectionately, as "old Clubfoot."

Let me hope that, renewing acquaintance with him in this Omnibus Edition, they will find that their feelings for him have stood the test of time.

VALENTINE WILLIAMS

Estoril, Portugal,
March, 1936.

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THE CROUCHING BEAST

Peace at last....

I can scarcely believe we have beaten them. Yet to-night bonfires were flaming the wonderful news across the Downs and Bill Bradley says London has gone wild.

Dear Bill! He knew I would be sorrowing while all England rejoiced, and he turned his back on the junketings in town to motor down to Sussex and comfort me. He has been so patient, so understanding, through all these agonising months of uncertainty that to-night, before he left, I promised to give him his answer at Christmas, if by then there is still no news.

How should there be any news? The British mission which has gone into Germany has been ordered to make the closest inquiries; but what more can they do than the Red Cross, the Crown Princess of Sweden (bless her golden English heart!), the King of Spain, the Vatican, all the high neutral sources which have already tried and failed?

It is so bitter hard to abandon hope. And yet I haven't much faith left. It is eight months since I last heard: and they are quite definite when I see them in Whitehall. Well may they call it the Secret Service! Shall I ever forget the furtive little office, high above the stir of the Embankment, the tidy desk, with just a telephone and some letter trays, and behind it my Nigel's Chief, that frightening old man, whose eyes were yet so gentle as he told me I must make up my mind for the worst?

To ease my mind of its grief, to clear it for this decision I feel I owe to poor Bill, I have resolved to write my story. Perhaps I shall find solace in the very anguish of living in memory once more through the phases of that extraordinary adventure which Nigel Druce and I confronted together.

The last bonfire has flickered out. Not a dog barks: the countryside is deathly still, blanketed in the November sea-mist that clings pearling to the diamond panes of my cottage window. But shadowy figures come thronging about my lamp: dear Lucy Varley, my little Major, the Pellegrini with her flaming hair, Rudi von Linz, dapper and debonair, Pater Vedastus, as I first saw him, leaning on his spade in the garden of the Capuchins, and that man of terror they called The Crouching Beast, Clubfoot, the grim and sinister cripple who stood in the forefront of those who brought down untold misery upon the world and on me.

And my Nigel. God help me! Of him it will be hardest to write....

Olivia Dunbar.

11th November, 1918.

Was the hush that rested over the garden of the old Kommandanten-Haus, that breathless July evening of 1914 which launched me on my strange adventure, symbolical of the lull before the storm which was about to break over Europe? Now that I look back upon that summer I spent at Schlitz I think it was. Personally, I was far too busy absorbing first impressions of life in a pleasant German garrison town to have ears to hear the ominous beat of the war drums, faint at

first but growing steadily louder, like the tomtoms of "Emperor Jones." But later, when I was a V.A.D. at Dover and at night the wind from the Channel would awaken us with the throbbing of the guns in France, thinking of those glorious summer days, I would picture myself sleeping peacefully, like almost everybody else, through the growling thunder of the approaching catastrophe.

On this evening, as I remember, dusk had fallen early. The sun had died in a riot of wrathful colour, and beyond the end of the garden the lemon-tinted sky set off in sharp silhouette the high wall of Schlatz Castle and the square tower, still higher, that rose to heaven above it like a stern prayer in stone.

Not a leaf stirred in the rambling and neglected garden which, between two blank grey walls, spread its train of green right up to the piled-up mass of the Castle. The air was warm, and through the open French windows of Dr. von Hentsch's study the heavy fragrance of the roses mounted to me as I sat at the typewriter. I had the feeling that the garden was holding its breath, waiting, as it were, for something to happen, while the darkness slowly deepened and high up in the air yellow lights began to glimmer in the Castle windows.

I had just switched on the reading-lamp when I heard the postman coming up the gravel path at the side of the house. Nothing much ever happened at Schlatz; and we had so few visitors that it was not hard to identify our different callers by their step. Particularly Franz, our postman. Though Lucy von Hentsch and her husband were kindness itself, I was at times homesick for England. Letters made a great difference to me at Schlatz, even poor Bill's, and I used to catch myself listening for Franz's stolid, military tramp.

At his sonorous sing-song greeting, "Schon'gut'n Abend, Fräulein!" I looked up from Lucy's manuscript to see him standing in the open window, his loose blue uniform all flecked with the July dust.

"There was nobody at the front, Fräulein," he said, "so I thought I'd look round at the back, on the chance."

"I didn't hear the bell," I explained. "The Herr Landgerichtsrat and Frau von Hentsch are dining out and the maids have gone to the Fair."

"And the Miss"—"die Miss" was the way I was often addressed—"remains like that all alone in the house?" Franz was sorting through his bag.

I laughed. "The Miss has plenty to occupy her, Franz," I told him, and pointed to the pile of manuscript beside my machine.

He wagged his head doubtfully.

"The newspapers are full of nothing but robberies and murders," he observed with an air of gloom. "The Kommandanten-Haus is lonely, perched up here on the hill above the town. Frau von Speicher, the late Kommandant's lady, she would never stay in the house by herself—nee, nee! The Fräulein should, at least, keep the windows closed."

"Nothing's going to happen to me right under the noses of the Castle guards," I answered, and took the letters he handed over—there was one for me, I saw with delight, from my married sister, Dulcie. "You must remember that English girls are used to taking care of themselves, Franz...."

"Na und ob!" the postman put in, as who should say, "Now you're talking!" "It's the men in England who need protecting, Fräulein, if the newspapers tell the truth about the goings-on of your friends, die Suffragetten...."

We both laughed. This was a stock joke between Franz and me. Like all Germans I met, he displayed a sort of incredulous interest in the fight for female suffrage in England which loomed so large in the newspapers that summer.

"Anyway, the Miss has nothing to fear from the prisoners," the postman resumed, moving his head in the direction of the glowing windows of the Castle. "The Herren Offiziere amuse themselves far too well under arrest to think of escaping...."

I smiled my assent, for the same thought was in my mind. I should explain that Schlatz Castle, once the seat of the

Dukedom of Schlatz—Herzog von Schlatz is one of the titles of the Kings of Prussia—was used to lodge officers sentenced to fortress imprisonment for offences against the military code such as duelling, gambling and the like. These officers were frequently let out on parole, to get their hair cut and so forth, and I used to see them about the town in undress uniform without their swords. As far as I could gather, their punishment consisted solely in the loss of promotion and the temporary deprivation of their personal liberty. Even Dr. von Hentsch used to say that the drinking and gambling up at the Schloss were a disgrace.

The garden of the Kommandanten-Haus ran right up to the Castle wall, and sometimes in the evening sounds of revelry would be wafted down to us from the detention quarters. Our house, as its name indicated, was really the official residence of the Castle Commandant. But when Major von Ungemach, who was a bachelor, was given the post, he preferred to occupy a suite in the Schloss and let the picturesque 18th-century house to Dr. von Hentsch, who was transferred about the same time to Schlatz as judge at the local courts.

"The Herren Offiziere won't trouble the gracious Fräulein," Franz added. "I meant tramps and such rabble. With the harvest a lot of bad characters drift into the town." He wagged his head. "One can't blame them. Hunger makes men desperate. As long as you have wage-slaves, you'll have crime, Fräulein. Even in old England, which isn't a police State like this...."

I stared at him in amazement. "Why, Franz," I exclaimed, "you're talking like a Socialist. You'd better not let the Herr Landgerichtsrat hear you...!"

His sun-browned face, bony and, in repose, rather severe, broke into a slow smile at the horror in my voice. I really was taken aback. Socialists at home I knew of mainly as shabby men in cloth caps who walked in procession to the Park on Sundays under huge banners. But in Dr. von Hentsch's well-ordered household, where only thoroughly constitutional newspapers like the *Kreuz-Zeitung* were read, Socialists, or Social Democrats, as he called them, were mentioned only to be denounced as incendiary scoundrels dangerously favoured by parliamentary institutions. It sounded to me odd to hear this civil-spoken, rather staid Prussian postman in his trim uniform voicing Socialist doctrines.

"One can say things to an English Miss one wouldn't say to a Prussian official," he observed drily.

I hastened to change the subject, which I felt to be dangerous.

"I'm sure you'd like a glass of beer after your walk," I put in.

"Since the Fräulein is so kind. It's sultry out. I think there's a storm coming up...."

As I ran through the adjoining dining-room, hung with Dr. von Hentsch's collection of antlers, to fetch a bottle of beer from the cooler in the pantry, I heard a tremor of distant thunder go rolling across the garden. With a muttered "Pros't, Fräulein!" Franz drained the glass at a draught. As he set it down and wiped his moustache, the lamp on the desk blinked.

"Oh, dear," I exclaimed, "I do hope the light's not going to fail again to-night. I want to finish all this typing before I go to bed....!"

"The power station's overloaded," remarked the postman, adjusting the sling of his bag over his shoulder. "After the entertainment of His Majesty when he visited Schlatz last winter there were no funds available for carrying out the necessary improvements. The town will have to wait for a decent electric light supply until a few more Social Democrats are elected to the council. That time isn't far off now, Fräulein. The struggle is coming to a head...."

"I'm afraid I don't know very much about your German politics, Franz," I interposed evasively.

"This is something bigger than mere politics, Fräulein," he answered in his earnest way. "The struggle is not simply a clash between parties. It's a fight between the army and the people. It can end in only one way. There'll be either a revolution or a war."

Once more the thunder growled in the darkness without.

At that I laughed outright. "Revolution? War? Now you're talking nonsense, Franz. If you said there was going to be a revolution in England, you'd still be wrong; but you'd be less far from the truth. Of course, if civil war does break out in Ulster, there's no knowing what might happen. But in Germany! People who say things like that don't know when they're well off. You've got a Kaiser to be proud of, a prosperous country, good wages, beautiful cities with splendid theatres and music and open-air beer gardens where you can take your wife and children, all kinds of inexpensive pleasures that working-men in England don't enjoy, I can tell you. As for war, you mustn't believe all this scare rubbish you read in the newspapers. In spite of the *Daily Mail* relations between Germany and England were never better than they are to-day."

With a brooding air the postman settled his red-striped cap on his head and hitched up his bag.

"All that may be true," he said. "But if the military want a war, it won't be hard to find a pretext. For the rest, you Engländer have a parliament that is a parliament, that can make and unmake Ministries; not a wretched talking-shop with no real power like our German Reichstag. This is a military State, Fräulein. The civilian doesn't count. He's only fit to be sabred, like the cobbler of Zabern, to teach him his place. There is no liberty for the individual in Prussia. If you were to report to the Post-Direktor what I have said to you this evening I should be flung into the street, into gaol, maybe, my pension would be taken away and my wife and children would starve. But the masses are getting restless under the rule of the sabre. As soon as the military believe that the people are getting out of hand, they'll start a war. And that may be sooner than you think...."

I laughed incredulously. "A war? A war with whom?"

For a moment Franz was silent, and in the pause I heard a sudden wind brush shudderingly through the trees outside the window. Behind the jetty mass of the Castle the lightning flickered white across the sky; and louder now, but still reluctant and stertorous, the thunder muttered again.

Then the postman, having glanced cautiously over his shoulder, drew nearer and, dropping his voice, said:

"Strange things are happening up at the barracks. At the mobilisation store they are working day and night. There is talk of a new uniform to be handed out, a grey uniform which has never been seen before. Do you know what that means, Fräulein?"

His serious brown eyes, intelligent and trusting as any dog's, were fixed on my face. His manner was so portentous that I fell back a step. He did not wait for my answer.

"This new uniform is clearly for service in the field," he declared. "In other words, the German Army is preparing to mobilise. And that means..."—he paused, to wrench his mouth into a wry and bitter grimace, then added with measured deliberation—"... that means war!"

I was not greatly impressed. Why, only that afternoon I had been to a Kaffee-Klatsch at Frau Oberleutnant Meyer's! All the young officers of the infantry battalion stationed at Schlatz had been there, including Rudi von Linz, a charming lieutenant who was a particular friend of mine, and we had danced until seven o'clock. And had not Major von Ungemach, the Castle Commandant, telephoned that very evening to ask whether he might call upon me? I had no intention of being alone in the house with the somewhat ardent Major and I had told him I was busy and couldn't see him.

But when an army mobilises surely the officers haven't time to go dancing or calling on their women friends? So I said, rather sarcastically, to Franz: "With whom, pray?"

He shook his head sagely. "That remains to be seen, Fräulein. I'm no politician. Perhaps over this trouble in the Balkans. The newspapers say that the Austrians intend to demand satisfaction from Servia for the murder of the Archduke...!"

"And quite right, too!" I cried. "Dr. von Hentsch says the whole thing was planned by the Servian Government. To think of that poor man, and his wife too, being shot down like that in cold blood!"

"Na," said the postman, heaving up his satchel, "what will be, will be! I wish you good-night, Fräulein!" He glanced

into the garden stretched out black and listless in the close air. "I must hurry if I'm to finish my round before the storm breaks."

"Gute Nacht, Franz," I replied, and turned back to the desk to read my letter.

At the window he hesitated. "The Fräulein will have the goodness not to repeat what I said to-night? It would get me into serious trouble if it were known...."

"Schwamm darüber!" I told him, or "Wash it out!" as you might say. "I've already forgotten it. And I advise you to do the same."

He smiled whimsically and wagged his head in a gesture expressive of doubt. Then, "Gute Nacht, Miss," he said. "Angenehme Rune!"

"Ebenfalls!" I answered, giving him back the stock reply to his wish that I might sleep well—German, like Chinese, bristles with ceremonial greetings and no less formal rejoinders—his feet rasped on the path and he was gone. A vivid lightning flash revealed to me a momentary glimpse of the garden with every leaf, as it seemed to me, hanging motionless in the sultry atmosphere. As I picked up Dulcie's letter, once more the thunder rumbled sullenly out of the night....

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A footfall in the garden

The postman's gloomy forebodings had left me vaguely restless. Not his talk of war. The activity at the barracks I set down to preparation for manoeuvres or the like; for, from the way the young officers grumbled, to me, at any rate, the battalion at Schlatz appeared to be constantly making ready for something, whether it were inspection by an incredibly terrifying military personage, a field day, or night operations. I was thinking of what Franz had said about tramps. The Kommandanten-Haus was certainly isolated from the town, and I had read in the German newspapers of ghastly crimes committed in lonely mansions.

But the night was airless, and with the windows closed I felt I should stifle in the stuffy study with its thick red curtains, heavy mahogany furniture, and great green-tiled stove gleaming dully in the corner. I contented myself, therefore, with opening the drawer of the desk in the centre of the room on which my typewriter stood and assuring myself that the big revolver which Dr. von Hentsch kept there was in its accustomed place. Leaving the drawer half open, I settled down in my chair beside the lamp to read my sister's letter.

I came across that letter the other day, poor bit of flotsam to survive the deluge which was to sweep so much away. It is mostly about a plan we had made, Dulcie, Jim her husband, and I, to pass the summer holidays together in the Black Forest. I had been invited to spend the last week of July with some American friends in Berlin where Dulcie and Jim, her husband, were to meet me on the 1st of August. As the von Hentsches were leaving for their summer holiday at Karlsbad on 24th July, the arrangement just suited.

August, 1914!

As I re-read my sister's letter the other day, I felt glad that fate had mercifully veiled the future from our eyes. Neither she who dashed off that cheery scrawl on the pretty, azure-tinted note-paper, nor I who read it in the quiet of Dr. von Hentsch's study on that thundery July evening, with the summer lightning streaking the sky behind Castle Schlatz, could know that almost every date she mentioned was inscrutably marked down to be a milestone of history.

This 31st of July, for instance, when she and Jim, who now sleeps under Kemmel Hill, were to start off from London, was to see a brief cipher flash like a train of fire across two vast Empires and call millions of men to arms: this

1st of August, appointed date for our happy reunion in Berlin, was destined to live through the ages as the day on which, by mobilising against Russia, Germany took the irrevocable step: this 2nd of August, when we were to leave Berlin, was doomed to witness the first blood spilled on French soil by the invader. "*Jim has booked our rooms in the Forester's house at Kalkstein for the 4th,*" Dulcie wrote: the fateful 4th of August, which was to bring the British Empire to its feet to face the challenge....

Dulcie wrote to me every week, adorable letters, a bit of herself. I have always been pals with Dulcie, for we had no brothers and Mother died when we were kids. And during the greater part of our childhood, Daddy was soldiering in India while we were being brought up at home.

Dulcie is domesticated, not, like me, "an adventurous romantic," as Daddy used to call me. Before I went to Schlitz I lived with her and Jim at Purley. When Marie von Hentsch, who was at school with me—by the time I got to Schlitz she was married and living in America—proposed me to her mother as private secretary—perhaps I ought to explain that Frau von Hentsch was Lucy Varley, the popular American novelist—I was vegetating in a highly respectable, and abominably dreary, typing job in the city. Dulcie was all against my going out to Germany. But then she was all against my doing anything except marry Bill Bradley. She wanted me to marry Bill and "settle down."

That is precisely what marriage with a thoroughly good-hearted, dull, dear fellow like Bill would have done for me. I should have "settled down" like porridge in a plate. But at twenty-two I didn't want to settle down. On the contrary, I was mad to be up and doing. I wanted to see more of life and the world than I could observe from the windows of the 9.12 from Purley to London Bridge or from my desk in St. Mary Axe. So, having refused poor Bill for the umpteenth time, I went to Schlitz.

Darling old Dulcie! She always wrote reams, everything, just as it drifted into her pen, about Jim and her babies, and the new car ... and Bill. Her letter carried me right out of the tranquil old house with its faint, clean odour of much scouring blended with the summer scents of the garden. As I read on, sheet after sheet in her big, sprawling hand, I forgot all about Franz and his dark forebodings and the lightning flaming behind the Castle and the thunder growling ever louder overhead.

"Bill came in on Sunday after golf," Dulcie wrote. "His first question is always: 'How's Olivia?' You really ought to write to the poor fellow. He looked perfectly miserable although he's won the monthly medal with a round of 78. He says you never answer his letters. He's convinced you've fallen in love with some incredibly dashing Prussian officer. Have you? Jim says if you marry a German he'll call him out and shoot him. Tell me about your conquests when you write. Don't the German men rave about your blue eyes and black hair? They must be sick of blondes. I saw Mabel Fordwych at Murray's the other night. She's got a studio in Chelsea and has cut her hair short. She looked MOST eccentric and mannish. Everybody was staring at her. Great excitement here about the suffragettes. Did you see they tried to blow up the Abbey? Jim took me up to town for our wedding anniversary on Thursday. We dined at the Troc. and went on afterwards to see the new play at the Criterion. At least, it's not a new play but an old one revived. Do you know it? It's called 'A Scrap of Paper.' Stupid title but quite a thrilling story. Some of the crinolines were rather sweet. I suppose you can't get any decent frocks out there. They say we're all going to show our ankles next winter. The creature next door won't like that, will she? You and I will be all right, anyway...."

The sudden loud swish of water plucked me away from Dulcie's gossip. Outside the rain was coming down in a solid sheet. The garden rang with plashings and gurglings, and the clean savour of wet leaves and damp earth was wafted into the room.

Frau von Hentsch had lived long enough in Germany to be as fussy as any German Hausfrau about her belongings. I sprang to the window to close it; for the rain was spurting on the carpet. As I rose from the desk my eye fell on the clock. The hands marked a quarter to ten.

As I reached the window I thought I heard a soft footfall scrape the gravel outside. It was too early for the Hentsches or the maids to be back; and anyway the former would come in by the front door where the car put them down, while the servants would use the kitchen entrance.

Rather startled, I paused and called out: "Wer ist's?" But the footsteps had abruptly ceased and only the hissing

crash of the downpour answered me. The garden was inky black and I could see nothing beyond the silvery shafts of the rain, a couple of yards from the window, where the light from the room shone out into the night.

Suddenly the lightning flamed in a flash so broad and dazzling as to light up and hold, for the fraction of a second, in brilliant illumination the whole scene before me, from the little bushes, writhing and bending under the lashing rain outside the window, to the gilded fane on the summit of the Castle tower. On the edge of the turf, not a dozen yards from the window, I saw a man cowering in the shelter of a bush.

I was terribly frightened but I did not lose my presence of mind. As all went black once more, I seized the two doors of the window to shut them. But at that moment came a clap of thunder, so unheralded, so ear-splitting, that I staggered back into the room.

And then, without warning, the lamp at the desk went out and the study was plunged in darkness. Once more I heard that stealthy footfall on the path. There was a hollow sound as the wings of the window fell back again. Against the patch of semi-obscurity they framed, I saw a dark form slip into the room.

50

The gun

Before I could move or cry out, a quiet voice spoke in English out of the blackness:

"It's all right," it said. "Don't be scared!"

It was a man's voice, well-bred, a little breathless and, as it seemed to me, a trifle high-pitched from excitement. Still, it was an English voice—and I had not heard an English voice in the six months I had been at Schlatz. Somehow, the familiar timbre seemed to steady my nerves. Still rather tremulous, I answered: "Who are you? What do you want?"

I had stepped back and my hands were on the edge of the writing-table. That blessed light again! The switch of the reading-lamp turned ineffectually at my touch. Now my fingers groped in vain for the box of matches I had left beside the typewriter with my packet of cigarettes. I knew that a candle used for sealing stood on the desk.

A low laugh sounded out of the obscurity.

"It's devilish awkward introducing oneself in the dark," was the reply. "Don't you think we could have some light? It is Miss Dunbar, isn't it? Miss Olivia Dunbar?"

The utter conventionality of his remark went far to allay my fears. The humour of the situation struck me and I, in my turn, laughed.

"Yes," I said, "I'm Olivia Dunbar. But the electric light has failed. Who are you? And what on earth do you mean by frightening me like that?"

"I say, I'm most frightfully sorry, really," the voice broke in contritely. "I had no intention of scaring you. Of course, I thought you'd understand...."

The fright I had received had frayed my nerves. I felt distinctly irritable. This invisible visitor's bland assumption that it was an intelligible proceeding for a complete stranger to burst into a private house at night at the height of a thunderstorm nettled me.

"I don't know what you mean," I retorted hotly. "How am I to know you aren't a burglar, creeping in like that?"

I heard a sharp sigh.

"My gracious goodness, I *can't* explain things like this in the dark. Can't you light a candle or something? It's simply preposterous, the two of us gassing away here like a couple of blind men. Hang it, I want to see you!"

His outburst had an almost pathetic ring which tickled my sense of humour.

"Not half so much as I want to see *you*," I gave him back. "Am I supposed to know you?"

"Yes ... and no," was his extraordinary answer.

"Well, give me a match!" I said.

He groaned audibly. "I haven't got one. Have you?"

"There's a box somewhere," I replied, "but I can't lay my hands on it in the dark..."

"Look here, if there's a box about, the two of us should be able to find it..."

My eyes, growing used to the obscurity, could now discern a form vaguely silhouetted against the dim window. There was a brusque movement towards me.

"Stop where you are!" I ordered sharply. "Wait till I find the matches! Do you think I'm going to have you groping about after me in the dark?"

I heard a suppressed chuckle and the movement stopped dead. Then the lightning gleamed and revealed a youngish figure of a man standing bare-headed just within the room. The sight of him, brief as it was, linking up the vague, immaterial voice with a definite individual, steadied me.

"Can't you *borrow* a light from somewhere?" came out of the dark. "I..."

A long, loud thunder peal drowned the rest of the words.

The sudden noise jarred me horribly.

"No, I can't," I answered crossly. "Everybody's out, and I don't know where there are any more matches."

Scarcely were the words out of my mouth than I knew I had said a foolish thing. Until I had ascertained what this man wanted, I should never have let him know that I was alone in the house. I realised my mistake when I heard a sort of gasp come out of the obscurity and the voice remark:

"There's nobody at home but you, then?"

I made no answer. I was round at the front of the writing-table now, hunting feverishly for those infernal matches. My hand touched the half-open drawer and I drew out the revolver and laid it on the desk beneath a sheaf of typing paper. Then to my intense relief I trod on the box of matches which had fallen on the carpet.

I struck a match and lit the candle in its silver holder. The wick, smeared with the wax of ancient sealings, burned low at first, spluttering, and by its feeble radiance I examined the stranger. I am bound to say that my apprehensions diminished with my first look at him. He was a little, gingery man, rather below medium height, whose outward appearance certainly confirmed the impression I had derived from his voice, namely, that he was a gentleman.

His grey tweed suit, though worn and rather crumpled, suggested a West End cut; and as, the candle burning brighter, the detail of his features became apparent, I saw that he was well-groomed, with thinnish, sandy hair brushed neatly back off his forehead and a small, carefully trimmed moustache. He seemed to be very wet and had his jacket collar turned up against the rain. When I first saw him in the light he was wiping the moisture from his face with what I remember struck me as being an exceedingly unclean pocket-handkerchief.

If I scrutinised the stranger, he appeared to study me with no less interest. As we stared at one another in silence, it struck me that he had an oddly watchful air, like a rabbit at the mouth of its warren. I noticed, too, that his eyes kept travelling from me to the half-open door of the dining-room and thence over his shoulder to the window and the garden, all rustling under the downpour, beyond. They were curious eyes, reddish in hue and set rather close together, with a reckless, almost an unbalanced expression in their depths.

He was the first to break the silence between us.

"You were not expecting me, then?"

Greatly mystified, I shook my head. "If you would tell me your name..." I ventured. But he ignored my lead.

"This *is* Sunday, isn't it?" he demanded suddenly, very earnestly.

"Certainly," I replied. I was beginning to feel uneasy again. He appeared to be perfectly sober; but didn't those shifting, tawny eyes of his look a little mad?

"Sunday, the 19th of July, eh?" he persisted.

"Yes.

On that he fell into a brooding silence, puckering up his forehead and casting sidelong glances at me from under his reddish lashes.

"You don't happen to know a party whose initials are N.D., I suppose?" he said at last.

"N.D.?" I repeated. "No, I don't think so. Who is he?"

Again he evaded my question.

"And an Englishman hasn't called to see you here during the past few days? Or written?"

"No," I told him. "You're the first Englishman I've seen for six months. You *are* English, aren't you?"

"Me?" he said absently. "Oh, rather!" Then, harking back to his theme, he demanded again: "And you don't happen to have seen this fellow about the town, I suppose?"

"I don't know what he looks like," I replied.

"No," he rejoined absently, "of course, you wouldn't. Party about thirty, very fit-looking, sort of quiet, with dark hair and very bright blue eyes...."

He rattled this off quickly, then paused, his furtive eyes eagerly fixed on mine.

"No," I said, "I've seen nobody like that about the town. As a matter of fact, I believe I'm the only English person in Schlatz. And now," I went on, rather impatiently, for his extraordinary air of mystery was getting on my nerves, "perhaps you would tell me what I can do for you. In the first place, how do you come to know my name?"

At that, on a sudden, he seemed to slough off his vague and despondent air.

"To tell you the truth," he remarked brightly, "I was asked to look you up...."

"Oh," I said, "by whom?"

"By your people in town...."

I looked at him sharply. Daddy's only brother has a fruit farm in California, and Aunt Sybil, Mother's sister, our only

other near relative, is an invalid who lives at Bath. And Purley cannot be claimed as "town" by even the most optimistic of suburbanites.

"You've met my people then?" I replied. "Who was it told you to call?"

He paused for a second, and then answered rather hastily: "Why, your father! You're Colonel Dunbar's daughter, aren't you?"

At that I stiffened. But, noticing how sharply, how eagerly almost, the stranger was eyeing me, I rejoined as nonchalantly as I could:

"Fancy your knowing Daddy! When did you see him last?"

"Oh, just the other day, in London..."

"Where did you meet him?"

"Someone introduced us at a club. The Senior, I think it was. Or was it the Rag? When he heard that I was going to Germany he said to me: 'If you're in the neighbourhood of Schlatz, mind you look up my daughter, Olivia. She's secretary to Frau von Hentsch—Lucy Varley, the novelist, you know—at the Kommandanten-Haus!' A splendid fellow your father, Miss Dunbar!"

"Yes, isn't he a darling?" I replied. My heart was beating rather fast, and I was straining my ears for any sound within the house that should tell me of the von Hentsches' return. But the clock warned me that it was not yet ten; and I could not hope that either they or the maids would be back before eleven. "You ... you haven't told me your name," I continued, as he did not speak and I felt I must say something.

He laughed rather nervously.

"Why, no more I have! It's Abbott, Major Abbott. And now that I've introduced myself, Miss Dunbar," he went on rapidly, "you must let me apologise once again for the way I frightened you. But I was sheltering from the storm under a tree out there, and when that terrific flash of lightning came I suddenly thought of the danger of trees in a thunderstorm, and ... and all that, don't you know, and seeing you at the window I knew at once that you were English, so I just dashed in out of the rain, meaning to explain. And then the light went out. I expect you're wondering what I was doing in the garden. Perhaps I ought to tell you that I wanted to see you on private and very urgent business. Before I rang the front door bell I thought I'd try and find out if you were anywhere about..."

He dashed off this fantastic explanation with the utmost glibness and paused, as though waiting to see what I should reply.

The house was very still. The rain was lessening now, and the thunder had ceased. The storm seemed to have passed over, but there was still some lightning about—I could see the flashes glint from time to time on the gleaming leaves outside the window.

"Well, now that you are here," I said, and tried to banish the nervousness from my voice, "won't you tell me what it is I can do for you?"

He laughed easily. "I'm in the most absurd predicament, really. It's this way. I was going to meet this pal of mine here at Schlatz and travel with him to London. He was due here yesterday; but he doesn't seem to have turned up. As you were the only person I knew here I gave him your name so that he could call—as I'd promised your father to look you up—in my place, in case I didn't have time between trains. That was why I thought you might be expecting me. Do you see?"

"I see," I answered without enthusiasm.

"Coming here in the train this evening," he resumed, quite unabashed, "I was robbed. I fell asleep and when I woke

up I found I'd lost my pocket-book with all my money, my bag, my overcoat, my hat, even. If my friend were here I'd be all right, see? And if I could stop over till the morning, I could wire Cox's for funds, of course. But I must get on by the last train to-night. And so I'm in the embarrassing position of having to ask you, as the only person I know at Schlatz, for a loan, a hundred marks or so would do, just enough to buy my ticket. And perhaps if you could borrow a hat for me..."

All this time we had been standing up, he furtive and so very glib, between me and the window, I behind the desk with my hand clutching the revolver under the sheets of paper that covered it.

"Is that all?" I said when he had finished.

At my tone the easy smile fled from his face.

"I ... I think so" he rejoined. "You ... you believe my story, don't you, Miss Dunbar?"

"Not a word of it," I answered firmly.

"But why?" he broke in.

"Because," I told him "my father died three months before I came to Schlatz!"

He was not in the least disconcerted. He ran a wiry freckled hand over his sandy hair.

"My God," he ejaculated, "that's torn it!"

"And now," I said, "perhaps you'll leave this room by the way you entered it?" And with my free hand I pointed at the window behind him.

He stood there, gazing at me forlornly, his pointed features twisted into an utterly woebegone expression, his forehead a mass of furrows.

"But I can't do that," he protested with a sort of desperate air. "Not without some money, and a hat, at any rate!"

"You'll get no money from me, *Major* Abbott," I retorted very scathingly. "And I strongly advise you to take my offer and disappear before Dr. von Hentsch comes back. He's a German judge and you won't find him as lenient as I am!"

"You don't understand," he exclaimed gloomily. "I can't go. Look here, Miss Dunbar"—his voice grew warm—"be a sport! Think what you like of me; but lend me a hundred marks. You'll get it back and you'll render me a tremendous service...."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," I replied. "You're nothing but a common cheat. Why should I give you money?"

"Because I must have it, I tell you!"

"I'm sorry," I gave him back coldly, "but I can't regard that as a sufficient reason."

He shot a slow glance over his shoulder and remained like that for a moment, as though listening for any sound from the garden. The gesture frightened me, I don't know why, and I disengaged the revolver, but held it down on the desk so that my typewriter hid it from his view. When he turned back to face me, his face was dark with determination.

"You make things very difficult," he said. "But I've got to have that money." And he stepped resolutely forward.

On that I raised the revolver and covered him.

"It's loaded," I warned him in a trembling voice. "If you come any nearer, I'll shoot!"

He halted abruptly and held up his hands in front of him as though to ward me off. It irritated me to find that he was indignant rather than impressed.

"Haven't you been taught never to point a loaded gun?" he cried sharply. "Put that damned pistol down!"

I stamped my foot angrily for, like a fool, I felt I might begin to cry. "Then go away!" I cried. "I tell you again you'll get nothing here!"

But he did not budge. He stood there, facing the revolver which I could not keep from shaking in my grasp, his tawny eyes warm and friendly, a smile playing at his lips.

"By George," he exclaimed, as though to himself, "I like your spirit. I wonder if I dare...!"

At that instant, with a roar that crashed and reverberated through the dripping night, the Castle gun was fired.

51

In which I first hear of the lame one

Everybody at Schlatz knew the noonday gun.

It was a pudgy, little brass affair, mounted on a squat wooden carriage, its bright muzzle peering down from the age-mottled Schloss wall upon the red roofs of the town. Each day, a few minutes before noon, old Heinrich, the gunner who had left a leg at St. Privat might be descried stumping along the battlements to take up his position beside the cannon, lanyard in hand, eye on the Castle clock, whose dials were set in the four faces of the tower.

As the first stroke of high noon clanged out above his head, the loud bang of the gun would cut across the confused chiming of the mid-day bells down in the town. The other clocks did not always wait for the gun; for the Castle clock was not particularly accurate. It was a stock joke of Dr. von Hentsch's that old Heinrich took his time from the Schloss clock and that the Schloss time was regulated by the noon gun. In all the months I had been at Schlatz, I had never known the cannon fired except at mid-day.

Even as the gun spoke now and the Kommandanten-Haus, according to its wont, jarred and shook to the concussion, I saw my visitor spring back from the window. At the same time, from sheer surprise, I forgot all about the revolver and, still clutching it, my hand sank down upon the desk.

"The Castle gun!" I whispered blankly. "Why are they firing it at this time of night?"

Without replying, the little man sprang to the window, closed it and drew the heavy curtains across. Even as he did so, within the lofty enclosures of the Schloss a wild hubbub broke loose. There came a sudden burst of shouting, a whistle shrilled thrice, a drum rolled. Then the cannon roared again, over-toning the din, and, as the noise of the explosion rolled away, an electric gong, brazen-throated, nerve-racking, like a fire-alarm, began to stutter its harsh summons through the night.

As I stood there, one hand pressed to my heart, and listened to that awesome racket, too insistent for either closed window or drawn curtain to drown, all the dank and clinging darkness outside seemed to be vibrant with dynamic energy. I had the feeling that, at the foot of the hill, the sleeping town was stirring into life, with voices upraised in affright and footsteps that raced madly through its narrow streets.

For the third time the gun boomed forth above the swelling tumult and the windows of the old house started and sang.

"Oh, what has happened?" I asked in a panic. "What does it all mean?"

My companion was cool and brisk.

"It means," said he, and held me with his bright, bird-like eye, "it means that a prisoner has escaped from the Schloss."

"A prisoner?" I repeated incredulously. And then the truth dawned upon me. "You mean...?"

He nodded cheerfully.

"But you're English...?" I faltered.

"I'm English all right," he retorted. "Nevertheless, I've been stuffed away in that damned stone jug up there for thirteen days without a trial...."

People at Schlatz were always talking about the imprisoned officers; but I had never heard of an Englishman being of their number. Many of the prisoners were known to me by name, too; for some of them were quite lionised in conversation, such as the young Hussar lieutenant who, to avenge his wife's honour, had killed in a duel a brother officer, his senior in rank: the offences of others were passed over in silence, like that of Rittmeister von Krachwitz, a horrible, drink-sodden creature—I had seen him about the town—who had "accidentally" slain his soldier servant.

Yet this time it did not occur to me to doubt the statement of my odd visitor. For once his uncanny composure had forsaken him and his words, spoken heatedly, savagely almost, rang true.

Suddenly a lump came into my throat and I felt myself soften to this quiet, tawny little man. I had been many times to the Castle and knew its grim, high walls, its solid, frowning gates, iron-studded, guarding its cloistered intricacy of keep and covered way and courtyard, its ringed system of solemn, pacing sentinels.

My thoughts flashed back to that moment when, the candle flaring up, I had had my first clear glimpse of my mysterious visitant, a little breathless, wiping the rain out of his eyes with his grubby handkerchief, but no more flustered than one who has run for shelter from a sudden shower, he who, with what infinite resource, cool judgment and reckless daring, had but lately burst his way to freedom through massive doors, over lofty escarpments, past lines of guards!

I thought of him, with his gloomy prison at his back and the minutes of the precious start he had gained slipping, one by one, away, almost jauntily spinning to me the foolish yarn, by means of which, without disclosing the truth, he had hoped to enlist my aid. His motive for concealment was not hard to understand. With a rush I realised that this must be an almost incredibly cool and fearless man.

But now, in his clipped and jerky way, he was speaking to me.

"I'm a British officer on duty," he exclaimed. "I can't say more. That should be enough for you, a soldier's daughter, to know. And I've got to get clear away. Never mind about those lies I told you: the service don't encourage confidences. They smuggled a letter in to me up there"—he jerked his head backwards—"giving me your name and saying that Nigel Druce—you don't know him, apparently, but he's another one of us—would warn you to expect me. You've seen nothing of him, you say?"

"No," I answered wonderingly.

"Then he's dead," snapped back my little man, very decisively. "Nigel never missed a date in his life. Listen, you'll help me?"

"Yes," I said.

"How much money have you got?"

I had already picked up my bag from where it lay beside the typewriter and was counting through my notes.

"A little over 300 marks."

This, in those days, was fifteen pounds odd, a lot of money to me.

"Can you spare all of this?"

"Of course," I lied.

He took the notes I gave him and stuffed them in his pocket.

"You'll get it back," he remarked. "Either from me or from my people. If you don't, write in for it. Just drop a line to M.I. 5, War Office, and explain the circumstances. They'll pay you."

With a bland air he rubbed his hands together. "I must have a hat," he announced. "And some sort of overcoat would be useful, too!"

"Dr. von Hentsch's son, who's studying law in Bonn, is away," I replied. "There's an old hat and, I think, a raincoat of his, in the hall. They're not likely to be missed until he returns for the vacation. You could have those. I'll fetch them..."

"Wait!" he bade me. He was looking at the clock. "Half-past ten now: at what time do you expect your people home?"

"Not before eleven at the earliest. The servants are supposed to be in by eleven. But they've gone down to the Kermesse and they're sure to be late. And the von Hentsches are out playing bridge. They mayn't be back until half-past eleven or a quarter to twelve. I don't want to hurry you," I added hesitatingly, "but don't you think you ought to be getting on?"

"There's no great urgency now that they know I've legged it," he answered nonchalantly. "It's always a sound plan to let the first heat of the chase spend itself before one takes to the road. I've got half an hour, anyway..."

"Not if they search the garden," I suggested. "They're bound to think of that, aren't they?"

He wagged his head knowingly.

"Perhaps. Not at once, though. Our German pals haven't got much imagination. I purposely laid a good strong scent on the ramparts on the other side from this, where that market garden comes up to the Schloss wall on the slope nearest the town. I'm trusting that they'll start by following up that clue..."

"Then you escaped on this side?" I broke in eagerly. "Do tell me how! Not by our garden?"

His amused smile seemed to me to confirm my idea.

"But," I exclaimed aghast, "the wall between this and the Castle is frightfully high and all studded with spikes and broken glass. And the door's locked...!"

The door I spoke of was at the end of the garden, a little postern gate set deep in the immensely thick and lofty outer wall of the Schloss, and giving direct access to the courtyard. It enabled the Commandant of Schlatz to enter the Castle from his house without going round by the main gate. When Dr. von Hentsch went into residence at the Kommandanten-Haus, the door, being no longer in use, was locked and the key deposited in the Castle orderly-room.

"Locks can be picked," bluntly retorted my little man. "But," he went on, looking at me with a friendly air, "I'm not going to tell you anything. Bear this in mind, my dear: the less you know about me, the better for you. You've got to forget that you've ever seen me. You're green to this game; but I want you to understand that there's the worst kind of trouble in store for any one suspected of aiding me to escape..."

"Bah," said I, little knowing how bitterly I was to think back upon the foolish boast, "they daren't do anything to me."

I'm English. I'm not afraid of them."

The tawny eyes were, of a sudden, thoughtful.

"Don't be too sure. '*Der Stelze*' don't stop at anything."

"'*Der Stelze*'?" I repeated. "That means 'the lame one,' doesn't it? Who is '*der Stelze*'?"

I was watching my companion and at my question I saw a curious change come over his face. The features seemed to grow rigid and, for an instant, an odd light, like a tongue of fire, flamed up in his wary eyes.

"God forbid that you should ever run foul of him, my dear," he said, so earnest of a sudden, by contrast with his former easy, almost bantering, manner, that I stared. "But, remember what I say to you now, especially after what has happened to-night! If a lame German, a whopping great fellow with a clubfoot, comes inquiring after me, be on your guard! Don't let him suspect you or ... beware!"

A little silence fell between us. All was still outside now. The tumult up at the Castle seemed to have died away. With a brisk gesture the little man buttoned up his jacket.

"And now," he said smartly, "action front! By reason of what I've just told you, you mustn't get mixed up in this. We're going to put out the candle, you'll fetch me that hat and coat and show me where the front door is. Then you'll cut upstairs to your room as fast as your legs can carry you, nip into bed and stay there until morning...."

"And you?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, I'm going to finish my job." He extended his hand. "Good-bye, my dear, thank you a thousand times. I wish to Heaven I'd trusted you from the start. But a woman let me down once, and since then I'm being extra cautious."

His lean hand clasped mine. My hands were cold as ice; but his grasp was warm and firm.

"Good luck," I said. "I'm sorry I was so ... so unsympathetic at first, but I didn't understand. Before you go I want to tell you this: I think you're the bravest man I've ever met."

He shook his head and laughed.

"Not brave. Only reckless. As a gambler's brave who's down to his last penny. I left my honour behind when they nabbed me and clapped me in gaol up there. But now, by God"—he pursed his lips into a grim line—"I'm going to fetch it back!"

"Your honour?" I echoed. I wondered what he meant. But his unflinching pluck touched me, and I said: "Listen, Major Abbott, I've done so little for you. Can't I help in any other way?"

He shook his head. "You've been a perfect brick. But there's nothing more you can do ... here."

"Where are you making for?" I asked.

He hesitated and looked at me steadily.

"Berlin..." he said at last.

"Berlin?" I repeated. "Why, I'm going there myself next week...."

He paused, and his eyes narrowed. "The devil you are!" he muttered softly. Then he laughed. "No. You keep out of this. It's no work for a charming girl like you...."

"I'm not such a helpless female as that sounds," I told him. "I'm used to taking care of myself. And I really do know

German well. If there was anything..."

He checked me with his hand. "I know. But I've got to plough a lonely furrow." He turned to the desk. "Ready? I'm going to blow out the light...."

At that very moment an electric bell resounded through the house.

The little man was stooping to the candle on the desk. Now he straightened up and looked at me inquiringly. And for the first time his face was really anxious.

"There's someone at the front door," I explained in a rapid undertone.

"Who is it, do you know?" he whispered.

Mystified, I shook my head. "The von Hentsches wouldn't ring. They have their key. And so have the servants."

"Bad!" he commented briefly. "It must be the window for me, then. That path I saw outside the house, does it lead to the road?"

"Yes," I said.

"Good. Shut the window after me, then bolt upstairs and get into a wrapper. Come down, then, and see who's at the front door. I'll watch my opportunity and nip out on to the road...." The bell trilled again. "You can let 'em ring for a bit. They'll think you're asleep."

He tiptoed to the window. "Ready?" he said softly. Then I saw his body stiffen. He held up a warning hand. I listened; and out of the stillness I heard the gentle rustle of feet in the garden.

Quick as thought, my companion bent to the candle and the study sank into darkness. At the same instant another patient, enigmatic ring whirred through the silence. There were vague, muffled sounds in the garden; but not very close to the house, as it seemed to me.

A hot, staccato whisper rasped on my ear.

"You're going to Berlin for sure?"

"Yes, on Friday. Why?"

"If anything should happen to me, can I rely on you to redeem a ghastly folly of mine?"

"I'll help you in any way I can."

Our hands met in the dark.

"Listen, then! In the drawing-room of a woman called Floria von Pellegrini, an opera singer, who has an apartment at 305 Hohenzollern-Allee, a sealed envelope is hidden in the gramophone cabinet. It is in the lower part, thrust away behind a lot of old gramophone records, a blue envelope, you can't mistake it. Do you think you could retrieve that envelope without this woman or any one else knowing, and take it to an address I'll give you?"

Feeling rather scared, I answered as bravely as I could:

"I'll do my best. But how can you be sure it's still there?"

"Because the gramophone is never used. Floria hates gramophones..."

His use of the woman's Christian name was to recur to me later.

"If the envelope has gone," he went on, "you'll know that I've been there before you. She gets up late. If you call early, it oughtn't to be difficult. Pretend you've got something to sell, frocks or furs, and the maid—her name is Hedwig—will show you into the salon to wait."

Again that awful bell, patient but persistent.

"And what am I to do with this envelope?" I asked.

"Take it to one Joseph Bale. He's got a theatrical agency in the Tauben-Strasse, one of the turnings off the Friedrich-Strasse, at No. 97. Give him the envelope, in person, only in person, remember. He'll know what to do with it. He's an elusive beggar, but if you say you're a friend of mine, he'll see you at once."

"You can count on me," I said.

He squeezed my hand. "I know you won't fail me. If you only understood what this means to me! I let my people down. And I have to make good. Sure you've got those two addresses?"

I repeated them as he had given them to me.

"Good. The name's Bale, remember. 'A friend of Major Abbott,' you'll say. Got that?"

"Yes," I said.

"Then stand by to shut the window after me!"

I caught his hand as he turned away. "You're never going out there?"

Two long and steady peals in succession resounded from the front hall.

"It's my only chance. There's no knowing what they wouldn't do to you if they caught me here. Besides, for the present it seems all quiet again. Hush, now!"

His hand was on the window-latch. Noiselessly the window swung back. The smell of damp leaves was in my nostrils. And then the little man was gone. The night, moonless, starless, and black under a pall of low-hanging clouds, seemed to swallow him up. Only then did I remember that he had left without the coat and hat I had promised him.

I closed the window as gently as I could, groped my way to the door, and darted up to my bedroom. By candlelight I whipped the pins out of my hair, tore off my blouse and skirt, and dragged on my kimono. Candle in hand, I hastened downstairs again to the front door.

"What is it? Who's there?" I asked, my hand on the latch.

A thick voice answered in guttural English:

"Is that you, gnädiges Fräulein? Please to open quickly. It is I, Major von Ungemach...."

His voice, usually a sort of jolly, jovial bellow, was husky and apprehensive. I scarcely recognised it.

"But what do you want?" I persisted. "I'm not dressed. I was in bed and asleep...."

His heavy hand beat impatiently upon the glass panel of the door.

"Open only! I must see you at once. It is most urgent!"

I swung back the door. Von Ungemach stepped swiftly into the hall. His puffy face was deeply troubled and his pale eyes smouldered angrily. His grey military overcoat was cast about his shoulders, and he carried an electric torch in his hand.

The change in his appearance gave me a sudden feeling of fear. I had never seen the Herr Kommandant like this before. I knew him only as a plump, self-indulgent, amusing creature, prodigiously vain, an indefatigable talker, and untiringly assiduous in his attentions to me. I found it hard to identify him with this grey-faced man, haggard-eyed and curt of speech.

He turned from me to rap out an order to someone invisible in the gloom.

"Stay there with your men at the garden gate," he barked. "You'll let nobody pass, verstanden?"

"Zu Befehl, Herr Major," a gruff voice spoke back out of the night. Von Ungemach took the door from me and closed it. I was tortured with anxiety for my poor little man. Pinned in, as he was, in the garden, with its high, unscalable walls, and the gate on the road guarded, what chance did he have?

"One of our people has escaped," said the Major bluntly: he spoke in German; usually he aired his English on me. "It is thought he may have come by way of your garden. You say you were in bed. Did you hear any suspicious sound downstairs?"

"Only the gun," I replied, and wondered whether I looked as terrified as I felt, "and the excitement afterwards."

The beam of his torch swept the bare hall. It fell upon the electric switch beside the door. His hand turned the button; but the hall remained dark.

"Verdammt," he rasped, "the light to fail on this of all nights!" He swung round to me. "You said the Herr Landgerichtsrat was out when I telephoned. Has he come back yet?"

"No," I replied.

"Then, with the gracious Fräulein's permission, I will take a look round. We'll start with the study, as that gives on the garden...."

Familiar as he was with the house, he led the way without hesitation along the passage and through the dining-room, his lamp flinging a shaft of white light before him as he went. I followed, my mind a medley of conjectures and fears. Had my visitor left any trace behind? And what story was I going to tell if the Major took it into his head to cross-examine me as to my movements during the evening?

We had reached the study threshold when a single shot rang out from the garden. With a muttered exclamation von Ungemach dashed into the room and plucked open the window. There fell another deafening explosion without; guttural voices shouted incoherently, heavy footfalls grated on the gravel.

The Major darted out, taking his torch with him, and I was left alone in the dark.

Sick with fear, I leaned back against the door-post, afraid to ask myself what those shots portended....

Dr. von Hentsch changes his mind

Doubtless you who have lived through the amazing Iliad of the Great War will count it as nothing that a rifle should crack out across the peace of a German garden, and a man disappear thereafter as completely as though he had never existed. But at the time of which I write the world at large still knew not what manner of thing was this Prussian military system which the spirit that sets liberty before death was to undertake to smash....

I least of all. I was of that generation of the English to the bulk of whom a European war, as a reality of everyday life, appeared a catastrophe as fantastically remote as a volcanic eruption in our Surrey hills. Before that thundery July evening and the events it brought in its train, it never occurred to me that the military atmosphere I found so entertaining at Schlatz—the elegant officers, the bright uniforms, the many parades, with hundreds of stiff legs moving as one in the goose step, and the bands crashing out through the red dust,

"Ich bin ein Preusse,
Kennt Ihr meine Farben?..."

—I never discerned, I say, that all this brave show was merely the fair cover of a ruthless and deadly machine which, while peace endured, crushed those who opposed it at home as mercilessly as later it was to seek to overthrow the world that sprang to arms to destroy it....

Two shots and then silence, but for the growing hubbub of voices under the trees. And I, standing there by the open window in the dark, as Major von Ungemach had left me, trying in vain to read the riddle, wondering apprehensively what I should do next....

The muffled throbbing of a car, the sound of an angry altercation in the hall, and the violent slamming of the front door, decided the question for me. A light glimmered in the passage, and Dr. von Hentsch, in a high state of nervous indignation, burst into the study. He was engaged in a furious argument with his wife, who followed after. He carried the paraffin lamp from the lobby in his hand.

"Shots in my own garden, Donnerwetter," he exclaimed shrilly, "and I'm not to be told what it means? I'll let von Ungemach know exactly what I think of him, keeping me out of my own grounds with his damned sheepsheads of guards!" He set the lamp down on the desk and caught sight of me. "Ach, Olifia," he cried, "what's happening here? Have they all gone mad up at the Schloss?"

"A prisoner 's escaped," I replied rather weakly, for I was feeling terribly upset. "Major von Ungemach came round about it. He's out there in the garden now...."

"Quatsch! Blödsinn! Ridiculous rubbish!" squeaked my host. "A nice state of things, I must say, if they're going to open fire from the Schloss and picket my garden every time one of these good-for-nothing gentlemen chooses to stay out all night with his mistress...."

"Once and for all, Fritz," his wife intervened, but not severely—I don't think Frau von Hentsch could have been really severe with any one—"once and for all, I won't have you say such things in front of Olivia...!"

"Olifia's not a child," the Doctor snapped back. "Like everybody else at Schlatz, I presume she knows that all these fellows in fortress arrest keep women down in the town. But, zum Teufel," he went on in an access of exasperation, "if von Ungemach thinks I'm going to put up with his tomfool melodramatic nonsense, he's very much mistaken. Es ist unerhört! I shall certainly complain to the General."

With a furious gesture he dashed his hands together, and his tubby form vanished through the open window into the garden.

Frau von Hentsch shook her head compassionately, an indulgent smile on her plain but rather charming face. She came across and put her large arm about me.

"Poor Fritz is very cross," she explained. "A soldier tried to prod him in the stomach with his bayonet. Such a stupid man not to know him! One of these Polish recruits, I expect: some of them scarcely seem to understand German. Dear child," she added, looking at me anxiously, "I'm afraid you must have been dreadfully alarmed?"

"I was rather scared," I admitted, very ill at ease.

"Tell me what happened!" she urged....

Dear Frau von Hentsch! How I hated to lie to her! Here was one of the sweetest, most unselfish natures I have ever known. I always thought that the popularity of the Lucy Varley books, those simple tales of American farm life that everybody has read, was largely due to the fact that they were infused with something of my dear friend's Christian kindness.

Somehow she had contrived to impart this radiant spirit of hers to her German husband. With a wife of his own race I suspect that Dr. von Hentsch, caste-bound, dogmatic, fussy, as he was, would have developed into a bully like so many of his fellow-countrymen. But Lucy von Hentsch, without hectoring or fault-finding, but solely, as I read it, by virtue of her great affection for her husband, appeared to have brought out the best in him. Through all the bitterness of the war years I held fast to my memory of Fritz von Hentsch as an upright and honourable man.

Poor Frau von Hentsch! The war killed her as surely as it killed Kurt von Hentsch, their only son. When Kurt fell on the Somme, Lucy Varley laid aside her pen and wrote no more. But America's declaration of war was the *coup de grâce* for her who, during more than thirty years of exile, had always remained the staunchest of Americans. Fended by the conflict between her love of country and her affection for her husband, that loyal heart broke, and she died.

I can see her now as I saw her that evening in the study, the last night I was to spend at Schlatz, with her beautiful white hair and her ample, motherly figure moulded in a black velvet gown, exquisitely draped (Frau von Hentsch always bought her frocks in Paris, despite sundry pan-German jeremiads of the Doctor's)—that plump body of hers that used to give her so much anxious thought. ("*Child, I know I'm getting to look like a regular, stout old German Frau. It's because I'm just greedy, I guess. But my! their cooking is so delicious!*")...

I set my teeth and fibbed. What else could I do? The secret I held was not mine to share with another living soul. So I explained that, growing sleepy over my typing, I had gone off to bed, to be awakened out of my first sleep by the firing of the Castle gun. Lest von Ungemach should mention the fact that he had been kept waiting at the front door, I was careful to add that, when he first rang, I had put my head under the bedclothes, too frightened to go downstairs and see who sought admittance.

As I warmed to my tale, my fears began to leave me. My story was quite plausible, I felt, and, glancing unobtrusively about the study, I could not discover that my visitor had left behind any trace of his presence. But I wished I knew what had become of him! I should have no peace of mind, I felt, until I found out. The echo of those two shots seemed to go reverberating down my memory....

"Well, I declare," exclaimed Frau von Hentsch, when I had done, "I'm not surprised at Fritz getting mad! If I know anything of these Deutschers, there's going to be one most almighty row over this! That von Ungemach must be plumb crazy! I could understand one of those dumb Poles losing his head if he were alone in charge and a prisoner broke loose. But the Major was here himself, you say, when those shots were fired in the garden?"

"Yes," I replied. "He was talking to me here in the study...."

Frau von Hentsch went over to the window and peered into the night. A lantern shone among the trees, and there were voices at the gate.

"I wonder what Fritz is doing," she said. "I hope this man wasn't hit. Did the Major tell you who it was?"

"No...."

"If it were that von Krachwitz creature I shouldn't worry," was her caustic rejoinder. "But I expect the Commandant's doing some thinking. If anything's happened to this man, Major von Ungemach can go out and buy himself a suit of plain clothes, I'll say! *He* won't want his uniform any more. My goodness, I hope his successor isn't married! I'd

just hate to leave this dear old house...."

"But why should Major von Ungemach get into trouble?" I asked. "If a prisoner escapes he has to try and catch him again, hasn't he?"

"You've got to remember that all these prisoners are German officers," said Frau von Hentsch, gazing out into the darkness. "And an officer in this country is a little tin god on wheels, even if he is in fortress arrest. This is a military State, my dear...."

Her words touched a responsive chord in my memory. Where had I heard that phrase before that night? Suddenly I remembered my talk with Franz, the postman. What had he said, again? "*This is a military State, Fräulein...*"—Frau von Hentsch's identical words—"*...the civilian doesn't count...*" Then in a flash, the rest of our conversation came back to me: Franz's forebodings, his tale of preparations for war; and I thought of my little man and his mission. For the first time I began to speculate about the contents of this envelope, the recovery of which had seemed to be of such vital importance to my odd visitor.

Frau von Hentsch had taken a cigarette from her bag. She stooped and lit it at the lamp.

"And," she went on, "the officer is its highest social unit, the only class that matters. The Government never lets the Army down. That is why this von Krachwitz brute, instead of being handed over to the police to stand his trial for murder, as would have happened in your country or mine, is judged by a military court and gets a nominal sentence...." She began to walk up and down the study, like she used to do when she was dictating her stories to me. "If Dr. von Hentsch had been wounded by that sentry to-night, do you suppose he'd have got any satisfaction, although, as you know, he's a judge, a high Prussian official? No, child, not on your life! As like as not, the Major would have been commended and the sentry promoted. That's the way they handle things in Deutschland. The Army can do no wrong. It's the Prussian system, and if you live here, as I do, you've got to get used to it." She paused and abstractedly flicked the ash from her cigarette, into the wastepaper-basket beside the desk. "Not that I ever have, Olivia," she continued rather wistfully. "Dr. von Hentsch knows it, and we've agreed to differ. It's the only real difference of opinion we've had in the twenty-eight years we've been married. In my heart I believe that my husband thinks as I do, for he's good and just and God-fearing. But he's an officer himself, an officer of the reserve, and he has to support the existing order...."

There was a step on the gravel outside the window, and Dr. von Hentsch came in. I am pretty intuitive, and the moment I saw him I was aware of a sort of tension existing between us. His first glance was towards me, an odd, questioning glance delivered with a faint air of embarrassment. I felt myself go cold all over.

Frau von Hentsch divined at once that something unpleasant had happened.

"Ah, there you are at last!" she said. "I hope that no one's been hurt, Fritz?"

Before he replied the Doctor turned his back on us to close the window and draw the curtains across.

"Nothing of any consequence," he remarked nonchalantly, picking up the letters which Franz had left on the desk.

"But the gun, the alarm bell, this shooting?" his wife demanded.

"A misunderstanding, it would appear," rejoined the Doctor, who was glancing through his mail.

"But the Major *told* Olivia that one of the prisoners had escaped," Frau von Hentsch persisted.

"As a matter of fact," retorted her husband rather testily, "the Major was not in the Castle at all when it happened. He was down in the town at Schmidt's Weinstube. With your permission, my dear Lucy," he went on quickly, seeing that Frau von Hentsch was about to speak again, "I don't propose to discuss it. The matter is best forgotten, unless you want to get von Ungemach into serious trouble with the General...."

"But, Fritz, you said yourself that you intended to make a complaint to the General...!"

The little Doctor clicked with exasperation.

"It is human nature to make rash statements in moments of irritation," he remarked pedantically. "I have received the Major's apology. I am content to let the matter rest there. And I do not wish you, Lucy, or you, Olifia"—his small, vivacious eyes flashed to my face—"to gossip about this affair. We don't want to get von Ungemach into hot water, if only for the reason that if he's transferred we shall probably have to leave this comfortable house...."

Frau von Hentsch laughed.

"Most immoral reasoning from a judge, I call it," she chaffed him. "It's all very mysterious, but if our staying on at the Kommandanten-Haus depends on our discretion, Olivia and I will be silent as the tomb, won't we, Olivia?" She broke off, wrinkling her brow. "But, by all accounts, the noise to-night was enough to wake the dead. The whole of Schlatz will be buzzing with it in the morning: have you thought of that?"

The judge coughed discreetly. "There have been night alarms at Schlatz in the past to test the preparedness of the garrison. This time, instead of the barracks, it was the turn of the Schloss to be aroused. There's no need for the public to be told more than that." He made a deliberate break as though to intimate that the subject was exhausted. "But," he continued in a more matter-of-fact tone, "it's close on midnight. Time we were all in our beds!"

Usually Frau von Hentsch went upstairs with me, leaving the Doctor to make all fast for the night. But on this evening she remained behind. She kissed me warmly and for an instant I clung to that affectionate embrace, so anxious, heart-sick, and lonely was I.

The Doctor's "Good-night!" was kindly enough. But, as he gave me his hand, once more his eye, the stern, probing eye of the judge, rested tentatively on my face.

And again I felt a quick stab of fear....

53

The man with the Clubfoot

I passed a wretched night. For pondering over the enigma of those shots in the garden I scarcely closed my eyes. Dr. von Hentsch's attitude made it clear that the authorities meant to hush the matter up; but whether this was because the prisoner had been recaptured, or because he had got clean away, I was at a loss to determine. At this juncture I don't think I ever seriously imagined that my visitor might have been shot down and killed. In those halcyon days of peace the Reaper was a less familiar companion than—in how short a span of weeks!—he was destined to become.

Nor was I at this time so much concerned for myself as for my little man. Most devoutly I wished him safe; but I also had a sort of subconscious hope that, were he still at large, he would contrive to send word and relieve me of the necessity of carrying out his embarrassing errand which, on cooler contemplation, I was most reluctant to undertake. Regardless of Dr. von Hentsch's injunction I was determined not to rest until I had discovered the truth. I thought I should be able to find out something from one or other of my friends among the young officers of the garrison; and I made up my mind to set to work next day.

On which resolution I fell asleep at last. But it was only to slide into a ghastly nightmare in which I seemed to be fleeing along an endless, stone passage, very narrow, with towering walls on either hand, pursued by a gigantic lame man who waved a blue envelope above his head. Already he was gaining on me, and I could hear him drawing ever closer, his heavy limp thumping rhythmically on the flags, when, with a stifled cry, I awoke to find my room flooded with sunshine, and Franziska, the housemaid, rapping at the door and crying: "Sieben Uhr, Fräulein!"

I hurried over my bath and dressing in order to have an early breakfast, and polish off the typing I had left over from the night before. A batch of the new story we were engaged upon had to be despatched to New York by the afternoon mail. Right up to the lunch hour I was fully occupied. Frau von Hentsch always worked in the mornings. Breakfast over, and the Doctor packed off to the Courts, she and I would settle down in the study, where she would dictate to me until one o'clock, when the Judge came home for the mid-day meal. She used to dictate straight on to the machine, afterwards revising the typescript chapter by chapter. Then—usually in the evenings, for we went out little at night—I would make the final fair copy.

Frau von Hentsch was wonderful at dictation, clear-minded and precise, rarely at a loss. But on this morning she was, for her, curiously distraught. I wondered what Dr. von Hentsch could have confided to her after I had left them on the previous evening. Her manner towards me, however, was as kindly as ever; and I sought to dismiss my suspicions from my mind by telling myself that probably she was simply worried, as she sometimes would be, about the development of her plot.

Luncheon brought no elucidation of the mystery which so greatly intrigued me. Indeed, there was no allusion of any kind to the events of the preceding night. Dr. von Hentsch, who had been talking with a colleague fresh from Berlin, was in his most ponderous political mood. He treated us to a long lecture on the misdeeds of the Servians whom, he solemnly assured us, the Austrians would chastise as such "murder ruffians" merited.

After lunch he and Frau von Hentsch disappeared for their customary nap whilst I returned to the study to finish typing out the chapters which had to catch the afternoon post. I had told Frau von Hentsch, who seldom went out during the heat of the day, that I would walk down to the station with her batch of MS. and post it in the mail train which left Schlatz at 4.35. After my bad night I thought a turn in the fresh air would do me good. But I also remembered that, between the hours of four and five, the Hohe Strasse, which is the main street of Schlatz, was full of people; and I hoped to run across some acquaintance who might throw some light on the mysterious happenings up at the Schloss.

Accordingly, the chapters completed and sealed up in their envelope, soon after four o'clock I was descending the leafy avenue of lime-trees that curved down to the town. It was a serene afternoon of sunshine, the air heavy with the perfume of lime-blossom, and as I walked slowly down the hill, my eye rested pleasantly on the *sang-de-boeuf* roofs of the old houses which, stepped one behind the other down the precipitous hillside, seemed to glow under the bright blue sky.

The siesta hour was over. The Hohe Strasse was stirring into life. At their doors the shopkeepers, most of whom greeted me impressively, were sunning themselves and watching with never-failing interest the unchanging pageant of the small garrison town.

How I loved it all, finding it always fresh, always picturesque, after the smug drabness of Purley! Little did I think, that sunny afternoon, that I was gazing for the last time upon that scene: the old-world street, smooth-cobbled, winding down to the tiny square where the tubby little Rathaus, baroque survival of the city's ducal heyday, with its turrets and pinnacles and rounded windows, seemed to be snoozing in the sunshine over against the ancient inn with its swinging sign, "Zur Ewigen Lampe"; the groups of strolling officers, all moustaches and pomade, high-collared and tight-laced in their blue military frocks, caps set at a rakish angle, desperate dogs every one, ogling the women and saluting each other punctiliously with many bendings from the waist; a party of recruits tramping wearily back from the parade-ground, impassive, loutish peasants for the most part, in coarse canvas suits; soldier servants with market baskets; the Lutheran pastor in sober black; the Frau Bürgermeister in bugles chatting with the Frau Post-Direktor in a dreadful pork-pie hat; Colonel Dörner, the grizzled garrison commander, at whose passage the whole street was of a sudden alive with salutes and bows, driving himself back to the office in his dog-cart.

There seemed no place for tragedy in that peaceful landscape; yet, had I but known it then, tragedy hung poised above us all as surely as the tall tower of Castle Schlatz that reared itself above the little town.

I was passing the Einhorn Apotheke when the apothecary, a chubby, pink young man, with a brushed-up Kaiser moustache, ran out.

"The gnädiges Fräulein will excuse me," said he, "but I have received the drops for the Frau Landgerichtsrat. If the

gnädiges Fräulein were going home, the bottle is there!"

Herr Apotheker Lachwitz knew all the gossip of Schlatz. So as I had plenty of time before the train, I followed him into the shop. With the Herr Apotheker no need for me to disobey Dr. von Hentsch's injunction: he opened fire at once.

"What doings up at the Schloss last night, Fräulein!" he began as he wrapped up the bottle.

"You heard the racket, too, then?" said I.

His cherubic face creased itself into a good-humoured smile. "Na, and who didn't? Unless it were my neighbour, the corn-chandler, who's so deaf that he'll miss the Last Trump." He chuckled at his joke. "Every one thought that war had broken out. But I happen to know that it was only a false alarm, a surprise, as you might say, to test the vigilance of these gentlemen up at the Schloss. But they didn't catch them napping, eh, Fräulein?"

"Rather terrifying if one isn't used to that kind of thing, isn't it?" I ventured to put in.

"Tchah," remarked the chemist dispassionately, handing me my package, "with a great army such things must be." His voice waxed sonorous. "Encircled as we are with enemies, we Germans must continually satisfy ourselves that our good sword is sharp. What did der alte Fritz say...?"

But I had ceased to listen. I was not interested in the dictum of the great Frederic. Dr. von Hentsch's version was going the rounds, then. I was surprised to find it thus implicitly accepted.

And then, resuming my walk, as I crossed the Rathaus Platz, whom should I run into but Sonia von Wiltsche, whose husband was rather a nice major on the Staff at Schlatz? Of all the women I knew at Schlatz, Sonia was the only one who had any pretence to looks or elegance, the only one, apart from my dear Frau von Hentsch, I cared anything about. She was a Rumanian by birth, young and dark and vivacious, with plenty of pretty frocks, wherefor she was secretly envied and publicly sniffed at by the dowdy frumps who composed the feminine section of the military set.

"Olivia, my dear, you look lovely," she cried in her impulsive way—Sonia always raved about her friends. "I adore your big, shady hat. No wonder all the young officers are dying of love for you. Rudi von Linz will talk of nobody else. Only at dinner last night..."

"Rubbish!" I said. "Rudi's a nice boy, but much too sentimental. Walk up to the station with me, Sonia, if you're not in a hurry. I've got a letter for the train, and I don't want to miss it!"

"Volontiers, ma chérie," she answered: Sonia detested German and spoke French whenever she could. "How's our darling Lucy Varley? I saw the Judge going into the Headquarters office this morning, looking frightfully important. By the way," she added, "what exactly did happen up at the Schloss last night?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "I don't quite know. All I can tell you is that there was a terrible hullabaloo which scared me stiff. Dr. von Hentsch says it was a surprise alarm, to test the garrison, you know."

Sonia gave a contemptuous laugh. "Et avec ça?" she exclaimed derisively. "You don't believe that cock-and-bull story, do you, ma chère?"

"For want of a better I have to. What is supposed to have been going on, anyway?"

"They say one of the prisoners escaped."

I received a sudden thrill. Had my little man won his way to freedom after all?

"Did your husband tell you this?" I asked.

She threw back her head and laughed. "Grand Dieu, no! Franz tells me nothing. I had it from Anna my maid, who got it out of Anton, my husband's orderly. I asked Franz about it, but..."—she laid a finger on her lips and flashed her dark

eyes mischievously—"not a word! He said I was not to listen to such nonsense. But for all that, I think it's true."

"Why?" I demanded eagerly. We had now reached the Kaiserin Augusta-Strasse, the broad boulevard that ran straight to the station. Sonia glanced at the clock above the station and stopped. "Twenty past four! Good gracious, chérie, I can't come any farther. I promised to be at the Dorners at four for bridge. I'm going to hop into that little carriage." She waved her gay parasol at a passing droschke.

I followed her to the kerb where the cab had drawn up. "What makes you think that this story's true?" I asked, doing my best to appear unconcerned.

Her foot on the carriage step, she turned back to me and answered impressively: "Because there was the most frightful row at Headquarters this morning. The General was over from Wiesenfeld. This poor von Ungemach, it appears, was on the carpet. Anton told Anna he had never seen the General in such a fury." The long suède gloves she carried gave my arm an affectionate tap. "Au revoir, ma petite. Come and see us soon again. Franz, the monster, is in love with you, too, you know!"

"Everybody knows whom Franz is in love with," I laughed back. She fluttered her hand at me, the driver whipped up his ancient horse and she drove away. Almost gaily, for her news had lightened my heart, I continued on my way to the station.

The long mail train was in when I went on the platform. Having posted my letter in the postal van, behind the engine, I was making for the exit through a press of passengers and porters, when a man standing at the door of one of the compartments, lifted his hat to me.

It was Major von Ungemach. At first I did not know him, for he was wearing plain clothes, and hitherto I had seen him only in his smart uniform, sky-blue with pink facings, of the Dragoons of the Guard. Now in an appalling suit of black-and-white check and very yellow shoes, he looked shapeless and shabby and undistinguished.

He came towards me at once and ceremoniously kissed my hand.

"Just now I have thought of you," he said, in his stiff English. "Dear Miss Olivia, of all my friends at Schlatz, you are the only one I was sorry to part from without making my adieux...!"

Sonia was right then. The prisoner had got away. Was it possible that the unfortunate von Ungemach had been relieved of his command? At once I thought of the von Hentsches and their lease. Oh dear, how upset they would be....

"But, Major," I exclaimed, "you're not leaving us for good, I hope?"

He nodded sombrely. "Yes," he said, "I do not come back any more to Schlatz."

It struck me, then, that all his ebullience had left him, as though, with his gay uniform, he had stripped off that buoyant air of his which at times I had found rather tiresome. Loose in the ill-fitting tweeds, his big body had a deflated look, and his voice was tired and toneless.

"Dear me," I remarked, "I shall miss you, Major! But surely it's very sudden, isn't it? Have you got another job? Or are you going back to your regiment?"

"Neither," he answered huskily. And then, to my horror, his face contracted and his bushy moustache began to tremble. "I must tell you now, my dear," he said brokenly, "that I leave the Army. I am——" he turned from me and stared at the train with tragic eyes—"I am sent away!"

The spectacle of this fat man on the verge of tears was incredibly grotesque. But I had no inclination to laugh. By contrast with his wonted self-sufficient sprightliness, there was something genuinely pathetic about his utter moral abasement. Besides, his statement surprised me considerably. It looked to me as if my little man had been a prisoner of mark....

"Oh, dear," I rejoined, "I'm very sorry to hear that. But what's happened? Is it over the pris——?"

He threw up his hands to stop me, glancing rapidly about him. "Um Gottes Willen," he exclaimed in a low voice, "you must forget what I told you last night. For that indiscretion, for that and for ... other things, they have retired me...."

I stared at him aghast. "It isn't possible!"

He nodded mournfully. "By special decree of the Emperor's Military Cabinet. No trial and no appeal."

"But what have you done to merit such a terrible sentence?"

"I must not say. But it is nothing that goes against my honour. You'll believe me when I tell you that, won't you, Miss Olivia?"

"Of course," I assured him.

"Eighteen years' service and then to be thrown away like some old hat. It is hard," he sighed. "Now I go to my estates in Pomerania to be a farmer and grow swines. Can you imagine me as a dealer of swines, Miss Olivia?" There was a passing touch of the old gaiety in his voice. "But at home among my peasants," he went on dramatically, "I will think to myself: 'When these old cats at Schlatz shall start pulling my reputation to pieces, the so beautiful Olivia will speak up and tell them all that this poor von Ungemach may have been a stupid fellow, but he did nothing that went against his honour.' You'll say as much for me, my dear, nicht wahr?"

"Indeed I will."

"Hand darauf!" he cried, already more cheerful. As we shook hands on our bargain, a whistle shrilled, doors slammed. The Major made a flying leap for his carriage, and, as the train began to move, thrust his head out of the window and kissed his hand to me with the utmost gallantry....

Without further encounters I returned to the Kommandanten-Haus. Outside the front door an enormous scarlet racing car, smothered in white dust, was parked under the limes. A chauffeur with a hard face, grimy and unshaven, sprawled in a death-like slumber at the wheel. Franziska, who answered my ring at the bell, explained the presence of the car. It belonged to a gentleman who had called to see the Herr Landgerichtsrat and, finding him from home, though momentarily expected back, had elected to wait. The Herr was in the study now. The gnädige Frau, the servant added, was also out: I remembered, then, that Frau von Hentsch had spoken of going to the Dorners' bridge party.

I had started to mount the stairs to go to my room, when the idea came to me to avail myself of the absence of the von Hentsches to have a look round the garden. I was certain now that Major Abbott had got away; for, since he had contrived to elude the ring of his pursuers, I made sure he would be fully capable of eluding ultimate recapture: and I thought I should like to see for myself his route of escape. Anyway, I should have to go into the garden some time before the evening meal to cut flowers for the table: Frau von Hentsch always left the arrangement of the flowers to me. So I fetched the flower-basket and the garden scissors from their place in the pantry (everything in Lucy Varley's household had its place) and, going out by the front door, entered the garden through the gate on the road.

I have always loved a garden, and on this perfect summer afternoon my mind, weary from the harassed hours I had passed, seemed to drink in the peace of this old-world pleasaunce. Years of neglect had effaced almost the last semblance of arrangement from what had once been a stiffly formal park, with patterned flower-beds laid out upon the hillside to contrast with the dark verdure of the trees behind where the Schloss was piled up against the sky. Now between the phalanxes of luxuriant rhododendrons sentinelling the garden on either hand, the flowers ran riot everywhere, insolently trailing out upon the moss-grown paths, and making of what once had been a precise mosaic a crazy quilt of many colours.

It was a place of vivid hues, of drowsy insect noises, of busy bird chatter, of fragrance, of solitude, of oblivion. Deliberately, to give myself up to its enchantment, I put off the real errand which had brought me there, wandering

haphazard, my basket on my arm, along the paths and stopping from time to time to pluck a flower.

I felt very happy that evening in the garden. I was twenty-two, romantic and eager: I had had the most picturesque adventure: and I possessed a secret, a delightful, exciting secret, to browse over and be thrilled by in moments of depression. Luxuriously, I let my mind slide back over the events of the past twenty-four hours, and smiled out of sheer relief that all—for Major Abbott and me, at least—had passed off so well.

I had left the path I had been following and, smiling happily to myself, was bending over a rose-bush which grew apart in front of a laurel thicket, when a harsh voice spoke suddenly almost in my ear.

"It is so mournful to be mirthful alone," it said in German.

Considerably startled, I sprang back. From the other side of a laurel bush a man with a heavy, square face was smirking at me most ingratiatingly.

"I beg your pardon?" I said rather hastily.

He had doffed his hard, black felt hat, disclosing a very short crop of wiry, grizzled hair. His head was shaved at the sides so as to reveal the scalp greyly. He was one of the most hirsute individuals I had ever seen. There were pads of black hair on his projecting cheek bones, and little tufts at his nostrils, and a velvety thatch darkened the backs of his large and spade-like hands. He was half-hidden by the laurel bush; but from what I could see of him he was a most massively-built person, with curiously long arms and an amazingly broad shoulder span. Altogether, what with his remarkable build, his great bushy eyebrows shadowing hard and rather fierce eyes and his general hairiness, there was more than a suggestion of some gigantic man-ape about him.

At my rather stiff rejoinder, he cocked his head at me, narrowing his eyes. Then he smiled more expansively than ever, baring under his coarse and close-clipped moustache big yellow teeth set with gold that glinted in the sun.

"A quotation," he said in his grating voice. "Minna von Barnhelm. The masterpiece of our national poet, Lessing. A classic. You, as a foreigner, mein teures Fräulein, you should study our great German writers!"

His familiar air offended me, besides, I was growing uncomfortable under his persistent stare. So I said very distantly: "This is a private house. Were you looking for anybody?"

For an instant his mouth was grim and rather frightening. Then he smiled again, but this time his smile was less engaging.

"Aye, that I am. And the goddess, Fortune, who, like all women—with your permission, dear lady!—never spurns those who resolutely show themselves independent of her caprices, has come to my aid. Jawohl!"

He broke off with a sort of irascible grunt and, still clasping his hat, folded his hairy hands across his great paunch to rest on the crutch handle of his walking-stick.

"I come a long and fatiguing journey by automobile to pay a call on our esteemed friend, Herr Landgerichtsrat von Hentsch..."

He must have been watching me more closely than I realised. For, as though he could read my thoughts, he rapped out sharply: "You saw my automobile outside, hein? Na, schön," he resumed, "I find the worthy Judge from home. Do I sit down to repose myself in the cool of the house? Do I loiter idly to await his coming? Nein, Fräulein. I..."—he touched his chest with impressive forefinger—"I never rest. 'If I rest, I rust!'—you know the proverb? So I step out into this beautiful garden to see what gift Fortune has in store for me. And sehen Sie, the fickle jade meets me with open arms!" His great body shook in a silent chuckle.

All this time he had been eyeing me with his probing and vaguely menacing glance. And I was seized with an almost uncontrollable panic of fear. For suddenly Major Abbott's warning had come into my mind: "*if a big German, an enormous man, with a clubfoot, comes inquiring after me, be on your guard! Don't let him suspect you or ... beware!*"

Instinctively my eyes dropped to the stranger's feet. But the bushes concealed them.

Meanwhile, the rasping, guttural voice went on:

"And then, while I walk behind the laurels here, meditating upon the vicissitudes of human fortune, I raise my eyes and what do I see? The most exquisite picture of English girlhood approaching. Like some beautiful butterfly, most gracious young lady, you moved from flower to flower, smiling at your thoughts"—he made a little pause, and my heart seemed to miss a beat—"the happy thoughts of innocent and guileless youth, no doubt," he added blandly. "How does your great Shakespeare put it? 'In maiden meditation, fancy free.'"

I was racking my brains feverishly for an excuse to break away and leave him. This man was playing with me. He knew something. But, oh God, how much?

"Once more," the snarling tones proceeded, "Fortune was kind to me. For, sehen Sie, liebes Fräulein, it happens that I am in need of your assistance...."

He broke off deliberately. And I was silent, tongue-tied through fear.

With an ungainly movement he thrust his hand slowly into the pocket of the black alpaca coat he was wearing and produced a man's collar. It was a soft collar, one of the double kind, with a blue and white stripe, and all stained with earth.

I knew the collar at once. Major Abbott had worn one like it.

The stranger held out the collar across the laurel bush.

"Will you have the great kindness, my dear young lady," he said sleekly, "to tell me whether you have ever seen a collar like that before?"

I tried to answer nonchalantly, for his challenging eye was on me.

"I'm sure I don't know," I retorted. "Heaps of men wear collars similar to this."

"But not in Germany," was the quick rejoinder. "This is a collar made in London." He opened it out. "See, the makers' name, 'Maitland & Chard, Jermyn Street....'" His thick finger dabbed at the lettering on the inner band.

But I was not looking at the lettering. My eyes were riveted on a long, dark-brown smear that stained the linen through and through. And I knew that the stain was not of earth, but of blood.

With a brusque thrust of his huge body, the stranger burst through the laurel bush and stood before me.

He limped as he went and, as he emerged from the thicket, I saw that one of his feet was misshapen and encased in a monstrous boot.

54

"Auf Wiedersehen!"

But for the surprising intervention of Franziska, I believe my face would have betrayed me. I was numb with horror. My little man was once more a prisoner, then, if not dead, and here already, hot on the track, appeared "der Stelze," against whom he had so impressively cautioned me: I was not likely to forget the odd expression that had come into his eyes when he spoke the name.

I thought of the travel-stained car, the weary chauffeur, at the door. "The Lame One" had lost no time. The memory of Major Abbott's warning descended upon me like a cold douche: "*There's the worst kind of trouble in store for any one suspected of aiding me to escape...*"; and my sense of security collapsed like a house of cards.

Franziska's appearance, I say, gave me a brief respite. I had not heard her approach, and the first thing I knew of her presence was when a solid mass of flesh, tightly packed into blue and white check, tripping over a root, was precipitated between us. Franziska, a strapping peasant wench, with scarlet cheeks and hair screwed up into a close bun at the back of her head, was always falling over things, moving through life like an elephant in the jungle. I helped her to her feet.

"Herr Je," she panted, one red hand pressed to her enormous bosom. "I ran so fast ... the Herr Landgerichtsrat is so nervös. He's waiting in the study now to receive the gentleman. Ach, du lieber Gott...!" She gasped, puffing, for breath.

I busied myself with brushing the pine needles from her dress; for I was conscious of the jealous challenge of those disquieting eyes. Anything to gain time....

"Tell the Herr Landgerichtsrat I will see him presently," was the clubfooted man's surly rejoinder. "And you, get out!"

The maid goggled at him. "But the Herr Landgerichtsrat is impatient, Herr," she blurted out. "He ordered me to find you immediately and bring you to the study...."

"The Herr Landgerichtsrat will await my pleasure." announced the cripple, with dignity. The crutch-handled stick described a gesture of dismissal. "Do as you're told, my girl!"

The action seemed to terrify Franziska, for she staggered back, her china-blue eyes starting from her head. "Aber, Herr..."

"Go...!"

Sharp as the bark of a dog and as fierce, the order rang out. At the same time the lame man lurched forward a pace, determined, ominous, with stick uplifted. Franziska did not wait for him. Unceremoniously she took to her heels and fled. A distant crash of glass among the cucumber frames marked her head-long retreat to the house. Then once more all was still, and the drone of the bees and the chatter of the birds resumed possession of the garden.

I had myself in hand now. I knew the danger, and I was prepared to meet it. Boldly I faced the man with the clubfoot. I saw him holding out the collar to me. But I feigned to ignore it.

"Dr. von Hentsch isn't used to receiving orders," I explained, laughing.

The cripple bent his bushy eyebrows at me. "Then he'll find he'll have to change his habits. Like certain other self-complacent individuals in this town...."

As he said this, he shot me a mustering glance out of the corner of his eyes. His manner was frankly threatening; and I resented it. After all, I was a British subject, the guest of one of the highest officials at Schlatz. Who was this man that I should be afraid of him? I could not gainsay his unmistakable air of authority; but, for the rest, his manner, and particularly his sober if rather nondescript clothes, suggested the small Prussian functionary. In that case, it seemed to me, he would not bounce Dr. von Hentsch very successfully. So I smiled politely and said: "Perhaps you don't know that the Herr Landgerichtsrat is the highest judicial authority in the district?"

He bowed. "Notwithstanding that, even..." With a thoughtful air he began to roll up the collar between his fingers.

"Then you can't identify this collar?" he asked presently.

"No," I answered. "It's English, you say?"

"You saw the makers' name..." he pointed out.

"I didn't know there was such a thing as an Englishman at Schlatz," I told him. "I've never met one, at any rate...."

"Nevertheless, there was one here," he rejoined, stuffing the collar away in his pocket. "A prisoner in the Castle..."

"But I thought that only German officers were interned at Schlatz?" I interposed.

"As a rule, yes. But this was the exception. A desperate criminal, my gracious young lady, a ... a murderer, a man who would stop at nothing, arrested by the German authorities and held at the request of your British Government...."

All the time he was speaking his tigerish eyes kept boring into my face. Not for an instant did I believe his tale. My game little Major was no murderer, of that I was convinced. But I grew nervous, scenting a pitfall.

"You knew that a prisoner had escaped, didn't you?" he added casually.

I thought rapidly. If this man were charged, as he appeared to be, with the investigation of the affair, he must be acquainted with my story as I had given it to Major von Ungemach and the von Hentsches. So I said, yes, I had heard so.

"Did this Major Ungeheuer, Ungeziefer, na, whatever the Kommandant fellow's name is, did he tell you that the prisoner was *English*?"

For the fraction of a second I paused. I was not afraid to tell him the truth; but some instinct bade me beware of a trap.

"No," I answered very decidedly, and left it at that.

"So, so," said the lame man musingly. "Then you've only just heard from me that it was an Englishman who escaped, nicht wahr?"

"That is so...."

His gleaming gums were fleshed in an expansive smile. "What a wonderful thing is the phlegm of the English!" he exclaimed in a softly purring voice. "What nonchalance! What self-control! You, a charming young girl, are startled out of your beauty sleep by the firing of cannon, the ringing of bells, the hue and cry, in a word, the whole *klimbim* of the alarm, and learn that a prisoner has escaped! What more thrilling than an escape, mein Fräulein! What more dramatic! The historic and inevitable file, the rope ladder, the breathless wait for the sentries to pass, the bold dash into freedom, the scurrying in the dark like a hunted rat! Tell me, don't you find it exciting?"

I felt very much like a hunted rat myself, a poor, little, frightened rat, worried by a savage, bristling dog. Rather hurriedly, and not knowing much what I was saying, I agreed absently that it was most exciting.

"And yet," he went on reflectively, cocking his clipped head at a thrush swaying on a pine-branch, "and yet you display no emotion. Mein Kompliment, Fräulein! Your English upbringing, no doubt. Had I been asked, I should have said that an English girl like you, alone in a foreign land, would have been amazed and thrilled to learn that the hero of this romantic episode was an Englishman, one of her own flesh and blood...."

My throat was dry; my hands burned. I had blundered, and blundered badly. Of course, I should have manifested surprise, interest, and plied him with questions about the prisoner. But his allusive manner, and, above all, the persistent inquisition of those suspicious eyes, had quite flustered me out of my rôle....

"After all," the velvety voice proceeded, "if he had known, when he was skulking in this very garden, that one of his compatriots was only a few yards away, he might have sought you out and implored your assistance...."

"Oh," I cried, "I'm thankful he didn't. I should have died of fright. A murderer, you said he was, I think?"

"Jawohl. A redoubtable assassin...."

"And did he get away? I mean, did he make good his escape? Or was he recaptured and brought back?"

A cloud seemed to pass over my companion's hard features. He gave me another of his piercing glances.

"You'd better ask your friend, Major ... Major..." he snapped his fingers—"na, this imbecile of a Kommandant!"

I laughed, though, God knows, I felt little like mirth. "Ah, but the Major won't talk. Besides, he's gone away...."

The big cripple seemed to take a deep breath; his sprouting nostrils opened and shut; and his eyes flamed up suddenly, like a kindling fire. "Yes," he growled irascibly, his sleek accents forgotten, "and lucky he is to get off so lightly. If I'd had my way, I'd have clapped the infernal, bungling fool into the lowest range of the solitary confinement cells at Spandau, and left him to rot there, verdammt!" His great chest swelled out. "Himmelkreuzdonnerwettersakrament nochmal," he boomed in a crescendo of expletive—he was chattering now like an angry baboon, grinding his teeth and rolling his eyes—"am I to plan, to toil, to slave, to follow my goal unswervingly, heedless of the enemies, the powerful enemies, I make, in order that some clumsy sheephead of a cavalry Major shall come blundering in and upset my careful calculations? Herr Gott,"—he rolled out the oath raising his hairy paws aloft and shaking them at the sky of cloudless blue—"it's enough to drive a man out of his mind. Pah!" He spat raucously, and then, drawing an enormous red and yellow handkerchief from his pocket, blew his nose with the noise of a trumpeting elephant. This dual operation appeared to pacify him, for presently his large, rather pudgy hand went out, and he would have stroked my bare arm if I had not shrunk back.

"Na ja," he remarked in a silky voice, "it's a hard life, a very hard life, my dear. More kicks than pfennigs, is old Clubfoot's portion. But I can learn from you, jawohl. You've given me a lesson in self-control. An excellent thing, self-control, an invaluable quality..."—he broke off to plunge his searching regard again into my face—"provided you're sure of yourself. A bold front, that's the secret of success. How do the smart Yankees put it? 'It's a good life if you don't weaken!'" He paused, and then, lingeringly, as though he were smacking his chops over the words, repeated the phrase. "If you don't weaken, my dear young lady!" He made me a ceremonious bow. "I have the honour to wish you a very good evening!"

"Good ... good-bye!" I said falteringly.

"Auf wiedersehen!" he countered.

With a grave deliberation that to my fevered imagination had in itself a faint air of menace, he clapped his bowler hat on his head and, leaning heavily on his stick and hauling his monstrous foot along in a painful limp, hobbled briskly off in the direction of the house.

I stayed behind in the sun-lit garden. Picking up my basket, I returned to my flowers. I realised that I was still in the dark as to Major Abbott's fate, and asked myself, without finding an answer, how far I had compromised myself in the eyes of this sinister man. I wondered whether his parting words had any ulterior meaning. This mysterious cripple terrified me; and I resolved, his confident "auf wiedersehen!" notwithstanding, to keep out of his way as long as he remained in Schlatz....

For perhaps half an hour I lingered among the roses until the mighty roar of a motor engine in the distance told me that the racing car had taken the road again. Of course I could not be sure that the clubfooted man had gone with it, so I carried my roses indoors by the kitchen, making for the pantry, where I was accustomed to arrange the flowers. As I entered the pantry, Franziska appeared from the adjoining dining-room.

"I was just coming to look for the gnädiges Fräulein," she announced. "The Herr Landgerichtsrat wished to see the Miss in the study immediately."

Her words gave me an unpleasant sensation. Never before had Dr. von Hentsch been thus formal in his dealings with me. What could this man have told him?

"Has the visitor gone, Franziska?" I asked.

With a grunt Franziska plumped her rotund person down upon a chair, planting her hands on her knees. "Jawohl, and a good riddance," she declared. "You should have heard him in the study, that's all! Shouted and raged like a Turk, he did. I thought murder was being done. And when the study bell went for me to show him out, there was the Herr Landgerichtsrat, God help me, as white as a shroud, handing old hop-and-go-kick his hat as it might be the Pope! Such insolence! I wish the gnädige Frau had been here! She'd have put the great ape in his place...."

Her vehement indignation brought a smile to my face. But, as I crossed the dining-room to the study, I, too, wished with all my heart that dear Frau von Hentsch would come back. I sorely lacked her gentle presence in this atmosphere of storm....

55

In which I lose my job

Dr. von Hentsch always reminded me of an elderly cherub. Short and plump and round, he had a tight little tummy spanned by a watch-chain as taut as a telegraph wire. His chubby face, of which a gleaming bald pate seemed to be merely the extension, so pink and smooth was it, was suffused with a perennial flush like the Alps at sunset.

I found him pacing up and down the study smoking a cigarette with quick, nervous puffs. When he caught sight of me, he hastened to bring me into the room, shutting the door after me.

"Please to be seated, Olifia," he said in his rather stilted English. "I have something to say to you."

With his wonted gravity he placed himself with his back to the unlighted stove, his little paunch stuck out, his hands tucked away beneath the tails of his black morning-coat. His manner was extremely embarrassed. Behind their rimless pince-nez his eyes were troubled. He looked like a distracted cupid.

"I must tell you, my dear," he began, "that I ... that we,"—he fumbled for the word—"that my wife and I find it necessary to make a change."

My face fell. I had not anticipated this. At twenty-two one does not worry much about the future; but now that I was installed at Schlatz and had fallen into Frau von Hentsch's ways, I had expected to make my home with her more or less indefinitely. Horrid memories of Purley and its red-brick villas, of my desk under the grimy, reflector-lit window of St. Mary Axe, the evening fight for trains at London Bridge, poured, jostling, into my mind....

"Oh!" I exclaimed in dismay. "I hope you're not dissatisfied with me, Herr Doktor?"

"No, no," he answered at once. "We shall be most sorry to lose you, Olifia." His mouth set in an obstinate line. "But my wife will have to engage another secretary."

"Has Frau von Hentsch any fault to find with my work?" I put in.

"On the contrary," he made haste to assure me in his pedantic way, "she has never had a more efficient amanuensis."

"Then why do I have to go?"

He was silent, studying the pattern of the carpet.

"Does Frau von Hentsch know about this?" I asked suddenly.

He kept his eyes to the ground; but his ears became very red. "As a matter of fact," he said reluctantly, "I have not as

yet discussed the matter with her. But she will recognise that the change is inevitable...."

All this, I was well aware, was only so much beating about the bush. It was not hard to see what had happened. The moment I entered the study I divined from the Judge's manner that his visitor had spoken to him against me. I had always regarded Dr. von Hentsch as a fair-minded person, and, though I realised that I was getting only what I deserved, I was surprised to find him thus willing to condemn me unheard. Not from hypocrisy, but merely to discover, if I might, the extent of the lame man's suspicions against me, I assumed an injured air and said: "I can guess what it is. The person who was here just now has poisoned your mind with his suspicions. I know it. Do you believe I had anything to do with this Englishman's escape, Herr Doktor?"

"Not for one instant!" he declared emphatically, and with such honest indignation that I felt a secret twinge of shame. "I accepted your word implicitly, my dear, as I told this gentleman not five minutes ago." He cleared his throat. "This is a hard task for me, mein Kind. We have grown very fond of you since you have been here, my wife and I. With our daughter married on the other side of the Atlantic, and our son so much away, our house was lonely until you came. You brought back the joy of youth under our roof, and we are grateful to you." He whipped off his pince-nez, breathed on the lenses, and started to polish them with a sort of furious industry. "We ... we shall miss you, Olifia."

"Yet you send me away?" I said.

He threw up his hands helplessly and turned aside.

"Of what does this man accuse me?" I demanded.

"He brings no specific charge, save that you are a foreigner. On that ground he objects to your presence here, practically within the precincts of a State prison."

"And you admit his objection?"

The little Judge coloured up. "I have no choice," he muttered.

"Good gracious," I exclaimed, "even if this isn't a free country, I should have thought a man in your position..."

"Gott...!" His manner was deprecatory. He was staring miserably out through the open window. "You don't understand. This gentleman has influence which I find myself unable to withstand."

"Influence?" I repeated contemptuously. "What influence does a vulgar creature like this possess, I'd like to know?"

"Enough, at any rate, to have had Major von Ungemach placed on half-pay. And von Ungemach is in the Guards Cavalry, with a father who is a General. I may be the next victim for all I know."

"I don't believe it," I cried. "The man was boasting!"

The Herr Doktor shook his head. "I have only too good reason for knowing he was not," he replied.

"But who is this man?" I demanded.

The Judge did not reply at once. In the silence that fell between us, a symphony of quiet, unobtrusive sounds, as it were the pulse-beat of this tranquil German household, drifted into the room: Franziska's voice in the kitchen, rather flat and monotonous, raised in song; the distant squeak of a pump; the hollow rattle of woodblocks in the cellar where, on this hot afternoon, with characteristic Teuton foresight, the winter supplies were being laid in. Gravely the Judge adjusted his pince-nez and looked at me.

"Olifia," he said, "I take the privilege of a friend who is old enough to be the father you have lost to offer you a piece of advice. Through no fault of your own, you have touched the fringe of a disagreeable, an unfortunate, business. It is perhaps natural that you are inquisitive about it: curiosity is the principal weakness of your sex; but believe me, if you indulge this propensity you run the risk, the serious risk, of deepening those suspicions which—quite blamelessly, I

admit—you have aroused. Ask no questions, my dear, but forget the whole affair and return to your own country without delay!"

Dr. von Hentsch liked to orate, and this rather pompous speech appeared to raise his morale. It was with a certain briskness that he stepped over to the desk and picked up an envelope which lay there.

"Here," he went on, "is your salary for six months, together with your fare to London. The last train for Berlin leaves here at 11.12 to-night. It reaches the Stettiner Bahnhof at 6.21 in the morning. That will give you plenty of time to have a bath and some breakfast before going on to London by the noon train from the Friedrich-Strasse. I can give you the name of a quiet, respectable hotel..."

"But, Herr Doktor," I broke in, rather agitated, "you surely don't expect me to leave right off like this, this very evening?"

He looked terribly uncomfortable. "Believe me, it would be best," he murmured.

"But I'm going to Berlin on Friday, anyway, and this is Monday. The Transomes can't have me before Friday as they've got friends stopping with them until then. And I can't return to England. As you know, my sister and her husband are meeting me in Berlin on the first for our holiday in the Black Forest. Surely it can't make any difference if I stay on here until ... until the night train on Thursday, say?"

"I am sorry, Olifia," he answered testily, "but it is impossible...."

Then I knew that the lame man must have demanded my instant dismissal. If he suspected me, that was not surprising; but what filled me with consternation was my host's meek acquiescence. Dr. von Hentsch came of old Pomeranian Junker stock, a class which, as he was fond of telling me, for all its disciplined loyalty, had always jealously defended its prerogatives, even in defiance of the throne; and he was not the man to be bullied into acting against his conscience. Who was this mysterious cripple, and what strange power did he wield to be able to sweep the unfortunate von Ungemach, for all his aristocratic connection, into ignominious retirement, to impose his orders upon a highly-placed and usually by no means tractable Prussian judge. If he were of the police, then he must be a very important official, perhaps the Chief. In any case I had made a dangerous enemy....

Dr. von Hentsch was speaking again. "According to your agreement with my wife," he said, "you are entitled to your first-class fare home. You are, of course, mistress of your own plans; but if you will be guided by me, Olifia, you will put your friends off, give up this holiday, and go straight back to England."

"Give up our trip to the Black Forest?" I exclaimed. "Why on earth should I?"

Nervously Dr. von Hentsch pounded the knuckles of his right hand into the palm of his left. He cast a despairing glance to right and left of him like a frightened rabbit.

"I have said as much as I ought," he rejoined testily. "But this much I will add: if you remain in Germany, the consequences to you may be disagreeable. Even dangerous, perhaps."

He mentioned no name, but I knew what he meant. He was warning me against "der Stelze," the second warning, within twenty-four hours, I had received against this enigmatic figure. A sensation of despair suddenly assailed me, the sort of feeling some people have in a tunnel or one of those slimy, stalactite caves which tourists are dragged to see—claustrophobia, don't the doctors call it? I felt as though unseen hands were weaving a web about me, an intricate mesh which was slowly but surely closing in to stifle me. I had a vision of the man with the clubfoot as a great, hairy spider, obese and horrible, crawling laboriously, menacingly, athwart the web he was spinning about me, patient and implacable. And I was afraid, afraid....

At that moment, I think, I had fully decided to take the Judge's advice and return straight to England. I picked up the envelope.

"Oh, all right," I said listlessly. "But I can't accept all this money, Herr Doktor. Six month's salary is excessive. You

are far too generous."

An immense relief appeared in his face. He beamed through his glasses, and coming over, put his arm about me and patted my shoulder. "Not at all, not at all," he declared. "It is the least we could do, my dear. We are greatly in your debt, Olifia. You have brought the sunshine back to our house and made my wife so happy...." With a deeply perplexed air he rubbed his eyebrows. "Weiss der Teufel, what she's going to say!" He took my two hands in his. "Think kindly of us, when you are once more in your own country," he said very earnestly. "We ... we have loved you, Olifia, and I am ashamed to have to treat you thus. Aber..." He broke off and hunched up his shoulders in a forlorn shrug. "I have telephoned for my wife," he went on. "She is on her way here now. I have been called to Wiesenfeld"—Wiesenfeld is the large town nearest Schlitz—"but I shall see Lucy before I leave. And I shall telegraph your sister to expect you tomorrow evening in London. You will, perhaps, explain matters to her when you see her. As I shall not be back from Wiesenfeld to-night, I will say good-bye to you now." He hesitated. "I shall ask permission to embrace you, Olifia...."

I couldn't help it: my eyes filled with tears. The simple little Judge had always been kind to me. I stooped to him, for I was by half a head the taller, and he solemnly kissed my cheek. Then he stepped back and blew his nose loudly. "There's a receipt in the envelope," he announced in a mournful voice.

I signed the docket he had prepared and went to my room to pack. I never saw Dr. von Hentsch again....

Half an hour later my dear Lucy Varley came to me in my little green and white bedroom, all littered with my preparations for departure. "My dear, my dear," she cried, as she took me in her arms, "I don't know what I'm going to do without you! Oh, these men and their wretched politics! It's at moments like this that I realise that Germany is no country for a woman. I've had to get used to it, and it hasn't always been so easy. But this is the hardest blow of all."

She plumped down on my bed, her fat face all wrinkled with dismay.

"They object to an Englishwoman being here right alongside their old Castle," she explained. "We're in Germany, and I guess they have the right. You don't want to feel sore with Dr. von Hentsch, honey. People in Berlin are very jumpy about the international situation just now, he tells me. If it comes to a war between Austria and these wretched Servians, Russia will never stand for it, he says, and that would mean the French and, maybe, you British as well, being dragged in."

"Who is this lame man who's been making all the fuss?" I demanded.

"I don't know," she answered frankly. "My husband didn't tell me. And when Fritz von Hentsch doesn't tell me a thing, I just don't ask. Some time or other every woman who marries a Prussian official has to learn that lesson. But I can tell you his name: it's Grundt, Dr. Adolf Grundt...."

"Is he in the police or what?"

"I haven't any idea. But he's some one high up, mighty high up, or my husband would never have let you go, child. I can tell you that."

"What became of this Englishman who escaped?" I asked. "Did they catch him again?" And I told her about the blood-stained collar which the clubfooted man had shown me in the garden.

Frau von Hentsch shuddered. "My husband knows, I think," she answered; "but he hasn't told me. Something happened in the garden last night, but what it was I have no idea. Since they won't let you stay on here," she added, "I suppose it means that they've recaptured this poor creature. Or that he's dead. Unless, of course, there are other English spies imprisoned in the Schloss...."

I felt my pulses quicken. I bent down over my open trunk so as to hide my face as I asked, as nonchalantly as I could contrive: "He was a spy, then?"

"Dr. von Hentsch calls him a political prisoner. But I guess that's just a polite way of saying the same thing...."

So much for Grundt's stupid lie, I thought...!

"A great many queer things go on in this country that nobody knows anything about," Frau von Hentsch proceeded. "The discipline is wonderful. If the word goes forth that a certain scandal is to be hushed up, well, it's as if it never had been, and that's all there is to it, I'll say. With the exception of Major von Ungemach I don't believe a soul in this town knew that an Englishman was interned in the Castle. Dr. von Hentsch certainly didn't, or I feel sure he would have made difficulties about your staying on here. This affair is one of their secrets, and a mighty big secret, judging by the almighty rumpus they've made about it. It's not healthy for foreigners to get mixed up in these things. That's why Dr. von Hentsch is anxious to get you back home as quickly as possible."

There by my open trunk, a crepe-de-chine nightdress in my hand, I fell a-musing. Once more that staccato whisper was in my ear: "*If anything should happen to me, can I rely on you to redeem a ghastly folly of mine?*"

"If anything should happen to me..."

In all the fog of mystery that imprisoned me, was not the only tangible feature looming up through the gloom the fact that Major Abbott was out of the running, either back in his fortress cell, or deep in a nameless grave? And he had entrusted me with the redemption of his honour, the good name he had left behind him in Berlin where, so be it I had the pluck to defy the lame man and his unspoken threats, I might, with luck, carry out my mission between trains.

If I took the night train I should reach Berlin on the morrow, which was Tuesday. A little dash of courage, and an hour on the following morning, should see my mission accomplished. I reckoned on having enough time between trains to retrieve the envelope and deliver it to Mr. Joseph Bale, of 97 Tauben-Strasse—the names and addresses my little man had given me were firmly fixed in my memory. And did I miss the noonday train for London, there was one in the evening I could take. On reflection, my mission seemed simple. And yet, when I thought of "der Stelze"...

It would be more prudent, I knew, to wash my hands of the whole affair and spend the few hours I should have in Berlin with Molly Transome, to whom, over breakfast, I would explain my change of plan. But Daddy, sprung from a long line of Empire-builders, always bade me avoid the easy thing. Most of the trouble in my life has been due to my trying to follow that stout-hearted counsel. And so, too, this time it was to befall...

"I declare you're not listening to a word I say," Frau von Hentsch's voice, gently reproachful, cut across my meditation. "Why, child, you look as though your thoughts were miles away..."

"They were," I told her, "I was thinking of my journey..."

But not, merciful Heaven—for I still groped in darkness—of what that journey was to bring forth!

56

I am kissed by a nice young man and make an alarming discovery

Under the frigid beams of the arcs the long Berlin train stood at the platform. At that late hour Schlatz station was almost deserted, and so quiet that, as I followed the sleepy attendant into the compartment he allotted me in the single Schlafwagen, I could hear the engine's hoarse and rhythmic panting beat upon the still night air.

A certain stealthy hush about the sleeping-car suggested that my fellow-passengers were already asleep. Only one other person besides me joined the train at Schlatz, a nondescript German in a mustard-coloured overcoat, who looked like a commercial traveller. He was given the berth next to mine.

There was no one to see me off. Frau von Hentsch wanted to come, but I would not let her. Having made up my mind to deceive her, I was feeling pretty badly about it; and I was afraid of my resolution weakening under the ordeal of a prolonged station farewell. I bought a ticket to London, as I was going to register my heavy luggage through to Victoria: I had only my dressing-case with me in the carriage. The ticket allowed me to break my journey at Berlin if I wished.

The attendant had returned, and I was thinking about going to bed when from the outside an enormous sheaf of pink roses was pressed against the window. A signet ring rapped upon the glass. I let it down and saw Rudi von Linz. The sight of him reminded me of how lonely I was feeling. His bright and boyish face looked rather white: but perhaps it was only the effect of the ghastly, mauvish light.

"Olivia," he cried breathlessly, "I was so afraid I'd miss you! I heard only just now at the Officers' Casino that you were leaving." His voice was reproachful. "I wasn't sure you'd want me to come and say good-bye, as you never let me know you were going away..."

"I'm sorry, Rudi," I answered, genuinely enough, for I had always liked him tremendously, "but, honestly, it wasn't my fault. I had barely time to get my packing done and catch the train..."

"But what's the hurry?" he demanded, "I thought you weren't going to Berlin until Friday...?"

"Haven't you heard what's happened?"

"No..."

I looked at him inquiringly; but his face was blankly ignorant.

"Then how did you know I was leaving to-night?"

"One of the mess waiters told me. I gave him a note to take round to you, and he said you were going back to England by the Berlin train to-night. He'd heard it up at the Kommandanten-Haus, it appears,"—I remembered that Franziska was walking out with one of the waiters at the Casino. "I came straight to the station. I stopped only to wake up the florist and get you a few flowers. I'm going to bring them into the carriage. We've got lots of time...."

He whipped round so suddenly that he cannoned into a man who was mooning up and down the platform after the manner of people waiting for a train to start. I saw that it was my neighbour in the mustard-coloured overcoat. With a muttered apology, Rudi raced down the train and burst tempestuously into my compartment.

"Oh, beautiful Olivia," he exclaimed—that, by the way, was what he had always called me—"if you only knew what a supreme disaster this is! Here, take your flowers! In the night that is bearing you away from me they shall tell you of my despair and whisper very quietly in your ear, perhaps, what I never had the courage to tell you myself!"

Spoken by Bill Bradley, or any other man of my own race, this flowery speech would have sounded preposterous. But as this charming, eager boy—he was only twenty-two—handsome and gallant in his trim uniform, uttered it, it rang so genuine that I was touched.

He gave me the roses which, nestling in their cincture of damp maidenhair fern, filled the compartment with their fragrance. I was never to inhale the scent of roses again without thinking of poor Rudi and that night at Schlatz station.

I buried my face in the blooms. "They're adorable, my dear. Every time I see them during the night, they'll remind me of you. But we must give the poor darlings some water...."

I let down the wash-basin, filled it, and placed the bouquet there. When I turned round I saw the boy with his hands outstretched towards me. He had flung aside his high-crowned uniform cap, and his crisp, flaxen hair shone like fine gold under the light. He took my two hands in his and kissed them, then made me sit down beside him on the narrow bed.

"What's happened?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "There's been this fuss up at the Schloss about the Englishman escaping..."

"Englishman, did you say?"

"Yes. Didn't you know?"

Rudi shook his head. "All we heard was that one of the prisoners got out, and that this ass of an Ungemach had lost his job...."

"He's been retired from the Army!"

The boy stared at me in astonishment. "Then you know more about it than I do. Poor devil! Between ourselves, Olivia, the battalion commander sent for all us officers to the orderly-room this afternoon and forbade us to speak about the matter. But, Um Gottes Willen, what's it got to do with you?"

"It seems they object to an English subject living so close to the prison."

"They? Who's they?"

"A man called Grundt, Adolf Grundt. Who is he, Rudi?"

My companion shook his head. "Never heard of him. Is he from the Corps Command?"

"No. He's a civilian."

Rudi's lip curled. "A policeman, *was*?"

"He seems very important. Dr. von Hentsch paid me six months salary and advised me to go back to England at once, or the consequences might be disagreeable."

The boy looked at me rather strangely, as I thought, and did not speak for a moment. Then he groaned aloud. "What am I going to do without my beautiful Olivia, will you tell me that?" he declaimed tragically. "Only you have rendered my life endurable in this damned, dull hole. It's enough to make a fellow want to blow out his brains. And to think that I'm stuck in this thrice-cursed village for another year at least. Unless..."

He broke off and looked up quickly. A shadow fell between us and the platform lights outside. It was my neighbour of the sleeper passing along the corridor to his berth.

"You're too hard on Schlatz," I said. "I think it's a dear little place. And the people are charming."

Rudi made a face. "You say that because you've never seen Berlin...."

The officers at Schlatz were always raving about Berlin. They talked incessantly of it as the zenith of all their ambitions, with its theatres and restaurants, its dancing places, and its 'Weiber,' its women. The glitter of the Weltstadt dazzled them, middle-class provincials as most of them were. But with Rudi von Linz it was different. He was of good family, and had held a commission for eighteen months in one of the regiments of Foot Guards in garrison in the capital. He had never told me the cause of his transfer to the Line, and I had never asked him; but Sonia von Wiltsche confided to me once that Master Rudi had lost more money than he could afford at *écarté* and had been banished to the infantry at Schlatz as a punishment.

There was a pause. "I suppose," said Rudi slowly, "that you must go straight through to London?"

I gave him a quick look; but his face told me nothing.

"I'm afraid so," I replied.

He nodded sombrely. "I never have any luck. Do you know what was in that note I wrote you to-night?"

"Tell me...."

"It was to ask you to give me without fail your address in Berlin before you went away."

"Why?"

He glanced towards the door, then, standing up, peeped cautiously into the corridor. To my surprise he shut the door before coming back to the bed.

"My dear Rudi," I laughed, "are you sure it's quite proper?"

He jerked his head in the direction of the adjoining compartment. "Solche Frechheit! The fellow who has the berth next door was out there in the corridor listening to every word we say."

The incident was to recur to me later. But at the moment it made little impression on my mind, for your average German bourgeois, especially when travelling, is the most pestilentially inquisitive creature alive.

Rudi glanced at his wrist. "We have five minutes left. Listen, Olivia, I'm going to tell you a secret. I've got to go up to Berlin on duty to-morrow."

"Oh, Rudi!" I exclaimed.

He nodded glumly. "I may be there for a week, and I meant to give you such a good time. I had it all planned out. One day I was going to take you to lunch at the Bristol—it's very chic and amusing there; and afterwards drive you round and show you the Kaiser's Palace and all the sights. Then we'd have done a *thé dansant* at one or other of the hotels, the Adlon or the Esplanade, and dined, perhaps, one night at the Wintergarten on the terrace—that's the big music-hall, you know, with a tremendous blue roof like the night-sky, all dotted with stars. And, of course, we'd have had a grand bummel some evening round the night restaurants, the Palais de Danse, the Mascotte, the Gala—I know them every one...."

"My dear, it sounds entrancing!"

His eyes sought mine pleadingly. "Can't we fix it? I shall be in Berlin by dinner-time to-morrow evening. Why not stay over and dine with me?"

I was silent for a little spell, thinking. The prospect of being given a whirl round Berlin by Rudi was certainly attractive. It would be a last pleasant remembrance to take back to the dreaded monotony of my life at home.

"I might," I said at last.

With a sort of boyish glee he flung his arms about me.

"Olivia, you're a darling!"

"Behave yourself, Rudi, you're squashing my frock!" I reproved him. "If I agree to stay over a day, you're not to tell a soul, do you hear? And particularly not the von Hentsches. They're ... they're rather old-fashioned, you know, and they'd be horrified at the idea of my going round Berlin with you alone."

Rudi began to laugh. "They'd be worse than horrified if they knew that you and I were going to bummel until daylight...."

I shook my head at him. "Now, Rudi," I said, "I didn't promise that...."

He caught my hands. "Beautiful Olivia, you wouldn't be so unkind. The Palais de Danse doesn't get going until after midnight. You shall see how amusing it is. You can easily stop over: what does one day matter?"

"And the disagreeable consequences that Dr. von Hentsch spoke of?"

"Unsinn! Twenty-four hours won't make any difference. The main thing was for you to leave Schlatz...."

I drew my hands away. It was hard to refuse Rudi anything. "I shall make no promises." I glanced out of the window. "We shall be starting in another minute. Hadn't you better be getting back to the platform?"

"Not until I know where we are to meet. Where shall you put up in Berlin?"

"At the Continental. Do you know it?"

"Of course. May I fetch you there at eight o'clock?"

I nodded. The adventure began to please me. It looked as though I should have a full time in Berlin. "I've registered my heavy luggage through to London. I shall have to come as I am. Does it matter?"

"Not in the least. In Berlin we are not so stiff as you are in London." He stood up. "Beautiful Olivia, you don't know how happy you've made me. I shall be eating my heart out until I see you again." He put his arms on my shoulders. "Auf wiedersehen, my dear. You promise me it's 'auf wiedersehen'?"

"I promise," I said....

Yes, I let him kiss me. After the strain of the past twenty-four hours I yearned for sympathy; and, seeing him go, I felt suddenly oppressed by the prospect which my journey unfolded. Of course, I wasn't in love with him: he was too young; besides, I had never fallen in love with any man then. But he was youthful and beautiful and compelling. And I gave him back his kiss.

Immediately thereon a harsh voice outside shouted, "Abfahren!" Crying "Auf wiedersehen!" the boy snatched up his cap and gloves and hurried out.

Clanking heavily over the points, the Berlin train bore me away into the Unknown....

As I was going to get up so early, it did not seem worth while undressing. But I had changed into the kimono which I had in my suit-case and, propping up my silver mirror on the little folding table, began to cream my face for the night.

I was wondering about this Floria von Pellegrini, who she was, and how I should gain access to her. She was an opera singer, Major Abbott had said, and he had suggested that, if I called early, pretending to have something to sell, I might succeed in being left alone in the salon long enough to retrieve the envelope from the gramophone cabinet.

Well, the plan sounded all right. But suppose it went wrong? What if the maid—Hedwig, wasn't that her name?—what if Hedwig demanded to see what I was offering for sale and left me on the mat while she went to submit it to her mistress? Obviously, I should have to take some article or other with me....

But what? Wouldn't it have to be something rather luxurious to interest an opera singer? The only thing I could think of belonging to me was my Manila shawl that Daddy gave me; and I shouldn't dream of selling that. Perhaps if I were to put a stiff price on it.... As my fingers mechanically worked the skin-food into my face, I felt a little tremor of excitement gain me. The adventure was beginning to interest me. I was never able to withstand the lure of romance. It must be in the Dunbar blood. Our family is one of those which have helped to lay out the Empire, like a golf professional laying out a course, only instead of putting down greens we have left graves. Ancestors of mine are buried all along the trail of Empire, from that Major Dunbar who was killed with Braddock in America, to my father's elder brother, dead of dysentery, whom Daddy buried at Wady Halfa, on the way up to Khartum with Kitchener. All we have to show for it are some swords on the wall, a few trophies, and a line of medals in a glass case. But, though the last of our branch of the Dunbars is out of the Army List now, I expect the old strain endures.

Daddy used to say that my character was Nature's attempt to compensate her blunder in giving him daughters instead of sons. I should have been a soldier if I had been a boy; for I spent my childhood at Aldershot, so brave, in those pre-

war days, with scarlet and gold, symbols of the blood and glory of Britain's fighting past. I revelled in the perpetual stir of the Lines, the rolling drums, the gay bugles, the musical cavalry calls, the gallant din of Grand Reveille that, on summer mornings, would pluck me, a little maid, from my bed, and at night the skirling pipes of Daddy's Highlanders at Tattoo, and, in the ensuing silence, the high notes of the Last Post wailing out of the dark. When I was not yarning with old MacTavish, Daddy's soldier servant who had seen the square break at Tel-el-Kebir, I was browsing among the books in the study, hunting adventure, always adventure.

And now, for the first time in my life, adventure, a Secret Service adventure, had come my way. As the train went roaring through the night, a flutter of pride stirred me at the thought that Fate had made me the comrade of my gallant little Major. I had a curious feeling that with me rode in escort dead-and-gone Dunbars who, in their day, had set out on missions far lonelier and, as it seemed to me then, more desperate, than that towards which the Berlin express was bearing me.

I wanted to prove myself worthy of the family record; but my heart sank when I thought of that clubfooted man....

I wiped my face clean and put the mirror away. I left my suit-case unlocked against the morning, but I tucked the glass out of sight, as was my custom when travelling; for once, in a Paris hotel, a silver mirror which I had left exposed to view in a valise had been stolen. Then, making sure that I had bolted the door, I got into bed and turned out the light.

It was broad daylight when I awoke. A knocking at the door aroused me. I heard a key grate in the lock. The attendant appeared with a tray.

"Donnerwetter," he remarked cheerfully, "the gnädiges Fräulein sleeps sound. I thought you were never going to hear me. So, we reach Berlin in thirty-five minutes, and I have made you a cup of coffee."

I looked out of the window. The train was rushing through a dreary region of sand and pine and water, the landscape bathed in the sickly light of a clouded and unfriendly morning. I drank up my coffee, and it did me good. I sprang out of bed and began to dress.

When I opened my suit-case to take out my toilet things, I found my hand-glass lying on the top. The discovery sent me instantly to the table where I had left my purse with the money, my entire available capital, which Dr. von Hentsch had given me. The purse was as I had left it, and the money intact.

But when I examined my suit-case more closely it was to discover that everything in it was topsy-turvy. Nothing appeared to be missing. I realised at once that some one must have visited my compartment in the night and rifled my suit-case. The attendant had unlocked my bolted door from the outside; therefore, armed with the proper key, anybody else could have gained admission. And worn out as I was, I had slept dreamlessly, heavily. But who? Why...?

With a horrid sense of misgiving I suddenly thought of my neighbour in the next berth, the man in the yellow overcoat, whom Rudi had surprised eaves-dropping....

57

I arrive in Berlin and score the first trick

I was fully alive to the gravity of my discovery. Blankly I sat down again upon the bed, the mirror in my hand, while ripple on ripple of chill, nauseating fear swept over me.

Inexorably train rocked on Berlinwards. Culverts roared thunderously beneath our wheels: spick-and-span stations whizzed frantically past in a dazzle of black and white. A pale sun came out and peeped at its reflection in the irrigation channels that gleamed like knives among the low-lying fields. Like the mists of morning melting on the steaming plain,

the fog which had hidden the truth from my eyes suddenly seemed to lift, and I saw the peril of my position stand out as clear-cut and hard as the telegraph posts that flashed by.

Whoever had broken into my berth, my neighbour or another, I knew what he was after. He was looking for the blue envelope, this mysterious pledge of Major Abbott's honour which I had fondly imagined to be a secret between my little man and me: that, or some indication of its hiding-place. Grundt's dramatic arrival, von Ungemach's disgrace, Dr. von Hentsch's inexplicable surrender to his browbeating visitor—all these things had told me that the Major was a prisoner of mark. But, within an hour of his escape, he had been recaptured. Alive or dead, he was back in custody almost before the racket of the alarm had died away.

What had puzzled me all along was Grundt's precipitate arrival at Schlatz. This highly-placed official, before whom everybody trembled, had come a long way: the grimy chauffeur asleep at the wheel, the dusty car, showed as much—if from Berlin, as seemed likely, a motor journey of many hours. Why? To scarify the wretched von Ungemach? To root about in the Kommandanten-Haus garden for traces of a fugitive no longer at large?

Absurd. Not Major Abbott, I realised it now, but the errand which had brought him to Germany, was the important thing. It was the mission, not the man, that mattered. If the news of the prisoner's brief dash for liberty had brought Grundt post-haste to Schlatz, it was because "der Stelze" was aware of the existence of the document which I had so blithely undertaken to retrieve.

That Grundt did not know that the blue envelope was deposited in Berlin, his rush to Schlatz and the raid on my suit-case indicated. But he could scarcely have believed that Major Abbott had contrived to retain possession of the document while incarcerated at the Schloss. Might it not rather have been that, on learning of the prisoner's escape, Grundt feared that the Englishman had used his little hour of freedom, if not to communicate verbally to an accomplice the substance of the document, at least to tell him where it was concealed? As this accomplice, I, the prisoner's fellow-countrywoman, alone, on the night of the escape, in a house abutting on his place of custody, was, of course, the most clearly-marked object of suspicion. Hence Grundt's cross-examination of me, hence his veiled threats, hence his demand that I should return to England forthwith.

That he left nothing to chance, "der Stelze," the rifling of my luggage showed; and I had the very definite notion that he would not let his suspicions rest until he had seen me safe back to my own country. If I lingered in Berlin, I might expect to be shadowed. This, I divined, was the real meaning of Dr. von Hentsch's plain hint to me not to tarry in Germany....

Throughout my life I have always tried to face facts as they are. Now, as I dressed, I faced these. They terrified me. If I were going to carry out my promise to my brave little man—and, the worst of it was, I knew I should have to—I might reasonably count on finding myself confronted by this ruthless and sinister cripple.

There was a chance, a slight chance, but no more substantial, as it seemed to my disturbed imagination, than a wisp of straw whirled into the air by the passage of the train, that my mission might yet prove to be as simple as, in my *naïveté*, I at first had figured it. This Floria von Pellegrini was a friend of Major Abbott's—had he not called her by her Christian name?—and he had secreted the document in her drawing-room presumably because it was the most unlikely place in which Grundt would look for it. Unless, of course, my little man had been surprised and had thrust the envelope away in the first hiding-place that occurred to him. Anyway, Grundt clearly did not know where to find the paper, so there was always the possibility that, could I but elude him, I might fulfil my errand unimpeded.

But I had a presentiment—I think it must have subconsciously oppressed me that evening when he challenged me in the garden—that I and the man with the clubfoot were destined to meet again....

And so, weighed down with this dull foreboding, I came to Berlin.

My neighbour of the mustard-coloured overcoat—a hideous garment it was, curry yellow, with a green stripe!—was in the corridor outside his compartment when I left mine, such a commonplace German traveller, with his pince-nez,

his sage-green hat with a feather stuck in the band, his umbrella, and his imitation leather suit-case, that I began to ask myself whether, after all, I had not been mistaken. In any case, he paid not the slightest attention to me and, as soon as the train had come to rest in the big, bare station, sprang smartly to the ground and was quickly lost to view in the crowd on the platform.

Perhaps I was obsessed by my fears, but my first impression of Berlin was unfavourable enough. The station where I landed lay in a dreary working-class section of the city and, even at that early hour—it was not yet seven o'clock—its bleak and sordid hall seethed with swarms of pallid, shabby workers, jostling their way, grim and silent, to and from the trains. These determined, unsmiling hordes depressed me, fresh from the sleepy, pleasant atmosphere of Schlatz. The blue-bloused porter who went in search of the trunk I had registered was friendly enough, but the policeman at the entrance, who thrust a metal disc into my hand, screamed rudely at me: "Do you want a cab or don't you?" when I asked him what the disc was for.

For me he typified Berlin as I was afterwards to know it, that Schutzmann, squat and gross and obese, with a spiked helmet perched above a purplish, irascible face, and a curved sword and a huge revolver strapped about his vast blue middle. He had little, angry eyes, and seemed to bristle menace like one of those frightful images of malevolent Japanese deities. When at length my nice porter appeared with the trunk, the policeman, for some reason not apparent to me—for I found his clipped Berlin jargon almost unintelligible—rounded on the inoffensive creature with a flood of squealing abuse. The porter heard him in submissive silence, then took me to my cab.

I was to learn that Berlin, like every other capital, possesses a beauty of its own. But as it revealed itself to me on that grey and sunless morning in the uncompromising shabbiness of its northern quarters, I found it a dour and soulless place, without charm, without character, without identity. Paris lingers in the memory, with its first faint tang of burning wood, London with its strong reek of smoke; but Berlin had not even an odour of its own to lend it individuality.

Discipline, that rigid Prussian discipline which so wonderingly I had just seen in action at Schlatz, seemed to be the keynote of this hard, clean city. Everything struck me as being standardised: the broad, asphalted streets, the gaunt tenement houses, the clanging trams, the drab motor-buses, even the droves of meanly-dressed toilers hurrying in two well-regulated streams along the pavements. To my eyes one corner of these straight, endless streets, laid out in parallels on the American plan, was exactly like another, just as one man in his ugly, ill-fitting clothes resembled his fellow.

* * * * *

In the first alarm over my discovery in the train, my idea had been, on arriving in Berlin, to drive straight to my friends, the Transomes, who had an apartment in Viktoria-Strasse. But Geoff Transome was one of the secretaries at the American Embassy, and now that I had made up my mind to see this thing through, it seemed scarcely fair to run the risk of implicating him in an affair which might cause him unpleasantness in his official capacity. Not that Geoff would hesitate to come to my aid, if needs be. Though he liked Germans well enough, he had little use for Prussian militarism; and when I used to see him on his leaves in London, he would often rag about Prussian stiffness. I had a notion that I should find his easy-going, uncompromising Americanism a healthy tonic after my experience of the Prussian military machine. But it must be after I had carried out my mission. I would spend a jolly day with him and Molly, who had been at Miss Fairfield's school with me, until it was time to meet Rudi.

Accordingly, on leaving the station I had told the venerable old gentleman in the glazed white top-hat, who piloted the little horse-cab I had chartered, to drive me to the Continental. But now, as we clip-clopped at a leisurely trot over the asphalt, it suddenly occurred to me that my inquisitive neighbour of the sleeping-car might well have overheard me telling Rudi von Linz my address in Berlin. In that event, no need for him of the curry-hued overcoating to shadow me. He had only to go to the Continental and await me there. And then I thought of Kemper's.

On their rare visits to Berlin, the von Hentsches always stayed at Kemper's Hotel in the Mauer-Strasse, an old-fashioned "family house," mainly patronised by the small Prussian nobility. My dear Lucy Varley, whose American tastes ran more naturally in the direction of the Adlon or the Esplanade, had often told me laughingly about Kemper's, with its aged servants, its mirrors and red plush, and its antiquated lift. ("*I can tell you, child, that in America the trees come up quicker than that old elevator!*")

But generations of von Hentsches had made Kemper's their Berlin headquarters, and so, to please her husband, she put up with its manifold drawbacks. In my dilemma Kemper's appeared to me as quiet and, since the Herr Doktor was essentially frugal-minded, probably cheap. I knew that the mention of his name would ensure me a friendly reception; but on reflection I decided it would be more prudent to say nothing about him, in case of awkward inquiries.

I was about to give the cabman the address, when it struck me that, were Grundt really interested in my movements, this infernal Prussian system of cab-discs at the stations would enable him without great difficulty to pick up my trail. So I changed my mind and, plucking my ancient jarvey by the sleeve, bade him stop the next disengaged motor-cab he saw.

He pulled in to the kerb and stopped by the simple process of jamming on his foot-brake, so that his unfortunate horse slithered with its four feet outstretched on the slippery asphalt.

"What for?" the cabman demanded, turning round on his box to regard me with astonishment.

"Because I'm in a hurry," I explained.

"Don't we go fast enough for you?" he asked.

"No," I told him.

On that he doffed his snowy topper which, with its curly brim, lent him quite a raffish, Regency air, and scratched his grizzled poll. "Merkwürdig!" he murmured. "For fifteen years I've driven Hermine here"—he indicated his wretched steed with his whip—"and no one's ever complained before. Want one of those stinking motors, do you? You'll have to pay me what's shown on the clock, you know...."

I cut short the discussion by signalling myself to a passing taxi. I paid off my aged charioteer, who looked like Father Time beside the smart young chauffeur, my luggage was transferred, and five minutes later I was being conducted, with extreme deference, to my room at Kemper's.

An elderly virgin, with blue veins in her nose, prepared a hot bath for me in a dank and tomb-like chamber. But the water was hot and the towels were clean, and, after changing into a cool grey linen frock, and thoroughly enjoying some delicious coffee and hot rolls in the rather austere Speisesaal, I looked with a more cheerful eye upon Berlin and the errand that had brought me there. My spirits were further raised by a little incident which seemed to show that fortune was working on my side.

As I crossed the hotel vestibule after breakfast, I met the manager. He bowed and said: "Perhaps the gnädiges Fräulein will have the goodness to fill in the police form?"—this is the registration docket which every hotel arrival in Germany has to complete. I was completely taken aback. I had forgotten all about the so-called Anmeldungsschein which, I realised, would immediately set the police on my track. I was wondering whether I dare give a false name when, to my utter relief, the manager went on, "There is no hurry if the Gnädige is pressed for time. It will do when the Fräulein returns."

I breathed again. I should have to stave off the filling in of the form until the last possible moment before my departure for London, I told myself. Meanwhile, I was free to set out on my mission in the full consciousness of having thrown my pursuers off the trail. I felt that I had scored the first trick.

The morning dullness had passed, and the sun was shining brightly when, soon after nine o'clock I left Kemper's. My Spanish shawl, wrapped up in tissue paper, was under my arm. At the entrance of the hotel I paused, as an additional precaution, to survey the street, a discreet thoroughfare of prim banks and stolid public buildings. But my friend of the train was nowhere visible and, as far as I could determine no one followed me when presently I went the length of the street to where, as the hall porter informed me an archway gave upon Unter den Linden.

In the crowded avenue I felt safe. My cleverness in outwitting Grundt's emissary rather tickled my fancy and I was smiling to myself as I took a taxi from the rank opposite the Bristol Hotel, and bade the driver drive me to Hohenzollern-Allee, 305.

Hohenzollern-Allee, 305

The Hohenzollern-Allee was a brand-new street in a brand-new quarter of Berlin. A double row of brand-new trees lined it, and behind them brand-new blocks of flats in an extraordinary jumble of architectural styles, but each as bright and staring as the picture on a child's box of bricks, succeeded one another until the Allee suddenly decided to stop being the city, and frankly became the open country.

The effect of this metamorphosis was to cut off the three-hundreds in their prime. No. 305, as far as I could judge, was one of the last of the houses. Still careful to cover up my tracks, I dismissed the cab a few blocks before my destination and, keeping a keen watch about me, did not proceed on my way until the taxi was out of sight.

But the appearance of the street reassured me. In the bright sunshine it ran its length to where the brown fields swallowed it up, as quiet and deserted as you may find any suburban thoroughfare on a week-day morning. A chauffeur washing his car, and a soldier servant in canvas slops beating a uniform in a front garden, were the only human beings in sight. With rising confidence I came to my goal.

A warm red roof and timbered front, on which two elongated seraphim were depicted, elegantly upholding a scroll inscribed with some appropriate German trope, gave a not displeasing suggestion of old Nuremberg to the architecture of No. 305. But this artistic grouping was promptly arrested by the pompous entrance hall panelled with glittering mirrors, which reflected a positive orgy of marble, crushed-strawberry carpet, and gilt.

The automatic lift bore me to the third floor where, the concierge told me, Frau von Pellegrini occupied the left-hand apartment. A plump blonde, as natty in her dainty cap and apron and short black skirt, as any soubrette of French farce, opened to my ring. This, I told myself, must be Hedwig...

"Nicht zu Haus!" she announced pertly in answer to my inquiry. "What was it, please?"

The augury was excellent, I decided. Nothing suited me better than to find the lady from home. If only I could gain admission to the drawing-room...

"I have a shawl to sell," I exclaimed, "a Spanish shawl...." And, shaking it from its paper, I held it up for the girl to see.

She cooed her admiration. "Gott, ist das reizend...!" Then, taking the shawl from my hands, she draped it about her, turning this way and that to catch her reflection in a long mirror which hung on the wall behind. At last, with a sigh she handed the shawl back to me. Now that she had placed me as a humble suppliant, her manner became at once familiar.

"She's out riding, my little one. And she may not be back for an hour or more. D'you want to leave it?"

"Oh," said I, "I couldn't do that!"

"Just as you like. Only I handle all Madame's money affairs, you may as well know. *Also...*" She made as if to shut the door.

I knew what she meant. My talks with Franziska, who had been in service in one of the rich patrician families of Hamburg, had taught me something of Continental servants and their ways. My gold piece was in Hedwig's hand before she could carry out her intention. "If I get my price from Madame, there'll be another twenty marks for you," I said. "But I can't leave the shawl, for I need the money at once. Couldn't I come in and wait?"

With a gratified smile the maid stowed my tip in her purse. "One has to live, nicht wahr?" she remarked, with an air half apologetic. "And it's little enough I get out of Madame, even when she remembers to pay me my wages. If it weren't for her gentlemen friends, here and there.... And it's not an easy place, you know. She's a proper handful, you can take it from me. Temperament, that's her trouble. You know what these artistes are." She sighed. "Gott, if I were only as beautiful as she is! Or rich! It comes to the same thing. You can only afford to be temperamental if you're one of the two, and that's a fact!" With a gesture of the head she beckoned me in. "Quietly!" she enjoined, a finger to her lips.

She closed the front door gently, and led the way through the hall, across a soft green carpet which deadened all sound, to a pair of white sliding doors, with the upper panels of glass curtained in green silk. Her hushed air intrigued me. But then I reflected that probably her mistress was still in bed and asleep. No doubt the statement that she had gone out riding was an excuse to put off inconvenient callers....

The girl slid back one side of the white doors, and a long, dim room appeared. Closed shutters darkened the bright sunshine of the street, and curtains of grass-green silk filtered the light softly upon gilt furniture of the formal French sort, a long, black piano, and sundry laurel wreaths, tied up with ribbons, that hung round the walls. The air was very faintly scented. I thrilled to the realisation that I was in Floria von Pellegrini's drawing-room, and yes! there in a corner, between a rack of opera scores and a Buhl console, stood a leggy contraption of dark mahogany, a bogus Sheraton affair, the gramophone, no less!

I had reached my objective at last!

Hedwig was at the windows, opening the curtains, throwing back the shutters. Her movements were swift and quiet. The room was flooded with light. I looked about me. Clearly, green was the favourite colour of the lady of temperament. The walls were washed in a neutral tone of it, somewhere between verdigris and apple, but the paint-work of doors and windows was grass-green like the curtains, and of the same hue was the thick pile carpet which covered the entire floor with, here and there, an Oriental rug spread out. There was a broad, green divan piled high with enormous, gaudy cushions, emerald, orange and gold; and pale green shades, of Chinese shape and design, screened the lights. After nightfall, with the green curtains drawn, and the Chinese lamps spilling a soft green radiance, I could imagine the room intimate and charming. But, bathed as it was in the dazzling sunshine, its air of exotic luxury, like its subtle, clinging perfume, struck stalely, as it were, upon the senses, and in the glory of the summer morning the effect was tawdry, even as the cluster of strangely-striped purple orchids, that stood in a crystal vase upon the piano, seemed tawdry by contrast with the tall basket of white roses that neighboured them.

"So!" said Hedwig, as she turned to go, "wait there a little till Madame comes! And, hören Sie, whatever you do, don't stir from this room or make any noise! You've got to keep still as a mouse, d'you understand?"

Her manner was strangely impressive awed almost. Once more she put a finger to her lips, the door slid to silently, and I was alone....

The moment for action had arrived. My heart was thumping with excitement, but I was resolved to do nothing to jeopardise the miraculous good fortune which had so far accompanied me. The maid might come back. I glanced at my watch. I would give myself two minutes to obviate this possibility. In the meantime, I reconnoitred the position.

In the wall opposite to where the gramophone stood guarding its secret a door was set. That door worried me. Obviously, it communicated with the interior of the apartment: with Frau von Pellegrini's bedroom, as like as not. I crossed to this door and listened. Not a sound. Longingly I regarded the dulled silver handle. The apartment was sunk in silence. Dare I try the door? The risk, I decided, was too great. I consulted my watch. My two minutes were up. Taking my courage in both hands, I approached the gramophone.

It was of the familiar cabinet type, with the revolving disc and the sound-box above, and below a cupboard with three shelves, one above the other, to hold the records. I dropped to my knees before the cabinet and, lifting out the records stacked in an untidy pile on the topmost shelf, swiftly explored the sides and back of the niche with my fingers. Nothing! I repeated the process with the second shelf. Again the same negative result!

Remained one shelf, the third and last, cluttered up, like the others, with an untidy pile of dusty discs. As I gathered

them together, I was conscious of a wild hope that the envelope might not be there, for that would mean that my friend the Major had forestalled me and was alive and at liberty. For myself, too, I was secretly praying that my mission might thus prematurely end. Obsessed as I was, by a dull premonition of evil, I had the sensation that hitherto my undertaking had run all too smoothly, and I dreaded what the future might bring forth.

I had the records in my hand, and was in the act of depositing them upon the carpet at my feet when, to my intense alarm, I heard a movement in the adjoining room. There was a muffled thud and then a stealthy, padded footfall as of some one in slippers moving about on a soft carpet. I could guess what those quiet sounds signified. The temperamental Floria had left her bed and was getting up. Any second now I might expect to be interrupted.

But, having advanced thus far, I made up my mind, at whatever risk, to go through with the job. I put down the records and plunged my hand into the cabinet. The narrow shelf cramped my fingers and, as I groped, I distinctly heard, above the thudding of my heart in my ears, that stealthy footfall in the adjoining room. But now the footsteps were crossing the floor towards the door at my back.

And then my fingers slipped on some glazed surface, on something that rustled and crackled at the touch, and I drew out a long blue envelope.

Without noticing more than that it was sealed and unaddressed, I thrust the envelope down the front of my frock, crammed the records back on their shelf, and even as, very slowly and quietly, the door in the wall swung back, sprang for the green divan where I had put down my belongings. Too late I observed, with a sense of dire dismay, that in my haste I had omitted to close the doors of the cabinet.

The divan occupied a corner beside one of the two windows of the salon, and was so placed that the door in opening hid the intruder from my view. As the door was pushed deliberately inward, I took the shawl from its paper and stood up, intending to place myself between the door and the gramophone, in the hope of screening the evidence of my carelessness until I should have the opportunity of rectifying it. But I remained rooted to the spot, for there, in the doorway, instead of the woman I had expected to see, a fat young man in a dressing-gown was standing.

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Enter the Pellegrini

For a full minute he remained there in the doorway, blinking at me out of little, puffed-up eyes, that were like currants sunk in a suet pudding. It was apparent that he had only just awakened from sleep, for his hair was all tousled, and the lower part of a purple crepe-de-chine sleeping suit projected below his dressing-gown, a flaming affair of green and orange flowered silk with wide sleeves. His bare feet were thrust into a pair of scarlet Turkish slippers.

Presently he groaned aloud and pressed his fingers to his temples. With some disgust I observed that he wore a gold chain bangle about his right wrist. "Lord," he said in German, "my head!" Then he came into the room and, going to a side table, poured himself out a glass of mineral water from a bottle that stood on a tray, and drank it off. He took a cigarette from a silver box on the piano, lit it, blew out a cloud of smoke, and turned to me.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded, and promptly closed his eyes, as though he had forgotten his question.

All my life I have abominated two things in a man: fat and a monocle. In both respects the creature in the gorgeous dressing-gown fell under my inhibition. He was that object of ignominy, a fat, *young* man, not more than twenty-five at the outside, sleek as a firkin of butter, and as full of curves as a Cubist drawing. But for all the grotesqueness of his avoirdupois, there was nothing loutish about him: on the contrary, he bore himself with a certain air of distinction marked by an utter absence of self-consciousness most unusual in the German male. I had a feeling that he represented a type; but in what walk of life I could not determine.

I remained silent, and on that he opened his eyes, made a grimace, and his monocle dangled, swinging, from its string. Without his eyeglass he looked less vapid; but he had, below a small blond moustache, a loose and sensual mouth, and a tip-tilted nose lent his face a horribly gross, snouting expression. This, I told myself, must be one of the "gentleman friends" I had heard of from Hedwig.

"Where's the Pellegrini?" the young man demanded.

"Out riding, the maid said."

"So!" He dropped down upon the couch. His eye fell upon those tell-tale doors of the gramophone cabinet. "Hullo, who's been playing the gramophone?"

I went over and closed the doors. "I was just looking over the records," I explained.

Roguishly he wagged his head. "Don't you ever play the gramophone in this house! I gave the Pellegrini that machine, and she's never opened it. She hates tinned music, our Floria, and what she hates, she won't have. She hates me, sometimes..." He grinned expansively, as though to ask, "What do you think of that?" When he smiled, his face, pink and round and shining, creased itself into innumerable little mountains of fat, from which the sun struck high lights, like peaks in a landscape of lard.

"You're not German!" he observed suddenly.

He caught me unawares, and, not knowing whether to contradict him or not, I murmured rather feebly: "What makes you say that?"

"Because our German women are big and strong, and *na...*"—his plump hands outlined a rotund gesture—"you're too thin, like an Englishwoman. You're English, that's what you are." He did not give me the chance to deny it, but went on immediately: "London Kolossal!" He broke into passable English. "Many times I haf been there. I know your Ritz, your Saffoy. I haf been to the Der-r-by, to Ascot. Chic, hein, Donnerwetter? Fine horses and lovely ladies: funny, how they go always together! Your English girls are nice, too! I had, oh, a colossal success with the English misses. They found me very attractive. Do you, also, find me attractive?"

He turned the most engaging leer upon me. If I had been less nervous, I should have felt inclined to laugh. But, having secured the blue envelope, I was on fire to get away. I wanted to tell him that he looked like a performing pig in that monstrous dressing-gown of his; but I mastered my feelings sufficiently to give him the answer he undoubtedly expected.

With perfect gravity he nodded. "Yes, all women tell me this. They find me unwiderstehlich—how do you say that in English...?"

"Irresistible?" I suggested, but without enthusiasm.

"Irresistible, that's the word. It is a great bother to me that I am so irresistible. I am not to blame. But it makes our Floria very angry sometimes, and then she hates me. Pfu! Deibel!" He passed his hand tenderly over the back of his head.

While he was speaking, I was conscious that he was mustering me out of his small, dull eyes. His scrutiny made me uncomfortable. I seized upon the lull in his flow of talk to make a determined effort to break away.

"I'm afraid I must be going," I said. "Will you tell Frau von Pellegrini that I'll call another time?"

"Don't be in such a hurry like this," he replied in his quaint English. "What do you want with her? Is she going to hear you sing?"

"No," I told him, "I've brought a shawl to show her. I thought she might buy it..."

I had approached the divan to get my gloves and things. The young man caught my arm. "A shawl? Is that it in your

hand?" He forced me down beside him. "Put it on and I shall tell you how I like it!"

To save argument I did as I was bid. "Entzückend!" exclaimed the fat youth. "With your black hair you are like Carmen!"

I whipped off the shawl and wrapped it up again. "And now I really must be going," I said.

"And leave me all alone? You wouldn't be so cruel. Such pains in the head I had this morning! I was so drunk like a monkey last night. You must keep me company a little longer already. The Pellegrini will be back in a minute...."

"I really must go," I repeated, and tried to stand up.

But his grip on my arm tightened. His wide nostrils twitched and his eyes glittered horribly.

"Don't you want to be nice to me?" he said rather thickly. "Come on, give me a little kiss!"

I tore my arm away and sprang to my feet. I tried to be calm, but I was angry, and frightened too. He jumped up and, darting to the door into the hall, locked it and put the key in his pocket.

"What a fire!" he exclaimed. "What a spirit! Na, I like it so. What a pretty thing you are, my dear!"

So saying, he came prancing across the floor at me, his loose, wet lips pursed up in a fatuous and evil smile.

"Please unlock the door and let me go!" I told him. But he only laughed and made a grab at me. I eluded him and shrank back. But all the time he was driving me into the corner where the divan stood.

And then without warning he sprang at me. I was afraid to cry out; but I dashed my two clenched fists into that flabby and leering face. He imprisoned my hands and slobbered over them. Shuddering at the contact, I tried in vain to tear them free. His snouting face was pressing into mine, while, sick with disgust and horror, I strained away from him, when, without warning, the handle of the locked door was rattled sharply, there was the rapid patter of feet outside, and the next moment Hedwig burst in upon us from the bedroom.

"Highness, Highness," she cried, "the gnädige Frau!"

From the promptness of her intervention it was clear to me that Fräulein Hedwig had been listening at the keyhole. I looked in amazement from her to the fat youth whose face betrayed symptoms of the liveliest alarm. She had called him "Hoheit"—and "Hoheit" in German signifies a Prince of one of the ruling families.

But before his Highness could move, there came a furious rattling of the door-knob, and immediately thereon, from the bedroom, a tall, slim figure in a riding-habit swept down wrathfully upon us.

The moment I set eyes on Floria von Pellegrini I understood why she had chosen green as the colour scheme of her apartment. This woman was the perfect red-blonde. Her hair, or as much of it as appeared from under the brim of her hard black riding-hat, flamed like the heart of a fire, a deep, rich, natural auburn, and she had the creamy, lustrous skin and emerald-green eyes of the type. She was tall and lissom, with a figure of exquisite moulding, a gorgeous, warm creature whose vivid beauty glowed like the brilliant plumage of some brilliant sub-tropical bird.

My relief at her timely intrusion was so immense that I suddenly perceived the humour of the situation. It was, in truth, preposterous. The pair of us were breathing hard like a couple of wrestlers, I with my hat over one eye and my hair coming down; my fat companion, a grotesque object in his gaudy wrapper, pouting like a naughty child, with a scarlet face which, I was delighted to see, bore the mark of my knuckles. The shawl lay on the carpet between us, where it had fallen in the struggle.

The Pellegrini was white with anger.

"So," she cried furiously, "you'd bring your women here, would you? You wouldn't come riding with me, oh no! You

were tired: you'd sleep a little longer! And the instant my back is turned.... What are you doing here?"

Shrilly she rounded on Hedwig, who was standing there with her mouth open.

"I was going to explain to the gnädige Frau," faltered the maid. She pointed to me. "This person brought a shawl for the gnädige Frau to see...." She gathered up the shawl from the ground. "I put her in here to wait. His Highness knows nothing about her...."

The Pellegrini flung me a glittering look. "Is this true?"

But now the Prince stepped forward. "Send Hedwig away, and I'll explain just what happened," he said ingratiatingly.

"Get out of here!" The Pellegrini snapped out the order over her shoulder, her eyes travelling from the fat man to me. Hedwig thrust the shawl into my hands and fled away through the bedroom.

With a meaning glance at me, the Prince laid his hand gingerly on the Pellegrini's sleeve. "Will Flo-Flo be patient and let her Karlchen tell her about the naughty trick he played on her?" he said in a flutey voice.

Angrily she shook his hand away. "More lies, I suppose," she exclaimed, and stamped her foot. At once the fat youth was on his dignity. "I beg you to remember, Floria, that we are not alone!"

She plucked off her hat and flung it with her riding-switch upon the divan. Her hair was glorious and very simply dressed. "I am listening to your Highness," she observed coldly.

He patted her shoulder. "Come now, don't be cross with Karlchen." He flung me an imploring glance. "It was just a joke to make you jealous. I heard you in the hall and locked the door, and ... and..." he fumbled for his words—"na, as I say, it was all a trick. We ... we"—he made an encouraging sign—"we planned it between us. She ... she disarranged her hair on purpose, nicht wahr?" His little eyes, small and furtive, like an elephant's, appealed to me.

Floria threw me the briefest of glances. "Well...?"

But, Prince or no Prince, I was determined he should get no support from me.

"All I know," said I stoutly, "is that this gentleman locked the door and tried to kiss me. And now, if you'll allow me, I'm going." On that I picked up my belongings, and began to set my hat to rights in the mirror over the divan. In the glass I saw the venomous look that came into the Prince's eyes.

"A-ah!" The exclamation that broke from the Pellegrini's lips was like a hiss. "I might have known that no woman was safe from you." She was pacing up and down the floor. "But in my own house, under the eyes of my own maid...." She burst into tears and began to sob with rage. "You ... you ... in your position, you never think of me. You humiliate ... me. Oh, it's infamous!"

The Prince snapped his fingers at me. "Go away!" His fat face was vindictive. He unlocked the door into the hall and flung it wide. As I passed out, Hedwig came running through the vestibule, one hand on her heart, her face as white as paper.

"Grundt!" she gasped.

I was thunderstruck.

They had followed me after all, then, and, having seen me safely inside the flat, had waited while Grundt was fetched. By this time, doubtless, the house was surrounded. And I, who had deemed myself so clever in eluding the tracker, I should be taken red-handed, with the blue envelope on me: under my frock I could feel the stiff paper against my skin.

The alarm my face must have revealed was nothing to the effect of the announcement on the Prince. I turned to find him staring in terror at the maid, his mouth open, and his flabby cheeks quivering like jelly.

I looked at Floria. At Hedwig's cry she had whirled about to face the door. Her rage had left her on the instant, and she stood there, with the tears yet glistening on her lashes, tense and watchful. Wariness was in every line of her beautiful body, and her eyes were as sparks of green fire. There was something in her pose that made me think of a panther.

She acted promptly. Plucking the girl by the arm across the threshold—I had already stepped back within the room—she shut the door. "Where is he?" she demanded in an imperative whisper.

Hedwig made a frightened movement of her head towards the hall. "In the dining-room!"

"You fool! Did you let him know I was at home?"

"He didn't give me the chance to speak. When I answered the bell, he stepped inside the hall and said he must see you at once..."

Floria frowned and looked inquiringly at the Prince. "I'll have to receive him," she said.

In a voice squeaky with fright, the other burst out frantically: "You can't! I forbid it, do you understand? It'll be my ruin, my ruin, do you hear me? You know that I'm absent without leave..."

"And whose fault is that?" was the almost savage retort. "Did I press you to stay? Didn't I implore you to go back to Spandau last night?"

"If he finds me here, I'm finished," the plump youth wailed. He was gibbering. "His Majesty won't overlook it again. You know what he is. I shall be banished to the colonies, to ... to Tsingtau, or Swakopmund, or some such ghastly hole. Grundt mustn't find me here, I tell you. Send him away: tell him anything you like; but don't let him in!"

She knit her smooth white brow and shrugged her shoulders. "What's the use? He won't be put off like that. This man knows everything that's going on. If he's here, it means that he's come after you. You'll have to face it, Karlchen. You'd better let me handle him, though..."

Abruptly she ceased, for at that moment we all heard a dull, clumping step outside. Some one with a heavy limp was coming through the hall.

Seeing that they had apparently forgotten all about my existence, I had been edging, as unostentatiously as possible, towards the bedroom door. A little flicker of hope was burning up within me. It seemed impossible that the man with the clubfoot should have come to the flat except in pursuit of me. Yet what if, after all, he was merely in search of the delinquent Prince? In that case my fears were groundless. I had not been shadowed, the house would not be guarded, and if only I could avoid being seen by Grundt, I might yet get away. My idea was to slip through the bedroom into the hall and make a dart for the front door while Grundt was in the salon. It was a fighting chance; but it was the only chance I had and I meant to take it.

The inexorable footsteps halted. An imploring whisper cut across the pregnant silence. "Floria, you'll have to hide me..."

With a look she silenced the ignoble, gaudy figure: she had taken full command of the situation now. A single,

imperative knock fell upon the door. She signed to Hedwig to open.

As the maid went forward, the three of them had their backs to me. The bedroom door was ajar. Noiselessly I stepped within. I had to leave the door as it was: I dared not shut it.

In the bedroom it was cool and dim; for shutters and curtains were yet closed. As I tiptoed over the velvety carpet I was conscious of a four-poster bed looming up, pompous and golden, and a three-part mirror above a dressing-table threw back a glitter of silver and crystal. The door into the hall was half open. I posted myself there and waited; for to reach the front door I must pass the salon, and I would not venture forth until I knew that Grundt was safely in the room with the door shut.

There was a creak of hinges and immediately thereon the patter of a light step in the passage. Hedwig must have retired to her kitchen. Then, so close that it seemed to speak in my ear, I heard the grating voice which, I sometimes fancy, will haunt my memory, like the vestige of an evil dream, until my dying day.

Grundt was speaking from the threshold and his tone was raging. "Herr Gott," he thundered, "am I to be kept kicking my heels in the ante-chamber like a dunning tradesman? The maid has told you, I observe, that I wished to see you immediately. May I ask, then..."

The end of the sentence was smothered by a sort of gruff growl. I guessed that he had recognised Fiona's visitor. "Your Highness, my respects!" The compliment was ruthlessly perfunctory: the voice snarling and mocking. "Your Highness has doubtless an adequate explanation for your absence from duty?"

Fiona's clear contralto broke in. "Herr Doktor, the Prince is indisposed..."

Grundt did not let her finish. "My remarks were addressed to His Highness," he reproved her icily.

In a whining voice the Prince took up the cue. "Unfortunately, I am far from well. Otherwise, I should have returned to barracks yesterday. But I shall explain everything fully to my Commanding Officer. Count Westfried knows my wretched state of health. Rest assured, Herr Doktor, I shall make it all right with the Colonel..."

Grundt cleared his throat. "I am aware," he rasped out, "that Colonel Westfried's social ambitions, or perhaps I should say, those of the Countess, his wife, lead him to place the most liberal interpretation upon Your Highness's conception of your military duties. I would point out, however, that on this occasion any excuse Your Highness has to offer will have to be made in the first instance to the Minister of the Royal Household."

The Prince's gasp was clearly audible. I could picture the wretched youth collapsing like a pricked balloon. "The Minister of the Royal Household!" he repeated in a dying voice.

"Since you omitted the formality of applying for leave," the relentless indictment proceeded, "your Adjutant, in the absence of the good Count Westfried, who had been summoned to a conference at the War Office, became alarmed and telephoned up to the Colonel. Count Westfried requested the Berlin authorities to investigate discreetly. The matter was referred to the Minister of the Royal Household, who communicated with me. Doubtless the Supreme War Lord, my Imperial Master, who, as Your Highness knows, is now on his Norwegian cruise, will be suitably edified to receive a telegram informing His Majesty that Prince Karl-Albrecht of Traubheim-Zwickau, absent without leave, has been discovered in his..."—the mocking inflection of the voice was emphasised—"na, let us say, *en déshabille* in the boudoir of..."

"Um Gottes Willen, Grundt," Floria exclaimed earnestly, "you're not going to bring this silly escapade to the Emperor's ears?"

"What I hear," was the sombre retort, "His Majesty also hears! But we waste time. I have other things to think about. Your Highness will have the goodness..."

"I ... I throw myself upon your mercy, Herr Doktor," cried the Prince, shrill with agitation. "I know the immense influence you wield. In the absence of His Majesty you can hush this thing up, nicht wahr? I am sure you can. Oblige me

in this and ... and you'll not find me ungrateful, I promise you. We've ... we've a very chic decoration at the Court of Traubheim-Zwickau, the Order of the Portcullis. Very distinguished, really..."

"The same, I think, as Count Westfried wears?" Grundt remarked drily.

"Yes, yes. Precisely. A green ... a green ribbon. It looks quite delightful across a white shirt-front. I was about to say, lieber Herr Doktor, that if I were to say a word to Papa, I'm sure the Duke would..."

The harsh voice stemmed his excitable gush.

"Old Clubfoot, as they call me, is not to be bribed. His Highness, your father, would tell you that. I accept no ribands, Prince. I bestow them."

But it struck me that Grundt's manner had become perceptibly less hostile.

There was a movement in the room. I heard the jingle of spurs, and Floria's voice in a caressing undertone: "No scandal, Grundt, I beg! Leave him to me, and I'll see that he goes back to his regiment without delay. If you report this business, there'll be a black mark against me at police headquarters, and we don't want that, do we? Nicht wahr, you'll leave this to me?"

There was a pause. Then Grundt, gruffly: "Have it your own way!"

An awful panic seized on me, for she promptly called out: "Karlchen, go and get dressed at once!" Softly I edged round the door and peered into the hall. It was deserted, but the salon door stood wide. If Grundt now took his leave, and the Prince came into the bedroom, I should be trapped. I waited, trembling, on the threshold. I heard the Prince's ponderous tread as he crossed the drawing-room, and a rasping whisper from Grundt:

"Hurry up and get rid of the fool, Floria! I want to speak to you about the English spy, Abbott!"

And then, abruptly, the salon door was shut.

I don't know how I got out of the house.

Desperately curious though I was to hear what Grundt had to tell Floria about my little Major, I dared not neglect my one chance of escape. I remember reminding myself to close the front door softly after me, but thereafter my recollections are a confused impression of flights of carpeted stairs that never seemed to end, of the enormous relief with which, as I cowered, breathless, in the pink and gold entrance hall, I discovered the Hohenzollern-Allee to be as placid and deserted as when I left it; of a line of taxis on a tiny Platz, where a fountain played in the sunlight. I took the first cab on the rank and bade the driver put me down at the corner of Unter den Linden and the Friedrich-Strasse. From there, as I had ascertained before setting out, from the map in the lobby at Kemper's, it was a step to the Tauben-Strasse. I meant to lose no time in passing on the blue envelope to Mr. Joseph Bale.

As we rolled smoothly along over the shining asphalt of new streets, past natty apartment houses, where every balcony blazed with flowers, I took stock of the situation. It was not easy to sort out the facts.

In the first place, why had Grundt come to the flat? In quest of the Prince or of me? By the tone of his voice he had appeared surprised at finding the Prince there: on the other hand, if I were his quarry, why had he not immediately asked for me, ransacked the apartment until he had run me to earth?

The answer, I felt sure, was that Grundt, not knowing where the blue envelope was hidden, did not connect the flat with the missing document. Then what had brought him to the Hohenzollern-Allee? The Schlatz business, I was certain. His remark to Floria showed that. Then what was the woman's rôle in the affair? She and Grundt were obviously old-standing acquaintances: but Abbott was a friend of hers too. A lover, perhaps?

And then, in a revealing flash, something that Abbott had said that night in the study of the Kommandanten-Haus came back to me. He had spoken of having been "let down" by a woman, and of his "ghastly folly." Might not this "ghastly folly" be that, while on a secret mission to Germany, he had become Floria's lover, and that she had betrayed him to Grundt? Was not this the explanation of the Major's strange remark that he had left his honour behind him in Berlin? The hypothesis would account for the hiding-place of the blue envelope, at the same time supplying the link between Grundt and Floria. If Grundt had travelled from Schlitz by car, he could not have arrived in Berlin much before I had. Clearly he had gone straight to the Hohenzollern-Allee to inform his accomplice of what had occurred at Schlitz.

But if Floria had denounced the Englishman, how was it that the blue envelope had not been found? The most superficial search of the apartment would have revealed it. The question defeated me. I only knew that, though Grundt was apparently aware of the existence of this missive, he was, for some reason or other, not looking for it in Floria's flat.

What did the envelope lying in my bosom contain? Grundt knew. Always my thoughts came back to him. Who was this man to whom all paid such deference, the pugnacious little Judge alike with Floria's fatuous princeling? What post did he fill, and what was this immense influence of his, of which the Prince had spoken, which Dr. von Hentsch had found himself "unable to withstand"? I remembered Grundt's outburst in the garden when, with rolling eyes and arms dramatically uplifted, he had raved about the powerful enemies he made in following his goal...

To make powerful enemies argues the possession of power. And power was draped like a cloak about this ungainly cripple. He had called the Emperor his master, and I had not spent six months in Germany without perceiving that I was in an absolute monarchy in which the ruler's world was law. What if the contents of the blue envelope concerned the Emperor...?

The thought appalled me. As we plunged into the seething traffic of the Potsdamer Platz, the docile throngs of people, shepherded by the bristling police at the crossings, or pressing along the pavements, gave me a terrified feeling of isolation. These rushing, determined hordes seemed to dwarf me, to scale me down to that dream-like state of negation of which Gerontius speaks. I pictured to myself the man with the clubfoot as the latent force behind the swarming hordes, a resolute, grim figure hovering halfway between heights my puny experience could not soar to, and depths my imagination could not plumb. I longed for England and my home.

It was a quarter past ten by my watch. I made up my mind that, the envelope handed over, I would abandon my dinner with Rudi and take that noonday train...

Like many of the cross-streets of the Friedrich-Strasse, the Tauben-Strasse looked dingy and vaguely disreputable. One or two new office buildings and some plate-glass shop fronts did nothing to obliterate the palpable fact that here the far-famed night-life of Berlin's main artery overflowed. There was an "Art Cabaret," whatever that might be, with a huge electric sign as nakedly hideous as such things are by daylight, a dreadful restaurant made to represent Hansel and Gretel's Zuckerhauschen, with a papier-mâché witch peeping perpetually out of the window, and a whole flight of mean little cafés, whose dirty lace curtains, discreetly drawn, lent them a faintly scabrous air.

No. 97 was a tall and shabby house half-way along the street, and, as a brass plate on the doorpost below set forth, Mr. Joseph Bale's "Agentur" was situated on the fourth floor. There was no lift, and the staircase, permeated with a faint cooking odour, as of cabbage fried in grease, wound aloft into a black silence broken only by a melancholy hurdy-gurdy which, in the inner courtyard, was grinding out "Donna è mobile."

The door of Mr. Bale's office, marked by an enamel plate bearing his name, stood ajar. I found myself in a long and sunless ante-room, hung with theatre posters, where a handful of people, men and women of all ages, with the rather obvious appearance of stage folk of the humbler sort, stood aimlessly about, or sat on a bench running round the walls, gossiping in undertones. At the far end of the room, besides a rack of hats and coats a long counter barred the access to a glass door bearing the painted inscription: *Herr Direktor Bale. Kein Zutritt.*

I looked around for some one to take in my name. On the other side of the counter lounged a Jewish-looking youth in a shiny blue suit, who was picking his teeth abstractedly, while a fat and florid woman in a picture hat poured what

seemed to be a very long and earnest story into his ear. I pushed my way through to the counter, where I came upon a thin and rather dirty-looking young man, with an enormous shock of hair, who clasped a letter, and a much-painted female with a visiting-card, prancing about, impatiently waiting for the florid woman to end her tale.

I had no time to spare, I realised, if I wanted to catch that train. My experience with Hedwig had taught me something. Propping my parcel and parasol against the counter, I opened my purse and took out a five-mark piece. But I had yet to catch young Israel's eye: the florid female was still in the full flow of her narrative.

I glanced casually round. There was a poster of Little Tich under the clock, I remember, and one of Saharet, the dancer, close by. On the bench next to the door a man in a straw hat was gazing intently at me over the top of a newspaper he was affecting to read. His stare embarrassed me, and I turned my eyes away.

It was then that I remarked, hanging from the rack on the wall, a mustard-coloured overcoat.

61

The Café Zur Nelke

There was no mistaking that garment and, in further identification, on the hook above it I recognised the sage-green hat, with its jaunty feather, which my neighbour on the journey to Berlin had sported.

The owner of the overcoat was nowhere visible in the ante-chamber, and I concluded that he was closeted with Bale. I did not linger to ask myself what he wanted with the Herr Direktor: I just made straight for the door. It seemed to me, as I went out, that the man with the newspaper, who had stared so hard at me before, made some remark in an undertone. But I did not wait to find out whether he were addressing me.

Once outside the office door, however, I ran swiftly downstairs. As I went I thought I heard a step, hurried yet oddly cautious, coming after me. That quiet footfall made me desperate; for I had no plan, only the urgent instinct to shake myself free from this stealthy, relentless pursuit. Now to my horror I realised that the trackers were still at my heels.

The step gained on me, and I had not reached the bottom flight before, looking over my shoulder, I saw a man hurrying down in my wake. Realising at a glance that I could not shake him off, I slowed down, so as not to arouse his suspicions if my fears were groundless, and leaned back against the grimy wall to let him pass. The sad notes of the barrel-organ floated flutily out of the depths of that sombre house. Now it was playing the Old Hundred, and the wheezing melody brought, to my mind a sudden, irrelevant memory of Calverley, nimblest of rhymsters, and a tranquil Cambridge quad.

My unknown pursuer swung sharply round the bend of the stairs. Below me, at the foot of the last flight, the entrance hall was a funnel of gloom opening at the end into a panel of dazzling sunlight enclosed within the two tall wings of the street door, the one shut, the other folded back against the wall. My heart seemed to miss a beat as I saw how, at the sight of me, that vague figure on the stairs above slackened pace. I recognised the man in the straw hat who had stared at me in Bale's office.

I shrank back against the wall as he stopped before me and, speaking in a sort of breathless undertone, said, "Bale's double-crossed us. I tried to warn you when you came in, but you wouldn't heed me. You seemed to scent it out for yourself, though, didn't you? Gad, you've got a fine flair!" He smiled at me.

I gazed at him in wonder. *He spoke in English.*

He spoke our language like an Englishman, and an Englishman of breeding at that. But he was pallid and hungry-looking; shabbily dressed, too, like all the others I had seen kicking their heels in Bale's agency: and any Latin race might

have claimed his crisp, black hair, dark rather fiery blue eyes, long-lashed, and straight, proud nose.

His smile was bright and kind, and I liked it. My heart was banging against my ribs, but something about this quiet stranger comforted me immeasurably. It was not merely the thrill of meeting a fellow-countryman in such a dilemma as mine. It was some indefinite, reassuring quality about him, perhaps the self-confident, faintly arrogant timbre of his speaking voice, perhaps a sort of lurking twinkle in the cobalt of his eye.

He took instant charge of the situation. "Come on," he said quickly. "This house ain't healthy for either of us..." He caught my arm and began to hurry me down the last remaining flight. "I don't believe that any one spotted you upstairs except me," he said, "and I was looking out for you. Lucky for you that you arrived when you did. There's a plain-clothes man with Bale now. Trailing you, of course. Another minute, and he'd have had them all on the *qui vive*..."

By this we were at the street door, past which streamed the traffic of the Tauben-Strasse. I paused an instant to take breath; my heart was beating so fast. My companion glanced at his watch. "We must have a talk," he observed thoughtfully, "but first I want to take a look round here. There's a café next door to this, the first door on the left on leaving the house, the Café zur Nelke it's called. Suppose you pop in there for a moment? Ask for Fräulein Ottilie, and say you're waiting for Max. Never mind what it looks like. It's the only place about here where we can be sure of not being interrupted. Why, what's the matter?"

I had drawn back in horror behind the wing of the door. At the kerb outside a taxi had drawn up. With infinite labour a burly figure was getting out backwards. I knew that vast back, that monstrous boot.

"Der Stelze!" I murmured aghast.

At the words my companion's eyes snapped, and on the instant he was all watchfulness. But he never lost his jaunty air, and even in my terror I remember thinking that this man must have an iron nerve. "So that's old Clubfoot, eh?" he remarked, as though to himself. Then I felt my arm grasped firmly, and I was thrust behind the wing of the door set back against the wall. I was numb with fright, and from an immense distance as it seemed to me, I heard my unknown friend's sharp whisper: "The moment the coast is clear nip into the café!" The rapid patter of his feet along the hall died away.

The upper panel of the door that sheltered me was fitted with a grille of heavy iron lattice-work covered by a grimy glass shutter that might be opened, when the doors were shut, to air the house. The triangular recess in which, between wall and door, I was squeezed, was pitch-dark, and for this reason I surmised that while, through the glass shutter and the lattice beyond it, I commanded a view of the entrance hall towards the staircase, I ran little risk of being seen myself.

Presently, on the other side of my hiding-place, my straining ears caught the pant of laboured breathing, the tap of a stick, and the thud of a heavy boot on the flags. Then Grundt emerged into my field of view. The sunshine gleamed on that immense back moulded in the black alpaca jacket, as he lurched painfully forward towards the stairs. Two vague men in bowlers were with him: one passed within a few inches of where I lurked behind the door, and I had an impression of a grim, bloodless face, an enormous red moustache.

I waited until, from my niche behind the door, I had seen the trio disappear round the bend of the stairs. Then I darted out into the street. The next moment I was entering one of the sordid little cafés I had noticed as I walked along from the Friedrich-Strasse. Lace curtains yellowing on the glass door and the single window, broad and long like a shop front, and, half-way up, hangings of faded red baize to keep out winter draughts, effectually screened the Café zur Nelke from the curiosity of the street. The traffic drummed faintly upon the quiet within. On the walls, above a red plush bench that ran on either side, nymphs, obese and pinkly nude, looking as though they had escaped from the hoardings of a country fair, pelted one another with handfuls of the carnations which gave the café its name.

Small tables spread with white cloths stood in front of the bench. A red stuff curtain, embroidered with yellow arabesques, divided the café into two, and from the other side of the hanging the sound of some one picking out a tune with one finger on a cracked piano was audible. Low of ceiling and airless, the room reeked of dust and stale perfume, cigar-smoke and beer.

There was no one in the place as I entered but a fat woman with a prodigious bust crammed into a high-collared silk

blouse, and a mass of very bright yellow hair piled up on her head. On the stroke of the bell that rang as the door opened she rose up to meet me.

Her face was bloated and cruel, and she had the eyes of a cod. With every manifestation of extreme distrust she mustered me. "Sie wünschen?" she said in a beery voice. I asked for Fräulein Otilie.

"Otilie!" the woman called, and, still eyeing me suspiciously, returned to her table. Abruptly the piano ceased, and a girl came in from the back room.

She was much younger than the other, but her skin had the same puffy, dead-white texture. Under a mask of paint her face was emaciated and wan. She appeared astonished to see me there.

"I've come to meet Max," I said. "He told me to wait here for him..."

"Max?" She glanced at me quickly. "Max is in the pen."

"In the pen?"

"Na, in Moabit, then..."

"Moabit?"

"D'you mean to say you've never heard of Moabit gaol?"

"I think there's some mistake," I told her. "I've only just left the Max I mean. He was going to meet me here..."

Her eyes, deep-sunk, and oh, so haggard, were drinking in every detail of my appearance.

"There are so many Maxes," she observed reflectively. "What does this one do?"

"I think he's an actor..."

Her face lit up at once. Her smile made me realise how young she really was. "Ach, *der!*" She giggled. "I thought you meant Blonde Lotte's man. They've put him away for six months." She rubbed her first finger and thumb together and raised them to her nose as though she were taking snuff. "You know...?"

I didn't. I suppose my face showed it, for she added: "Snow-peddling..."

"Snow-peddling?"

"I thought everybody knew what snow was," she remarked contemptuously. "Cocaine, if you like. Smart ladies like you have been here inquiring for him, so naturally I thought..." She broke off and gave me a challenging look. "So you're a friend of 'The Count,' *was?* That's what the girls call him here, you know. Well, I suppose you'd better sit down!"

So saying, she dragged the curtain back. A frowsy room, heavy with the reek of cheap perfume and powder, was disclosed. Like the other it was set with small tables, and the electric lights were on, for the window was heavily curtained.

Two girls, painted like my companion, and dressed in the same vaguely provocative style, as we deemed it in those days, very low-cut blouses and black skirts to the knee, were there. One, a little brunette with lively, dark eyes, was playing patience at a table: the other, a big-boned, animal-looking creature, had one massive leg cocked over the other and was darning a hole in her stocking. It was a disarmingly domestic scene; but somehow the place had an unspeakably obscene atmosphere that made my gorge rise.

"A friend of 'The Count's'," Fräulein Otilie introduced me as she drew up a chair. The other two girls stared at me as though I were a wild beast. The formal bow, however, wherewith they acknowledged the presentation would not have disgraced a vicar's wife. The fat woman bustled in from the front.

"The Fräulein will take a little something while she's waiting, nicht wahr?" she said, her dull eyes alight with cupidity. I told her I wanted nothing. Her mouth set like a rat-trap. "It's the custom of the house," she announced. I said I would have some coffee. "And will not the Fräulein offer something to these ladies as well?" she persisted. I told her to take their orders. Otilie chose stout: the patience player, whom they addressed as Lenchen, promptly demanded beer: while the girl who was darning her stocking—her name was Hermine—declared in the most refined manner imaginable that she would "fancy" a little glass of "Porto." Scratching herself thoughtfully, she explained her preference by expatiating with disingenuous candour on the disadvantages of stout as it affected her digestive processes.

The fat woman brought the drinks and retired to the front room with the bottle of stout she had opened for herself. The three girls plied me with questions about "The Count." I concealed my ignorance as best I could. I told them he was well, that, as far as I knew, he had not yet found an engagement.

He seemed to be extremely popular with them all. Otilie said he was a "famoser Kerl"; Lenchen, engrossed with her patience, murmured that she adored his "romantic Italian appearance"; while Hermine, sipping her port, declared that he was a "flotter Kavalier," and free with his money when he had any.

Those three poor creatures displayed the most inordinate interest in my clothes. They fingered the material of my frock, demanding to know what it cost: they cooed their admiration for my silk stockings—from Fifth Avenue, they were, a present from my dear Lucy Varley: they made me take off my hat and show them my hair. Their curiosity left no portion of my attire to the imagination: in short, I felt like a traveller who arrives unexpectedly at a kraal in the heart of the African bush.

This sort of thing having lasted for the best part of an hour, I began to wonder what had become of my young man from next door. It was half-past eleven by my watch. Twice already the glasses had been replenished; but now they were empty again, and the fat woman was hovering meaningly about my table.

I was feeling seriously alarmed. What could be keeping my unknown friend? I could not remain indefinitely in the café; yet what was I to do? I still had the blue envelope. Abbott had given me the name of the branch of the War Office for which he worked: M.I.5, wasn't, it? There was yet time to collect my suit-case and catch that noonday train, that was, if I dared go back to Kemper's. But what if the café were watched?

My mind tormented by these questions, I asked for my bill. The fat woman brought it. It was preposterously high, something over sixty marks, more than £3. But I knew it would be useless to dispute the reckoning in a place like that.

And then I discovered that my purse was gone...

It must have been stolen from me in that nondescript throng in Bale's ante-room, for I remembered putting it back in the pocket of my overcoat after getting out the tip for Bale's clerk. It was a stunning blow. The purse contained not only all my money, but also my ticket to London. No chance of catching that train now: I had not the price of a 'bus fare on me; and there was my bill at the hotel to settle.

The realisation made me sick with fear. The fat woman was surveying me in a grim and forbidding silence. I told her I had lost my purse. I seemed to detect a hint of sympathy in Fräulein Otilie's weary eyes; but the other girls exchanged a malicious glance and sniggered. "So?" remarked the fat woman incredulously, in her beery voice. Imperiously her bloated hand tapped the bill as it lay on the table. "And my money?"

I thought of the Transomes. I should have to ring up Molly. What should I say to explain my presence in this disreputable place?

"Have you the telephone?" I asked.

"Bitte schön..." The woman pushed open a door at the back of the café, disclosing a passage where there was a wall instrument. While I looked up Molly's number, she stood in the doorway, a silent and implacable sentinel.

A man's voice answered my call in German: a butler, the cold, suave intonation suggested. "The gnädige Frau is away," he said.

This was a facer. I gasped, and asked unsteadily: "Is Herr Transome there?"

"Herr Transome has gone away with the gnädige Frau," came back the smooth answer. "The mother of the gnädige Frau has died suddenly in Switzerland. Who is this speaking, please?"

But I hung up the receiver and turned away. Of what use was it to give my name? If Molly, not expecting me before Friday, had written to Schlätz to put me off, her letter must have arrived after I had left. What on earth was I to do?

I found myself face to face with the fat woman. Her leaden-hued features were clouded with anger. She gripped my arm and shook me. "Na, and what about my bill, my little one?"

"I have no money," I faltered. "My friends are away. If you would let me wait a little until Herr Max comes...?"

She burst into a sort of shrill snort. "That beggarly mummer! I'll have my money from you, my fine lady, and I'll have it now..." She flung me back against the door, and called stridently down the passage: "Hans!"

A man in his shirt-sleeves, with great ears bulging out from under a cloth cap, appeared instantly from the end of the corridor. I fell back before him into the café. Some one had dragged the curtain across again, shutting out the heartening bourdon of the adjacent Friedrich-Strasse. I was trapped in that evil, airless room, alone with these painted women and this man who, with narrow crafty eyes smouldering menace out of a livid and lecherous face, was advancing on me.

"*Also*," screeched the harridan, arms akimbo, "the young lady runs up a bill for 63 marks, 50 pfennigs, and hasn't the money to pay for it!"

With a lithe and noiseless gait the man came at me. The three girls scattered at his approach. He moved so swiftly that his hand was on my shoulder before I could avoid him.

"No money, *was*?" He pawed my arm. "But these pretty clothes will fetch something, my dear..."

Hermine cackled shrilly. "You should see her underthings. Fine silk! And she says she can't pay for our drinks! Why don't you strip the haughty slut, Hanschen?"

He chuckled. "A good idea! Come and hold her, girls!"

Otilie did not move; but the fat woman and the other two swept down on me in a body.

Then the door-bell clanged, and the young man I was so anxiously expecting came swiftly through the curtain.

62

Nigel Druce

My new-found friend was not the one to let the grass grow under his feet, as my old Nana used to say. With the same swift presence of mind which had saved me once already that morning, he now grabbed the bully by the collar, swung him round and sent him reeling backwards. Despite my upbringing among men, the sight of violence has always sickened me; but this was done so tranquilly, with a flick of the wrist, as it were, that the hard thud which sounded the contact of the German's head with the wall gave me only a thrill of elation.

The young man wasted no words on the bully. "Get out!" he said. The other hesitated: he seemed half-stunned, and no wonder.

"Don't let him bounce you, Hans," the harpy screeched. "Make him brass up what his tart owes and take her to hell

out of this..." "For the love of God, Count, watch out for his knife!"—I caught Fräulein Otilie's frightened whisper.

But the young man appeared to be completely at his ease. He had placed himself in front of me, and was regarding Hans with a singularly detached air. The German evaded that steady blue eye. He picked up his cap, which had fallen off. "Settle it yourself!" he growled at the fat woman. He paused to fling his assailant a vindictive look. "And you, watch out! I'll get you for this!" On that, with his curious, cat-like gait, he slouched off down the passage. A door banged.

"Exit the First Murderer," remarked the young man, with a laugh. The smile was still on his face as he turned to the woman. "The bill!" he said. She pointed to the table. He glanced at the slip of paper and gave a good-humoured laugh. Then, as any German might—he was thorough in all things, I was to discover—he produced a little leather purse and flung down a ten-mark gold piece. He turned to me. "Come on!" he said in German.

"No, you don't!" screamed the woman, and placed herself between us and the front part of the café. "My bill's 63 marks and 50 pfennigs, and I'm going to have my money..."

"Nee, nee, Frau Hulda," retorted the young man pleasantly. "You know I've paid you already more than twice what those few glasses of sudden death are worth. What d'you take me for, a bumpkin from the back of Pomerania, or what?"

He spoke German with amazing fluency, the same rough Berlin jargon that the policeman had used. It struck me then that he acted, as well as looked, the part of the sort of seedy theatre tout one would expect to find in a place like that. I had met Germans with hair as dark as his: if he had not revealed himself to me by his English, I should certainly have taken him for a native Berliner.

"You dirty bilker!" squealed Frau Hulda. "Pay what you-owe me, or I'll send for the police!"

But he ignored her. He had taken something from his pocket and handed it to me. It was a veil—some of us still wore veils in 1914—close-meshed. "You left it behind," he said meaningly, "so I brought it along."

I never wore a veil. But I knew what this one was for, and marvelled that he should have thought of it. It was grey, too: he had even found time to notice the colour of my frock. I had yet to learn that he never overlooked the smallest detail. He helped me fasten the veil about my hat and pull it down over my face.

"Pay me my bill," stormed Frau Hulda, hoarse with fury, "pay me my bill, or I'll hand the pair of you over to the police!"

He smiled his bright smile at her and shook his head. "You *will* have your fun! You'll be the death of me, die Olle. The police, indeed! Why, I know enough about you to send you to the pen for a couple of years..."

"It's a lie," she cackled. "The police have got nothing on me!"

"Possibly. But that's not saying they wouldn't like to. What about that farmer who lost his wallet here last week? What about the dope merchants who drop round after dark, Otto the Fox, and Black Lola, and all that lot? What about..."

Frau Hulda's face was livid. She pointed a trembling finger at the door. "Take yourself off my premises before I do you a mischief!" she gasped huskily.

"Unless you insist on us remaining for lunch?" was the imperturbable reply. "Meine Damen..." He lifted his straw hat and began to shepherd me towards the entrance. "Knowledge is power," he remarked to me humorously, under his breath.

He must have read in my face my reluctance to venture forth in Berlin once more, for he whispered softly in English: "Quite safe now!" Fräulein Otilie held the door for us, her sad eyes fixed on my companion. He gave her an encouraging smile.

His hand restrained me for an instant, while his keen glance swept the street up and down. "All serene!" he announced cheerfully.

Together we stepped out into the noonday turmoil of the capital.

For me the street was peopled with terrors, and I scrutinised every man's feet; but my escort strolled along unconcernedly. At a leisurely pace he led to the corner of the Friedrich-Strasse, where we turned north, in the direction of Unter den Linden. "Awkward that!" he remarked, with a reminiscent wag of the head as we went along. "A nasty piece of goods is Frau Hulda. But I blame myself. It never occurred to me that you hadn't any money."

I told him of my misfortune. "Bad luck!" was his laconic comment. "But," he went on, "unhappily, in this case money is not the first consideration." Without explaining his enigmatic remark, he added: "I suppose you're sure the purse was stolen?"

"I think there's no doubt about it," I said.

"As long as old Clubfoot and his merry men didn't light on that ticket to London!" he answered crisply. "That would have told them, plain enough, that you'd called, wouldn't it? As it is, you weren't in the place long enough for Izzy—that's Bale's clerk—to remember you in all that crowd..."

As we sauntered up the noisy street, with the heat rising in quivering waves from the asphalt, I mustered my companion unobtrusively. Quiet; dark; very bright blue eyes: this, of course, must be the man about whom Vivian Abbott had questioned me, when he inquired so persistently if I had not seen anything of another Englishman at Schlatz. And in some strange way the impassive individual at my side seemed to have been warned of my coming: had he not said he had been on the look-out for me at Bale's?

"Fit-looking," Abbott had called him, and now that I examined my companion more closely, I discerned a certain alert and wiry air about him. Assuredly the way he had dealt with the bully suggested that he was trained to the last ounce. I had a notion that the Major had mentioned a name; but for the moment I could not bring it to mind.

A dry chuckle from the stolid figure at my side broke in upon my reflections. "So that was the celebrated Dr. Grundt, eh?" he remarked musingly. "Gosh, what a man! I don't know what he was saying back there in Bale's room, but you could hear his voice all over the office. He was chattering like an angry baboon..."

"You went back?" I asked, incredulous.

He laughed. "You bet I did. I've never seen the famous Clubfoot in the flesh before—the flesh is the word, isn't it?—and I wanted to feast my eyes on him. There wasn't any risk, really. He doesn't know me..."—his face was for a moment anxious—"at least not by sight, as far as I'm aware, and, as I've been hanging round Bale's for the past week, pestering them for work, it might have looked fishy if I'd disappeared just then. I thought I'd better wait till Grundt had finished with Bale. That's what kept me so long. When they came out together, I tackled old Bale for a job again. My hat, he was wild!" He broke off, shaking with laughter. "He asked old Clubfoot's permission to kick me out!" he added weakly. His mirth was so infectious that I found myself laughing with him.

Just below the juncture of the Friedrich-Strasse with the broad and seething avenue of Unter den Linden, we turned into a great arcade. Here the hum of the traffic was behind us and the voices and feet of the strollers, as they drifted past shop windows a-glitter with all manner of rubbishy Berlin "souvenirs," photographs on plush, plaster busts of the Kaiser and what not, rang hollow on the clean mosaic flooring under the high-domed roof.

"And what now?" I asked.

My companion turned to me with a whimsical grin. "I thought we'd go to the wax-works," he announced cheerfully.

"*The wax-works?*"

He nodded, smiling into my astonished face. "We've got to exchange credentials, and we don't want to be disturbed. That's why I thought of the Panoptikum, Berlin's Madame Tussaud's. I'm rather proud of that inspiration, do you know?"

No Berliner ever dreams of setting foot inside the Panoptikum: it's the happy hunting ground of the hayseed. Grundt wouldn't think of looking for you there in a thousand years. They've got a restaurant of sorts where we can have a bite to eat, and over lunch you shall give me news of a friend of mine." The blue eyes sought mine. "I think you must have seen, or, at any rate, heard from him lately, haven't you?"

It was the first question he had asked me.

"Yes," said I.

I shall always look back upon that as one of the strangest interviews of my life. We sat at a marble-topped table in a corner of a cheerless refreshment-room, which might have been transplanted bodily from the Crystal Palace of my childhood days, from the glass-encoffined sandwiches and aspidistra on the bar to the barmaid, elderly and mittened, humped up over her knitting behind the coffee urn.

In our nostrils was the familiar wax-works smell, that strange blended odour of melted wax and size and old clothes. Before our eyes, in the broad gallery from which the restaurant opened off, rows of sad, still figures, in the garb of all ages up to the fashion of a decade past, had the air of frowning their resentment at our intrusion.

Surrounded by the heavily-bewhiskered rulers of the brand-new German Empire, old Bismarck, in a dusty white tunic, with yellow facings, and enormous jack boots, fixed me with a waxen glare until I felt inclined to turn my back upon him, and near by, in her glass casket, the Sleeping Beauty slumbered so quietly that I could hear the whirr of the ingenious clockwork which imparted a realistic rise and fall to her opulent bosom.

At this, the lunch hour, the Panoptikum was all but deserted. About us drooped leaden the embarrassing silence of such places, as though all this pallid company of princes, statesmen, soldiers, scientists, and criminals, had suddenly broken off their conversation on our arrival. The melancholy stillness was fended only by the rustle of rare feet, or the occasional reverberation of a child's clear voice.

My companion seemed delighted by the sureness of his judgment. He rippled with high spirits. While the single dispirited waiter, with splay boots that looked as if they had been put through a mangle, hobbled off to fetch the Wiener Schnitzels and the bottle of Moselle we had ordered, the young man made ribald comments on the martially hirsute appearance of the illustrious personages figuring in "The Proclamation of the German Empire," the large group facing us.

But I found it hard to smile with him. I was wondering whether I should be justified in handing over to him my little Major's precious letter. "You look too solemn," my companion rallied me in an undertone. "We've got to appear like ordinary trippers, you know, or some one may remember us. The waiter will clear off to have his lunch presently, I expect, and then we can talk. Let's see if I can't make you laugh. Do you know that touching ballad of the English lower classes: 'To Mother in the Chamber of Horrors'?"

I shook my head, smiling in spite of myself.

He began to declaim:

"Every Saturday night at eight
We likes to drown our sorrers,
We all goes down to the Waxworks
And sits in the Chamber of 'orrers.
There's a lovely himage of Mother there,
Is it like the old 'un? Rather!
It shows the old girl as she was
The night she strangled Father!"

He reeled off this nonsense with such an air of mock sentiment, with such a perfect imitation of the Cockney manner, that I had to laugh. The waiter brought our food. No one else came into the refreshment-room, and presently, the waiter having disappeared by a door behind the bar, the aged Hebe folded up her knitting and squeaked away after him. We were alone. Then the young man said:

"Well, have you got it?" His voice vibrated with eagerness.

I knew what he was alluding to, but I thought it prudent to affect ignorance.

"The report," he went on. "The paper that Abbott gave you!"

Seeing that I still held back, he added quickly: "Quite right to be cautious. Let's see if I can give you a lead. In the first place you should know my name. I am..."

"Wait," I checked him. "I believe I know it, but I've forgotten. Tell me your initials!"

"N.D.," he answered.

"Now I've got it," said I triumphantly. "Your name is Nigel ... Nigel Drew!"

"Druce," he corrected.

"That's it..."

"And you're Olivia Dunbar!"

"Yes!"

"In the Service, of course?"

"The Secret Service, do you mean?"

He nodded.

"No," I said. "Are you?"

His affirmative nod was almost imperceptible. "And Abbott," he demanded, with almost fierce intensity, "what's happened to him?"

I felt myself pale under the eager questioning of those bright blue eyes. I had the sudden intuition that these two men were friends. It came back to me that Abbott had spoken of the other by his Christian name. "Nigel never missed a date in his life," he had said.

My companion misinterpreted my hesitation. "Let me help you out. Abbott came to Berlin on 5th July to fetch a certain, let us say, envelope, which he was to hand on to Bale. Abbott disappeared, and Bale never received the envelope. That much, at least, is certain. Abbott was due back in London on the 8th. When he did not appear, I came out to try and discover what had become of him..."

"He was expecting you at Schlitz," I put in.

"I know. But my instructions went astray. Chivied about from pillar to post as I've been, the letter from Headquarters reached me only this morning. To think I should have been at Schlitz three days ago to put you wise to the details of Abbott's plan to escape, and leave with you money for the poor old chap! In the circumstances the only thing I could do was to go straight to Bale's and try and head Abbott off. But instead of Abbott, you turned up..."

"But how did you recognise me?"

"By the description in the letter from Headquarters. It was quite flattering, I assure you." He grinned and added, with a little bow: "But not flattering enough!"

"But I know nobody in the Secret Service," I protested, greatly mystified. "How could they send you my description?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Our old man is full of surprises, Miss Dunbar. But I'm dying to hear about Abbott. Where is he? Still at Schlatz, I suppose? Knowing the old boy as I do, the one certain thing is that he's still in gaol, or he'd have been here himself..."

He broke off, looking to me for my answer. I could not speak. There was a lump in my throat, and my eyes filled with tears. But there was no need for me to say more. He guessed the truth at once. I was surprised to see how, on my silence, the keen face grew hard, the blue eyes cloudy: I had yet to learn that, in the Secret Service, there are casualties of peace as well as of war.

"They got him, eh?"

He turned away and gazed out moodily over the array of waxen puppets. "Poor old Vivie," he said at last. "What a dear good chap he was! And, oh, my dear, he was the bravest of the brave! But foolhardy too. I told him so often enough; but Lord, he would never listen to me..." His voice trailed away.

"You were great friends?" I queried.

He nodded. "Vivian Abbott stood by me at a time when what I most wanted in the world was a faithful friend."

A tear ran down my cheek and splashed on the marble table. I had a fleeting picture of my little Major, as he had confronted me that night in the study at Schlatz, casual almost, yet oddly watchful. So strong was my impression of him that he seemed to be standing there by my chair, contemplating us with that spry air of his and faintly amused smile...

Druce's thin, brown hand touched mine. "Tell me about it," he said. And so, in that drab, cool place, under Bismarck's sombre stare, I told my story.

63

A council of war about a council of war

One of the rarest of human powers is the art of compelling confidence. Those few people who possess this gift seemed to be endowed with a magnetic force which attracts sympathy without effort, and immediately creates an atmosphere of intimacy. So it was with Nigel Druce. I could see that he made friends easily: indeed, when I look upon my first meeting with him that morning, I have the impression that we were never strangers to one another, he and I.

Unconsciously, I must have been drawn to him from the outset. At any rate, it appeared to me the natural thing to tell him the whole story. I omitted nothing, from the Major's escape two nights before, down to my adventure that morning in Floria von Pellegrini's apartment. When I had done he remained lost in thought, his eyes fixed on the table, his chin propped up on his hand.

A subtle change had come over him. When, at the finish of my narrative, my eyes sought his face, I found the blue eyes unsmiling, the lean countenance stern and even haggard. Gone was that imperturbable, faintly bantering manner which I had seen him flaunt like a panache at the Café zur Nelke. Now I was aware of a desperately unhappy air in him, a haunted, hunted, forlorn sort of mien which—I don't know why—made my heart ache. I felt I wanted to help him.

"The Pellegrini, eh?" he said, breaking silence at length. "I've heard of her, but only as the mistress of Prince Karl, never as an agent. Poor old Vivie! I knew there was a woman in the background. He told me in London about some marvellous creature he had met abroad: he was ruining himself for her, too, spending every cent he'd got. I had no idea she was in Berlin. He always was a wild devil. But what madness can have possessed him to go to that woman's flat with the report on him! By the way, have you got that blue letter with you?"

I nodded and put my hand to my frock. The next instant Druce's hand fastened on my wrist like a clamp, staying me. A loutish pair of lovers, hand in hand, peasants in their Sunday best of rusty black, grasping enormous umbrellas, came round the corner of the Versailles group. They gaped at Bismarck, at the old Grand Duke of Baden calling, with sword uplifted, for three "Hochs" for the newly-proclaimed Emperor; they gaped at us; and, gaping still, meandered off along the gallery, leaving us once more under the stern eyes of our waxen sentinels.

"Now," said Druce quickly. I drew forth the envelope and gave it to him. For an instant he held it in his hands, turning it over to scrutinise it back and front, then thrust it into the inside pocket of his shabby jacket.

The waiter shambled up with a dish of fruit and changed our plates. When he had gone: "Did Vivian—did Abbott tell you where they arrested him?" Druce asked.

"No," I replied, "but you must remember how little time he had to tell me anything. I assumed it was at this woman's flat as he had hidden the envelope there."

My companion shook his head. "Like all Germans, old Clubfoot is thorough. If he had searched the flat, he'd have found the report all right. The fact that he didn't look for it at the Pellegrini's means that he didn't know Abbott had been there. Yet from what you overheard at the Hohenzollern-Allee this morning, it's obvious that Grundt and the fair Floria are in this together. Do you know what I think? The Pellegrini, like other women of her type, may be working for the German Secret Service; but I believe she kept her affair with Vivian Abbott dark, even, or I might say, particularly, from Clubfoot, for fear it should reach the ears of the Prince. It's quite apparent to me that Vivian, who was always a harum-scarum sort of chap where women were concerned, had arranged to spend the night at the Hohenzollern-Allee. Grundt used this woman as the decoy; but she, on her side, took devilish good care that, if Abbott was to be nabbed, it would not be at her apartment. What poor old Vivie told you about having left his honour behind in Berlin seems to bear out my theory, don't you think?"

I nodded. "Yes. But how did Clubfoot know that Major Abbott was coming to Berlin?"

Druce's mouth set in a grim line. "We have Bale to thank for that. You can't insure against the risk of double-crossing: that's the trouble about our game. Bale's a Galician Jew, naturalised British. Until just the other day, he has been regarded as perfectly reliable. But Grundt got hold of him—money or threats, it's always the one thing or the other—and made him squeal. The only fortunate part of the whole of this business, except for your most gallant intervention, is that Clubfoot didn't squeeze the truth out of Bale until after Abbott had arrived in Berlin: otherwise, it would have been the simplest thing in the world to have shadowed our poor friend and pinched him with the goods on him." He broke off as the waiter appeared with the coffee. "Well," he remarked bluntly, when we were once more alone, "old Clubfoot has bagged his man." He tapped his pocket. "But we, thanks to you, we've got the report..."

"You mean you think that Major Abbott is ... dead?" I asked.

He nodded, lips pursed up. "Grundt would never have left Schlatz if Vivie were still alive."

"Why not?"

He paused. "This is how I see it. Abbott didn't have the report on him when he was arrested. This may have led Clubfoot to believe that, by clapping the poor old boy into solitary confinement at Schlatz, he had headed him off. Grundt didn't guess the truth until he heard that his man had escaped, and that, instead of legging it while the going was good, he'd hung about an hour or more in your garden. Clubfoot then realised that, after all, Abbott must have collected that report before his arrest, and managed to secrete it somewhere; that, prevented from fetching it himself—he had no money, as we know—he was trying to pass word of the hiding-place to a confederate. This confederate, in a community

as small as Schlatz, was most likely to be you. Grundt intended to make sure. So he had you sent away from Schlatz, meaning to have you shadowed to see whether you would lead him to where the report was concealed..."

"Before you say any more," I put in, "there's one thing I wish you'd tell me. Who and what is this man they call Clubfoot, who can dictate to a high official like Dr. von Hentsch, and have a Guardsman struck off the active list?"

"Ah," said Druce, "I was waiting for that question. And in answering it, Miss Dunbar, I'm going to treat you as one of us. Listen!" He pushed away his coffee cup and leaned across the table towards me. "A fortnight ago I arrived in Germany to look for Vivian Abbott. I volunteered for the job, because he was my friend. It was pretty much of a forlorn hope, and the old man—the Chief, you know—didn't want me to go: I think he guessed he could wipe poor Vivie off the slate. I've been in this country often enough before, but the moment I crossed the frontier on this trip I seemed to sniff something queer, something thundery, about the atmosphere. I'm fairly intuitive, and I hadn't been an hour in Berlin before I had the sensation of being under a kind of latent surveillance, like a man in the jungle who feels that unseen eyes are watching him from behind every bush. Mind you, my 'cover,' as we call it in this game of ours, was flawless, or so we thought. I had a perfectly good business pretext for visiting Berlin: proper credentials, regular line of talk, suite at the Adlon, everything O.K. But, when I started to look up our resident agents—you know, the Secret Service people who collect information for us in Berlin in the ordinary way ... whew!"

He paused and, with a distracted gesture, ran his fingers through his crisp, dark hair. "My dear, they were in a panic. Gibbering, that's the only word for it. Most of them simply shut their doors on me; and those whom I contrived to see wouldn't talk, all except one that is, and he was drunk, who let on that Bale had blabbed. Our old man must have suspected something of the kind, for I was expressly cautioned against revealing my identity to Bale. Without being actually molested, I was conscious of being shadowed. Inquisitive strangers tried to get into talk with me at the hotel: I moved to the Atlantic; and in my absence my luggage was rifled. I changed my hotel again, my identity, my appearance, even; but it was no good. Some secret force, skilfully concealed but immensely powerful, blocked me at every turn. One after the other, I was driven from every position until at last I took refuge in this underworld of prostitutes and dope-peddlers, where you saw me to-day. For the time being I seem to have eluded the chase, but..."—he shook his head sagely—"Oh, I'm wise to it now. The moment I entered Germany the net was let down behind me; as I shall very quickly discover when I try to get out again..."

His voice died away, as though his thoughts had wandered off along the dark road his words opened up. "Not until this morning," he went on presently, "when the man himself appeared on the scene—I've never set eyes on him before, well as I know him by repute—and I heard your story, did I realise who was behind this stubborn effort to defeat my mission. Now I can understand, as I never understood before, for Headquarters kept me completely in the dark, the importance of this document"—his hand brushed his pocket—"for which poor Vivian Abbott gave his life. The fact that Clubfoot is in charge means that the one man that matters in this country is vitally interested in the recovery of this report. That man is..."

He checked himself suddenly, his eyes bright with suspicion, for at that moment a heavy footstep rang along the gallery. A policeman with spiked helmet, sabre and revolver all complete, was advancing smartly towards us between the double line of waxen figures. I felt a chill premonition of evil.

My companion sat like an image, watching the policeman approach. His right hand, I observed, was thrust inside his coat just above the pocket where that precious letter lay.

From the near distance in the recesses of the Panoptikum a noisy electric piano began to jangle out a military march very rapidly. Instinctively, the iron-shod boots fell into step. Now the intruder was almost level with where we sat looking along the gallery from our table in the refreshment-room. Druce's right hand moved ever so slightly: there was the dull glint of metal between palm and waistcoat, and I saw that he was grasping a pistol.

And then I breathed again. Without so much as deigning to glance at us, the intruder went straight on and disappeared from view at the end of the gallery. Druce withdrew his hand from his pocket, and waved it towards where, somewhere out of sight, the busy piano hammered out its trills and shakes. "It's only the Schützmann on duty at the kinema," he explained. "They have a show in the afternoons for the kids."

I uttered a sigh of relief. "About Clubfoot," I said. "I believe I know what you mean. He spoke to me of his Imperial master, as he called him."

"Clubfoot is the Kaiser's man of confidence," rejoined my companion sombrely, "the head of the Emperor's personal secret service. When Clubfoot speaks, it is the Emperor speaking: when Clubfoot strikes, the whole German autocracy is behind the blow. You've been long enough in this country to have seen something of the working of German discipline: can you wonder, then, at the man's power? At least the official espionage and counter-espionage services, like the secret police, are controlled by responsible Ministers. But Clubfoot is a law unto himself, responsible to none but his master, this wretched mountebank who is the greatest existing menace to the world's peace...."

His mouth was bitter as, with a quick, nervous movement, he scratched a match and lighted a crumpled cigarette which he dredged up from a pocket of his shabby jacket.

"Clubfoot always works in the dark," he went on. "That's part of his strength. The vast majority of Germans have never heard of him. In his real capacity he has no official status; but in the Ministry of Education List you will find the name of Dr. Adolf Grundt, Inspector of secondary schools. His rare public appearances at the Palace are explained by the fiction that he occupies himself with certain charities in which the Emperor is interested. The service he directs is a branch of the famous Section Seven of the Prussian Police, the Political Section, you know...."

"He's in the police, then?"

"Only nominally. 'G' branch, of which he's the head, takes its orders from the Palace. No one but Kaiser Bill himself, they say, dares interfere with old Clubfoot...."

"The Prince certainly seemed terrified of him," I put in.

"He would be. Grundt wants nothing, you see, nothing except power, that is. He's the most powerful figure in modern Germany, and quite the most unscrupulous. The most feared and hated, too, for his spies are everywhere: at Court, in the Army, in the Ministries, as well as in the underworld. Indeed, he's better known in the 'Kaschemmen,' as they call the thieves' kitchens here, than in the salons, for his work takes him into strange places, by all accounts, and he's not particular about soiling his hands. Ministers, Court officials, generals, crooks, they're all scared to death of him as he lurks in the shadow ready to pounce, and none can say who'll be the next victim. They call him 'The Crouching Beast'..."

I shuddered. "What a dreadful name! But it suits him...."

"So I've been told. I've heard tales about him, at the Café zur Nelke and elsewhere...." He broke off, his eyes clouded. "Well, my dear," he concluded, "there's old Clubfoot's portrait for you. And you can take it from me, he's out to do his damndest to prevent this paper from ever reaching its destination."

I thought of Grundt as he had confronted me in the garden of the Kommandanten-Haus, hirsute, vital and compelling. I shivered and tried to put him from my mind.

"This report," I questioned, "do you know what it is?"

"Not definitely," said Druce, "but I've a pretty good idea. I've been putting two and two together since we've been sitting here." He contemplated me with a whimsical air. "Has it occurred to you that we are on the verge of a European war?" he asked suddenly.

My strange talk with the postman came back to me. "Of course I know about this trouble between Austria and Servia," I answered. "But surely the Powers will patch it up?"

He sniffed resentfully. "If they're allowed to! Austria, strongly backed by Germany, has made up her mind to twist the Serbians' tail so devilish hard that they'll lose all taste for the sort of agitation against the Habsburg Monarchy that led to the murder of the Archduke. Austria can do it, too, if Russia will let her. That's where the danger of war comes in. One can't say yet that Germany intends to provoke war. But she's out to humiliate Russia and Russia's ally, France. If Russia stands up to Austria and Germany, it'll be war...."

You, who read this, are wise after the event. But at the time I was not greatly impressed. In those days one was always meeting people who talked darkly about the danger to European peace. As a matter of fact, a succession of war scares had made most people at home apathetic. After all, to our generation the peace of Europe was not a very tangible thing. It was one of those abstract conceptions like the British Constitution which one took for granted. And for the moment I was far more interested in my own position than in the general situation in Europe.

"On 5th July," Druce went on, "exactly a week after the Archduke's assassination, the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador in Berlin lunched with the Kaiser at Potsdam, and handed over an autograph letter from old Francis Joseph. Immediately after luncheon, in the Potsdam Sabbath calm, all the heads of the German war machine, the Prussian War Minister, the Chief of the Emperor's Military Cabinet, and bigwigs from the Great General Staff and the Admiralty, met the Kaiser in council. It's morally certain that the punitive measures which Vienna is planning against Serbia, and their possible outcome, were discussed. In other words, this meeting was a council of war. It took place, as I've said, on 5th July...."

He paused significantly and held me with his eye. "On the morning of that day Vivian Abbott arrived in Berlin!"

"Then the report in your pocket...?"

He nodded. "Look here. If Austria goes for Serbia, there's a good chance of a general flare-up. Our German friends leave nothing to chance. Since they're backing their Austrian ally to the limit, they've got to reckon with the possibility of mobilisation. Now mobilisation consists of a whole series of graduated preliminaries, each involving a mass of preparations. If we assume that Austria's plan for action against Serbia is cut and dried, we may take it that Germany is losing no time about synchronising the different stages of her mobilisation with the progressive steps of the Austrian programme. When I tell you that success in war largely depends on the speed with which mobilisation takes place, you will realise the importance of the report of a meeting at which its time-table is discussed. That at the Potsdam meeting it was not only discussed, but also decided upon, is shown by the fact that two days later the Emperor left Germany on his annual Norwegian cruise...."

Like most women, politics have always bored me. And I never knew anything about foreign affairs.

"I don't see what it's got to do with England," I said carelessly. "Austria is perfectly justified in punishing the Servians for that horrible murder...."

"It's got this to do with us," my companion retorted. "If Russia supports Serbia, France is bound to be drawn in. In that case, we can hardly stand aloof...."

I laughed. "I don't see why not. We're an island, thank God. If Germany and the rest of them do go to war, it can't affect England...."

"Germany has a Fleet," said Druce quietly. "If she mobilises her Army, she mobilises her Fleet at the same time. Before that happens, we've got to know where we stand. That's why we're vitally interested in this Potsdam meeting. That's why Clubfoot is making every effort to prevent this report from reaching London. And that's why"—he gave me one of his bright smiles—"we've got to get you out of this country quick!"

This realm of high politics into which he had led me filled me with awe. His sketch of Clubfoot, combined with all I had already undergone, seemed to blunt in me every instinct save that of self-preservation. Now that I had got rid of the blue envelope, my one desire was to return to my native shores with all possible speed. I yearned for the staid monotony of Purley and St. Mary Axe with the eagerness of the hunted outlaw heading for sanctuary. Selfish, I know; but fear makes us selfish.

"I'm all for the idea," I replied promptly. "I've had quite enough of Germany, thank you. I shall take the first train back to England, as soon as I can get money from home, that is...."

The grave air with which he shook his head made me vaguely uneasy. "I can let you have what money you want," he said. "But believe me, it's not going to be as easy as that. With luck you might get as far as the frontier by train. But you'd never cross it; not by train, at any rate, or even by motor-car, for the matter of that. I don't think you realise how serious

this is. The fact that Grundt in person is after this report shows that it must have emanated, in the first instance, from some member of the Kaiser's immediate entourage, if not from His Nibs himself; it wouldn't be the first leak in that quarter, by any manner of means. Unless Grundt is convinced in his own mind that you are not implicated in this affair, and until he has ascertained just why you didn't travel on to London this morning—for, of course, he knows you haven't gone—and what exactly you have been doing with yourself all day, you'll not get out of Germany by any ordinary channel. He'll see to that. By this time Clubfoot's net is spread; and you can take it from me, my dear, it don't let much through its meshes...."

His words, spoken without any dramatic emphasis, brought back my fears with a rush. But I made a last effort to battle with them. "I can't help thinking you exaggerate the difficulties," I replied, as stoutly as I might. "It's not as though I'd broken the law. If anyone tries to stop me, I shall go to the Embassy..."

He gave a dry laugh. "My dear Miss Dunbar! I don't want to scare you, but you've got to get this right. I'm a properly accredited secret agent, as much a salaried servant of the Crown as our Ambassador over there in the Wilhelm-Strasse. But he wouldn't lift a finger to help me. He's not allowed to. It's one of the rules of the game. When we're on the job, my dear, we're the untouchables, pariahs, with every man's hand against us. And now that fate has made you one of us, you've got to get used to the fact that you're a pariah, too!"

"But I'm not one of you..." I protested in alarm.

"Clubfoot thinks you are: it amounts to the same thing...."

"But what am I going to do? I've got no money, and the friends I was going to stay with have gone to Switzerland. Even if you lend me money I can't remain in Berlin. I haven't registered at my hotel yet; but as soon as I do, I shall have the police on my track...."

"You're not going to remain in Berlin," was the calm rejoinder. "You're coming away with me. But I've got to make certain arrangements which will take time. And we can't leave before dark, anyway. What had you intended to do if we hadn't met?"

"I was going to dine with a friend of mine, one of the officers from Schlitz. He was to fetch me at the Continental at eight o'clock—and afterwards show me round some of the night restaurants. Of course, that's all off now...."

"Nothing of the kind," cried Druce. "You will most certainly dine with your friend. In this country uniform is the most perfect guarantee of respectability. No one will say a word to you as long as you are accompanied by an officer. But you won't be able to go bummeling.... Stop a minute!" He paused doubtfully. "An officer isn't allowed to visit these night places in uniform"—once more I was impressed by his extraordinary grasp of detail. "Your friend is bound to be in plain clothes. Tell me, what's his regiment?"

"At present he's in the infantry, the 56th Regiment. But he's really in the Foot Guards...."

Druce rubbed his hands delightedly. "A Guardsman, eh? Then in mufti he'll look the part every bit as much as though he were in uniform. What do you say? Am I right?"

I laughed, thinking of Rudi's elegant waist and stiff, angular movements. "I dare say you are...."

"You bet I am," was the gay rejoinder. "You dine with your Guardee, my dear. But after dinner you must make an excuse and slip away. And you'll have to dissuade your young man from driving you home." He smiled at me. "It won't be so easy, I expect, but I must leave that to you. For you're not going back to the hotel, d'you see? You can tell them at Kemper's that you're leaving by the evening train, and pay your bill before you go out to dinner. And, oh yes, send your luggage—you have only a suit-case, I think you said?—up to the cloakroom at the Friedrich-Strasse station by the boots this afternoon, and let him bring you back the ticket. We'll pick up your case on the way out..."

"But how are we going?" I asked.

"By car. We shall have to make a latish start, for I've a terrible lot to do before we leave. I shan't be ready much

before eleven, I expect—better say half-past. That'll give you plenty of time to get through dinner and shake your friend. Where are you dining, by the way?"

I shook my head blankly. He knit his brow.

"Awkward. Know this town at all?"

"Only what I've seen of it to-day."

"We can't have you losing yourself. And taxis are so easily traced. Unless we met right in the centre. You'll dine somewhere central, I expect?"

"Herr von Linz said something about the Wintergarten...."

"That's central enough: just by the Friedrich-Strasse station. If you had to walk, I suppose you could find your way back from there to your hotel, couldn't you?"

"Oh yes...."

"Then we'll make it Kemper's. The Mauer-Strasse is quiet at that time of night, and we're not likely to be observed. It won't give anything away if you take a taxi back there, as long as your young man don't come with you. But it's just as well to have a rendezvous that you can reach on foot, if needs be. Kemper's then, at 11.30: I'll be outside with a car. Wait! You'll want money for your hotel bill...." He handed me a hundred mark note from his purse. "If I were you, I'd be at the Continental a little ahead of time—they've a lounge where you can wait—so that your officer pal won't need to ask for you at the desk. One never knows: if Clubfoot's busy bees were buzzing around for you there this morning, it might be awkward, don't you know? And I think I'd wear that unusually hideous veil, at any rate until you're clear of the Continental. Was there anything else?"

There was, and it was worrying me terribly. "They'll make me register before I leave the hotel," I said. "I can't give my real name, can I?"

He rubbed his nose reflectively. "No, I don't suppose you can. There isn't any very great risk, really, for the hotels send in these forms to the police only once a day, in the mornings, and by the time yours goes in to-morrow, we shall be over the hills and far away. But there's always a chance of the police making a round of the hotels looking up the names of the latest arrivals. Is your dressing-case labelled or marked with your initials?"

"No...."

"Good. Your German sounds A1 to me, but just in case you've a touch of accent, I should take a foreign name, I think. Anything but English, anyway. What about being a German Swiss? That would explain any unusual intonation, besides being eminently dull and respectable. Let's see: how would Maria ... Maria Hübel from, say, Zurich, do?"

"Anything you like," I agreed forlornly, for this registration business frightened me.

His hand pressed mine softly under the table: he had a gentle way with him in everything he did. "You've been splendid up till now," he said. "Be brave a little longer! I'm ever so glad I met you, my dear. It's going to make a lot of difference having a partner. The loneliness has been the worst part up till now. Buck up! You and I together are going to put rings round old Clubfoot...."

The pressure of that firm, strong hand steadied me. Again I was conscious of the desire to help him. His blue eyes smiled into mine. They were shining now as though he were elated at the prospect of beating our terrible adversary on his own ground. Slowly my confidence flowed back. This strange young man's undaunted assurance seemed to protect me like a shield. I felt that Nigel Druce would see us through.

"A bold face now," he counselled, "and we'll have you home in two ticks. Kemper's is only just around the corner from here. Hold up your head, and remember there are three million people besides ourselves in this city!"

He rapped with a coin upon the marble slab of the table. "Kellner, zahlen!"

64

At Schippke's

It was ten minutes to eight when my cab deposited me beneath the glass awning of the Hotel Continental, which loomed large in a short, quiet street behind Unter den Linden. I felt rested and refreshed: my nerves, too, were relaxed, for the afternoon had passed off without the slightest incident.

From the wax-works Nigel Druce had driven me back in a taxi to Kemper's, where I slipped out of my clothes, and lay down on the bed in my room, meaning to rest for a couple of hours. I must have fallen asleep, however, for when I next caught sight of the time it was past six.

The nap did me good. By the time I had had a bath and a cup of tea, put on the change of linen I had laid out and got into the tailor-made in which I had travelled from Schlitz, I found myself prepared to look on the best side of what was proving to be at any rate an exciting and romantic adventure. And when, my suit-case despatched to the station, and my bill paid, they brought me the police form to fill up, I signed myself Maria Hübel, Spinster, twenty-three, from Zurich, with all the aplomb of the practised adventuress. From the indifferent air with which the woman in the office laid my form away with the others, I felt certain that, up to that moment, at any rate, no one had come inquiring after me at the hotel.

My short drive along the Linden to my rendezvous with Rudi went far to restore my mind to normalcy, to use the word with which, a few years later, a prophet arisen in the West was to enrich our English tongue. The evening was serene and warm. Behind the leafy green of the Tiergarten, under the high arch of the Brandenburg Gate, the western sky was softly purple and all tremulous with the first stars, and along the wide avenue the limes were fragrant beneath their powdering of summer dust.

Over hotel and café the house-fronts, one by one, were quietly bursting into radiance, with lettering picked out in electric lights, red and white and green, or with signs that flashed and spun and zig-zagged rhythmically, flaming up to die and flame again, their effulgence yet paled by the sunset after-glow.

After the day's toil the city was starting on its nightly pleasure round. The cafés were thronged. Each had its serried ranks of habitués grouped about small tables overflowing upon the sidewalk, each had its windows folded back wide to reveal further phalanxes of placid burgesses under the lights within, and waiters, clamouring and perspiring, darting to and fro. There was laughter in the air, laughter and the murmur of light-hearted voices that rose on the still evening from the crowds sauntering along the broad pavements and mingled with an accompaniment of lively sounds, the clanging of bells where the trams thumped ponderously across the avenue, the staccato squawk of motor-horns, the brisk clip-clopping of the little horse cabs, and the smooth whirr of the electric droschkes over the shining asphalt roadway.

It was as though the approach of night had wrought a fairy change in the city which had seemed to me so harsh and inhospitable in the garish light of day. Before the spontaneous gaiety of the street, my picture of Clubfoot, crouched behind these peaceable, good-humoured throngs, began to recede into the distance and, as I drove along, I asked myself whether I had not been unduly alarmist.

Amid the lights and laughter of the summer night, the story of Vivian Abbott was hard to credit. After all, I mused, I knew nothing of Nigel Druce. He might be one of those scaremongers who were always prating of the German menace. What if he had lied to me? If Grundt were right, and the little Major just a vulgar criminal, might not the blue envelope contain some proof of the crime? In that event Nigel Druce would be merely Abbott's accomplice. Yet he had honest eyes....

The sight of Rudi carried me still farther along the road back to my old life of undisturbed peace. I had not been with him five minutes before it seemed to me that I had never left Schlitz. I had only just taken a seat at one of the small tables in the spacious hall of the Continental facing the swing-door, when he appeared.

Rather to my surprise, for I remembered what Druce had said, he was in uniform. Directly he caught sight of me, he rushed forward and fairly fell upon my hand. "Most beautiful Olivia," he cried, as he kissed it, "the sight of you is the crowning joy of a most auspicious day. Gott, what a rush it's been! I'm dying for a drink. In your honour I shall be English and drink the whisky-soda." He snapped his fingers at a waiter hovering near. "Zwei whisky-soda!" he ordered.

"If you make me drink whisky," I said laughing, "people will take me for one of those strong-minded Englishwomen you disapprove of so violently. I don't want anything: I've just had tea."

He changed the order and, hitching up his sword, dropped into the chair at my side. "My dear, how sweet of you to have stayed! I'm so delighted that you're going to dine with me to-night. I've got glorious news to celebrate...."

"Oh, Rudi," I said, "am I allowed to know?"

"It's not official yet, but it's as good as settled. I'm going back to the Foot Guards...."

"My dear, how wonderful!"

"I should say so," he proclaimed triumphantly. "No more Schlitz for me, that dead-and-alive nest you're so fond of, no more ghastly Kaffee-Klatsches, no more bridge at a mark a hundred...." He was radiant.

"However did you manage it?" I asked him.

He wagged his head knowingly. "Well, I had a tip that a sort of relation of mine was going to get command of my old regiment: at present he's commanding one of our battalions at Spandau. I put in for leave to come up and tackle him. Ever since I arrived at four o'clock I've been on his track. At last I got him on the telephone, and I think it's going to be all right. I'm seeing him later in the evening. That's why I'm still in uniform: officially, plain clothes are forbidden, you know." He looked at me doubtfully. "It means that I can't take you bummeling. These night restaurants, you see, are out of bounds to us in uniform...."

He seemed quite relieved when I told him that I had decided to make it an early evening, anyway: it was plain that he was absorbed with the prospect of his rehabilitation.

"Well," he observed philosophically, "it'll have to be for another time. You'll be in Berlin again, I expect. Now about dinner: d'you mind very much if we dine at Schippke's?"

"I'm entirely in your hands," I told him laughingly. "What is Schippke's?"

"It's a restaurant near the War School," he explained. "Not frightfully fashionable, you know, but they've got a band and it's amusing at times. Mostly officers and little ladies, if you understand me. But outwardly quite respectable. And the food's good. This Colonel of mine is attending a regimental dinner in a private room there to-night and I'm to see him afterwards. It was the only time he could give me as he's going on leave in the morning...." He took his drink from the salver the waiter presented. "Prost!" He drained the glass at a draught. "Brr!" he exclaimed, as he brushed his fine yellow moustache with his handkerchief. "No wonder the English are so tough!" He flung the waiter a coin. "Come on, proud Albion, let's get to Schippke's before the lads have drunk up all the champagne!"

At the first glance I decided that Schippke's was going to be great fun. It was the kind of place no tourist ever discovers, and infinitely more characteristic of Berlin life, I surmised, than the terrace of the Wintergarten or similar cosmopolitan resorts. In the entrance hall a grim and richly moustachioed beldame hung up my tweed travelling coat cheek by jowl with an extraordinary assemblage of military millinery suspended on hooks round the walls. There were lines of swords and caps and spiked helmets, and I noticed a wonderful Hussar dolman, edged with astrakhan and laced

with gold, and a gleaming Cuirassier helmet.

While Rudi saw about a table I looked in upon the restaurant. It was a long room, white-panelled, filled with noise and tobacco smoke and the smell of food. At one end was a band that seemed all brass and cymbals, and in the centre of the floor a table piled high with viands in tiers, Strassburg patties, pots of caviar, faggots of asparagus, melons, boxes of peaches.

Our entrance drew all glances to the door. At almost every table I recognised the officer type, though many of the diners, notably those dining *tête-à-tête* with ladies, were in plain clothes. There was no mistaking the evidence, however, of the close-cropped heads and the monocles, above all, of the band of deep sunburn ending abruptly on a level with the eyes.

There were many salutations as we entered, a formal bow for me, a friendly hand-wave, a lifted glass, for my companion. Rudi seemed to be known to almost everybody at Schippke's, from the Viennese *maitre d'hotel*, who greeted him like a long-lost son, to a young Guardsman with a vinous air, who rose up from a party of men as we passed, and shouted: "Kinder, Rudi's back. Now it can start!" which obscure remark was uproariously applauded by his friends.

There was a sort of holiday atmosphere about the place which was most infectious. The band scarcely took a rest: everybody seemed to be drinking champagne and talking to everybody else; and presently I found myself raising my glass with Rudi to different people who insisted on toasting us from adjacent tables. Rudi ordered a marvellous dinner. The caviar was of the freshest: the blue trout broiled to a turn: the chicken *en casserole* deliciously tender. The champagne glasses at Schippke's were capacious; and by the time we had reached the chicken, Rudi, despite my protest, was ordering a second bottle of Pommery. Perhaps I didn't protest very hard. I was so happy for a spell that evening that I believe I actually forgot the imminent ordeal of that long motor journey into the unknown. Rudi was excellent company. He knew stories about almost everyone in the room, particularly the "little ladies," and he kept making me laugh. All this time the restaurant was filling up. With every fresh arrival new tables were squeezed in until we were all sitting elbow to elbow.

The band had been playing old German airs—soldier songs they were, Rudi explained—and people were singing to the music, when suddenly there were cries of "Nein, Nein," a hubbub of voices and laughter.

"What's happening?" I said, looking up from my peach.

Rudi chuckled. "It's rather funny. The band was playing 'Reserve hat Ruh!' that's the song the Reservists sing when they're released from their annual service with the colours, and the fellows won't have it."

"Why not?" I demanded.

The boy sipped his champagne thoughtfully. "Well," he remarked reflectively, "there's a lot of talk about war just now. Of course, if we go to war, the Reservists who are doing their training will be kept on. So, you see..."

"But surely you don't think that there's any real danger of war, do you?"

"Not if Russia behaves sensibly..."

"And if she doesn't?"

He shrugged his shoulders and did not reply.

"I see," said I. "Then that was what your friend meant just now when he called out to you, 'Now it can start!'"

Rudi flushed up. "Nobody pays any attention to old Kurt's nonsense," he answered evasively.

"The people who stopped the band from playing that Reservist song didn't seem to think the chances of war nonsense," I put in.

"You're right," said the boy solemnly. "There's a limit to Germany's patience, Olivia, as your dear French friends will find out if they go on trying to push Russia into war over these dirty Servians. Germany stands encircled with foes"—his voice became animated—"but if needs be, we shan't be afraid to hack our way through. Our good German sword is sharp, as you English and French may discover sooner than you think. There's no nonsense about that, at any rate...."

He spoke with such heat, with a challenging air so foreign to his customary easy-going nature, that I stared. "My dear Rudi, nobody wants to go to war with you..." I was beginning to say, when a great shouting interrupted me. All over the restaurant people were standing up and crying out a name. In a flash Rudi was on his feet, waving his napkin and yelling with the rest: "Prince Eugene, give us the Hymn of Prince Eugene!"

There was a moment's lull and then, with a roll of drums, the band swept noisily into crashing martial music. From group to group the song was taken up. The whole company chanted the words, keeping time by pounding the tables with their fists, with bottles, with anything that came handy, until the glasses jingled. "*Prinz Eugen, der edle Ritter...*" they roared: the rest of the words escaped me in the din.

Rudi's voice was in my ear. He was shouting to make himself heard. "It's the song of Prince Eugene, the Austrian General, who captured Belgrade from the Turks," he explained, and added: "Perhaps the Austrians are going to take Belgrade again, to punish these rascally Serbs."

The song ended in a crescendo of cheers. The band stopped and people resumed their seats. An officer in uniform remained on his feet, a stout man with a purple face, his tunic unbuttoned at the throat, who swayed as he stood. In stentorian tones he was declaiming:

"Jeder Schuss ein, Russ,
Jeder Stoss ein, Franzos,
Jeder Tritt ein, Brit...."^[1]

The whole restaurant broke into hand-clapping and laughter. Someone pulled the officer down into his chair and the band broke into "Puppchen," the popular song of the day. Rudi laughed happily. "Infantry, obviously," he remarked drily. "The trouble about these Line fellows is that they can't hold their liquor. But though the man's drunk, he speaks the truth. We Germans are ready, Olivia, and..."

But I scarcely heard him.

Floria von Pellegrini had just come into the restaurant.

[1] "A Russian with every shot,
A Frenchman with every thrust,
A Briton with every kick."

I escape from twin perils to meet with disaster

The Pellegrini certainly knew the value of an effective entrance. Every other woman in the place had an escort; but she came alone. As she paused upon the threshold to gaze upon that animated scene, she looked superb. She was in *décolleté*, as though she had been to the Opera—I remembered noticing that Burian, the great Wagnerian tenor, was

billed to sing Siegfried that night—her exquisite figure moulded in an ivory satin frock, quite plain but marvellously draped, with a bodice that left her gleaming shoulders bare. Her gorgeous hair was loosely gathered up to lie in a thick coil upon her shapely neck, and looped up to show her small and beautifully-moulded ears to which a pair of emerald ear-rings, each a small but marvellously fine cabuchon stone, the only jewellery she displayed, drew the eye.

Her appearance sent the waiters scurrying in all directions. Hector, the *maitre d'hotel*, with his old-fashioned mutton-chop whiskers, was before her in an instant, bowing low. But for the moment she ignored him, disdainfully surveying the room, while a sort of suppressed murmur ran from table to table.

Her curious green eyes were veiled in sullen arrogance. With a sort of dreadful fascination I watched her gaze slowly traverse the restaurant. Now she was looking at us; but her eyes passed me by. They rested for a moment on Rudi, who was staring at her through his eye-glass with unabashed admiration, as was, incidentally, every other man in the place; and I reminded myself that, in the Pellegrini's profession, it is men, not women, that matter.

My thoughts went back to Vivian Abbott. So this was the woman who had betrayed him. She looked spoilt, luxury-loving, but not vile, as a woman who sells her lover must be. Indeed, in her shimmering white frock, she had almost a virginal air. With her entrancing colouring; her coquettish nose, the nostrils rather wide; her eager mouth, pretty as a cupid's, but a thought too heavy; her ravishing form, she was a splendid and alluring creature. I could understand any man falling in love with her.

Amid a buzz of comment they conducted her to a table apparently reserved for her on the far side of the room. Rudi was talking excitedly in my ear, a string of scandal... "...the best-gowned woman in Germany ... von Dagen, of the Pasewalker Cuirassiers, shot himself over her ... ruined half a dozen men besides ... now with Prince Karl-Albrecht...."

But I paid scant attention. I was trying to grapple with the situation with which the Pellegrini's unexpected appearance had confronted me. She had only caught a glimpse of me at the flat; and could I avoid meeting her face to face, could I but slip away before the restaurant began to empty, I might yet pass unrecognised. The Prince was the danger: he, I felt sure, would know me again. Since she was alone, it looked as if he might join her.

I roused myself from my reverie to find a tall officer in uniform bowing before me. He was, I think, the thinnest man I have ever seen, a regular bodkin of a figure, buttoned into a bright blue tunic, skin-tight and wasp-waisted. Rudi was on his feet, murmuring a name—Baron von Something-or-other.

The Baron smiled at me most ingratiatingly out of a perfectly vacuous face. "If the gnädiges Fräulein will have the extraordinary goodness to put up with my company for a little..." he drawled in a ridiculously affected voice. "The Colonel is asking for our friend. Du, Rudi," he went on, addressing the boy and ogling me most desperately the while, "you needn't hurry back. If I hadn't drunk so much champagne"—he swayed a little as he spoke, and sat down rather abruptly—"I should speak English with this most lovely lady. But ach je! I can think of only one word"—he grinned at me expansively—"Meexed Peeckles!"

Rudi laughed and clapped him on the shoulder. "Miss Dunbar speaks German as well as you do, Helmuth." He turned to me. "You don't mind my rushing off? The Colonel won't keep me long. Helmuth will look after you, won't you, old man....?"

I had been watching the Pellegrini. Her unexpected appearance had brought back to my mind with horrifying vividness that old familiar terror of mine, a vision of the clubfooted man, lowering somewhere out of sight behind this scene of gaiety, with its brilliant uniforms, pretty women, laughter, music. A knot of men pressed about her table. It seemed a good moment to slip away. I glanced at my watch: a quarter to eleven. Three-quarters of an hour to my rendezvous outside Kemper's. What on earth was I to do with myself in the meantime? But it was dangerous to stay...

"If you don't mind, Rudi," I said, "I think I'll be going now...."

He swung round aghast. "Olivia, not yet!"

"I've got one or two things to see to. And ... and my head's aching rather. I'll find my way back to the hotel all right. There's no need for you to come...."

"But at least I'm going to see you home," he cried. "Wait there for me! I shan't be five minutes...."

"Really, I can go quite well by myself," I protested.

"I won't hear of it," he flashed back. "I'd rather put old Westfried off...."

"Don't be absurd," I told him. "Of course you must see your Colonel...."

With an obstinate look on his face he dropped into his chair. "I'll get my bill and come with you," he announced.

"I won't hear of any such thing," I told him. "Go to the Colonel at once, Rudi!"

"Not unless you promise to wait for me!"

The Baron suddenly emitted a loud groan. "I am more drunk than I thought," he announced solemnly. "The English Miss is frightened of me." He shook his head forlornly. "And everybody has drunk more than I have. The Adjutant is at least a bottle ahead...."

I could not help laughing, he was so desperately in earnest. "It's nothing to do with you," I assured him. "It's only that I'm tired and I've a long journey before me to-morrow."

"Give me five minutes, Olivia," Rudi pleaded. "It's our last night together. Heaven knows when I shall see you again!"

"'Maid Joan departs and never more returns!'" declaimed the Baron lugubriously—I recognised the quotation: it is from Schiller's 'Jungfrau von Orleans,' and hardworked at that. "Stay, most beautiful lady, and"—his eyes brightened—"we'll have a bottle at Rudi's expense...."

A plump officer, round as a ball, bustled up. "Mensch," he squeaked at Rudi in the nasal tones the Prussian Guardsman affects, "have you taken leave of your senses? The old man's hunting for you everywhere. You'd better make haste if you want to see him. He's just leaving...."

I had risen from my chair, for I was determined to get away. But it was no easy matter, penned in as we were by tables.

"You'll wait a minute, Olivia?" Rudi begged.

"Of course she'll wait," cried the Baron. "We'll take care of the Gnädige in your absence, mein Junge!"

Rudi flung me an imploring glance and hurried off.

I wavered; and on the instant was lost. The Baron stood up and gravely presented his plump friend. "I really I must be going," I declared. But the pair of them barred my passage, waving me back into my seat.

"Um Gottes Willen," the fat man ejaculated, "you wouldn't leave our Rudi in the lurch, on this night of all nights, when he's coming back to us! Be patient a little, meine Gnädige: he won't be long. Colonel Westfried has a train to catch...."

Colonel Westfried? The name sounded familiar: surely I had heard it quite recently?

The Baron had got his bottle of champagne. He was solemnly filling up three glasses, spilling a good deal of wine on the tablecloth in the operation. "We will now drink," he gravely announced, "to the so lovely ladies of Old England. Meexed Peeckles, goddam!" He forced a glass into my hand and clinked his glass with mine, while his companion followed suit.

At any other time I might have laughed, he was so charmingly absurd in his intoxicated state. But the presence of that woman oppressed me: I was on fire to be off. I put my lips to my glass, set it down upon the table and stood up. The

Baron and the other stared at me in dismay. It was then I became aware that, from the far end of the restaurant a stream of officers in uniform, noisy and flushed with wine, were slowly forging their way down the restaurant between the closely packed tables.

A spate of blue tunics eddied about us. Suddenly I saw my two companions simultaneously spring to their feet and stand stiffly at attention. The crowd divided; and I found myself face to face with Floria von Pellegrini's friend, the Prince. All too late, I then remembered in what circumstances I had heard Colonel Westfried's name. Westfried, of course, was Prince Karl's Commanding Officer, of whom Grundt had spoken so contemptuously at the Pellegrini's flat.

The Prince was smoking a large cigar and laughing uproariously, his suety face from heavy drinking more pallid than ever and beaded with moisture. Like the rest, he was in uniform, with a cross dangling from a riband about his neck and a row of medals glittering on the breast of the bright blue tunic into which his gross and flabby torso was crammed as tightly as a sausage in its skin. A slim Hussar officer, gorgeous in scarlet and gold, with a saturnine face, held him by the arm and recounted some facetious story to which the Prince was listening abstractedly, while those little pig eyes of his fluttered from table to table, now to bestow condescending recognition upon an acquaintance, now to linger suggestively upon a woman in a brazen and lecherous stare.

Hedged in as I was, I could not flee. As they fell back on either side before him, the officers eddying about our table formed a lane which led directly to where I stood between the Baron and his portly friend. Beyond our immediate vicinity the life of the restaurant proceeded as usual: with its military *clientèle* I imagine that princes were three-a-penny at Schippke's. But I was caught up in this torrent of Guardsmen, and I wished that the ground might open and swallow me up, or that I might take a header and disappear among the outer fringe of tables where the cheery buzz of chaff and laughter, the constant to-and-fro of the diners, contrasted with the sudden chilling hush, the line of stiffening backs, among the blue tunics surrounding me.

He recognised me instantly, as I had felt it in my bones he would. I saw his eyebrows go up, a pink hand grope for his monocle. With a curt gesture he silenced his companion and came straight up to me.

It seemed to me that every drop of blood had drained away from my face. Was this denunciation? I glanced desperately across the restaurant to where the Pellegrini had her table. But the seething crowd obscured her from my view.

Screwing his glass in his eye, the Prince tittered shrilly: "Donnerwetter, die kleine Engländerin!"

He paused and looked interrogatively from one to the other of the two officers flanking me.

I was aware that the Baron was nudging me and whispering something behind his hand. "Knix machen," he muttered hoarsely. "Knix machen!" and, to illustrate his meaning, sublimely oblivious of the fact that some fifty people were watching him intently, he dropped a most elegant curtsy. I bobbed hastily. The Prince burst into a peal of throaty laughter. "Kolossal!" he gurgled. "You should be in the ballet, Baron! One of these days we'll put you in a frilly skirt and see if you can shake a leg as gracefully as this poor von Hülsen used to...."

This was a joke, and His Highness glanced round the circle for approbation. Everybody roared, and there were murmurs of deferential delight—"Ausgezeichnet!"—"Ein vorzüglicher Witz!"—"Hoheit sind unglaublich komisch!" I should have been better able to appreciate Prince Karl's peculiar form of humour had I known then, as I was to discover later, that, at a house-party at Prince Fürstenberg's some years before, Field-Marshal Count Hülsen-Hasler, in a ballet skirt and with his face painted, had dropped dead in the presence of the Emperor while giving his famous imitation of a ballet dancer.

Expectantly the Prince pursed up his thick, wet lips, and his small eyes gimleted into mine. He turned to my companion. "Well, Baron," he said jovially, "aren't you going to present the lady?"

The Baron swayed slightly and steadied himself by gripping the edge of the table. "His..."—he swallowed with an effort—"His Highness Prince Karl-Albrecht of Traubheim-Zwickau," he announced very formally. He waved a hand airily in my direction. "Mees ... Meexed Peeckles!" He smiled seraphically and gently collapsed into his chair.

The Prince shrieked with laughter. "Man, you're drunk!" he chortled.

"Not drunk, Hoheit," replied the Baron with dignity, "not drunk, only forgetful. Herr von Linz, with whom the gnädiges Fräulein is dining, told me her name, but it has escaped me with the rest of my English...." He struggled to his feet.

"Then," said His Highness, with a significant glance round the circle, "I must find out the name for myself!"

On that the Hussar officer fell back discreetly, and the eddy of blue tunics began to move forward again, carrying with it the Baron and his friend. Prince Karl motioned me to a chair and took one himself. What was I to do? I sat down.

He placed his soft, plump hand over mine. "Na," he remarked confidentially, "die kleine Engländerin is a friend of our Rudi, *was*? So that's why you were so cruel to me this morning! All day long I've been wondering what the reason could be...."

I was beginning to feel easier in my mind. For some reason or other the Prince appeared to be unaware of Clubfoot's interest in me. It was not much after eleven o'clock. If I could get rid of the Prince before Rudi came back, all would be well.

He grunted and mopped his shining face with a handkerchief as fine as a woman's, and embroidered with a large coronet. "Verflucht," he muttered thickly, "you've quite bewitched me with your great big eyes and your pitch-black hair. Do you know that ever since this morning I've done nothing else but think about you, you ... you sweet little morsel..." The snouting nose was thrust forward at me. The sweet little morsel repressed an inclination to laugh. I stand five feet eight in my stockings, and I weighed then, as I weigh still, about one hundred and forty pounds in my birthday suit. But as he suddenly bent down I caught a glimpse of his eyes, and the mirth died in me. His gross and horrible lips fumbled for my hand. I snatched it away.

"Such maidenly modesty," he chuckled, "and yet what fire! I tell you what, little woman, you and I must meet again. I've decided to overlook your foolishness of this morning: you were, of course, unaware of my rank. You shall come out and have a little supper with me somewhere quietly, to-morrow or the next day..." He produced a gold pencil and pushed up the cuff of his tunic. "Just give me your name and telephone number," he said, with pencil poised. "I'll ring you up in the morning, and tell you when and where...."

I had been thinking swiftly. Time pressed, for Rudi might return any minute now. I could see only one possible means of shedding this preposterous clown. "I suppose Your Highness knows that Frau von Pellegrini is sitting over there?" I observed gently.

He whipped round like a shot rabbit. "Um Gottes Willen, where?"

The Pellegrini was not to be discerned in that crowd; but I indicated the direction of her table. The Prince scrambled to his feet. "Herr Je," he murmured, "I'd forgotten I'd told her to meet me here. She'll make a fearful scene if she catches us together again. Ring me up at the Hôtel Atlantic, Kleine: I'm staying there for a few days. O Gott, O Gott...!"

He bounced off, his fat face awry with an expression of utter dismay. I let him get clear, then stood up swiftly and made for the door. It had proved easier than I had ever dared to imagine. Looking neither to left nor right, I passed out into the lobby, where I gave the attendant the ticket for my travelling coat. It was twenty minutes past eleven. I had not a moment to lose.

The bearded lady in charge of the cloak-room helped me into my overcoat. I gave her a mark, and was turning to go when the door of the telephone-box on one side of the lobby opened suddenly, and the Pellegrini came out.

The passage-way was narrow and thronged with people collecting their hats and coats. To reach the street door I had to brush past the woman. Pulling down my veil, I sought to slip by; but it was too late. Her emerald eyes seemed to flame as they fell on me. With a resolute air, she put herself in my path.

"I want a word with you," she said; but for all her bold front, her voice shook a little as though some strong emotion gripped her. I sought to appear collected.

"There's some mistake," I rejoined, making another attempt to pass, "I don't know you!"

She cast a slow, sidelong glance about her out of her oddly lambent eyes. There was a wariness in her whole mien that filled me with an obscure dread. "No mistake, Fräulein Dunbar," she rapped back in a hurried undertone, and emphasised my name. "You will hear what I have to say or face the consequences." The green eyes were menacing. "Bitte...." She indicated a door that stood ajar a little way along the vestibule. "We shan't be disturbed there...."

I made a final effort to shake her off. "I tell you I don't know you. And, anyway, I can't wait now. I..."

Scathingly her voice broke into mine. "You little fool, d'you know who rang me up just now? It was Grundt...." She was quick to see the fear which must have shown in my face, for she added brusquely: "Now will you listen to *me*? Or shall it be to him?"

Half-dazed with apprehension, I allowed her to shepherd me into a little office where she clicked on the light. I saw a roll-top desk, some chairs, a stack of files, a calendar. She motioned to me to shut the door, leaning against the desk, incessantly twining and untwining her long white fingers.

"I've one word of advice to give you, meine Kleine," she said as I faced her. "Go back to your own country at once!" I noticed the drawling Viennese lilt to her speech. I took my courage in both hands and tried to brazen it out.

"Of course, I remember you now," I said as easily as my thumping heart would let me. "I didn't recognise you without your hat. You're Frau von Pellegrini, aren't you? I brought you a shawl to see this morning. I want to assure you that I was in no way to blame for the very unpleasant incident that occurred at your flat. It's not my fault if your friends try to kiss me...."

She cut me short with a gesture. "Why did you come to my apartment?" she demanded, with angry brusqueness.

Her insolence touched up my Highland blood. "Not to be insulted by your friends, anyway!" I retorted.

She stamped her foot. "No evasions! Answer me! Why did you come?"

I had foreseen this question. "To try and sell my shawl...."

Her gaze swept me up and down, contemptuous. "Are you so poor, then?"

"I'd lost my purse with my ticket to London in it...."

She looked up eagerly. "Is this true?" Then doubt reappeared in her face. "Who gave you my name?" she demanded quickly. She bent forward, and again I saw the nameless fear that lurked in the green pools of her eyes. "It was Abbott, niet?"

I caught hold of myself, prepared to meet the danger. "Who?" I asked, and sought to make the question sound indifferent.

"You were at Schlatz when the Englishman got away," she said, and her lips trembled. "He sent you to me, nicht wahr?" Her voice rose to a shrill whisper. "It was Abbott who sent you, wasn't it? Answer me, can't you?" She caught my wrist.

I shook myself free. "I was at Schlatz when some prisoner escaped," I told her, "but whether he was English or German, I can't say, for I never saw him or spoke with him...."

She was watching me narrowly. "Is this true?" she asked again, and this time her voice was soft as with some immense relief.

"Certainly," I lied stoutly.

"Then who gave you my name?"

I was prepared for this, too. "The chambermaid at the hotel. I asked her if she knew of any fashionable actress who might buy a shawl, and she mentioned you...."

"So...?" The exclamation was like a sigh of contentment. She opened her purse, a beautiful thing of green, gold and platinum chain-work, set in alternating stripes, with an emerald clasp, and took out a handful of notes. She thrust the money in my hand. "Listen to me, Kleine! What you've got to do is to get out of this city as fast as you can and never come back. If you value your safety, you'll make a point of leaving Berlin without a moment's delay, now, this very night. And if you're wise you'll say nothing to anyone about your adventure at Schlatz, or about seeing me. You can take the money," she added, observing that I had laid the roll of notes upon the desk. "I have plenty more. Or, if it isn't enough....?"

She broke off, and then, seeing that I made no move, with a nervous laugh she stuffed the wad back in her purse. "As you will. But remember, I speak for your own good. Grundt suspects you, and whom Clubfoot suspects..." She checked herself: there was terror in the glance she gave me. "Oh, this man appals me," she wailed, distraught, of a sudden, with fear. "You look kind-hearted, Fräulein. Promise me that you'll go away at once and say nothing...."

"You may rely on me," I answered coldly; for I could not forget that it was this creature who had sent my poor little Major to his death. Then I walked out of the office and left her there. As I hurried through the lobby to the street, I had a glimpse of the Prince hovering nervously about the threshold of the restaurant.

It was 11.35. I walked until I was clear of the lighted approach to Schippke's, then hailed a passing taxi.

* * * * *

The Mauer-Strasse lay quiet and deserted, its asphalt roadway shining in the dim light of the street lamps like a dark river flowing under the stars. As we rattled down the street, I saw that in front of Kemper's a ruby gleam spilled a pool of blood athwart the kerb. A closed car was there, its tail-lamp towards us. I stopped my cab a few yards from the hotel, paid it off, and hastened towards the car. As I drew near I discerned a shape immobile in the driving-seat. "Here I am!" I cried softly.

The figure at the steering-wheel did not move, but at that moment a shadow seemed to detach itself from the gloom under the house walls. A short, square-shouldered man, with a large moustache, stepped up to me. He laid a finger to his bowler. "Fräulein Dunbar?" he said politely in German.

His matter-of-fact tone disarmed me: I took him to be a messenger from Druce. "Yes," I said. Then I started, for two other men had appeared noiselessly at my elbow.

"We are the police," said the first man. "You must come with us to Headquarters."

I sprang back. "The police?" I repeated. "Why? What have I done?"

"False registration," was the curt reply, as the speaker flung open the car door. "Get in with her, you two: I'll sit next to Fritze...."

They hustled me into the car, and we were whirled away over the gleaming asphalt.

The Crouching Beast

If there be any courage in my composition, it is of that common brand which asserts itself only when confronted with the inevitable. And there was something essentially finite about the two large and stolid plainclothes men who bore me company as the limousine sped quickly through the streets.

In the first shock of my arrest I was angry rather than scared. Angry with myself for having walked thus blindly into the trap. I suppose my good fortune in emerging unscathed from the unexpected encounters of the evening threw me off my guard.

An endless chain of arc lamps shining milkily among a central avenue of trees, a blaze of light from the pavements told me that we were crossing Unter den Linden. On the farther side we seemed to be immersed at once in a network of dim streets. As we glided along I tried to review my position.

What exactly had Grundt against me? Definitely, only this tiresome business of the false registration. He knew, of course, that I had spent the day in Berlin; but—for the present, anyhow—he could have no evidence that I could see as to how I had passed the time.

From Druce's account of what had taken place after my flight from Bale's, it was pretty obvious that my brief appearance there had not been discovered. What about my trip to the Hohenzollern-Allee? Here, too, it seemed to me, the scales were depressed in my favour. The Prince was clearly ignorant of the Abbott business and of my part in it: otherwise, on running into me at Schippke's that unsavoury young man would have lost no time in handing me over to the authorities. Yet Clubfoot had certainly gone to the Hohenzollern-Allee to tell the Pellegrini what had happened at Schlatz. I could only suppose that the Prince had left the flat without seeing Grundt again, for, if he had heard Clubfoot's story, he would most assuredly have mentioned my visit.

As for the Pellegrini, I could not believe it was she who had betrayed me. The fact that she had left her lover in ignorance of Clubfoot's suspicions of me, and the state of terror in which I had seen her that night, were abundant corroboration of Druce's theory that she had kept her affair with Abbott a secret from Grundt. Her manner had shown me that she was racked with anxiety lest Clubfoot should learn the truth, namely, that, on the evening of that fateful 5th of July, Abbott had been in her apartment, and that she was desirous, above all things, of getting rid of me, the only person who could give her away. I imagined I could rely on her to keep her princeling quiet. As long as these two held their tongues, Clubfoot could have no suspicion that I had been to the flat.

And Druce. What had become of him? I had seen no car in the Mauer-Strasse other than the one which was now bearing me towards a fate unknown. Yet Druce was not the sort of man to leave a friend in the lurch. Couldn't he have stayed to warn me?

I felt a faint stirring of my old misgivings. He had recovered the blue envelope: I was of no further use to him now. Might he not be glad to be quit of an embarrassing accomplice? He might even have sent word to the police ... but I could not believe that of him. And yet it was he who had fixed the rendezvous: he—the thought made my cheeks flame—who had suggested that I register in a false name....

The stopping of the car put an abrupt end to my fruitless searchings. The rays of a street-lamp, falling through the glass, picked out the foliage of a box-hedge. A gate creaked, and the car, moving forward, swung round the short curve of a gravelled drive and drew up outside a low porch. In the glow from the head-lamps I was aware of a dark house, with gables overhanging like a Swiss chalet, that rose above it.

I had expected to be taken to some large public building, a Berlin equivalent of Scotland Yard, not to a suburban villa, as this seemed to be. I hung back as one of my companions in the car stepped out and held the door expectantly. "Bitte, schön!" he said politely.

The front door was already unlatched. It brought us into a nondescript lobby, where a stained-glass lantern, pendant from a chain, striped with bars of sparse-coloured light a great stove, white and pompous as any tomb, and some dusty antlers forlornly impaled upon the walls. Here they kept me while the man who had ridden on the box tiptoed away with

creaking boots, presumably to give notice of our arrival. An oppressive stillness rested over all; and my companions conversed in hoarse whispers, as though fearful to break the spell. I felt myself borne down by a presentiment of evil.

After a little wait a door, gaping suddenly, rent a bright rift in the gloom at the lobby's end. The man with the creaky boots stood and beckoned. As they thrust me forward I caught a glimpse behind him of a sort of cubby-hole, with desk and typewriter, and a second door beyond. This the messenger, without knocking, opened, disclosing an inner portal, sheathed in baize, which swung inward at his push.

The room into which, at his silent bidding, I passed was dark save for a blur of light thrown downward by a reading-lamp on a desk in the centre. The desk, a massive roll-top affair, backed on the door, and of the lamp nothing but the glass shade, gleaming like a great green eye, was discernible. Its reflected light, spread about the room, glinted on one side upon book-shelves tiered to the ceiling, and on the other was lost in a band of starry night-sky which, above a dark mass of foliage, hung like a drop-scene between the two wings of a tall casement window folded back against curtains. Somewhere in the distance a dog barked, and the thumping of the city trams was faint in the room. The rest was stealthy silence.

The door by which I had entered sighed as it was softly shut. I realised that my guards had remained outside. I glanced cautiously about me. It seemed incredible that they should have left me there alone with that open window inviting escape. Buoyed up with sudden hope, I took a step forward, and then my heart suddenly seemed to stop beating. For, as the further side of the desk came into view, I became aware that a man was sitting there: I could see the top of his head on a line with the green lamp-shade, a mass of stiff bristles, iron-grey. No need to look twice: I knew at the first glance who it was, just as I had known by instinct to whose house they brought me, just as I recognised the raucous voice that now fended the eerie stillness.

"I should not try the window, Miss Dunbar," it said. "The night air of Berlin is not healthy...."

And on that the massive form of Grundt rose up from behind the desk.

Once more I was impressed by the man's tremendous personality. He radiated authority. The room was spacious, high of ceiling, too, but he seemed to fill it like a procession. He was smiling, as though in welcome, but the cruel, yellow fangs his parted lips unbarred robbed his smile of all kindness, and the hard glitter of his eyes belied any friendly intention. For the rest, his features were blankly impassive—deliberately impassive, it seemed to me—as though he wished by sheer will-power to bludgeon me into submission before unfolding what was in his mind.

He indicated a chair near the desk. "Bitte...." The tone was formally polite; but he was watching me from under his shaggy ape-like eyebrows as I crossed the room. As I sat down I saw his hand move to the lamp, which he manipulated so that my face was in its indirect radiance. His features remained in shadow.

By this I was almost distracted with fear. And yet the issue before me was perfectly plain. I had to find a reasonable explanation, if not a valid excuse, for that false registration. Irrelevant ideas floated aimlessly through my mind like straws whirled about the head of a drowning man. Vainly even as he might, I snatched at them, and found them, even as he, unavailing when in my grasp. I tried to collect my thoughts; but they seemed to flee me in wild confusion under the baleful, unrevealing scrutiny of the man at the desk.

Yet when at length he spoke his tone was not unfriendly:

"Two days ago at Schlatz," he said, in his grating voice, "Dr. von Hentsch gave you a piece of advice. Do you remember?"

I tried to say something; but the words would not come. He took my silence for obstinacy, for he went on, though in the same level tones: "It would be foolish on your part to attempt to hide anything from me, Fräulein. And you have been sufficiently foolish already...." He picked up a pair of horn spectacles which lay on the large and littered desk, and adjusted them on his nose. Then, taking a file from the top of a pile of similar folders, he opened it and consulted one of the papers it contained.

"At Kemper's Hotel, in the Mauer-Strasse, this evening, you registered in the false name of ... um ... Maria Hübel,"

he resumed. He held forth a slip. "You will not deny that this is in your handwriting, I presume?" And without waiting for me to reply, he spread out his enormous hairy hands before him and went on:

"False registration is a very serious offence in Prussia. Punishable by imprisonment under the Penal Code. Our German prisons are not pleasant places, Fräulein Dunbar. Our methods are not dictated to sentimental Ministers by dithyrambic playwrights. We make gaol so damnably uncomfortable that no prisoner ever wants to get back. Corporal punishment, I believe, is still in force for unruly prisoners. For women as well as for men." His shoulders shook in a spasm of silent mirth. "And you are a very unruly person. Jawohl...." He paused. "I don't think ... I *don't* think you'd care about the Frauen-Gefängniss, my dear." He swung round unexpectedly, his great eyebrows drawn together in a frown. "But it's where you'd be at this moment if, out of deference to the good Dr. von Hentsch, I had not had you brought here. Now," he demanded, suddenly stern, "what's the meaning of all this nonsense?"

I had only one weapon to my hand, a woman's weapon, and I used it. After all men were all alike; and it was not the first time I had had to wheedle myself out of a scrape. Besides, under the paternal tone he adopted with me, I seemed to discern a sort of sympathetic interest: well, perhaps sympathetic is not quite the word; benevolently appraising, let me say, as though, not too critically, he were summing me up. I was foolish enough to imagine it showed that he was not entirely insensible to the other sex.

Dulcie used to say I had no heart because I would not encourage poor Bill Bradley. I never was sentimental, anyway; and that was why, I suppose, I discovered for myself at Schlatz that sentimentality is the strong suit with all German men. The Prince had described me as a "sweet little morsel"; and I resolved to play up to the rôle. So I gave Dr. Grundt a soulful look and, playing with my handkerchief, said rather sniffily: "It was very silly of me, I know. But I promised Dr. von Hentsch to go straight back to London; and I didn't want him to know I'd stopped in Berlin...."

Clubfoot grunted. "So? And why did you stay in Berlin, may I ask?"

I dabbed my eyes. "A friend of mine was coming up from Schlatz this afternoon. I'd promised to dine with him...."

The big man clicked chidingly with his tongue: you know, the noise that Nursie makes to a naughty child.

"Very foolish. Who was this friend?"

"One of the officers from Schlatz...."

He laughed drily. "So I imagined. What's his name?"

I hesitated. "It won't get him into trouble, will it?"

"A Prussian officer would know better than to make himself accessory to a falsification of documents...."

"Must I give the name?"

"Certainly, if you wish me to verify your story."

"It was Lieutenant Linz," I said.

He made a note on a block. "And where did you dine?"

"At Schippke's...."

I spoke without thinking. Not that I could have avoided answering the question! But I felt I had blundered when I saw his hand, playing with the pencil, suddenly become motionless, though the expression on his face never changed. He knew, I remembered then, that the Pellegrini was at Schippke's: he had telephoned her there. Never mind, I could count on the fair Floria not to give me away....

He made another note and ripped the sheet from the block. He must have rung some concealed bell, for the door

opened without warning. The messenger was the man with the bloodless face and huge, tawny moustache who had accompanied him that morning to Bale's. He took the slip without speaking and disappeared.

There was a little silence in the room. Clubfoot's hairy hand dipped into a cigar-box on the desk. I have never seen the simple operation of lighting a cigar performed with such an air of ferocity. It was an enormous cigar, and there was something tigerish about the way his strong teeth fastened upon it and bit off the end which he spat, disgustingly, far into the room. He emitted a deep grunt of satisfaction as, having lit up, he lolled back in his chair and blew a cloud of smoke into the air.

"So you wanted to dine with your officer friend, eh?" he remarked, and with a thrill of hope I noticed that his tone was quite jocular. "Well, well, perhaps there's some excuse for you. Splendid young men, our Prussian lieutenants, nicht wahr, Fräulein?"

I murmured I thought they were very nice.

"And so the Herr Leutnant took you to Schippke's, did he, the dog!" he observed waggishly. "A young German girl would not dine alone there with a man. Liebes Fräulein, aren't you a little unconventional?"

"Herr von Linz is a gentleman," I rejoined. "Besides, we are used to our liberty in England...."

He smiled his grim smile. "Evidently...." With a thoughtful air he shook the ash from his cigar into the waste-paper basket. "Some of your compatriots are inclined to be promiscuous in the choice of their gentlemen friends. Only to-day I heard of a young English girl being seen here in Berlin in company with a notorious criminal at one of the lowest haunts in the city, the resort of thieves and..."

He broke off as, without warning, the door facing him opened. A stout woman, with a pasty face, stood irresolute on the threshold. Clubfoot's hot and savage eyes seemed to burn holes right through me as he looked at me and from me to the door.

"Don't stand there like a fool!" he roared at the woman. "Come in, verdammt, and tell me if this is the girl you saw this morning!"

The woman closed the door behind her gingerly, and stepped into the circle of light.

It was Frau Hulda from the Café zur Nelke.

She had donned her finery for the street; a hard straw hat, a blue feather boa, a short black jacket. Her thin lips were pressed together, her shifty eyes round with apprehension.

"Is this the girl?" snapped Grundt.

She nodded impressively. "Jawohl...."

"You're sure...?"

Her glance swept me, contemptuous, from head to foot.

"I'd know her anywhere. We wondered what she was doing in the café in her fine clothes with that low-down actor. I said to the ladies who work with me, after she and her feller had gone: 'Girls,' I said, 'as God is my judge,' I said, 'she's...'"

But Grundt had heaved himself up and hobbled across to the window. "Bartsch!" he called out into the night.

A voice spoke back: "Herr Doktor?"

"Stay beneath the window and keep your eyes open, verstanden?"

"Ist gut, Herr Doktor!"

Clubfoot slammed the window and turned about. He pointed at me with a commanding gesture.

"Search her!" he said to the woman.

I sprang forward, my every instinct in revolt. "I won't have it,..." I cried.

"Another word from you," rasped Grundt, rounding on me savagely, "and I'll do it myself!" He swung round to Frau Hulda. "You've been in gaol. You know how it's done. And don't overlook the linings!"

He limped cumbrously from the room.

67

The photograph

When I set out to write my story, I meant to put down each successive phase of my adventure just as it happened. But the feeling of nausea which brought me nigh to fainting, as that evil harpy laid her damp and pudgy hands on me, comes over me again now, more than four years after, in the country peace of this dear land of ours, and I cannot bring myself to think, much less to write, of that sickening ordeal...

And then Clubfoot was back again, leaning on his stick. Frau Hulda had stood away from me at last, and I was cowering back, as far away from her as I could get, against the wall beside the window. Grim and silent, he surveyed us.

"Also ... nichts?" he said at length.

A servile smile spread over the woman's uneasy features. "Nichts, Herr!"

The misshapen boot thumped the floor as he took a pace towards the desk. "Get out!" he barked over his shoulder.

Frau Hulda cringed. "If I might make so bold as to trouble the Herr for my little expenses! I took a droschke, so as not to keep the Herr waiting. And there's the fare back..." She paused, expectant.

With a snarl he turned on her. "Expenses, is it, you old hag? Madame must have her carriage, must she? She shall have her carriage, too, zum Donnerwetter, a beautiful green carriage, with a little cell all to herself and the door locked, so that she can't fall out..." He chuckled unpleasantly and roared, "Hansemann!" The pasty-faced man appeared. "Ring up the Tiergarten police station and tell them to prepare the pink suite for the Frau Gräfin..."

With a wailing cry the woman plumped down on her knees and held up her hands in entreaty. "Ach nein," she gibbered. "Ich bitt' Sie, Herr..."

"Let them send for her at once,"—Clubfoot seemed to roll the order upon his tongue, as though savouring an unusual dainty—"and telephone to the Alexander-Platz: my compliments to the officer in charge, and he should send the flying squad immediately to raid the Café zur Nelke. They know it at police headquarters: it's the Animier-Kneipe in the Tauben-Strasse. Take the slut away!"

The man grabbed Frau Hulda by the shoulders and ran her, blubbing and lamenting, from the room. Clubfoot dropped into his chair with a heavy grunt. "And now," he remarked, as he began to hunt among the papers that littered the desk, "you and I will have a little talk, liebes Fräulein." He glanced up from his search. "But won't you sit down?" He

pointed to the chair beside him.

I had not moved from my place beside the window. I was paralysed by the disaster which had overtaken me. Seeing that I remained still, Grundt barked sharply: "Sit down!" I obeyed.

He started to rummage among his papers again. "I like spirit, jawohl," he observed reflectively, as though thinking aloud. "But too much spirit is a bad thing. An arrogant spirit must be tamed. Na ja, we have our little methods. So...!" He disentangled a file from a pile of folders and, spreading out his large right hand upon it, considered me tentatively, while his fingers drummed on the drab cover. He puffed once or twice at his cigar, then said: "You've given me a great deal of trouble to-day, liebes Fräulein. I'll pay you the compliment of admitting that for quite a while I lost all track of you. I won't deny that luck was on your side. If you'd gone to the Hotel Continental as was, I understand, your original intention..." He broke off. "Not that your change of plan would have made any difference if the triple sheepshead whose duty it was to ... na,"—he grinned impishly—"to escort you, shall we say, to Berlin, had carried out his instructions...."

My nerve was coming back to me. I began to realise how savagely angry the indignity I had suffered at the hands of that disgusting woman had made me. I would not let this overbearing cripple frighten me....

"I changed my hotel," I replied cuttingly, "because I object to being shadowed. Particularly, when there's no reason for it...."

"No reason?" Grundt's tone was mild as milk. "Have you forgotten our talk in the garden at Schlatz?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "I can't help it if you won't believe I had nothing to do with this English prisoner of yours...."

"Have I ever said I disbelieved you?"

"Your actions show that you do!"

He held up his great hand. "Erlauben Sie! You were a young girl, unprotected, coming to Berlin. If I accepted your assurance that you had had nothing to do with the English criminal, Abbott, I had reasons for thinking that there were others who would be less credulous than I, associates of this man, accomplices. It was my duty, mein Fräulein, to see that you did not fall into evil company." He wagged his head ponderously. "I fear I have reached you too late...."

His voice was soft and purring. He made me think of a great cat playing with a mouse. But this time I did not deceive myself. In a minute he would show his claws, and then, God help me! But what and how much did he know? And what surprise was he waiting to spring on me?

The file under his hand held the secret, whatever it was, I felt certain. He was opening the folder now. A photograph lay on top of the papers it contained. Grundt took the photo, glanced at it for an instant, then placed it, tantalisingly, face downwards on the desk.

"To spare you useless denials," said Clubfoot, "I will tell you what happened this morning. You called at Frau Hulda's cosy little café in the Tauben-Strasse and asked for an individual who calls himself Max Held, but who is also known by the nickname of 'The Count.' This man was seen no later than this morning in an office he frequents next door to the café, the office of a man..."—he shot me a glance out of the corner of his eyes—"named Bale. Bale claims to be a theatre agent. But the police suspect him of being a receiver of stolen goods. Do you begin to see the connection?"

"I can't say I do," I retorted, affecting an indifference I was far from feeling.

"Na, schön! Let me take my story—your story—a stage further. At the café you ask for Max. He is not there. You wait for him. There's a little trouble about the bill as you have lost your purse. But then Max appears. He pays the reckoning, and you go off together. These are proved facts. You're"—he cackled his dry laugh—"you're not going to deny them, I trust?"

I was speechless. With a smirk Grundt picked up the photograph he had taken from the file, glanced at it briefly and

handed it to me. "Here you are...."

It was one of those grim rogues'-gallery portraits seen on handbills outside police-stations, in three parts, the full face, and the side face, viewed from the left and the right. At first glimpse my spirits soared, for I thought I was looking at the likeness of some German criminal whose identity Nigel Druce had assumed, perhaps of that Max, the drug-seller, of whom Otilie at the café had spoken, who was in Moabit gaol. As a portrait it was crude, as all such photographs are, flat and unlikelike; but when I looked closer I saw that the face was the face of Nigel Druce. His mien was haggard and bitter and miserable; but the eyes, still proud, still uncowed, were unmistakable. It was obviously a police photograph—a reference number was scratched on the plate at the foot: I wondered why Druce had not told me that he had been in the hands of the German police.

Clubfoot chuckled. "Well," he said jovially, "do you recognise your beau chevalier? Scotland Yard isn't so well equipped for this sort of work as we are; but Frau Hulda declares it's an excellent likeness...."

"Scotland Yard?" I repeated dully.

Grundt turned the photograph over. His forefinger stubbed at a time-stamp encircled with an inscription: "C.I.D., New Scotland Yard." Below it was an undecipherable scrawl in German.

"Come, come!"—Clubfoot's strident voice broke in upon my stupefaction—"You're not going to pretend you didn't know that your Max Held was an Englishman? But perhaps he didn't enlighten you as to his career. Here...!"

He dipped into the folder and drew out a sheaf of newspaper cuttings pasted on to sheets of paper. There were headlines: "Country House Theft: Officer Charged": "The Bandon Chase Robbery: Defence Opened": "Twelve Months for an Army Officer: Judge's Scathing Address": and columns of print that swam, as I tried to read, before my eyes. But a name stood out, the name of the prisoner. It was Nigel Marston-Gore.

Grundt took the cuttings from my lifeless hands. "You needn't read all that. If you follow the newspapers at all, you must remember the case. This fellow what's-his-name—na, verdammt, these English names are beyond me—stole a gold cup from the collection of his host, Sir ... Sir ... nanu, read it for yourself..." His broad nail underlined a name: Sir Charles Whirter. "A nice scandal for the British Army!" he went on. "But they cashiered him. See...." He turned over the sheets until he had found the cutting he wanted. He handed it to me. The words zigzagged this way and that as I tried, blindly, to piece together their meaning: "*The 'London Gazette' announces ... conviction by the civil power ... dismissed His Majesty's service.*"

I sat there staring stupidly at the cutting. I was vaguely aware of Clubfoot rustling the papers as he replaced them in the file. His harsh voice sounded through the quiet room: "This scoundrel, Abbott, to abuse the confidence of a charming young girl! It was he who put you in touch with this English gaol-bird, nicht wahr? He told you where the paper was hidden; and you recovered it and gave it to his accomplice. That was the way of it, *was?*"

He drew my gaze. I looked up to find his hard, fierce face eagerly thrust forward, his eyes glittering behind the big spectacles, his strong hands clutching the arm of his chair, as though he were about to spring at me and claw the truth from my throat. Then came an interruption. Hansemann's pallid countenance appeared in the doorway. He displayed a slip of paper.

Grundt swung round to face the intruder. Anger blazed in his face. "Get out!" he ordered savagely. "And don't interrupt me again!"

The man wavered and held up the slip.

"Not now," roared Clubfoot. "Später..."

But before Hansemann could withdraw he was rudely elbowed aside, and Rudi von Linz stormed into the room.

In which I am unpleasantly reminded of an unimportant personage

"Olivia," the boy exclaimed breathlessly, "I came the moment I received your message...."

"I'm glad you're here, Rudi," I said. "But I sent you no message...."

"Strange! They brought word to me at Schippke's that you had telephoned for me to come on immediately to this address. It was most urgent, they said. But what's happened? How did you get here?" The charming face was full of solicitude: as the result of Frau Hulda's mauling, I suppose I did look a bit ruffled. Seeing that I made no reply, he glared provocatively at Clubfoot. "Has this fellow been annoying you? And what have you done with the..."

Behind the desk Grundt, as motionless, as grotesquely forbidding as one of those strange island images of the Pacific, was contemplating the intruder in a silence more oppressive than the airless summer night. The very atmosphere seemed impregnated with the menace of that black and icy stare. But now he spoke, and his bass growl struck terror into my heart. "Who are you?" he demanded, bending his bushy eyebrows at the young officer. "And what the devil do you mean by forcing my door?"

The boy stiffened to attention and, clicking his heels, outlined a perfunctory bow. "Lieutenant von Linz, Fifth Regiment of Foot Guards, attached to the 56th Infantry at Schlitz," he announced, introducing himself in the German fashion. "And," he added sternly, "you will have the goodness to remember, Herr, that you are addressing an officer!"

Clubfoot's face relaxed, and a flicker of interest stole into the wary eyes. He laughed noiselessly. "So, so, the *flirt* of the English Miss?" he said, with gentle raillery. "Well, with the greatest possible respect I must request the Herr Leutnant to oblige me,"—of a sudden his tone was harsh and commanding again—"by removing his high-well-born presence from my study this instant. You can wait in the ante-chamber," he rasped. "I'll ring when I want you...."

Rudi's face flamed, and I saw his gloved hand flash to his left side, where the hilt of his sword made a bulge below the slim waist-line of his long military frock. You must remember that Prussian officers, as Rudi had often explained to me, were not only permitted but, under the military Code of Honour, also compelled, to use their swords against civilians who showed disrespect for the King's uniform. "Herr..." he cried threateningly.

"No brawling here!" Clubfoot thundered. "Why, you poor worm, don't you know who I am?" His great chest seemed to swell. "I," he boomed, and his deep voice seemed to linger on the pronoun, "I am Dr. Grundt!"

Rudi laughed contemptuously. "Highly honoured! But for all I care, your name may be Lehmann or Schultze, like every second person in this town. What is certain is that you're either mad or drunk...." He turned to me. "Come on, Olivia, I'll take you home."

"A little moment, if you please," Clubfoot intervened in velvety tones. He lifted the receiver from the telephone that stood on the desk. "The Fifth Foot Guards is your regiment, I think you said?" He spoke briskly into the instrument. "Official. Fräulein, give me Potsdam! I want the house of Major-General von Kessel ... jawohl, the Commander of the Guards Corps...."

I saw Rudi's face change. There was rather a long pause, then Clubfoot at the telephone said: "Is that you, Excellency? Dr. Grundt here. Good evening! I have with me one of your young officers. Would your Excellency be good enough to tell him who I am? Your Excellency is too kind...."

A brusque movement of the bullet head signed to Rudi to approach. With a perfectly impassive face the boy went forward and took the receiver. "Leutnant von Linz, Fifth Foot Guards, speaking." His voice was metallic, military. "Zu Befehl, Excellenz...." There was a moment of stillness in the room. Clubfoot sprawled back in his chair, complacently smoking his cigar, his head cocked at the ceiling. The silent attendant loomed large in the dim background, guarding the

door.

There was a little click as Rudi restored the telephone receiver to its hook. The action was listless. He had his back to me, and it looked dejected, as though all the spring had gone out of that elegant figure. As he turned half round, I caught sight of his face. It was ashen.

He glanced hesitatingly towards the man at the desk. "I ... I owe the Herr Doktor an apology," he stammered. "I ... I had no idea ... I've been so long away from Berlin. I was upset when I arrived, on account of Miss Dunbar. When I found that she had left the restaurant, I naturally assumed ... Gott, the Herr Doktor knows the Prince's reputation...."

Clubfoot frowned and bared his yellow teeth, clamped upon the stump of his cigar. "Do you mind telling me what you're talking about?" he said icily.

The boy floundered. "I ... I thought the Prince had brought her here against her will. That message to me..."

"I sent it," Grundt snapped. "And who might this Prince be?" He glanced at me. "Or perhaps Miss Dunbar will..." He broke off suddenly, and sat up in his chair with a jerk. I knew what was coming. It was as though I was looking into the mechanism of that rapid brain, cog moving cog, setting in motion a progression of thought: Schippke's, the Pellegrini, the Prince, myself....

From under his overhanging eyebrows, as he crouched, with head bent forward in thought, at the desk, Clubfoot balefully mustered the young officer. "Not ... not Prince Karl-Albrecht?" he queried softly.

"Jawohl...."

Grundt's fingers hammered softly upon the blotter. "Do I understand that His Highness dined with the lady and yourself?"

"No...."

"He joined you after dinner, then?"

Rudi looked at me uncomfortably. "I think Miss Dunbar can answer that question better than I can."

"Possibly," was Clubfoot's imperturbable rejoinder. "But I'm asking you. We'll hear the lady later."

The boy made a helpless gesture of the hands. "I didn't see the Prince myself. I had to leave after dinner. Colonel Westfried, who was being entertained in one of the private rooms, sent for me...."

"His Highness's Commanding Officer, do you mean?"

"Colonel Westfried has been promoted to command the regiment. The officers of his old battalion, the 2nd, in which the Prince is serving, gave him a farewell dinner to-night."

"At which, no doubt, His Highness was present?"

"They told me so, but I didn't see him. But when, on leaving the Colonel, I went to look for Miss Dunbar, the head waiter told me that she had been sitting with the Prince. Since they had both disappeared, I naturally assumed..." He broke off awkwardly, and looked towards me. "You ... you were sitting with the Prince, weren't you?" he said.

The lamplight glinted on the lenses of Clubfoot's thick glasses as he pivoted his glance round to me. Behind the glitter his eyes were a blank, but merely from the angle at which his head was canted I was conscious of their suspicious scrutiny. With an effort I pulled myself together to meet this fresh development. "Certainly," I rejoined, addressing myself to Rudi. "Your friend, the Baron, presented me...."

"A chance meeting, then?" said Grundt.

"Oh yes...!"

"And did the Baron present you to the lady, too?"

"What lady?"

"Was His Highness not accompanied by a lady?"

"No!"

I answered boldly, for now I was on firm ground, and with no less boldness met the long, challenging stare that followed on my reply.

"When you left the restaurant, did the Prince go with you?" was Clubfoot's next question.

"No! I went alone. The Prince remained behind...."

"Pardon me, Herr Doktor," Rudi put in, "but, since the Prince did not leave with Miss Dunbar, he must have joined his ... na, the lady you alluded to just now...."

"You saw her, then?"

"Only from the distance. She came into the restaurant while we were having dinner."

"Alone?"

"Jawohl!"

"And when you came back?"

"She was no longer there. I presume she left with the Prince...."

Clubfoot emitted an enigmatic grunt and scribbled something on a block. Tearing off the sheet, he held it up in his hand. Hansemann stepped out of the shadow and took the message. "Wait!" Grundt ordered, as the man was about to withdraw. With a jerk of his thumb he indicated Rudi. "This officer is not to quit the house without my permission. He will remain in the ante-chamber until I send for him." He gave Rudi a freezing stare. "I'll deal with you later, my friend." An almost imperceptible move of the head dismissed the boy.

With an appealing glance at me, Rudi slowly followed the messenger out.

I found myself in two minds. I could not help feeling that Druce had abandoned me; and the evidence of that photograph had shaken me terribly. And yet, in spite of all, I clung to my faith in these two friends and their story. Now the moment had arrived for me to decide. Was I to make a clean breast of it and tell the truth to this pitiless inquisitor, or should I continue to pretend ignorance? As long as the Prince and his lady-love were kept out of it, the only thing I had to explain away was Grundt's discovery of my meeting with Druce at the café. Subconsciously, throughout the foregoing interview, my brain had been busy trying to hit upon some story that would serve to account for this embarrassing piece of evidence...

But Clubfoot was speaking, suavely bland once more. This man's unwearying persistence appalled me. More than once, since I had been in that room, I had seen a sort of berserker fury flame up in his eyes, and that huge form rocked by a gust of primitive passion, like a great oak shaken by the storm.... But to me he had scarcely raised his voice. There was something unspeakably sinister about his patient politeness, his iron self-control.

"To err is human," he remarked sententiously. "We all make mistakes. But now that I have shown you the character of the men who took advantage of your ... your ... inexperience and good nature, I trust, liebes Fräulein, that you will

waste no more time, but tell me just what this scoundrel, Abbott, said to you...."

I had chosen my part. "Herr Doktor," I answered firmly, "I can only repeat what I've told you already, that I did not see or speak with this prisoner of yours...."

He made no sign save that, like a cat stretching its paws, he suddenly flexed the fingers of his right hand as it rested on the blotter, and I saw the blotting-paper sag under the tense pressure. The heavy face, however, remained as hard, as blankly unrevealing, as a block of ice.

"Then how did you happen to go to the café and ask for this gaol-bird, this Max?" he questioned evenly.

I can abridge the tale I had concocted, into which I now resolutely plunged, for it was destined to be swept away almost as soon as it was told. It was thin, but it had the merit of being based on a fact of which Grundt had independent evidence, the fact that I had lost my purse. I am afraid I stressed the helpless maiden rôle pretty hard while describing how, walking along the Tauben-Strasse, I missed my purse and, thinking I had dropped it, went back to look for it. I introduced Nigel Druce as a casual passer-by who had helped me in my search and, discovering that I was English, had offered to lend me the sum necessary for my hotel bill and fare back to England. I went on to narrate how my unknown friend had proposed that I should wait for him at the Café zur Nelke while he went home to fetch the money.

Grundt made a note or two of my story, and at its close put a string of questions to me—what time was it when I met the young man?—how much money did he advance me?—where did we part and when?—to all of which I made what seemed to me to be adequate replies. But I was by no means sure that he was convinced. His air was restless and distraught, as though he had no heart in the business, and it puzzled me. He seemed to be waiting for something. Or somebody.

And then came the murmur of voices without and Hansemann's livid face peered round the door. On the instant Grundt bristled into life. "Well?" he was fiercely eager.

"They hadn't come back," was the stolid rejoinder.

"Herr Gott!" Clubfoot roared, and his fist crashed down upon the desk.

"But I brought the maid along. She knows something...."

"Die Zofe" was the German word he used to describe her, and "Zofe" in German means a lady's maid. In a flash I realised what had happened, and grasped the full extent of the catastrophe which had overtaken me. They had got hold of Hedwig, the Pellegrini's maid. I had forgotten Hedwig....

Clubfoot chuckled and ground his palms together softly. "Send her in, my good Hansemann, send her in!" he chortled. He looked at me, and there was the light of triumph in his face.

69

Hedwig

Outside a woman's voice was suddenly upraised in terror. "*Nein, nein, ich geh' nicht....*" I heard her scream, there was the sound of a scuffle, and a slight, girlish figure was almost flung into the room.

It was Hedwig. She was still wearing the neat cap and apron, the coquettish black skirt, in which I had seen her that morning: obviously, Clubfoot's emissary had not given her time to put on a hat. Inside the study, she brought up short, her small hands clasped tightly in front of her, the pupils of her china-blue eyes distended with fear and brimming over with

tears. She did not seem to notice me at first: she was staring fixedly at Clubfoot who, with one hand laid across his great gash of a mouth, surveyed her silently over the top of the desk.

"Herr Doktor," she began to wail forthwith, "I've done nothing. I've nothing to tell you...." She wrung her hands in anguish. "They frightened me so, dragging me out like that in the middle of the night. Please, Herr Doktor..." she held out her hands to him—"ach, please let me go home now!"

As she spoke she took a pace forward and caught sight of me where I sat in the chair beside the desk. On the instant her features became rigid in a dreadful expression of horror, her eyes and her mouth opened wide, and her hands went up to her face, the fingers clawing her cheeks. She rocked on her feet.

"Look out," spoke Grundt casually, "she's going to faint!" But Hansemann had forestalled the warning. He had sprung forward and caught the girl in his arms as she toppled backwards.

I jumped up to go to her, but, with a brusque gesture of the hand, Clubfoot stopped me. "Stay where you are!" he snarled. Hansemann had deposited the maid in a chair, and now crossed to the desk to fetch the carafe of water that stood there. "Dowse her well!" Grundt bade the man. "Nothing like cold water for the vapours. And here,"—he pulled open a drawer and handed the man a flask—"give her a dram of this!"

"You *must* let me go to her!" I cried indignantly. But Grundt's vast arm barred the way. "Sit still, you! Our good Hansemann is as tender as a young mother. He knows how to handle frightened folk. He used to be one of the State headsman's aides...." He laughed noiselessly. "See, the little lady's coming round famously.... Bring her over here, mein Junger! Chair and all, that's the style!"

Dripping with water, gasping and pallid, Hedwig lay back in the chair which Hansemann gathered up in his muscular arms and set down beside the desk. Presently she opened her eyes. The man held out to her a glass with brandy. But she waved it aside. "I feel so bad," she whimpered wearily. "I want to go home."

But Grundt leaned forward in his chair and thrust his beetling jowl in her face.

"Not until you've answered my questions." He moved his head in my direction. "You know this lady, I think?"

The maid shrank back in her chair. "Nein, nein...."

"You've seen her before! Where was it?"

But Hedwig covered up her face with her hands. "Nein, nein! I don't know her. Please let me go home...."

"Not before you've told the truth...."

The girl's hands fell away. Her face was ghastly. "To-morrow! I will tell you anything I can to-morrow. But now, *please*..." Her head drooped suddenly.

"This is inhuman!" I burst out. "Can't you see the girl's half dead with fright?" But as again I tried to rise that enormous arm shot out and pinned me, like a bar of iron, in my chair.

"Answer me, you!" Clubfoot's free hand went out and his broad fingers wrapped themselves about the slim young throat. He shook the swooning girl brutally. "The truth, you lying slut!" He fleshed his teeth and ground them together, while little beads of foam bubbled at the corners of his mouth. "I'll knock sense into you, if I have to bang your head against the wall," he roared, his features distorted with rage. "You know this smooth-tongued English jade: I saw it in your face, the moment you clapped eyes on her. Where did you meet her? Himmelkreuzsakrament, will you answer me?"

He moved his arm to reach for the carafe, and I, seizing my opportunity, slipped out of my chair and placed myself between him and his victim. "This sort of thing has gone on long enough," I cried, my fear for the moment forgotten in the blazing anger that carried me away. "Let the girl alone! I can tell you what you want to know...."

"I'll hear no more lies from you," he raged, and hauled himself out of his seat. "You've found your tongue too late. Stand aside!" His enormous arm cleaved the air and swept me from his path. With his other hand he dashed the water remaining in the carafe into Hedwig's face.

The girl moaned, stirred, and finally sat up. Grundt's hands clapped themselves upon her shoulders. "Answer me!" he commanded. "Where have you seen this Englishwoman before?"

"Don't make me say!" wailed the maid. "The gnädige Frau made me swear I wouldn't tell ... I shall lose my place...."

"Answer...!"

Hedwig closed her eyes. "At the apartment," she said huskily.

"When?"

"This morning...."

"What was she doing there?"

* * * * *

Bit by bit he dragged the truth from her. She must have been listening at the door all through my interview with the Prince. Apparently she had not overheard the brief allusion to the gramophone; at least, if she had, she did not mention the incident to Clubfoot: the only ray of light I could discern on my black and hopeless horizon.

I stood aloof while Grundt, barking out question upon question, gradually pieced the story together. The Prince, it appeared, had dressed and left the flat while Pellegrini was closeted with Clubfoot in the salon. They had discovered my disappearance, Hedwig said, only after Grundt had gone.

"And your mistress forbade you to say anything to any one about the Englishwoman's visit?" asked Clubfoot.

"Jawohl, Herr Doktor!"

"To me also, nicht wahr?"

A pause. Then a scarcely audible, "Jawohl!"

"Why?"

The maid hesitated.

"She told you," he prompted, "that it would get her into trouble with me, wasn't that it?"

Hedwig cast an uneasy glance about her. Her whispered "Yes!" was like a smothered sob.

"Then why didn't she send this Englishwoman about her business when she first saw her?"

"I ... I don't know, Herr Doktor!"

"Don't you dare tell me any more lies!" he screeched. "Wasn't it because your mistress was not aware, until I told her, that this girl was a friend of the Englishman Abbott?"

The maid was twining and untwining her fingers in an agony of apprehension. "I ... I can't..."

"Herr Gott," vociferated the cripple, "you'd better mind yourself! I'm going to have the truth if it means plucking your false tongue out by the roots. Answer my question!"

"It may be so," was the sullen rejoinder.

"So?" He cleared his throat raucously. "And did this man, Abbott, ever visit your mistress at the apartment?"

Hedwig clasped her hands together. "Herr," she implored in a trembling voice, "let the gnädige Frau reply to that question herself! I ... I told a falsehood to your man just now. I said I didn't know where she was. But I will tell you. She has gone to His Highness's suite at the Atlantic. If you go there you'll find her, and you can ask her yourself...."

Clubfoot leaned forward. "Did this man, Abbott, ever visit your mistress at her flat?" he repeated, with deadly emphasis.

"Urn Gottes Willen, Herr Doktor..." She wrung her hands in a frenzy.

"Answer the question!"

She bowed her head in affirmation.

I heard Grundt draw in his breath with a hissing sound, saw how his tufted nostrils opened and shut. Behind their thick glasses his eyes seemed to distend. The nails of his left hand, which rested on the blotting-paper, blindly clawed at the topmost sheet till it became detached and was crumpled up in that huge palm. His whole body shook: I could see how the livid cheeks, shadowed by a black stubble, and heavy as a mastiff's, trembled.

"The last time," he said in a rapid, croaking voice, "when was it?"

"It was a Sunday. About a fortnight ago...."

"The night he was arrested, nicht wahr?"

The maid gave a frightened nod.

"Tell me...."

"He came in the evening to fetch the gnädige Frau out to dinner. He was to spend the night...."

"How long was he there?"

"Not long, a little quarter of an hour. The gnädige Frau was practically ready. She had only to put on her cloak...."

"Where did he wait?"

"In the salon...."

"Alone...?"

"Jawohl, Herr Doktor!" Grundt's enormous fist tight balled, was pounding his knee. "But," the girl went on, "the English Herr didn't spend the night at the flat, after all. The gnädige Frau came back alone. And when I asked her what had become of Herr Abbott, she told me he had had to leave Berlin suddenly...."

The man at the desk remained silent. "Did another Englishman ever visit your mistress? Either before or after Abbott went away?" he asked presently.

"Nein, Herr...."

He gazed at her abstractedly. "Is this true?"

"As God is my judge, Herr Doktor. Herr Abbott was Madame's only English friend."

There was another pause. Then Clubfoot stood up suddenly. "Hansemann," he called, "my hat and coat. And tell Heinrich I want my car. Send this woman"—he indicated Hedwig—"home in a taxi. She"—he jerked his head in my direction—"is coming with us. You, too, and Freytag. Let Meyer remain here on duty. If there should be any urgent message for me, I shall be at the Hotel Atlantic, Prince Karl-Albrecht's suite." He clapped his hands. "Be quick!"

Hansemann padded away and returned with a bowler hat and a light overcoat. "The car is at the door, Herr Doktor!" he announced. There was a whispered conversation between him and Grundt, as he helped the latter into his overcoat.

"True," said Clubfoot aloud, "I'd forgotten him. Well, you can send him in...."

By this he seemed to have regained his equanimity. In fact, he began to hum a little tune as he opened a drawer of the desk and took from it a large black automatic. He scrutinised the pistol carefully, nor did he look up when Hansemann, reappearing, ushered in Rudi von Linz.

"Ach, Herr Leutnant," Clubfoot remarked, as he broke the pistol and applied his eye to the barrel, "there was a question I wanted to ask you. Do you know why your friend, Miss Dunbar, left Schlatz so suddenly?"

Rudi, who had been staring in blank astonishment at the spectacle of Hedwig with her dank hair and the front of her dress all running with water, started and looked at me. "N... no," he faltered reluctantly. "That is to say..."

"You are aware that she was asked to leave the town?" Grundt broke in.

"Yes..." he answered, after a pause.

"Do you know on what grounds?"

"I do!"

"In that case," said Clubfoot, snapping the breach of his pistol, "you will be interested to hear that she is under arrest on a charge of espionage...."

The boy gasped. "Espio ... it isn't possible!"

"Just as possible," Grundt retorted, as he clipped the magazine of the automatic into place, "just as possible as that an officer of His Majesty's Foot Guards should have so far forgotten himself as to have associated with and shielded a foreign spy...."

The boy was white to the lips. "Herr Doktor," he declared tensely, "I give you my word of honour as an officer..."

But, with a click of vexation, Clubfoot cut him short. "I've no time for idle excuses," he snarled. "You will return to your quarters and there await the Provost-Marshal of the Garrison. And," he added, as he delicately laid the pistol on the high top of the desk in front of him, "I would suggest you employ the time in seriously considering your position in the matter." He bowed formally. "Herr Leutnant,"—he paused—"it is doubtless the last time I shall have the advantage of addressing you by your military rank—ich empfehle mich."

Rudi drew himself up and, with a set face, marched up to the desk. To my intense surprise, he picked up the pistol and thrust it into the pocket in the skirts of his military frock. He bowed stiffly to Grundt, and without even a glance at me, strode quickly out of the room.

"Take her down to the car," said Grundt, pointing at me. Propping himself on his stick, he led the way.

The reckoning

I have no proper recollection of that journey through the night save that we drove at a breakneck speed, and that Grundt's scarlet racing car had a peculiarly melodious horn on two notes. We went so fast, indeed, that within a minute or two of our leaving the villa, or so it seemed to me, we were out of the car and passing through a turn-about door into a very ornate marble and gilt hotel lobby.

A clock above the reception desk, where the night porter was writing in a book, showed the hour to be a quarter to two. Most of the lights were extinguished, and a stunted old man in overalls was clanking about with broom and pail. The lobby was sunk in that exhausted hush which reigns in busy places after the day's work is done.

Grundt hobbled up to the desk and, opening his overcoat, appeared to show the porter some badge or emblem. At any rate, the man presently left his counter with considerable alacrity and crossed the vestibule to the lift. Clubfoot lingered to give an order to his two acolytes. Then his fingers gripped my arm, guiding my hand to the outside pocket of his overcoat. I felt the outline of a pistol.

"When I shoot, I shoot straight," he hissed in a rasping undertone. "You might bear that in mind, my fine lady. Vorwärts!" He gave me a push. His two men remained behind. He and I moved to the lift alone.

We shot up into the warm quiet of the slumbering hotel and stepped off in the dimness of a floor high above the street. The night porter wanted to escort us, but Clubfoot declared he would find the way alone. As the gate rattled to and the brightly-lit cage dropped, down into the stagnant darkness, such a sensation of terror-stricken loneliness as I have never known assailed me. But Grundt's steely fingers fastened about my arm and hustled me forward along the softly-carpeted corridor. A weary-looking waiter in a white coat, carrying a tray of empty champagne bottles, padded by. The jingle of a piano, the murmur of voices, raised in discordant song, drifted round the turn of the passage. A drunken voice, uplifted above the rest, was bawling:

*"Bis früh um fünf, kleine Maus,
Da geh'n wir sicher nicht nach Haus,
Bis dass der Hahn..."*

Clubfoot had stopped in front of one of the long line of white-enamelled doors and, without knocking, flung it violently open.

Within the room a sea of faces swam in a blue pall of tobacco smoke. It was a small salon, vulgarly pretentious with very bright gilt furniture and mauve upholstery and curtains, and ablaze with light from a huge crystal chandelier in the centre, and electric candles set in golden sconces round the panelled walls. The air was almost unbreathable with the aroma of tobacco, the fumes of spilled wine, and the cloying, sickly emanations of warm liquid white, grease-paint and perfume.

For there were women in the company of the round half-dozen officers who were taking their ease in His Highness's suite—three or four of them at least. One, a young thing, with pert, childish features, was perched on top of the piano, a uniform cap cocked at an impudent angle on her golden curls: another, much older, with a harlot's hard face, giggled drunkenly as she sat on an officer's knee. And the Pellegrini was there too, installed on the Louis Seize settee beside the Prince, who had an arm about her milky neck and his face buried in her resplendent hair. There were bottles everywhere; on the centre table, on chairs, on the ground; bottles and glasses and brimming ash-trays.

The piano ceased abruptly on our intrusion. But the drunken voice we had heard went dithering on, raucous as a raven's:

*"Bis früh um fünf, kleine Maus,
Da geh'n wir sicher nicht..."*

"Ruhe!" roared Clubfoot, and thrust me into the midst of them.

The pianist, a gorgeous figure in a tunic of scarlet and gold, swung round on his stool. I recognised the Hussar with the saturnine face I had seen with the Prince at Schippke's. When his eye fell on us, "Shut up, Helmuth!" he called out to the singer, who was the man with the girl on his knee, and no other, I perceived, than my friend, the Baron, who had presented me to the Prince. He seemed to be stupefied with drink; but he broke off with his song. Gradually, as the consciousness of the presence of that brawny figure, looming portentous in the doorway, penetrated through the befuddled wits, silence fell upon the company.

The Hussar, who was the only one to appear comparatively sober, was the first to speak. "Du mein lieber Gott!" he ejaculated blankly, staring at Grundt.

"Mind yourself, Ulrich, he's got a writ!" a voice cried facetiously.

The girl on the piano, who had been mustering me with owlsh solemnity, screeched suddenly: "Ach je, and I owe three weeks' rent!"

"A bailiff, pfui deibel!" ejaculated a plump blonde, who sat on the floor with her head in an officer's lap. "Chuck him in the bath, Hoheit, chuck him in the bath!"

A delighted roar greeted this sally. It was the Prince who quelled it. The Pellegrini had sprung up and, thus violently parted from his lady-love, the portly youth had struggled to his feet, and was now eyeing Grundt with every sign of the liveliest concern. He pawed the air with his hand. "Quiet, Kinder!" he bade. With unsteady gait he moved a pace towards Grundt who, hat on head, and leaning on his stick, morosely contemplated the scene from the door. "Herr Doktor," he articulated, rather thickly, "I am delighted." Then he saw me and repressed a start. I noticed how his glance swiftly travelled to the Pellegrini's face. "Lieber Herr Doktor," he went on cajolingly, "you will join us, I trust. Permit me to make you acquainted with my guests..." He swallowed a hiccough and smiled foolishly round the circle.

"Your Highness will have the goodness to send your guests away," said Clubfoot, brisk and firm. "I wish to speak to you alone...."

"I wo," the Prince tittered, "they don't matter. All good friends of mine, Herr Doktor. Sit down, man, and have some champagne."

With an exclamation of impatience, Clubfoot flashed a rapid glance round the room. His eye fell upon the gaudy Hussar who, sprawling back against the piano, with his elbows on the keyboard, was watching him out of a grave, impassive face. Grundt made a sign, and at once the officer rose up obediently and came forward.

"You remember me, Herr Graf?" said Clubfoot in an undertone.

"Gewiss, Herr Doktor!" The Hussar was all deference.

"We met over the Hohenau affair, I think?"

"Stimmt, Herr Doktor!"

"Oblige me by getting rid of this rabble!"

"Willingly, Herr Doktor!"

He bowed stiffly and turned to face the room. "Come on, Kinder!" he cried. "The party's over!"

A chorus of protest arose but, albeit with some difficulty, he shepherded them all into the adjoining bedroom, where evening wraps and service caps and swords were piled in a heap on the bed. As the Pellegrini rose to follow them,

Clubfoot called out sharply: "Not you...."

I saw her lip go out in pouting rebellion. But he pointed imperiously to the sofa, and she sat down, cowed and sullen, her green eyes watchful and uneasy.

When the last of the party had trooped out, Grundt shut the door and the clamour of their voices in the corridor died away. The Prince had drawn up a chair to the table, and was wetting a napkin with Giesshübler water and dabbing his forehead. Dragging his misshapen foot over the carpet, Grundt limped up to the table.

"Prince," he said, "before leaving on his Norwegian cruise, His Majesty, my Imperial master, entrusted to me the investigation of a grave affair of espionage. It will be my unpleasant duty to report to His Majesty that your Highness is one of the persons implicated...."

The Prince giggled and looked up from his toilette. "Some of those fellows put you up to this, I'll be bound," he remarked, with a knowing air. "I saw you confabbing, with old Ulrich. But I'm not so drunk as all that"—he wagged his head clownishly—"nee, nee, mein Junger...."

"This is no joking matter, Prince," Clubfoot retorted sternly. "Were you aware that this lady here"—he pointed with his stick at the woman on the sofa—"was the mistress of a notorious English Secret Service agent, a man called Abbott?"

With her green eyes flaming, the Pellegrini thrust herself between them. "It's an infamous lie," she cried, bringing her hand down with a crash on the table. "Don't listen to him, Karlchen! He's only trying to make mischief between us...."

Peevishly the Prince drew down the corners of his mouth. With a nervous gesture he began to brush away some fragments of cigar ash from the front of his tunic. "Erlauben Sie, Herr Doktor," he observed, with pompous irritation. "Your accusation is ... na, a direct reflection upon my honour...."

"Oh," exclaimed the woman, with an expression of extreme disgust, "is that all you find to say...?"

The Prince scowled at Grundt and tried to look fierce. "You ... you forget yourself!" he said in a very loud voice.

Clubfoot bowed. "Possibly, Prince. But I do not forget my duty to Your Highness. And my duty is to prevent this wanton creature..."

The woman stamped her foot. "Oh," she gasped in a furious voice, "this is too much!"

The Prince rose up, oversetting his chair. "Enough!" he squealed indignantly, "I will not sit here and allow you to..."

But Grundt's harsh voice spoke on inexorably: "... to prevent this wanton creature from making a public laughing-stock of Your Highness!"

Tortured as I was with anxiety, I could not help admiring the supreme adroitness of this approach. The princely vanity was flicked on the raw. I saw the flabby youth colour up and shoot an uneasy glance at his mistress who, pale and pleading, faced him across the table. She, leaning forward, cried out in accents strangled by tears: "Send this man about his business, Karlchen! Can't you see through his game? I've never told you before, but he's been pestering me for months. He swore he'd ruin me because I turned him down...."

This bold counter-attack won her a temporary advantage. The duel of wits was beginning to fascinate me. On its outcome, I realised, my safety depended. The Pellegrini was quick and full of pluck, that was clear. But was she a match for her terrible adversary? And how would she parry the deadly blow he had in store, Hedwig's evidence, a veritable *coup de Jarnac*? The Prince clenched his fists and advanced menacingly on Clubfoot, his small eyes alight with spite. "You'd dare...?" he muttered thickly.

Grundt's big teeth flashed golden as he bared them in a noiseless laugh. "Clever," he crooned, "but not clever enough. As you will discover, Prince, if you will let me finish what I have to say." He swung round, and, pointing an accusing finger at me, "Will Your Highness take a look at this young person," he said, "and tell me if you have seen her

before?"

How like the man! I might have known that Clubfoot would always regard attack as the best means of defence. Of a sudden the Pellegrini became oddly still. The Prince, pinned down by Grundt's merciless regard, gave me a reluctant glance, and then his eyes signalled a mute question to the Pellegrini. But she left him to flounder alone, affecting to be busy with the fastening of one of her emerald ear-rings.

Karl-Albrecht shrugged his shoulders. "I ... I can't really say offhand," he rejoined, with elaborate indifference. "Where should I have seen her?"

"This morning, at Frau von Pellegrini's flat," was the prompt answer. "And again to-night at Schippke's." His voice was a sing-song, as though he read from a list. "And each time *en tête à tête*," he added.

His Highness wilted. He became defiant, like a child caught fibbing. "Well, and what of it?" he demanded sulkily.

"Only that this Englishwoman is a spy in the British service...."

The Prince's fat face went a vivid scarlet. He cast an indignant glance at the Pellegrini. The instinctive movement did not escape Clubfoot. "Na, ja," he remarked softly, "I, too, am wondering why she didn't tell you!"

"Because I didn't know it," the Pellegrini exclaimed angrily.

"Then why, *meine Gnädige*," was the swift riposte, "did you especially warn His Highness not to mention to me his meeting with the Englishwoman at your flat?"

If this was a blind thrust, and I think it was, it pressed her hard. I could see how she gathered up all her wits to parry it.

"It was to protect you, Karlchen," she made answer in a low voice, gazing sentimentally at the Prince. "Whatever Dr. Grundt may think, you cannot afford to have your name dragged into an affair of this kind." Boldly she faced the cripple. "That's why, if you want to know,"—she flung the words defiantly at him—"I said nothing to you about this girl's visit. And because I had kept it from you, I requested His Highness not to mention it...."

Upright beside the table, his knee slightly bent to ease the weight of that monstrous boot, Grundt lowered at her. "So," he murmured through his set teeth, "you thought you'd hoodwink me, did you?"

"She was perfectly right," primly announced the Prince. "Of course I can't be mixed up in an espionage scandal, as you ought to know...."

There was jubilation in the Pellegrini's lovely face. But I divined that it was premature. Unshaken, Clubfoot returned to the charge. "Did the *gnädige Frau* confide to you, Prince, that she was in the habit of supplementing Your Highness's generosity in pecuniary matters by rendering certain small services to me?"

The question rang bitterly ironical. It acted on the Prince like a goad, for he sat up suddenly and said: "Is this true, Floria?"

She began to whimper. "I couldn't help myself. He threatened me...."

With an imprecation Karl-Albrecht flung himself violently back in his chair. "It's incredible. Do you mean to say that all this time you've been spying for him?"

She uttered a frightened wail. "Not against you, Karlchen. On my word of honour...."

"Ach, Quatsch!" he said roughly. "You know that everything he hears goes straight back to His Majesty. It's ... it's an outrage," he stammered. "You must be mad...." He relapsed into a gloomy silence.

"The *gnädige Frau* has proved herself one of my most valued aides," Grundt observed, quick to seize the advantage.

"Why, only the other day she was instrumental in securing the arrest of a dangerous British spy...." He made a deliberate pause. "One Abbott. Did Frau Floria never speak of him?"

"No," answered the Prince curtly.

"So, so...." The exclamation was as soft as a sigh. "And yet he was a great friend of Madame's. They were at supper together at the Mascotte the night we arrested him. A Sunday night, Prince, the 5th of July. If I remember rightly,"—he affected to be absorbed in the scrutiny of his nails—"Your Highness spent that week-end at home at Traubheim."

The Prince stirred himself from his lethargy. "That's true, certainly...." He looked sharply across the table at the Pellegrini. "Well, haven't you anything to say?"

Her resistance was ebbing away. "Grundt forced me to act as decoy," she faltered. "This man was nothing to me, Karlchen, I swear it. A mere acquaintance...."

Clubfoot cackled noisily. "So slight an acquaintance," he jeered, "that he used to spend the night with her during Your Highness's absence...."

"It's not true," she cried, her voice rising to a shriek. "Karlchen, you don't believe that...."

"Don't you dare give me the lie!" stormed Grundt. "I've got the evidence of your own maid against you." He swung round to the Prince. "Why, the very night he was arrested this man had arranged to stay at her apartment! And because we'd put him out of harm's way, because he couldn't perform the errand himself, he sent this accomplice of his"—the crutch-stick described a circle in my direction—"to retrieve what he had left behind." His great paws landed with a crash on the table as he lurched forward to thrust his jowl almost into the Prince's face. "You surprised this Englishwoman in the salon this morning. Did she seem to be looking for something?"

The young man jumped up in a pet. "I'll answer no questions, do you hear? You've got to leave me out of this. I ... I won't be dragged in...."

"You won't be dragged in, won't you?" shouted Grundt, casting all deference to the winds. "Don't you realise you're in it up to the neck? I've only to go to that telephone there to send you up for court-martial. And I'll do it, too, if I have any more nonsense. Now, will you answer me?"

With a livid face the wretched youth dropped back into his chair. "All right, all right," he muttered feebly.

"What was the Englishwoman doing when you found her?" Grundt demanded.

"Nothing in particular...."

"Was she sitting, or standing, or walking about, or what?"

"She was sitting on the sofa.... Wait, there was something...." He put his hands to his head. "Ach, ja, she said she had been looking through the gramophone records...."

Clubfoot's face changed. His eyes rolled, his nostrils twitched, and he ground his teeth together. A bellow of rage burst from his lips and, raising his heavy stick, he brought it crashing down upon the table, upsetting the bottles and shivering a glass. Bottles and glasses clattered to the floor as he snatched the stick away and, swinging it over his head, plunged round the table, dragging his twisted foot after him, straight at the Pellegrini. "I'll have your life for this!" he gibbered. With a scream she covered her face with her hands and cowered on the sofa.

At that moment there came a knocking at the door.

I don't think Grundt heard it. Even as he towered above the sofa, with his arm raised to strike, his paroxysm of fury seemed to pass. He lowered the stick, breathing hard. "You shall answer to me later," he muttered, and slowly swung his glance to me. His eyes, staring and bloodshot, had lost all human semblance: they were the eyes of an infuriated man-

ape. He made a vague gesture of the hand. "First, I'll deal with you...."

He was coming at me when, for the second time, the door was discreetly rapped.

71

Concerning a waiter and his tray

"Herein!" he trumpeted ragingly. The door gaped, and I caught a glimpse of a white coat in the corridor without. "What is it?" Grundt demanded irritably, and, without waiting for an answer, hobbled to the door.

I heard a deferential voice say in German: "It's the waiter, Herr! With His Highness's permission I was going to clear away...."

"Not now," cried Clubfoot. "In the morning will do. Go to the devil and don't come back!" And he made to shut him out.

"A moment, Herr, if you please," I heard the man reply. "A gentleman is downstairs asking for Fräulein ... Fräulein Dunbar. He says she is with His Highness. The night porter asked me to take up the message...."

I went cold with apprehension. This was the crowning catastrophe. Nigel Druce must have followed me. But what could he be thinking of to send up his name in this way.

I saw Grundt hesitate. Then, "Did the gentleman give his name?" he asked.

"Nein, Herr!" Grundt seemed to reflect.

"You can send him up..." he began. He glanced back into the room. "Wait!" he ordered. His fingers fumbled at the inside lock of the door. He withdrew the key and inserted it in the outside keyhole. Then, turning round, he crooked his finger at me. By the malicious glee that shone in his eyes I knew he had the same thought as I.

"A gentleman to see you, my dear," he chortled as I came slowly forward. "Shall we go down and find out what he wants?"

He held the door for me, and passing out, I came face to face with the waiter.

Just across the threshold he stood, a tray with a jug of water and some glasses in his hands, his drill jacket very white in the rays of the single electric lamp that burned a little way along the corridor. I had scarce time to identify the bright blue eyes that, for one instant smiling, strove to kindle in mine a reflection of the brave flame that burnt there, for, as I came forth, he slipped like a flash between me and Clubfoot, who followed after, and, without the slightest warning, hurled his tray, jug and all, full in the German's face. I heard the smothered roar with which Grundt reeled backwards merge in the clang of metal, the crash of broken glass, to cleave with horrifying din the night hush of the hotel. Then the door slammed violently, there was the click of the turning key, and a warm, firm hand grabbed my wrist. "This is where we run!" spoke a comforting English voice in my ear....

Even as we sped along the corridor, Nigel Druce and I, the uproar of Grundt's assault upon the door rang after us. The handle was madly rattled, a great fist beat a thunderous tattoo upon the panels, and a furious shouting welled out above the hubbub, an outcry loud enough to wake the dead. But we left it behind us as, round a turn of the passage, Druce whisked me through a shabby swing-door into a service-room where, in his stride, as it seemed to me, he whipped off his waiter's jacket and snatched up his own coat that lay on a table. Hand in hand, we scuttled through another door on the far side. It gave on a staircase, stone-stepped and iron-railed, that dropped, flight by flight, with gaunt monotony into

a stuffy half-light redolent of coke and decaying vegetables and vague backstair whiffs. Three at a time we took those stairs until we reached, at the bottom, a narrow lobby with a time-recording machine and a time-keeper's box where, it seemed to me, there was a movement and a shout as we streamed by.

But Druce never faltered. Across the courtyard into which we burst, a patch of gloom penned amid the soaring, window-studded walls of the hotel, a pair of gates, folded back, opened on a dim, quiet street, where an open touring car waited. Here Druce let go my hand and sprang into the driving-seat. Even as I scrambled in beside him, a whistle shrilled, a door banged, and excited voices and scampering feet rang hollow in the narrow canyon we had quitted. Then the protesting whirr of the self-starter, swallowed up at once by the roar of the engine, drowned all other sounds, and we shot away from the kerb.

At the end of the street we swung into a broad avenue where the deserted tram-lines gleamed like silver under the swaying arcs. The square mass of the Hotel Atlantic rose like a cliff on our right, with Clubfoot's scarlet car before the glass-canopied entrance, mirroring its sidelights in the dark and shining asphalt. The alarm had not yet reached the front. The big doors were shut for the night, and all was still.

"We haven't much of a start," said Druce, and opened up the throttle. "We'll have to make for the Tiergarten. If they get after us promptly we ought to be able to shake them off there. Damnation!" With a violent jerk the car's pace was checked. He clawed at the hand-brake, bringing us to a dead stop. They were washing the street. Dim figures in high boots, moving about on the fringes of the circle of light flung by the arc-lamp beneath which we had halted, were sluicing the roadway from a hose which, running on little pairs of wheels, barred the whole breadth of the avenue.

Druce glanced over his shoulder. "Down, quick!" he rasped at me. "They're piling into the car..." I crouched down in the driving-seat. We were moving forward again, though at a mere crawl, for the street-cleaners were dragging their hose to one side to give us passage. And then the way was free. Once more my companion's foot drove the accelerator home.

Gathering speed swiftly, we flashed into the first side street that presented itself, taking the corner at a pace that made my heart stand still. Our axles hummed as, at the end, with a brusque turn of the wheel, we swung to the left again and went roaring along a leafy boulevard with imposing mansions on one side, a tan-spread ride and the trees of a vast park on the other. I think it must have been the Tiergarten-Strasse, where the Berlin millionaires have their homes. I had no time to look for a name-plate, for almost at once we took a right-hand turn to shoot down an avenue driven arrow-straight through the heart of the park under an endless vista of milky arcs, strung out like a necklace of pearls. As, with a shiver, the car responded to the throttle, I heard behind us, above the brave hammering of the engine, the melodious call of a motor-horn, tu-tee, tu-tee....

All too well did I know what those two notes, one low, one high, signified. I glanced backward. Behind us the avenue we were following stretched bare and shining like a naked sword. I turned to the man at my side. He was preoccupied with the driving for, at the speed at which we were travelling, the car was rocking like a boat in a rough sea, and his face was set: but the ghost of a smile lingered about his lips.

"That's Clubfoot's car," I said.

He nodded, his eyes on the gleaming ribbon of road unwinding itself between the trees. "Can you see 'em yet?" he asked.

Once more I glanced behind. Now a funnel of brilliant white light was detaching itself without perceptible movement from the dark background. As I watched, the beam seemed to grow brighter.

"Yes," I rejoined. "And they're gaining on us, I think!"

"We'll have to double back on our tracks," he remarked. A single lamp-post in the centre of the road showed that we were approaching some cross-roads. "Hang on," he warned me, "it's a sharp turn...."

He tore at the wheel and held it grimly as we whizzed round a corner and zig-zagged wildly down another avenue, narrower and more sparsely-lit than the last. The car picked up speed again and rushed on, creaking and straining. The

wind whistled in my ears and tugged madly at my hat. For the third time I looked backward. There was a white luminosity in the sky, and even as I watched I saw that brilliant path of light stand out once more in our rear.

"They're still on our heels," I said to Druce, and glanced behind again. Now my eyes were dazzled by twin circles of vivid incandescence that bore down upon us.

Druce craned his head to peep into the driving-mirror affixed to the side of the wind-screen. "Humph," he said drily, "they've got the legs of us. Listen! I'm going to skid her. There's just about room to do it. When she stops, hop out and get in among the trees. Don't worry about me, I'll be behind. Ready now: hold tight...!"

He did not wait for my answer. I braced myself as his hand dipped down and his foot plunged forward. The brakes screamed and, with a sickening jolt, the car slithered like a live thing over the gleaming asphalt. The white kerb, the dark belt of leaves, the tall, grave tree-trunks, seemed to whirl about us in an unbroken circle as we spun. Then came a fearful jerk, a heavy thud, and I opened my eyes to find myself still in my seat, the car stationary, and the solemn dark of the forest before me.

An arm went about my shoulder, and Druce's voice whispered out of the black night: "Not hurt? Good. Quick..." He lifted me bodily out of the driving-seat and set me on my feet. The car sprawled athwart the avenue, with one front wheel, lamentably buckled, jammed against the kerb. The glare of those pursuing lamps was not a hundred paces away. I felt my hand gripped. The next moment we were running over the slippery carpet of pine needles in and out of the tall, slim boles. Scarcely had the darkness of the wood swallowed up the road we had quitted than we heard the approaching hum of the pursuing car. Louder and louder it resounded, swelling to a steady roar, until suddenly the clamour of the engine was blotted out, the wood's secret hush rudely shattered by a booming crash, the splintering of woodwork, the reverberating clang of shivered glass. A tumult of voices rose on the still night.

There was a soft chuckle by my side as we sped along. "They've hit ... wreck," gasped Druce. "I switched off the lights ... on chance. My hat ... old Clubfoot, eh? Hope he's broken ... blinking neck. Out of action for present ... anyway. You and I ... got to get under cover ... quick. Only bare hour ... before it's light. Pity ... about the car..."

The shouting grew fainter on the road behind us. There were no sounds of immediate pursuit. We plunged on through the wood, which all about us exhaled the fragrance of damp leaves, and moss, and pine-sap, into the coming dawn. Where the trees grew less dense, or where we crossed an alley, a pale moon, riding high above the sleeping city, peeped down loftily as though surprised to see us there.

We slackened pace as the arcs of another avenue glimmered through the branches ahead. For the moment I was at the end of my strength: I could not have run another yard. I halted, leaning against a trunk, and gazed at my companion. "I must rest for a minute," I panted.

He gave me his bright smile. "It was a shame to make you run like that. But the worst is over now, at least for tonight. If we're lucky, we may pick up a late cab. We'll hear it from here if one comes along the road. In the meantime, we'll take a little breather."

I was hot and dishevelled and irritable, my nerves frayed by all I had gone through that night. "And what now?" I said despairingly.

His lean face was wan in the grey light. "We've got to lie low for a bit. They're going to turn this country inside out to find you, you realise that? Clubfoot, if he's still alive, is likely to believe that we've lost no time in leaving Berlin. At least, that's what I'm reckoning on. My plan is for you to stay somewhere quietly until the first heat of the pursuit has spent itself and I can get hold of another car. You'll have to come to my place, I think. Would you..."—his eyes questioned mine—"would you mind doing that?"

"I'll do anything you say," I answered wearily, "as long as you hide me from that terrifying man."

He picked up my hand, cold in the dawn chill, and warmed it. "Don't worry. You'll be all right with me...."

"I try to be brave," I said, and struggled against the tears that rose in my voice. "But this awful man ... if you'd seen

him to-night...."

It was no good. I was worn out. I began to cry. He patted my shoulder. "Don't give way, my dear! What you want is sleep and a good rest. You've been so splendid. Here...." He produced a large, clean pocket-handkerchief and handed it to me. "That's better," he added, as I dabbed at my eyes. "You must have thought I'd deserted you, didn't you?"

I nodded forlornly.

"I'm not surprised...." He dipped a hand into an inside pocket and gave me a glimpse of the blue envelope. "With that on me, I couldn't risk falling into their hands, you understand...."

There in the twilight stillness, with the birds stirring in the branches, and the first streaks of morning stealing into the sky, he told me very briefly of the events leading up to his dramatic appearance at the Atlantic.

On arriving with the car at Kemper's, rather before the appointed hour, the presence of two stolid figures on the sidewalk before the hotel in conversation with the driver of a limousine halted beside the kerb, had aroused his suspicions. Accordingly, he drove past the hotel and, leaving his car in an adjacent side-street, returned to investigate. From a bar opposite, impotent to warn me, he witnessed my arrival and arrest and, when I was taken away, followed in his car. "When you disappeared into that villa," he declared, "I don't mind admitting that I had a bad moment. I didn't dare go into the grounds, for fear they were guarded...."

"They were," I put in.

"I guessed as much. You see, I had a notion that Clubfoot couldn't be very far away, and the old bird don't leave much to chance. So I dodged about among the trees lining the street, keeping an eye on the gate and wondering what the devil I should do...."

"You had the document," I said. "You were quite entitled to escape without me...."

He shrugged his shoulders. "There are moments in life when a fellow needs a friend. I had a feeling that you were going through one of those moments, so I hung round on the chance. Then things began to happen. First that old trollop from the café drove up in a taxi, and then came another cab with a young officer...."

"That was Rudi von Linz," I elucidated.

He whistled. "The investigation progresses," was his dry comment. He cocked his head in the direction of the road. "Hark," he said sharply, "I believe that's a cab!" The brisk clip-clop of a horse's hoofs came to our ears. "I hope to Heaven it's not taken. Come on!" He gave me his hand and, scrambling up a bank together, we hurried out upon the avenue.

The cab was disengaged. But the driver, returning from Berlin to his stable on the farther edge of the Tiergarten, was loth to make the journey back. The promise of a twenty-mark piece, however, decided him, and the next minute we were bowling smoothly over the asphalt in the direction of the faint glow in the sky I knew betokened the centre of the city. The thought crossed my mind that to charter a cab thus boldly was a venturesome undertaking in our present plight. But I was content to leave my future movements in Druce's hands, our movements as well as our destination. All I wanted to do was to lie back against the cushions with my face to the wan moon, the paling stars, and rest ... rest.

As we drove along my companion finished his story. There was not much to tell, for he made his contriving of my rescue from the Atlantic appear to be the simplest thing in the world. When I quitted the villa with Grundt, Druce followed after in his car. Having himself stopped at the Atlantic, he knew that Prince Karl-Albrecht kept a suite of rooms there, and when he saw me and my escort descend at the hotel, guessed at once Clubfoot's objective. He did not dare to follow us into the hotel, nor had he any particular plan in mind (Druce said) when he left his car at the service entrance and reconnoitred the yard, or even when, seizing a moment when the time-keeper was occupied at the telephone, he slipped through the lobby and mounted at hazard the back stairs.

Once inside the hotel, he was still in a bit of a quandary (Druce proceeded), for he did not know the number of the

Prince's suite or, consequently, the floor on which it was situated. But here luck came to his aid. While prowling about one of the upper storeys, he heard a noisy party stream into the lift on the floor above and, as the cage went sliding downward past him, the Pellegrini's name caught his ear.

It was a woman speaking (she was, of course, one of the Prince's guests on their way downstairs), and her chance remark gave him the information he sought. "*The Pellegrini*," she said, "*will know how to deal with the ugly brute.*"

Druce raced up to the next storey by the back staircase. Fortunately, he went softly, for in the service room he all but blundered upon a waiter stowing empty champagne bottles away in a crate. Druce slipped up the next flight, and waited there out of sight until the waiter emerged from the service room and descended the stairs. He had changed out of his white coat, and was evidently going off duty. (This must have been the waiter who had crossed Grundt and me in the corridor on our arrival.)

For quite a while (Druce said) he wandered aimlessly about the floor until, suddenly, as he tiptoed along the dim corridor, his attention was arrested by the murmur of voices. Creeping to the door whence the sound proceeded, he heard Grundt's deep bass: "*Will Your Highness take a look at this young person*," Clubfoot was saying, "*and tell me if you have seen her before?*"

He then realised (Druce told me) that the situation was desperate. But just how desperate it was he only discovered as that deadly cross-examination proceeded. It was clear that I was there, behind that door, and that Clubfoot was using the Pellegrini and her lover to force the truth from me. If he were to be of any service to me (Druce said), he knew he must act at once. But what could he do?

He could not remain there in the corridor, for if an hotel servant or one of Grundt's men should come, or Grundt himself should happen to open the door, the game would be up. And he had the document in his pocket. Then he thought of the waiter's coat which he had seen hanging on the wall of the service room. In the guise of a waiter he would at least have a pretext for being in the corridor. He crept back to the service room. Then, as he donned the coat, it occurred to him that, as a waiter, if he cared to take a big risk, he might, on some excuse or other, gain access to the room. Still without any specific scheme of operations, he snatched up a tray that stood on the table and returned to his listening post outside the Prince's suite.

As he stole along the corridor he heard Clubfoot's voice upraised in wrath. By the time he reached the door, however, the conversation had sunk to an unintelligible murmur. He was trying to make up his mind whether to rush straight in or wait, in the hope of overhearing something further to tell him how the land lay, when (he said) there was a hoarse shout within the room, a crash and a savage bellow from Clubfoot: "*I'll have your life for this!*"

It was then that my indomitable friend, in the belief that Grundt was attacking me, rapped on the door. His story that some one was asking for me, made up on the spur of the moment, was intended to let me know that he (Druce) was at hand. He had purposely left the document in his coat in the service room as, it being clear that the men who had come with Clubfoot had remained below stairs, he had determined (Druce said) to drag me, by force, if needs be, out of Clubfoot's clutches. But he had no plan of campaign more definite than this in his mind when he knocked.

How much of this simple, gallant tale I took in, as the cab rattled us through the quiet streets, I cannot say now: I expect I filled in the gaps, as it is set down here, from the many talks we had together afterwards. I listened in the dreamy silence of exhaustion, hovering in that no-man's-land which lies between sleep and waking, too weary to question, too weary, even, to tell of my ordeal at Clubfoot's hands.

In the end I think I must have dozed, for when I opened my eyes I found that the cab had stopped in a cobbled forecourt with the arched façade of a great railway station behind. Day was advancing with giant strides, and under a lemon sky pigeons were fussily picking a breakfast among the strewn oats of the cab-rank. "A cup of coffee to warm us," said Druce, helping me to alight, "and then we'll go home."

I was stiff and cold after our drive, and the coffee and hot rolls we had at the buffet did me good. "You realise,"

said Druce, "that Clubfoot is bound to dig out that cabby. That's why I told him to drive us here, to the Anhalter Bahnhof. No place as good as a big railway station for losing a trail. Now, if you're ready, we'll go on."

Outside the station we clambered on a tram, to leave it, after a short run, in a long and dingy thoroughfare permanently darkened by the steel carcass of the Elevated Railway straddling it. Behind nestles a cluster of small and shabby streets which, already at that hour, as Druce and I threaded them, were stirring into life.

Before little nondescript shops on the ground floor of the tall and gloomy tenements, housewives, still drugged with sleep, were beginning to struggle with the shutters or to sluice down the pavement. Old women, hooded and mittened against the eager early morning air, delivered bottles of milk from little push-carts: a hunchback girl, limping hideously, went from door to door with the morning newspaper: scavengers banged the dustbins about. Almost before the night was fully spent, this humble corner of the Weltstadt was awaking to another day.

But presently we turned into a narrow street where, in a blaze of electric light and to the jingle of an electric piano in the café at the corner, the night yet endured. It was a slip of a street, a mere hyphen between two broader arteries; but it pulsed with life. Almost every house harboured some kind of Nacht-Lokal, as the Berliner calls it, either a little bar, with a garish façade set round with festoons of coloured lights and artificial flowers, sentinelled by a shoddy-looking porter in tarnished gold lace, or a furtive-looking café like Frau Hulda's with curtains, glowing dully with the light within, close-drawn across the steam-blurred windows. A line of cabs edged the kerb outside an archway surmounted by a weather-beaten board on which, picked out in red lights, I read:

"VENUS-SAELE. HEUTE GROSSER BAL."

The strains of a very noisy orchestra, as discordant as a circus band, and the thudding of feet, proclaimed that within the "Halls of Venus" the aforesaid "ball" was in progress.

The spike of a policeman's helmet glittered in the lights across the way. Hastily Druce drew me into the forecourt of the dance-hall. We waited there in the shadow until the bulky, sword-girt figure had drifted out of sight.

The next house proved to be our destination. With his key my companion let us into a sordid passage-way lit by the first rays of morning struggling to enter through a glazed door at the end. Through this door we passed into a small yard, dank and fetid, and through another door on the far side into a second yard equally malodorous, where, in a corner, the foot of a dark staircase was flanked by rows of white china nameplates.

Here Druce struck a match. A lungful of foul air, clammy and close, and overladen as it were, with an accumulation of ancient reeks, nauseated me. I shrank back. "You don't live *here*?" I faltered.

"Indeed I do," he retorted cheerfully. "Pretty filthy, I grant you, but it's fresher higher up. I hope you don't mind a climb. Here, I'll lead the way...."

"I ... I couldn't sleep in a place like this," I said.

He cast a glance about him, then took my two hands in his. "I know what you feel. But, believe me, there's no other way. Be brave a little longer, won't you? Every second we linger we risk being seen by some one in the house. And it's essential that no one should know you're in hiding here...." He lit another match.

"Oh, all right," I capitulated listlessly.

In silence we climbed into the stuffy darkness, up and up, landing after landing, until, the staircase ending under a grimy glass lantern, we stood in a low-pitched corridor lined with doors. Druce laid a finger on his lips and went softly to the end of the passage. A key grated, a switch clicked, and a stream of light, falling through an open door, illuminated the mobile, valiant face.

"Sanctuary!" he whispered, and drew me in.

Sanctuary

You know how it is when you are expecting one thing and stumble upon another: any merits the substitute may possess are apt to be overlooked in the first keen shock of the disappointment. I had looked to find a flat: two rooms and a bath, say, at the least; but I discovered that my sanctuary was nothing but an attic under the eaves.

I did not then perceive that this humble refuge, though naked as a convent cell, was also as scrupulously neat and clean. I was weary and fractious, and saw with disgust only that the walls, blotched with damp, sloped at an acute angle up to the ceiling that arched itself not a yard above our heads; that of furniture, beyond a deal table and a pair of chairs, there was none, and that, to complete the garret setting, a packing-case with a division did duty for a cupboard to store some odds and ends of crockery; and that an assemblage of chimney-pots, with rusty and dilapidated cowls, peered, like a throng of hooded beggars, through the unscreened panes of the two small dormer windows. A pink check curtain drawn across a recess at one end of the attic suggested the presence of a bed.

If my companion remarked my obvious discontent, he did not comment upon it. Whilst I looked about me, he busied himself at a sink fitted into the corner opposite the alcove.

"Pretty squalid, what?" he observed chattily, as he filled a pan at the tap. "But in my position I can't afford to attract attention. And the best way to avoid remark in a big modern city is to pitch your tent among people who are equally intent on evading inconvenient inquiries." He chuckled, and set his pan down on a gas-ring which stood on a shelf beneath the sink. "I've got some devilish queer neighbours, my dear, I don't mind telling you, as you'll hear for yourself presently, when the bong tong starts coming home to bed...." He put a match to the gas. "There, that'll be hot in a minute. I dare say you'd like a tub before you turn in. I've got a rubber bath. I'll just dig you out some clean sheets...." So saying, he turned round to the alcove and pulled back the curtain. Then I heard him utter a sharp exclamation.

On the narrow camp-bed which stood in the recess, a girl lay fast asleep on the coverlet. She was fully dressed, with her handbag beside her, as though she had come in from the street, but her hat, a shabby black hat with a cherry-coloured ribbon, was skewered to the curtain with one of its long pins. Her back was to the room, her face pillowed on her hand, and her hair, which had begun to come uncoiled, lay in an ashen-blonde rope along her slim young neck.

"Why, Otilie!" I heard Druce say, and at his words she instantly awoke. She moved her head round and opened her eyes, and I recognised the little waitress from the Café zur Nelke. She did not sit up, but Druce stooped down and, stretching up like a child, she put her thin hands on the lapels of his rough jacket. Under its mask of paint her small face was haggard in the early morning light.

"Ach, Count," she murmured in a soft little voice, "I thought you'd never come. I was so tired, I lay down to wait for you, and I must have fallen asleep. Listen, I came to warn you. You can't go back to the café. It's shut up...."

She addressed him as "Du"; and I was not unaware of the sentimental significance of the second person singular in the relation of the sexes in Germany. I felt a sharp sense of irritation. It was bad enough of Druce to expect me to share a garret with him: but to find that garret in the occupation of his mistress...

"Raided, eh?" said Druce. (They seemed to have forgotten all about my existence.)

She nodded.

"I thought as much. When was it?"

"Just before two. And they've nabbed Frau Hulda. I heard the Kommissar tell Lenchen. But that's not the worst...."

She paused and drew him closer. "They've got your photo, Count. It's printed on a handbill as large as life, with a reward, a thousand marks, for your arrest...."

I saw his eyes narrow quickly; but he said no word.

"Hans offered to help track you down," she went on in her rather husky voice. "I didn't wait to hear any more. Fortunately, the joint was crowded, and while they were rounding up the gang, Black Lola—you remember her?—and I; we slipped away through the pantry and the court at the back. I came straight off here to put you wise." She uttered a little crooning sigh. "Du, I can stay with you now, nicht wahr, and do the shopping and look after you...?"

I saw him gently detach her fingers and straighten himself up. "You're a good friend, little Otilie," he said—he, too, used the familiar tense, and it jarred on me again. "But you can't stay here. You see...." He moved aside and disclosed me.

Her eyes widened at the sight of me, and her short upper lip trembled. For a moment I thought she was going to cry. Instead, she sat up abruptly and, snatching her hat, swung her feet to the ground and crossed to a mirror which stood above a wash-hand stand at the foot of the bed. In the moment of awkward silence that ensued, I heard, somewhere within the house, heavy footsteps mounting, and then a door bang dully.

Druce looked at me thoughtfully. "Let me deal with this, will you, please?" he interjected in a hurried undertone. "It's quite all right...."

"It's nothing of the sort," I rejoined, with heat. "You know I'd never have come here if I'd dreamed that you expected me to share a room with you. And in a place like this..."

"There was never any question of such a thing," he retorted indignantly. "Of course I'm going elsewhere...."

"You needn't bother," I told him icily. "I've no wish to upset your domestic arrangements,"—I saw him flinch at that. "The only thing I must ask of you is to advance me some more money, enough for me to get my ticket home."

While we thus senselessly sparred, all the unseen labyrinth of the great tenement beyond our threshold mysteriously crepitated, with stealthy footfalls, the drawn-out whine of a door, hushed laughter. Suddenly out of the rustling stillness a strident voice began screeching. A woman shrieked abuse. "Schwein, Schwein!" she screamed over and over again. There was the scrape of feet, a stifled cry, the thud of a door, then quiet again.

"Go out with all that scum on the stairs?" said Druce, rather scathingly. "Be reasonable! Besides, by this time your description is in the hands of every Schützmann in the city. You'd be grabbed before you were a dozen yards from the house...."

I held out my hand. "Please do what I say...."

"You're crazy!" he exclaimed, exasperated.

I suppose I was; but I was nerve-wracked and furiously irate into the bargain. "Very well," I cried, and swung about. "Then I'll just fend for myself...."

But even as I turned to leave him, a little voice cried out, "Adieu!" Otilie's slim figure flashed past me and whisked through the door. Druce sprang forward, but he was too late. She was away along the corridor and down the stairs before he could stop her.

He made no attempt to follow. He closed the door and placed himself before it.

"It's better so, maybe," he declared sombrely. "At any rate, she'll know how to keep out of harm's way, which is more than can be said for you." He broke off, and contemplated me gravely. "Won't you please be sensible? Believe me, I know what I'm talking about when I tell you that you've got to stop here. And so have I. At any rate, for the present. When you're rested, it'll be time enough to talk about your plans."

I make no excuses for myself. The long, long years of heartbreak have brought their punishment with them, although afterwards I did try to make amends. When I look back upon the way I behaved, that morning in Nigel's attic, the scene I made, the flood of wrathful tears in which my outburst culminated, and, when he forcibly prevented me from reaching the door, the hateful, mean things I flung at him, I am sick with shame to think I could ever have been such a stupid, caddish little prig.

But in 1914 we were not worldly-wise as the maidens of to-day. For all my Continental experience I was far from having flaked off the starch of Aldershot and Camberley. And, utterly ignorant, like every other English girl of my age and upbringing, of the trend of world politics, I was still incapable of appreciating the urgency of the circumstances. Despite all I had seen, and heard, and gone through, even at that date, a bare fortnight before the outbreak, I had no realisation of the swift approach of war as a fatality resolved, ineluctable!

The irony of it was that, where Nigel Druce was concerned, little though I knew about his private life, and that little how incredibly shameful, I had no fears for myself. I don't think it even occurred to me that there was any danger in my being thus alone with him in a lonely garret in the heart of what I suppose one would call the Berlin red light district. It was only my wretched dignity that was offended, part and parcel of that miserably smug conventionality which the war, glory be, has blown sky-high. Perhaps, too, a certain stirring of jealousy played a rôle; but that part comes later.

Why is it that in anger we women must always seek to wound? Men, too, say cruel things in their wrath, the crueller, perhaps, because they come from the heart; but women deliberately barb their tongues with falsehood. Actually, I had thrust that photograph, and the tale that went with it, far into the back of my mind, meaning to forget it unless my own impression of this man, who had so strangely entered my life, were in the upshot to be falsified. I had no wish to judge him: and I nursed a secret hope that somehow things might not be what they seemed.

But now that he held me prisoner in that sordid place, the thought came to me that this stranger, who had so sorely wounded my pride, was a convicted thief, a felon with his niche in the Rogues' Gallery. He could not know I did not myself believe a tithe of what I said as, in a burst of indignation, I flung his past in his face. Though he attempted no denial, or, indeed, any rejoinder, but only gravely considered me with those blue eyes of his rather sorrowful, I repented of my taunts as soon as they were spoken. God knows that in the years between I have done penance for them in many hours of bitterness.

The tears which blur the lines I have written cannot dim the memory. I can see him now, as he stood that morning between me and the attic door, in his shabby clothes, with the first flush of sunrise reddening the naked walls of his sordid lodging. For the second time, in the brief and crowded span of our acquaintance, I discerned a look of lassitude, of desperate unhappiness, in the lean, proud face: the first time had been at the wax-works when I told him of the fate of his friend: and my heart misgave me.

He let me storm myself out. Then very quietly he said: "You'll find clean sheets in the box under the bed, and some clean pyjamas too. I'll be back later and bring you some food."

With that he went away. And then I realised what I had done. How could I drive him from our only refuge, when by this, no doubt, the streets from end to end were flaming with the bills of the hue-and-cry? I was springing forward to call him back, when the sound of the key turning in the lock banished all unselfish thoughts from my mind. He had dared to lock me in. The mysterious noises of the house deterred me from hurling myself against the door. But I flung myself down upon the bed and gave vent to my outraged feelings in another storm of tears.

How wee my bedroom seemed! And surely the wallpaper had changed colour? How silly of me: this pinkness, with the sunlight glowing through it, was not wallpaper, but a curtain, a pink check curtain, shutting off the bed. But how did a curtain come to be there? I must ask Franziska. Funny, she hadn't called me. Yet I could hear her in the kitchen: Lord, the row she made! And those bells that kept on clanging, what could they be?

My hand, straying to my throat, encountered an unaccustomed constriction about the neck, an unfamiliar button. I opened sleepy eyes again and found myself blankly contemplating brandenbourgs that unaccountably slashed the front of my nightdress. Hold on, it wasn't a nightdress: I was wearing blue silk pyjamas.

Now I was wide awake. Abruptly I sat up in bed. The garret was like an oasis of quiet amid a desert of clamorous voices, the multitudinous din of the city. In the street children were calling shrilly and, with incessant gonging, trams bumped over the points; and every now and then, with a roar and a rattle and the shrill wobbling whinny of dynamos, an Elevated train trailed a streamer of individual noise across the picture.

The hands of my watch pointed to a quarter to six. They had stood at half-past five when, having fished myself out an expensive-looking sleeping-suit of Nigel Druce's, I had finally gone to bed. The watch had not stopped. I had merely slept for twelve hours. Now, when I drew back the curtain the empurpled sky behind the guard of solemn chimney-pots told me that evening was falling.

For a little while I lay still and listened to the restless surge of the city beat, like a tide, upon the stillness of my retreat. The last human being left alive upon the earth will not, I swear, feel more utterly forlorn and dejected than I did then, realising that I was at the end of my resources, feeling that amongst the teeming millions, whose voices seemed to mount in a dull roar to my hiding-place, the hand of every one was against me.

Presently, I noticed certain changes in the appearance of the room upon which, twelve hours before, I had closed my eyes. It was evident that some one had visited the garret whilst I slept. A great pan of water simmered on the gas-ring above a dim circle of blue flame: on a towel neatly spread upon the floor a rubber bath stood prepared; and a coffee-pot, flanked by a jug of milk, rolls and butter, and two eggs in a saucepan, in water ready for boiling, the whole set out upon a clean red and white tablecloth, reminded me that I was inordinately hungry.

During the mechanical operation of tubbing and dressing and tidying up the room, what time the water was boiling for the coffee and the eggs, I thought about Nigel Druce. On getting out of bed I had tried the door, and the discovery that it was still locked brought back with a rush all my irritation against him. But I was conscious that, in reality, my resentment sprang from my own keen sense of humiliation over my behaviour to him on the previous night.

The hot coffee, the delicious rolls: this welcome meal, complete down to the newspaper folded by my plate, which, as I began to realise, he could have procured for me only at imminent risk to himself, went far to smooth down my ruffled feelings. I told myself that I had treated him abominably. I should have to try and make amends when he came back.

But would he come back? What if it were the girl Otilie—I had heard her volunteer to do the shopping—who, at his bidding, had brought me breakfast? She must have a key to have gained access to the room the evening before. Supposing Druce had decided to have nothing more to do with me? Or, if he had meant to come back, what if he had been arrested? Had not Otilie said that the streets were placarded with his photograph?

The thought appalled me. Already I missed that strong, unflurried presence at my side. Deserted by Druce, to whom should I turn? What should I do?

The problem kept my mind busy while I cleared away and washed up the breakfast things under the tap. One thing was clear: I could not continue to keep Druce out of his room. And yet how could we share it?

To take my mind off my thoughts I sat down at the table and picked up the newspaper. It was the afternoon edition of the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, a journal which I saw at a glance was far more up-to-date and enterprising than the staidly monarchical and unspeakably dreary *Kreuz-Zeitung* or the smugly *Evangelical Reichsbote*, which, together with the *Schlätzer Volksfreund und Kreisblatt* (thrice weekly), had constituted the sole newspaper fare of Dr. von Hentsch's household.

A big headline right across the front page announced that the delivery of the Austro-Hungarian Note to Serbia was hourly awaited. There were columns about the crisis from Vienna and Belgrade and Paris and London. Madame Caillaux was about to stand her trial in Paris for the murder of the editor of the *Figaro*; and the London news was mostly about a conference sitting at Buckingham Palace to settle the Irish question. The long columns of print made my head swim, the serried files of wiggly, gnarled-looking German characters, planted as close together as the trees in a primeval forest, with great clumps of adjectives, like undergrowth blocking the trail through the prodigiously long sentences, and at the very end, as welcome as the glimpse of a distant roof through the foliage, the isolated and indispensable verb.

So I turned with relief to a column of short paragraphs headed "Vermischtes," that is to say, "Miscellaneous." Here, boiled down to a line or two, all the horror and misery of a great metropolis were packed away. Murder, robbery, arson: tragedies of love and of drink: suicides and attempted suicides: all were there, a single day's record of the stirring, pulsating existence of three million humans.

Suddenly, as I listlessly scanned the column, my eye fastened on a name, Von Linz. I thought at once of Rudi. In the spate of happenings since Grundt had carried me away from the villa, the boy had passed from my mind; but the sight of his name reminded me that Clubfoot had despatched him to his quarters to await the arrival of the Provost-Marshal. With a sudden pang I turned to the heading of the paragraph. What I read there was:

"Selbstmord eines Offiziers": "Suicide of an Officer."

The announcement was brief enough. "Early this morning," it stated, "in an hotel of the Dorotheen-Strasse, the dead body of an officer was discovered, a revolver in the right hand. The victim has been identified as Lieutenant von Linz, of the 56th Infantry Regiment (Fogel von Falckenstein). Lieutenant von Linz was formerly in the Fifth Regiment of Foot Guards. The suicide is attributed to money difficulties."

Poor, wretched Rudi! The utter horror of it, to think of him, with his sunny nature, sitting in his hotel bedroom all through the long night, waiting for the arrival of the Provost-Marshal, which he must have guessed would signal the end of his military career! He had chosen his own way out—no, not his, the way which Clubfoot had suggested. I could see that poor boy, the last sight I was to have of him, standing at the desk looking hopelessly down upon the revolver which Grundt, so meaningly, as I now understood, had laid there.

Clubfoot again! There was no limit to the power of this man. Swiftly, noiselessly, the Crouching Beast had sprung. Only a little bullet-hole was there to show for it, and blood on a young face where laughter once had dwelt. No fuss or scandal: the tale of money troubles was there to stifle that. And it was I who had sent this care-free charming youth, whose lips, now cold, had kissed mine, to his ignominious death. Horrible, horrible! While all the muted noises of the city came riding into the garret along the last rays of the setting sun, I sat and stared benumbed at the fatal sheet.

The sound of a key in the door aroused me. Thank God, it was Druce coming back. At that moment I yearned for some one staunch and unafraid like him to share with me this new burden. But when the door opened, it was Otilie who entered. And she was alone.

"I knocked," she said, "but there was no answer. So I let myself in with my key...." She broke off and, after a swift glance round, brought her pale eyes to rest on me. "Where's the Count?" she demanded.

Her tone was imperious, and it set my back up.

"As you can see for yourself, he's not here," I answered.

She clasped her hands before her, and her eyes grew large with dismay. "You don't mean to tell me he's gone out?"

"I'm afraid I know nothing about his movements," I retorted. "He went away early this morning and I haven't seen him since. Was it you who brought me coffee and eggs for breakfast?"

"No," she replied wonderingly.

"Then he must have come back. And not so long ago, for he left me the afternoon paper. I was asleep, and I didn't

hear him..."

Her eyes were fixed on my face in a sort of menacing stare. She nodded several times impressively. "So, and you let him go out. He must needs risk his life so that Madame can have her comfortable breakfast when she condescends to wake." With a violent movement she slammed the door to behind her and advanced rather threateningly to where I sat at the table. "Do you realise that they're raking the whole town for him? They're making the round of every Kaschemme between this and the Wedding Platz, and they'll not rest until they've hunted him down. That clubfooted dog is at the head of the pack, and the Crouching Beast always gets what he watches for." Her voice broke. "Why, you poor fool, you must be crazy! If he were my man, I'd have tied him to the bed there, I'd have locked him in, I'd have gone out and foraged myself, rather than let him risk his life in the streets...." Tears strangled her utterance. "As true as there's a God in heaven," she cried, "if anything happens to him, I'll go to the police and see that they grab you too!"

At that moment the door behind her was softly rapped. In a flash she was at it. "Gott sei Dank, it's you!" I heard her cry. "Ach, Count, I've been so terribly afraid...." The door opening disclosed Druce, his arms full of packets. She hung upon his neck and his parcels rained upon the ground. "Du, du," she repeated over and over again, "how could you be so foolish!"

He laughed in his quiet way, and the sound of his laughter fell like a balm upon my distress. "Na, na, Kind," he told her, "I know my way round as well as most. And I never was a one for taking risks. Why, have you been shopping too?" He was looking at a basket which I perceived for the first time standing by the door.

"A few trifles... I never imagined you would dare venture out...." Otilie was fumbling at her eyes with her handkerchief. "I ... I must be going now. I just looked in...." She turned hastily to the door.

He patted her shoulder affectionately. "You're a real friend, my dear. But you must let me pay you for these things...."

She shook her head. "I don't want your money..."

"But I'm counting on you to bring us our breakfast in the morning," he retorted. "If you won't let me pay you, however..."

"Then you don't mean to go out any more?"

I was conscious that he flashed me a rapid glance.

"Perhaps not for a day or so," he laughed. "It must be the weather, I think, but I find the streets of Berlin unpleasantly hot at present...."

She took the note he held out to her. "I'll be round first thing. But you ... you stay at home." She flung me a defiant look. "If I were you, I'd hide his clothes!"

Druce laughed. He emptied her basket and handed it to her.

"Until to-morrow, then..." she said and paused, reluctant to be gone.

"Until to-morrow," Druce rejoined. "And bring me all the morning papers, will you?"

She stood before him, a slight, shabby little figure, looking up into his face. He laid his hand softly along her cheek and said: "Thank you, dear Otilie!"

With that she stole away.

Druce shut the door after her and locked it. Then, whistling a little air, he began to assemble the various packages on the table. He sorted them into little groups, calling out their respective contents as he did so. "Cutlets," he announced, "butter, cheese, eggs, bread, some peas and carrots—I adore fresh vegetables, don't you?—a ham"—he slapped a large

bundle—"for boiling and as a stand-by—sound eating, ham, for all the Mosaic law—fruit, cigarettes, and some tinned stuff,"—he emitted a little ripple of laughter—"in case of a siege. Powder, face cream, eau de cologne, hairpins, a box of handkerchiefs, for you—I took a chance on the powder and bought the cream tint: I hope it's all right. If there's anything else you want, we'll have to make use of Otilie. And now let's see what she's brought us in that basket of hers...."

His debonair manner did not deceive me. His face wore a pinched look and, when he flung aside his hat, I saw that his hair was dank with perspiration. His clothes and shoes were white with dust. He gave me the impression of being utterly exhausted.

"Do sit down and rest," I said. "You look absolutely worn out. Have you had anything to eat to-day?"

He dropped into the chair I gave him, and the whole of his lean, muscular frame seemed to sag. "Well," he remarked, his features crinkled up in that easy smile of his, "now that you mention it, I don't believe I have!"

"It's too bad," I said. "I'm going to make you some tea and do you some scrambled eggs. While you're eating those, the cutlets can be cooking. You must be famished!"

"I could do with a cup of tea," he answered. "But don't you worry! I'm quite used to fending for myself...."

"You stay where you are," I told him, as I filled the kettle at the tap. "What have you been doing to get yourself into such a state?"

He flung back his head, gazing at the ceiling, and gurgled a dry laugh. "I've been running, running like hell, from the police...."

"You were followed, then? Your ... your friend said you were crazy to go out. It was foolhardy of you...."

"Not foolhardy: I had a job of work to do. Besides, I always like to see for myself. I wasn't followed either. But a nose—I beg your pardon, I mean a detective—spotted me as I came out of Wertheim's, where I had been doing my little shopping, and gave chase...." He gurgled again. "Gosh, it was funny. Like a comic film. In and out of the crowds in the Leipziger-Strasse, through that restaurant with the double exit—I forget its name—and along the Kronen-Strasse. Fortunately, I don't think my fellow was sure of me: at any rate I shook him off. But little Otilie's right. We've got to lie low for a bit."

I was at the gas-ring, stirring up his eggs in the pan. The flame fired my cheeks anyway as I said: "I blame myself for your going out like that this morning...."

"You needn't do that," he put in hastily. "I should have gone in any case."

"I owe you an apology," I went on doggedly. "I said things I had no right to say."

Dusk was stealing into the room, and the failing light seemed to spread a shadow across his weary face.

"You said nothing that was not true," he answered, rather tonelessly. "You don't understand, probably, that the Service can't afford to lay much store by what are conventionally known as morals. It uses such instruments as come to its hand. And it's a rare bit of luck, I can tell you, for an officer, dismissed as I was, to be taken on again in the King's service. For I *have* been in gaol, my dear Miss Dunbar, at the Scrubs and at Parkhurst, twelve months of the best for theft...."

His voice was hard, hard: it had a stabbing quality that seemed to pierce me through.

"Please!" I said. "I don't want to hear any more. Won't you forgive my abominable behaviour? Nothing you can tell me about your past will make me forget again all I owe to your splendid courage in getting me out of the hands of that awful man...."

"I don't desert my pals," he rejoined roughly. "I told you from the first that we were in this thing together. It's much

better," he added more gently, "that you should know all about me. Otilie's presence here, I admit, was an unlooked-for complication. Perhaps you will believe me when I say that, had I foreseen it, I should never have brought you to this place...."

"Let's say no more about it, shall we?" I put in. "Your eggs are done, and you must have them while they're hot. And while I'm frying the cutlets you shall tell me about our plans."

"Plans?" he repeated rather grimly, as he took his seat at the table. He paused, and in the twilight silence a train, far below, rushed screaming by. "I'm afraid we can't make any plans for the present. We're treed in this garret, you and I!"

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News of a friend

With that he began to eat. Because I saw that he was famished, I questioned him no further but busied myself with my cooking. When I brought the cutlets he wanted me to join him. But I told him I had only just had the food he had left ready, and retired to the alcove to freshen myself up with the eau de cologne and put on a dab of powder. There were not many men, I reflected as I creamed my face, who, hunted as he had been that day, would have been so thoughtful. In all the crowded hours we had passed together nothing he had done touched me quite so much as this.

When I returned to the table he had finished his meal, and sat quietly in the dusk smoking a cigarette. He gave me one and, fetching a cup, poured me out some tea. For a little spell, while the darkness slowly deepened, we faced each other across the littered table, and smoked in silence.

"Well," he remarked at last, "we're cornered right enough. For how long, the Lord knows. I was lucky to-day, devilish lucky. But I did what I meant to do, anyway."

I thought he was alluding to his shopping excursion. "I've not thanked you yet for the powder and things..." I began.

"I wasn't thinking of that," he rejoined hastily. "What I really went out to do was to get rid of you know what...."

My thoughts flashed back to that thundery evening at Schlitz. Had my little Major fulfilled his mission after all? And was his honour redeemed?

"You don't mean to say you've managed to send it home?" I cried, agog.

Thoughtfully he flaked the ash from his cigarette. "I wish I could be sure. If I know anything of Clubfoot's methods, nothing has left this country by post for a foreign address—no letter, at any rate—without being first opened and read. I had to risk that. Seeing that we're bunkered for the time being, I made a copy of that report this morning while you were asleep and posted it, rolled up in a newspaper, to a safe address in Brussels. Our people there will know what to do with it ... if ever it reaches them." His voice trailed away. "In the meantime," he resumed, fixing his blue eyes on me, "I'm afraid you'll have to put up with me here. I hope it won't be for more than a day or two. I'll rig up a curtain across the room, and see to it that you have as much privacy as possible...."

I felt the colour coming into my cheeks. "This is your room," I told him, "and rather than turn you out again, I should leave myself. If you'll let me stay, I shall be grateful. I'm sure that any arrangement you make will be satisfactory." And then, to bridge the awkward pause that ensued, I changed the subject. "This document," I queried, "was it what you suspected?"

The gathering gloom obscured his features; but there was a certain grimness in his affirming nod. "Yes...."

He was staring moodily in front of him. Then his feelings seemed to burst out in a cry of pent-up exasperation: "God, to think of my being caged here while they're preparing to spring *this* on us!"

"Why," I exclaimed, bewildered by the sudden change in him, "what do you mean?"

"What do I mean?" he echoed bitterly. "I mean that this time it's war. They've made up their minds to have their war all right, at any costs, on any pretext, against all comers ... now. If only my warning gets through to London...."

He rose to his feet and began to pace up and down.

"If war should break out," I tried to pacify him, "it won't affect us surely? At any rate, not at once...."

"You don't understand," he answered sombrely. "The Fleet is partly mobilised for manoeuvres. Manoeuvres finish this week, and ships and crews will automatically disperse over the week-end. Unless..." He pounded his open palm with his fist. "This delay in presenting the Austrian Note fills me with anxiety. I can't help fearing that they're waiting for the dispersal of the Fleet...."

Like other people in those bewildering days, I was still far from conjuring up out of the mass of newspaper verbiage about the "demands of the Ballplatz," "demarches at Belgrade," judicial investigation, guarantees, punitive measures, the spectre of the awful tragedy which was hanging over our heads.

"Must this Austrian Note necessarily lead to war?" I said.

"It's the starting gun. They're going to make their demands so utterly unacceptable that Servia must reject them. If Russia and France stir a finger in protest, they'll find Germany in all her military might drawn up behind Austria. They can eat humble pie or fight. That's the sort of Hobson's choice our French and Russian friends will be up against!"

The scene at Schippke's came back to me. "Soldiers always want to fight," I suggested. "It's their job. But the common people! I have so many good friends in Germany. I'm sure they don't dream of attacking any one...."

Druce halted in his stride and faced me. "They don't. But they'll be told, already they're being told, that this is a war of defence. Germany's a military State,"—the old recurrent phrase! "The great General Staff possesses a potential instrument of propaganda in every German who has performed his service with the colours, and that, as you know, is the bulk of the male population. For years now the German people, egged on by the Kaiser's incessant craving for personal glorification, have been told that Germany is surrounded by enemies ready to fall upon her. The whole nation is drunk with power. As long as the Kaiser kept his hand on the throttle, there was a chance for peace, for the man's a coward at heart, and always runs away from the logical consequences of his words and deeds. But he'll not wriggle out of it this time. Moltke and Tirpitz and the rest of the gang, they'll see to that. They've packed H.M. off to Norway to play whilst they're getting on with the work. When they're ready for him to sign the mobilisation decree, they'll bring him home and not before. As soon as friend Wilhelm reappears in Berlin, you mark my words, war will be only a matter of days...."

He moved to the window and stood there in silhouette, gazing out, past the cowed company of chimneys, at the first stars trembling in the evening blue. "We shall mobilise, we must mobilise," he murmured, as though to himself, "and I,"—he struck the window-frame with the flat of his hand—"I am cooped up here!"

There was a moment's silence, then he sighed and, going to the door, switched on the light. "I don't know why I'm gassing high politics to you," he said, smiling in his old, placid way, "when there's so much you have to tell me." His keen eyes searched my face. "You look upset. Has anything happened since I've been away?"

I could not trust myself to speak. I picked up the newspaper and showed him the paragraph about Rudi. He read it through in silence. "By George," he ejaculated, almost with an air of admiration, "the old man certainly is thorough. What did he have against your friend? But perhaps"—his voice was suddenly very gentle—"you'd prefer to speak of this at some other time?"

I shook my head and, gulping back the tears, told him poor Rudi's story and the rest of my adventures on the preceding night.

It was the 22nd of July, a Wednesday, when Nigel Druce brought me to the garret. The house reared its six storeys in the Mahl-Strasse, one of the narrow teeming streets which abut on the lower Friedrich-Stadt. The weather was magnificent, and in the sunshine of a glorious summer Europe lay at peace. It was stiflingly hot in our eyrie under the roof. The heat and the confinement, together with the atmosphere of breathless suspense in which we lived, produced in me a curiously unreal state of mind, so that, when I look back upon those four days I spent with Nigel Druce in his attic, it seems to me that I must have heard above the restless stir of the city, the sullen growling of the approaching storm.

I saw little of Druce. A pair of sheets now curtained the room into two. The improvised kitchen, with the sink, was on my side of the partition, so Druce, who had spread himself a bed of blankets on the floor of his domain, would get up first in the morning, whilst I was still abed in the curtained alcove, and wash and shave and prepare the coffee. He would have done all the cooking, but I insisted that I should take my share of the house work.

He was always courteous, always good-tempered with me. As far as any man could, he studied my comfort. Thus, on the morning after our arrival, when Otilie had come with supplies and the newspapers, he pushed a flat packet through the curtain. It contained nightgowns, stockings, and underwear, dainty and, as any woman could see at a glance, expensive, a boon which my enforced separation from my baggage made most welcome.

Otilie called every day, usually very early, before I was out of bed. She remained on Druce's side of the curtain, and I never saw her, though I heard her husky voice. I suspected that Druce had asked her so to time her visits that we should not meet. Druce and I took our meals together at the only table, which remained in his territory. At first, at any rate, he chatted with me unconcernedly enough, discussing the day's news, and telling me stories of the Berlin underworld, with which he appeared to have an extraordinarily wide acquaintance. But he never alluded again to that secret of his I had surprised. I was conscious of a certain austerity in his manner towards me, an air of reserve which, albeit never stressed, I felt to hang like a fireproof curtain between us, ready to descend, at the first renewal of the old intimacy, between him and me.

In truth, the memory of the cruel words I had spoken was a barrier more effectual than any improvised partition. I was no longer at my ease with this partner of mine. My peep into his past had shocked me terribly: less the discovery of his disgrace than his cynical admission of the truth: and the Otilie situation irked me. In vain I told myself that the private affairs of this man, with whom fate had thrown me into temporary association, were no concern of mine. I could not help remembering that he had made no attempt to explain Otilie; and his indifference humiliated me almost as much as his resolute evasion of my proffered atonement for my ungenerous outburst.

The most important thing in life, Daddy used to tell me, is to be honest with oneself. I have tried to set down here my feelings towards Nigel Druce in order to explain what came after. Candidly I don't think I was in love with him at this time, though I dare say I was jealous of Otilie. I admired him for his pluck, his loyalty, his splendid unselfishness; and I was overwhelmingly, desperately sorry for him. If there can be no jealousy without love, then perhaps my resentment at Otilie's intrusion sprang from a feeling of disappointment. I might suspend judgment on that old and bitter passage in my friend's life: but his relations with this waif of the streets were an ever-present fact which I could not evade.

He, too, it sometimes struck me, was conscious of and regretted, the tension between us. When we were together, and he thought I was not looking, his eyes would rest on my face. A word from me, then, I dare say, would have broken the ice between us. But I was too proud to speak it. Desperately I longed to be free and never to see him again.

I was worrying, too, about Dulcie. She would have received Dr. von Hentsch's telegram announcing my return to England; and by this she must be distracted with anxiety about me. I wanted Druce to let Otilie send her a wire, not necessarily signed, just a word to bid her not to be alarmed. But he would not hear of it. The telegram might be traced, he declared, and it was essential that Clubfoot should have no grounds for thinking we were still in Berlin. The argument was sound, and I did not insist.

Our neighbours in that great bee-hive of a tenement left us severely alone. Most of the tenants, Druce told me, were girls frequenting the dance-hall next door, the landlord of the house was the proprietor of the dance-hall, and depended

on these "Damen" to bring custom to his establishment. He was doubtless willing to pay heavily for the privilege of shielding his clients from troublesome inquiries: at any rate the house, Druce said, was singularly immune from police supervision. Rent at the Mahl-Strasse was paid six-monthly in advance, and Druce had secured his room by means of a lump sum down to his predecessor, a Galician anarchist, who had to leave Germany in a hurry.

Druce was restless, restless. He could not sit still. All day long, and often far into the night, I would hear him pacing up and down beyond the curtain. The delivery of the Austrian Note to Servia—the Berlin newspapers published the text on the Friday after our arrival, if I remember rightly—seemed to redouble his furious anxiety. That morning he made Otilie wait while he scribbled off a letter for her to take.

"It's war all right," he told me at the mid-day meal. "Even if the Belgrade Government is willing to accept Austria's terms, Russia will never permit it." He complained bitterly of the scarcity of news from London. "They should have received the report by this," he declared sombrely. "It must have gone astray. When it comes to hand, we're bound to see its reflection in the news despatches." But all the news from England was of civil war in Ulster.

Late that evening Otilie came back. I was already in bed when I heard her whispering with Druce. For the first time she seemed badly scared. "He wouldn't even open your letter," she said. "He sent out word that, if I bothered him again, he'd fetch the police." They talked in undertones far into the night, and I fell asleep on the murmur of their voices.

When I rose next morning, Druce still lay like a log among his blankets. Otilie had left an evening paper, and while the water boiled for the coffee, I glanced over the day's news. The tone of the newspaper was truculent. It seemed to be assumed that Servia would reject the Note and that the Austrian Army would occupy Belgrade. The Ulster Conference at Buckingham Palace was still muddling on. And then, under the heading "Society," I came upon an announcement which made my heart leap within me for gladness.

"*Herr Geoffrey Transome, Secretary of the American Embassy,*" I read, "*has returned to Berlin from Lausanne.*"

75

Druce and I fall out

Dear old Geoff! He wasn't a bit like a "Botschaftsrat," as the *Berliner Tageblatt* called him. It always struck me, when we used to meet in London, that Geoff, in his dry American way, got a lot of quiet fun out of his diplomatic duties amid the stiff and glittering magnificence of the Imperial Court. This is not to say that, like most sensible people, he did not have at heart a very real respect for the many excellent qualities of the Germans.

But the Court set, especially the military, with their titles, and gold lace, and ribands, and their portentous, mandarin-like formality, filled him with ribald glee. At Palace functions he was entranced when some spangled official would mistake him in his plain evening clothes for a waiter. He used to complain to me that he had never succeeded in "thinking up," as he called it, a really suitable rejoinder for use on such occasions. Geoff seemed to me like a haven of refuge in my present dilemma. Grundt would have no fears for him.

I did not impart my news to Druce: at least not then. I was unpleasantly and increasingly aware of being a drag on him, and, while I knew that he would never desert me of his own accord, I could not help feeling that he would have a much greater chance of making his way out of the country alone than with me. It gratified me to reflect that, now that he had virtually reached the end of his resources, it might conceivably be I who, through the Transomes, would secure our flight into safety.

This was not mere childishness on my part. Secretly I was a little hurt that Druce had never given me credit for possessing any brains or enterprise in our plight. He appeared to assume that all initiative must proceed from him. Yet he consulted Otilie eagerly enough. Thus when, at dusk that evening, after a day of gloomy moping on my companion's part

during which we scarcely exchanged a word, the girl arrived, Druce brisked up at once. Snatches of their whispered conversation came to me as I sat on my bed mending a ladder in my stocking.

Apparently Otilie had visited various garages on our behalf. At one the proprietor became hostile and suspicious directly a trip to the Dutch frontier was mentioned. Otilie thought he had been put on his guard by the police. At the others, in view of the uncertainty of the political outlook, she was equally unsuccessful. "On all sides," I heard her tell Druce, "there is talk of mobilisation. That means that all cars will be commandeered. So very few garages will send cars out on long trips."

They spoke of somebody called "Peter der Dachs," "Peter the Lynx," who seemed to be a friend of Black Lola's, with whom Otilie was putting up. "If the money's all right," I caught Otilie's husky whisper, "the Lynx won't let you down." Druce made some inaudible remark, to which the girl replied sharply: "Nein, nein, nein! He won't hear of it."

Druce's sibilant "S-sh!" rasped across the room. The voices sank once more to an unintelligible murmur. Then, "Don't be a fool, Count!" I heard Otilie exclaim. "You'll not get a chance like this again. It's only a question of time before he tracks you down. Any one of these women in the house will sell you for a thaler. And Clubfoot never gives up..."

The rest escaped me. Presently the door creaked softly. "As you will," said the girl. "They're over at the Apollo Café, so I'll be back within the hour. But I tell you now that, man or woman, he won't hear of it..." The door closed: and Druce resumed his endless pacing.

She did not return.

A golden evening deepened into a sweltering night. My head ached with the heat. We ate our evening meal in silence. After we had done, with the dividing curtain drawn aside to air the room, we lingered long at the table, smoking and listening to the voice of the city.

That evening it was as though an electric atmosphere rested over Berlin. A rumour, vague and distant, like a fading echo, seemed to hover above the habitual stir. At last I rose and went to the window. I became conscious of continuous waves of sound, like very faint shouting, mounting upward in the stagnant air. I called Druce over. As he stood beside me listening, the distant tumult swelled up for an instant and died down, like the tremolo of that motor engine which, as I write these lines in the peace of the winter night, goes throbbing in and out of the folds of the Downs.

"That noise is cheering," said Druce. His voice was husky with excitement. "Demonstrations, eh? Is it war already?" His fingers began to drum on the window ledge. "What's keeping that girl?"

He advanced his wrist in the failing light to consult his watch. Ten o'clock past: she had been gone these three hours. In a blur of sound raucous shouts now mounted from the street below. They were crying special editions. The warm evening was vibrant with the clamour. Close at hand a band began to blare. Voices took up the strain and rose in song, virile, reverent, sonorous, as the Germans sing, to our crow's nest under the stars:

*"Deutschland, Deutschland, über Alles,
Über Alles in der Welt..."*

"The sands are running out," Druce's deep voice overtoned the solemn chant. "If this isn't mobilisation, it's only a question of hours, of days at most. And mobilisation means no transport, and the frontiers shut tighter than ever. Why the devil doesn't Otilie come?"

Little by little the hubbub faded away. Once more the familiar racket of Berlin by night ascended to batter at my aching head, the clatter of the little horse-cabs, the staccato tang-tang of the trams, the winged screech of the electric trains.

I left the window and, sitting down by the table, resumed my needlework. But Druce remained where he was, staring out. After a while he turned about and said hoarsely: "Otilie has never failed me before. I'm going to find out what's happened to her."

I looked up from my sewing aghast. "You wouldn't be so foolhardy, after what happened the last time?"

His troubled eyes seemed to evade me. "I know where she lodges with Black Lola," he rejoined. "I can go by the back streets. There's not much risk at night."

"Don't be so reckless," I urged. "She's sure to be back soon..."

"I must know what's going on," he broke in wildly. "I can't afford to wait. Suppose that report has been held up in the post! How can you expect me to skulk here, knowing that the only other copy is in my possession? Besides, the Lynx is due to leave an hour before dawn, and I must find out if he's willing to take us with him."

"Who is the Lynx?" I asked, "and where are we going with him?"

"He's a friend of Black Lola's. He and some other men are starting by car, first thing to-morrow morning, for Cleves. That's near enough to the Dutch frontier for our purpose. The Lynx has no desire to attract attention to himself and his pals, and it's a heaven-sent chance for us to get away quietly, that is, if he's willing to take us..."

"I couldn't help overhearing some of your conversation with Otilie," I put in. "They won't take me. Isn't that it?"

"We're partners, you and I," he answered doggedly, evading my question, "and we stick together. Otilie ought to have made that clear to them to start with. I'm going now to find the Lynx and talk to him myself..."

"You needn't risk it," I said. "If this were our only chance, I wouldn't stand in your way, though I appreciate your loyalty tremendously. But I think I have a means by which we can escape together without separating."

His inquiring "Oh!" had a touch of rather patronising surprise which grated on me.

"Geoffrey Transome's back in Berlin. The newspaper says so."

"Who?"

"Geoffrey Transome. I told you I was going to stay with him and his wife. They're the kindest people in the world and tremendous friends of mine. They'll do anything to help me."

He knitted his brow. "But surely you told me he was at the American Embassy?" His tone was cold.

"Yes. He's one of the secretaries."

Druce gave a short laugh and, pulling open the table drawer, began to transfer to his pockets various articles lying there, the portfolio with his money, his cigarette-case.

"Don't you believe me when I tell you that Geoffrey is sure to help us?" I demanded rather tremulously.

"If you value your friendship with the Transomes," was the cool reply, "you'll leave them out of this."

"You don't know Geoffrey," I retorted. "He's the most unconventional person in the world."

"He may be. But he won't thank you for dragging him into this. He's a diplomatist officially accredited to a friendly Government. And you seriously expect him to assist me, a spy, and you, my accomplice? No, no, my dear, let's try and be practical!"

His superior tone nettled me. "I know Geoffrey Transome better than you do. I tell you he won't let us down."

"And I know this game better than you do, and I tell you that your friend will run a mile from you." He picked up his hat. "We shall probably make an early start. Hadn't you better lie down for a bit? You look dreadfully tired..."

"Don't take this awful risk," I pleaded. "For God's sake, wait..."

He made a gesture of impatience. "I can't afford to wait, I keep on telling you..."

"I shall be scared to death every minute you're away. What's to become of me if anything happens to you?"

He laughed a hard laugh. "It would certainly make your Yankee friend less disinclined to help you. But don't worry about me. I'll be all right."

"If you insist on going," I said, feeling rather desperate, "then let me go too..."

He shook his head. "To run the Lynx to earth I shall have to go to places where one can't take a woman."

"Oh, you're obstinate," I burst out angrily. "Otilie never failed us before. Why not wait a little, and when she comes, I'll give her a note to take round to Geoffrey Transome in the morning..."

He fixed his blue eyes upon me in a sombre stare. "Has it occurred to you that she may have been arrested?" he asked.

"And if she has been," I flamed back, "what good can you do?"

"Not a great deal. But I can leave money to get her decent food and provide for her defence."

"Oh," I cried out contemptuously, "you only think of her. I understand now why you're so anxious to go out. The rest is just a pretext..."

The shadows in the blue eyes seemed to darken. "I should have thought you too intelligent to be jealous," he answered, and it struck me that his voice was wistful rather than reproachful.

"Jealous?" I gasped wrathfully.

But my exclamation was cut off by the closing of the door. He had turned on his heel and walked out. I noticed that this time he did not lock the door behind him.

76

The man on the stairs

If he had called me selfish, unreasonable: if he had reminded me, as well he might have, that his duty came before any consideration of my comfort or safety, I should have cared less. But jealous; I who had been willing to overlook his disgrace and even to humble myself to the dust to tell him so and jealous of a street waif at that!

Well, it was finished now. I was beholden enough to this man. I would leave him to his friends and go to mine. With me out of the way he would be free to accept the Lynx's offer. After all, it was best so. Though I would not have admitted it to Druce, I had an uneasy feeling that it was going to be a little difficult to explain him to Molly and Geoff.

In point of fact, however, I did not stop to think things out properly at all. My stupid pride was bitterly offended and my sole impulse was to get away from my companion at all costs. My anger overcame my fear; and I lost not a moment in bundling my few possessions—even for those, I reflected wrathfully, I was indebted to him—into a brown paper parcel.

It was nearly half-past eleven, my watch told me. But the hour didn't matter. Geoffrey Transome, thank Heaven, was the sort of friend one could appeal to at any hour of the day or night. Molly too. I had their address. They lived in the Viktoria-Strasse, a street which, as I had discovered from the map of Berlin at the von Hentsches, abutted on the busy Potsdamer-Strasse, near the canal bridge. I should have to inquire my way there, for I dared not venture on a cab. But for the time being, uplifted by a wonderful sense of freedom, I was content to leave these details on the knees of the gods.

I put on my hat and adjusted my veil and, my parcel under my arm, made for the door. There I paused. I owed it to Druce to let him know that our partnership was dissolved. I found a piece of paper in the drawer of the table and scribbled him a note:

"I am deeply grateful for all you have done for me. But you must accept your friend's offer. I am going to Geoffrey Transome. I can find my way to England alone."

This bald message of farewell I left upon the table, propped up against the water-jug, where he would see it when he returned. As I turned towards the door, the sight of the orderly pile of blankets on the floor below the window, where he was wont to make his bed, gave me a momentary pang, and I wondered whether I would ever set eyes on Nigel Druce again. But I fought down the feeling of great loneliness that suddenly assailed me. I was only a pawn in the dangerous game he played so blithely; and now that I had done my part, I meant to show him that I could get on without him. I set my teeth and switched off the light. The next moment, with a thumping heart, I was tiptoeing my way down in the fetid, lurking obscurity of the staircase.

The house was sunk in a profound hush. No sound, other than the distant bourdon of the street, disturbed the stillness. The darkness of the stairs was clammy with evil, ancient reeks, and permeated, as it seemed to me, with all the sin and misery that dwelt within that place. I dared not strike a match, but let the greasy hand-rail guide me.

And then suddenly, from somewhere below, a shimmer of light and the murmur of voices brought me to a shuddering full stop. I peered over the balustrade. Two floors down the door of one of the flats had opened. From it a dim radiance shone out upon the figure of a man who was half-way across the threshold. He seemed to be taking his leave.

I heard a woman's voice speaking in German, throaty and rather harsh. "Wie gesagt, we keep ourselves to ourselves. They might have the flat next door for aught I know. Last year a girl hanged herself in a room upstairs. It was three months before they found her..."

"There are single rooms here, then, as well as flats?" The echo of the staircase absorbed and muffled the man's deep tones.

"Three, on the top. Two are store-rooms. A Russian student had the other; but I haven't seen him for weeks..."

"Keep your eyes skinned anyway, d'you hear?" said the man. "There's money in this for you, my lass. They're somewhere in the neighbourhood, that's certain."

There was a hoarse chuckle from beyond the threshold of the open door. "So are half the murderers the Blue-coats would like to get their claws into and can't. The quarter's a rabbit-warren, like this house. But I can't stick here jawing all night, zum Donnerwetter. I was due at the dance-hall this hour gone..."

Swiftly I mounted a few stairs as I heard the door close. The staircase groaned and the banister shook in my grasp. Holding my breath, I peeped over. I could see nothing in that pitchy darkness, but the woodwork creaked under a heavy tread. Merciful Heaven, the man was coming upstairs!

I turned about and on tiptoe fled upward. The darkness was in my favour. Behind me I could hear the unseen visitant stumbling and puffing as he laboured his way aloft in the dark. In an instant I had gained the top and, darting along the corridor, regained my haven under the rafters. Even as, with infinite precaution, I shut the door behind me, the awful truth

dawned upon me. Druce had carried away the key. I had no means of securing the door.

There was nothing heavier than the table with which to barricade it: besides, there was no time. I was caught in a cul-de-sac.

I sprang for the window farthest from the door, the one at the end of the room. It was a dormer window, small and low-pitched, that projected from the precipitous slope of the roof. Outside a broad gutter which ran below afforded the only foothold. I hesitated at the sight of it, guessing that, like everything else about the house, it was probably old and ramshackle, wondering whether it would support my weight.

The harsh shriek of a train speeding between the houses far below rasped across the sultry night. As the din died down, an irregular footfall, a sort of muted thud, followed by a softer sound, in the corridor without, came to my straining ears. Some one with a heavy limp was advancing stealthily along the passage.

I delayed no longer. Steadying myself on one wing of the casement windows, I swung myself out, dropping my feet to the gutter. One glance below, where the bright lights of the Mahl-Strasse lay like a narrow yellow riband at the foot of a canyon of darkness, sent such a sickening wave of giddiness over me that I shut my eyes and lay back against the rough, crenellated tiles of the roof, unable to move, to think, even to pray. The vibration of the open window to a ponderous tread on the bare boards within brought me to my senses. Stemming my back against the steep pitch of the roof, while the gutter sagged nauseatingly under my weight, I began to edge precariously along the tiles away from the window.

I had not recognised the voice on the stairs; but I knew to whom that heavy, halting step, now moving with cumbrous caution about the room below me, belonged. Somehow it had never occurred to me that Grundt, with all the forces of the police at his command, would thus come scouting in person.

For so far he was only scouting. The scraps of conversation I had overheard made that much clear. How had he tracked us down? Perhaps Otilie had been shadowed: if not to the house, at least to the street. The Mahl-Strasse was quite short; and there would be no great difficulty about ransacking it, house by house. Perhaps...

I went cold with fear. Merciful God, what if they had captured Druce? He was not five minutes gone. If they had been watching the street, he must have walked straight into them. And with Druce in his power, Clubfoot had come in search of me. Too well I knew the deadly thoroughness, the infinite patience, of the man. He would sit down and wait for me. And I should be trapped here on the tiles until the first peep of day, now but a few hours distant, should reveal me clinging to the roof to anybody who chanced to look aloft from the street.

And then I remembered the message I had left for Druce. All the effects I possessed were in the parcel which I still clutched under my arm. My note, coupled with the absence of any trace of me in the garret, surely this should suffice to convince Clubfoot that I had gone for good?

But what mattered I if Druce had fallen into their hands? Before the imminent, deadly peril threatening us both, all my stupid pique melted away. Of a sudden my mind was flooded with the glamour of the old camaraderie that had borne us high-hearted through so many vicissitudes together. I thought of the tenderness with which he had spoken of Abbott, his dead friend: of his unflinching courage: of the sparkle in those blue eyes of his which no challenge of danger, but only my heartless taunts, had been able to dispel.

As I cowered there in the soft, velvety darkness of the summer night, with every nerve vibrant, every sense awake, bitter remorse assailed me. I realised that, almost from the moment of my meeting with this man who had come so strangely into my life, I had lived only for the day when our ripening friendship should rend the veil between us, and he should open his heart to me. Now it was too late. We had parted in anger, and I felt that I should never see him again. Over the city spread out far below me, whose rumour mounted to my ears like some distant ocean surge, my thoughts soared out in quest of him on the wings of an unspoken, fervent prayer that he might still be safe.

The sounds within the garret had died away. Keeping my head well back, lest that glimpse of the vertiginous depths beneath should dizzy me again, I opened my eyes. Above my head the night sky was glorious with stars. Enthroned in the heavens, serene and cold, they seemed to be as aloof from the world on their perches as I on mine. But the next moment

the creaking of a board, so close at hand that my heart almost ceased to beat, brought me swiftly back to earth.

A dim glow in the window I had left warned me that the light had been switched on within the room. A plank groaned again, and Clubfoot stepped into the embrasure. I saw his face, under the black wide-awake hat, clearly framed in the pane of the open casement, the features terrible with implacable resolve, the eyes peering out from under the tangle of the projecting ape-like brows, flinging the menace of their dark and merciless regard at the dark windows across the way, the massive jaw thrust forward, as solid and as immovable as the Rock of Gibraltar. Numb with fear, I flattened myself against the roof, tucking my hands behind me, lest their light colour might betray me, thanking Heaven for my veil and my dark clothes.

With grim deliberation that ogre countenance slowly turned in my direction, and the measured scrutiny of the hot and angry eyes seemed to burn me. But the dark night was my friend, and in a little Clubfoot withdrew from the window. I heard his monstrous boot thump heavily on the planking, saw the room sink into darkness. Once more the window jarred to that ponderous tread: then silence....

Tense with expectation, I waited. I strained my ears for the sound of the door that should tell me he was gone. But the stillness of death reigned within the attic. In vain I sought to muster up the courage to make my way back along the gutter to the window; but each time my nerve failed me. The thought that that sinister cripple might yet be lurking there in the darkness of the garret, isolated at the top of this evil house, paralysed my will.

I watched the stars pale and wisps of grey steal into the sky behind the line of tall chimney-pots that, with their fantastic cowls, stood up like an array of Manchu war-braves on the house-tops across the street. At most an hour was left to me in which to screw up my courage to the sticking-point. Between the chance of stumbling upon Clubfoot now, and the certitude that dawn would discover me either to him or to the neighbours, there was not much choice; but I could not bring myself to do more than edge a few paces nearer the window. There I stuck fast, and with death in my heart witnessed the relentless approach of dawn.

There was a lemon light in the Eastern sky when, very distinctly, I heard a step within the room, and thereon the hollow slam of the door. At last! I squirmed my way along the gutter and laid my hand upon the window. I had to watch my feet, and it was not until I had steadied myself on the window-frame that I ventured to glance into the room.

What I saw there seemed to turn my blood to ice.

77

"Heute mir, morgen Dir"

With his hands raised above his head and his back to the door, Nigel Druce confronted me. In the foreground, between him, as he faced the window where I precariously balanced myself—it looked straight along the room to the door—and me, Grundt's vast back bulked enormous. The attic was mysterious with the russet shades of dawn, though in the corners the darkness yet lurked, and in the leaden half-light I could clearly distinguish every detail of the two motionless figures.

Druce was smiling; but his eyes were wary. He did not see me, for he was watching Grundt and the great hairy paw, held level with the waist, which I knew must be grasping a pistol, though from where I was I could not see it. Thus they stood in silence, eyeing one another, whilst I watched them fascinated.

The half-drawn curtain before the bed told me at a glance what had happened. Clubfoot had concealed himself behind it to wait, and on Druce's appearance had stepped out and surprised him. I must have appeared at the window almost at the moment of their meeting, for Druce was not a pace from the door, and Grundt was standing on a level with the alcove.

A sudden movement of the massive torso before me caused me to withdraw as much of my body as I could, leaving only my face peering round the window. Clubfoot was laughing silently: I could see the tremendous shoulders heaving.

"Lieber Herr," he remarked softly, "you must forgive my unseemly mirth. But really, as a student of human nature, I find the irony of the situation irresistible. I can understand your dismay in desecrating my somewhat Simian traits and rotundity of line in place of the bewitching face and sylph-like form of the delightful lady who shares, as I perceive, not only your fortunes, but also..."—he waved his stick airily in the direction of the alcove, and I felt my cheeks grow hot. "Na..." he broke off. "But," he went on, "the expression on your face on seeing me was so unutterably comical. Pardon me, but my profession offers so few opportunities for a hearty laugh." And he chuckled wheezingly.

Druce's face darkened. The raillery died out in his eyes, and I could see his hands, as he held them above his head, trembling. "We'll leave the lady out of it, if you please," he said, in a suffocating voice.

"Ah, but we can't," Clubfoot retorted blandly. "Like all Englishmen, you are doubtless addicted to the pleasures of the chase. You can certainly appreciate the beauty of a right and left..."

Druce shrugged his shoulders, but he did not speak. Only his eyes narrowed.

"An allegorical way of saying," the cripple went on with smooth mockery, "that your charming companion is by this time in the bag. You I bring down with my right: her with my left. Pan, pan, and the thing is done! Kolossal, nicht wahr?" Still chuckling audibly, he moved to the table. "You don't know perhaps that she left a message for you?"

Druce's face lightened suddenly, and he made an instinctive movement forward. "Stay as you are, you dog," Clubfoot bellowed savagely, every vestige of jesting banished on the instant, "or this gun may go off before it has to." He picked up my note. "I will read you the billet-doux." And in strongly guttural English he read out my message. "Do you know where she has gone?" he asked softly.

"As you see," said Druce stiffly, "Miss Dunbar has not acquainted me with her plans."

"A rift within the lute, hein? Perhaps I can enlighten you. Would it surprise you to learn that the lady has sought the protection of the Stars and Stripes?"

For the briefest instant a look of utter panic appeared in Druce's face. Prompt as he was to regain control, he was not quick enough for Clubfoot. "Schau, schau," was Grundt's comment, "old Clubfoot is not often out in his guesses. I thought you'd read the newspaper wherever you were. So you noticed my little paragraph announcing Herr Transome's return to Berlin, eh? And the lady flew straight off to her friends." He gurgled. "Na, one of my young men will have to do the honours in the Herr Botschaftsrat's place. Herr Transome has taken his wife to America, you see! But Miss Dunbar will be most welcome at the Viktoria-Strasse. It's dull work watching a house; and my people have been there for the past week..."

At that moment Druce caught sight of me. He had raised his head and was gazing rather miserably past Clubfoot out of the window. His expression did not alter: he showed not the slightest sign of recognition; and presently his eyes turned to Grundt once more. But in that instant communication was established between us, and I was conscious of the strong sense of confidence his presence always gave me.

Now Druce was listening to Clubfoot again. "The game's up, lieber Herr," the German was saying. "You know what I want. Hand it over!"

Druce smiled. "Your guesses aren't always so good after all, Herr Doktor. You may not believe me, but I assure you that I have nothing that can possess the smallest interest for you..."

"So?" The ejaculation rang through the garret like a pistol shot. "You'd lie to me, would you, you gaolbird? We'll see about that, you gallows-fruit!" The heavy boot clumped on the boards, as with clumsy agility the baboon-like figure scrambled forward. "The report, you scum," the great German squealed, "or I'll spatter your brains over the door behind you!" He slowly jerked up the pistol. He had halted three paces from Druce.

There was an instant's tense silence, then Druce said: "Oh, all right, you shall have it." I realised his purpose: it was to draw Clubfoot away from the window.

"Where is it?" Clubfoot demanded.

"In the inside pocket of my coat..."

"Turn about and face the wall. And remember, at the slightest attempt to lower your hands, I blow the back of your head off. Vorwärts!"

Druce turned about. Grundt turned his stick under his arm and his left hand shot forward. His long fingers fastened themselves in the collar of Druce's coat and, with a violent wrench, tore it away. His eyes never left his victim as his fingers explored the jacket pockets. Then the coat dropped to the floor and I saw the blue envelope in Clubfoot's hand.

He raised it to his mouth, and with his teeth ripped the envelope across. He shook out a folded sheet of folio paper and, dexterously catching it in his fingers while the envelope fell to the floor, spread it out, always with the one hand, glanced at it and grunted. He thrust the document in his pocket and called out to Druce: "You can turn round again."

Druce, in his shirt-sleeves, obeyed. His face was impassive; but there was something about him, perhaps merely the way he held up his head, which told me he had not lost all hope.

"A chancy business, this job of ours, Herr Kollege," Clubfoot remarked amiably: his gust of rage seemed to have blown itself out. "You know our German proverb: 'Heute mir, morgen Dir'—my turn to-day, yours to-morrow. I can't help feeling sorry about you. You've got remarkable aptitude for the profession, quite remarkable, jawohl, and, had circumstances been different, I might have been able to make you an offer which would have interested you. But in this affair, so very delicate, involving, as you will have probably realised, one of His Majesty's immediate entourage, it is quite out of the question that, on the losing side, there should be any survivors..."

Every word he spoke in his deep, resonant bass came to me distinctly. I was cold with horror.

"A pistol shot will rouse the house," said Druce evenly. "I suppose you've thought of that? You'll hardly want a scandal, will you, if discretion is so important?"

"There's been one suicide here already," Grundt rejoined. "A second won't be unduly remarked. Gott ja, every week some poor devil in this city shoots a bullet into his head. And a down-and-out actor—that's your present cover, I think?—will never be missed..."

* * * * *

It was abundantly clear to me now that this savage meant murder. Only I could do something! Between us we would have to get possession of that pistol. But how? Grundt was at the far end of the room from me. Were I to burst blindly in upon him, I knew he would not scruple to shoot down his prisoner before turning to face me. What plan could I most usefully adopt?

And then, as though he could read my thoughts, Druce supplied the answer to my question. "Your German proverb's a good one," he said to Clubfoot, in rather a loud voice. "But there's an English one you should know, too. We have a saying, 'While there's life, there's hope!' And let me tell you another one, 'There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip!' which applies rather neatly to this work of ours which, as you remark, is apt to be chancy. I've been in tight corners before, and somehow I've never felt absolutely certain that my number was up. Why, even while we're talking here, I have a feeling that anything might happen to avert the fate you have in store for me, even if it were an angel from Heaven that came flying in through that window behind you with a terrific crash of glass..."

He had given me my cue. I was to distract Clubfoot's attention. Without hesitation, I drove my knee into the window-pane and, with the glass tinkling and clattering all about me, hurled myself into the room. I was watching Grundt, and I perceived how he started at that resounding crash and, for the merest fraction of a second, deflected his gaze from the man before him. In that instant Druce sprang.

I saw the colossus rock and sway under the shock of that terrific impact. I waited for the shot; but no shot came. Above their heads, as they were locked together, Grundt's right arm pointed straight upward at the ceiling, with Druce's lean hand clutching at the pistol grasped in the hairy paw. As I gathered myself up from the floor I heard Clubfoot grunt stertorously as, with a supreme effort of muscle, he forced that ponderous arm downwards to level his weapon at Druce's head. But in the same moment he seemed to lose his balance, or else his crippled foot failed him, and he toppled over backwards with Druce still fastened to him like a tiger to its prey. He landed on the boards with a thud that shook the house, his head striking the leg of the table with sickening violence. Druce was on his feet by the time I reached him, the pistol in his hand. He was breathing rather hard; but the laughter danced again in his eyes. "Oh, well done, partner!" he murmured.

Behind him on the floor the huge mass lay limp and still. "Is he ... is he dead?" I said. Druce shook his head and stepped aside.

The body sprawling on its back was like the carcass of some giant gorilla flung down by the hunters. The eyes were closed, the lids yellowish and puffy, and the face, with its prodigious bony development and its pads of hair on the cheeks, was scarcely human. The bulbous lips were blown out rhythmically to the laboured heaving of that mighty thorax. The head, with its greyish, shaven scalp, reposed in a dark and sticky pool.

Suddenly I felt my senses slipping. The floor seemed to tilt. I must have uttered some sound, for Druce, who had dropped to his knees beside the prone figure, looked up in alarm. The next thing I knew his arms were about me: his cheek brushed mine: and, as though out of the far distance, I heard his voice: "Oh, my dearest dear..."

I did not faint. But I clung to him as the room swayed about me, caring nothing that the whole world should slide away from under my feet now that he had come back to me. He held me very close, and I yielded myself to the comforting protection of his arms. In happy surrender I listened to the voice I thought I might never hear again.

"Oh, my dear," he said, "everything's all right. The car is waiting for us, and we can make our way back to England together. When I came in and found you gone, and that savage in your place, I didn't care what became of me, for I thought I'd lost you. But now that I've found you again, you've given me something to live for. Olivia, dearest, you're quite safe with me. I'm going to take you home to England. Won't you speak to me?"

I opened my eyes. The floor was steady once more. "I've been so frightened," I said, in a voice that sounded in my ears like someone else's. "I thought I'd lost you, too; I never meant us to part like that. But I was angry, and when I'm angry I say and do horrid, stupid things. Can you ever forgive me ... Nigel?"

His blue eyes were gazing into mine. I tried to turn my head aside to hide the tears that were very near the surface; but he held me fast. Suddenly his head dropped upon my breast, and he clung desperately to me, even as I, a moment back, had clung to him. "Olivia..." he murmured brokenly. I bent and laid my lips softly upon his raven hair.

"Nothing matters now," I told him.

At that he raised his head and fell back a pace, staring at me in wonder. For a brief instant we faced one another in the rosy flush of sunrise which transfigured that shabby room. And then I was in his arms again.

In which we part from Clubfoot and embark on a journey

The rapture of that moment—ah, how often in my present loneliness my thoughts fly back to it!—was speedily ended. There was a movement on the floor. Quick as a flash, Nigel whipped round, at the same time thrusting me behind him, the pistol pointed at the figure at his feet.

Clubfoot had opened his eyes. Powerless though he was to harm us now, their expression frightened me. A sort of untamed, wild-beast fury smouldered in their depths, and the tufted, overhanging brows were drawn down in a savage scowl. He seemed to be still partly stunned, however, for he groaned feebly once, and closed his eyes again.

Side by side, Nigel and I stood, gazing down upon our old enemy. A muttered execration broke from Nigel's lips. "If he had his deserts," he said between his teeth, "I'd give him a bullet through that ugly mug of his. But if Clubfoot could have risked a shot, we can't afford to. It would bring the whole blinking house about our ears. Dash it all, I can hardly strangle the fellow: I'd better see about tying him up..." He consulted his watch. "We shall only just do it..." He glanced at the figure on the floor, then stooped to whisper in my ear: "The car's due to leave in half an hour. Fortunately, the rendezvous is quite close by. And that reminds me..." He gave me a questioning look. "Would you object frightfully to travelling as my brother?"

"Dress as a man, do you mean?"

He nodded. "The ... er ... party who owns the car refused at first to take anybody except me, and then only because Black Lola vouched for me. With a great deal of trouble I persuaded him to let my young brother come too. As a matter of fact, the disguise will make it easier for us getting across the frontier. You'll find what you want in that old box of mine under the bed: there ought to be a cap there as well. Do you mind awfully, Olivia darling?"

"I'll do anything you say, Nigel..."

He patted my shoulder. "You're a brick. While you're over there I think I could do with the straps off that trunk of mine..."

I threw him the straps and retired to dress. The grey flannel suit I found did not fit too badly, for Nigel and I were much of a height. I hunted in vain for a necktie. "Don't worry!" Nigel called out to me when I told him of this deficiency. "On this trip we belong to the dishonest poor!" So I left the blue tennis shirt I had donned open at the throat.

When at length I emerged from behind the curtain, Grundt, who was to all appearance still unconscious, was pinioned hand and foot. Nigel, kneeling on the ground, was tearing a towel into strips. "Great Cæsar," he exclaimed softly on catching sight of me, "was there ever a more perfect boy? Your name ought to be Viola, not Olivia! Classical allusion, very apt! But, oh, I say,"—acute dismay rang in his voice—"what *have* you been and done to your hair?"

"It had to be," I told him. "It would stick out from under my cap and spoil everything." I whipped off the cap and shook my shorn locks at him. "Does it look very awful?" I asked, for, now that it was done, I was not feeling too good about it. "I only had my nail scissors. I'm afraid it isn't much of a job..."

"The job's A1," he said rather glumly. "But I'm thinking of your beautiful raven hair, my dear!"

"It'll grow again," I answered bravely. (Within a month I was a V.A.D., and I was glad to leave it short. Little did I realise that I was anticipating a world fashion that morning in Nigel's attic.)

"You're certainly thorough, and I love you for it," he declared. "We're travelling with a roughish crowd, I suspect, and I dare say it's for the best..." He held up a strip of towel. "I've got to gag our friend here, in case he feels chatty when he wakes up, and then we'll be off."

"Are you sure it's safe?" I questioned cautiously. "Don't you think he has people watching the house?"

"Nobody stopped *me*." His eyes searched the brutish face on a level with his. "I think he's playing a lone hand in this. Now that we know where that report came from, one can understand the old man's wish to avoid publicity..."

"How did he track us to the Mahl-Strasse?"

Nigel hesitated. "Otilie was shadowed," he said rather reluctantly.

"Oh, Nigel, they haven't arrested her?"

He shook his head. "I put her and her friend, Black Lola, on the train for Prague to-night. Lola's a Czech, you know, though she kids the Berliners that she's Spanish. Otilie will be safe in Prague." He paused. "I want to explain about Otilie, Olivia..."

I was silent. Somehow, Otilie didn't matter now.

"I always meant to tell you some time," he went on. "She was one of my scouts. I arranged for her to report to me here, because it was safer. That's why she had a key." He hesitated. "I don't make a virtue of it, but the fact is that we were never more than friends."

"Oh, Nigel," I exclaimed, "you make me feel so badly. Can you ever forgive me?"

But now he raised his head and waved me backward out of Clubfoot's line of vision as he lay on the ground. Grundt's eyes were open again. Defiant and unafraid, they glared up into Nigel's face.

The huge German ground his teeth. "D'you have to truss me like a fowl to kill me?" he snarled.

Nigel's features hardened. "What happened to Abbott?" he demanded sternly.

The dark eyes were suddenly wary, like the eyes of a wild beast at bay. "I had no hand in that," he declared in a surly voice. "Ask the Engländerin,"—he craned his head to see me, but I shrank back out of his sight: "she'll bear me out. And, if you want to know, I broke the clumsy fool that gave the order."

"Abbott's dead, then?"

"Killed on the spot. He was shot through the head."

There was a pregnant pause. Then, "He was my friend," said Nigel.

The great mouth set in a grim line. "Les risques du métier," Grundt murmured. His eyes flashed an angry challenge. "Well, why don't you shoot?" he demanded doggedly.

The rolling bass was firm and insolent. I could not help admiring the courage of the man.

"Much as I'm tempted, Grundt," said Nigel, "I'm not going to kill you."

A little sigh broke from the fleshy lips, and the tigerish face melted into a crafty smile. "So, so?" Clubfoot muttered. "Heute mir, morgen Dir!"—did I not tell you it was the motto of our guild? But I see that you're itching to place that unpleasant-looking gag in my mouth. Before you silence me, let me say 'Auf wiedersehen!' for I have a curious feeling, Herr Kollege, that we may meet again..."

The words died in his throat for, with a sort of angry growl, Nigel thrust the gag into that ogre mouth. But it was not until Clubfoot's eyes had been bandaged as well that I was permitted to come forward. "I'm taking no risks," said Nigel grimly. He put on his coat and, with a gleeful face, showed the document restored to its place in his pocket. Then he laid a finger on his lips and opened the door. He paused to lock it after we had passed out.

A moment later we were creeping down the staircase.

The last of the tenants seemed to have retired to bed: at any rate, we met no one on the stairs. And when we peered out cautiously from the house door, it was to see the Mahl-Strasse lying deserted before us in the early morning light. It was stretched out like a funnel of silence between the tall tenements, and the ganglion of drab streets about it, too, were draped in a hush in which our footsteps echoed.

My unfamiliar attire, especially a horrible sense of nakedness about the legs, made me feel desperately self-conscious. But my bashfulness was quite uncalled for. It was Sunday morning, and there were very few people about.

The rare passers-by we encountered paid no attention to the rather skinny youngster with the shabby young man at his side.

"You and I will have to talk German together, of course," Nigel reminded me, as we threaded the quiet streets. "And, oh yes, your name's Heinrich, Heinrich Held, and I'm Max. The Lynx and his friends are not communicative, and I don't suppose they'll bother you much. If I were you, I'd try and get some sleep in the car. You'll probably be glad of it by the time you see a bed again..."

I asked him about our plans.

"We're bound for Cleves," he said, "and the lads reckon on travelling straight through..."

"How far is it from Berlin?"

"The best part of four hundred miles..."

"How long will it take us?"

"Twenty hours at least, I should say, not allowing for stops. We ought to strike Cleves in the early hours of Monday..."

"And what happens there?"

"We leave our friends and make for Holland on foot. It's only a matter of five miles or so to the frontier, and with luck we ought to do it before it's light. Otherwise, we'll have to lie up for the day. That won't be difficult, for the frontier's pretty well wooded in those parts. Indeed, that was why I didn't want to let this chance slip. I've had Otilie scouting everywhere for a car leaving for the Cleves region..."

"You know that part of the world, then?"

He smiled confidently. "Pretty well." He chuckled. "You and I won't be the first British agents to scuttle out of Germany through the Reichswald, my dear?"

"The Reichswald?" I queried.

"It's the biggest forest on the Rhine," he explained, "and it lies a mile or two south-west of Cleves. The frontier line passes through its far side. They'll be on the look-out for us, of course, but the forest is pretty dense and I know the paths..." He paused. "With old Clubfoot out of the way I'm pretty hopeful. Unless war breaks out before we get across..."

"Is there any more news?"

His face grew sombre. "The Kaiser's due back from Norway to-day. It won't be long now before the guns go off, I'm thinking. But we've got a sporting chance. Some time on Monday, with luck, we'll be on the train for London. If only we're not too late... But here we are! Throw back those shoulders of yours, young fellow, and take long strides. And don't forget to call me Max!"

We were skirting a fence which surrounded the ramshackle sheds of what seemed to be the premises of a dealer in old iron. The fence was broken by a pair of wooden gates at which we stopped. Nigel gave a peculiar whistle on three notes, and a small door in the gates swung back. A man in a peaked cap looked out.

"Na, endlich," he muttered gruffly. "The Lynx had given you up." He beckoned us in.

We stepped through into a yard where an enormous touring car, with the hood up, was waiting. An undersized individual was stooping over the open bonnet. At the sound of steps he turned and disclosed his face. Narrow, shifty eyes, a long and pointed nose, and a short upper lip that unbarred his teeth, gave him a furtive, rapacious air. This, I surmised, was Peter the Lynx, and a proper villain he looked.

"You're late, verdammt," he growled, while he eyed me suspiciously. "Got the cash?"

Nigel handed over a wad of notes. The Lynx flicked them over with a dirty thumb, grunted, and stowed them away in his pocket. "In at the back, you two!" he ordered, and slammed down the bonnet. "Crank her up, Moritz!" He moved to the wheel.

The floor of the car was stacked with petrol tins. There was a passenger already on the back seat, an individual with a livid complexion, high Tartar cheek-bones, and stony, merciless eyes. "You haven't met the Doctor," said the Lynx to Nigel. "Doctor, this is Max Held, a friend of Lola's, and his brother."

The man who, in his rusty black clothes, wore a vaguely professional air, bowed ceremoniously and made room for us. His basilisk stare rested on my face. "You're young," he remarked to me in a fluty voice, "and the young are apt to be talkative. Don't let your tongue wag, my friend..." He patted my thigh encouragingly. "Just a word of kindly advice, nicht wahr?" His upper lip drew up in a slow smile which made him look like a grinning fox mask.

"Got your little bag, Doctor?" demanded the Lynx jovially, from the driving-seat; and I perceived that my neighbour was nursing a small black bag on his knee.

"Gewiss, gewiss," was the softly purring rejoinder.

"All right, Moritz!" said the Lynx. The man in the peaked cap started the engine and swung back the gates, the car passed through, and Moritz, having closed the gates behind us, sprang into the seat beside our leader. We shot away into the streets of Berlin.

It was only when I sank back into the comfortably cushioned seat that I realised how utterly exhausted I was, body and mind. I felt too weary even to concern myself with the forbidding looks of these travelling companions of ours, or the nature of their business. If they were good enough for Nigel, I told myself drowsily, they were good enough for me. What a blessed relief to yield up my cares to him! Merely the touch of his arm against mine lent me confidence; his presence was like a buckler between me and a world of foes. I put my fears away and closed my eyes. Before we were clear of the Berlin trams, I was fast asleep.

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The end of the journey

I have but mixed recollections of that trip, excepting the shocking and terrible episode that marked its close. I was as though drugged with sleep. All through the morning I slept in snatches, as one sleeps in a car on a long journey, my impressions a jumble of vignettes: an endless ribbon of road glaring white in the sunshine of a flawless summer day; level crossings with black and white striped barriers which rose and fell to the clang of a gong; villages where the sound of bells floated on the air of our passage, and peasants, stiffly clad, and grasping large umbrellas, wended their way to church. And all the time the furious drumming of the engine throbbed like a pulse in my brain.

I remember feeling the eager nip of morning before the sun got up, and basking in its warming rays when we slowed down in a clean and bustling city which someone said was Magdeburg. Once Nigel sought to rouse me, and I opened my eyes to find the car at a standstill in the midst of brown moorland bright with gorse, and the party out on the road eating sandwiches.

But I was too sleepy to eat, and I soon dropped off again, nor woke until my arm was shaken, and I perceived Moritz unstacking the petrol cans under my feet. Again we had stopped in the open country, this time among the oak and beech of a dense wood. I felt refreshed and hungry, and was glad of the sandwich which Nigel had kept for me. Everybody appeared to be in the best of spirits. We had passed Hanover, Nigel told me, and were well up to time.

The tank replenished, and the empty cans, with most un-German extravagance, flung away into the undergrowth, we started off again. We did not halt again for a hundred miles. All the afternoon long we raced through the clinging dust, roaring through the villages, bouncing over the cobbles of sleepy little towns, dipping down through the green and resinous depths of great, mysterious forests: all through a mellow afternoon and a gorgeous, purple-hued sunset into a warm and moonless night, vibrant with the clamour of frogs. It was already dark when, between Osnabrück and Münster, on a lonely stretch of road, the Doctor, leaning forward, tapped the Lynx on the shoulder, the car slowed down and we drew up outside a solitary tavern.

Rapturous greeting rang from the threshold, and a fat man bustled into the glow of our head-lights. He led us into the tap where supper was waiting: raw Westfalian ham, smoke-flavoured and pungent; Edamer cheese, scarlet-rinded; heavy, sweetish black bread, what the Germans call Pumpernickel; and little glasses of a fiery white spirit that burned my throat.

The Lynx and Moritz ate and drank voraciously, and without speaking; but the Doctor, contenting himself with a cigarette and a glass of schnaps, sat conversing in undertones with the inn-keeper, who appeared to be his particular friend.

"They're mighty jumpy over Cleves way, so they tell me," I heard the inn-keeper say.

The Doctor made a contemptuous gesture. "We've had these war scares before ...

"Permit me," rejoined the host importantly, "but this time a regular frontier control is in operation. They're stopping cars..."

"It doesn't affect us," his companion put in. "We're not crossing the frontier, as you know."

"The car I heard of," the host insisted, "was held up in Cleves itself!"

The Doctor shrugged his shoulders. "They haven't manned the frontier with troops, at least?" he questioned.

"I didn't hear that," replied the inn-keeper.

"Na, ja," said the Doctor, "don't you try and make our flesh creep with your war scares, Fatty! We shan't reach Cleves until after midnight, and by that time the police will all be snugly tucked up in their beds. And apropos..." He lowered his voice and I heard no more.

I caught Nigel's eye and, rising from the table, strolled across to the tap-room door. It was one of those old-fashioned inn doors in two parts, and the upper half was folded back. I leaned over it, gazing out upon the dusty *chaussée* gleaming whitely under the stars. Presently Nigel joined me, and I told him what I had heard. He was not greatly perturbed.

"It was only to be expected that Clubfoot would take his precautions," he remarked. "But we needn't worry, Olivia darling. I know Cleves. Where they would stop cars would be at the Customs post, just outside the town, on the Cranenburg road, which is the main road into Holland. As long as we drop off in the town we shall be all right. By the way," he added, "I believe I've placed our friends." He moved his head in the direction of the supper table.

"Oh, Nigel," I exclaimed, "who and what are they?"

His eyes twinkled. "Can't say for certain. But as I got out of the car just now I kicked the Doctor's bag, *and it clinked!*"

"I don't understand..."

"Professional apparatus: they're going to crack a crib!"

"You mean... oh, Nigel, not burglars?"

He glanced cautiously over his shoulder. "You've said it. And I think I can guess the job they're on. There's only one place at Cleves, so far as I know, which could possibly interest high-grade operators from the capital, such as the Lynx and his assistants appear to be, and that's Schloss Bergendal. Its collection of old Dutch gold and silver work is celebrated. But it don't concern us, my dear. Once in Cleves, we go our way and they theirs." He gave my hand a gentle squeeze. "Buck up, sweetheart, we're doing splendidly!" He looked into my face with his happy smile.

I clung desperately to his hand. "This story about cars being stopped scares me," I said. "I thought we were done with Clubfoot for good!"

"Well," Nigel remarked thoughtfully, "I tied him up pretty tight. And we've come nearly three hundred miles without being molested. It's beginning to look to me as though we'd shaken the old man for good..."

But this time, as events were to prove, my young man spoke without the book.

Once more we went drumming into the night. The open road, a darkened hamlet, the hush of the fields again, another flying streak of rare lights and blind windows as yet a fresh village stood up in the glare of our lamps: so, in endless alternation, it went on. We travelled in silence. Our companions spoke no word now; and the steady beat of the engine, hammering out the kilometres, was the only sound.

But their taciturnity was only a cloak to cover up their growing nerve tension. We burst a tyre; and the Lynx fretted and fussed while Moritz adjusted the Stepney wheel, a job which seemed never-ending in the dark. Then, at a village before Münster, we missed a turn, and had to go back a considerable distance. The Lynx roundly abused Moritz, who held the map, and the man swore back at him. The Doctor had quite a business to restore peace.

It was half-past ten by the Münster clocks as we slid through; and beyond, on the Wesel road, the villages were fast asleep. At Wesel, two hours later, even the cafés were dark, and the Lynx cursed aloud when he saw the time over the station. But our troubles were not yet over. We had crossed the bridge of boats, and the dark and swiftly rushing Rhine was at our backs, when there came a series of splutters from the exhaust. The Lynx raved, while Moritz stolidly set about exploring for the seat of the trouble. Nigel, with a glance at his watch, shook his head gravely at me. It was a good half-hour before we got going again, and close on two o'clock when Nigel nudged me, pointing ahead to where brilliant lights seemed to ride in the sky above a cluster of railway signals dully gleaming. "Cleves!" he said.

My spirits soared. We had almost two hours of darkness before us, and the frontier, Nigel had told me, was but five miles away. The arc lamps that glittered coldly above the factories grouped about Cleves station were not brighter than my hopes as we nosed our way along the narrow, cobbled streets of the little town.

Nigel was speaking to the Lynx. "I'll put you down all right," the latter said. "But you'll have to wait until we reach the Tiergarten, where we turn off. It's dark there under the trees, and you'll be less noticed...."

And then, as we turned a corner, a raucous voice called "Halt!" and a policeman stepped out of the shadow. So promptly did the Lynx accelerate that the man had to leap back to save himself from being crushed. In the light of the ancient bracket lamp jutting out from the wall above his head, I had a glimpse of his face, scared but exceedingly wrathful.

The car seemed to bound forward, and we went thundering down the empty street. There was a wheezing sound beside me. The Doctor was laughing. I looked at Nigel. "This means we're in it to the end!" he whispered, frowning.

And, in truth, the Lynx showed no intention of stopping to let us descend. He seemed to be as familiar as Nigel with the geography of this remote corner of the vast German Empire. The street we had taken soon became a boulevard of villas with the steep, wooded banks of a park on one side. A narrow lane opened off on the right, and into this the Lynx recklessly swung the car.

We were now following a country road, a handful of houses on one side, flat fields on the other. The surface was appalling, and the three of us on the back seat were flung this way and that as the car bounced along. The last house was

passed, and we were in the open country, when suddenly there was a muttered execration from the driving-seat, and our mad pace was checked. Ahead, a ruby light gleamed from the middle of the road, beyond it the glint of metal in the yellow rays of a lamp. We had reached a level crossing; and the barrier was down.

We stopped, and in that moment a large gendarme—the Gendarmen are the German country police: I used to see them in their green uniforms in the villages about Schlatz—appeared at the Lynx's elbow. He had a holster on his belt, and a lighted lantern dangled from his left hand. "Your papers, please!" he said in a stern, official voice.

There was an ominous pause. It was broken by a terrific report, so close at hand that it made my ears sing. Crying "Ah!" in a voice shrill with surprise, the gendarme toppled forward and fell. The car rocked with the impact of his body as it struck the running-board.

"Up with the barrier, quick, Moritz!" said a sleek voice at my side, and I saw the Doctor leaning forward with a smoking pistol in his hand. Hardly had he spoken, however, than, with tremendous roar an orange flame streaked the darkness about us and with a grunt, the Doctor collapsed in a heap at my feet.

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The story of Marston-Gore

A whistle trilled clamorously. Without an instant's delay, Nigel was out of the car. By the glow of our lamps blazing on the lowered railway barrier I saw him on the road with his arms held out to me, behind him a low iron fence enclosing a fir plantation. It was only a fleeting glimpse, for in the same moment the headlights were switched off, and the utter blackness of a moonless night in the open countryside dropped down upon the scene. Another shot went crashing out, and a piteous voice, shrill with fear, was screeching, "Nicht schiessen!" as I sprang into Nigel's arms. He swung me clear of the railing and dropped me on my feet among the shrubs, then vaulted over himself.

He dived forward on his face and hands, and on all fours began to worm his way between the low trees, I following. Neither of us looked back. A tremendous hubbub was going on about the stranded car.

The plantation was quite small. Thirty yards, and we emerged upon the fence on the farther side, the flat fields beyond. Nigel sprang over and helped me across. Lights were moving on the road we had left. An infuriated voice was crying: "This way! One went this way!" With a brief glance at the stars, Nigel grasped my hand, and we set off at a run across the open country.

That was a nightmare course in the dark. All about us was the flat plain, in which the dim outline of the hill, above which Cleves clambers to its ancient Schloss on the summit, was the only feature. Not a wood, not a valley, to hide us: I felt that we were as conspicuous as flies on a ceiling.

The going was terribly rough: over stubble with the ghostly shapes of corn-stooks all about; in and out of the sun-hardened furrows of vast vegetable gardens; across thistley pasturage. Everywhere were little irrigation channels, dry, for the most part, at this season, into which we continually stumbled. Twice we had to make a detour to avoid a village; and there were innumerable plantations, four-square and close-set with baby trees, similar to that which had screened our flight, which we went round, rather than again force a way between the prickly firs in the dark.

Neither of us had any breath to speak. We must have been going for a full hour, and the Eastern sky had already begun to lighten, when a dark mass loomed out of the dimness ahead. "The Reichswald!" said Nigel.

We paused for a breathing spell. Nigel looked up at the sky. Already it was possible to discern objects in our immediate vicinity. He shook his head sagely. "I daren't risk it," he remarked. "I've not approached the Reichswald from this side before, and I've got to pick up my bearings yet. I shall never manage it in the dark. This is an enormous forest,

you know, more than forty miles square, and we can't afford to lose our way. We shall have to go to ground for the day, that's about the size of it. Never mind, my dear, our troubles are nearly over." He jerked his head in a backward direction. "We're well out of that mess, it seems to me...."

"Oh, Nigel," I said, "it was ghastly!"

He nodded moodily. "Your real German criminal is a murderous beast. However, we mustn't complain. That gendarme was looking for us, you know. If the Doctor hadn't pulled a gun... I'm sorry about the policeman, though: these gendarmes are mostly thundering good chaps. Of course there were two of 'em posted at the crossing. When one went down, t'other opened fire. And then, to judge by the row, others in reserve came on the scene. I wonder if the Lynx and Moritz got away? I hope to goodness they did. The Doctor and the bag of tools are quite enough to distract attention from us; but I wouldn't bet on the discretion of the Lynx and his pal if they've fallen into the hands of the police...."

"How much do they know about us?"

"Only what Lola told them, and she knows nothing, either. She simply gave them to understand, I gather, that I was in trouble and anxious to clear out of the country: they probably think that we're deserters from military service. Clubfoot, of course, would guess the truth in the wink of an eye; but by the time the story reaches his ears we shall be in safety...."

While he was speaking, we had resumed our weary trudge. The road we were now following presently became a cart-track striking across a fallow field to merge eventually in a black belt of trees. The track drove deep into the forest debouching, at last, upon a mossy glade, high-banked and dim, along which we went for perhaps a mile until we lighted upon another trail running right and left. We took the left-hand road, and when it ended, the left-hand turn again, travelling always with a left-hand slant or, as Nigel said, in a south-westerly direction.

Sunrise, which overtook us in that verdant place, was entrancing. Every leaf sparkled: the forest rang with the chorus of the birds; and the first shafts of light, falling between the solemn tree-trunks, spread a stencilled pattern of foliage on the spongy rides we tramped. There were strange rustlings in the undergrowth. A stoat skipped across the path; squirrels peeped, bright-eyed, from amongst the gnarled roots of the ancient oaks and beeches; and once we caught a glimpse of a dappled hind standing between the boles, with head uplifted warily. The soft air was impregnated with the forest fragrance, the clean smell of dry leaves, resin, and damp moss.

We were threading a track which seemed, by the coarse grass which had sprung up between the ruts, to be little used, when Nigel stayed me with a hand on my arm. I heard a distant rattling sound. I looked in the direction to which he silently pointed, and saw a horse and cart slowly moving between the trees. They were a considerable distance away, and it was impossible to distinguish whether the figure at the horse's head, enveloped in a sort of long cloak, was a man or a woman.

In an instant we were behind the nearest trunk. Crouching there, we watched until the horse and cart had passed out of sight. Evidently we had not been seen. "But," Nigel declared, "it's a sign that it's time we went to earth." Accordingly, we left the path and made our way between the trees until the forest grew denser. Presently, we came upon a nook, a rough triangle formed by the enormous trunks of two fallen elms, where, it seemed, we might lie safely hid in the event of any further interruption. There we flung ourselves down at full length side by side, our backs against the fallen tree, the blue sky overhead, and relaxed our exhausted limbs.

"Olivia," said Nigel suddenly, "are you asleep?"

I opened my eyes. The sun was high in the heavens. The forest was as still as a church. The very birds seemed drowsy with the heat, all except one, an obstinate fellow, who seemed so pleased with his imitation of two stones knocking together, that he kept on repeating it. I must have dozed. We had been talking about our plans. Nigel was still unfamiliar with his surroundings. His idea was that, in the noon-day hour, when the charcoal burners, who, he said, were the only people we were likely to meet, were at their dinner, he would steal out and reconnoitre.

"No," I said in reply to his question, smiling at him affectionately. Somehow I was very happy to be thus alone with

him in this world-forgotten spot. It was as though the hush of the woods drew us nearer together.

"I want to tell you a story," he went on, his blue eyes looking intently into mine, "and ask you a question."

I knew what was in his mind. I put my hand on his brown one. "Ask me the question first," I bade him.

He glanced aside. "I haven't the right ... until you've heard the story."

"Isn't that for me to say?"

Once more his eyes sought mine. Behind his eagerly questioning regard I was conscious of the abject unhappiness which once before, that evening in the garret when I had taunted him with his past, I had discerned in his expression. "Nigel," I said, "you break my heart when you look like that. Oh, my dear, you're a very reluctant lover. Do you want me to ask you your question?"

For an instant his face shone. But almost at once his eyes clouded over again and he shook his head. "You couldn't marry a man who'd been in gaol!" His mouth was bitter.

"I'd marry *you*," I told him, and smiled into the troubled face on a level with my own, "that is, if I were asked."

"Do you mean that?" he demanded, so sternly that the smile left my lips.

I found it hard to answer when he gazed at me so intently. "Women have intuitive instincts about men, they say. I never believed you were a thief, Nigel. You mustn't think of the cruel things I said that night. I was worn out and cross and ... and ... well, I didn't understand about Otilie then."

"My dear, I know that," he put in gently.

"But even if you were, I'd marry you just the same!"

He gripped my hand fiercely. "Olivia, is it true?"

I bowed my head. "Just as true," I whispered, "as what I told you last night. And what you told me."

"Oh, my dear," he muttered brokenly, "ever since I took up this work on my release from gaol I've never cared whether I came back from a mission alive. But this time, please God, we'll go home safely together. And now I'll tell you something I've never confided to a living soul...."

He paused, and in the silence I heard the chatter of that industrious bird reverberating out of the tangled green about us above all manner of drowsy insect sounds.

"I didn't steal old Whirter's cup," he said at last. "But, though I took the blame, my disgrace was the consequence of my own actions. Marston-Gore is my real name. I changed it to Druce, which was my mother's maiden name, when I came out of prison. I was a subaltern in the Indian Army. I didn't have much money, but I had a pretty good time; women, racing, polo, a bit of shooting: you know the sort of life. As long as I was in India, I managed to keep my head above water; but I exchanged into a British regiment, and when I came home, gosh, it was a different story. It wasn't long before I had to go to the Jews and raise money on some expectations of mine. Soon I was in fairly deep all round. The prosecution brought up these transactions at the trial; and they settled my hash all right...."

He fell silent for a spell, tearing at the golden blooms of a head of gorse.

"There was a woman in it, of course," he resumed slowly. "I met her in India. Her husband was a box wallah—you know, an English merchant—not a bad sort, but much older than she was, and dull, and absorbed in his business. I'm not saying this to excuse myself, but just because it's part of the story. It wasn't the first affair of the kind I had had by any means. But with her it was different. She was quite young and very pretty, and, until we met, her life had been quiet. India's a hotbed of the most ghastly snobbery; and anyway her husband hadn't contrived to get into the amusing set. I took

her round, got her asked out a bit and all that. And then... But I needn't go into that.

"At any rate, when I left India, I persuaded her to follow me home. There was no scandal: the pretext was that her two small children had to go to school. I wanted to marry her, but she wouldn't hear of it. She was fond of her children and afraid of losing them. She was always terrified of her husband finding out about us...."

He broke off suddenly, his head raised, listening. "Did you hear that?" Out of the forest depths a bell tolled faintly. "I thought I heard it before; but I was only half awake at the time. There it is again!" Three more strokes came to us distantly on the warm air. Nigel glanced at his watch. "Twelve o'clock; it's the Angelus. There must be a convent somewhere round here."

Once more the bell sounded thrice. Then silence descended again, and Nigel resumed his story.

"She had a flat in Knightsbridge and went about a great deal. I was stationed out of London, but I was in town every week. It sometimes struck me that she must spend a lot of money; but her husband was pretty well off, and she had always seemed to have anything she wanted. And then one day when I was with her at the flat, she produced this gold cup, and asked me to raise money on it for her. She was quite casual about it. She said she was overdrawn at the bank and didn't care to worry her husband: he hated her to exceed her allowance, she said. But she had to have £300 to settle some pressing debts. She didn't know how one raised money on anything: would I undertake the transaction as though it were for myself and hand her the proceeds?"

"Did she explain how the cup came into her possession?" I put in.

"That was the first thing I asked her, for, you see, I recognised the cup. Sir Charles Whirter was a rich old jossler living down in Hampshire. She had met him somewhere, and he was very sweet on her. She had made him ask me down to his place with her for a couple of week-ends, and I had seen this pot, an eighteenth-century French goblet and a lovely thing, in his collection. She told me he had given it to her. There was nothing unusual in that, for he was always making magnificent presents to women he liked. I told her she was a fool to accept such a valuable gift, but she laughed and said it was nothing to him; he had plenty more in his collection. To make a long story short, I did as she asked. My Jermyn Street Jew advanced me £300 on the pot."

"Had she stolen it?"

He nodded. "Unquestionably. But to me she held out to the end that old Whirter had given it to her."

"Didn't she come forward and say so at the trial?"

He made a little pause. "She went back to India before the case came on," he said.

"Oh, my dear...."

"I had no luck. It appeared that this cup was a unique specimen, a museum piece. My moneylender showed it about, and it was seen by a King Street dealer, who made inquiries. It was only then that old Whirter discovered his loss: you know the slack way some of these country house collections are kept. I had spent two week-ends with him: he had shown me his collection himself: I had pledged the cup: I was in debt: naturally, I was arrested."

"And you never told them the truth?"

"How could I? When I was on bail, before the police court proceedings, I saw her, and she promised to explain everything to Sir Charles and get him to withdraw the prosecution. She didn't tell me that she had already booked her passage, and that by the time I appeared at Marlborough Street she would be on her way back to India. Without her no one would have believed my story, even if I had been willing to speak. But I felt in part responsible for her downfall. I had taken her away from her husband: I had persuaded her to come to England: I had contributed to the development of the abnormal traits that were in her. For she was just a thief, Olivia, a plain crook. I didn't know it then, but I found out afterwards. Things were missed at country houses where she had stayed: she narrowly avoided prosecution for swindling one of the big stores. Vivian Abbott knew a bit about her and tried to make me speak. But I could do nothing

without her, and so I held my peace."

There was a moment's silence between us. Then, "Nigel," I said, "what has become of her now?"

"She's dead."

"Did you ever see her again?"

He shook his head. "She never even wrote."

"Did you?"

"No. I let her go. Afterwards her husband divorced her over another man. Then she went to the devil altogether. She was killed last year with a Rumanian in a motor smash on the Grande Corniche."

I could not trust myself to look at him. "I hate myself when I think of what I said to you," I whispered. "Oh, my dear, why couldn't you have told me then?"

His smile was wistful. "Because I'd buried the past. I learnt in prison to see Marston-Gore in his true light, and I wasn't very proud of him. I went into the Secret Service to try to make a new life for myself: that was Vivian's doing, God bless him! I was brought up in Germany, and, before I took this toss, I had been on one or two stunts for the Intelligence, following Divisional and Brigade manoeuvres on the quiet: you know, plain clothes and a push-bike. When I came out of prison, six months ago, it was Vivie—we were in India together before he went into the Intelligence, and he stuck to me through my trouble like a brick—who persuaded the old man to give me a chance. They tried me out on a couple of jobs in Germany—that's how I come to know this part of the country—and I didn't do too badly. I liked the work; it took my mind off myself—and I intended to make a career of it. I shall never get my commission back, of course, unless..."—his eyes shone—"unless war breaks out, and there's something worth while to do. Marston-Gore is dead and buried; but His Majesty might find a job of work for Druce." His arm went about me. "If you're still of the same mind, Olivia dear, I give you fair warning, you must be prepared to marry Druce."

I smiled at him happily. "You can call yourself Grundt for all the difference it makes to me," I answered.

He drew me to him. "Oh, sweetheart," he said, "you give me back my life. I never dreamed the world contained a woman who could make me forget the bitterness of the past. Olivia darling, tell me again that you care...."

"Nigel," I whispered, "I think I loved you from that first day when I met you on the stairs at Bale's...."

At that moment a dull, whirring noise, like the droning of some enormous insect, floated down to us from the patch of blue sky above our heads. We both looked aloft. High in the air an aeroplane, very white in the brilliant sunlight, soared majestically above the tree-tops.

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"A fool, a fool, I met a fool i' the forest..."

We exchanged a glance. Nigel's face was perturbed.

"I say," he murmured, "I don't like that...."

"You don't think he's looking for us, do you?"

"I wonder. The nearest aeroplane station is Wesel, where there's a big garrison. Of course, with all these war

rumours about, they may only be patrolling the frontier. Still..."

Swiftly the machine passed out of sight. The note of the propeller grew fainter. Nigel jumped up and helped me to my feet. "Everything seems quiet," he said. "I'm going to have a prowl round. If this lad is looking for us, the sooner we get under cover the better. In the very heart of the forest, near a sort of ravine known as Charlemagne's Ride, there are some caves. We'd be quite snug there, if only I can pick up my bearings...." He broke off listening. The 'plane was no longer audible. He took me in his arms and kissed me. "Don't be anxious if I'm rather long away. There are two main roads running through the forest. If I can strike one of them, I shall know where I am...."

"I hate letting you go," I said. "I wish you'd take me with you."

"Better not, in case they're out after us. I can travel quicker alone. You're ever so much safer here in this cache than you'd be with me. If you hear anything, keep down. And should you see any more aeroplanes, don't look up, but turn over on your face. Wait...." His hand went to his pocket. "I think you'd better look after this, just in case...." He passed over the blue envelope with the document. He made me put it in my inside jacket pocket and fasten the mouth of the pocket with a pin.

"You will take care of yourself?" I whispered.

"Have no fear for me...." He caught up my two hands and pressed his lips to them. The next moment he was plunging away through the brambles.

I sat down again against my fallen elm and prepared to wait. The peace of the woods was extraordinarily soothing. After a little while I heard that droning from the air once more. This time it came at me with a sudden rush and a roar, and before I had time to hide my face, there was the 'plane, like a huge white box-kite, skimming the tree-tops. So close to the ground was it that I could distinguish the great black Maltese crosses painted on the under-sides of its wings.

And then it was gone. As I lay face downward among the forest berries I could still hear the receding hum of its engine. Little by little the deep note swelled in volume till it was deafening; and I knew that, for the second time, the machine had swooped down over my hiding-place.

Gradually the whirring faded and stillness settled over the forest. For a good half-hour I must have lain motionless on my face, but the bird-man did not reappear. I tried to tell myself that this was a good sign: the aviator had gone on with his patrol. But I felt desperately uneasy. What if he had seen us the first time, returned to make sure, and had now flown away to report?

The hours of silence dragged on. I love the sunshine, and while I basked in the golden light I pondered on the strange story Nigel had related, and tried to picture this woman who had wrecked his life. Men, I had heard, always fall in love with the same type: I wondered whether this abominable cheat had looked anything like me.

How long this reverie lasted I cannot say, for when at length I looked at my watch I found it had run down. But I could tell by the change in the light that the afternoon was waning. The aeroplane did not reappear: in truth, I had almost forgotten it, for I was growing seriously alarmed at Nigel's prolonged absence. Our nest among the logs was situated in a clearing, on highish ground, looking across a steep, wooded gully to the farther slope where, half-way up, the trees were so close-set that their branches met and formed a thick screen. It was into this tangle that Nigel, after scrambling across the nullah, had vanished; and I now began to watch the slope for the first sight or sound of his return.

After some time I thought I heard a distant crashing somewhere behind this curtain of foliage. I had a thrill of relief, for I made no doubt but that, at any moment, Nigel would appear through the trees. The noise came nearer; and I had risen excitedly to my feet when a whistle rang shrilly through the forest, and immediately thereon a faint hubbub of voices came to my ears.

In my panic I had but one thought—that I was in the open. All around me the ring of solemn trees seemed to beckon me with their leafy arms to seek safety within their hidden fastnesses. Without a moment's delay I clambered out of my retreat and darted into the thicket behind.

I was not neglectful of my partner. I did my best to memorise my surroundings in the hope that, should the pursuit swing aside, or should I out-distance it, I might be able to retrace my steps and wait for him at the rendezvous. Once through the zareeba of fern and bramble which fringed the clearing I had left, the trees became widely spaced and the going easy, though often very steep. Downhill was the worst, as my shoes—white canvas, from Nigel's wardrobe—though tightly laced, were much too large for me, and my feet kept slipping on the dry leaves.

I was scrambling down one of these slopes when, as usual, my legs went from under me, and I found myself travelling on my back. Before I could regain my balance, the declivity became accentuated, and I perceived a high, naked wall at the bottom. I shot down and landed in a bed of nettles, with a thud that jarred every bone in my body. "Damn!" I exclaimed loudly and deliberately, as I sat up to look for my cap.

I found it beside me. I had just put it on, when a voice at my very elbow said—I write the words as I heard them—"You Engländer, a-oh yes?"

I whisked round in amazement. An extraordinary figure confronted me. It wore a monkish garb, a habit of heavy, coarse, brown cloth, girded about with a thick rope, and sandals. A partly filled sack hung across one shoulder. The face was the face of an imbecile, with a sloping forehead, vacant eyes of watery blue, and a foolish, dribbling mouth with a fringe of reddish beard under the chin. Behind this fantastic visitant the wall made an angle and I surmised that he had emerged from around the corner.

As I stared at him, dumbfounded, he cackled a high falsetto laugh. "'Damn' a very bad English word," he squawked. "Pater Vedastus he say 'Damn!' once; but he not let Josef, poor Josef"—the idiot mouth sagged—"say it." Ingratiatingly he grinned at me, blinking his eyes and nodding. "You come and talk with Pater Vedastus, yes?"

"Does Pater Vedastus speak English?"

The half-wit went off into a shrill peal of laughter. "Pater Vedastus Engländer the same as you. Very fine man, Pater Vedastus. He dig in the garden." His thin hand pawed my jacket sleeve. "I take you to him, yes?"

I hesitated, listening. It seemed to me that I could still hear vague sounds in the dark forest towering above the monastery wall. The note of the whistle, reverberating faintly again, decided me.

"All right," I said, "let's go to Pater Vedastus. But first tell me, what place is this?"

"Kapuziner-Kloster!" was the giggling reply.

Kapuziner? "Kapuziner" in German meant Capuchins, I reflected, as I followed my guide round the turn of the wall. Friars. I had never met a friar before. And apparently this Pater Vedastus was an English friar at that.

Would he see through my disguise? Heavens above, surely women were not allowed in monasteries? What would happen if he found me out?

Sniggering and talking to himself, my oafish escort had stopped at a gate in the wall. With a great key, which he drew from his ample sleeve, he unlocked it. We crossed a flagged yard, where he flung down his sack, to a small door set across a corner. He opened the door and disclosed an immense garden, enclosed within four high walls.

From the threshold I looked in upon a scene of utter peace. The garden seemed to glow in the golden afternoon light. There was the glint of ripe peaches and apricots on the honey-coloured walls, and apples and pears glistened in the sun on their loaded branches. Along one side of the enclosure flower-beds bright with flowers spread a lavish splash of colour: along another, vegetable plots were laid out in neat array: and in a remote corner, screened by a rank of solemn, black cypresses, the rounded tops of headstones, very white against the emerald turf, marked the dead friars' last resting-place. Above the wall on my right hand, a sober edifice of brick, weather-greayed, with high slate roof, stood up, with rows of little windows gazing down upon this vast and tranquil spot, and, at the end, a chapel, surmounted by a little belfry. In this hung a bell, the one, no doubt, whose voice had reached us in the forest.

The garden was deserted save for a solitary friar, garbed in the same rough habit as my guide, who was digging in a

plot of earth just inside the gate. When we came upon him, he had ceased from his labour and stood sunk in thought, with one sandalled foot resting on the spade thrust upright in the ground in front of him.

He was every inch of six foot and broad in proportion, with a great beard, heavily grizzled, spread out like a fan across his brawny chest. Though clearly getting on in years, he still looked alert and vigorous. His face, tanned by exposure to the weather, was as brown as his frock, and one had the impression of tremendous muscles under the coarse serge. As he leaned on his spade, with the belfried chapel at his back, with his huge beard and pointed cowl and sandals, he was like a picture from the *Little Flowers of St. Francis* come to life.

My oaf ran forward. "Gelobt sei Jesus Christus, Pater!" (Praised be Jesus Christ, Father), he cried. The bearded friar started, and to my immense surprise, I saw a tear splash down his face. Quickly he brushed a large hand across his eyes. "Amen!" he responded. "Was ist's, Bruder Josef?"

The half-wit broke into English. "Pater, Pater, an Englishman," he gibbered. "He fall on the back and say 'Damn!' like you that time you beat your foot with the spade. As I gather pine cones in the forest I hear him, and I bring him to you, yes?"

Now for the first time the Capuchin raised his eyes to mine, eyes luminous and kindly. "An Englishman at Materborn, is it possible?" he said in slow, deep English. "You are English, my son?"

"Yes, Father," I replied.

He thrust his hands into his sleeves and bowed his tonsured head, closing his eyes as though in prayer. "Oh God," he murmured, "how merciful art Thou to Thy poor servant!" He turned to my companion. "You did well to bring me my compatriot, Brother Josef," he said. "Now go back to your task! The Father Procurator will scold if your sack is not filled by Compline."

"Schön, schön," mumbled the imbecile and shambled away.

"A poor, weak-minded fellow, whom we employ as lay brother," the Father explained. "I have taught him a little English in the recreation hour. Strange are the ways of Providence, my son! Just as you appeared, my thoughts were with my country. For more than twenty years I have lived in this friary. We lie off the beaten track; and during all this time I have not had more than two or three opportunities for talking with a fellow-countryman." He sighed and added: "I know that the lowly disciples of our holy founder, St. Francis, have no fatherland, and that the love he taught us to bear for all men should rise above the turmoil of worldly strife. But I am weak, and in my weakness I prayed to him that, in this critical hour for our dear country, he would comfort an exile's lonely heart by letting him hear his mother tongue just once again. And behold, through his, our dear saint's, intercession, Almighty God has made this poor simpleton His instrument for bringing you to me." He paused and, producing an enormous red handkerchief, used it with vigour on his nose. "But," he went on, tucking the handkerchief away, "you look exhausted, my son. Your clothes are covered with dust and burrs, and your hands are all scratched."

While he spoke I had been listening for any sound from the forest beyond the high wall. But all was still.

"I slept out in the woods last night," I said. "And I've been running..."

"Running?" the deep voice echoed. "Why?"

"They are beating the forest for me. I am trying to reach the frontier. You're an Englishman, Father. Won't you help me?"

His eyes were stern. "I am a Capuchin, my son, and we are in Germany. I cannot hide a fugitive from German justice, a murderer..."

"A murderer?" I cried, aghast.

He bent his brows at me. "The gendarmes were here this morning. They asked whether anything had been seen of

two men implicated in the murder of a gendarme by a gang of motor bandits from Berlin last night, and believed to be hiding in the forest."

"Father," I exclaimed desperately, "it is true that we, my friend and I, motored from Berlin with these ruffians. They were burglars and when the gendarme stopped them at the railway barrier, they shot him down. But we had no hand in this terrible crime. Without knowing anything about these criminals, we paid them to take us with them to the frontier from Berlin...."

"A man is known by the company he keeps," the Capuchin rejoined severely. "Why should innocent persons consort with criminals?"

"Because the German Secret Service is on our track," I said, "and there was no other way."

He looked at me curiously. "The German Secret Service?" he repeated.

I nodded. "You spoke just now of this being a critical hour for England. Well, we are trying to bring into safety a document of vital importance for the security of our country."

His eyes were of a sudden misty. "It's many years since I heard of such matters," he remarked gently, "But surely the British Government doesn't employ children for work of this description. Why, you're only a boy!"

"I'm nothing of the sort," I retorted, with perfect truth. "And anyway, I'm not a British Agent. Though my friend is...."

Pater Vedastus seemed to catch his breath. "Is he English too?"

"Yes."

"An officer?"

"He used to be...."

"Army or Navy?"

I could not fail to be aware of the almost anguished curiosity behind his questions. He seemed to hang on my reply. "Army," I said, and he uttered a little sigh. I raised my eyes pleadingly to his. "Father, they're scouring the forest for us. He may have been taken. I can't cross the frontier without making an effort to find him. Won't you let me stay here quietly until the pursuit is past and I can go back and wait for my friend at the place where he left me?"

He was silent for a spell. "What proof have I that your story is true?" he asked at last.

What impulse moved me I know not, but I had made up my mind to trust this fellow countryman of mine. I cast a hasty look about the silent garden, then thrust my hand into my pocket and drew forth the document. I held it out to him.

"Even if you won't help me," I said, "I know you won't betray me. There's the document. It has cost two men their lives already. You may read it if you wish...."

But he made no move to take it, and his hands remained concealed under his wide sleeves.

"It is of vital importance, you say, this paper?" he inquired.

"My friend says that on it the movements of the British Fleet depend. And that, as you know, means the security of England."

At that moment the chapel bell began to ring. "Put up your document," he bade swiftly, "and listen to me. That's the bell for Compline. Go to the door of the tower yonder and mount the steps you find there. They will bring you to the organ loft. Wait there for me...." With that he pulled his brown cowl over his head and, thrusting his hands in his sleeves, strode off along the path.

Dumb with joy at the realisation that I had found an ally, I watched him pass through a gate in the wall below the monastery windows. Then I slipped across the garden to the tower door.

The chapel, with its narrow windows of stained glass set high up in the whitewashed walls, was dim. Save for the crimson gleam of the lamp before the altar and two candles burning on either side of a lectern in the choir, there was no light. In the organ loft it was almost dark, and I posted myself in the shadow of the great bunches of pipes that reared their heads towards the dusky beams of the roof. A handful of peasant women knelt motionless in the seats, and from time to time the padded door of a built-in porch on one side of the porch thudded softly to admit a newcomer. At first the chancel was empty, but presently the shuffle of sandals reached my ears, and a procession of hooded figures, two by two, defiled through the sanctuary into the choir.

There was a light step on the stair, the glimmer of a taper, and Pater Vedastus was at my side. "I have excused Brother Josef, who usually blows the organ for me," he whispered, "and you shall take his place. See, it is quite easy...." His big hands laid hold of a shaft projecting from the side of the organ, and drove it rhythmically up and down, then he made me try. "We shan't require the organ until Benediction," he explained. "Kneel down there meanwhile. You can follow Compline in the English Prayer-Book I gave Brother Josef. Here...." He placed an open book in my hand. "Don't come any farther than this: you might be seen from below. I'm going to light the candles...."

He padded away. A dull radiance illuminated the front of the gallery. Its reflected light glanced athwart the large print of the breviary, Latin and English, which lay open on the prie-dieu before me. In the choir a sonorous voice was intoning the opening of Compline. I started as my eye fell upon the English version of the Collect: its theme was so apposite to my plight:

"Brethren, be sober and watch. For your adversary the devil goeth about like a raging lion, seeking whom he may devour. Whom do ye, strong in faith, resist. But Thou, O Lord, have mercy on us!" The voice ended, and the rolling bass of the friars struck the echoes from the dimness as they made response: "Deo gratias!"

And then, as another voice began to intone the Psalms, I heard a heavy, halting step on the flags of the chapel below. I glanced down. Half-way up the aisle, hat in hand, irresolute, Clubfoot stood, leaning on his stick.

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In the Capuchin chapel

It was only a momentary glimpse, for the next moment he had stepped out of my range of vision. As in a dream I heard the Office out, through the stentorian chant of the Psalms, swinging, verse by verse, from one side to the other of the choir, and the rustling silence thereafter, on the lector intoning the Pater Noster, to the end. Then, somehow or other, I was at the bellows handle, filling Brother Josef's lowly part, while before the altar, ablaze with light, vestmented figures moved about the chancel, the smoke of incense eddied upward to the dark roof, and the organ pealed. And so to the close of the Benediction when, to a soft tolling in the tower above me and the musical clash of altar bells in the sanctuary, the glittering monstrance was upraised in the solemn hush of heads bowed in adoration. Presently, while the organ softly played, the coped ministrants filed out, a cowled cortege behind; sabots clattered on the flags as the little congregation dispersed; a friar silently extinguished the altar lights; and the chapel was once more dim and deserted. The organ ceased; and Pater Vedastus was at my side.

"Father," I whispered, "that man who entered, during the service, did you notice him? He has come in search of me...."

The Pater put a finger to his lips. "I guessed as much. Brother Hippolytus, our porter, fetched the Father Guardian

out of the choir after Benediction. Our Most Reverend Father and the stranger are now talking together at the bottom of the chapel. Ps-st...."

He raised a hand in warning and I heard the scrape of feet within the tower. Without a word, Pater Vedastus moved swiftly to the back of the organ and groping there, plucked open a low door framed between the soaring pipes. He signed to me to go inside: I crept through; and he closed the door after me.

My funk-hole was pitch-dark and reeking of dust and dry rot. I could not stand erect. The door was merely a means of access to the interior of the instrument, I assumed, for the purpose of cleaning and repairs. As I crouched there I suddenly heard a voice, cool and authoritative, speaking within a foot of my head.

"Pater," it said, "this gentleman is from the Berlin police. He has come by aeroplane from Berlin in search of two fugitives from justice, a man and a girl, implicated in this dreadful affair at Cleves last night. You were working out of doors this afternoon. Did you remark any suspicious-looking strangers?"

A harsh voice now broke in, a well-remembered voice, whose mere sound sent shivers of terror coursing along my spine. "They may have separated. When we were flying over this part of the forest in the early afternoon we observed two figures hiding in a thicket. On our return over the same spot only one was to be seen. That must have been the girl, for, at the Gendarmerie headquarters at Cleves just now, they told me that towards four o'clock this afternoon the man was sighted near Charlemagne's Ride on the far side of the forest. They lost track of him again, but they are quite positive that he was alone. The girl must still be in these parts. But for that damned fool of a pilot who lost me a good two hours by insisting on returning to Wesel to land, we'd have rounded her up by this. Have you seen anything of her, a tall, dark wench? Speak up man, I'm in a hurry!"

There was a pause: then the deep tones of Pater Vedastus, cold and lifeless, made answer: "I have seen no woman, Herr!"

"You understand, of course"—the Father Superior, or whatever Pater Vedastus had called him, now intervened—"that no woman has access to our enclosure...."

Clubfoot laughed stridently. "Possibly. But there's reason to believe that this woman is dressed as a man...."

"You saw no man, Vedastus," the suave voice demanded, "who might have been a woman in disguise?"

Once more there was a pause. Then, "No, Reverend Father!" the monk made answer.

"The Community are assembled for the evening meal," said the Superior. "If you desire to question any of them...."

There was a moment's silence. I was trembling: would Clubfoot insist on searching the organ loft? But then I heard him grunt and say: "Take me to your refectory. But you'd better warn your Fathers that I'll stand for no lies...."

"In the house of St. Francis you'll hear nothing but the truth," the Superior replied with icy dignity; and it seemed to me that, on the other side of the partition, someone had heaved a deep sigh. "Are you coming, Vedastus?" the speaker added.

"With permission, Most Reverend Father," was the respectful answer, "I have our music to put away, and the lights to extinguish."

"Then lend me your taper. The stair is dark...." A heavy limp thumped the flooring; the footsteps died away.

After what appeared to be an eternity of waiting I saw a rim of light about the entrance to my hiding-place, and the door swung back. Pater Vedastus stood there, beckoning me out. He spoke no word, but led the way down the corkscrew steps and through a little lobby at the bottom into the twilight gloom of the church. There he stopped before me, his sleeves covering his hands, his eyes cast down.

I had expected reproaches, but he made none. "My daughter," he said, and his voice was sad and humble, "if you

would save yourself, you will make for the frontier without delay. It is not three kilometres from here by the forest track. By this your companion is far away, if he has not already been taken. I will give you the key of the forest door by which Brother Josef admitted you. Do not fail to lock it behind you: you can push the key under it. Now pay attention to what I say! Opposite the forest door you will see a path leading through the woods. Five minutes' walk along it will bring you to a road, the continuation of the road which runs past the monastery on the other side of the garden. Never mind about the road, but cross it and continue along the path. After about two kilometres it divides at a birch copse. Take the left-hand fork: it leads to a farmyard gate. The frontier line passes through this farm. Go through the yard, and when you have reached the farmhouse, you will be in Holland. The farmer, Jan van Rossum, a Dutchman, is a friend of mine. If you mention my name, he will give you a bed for the night. You can trust him: he has no tenderness for the Germans. But you must not start until it is certain that our lame visitor has left. Wait here for me a little, since we are no longer in the enclosure, and if anyone should come, hide in the tower lobby."

I dropped to my knees. "Father," I whispered, "I have deceived you. But what is worse, I made you tell a lie for my sake. I can't abuse your generosity any further unless you tell me I am forgiven."

"Don't kneel to me, my child," he answered gently. "I stand in need of forgiveness far more than you. More than twenty years of my manhood I have passed in this peaceful retreat, priding myself on my freedom from the temptations of the world. But God in His Infinite Wisdom has seen fit to chasten my arrogance and self-complacency. He has decreed that in my old age I should cause our holy rule to be broken and lie to our Superior in Christ. I bear you no resentment, my daughter, for, had you told me the truth in the beginning—to my shame I confess it here, before the Blessed Sacrament—I doubt if I should have acted otherwise...." He clasped his hands together and, with head bowed down, pressed his lips upon his joined fingers. "As yet I have no contrition for what I did," he murmured brokenly. "Pray for me, my daughter, and perhaps God will hold it to my account that before I became a Capuchin in Germany, I was a naval officer...." With that he drew his cowl before his eyes and vanished through the tower door.

The tears were streaming down my face as I rose from my knees. The conflict of emotion revealed in his outburst had touched me profoundly. I was distraught, too, with fears for Nigel, and oppressed by the prospect of attempting the flight across the frontier alone.

And then a figure, close-hooded, glided out from behind a pillar and stood at my side.

I had to make a tremendous effort not to scream. But at the same instant the cowl was dropped, and I found myself staring with incredulous eyes into a familiar face. Its cheerful grin was altogether out of keeping with the monkish robe. "Stout fellow, your friend," Nigel observed. "He gives me a good feel...."

"Nigel," I whispered, "I can hardly believe it's you. They said you were miles away...."

"So I was," he retorted, "and a devilish stiff run I had for it, to get back to where I left you. Towards Charlemagne's Ride the woods were fairly creeping with the greencoats. When I found you had gone, I started to prospect, and, after dodging another line of beaters, fetched up on the road which runs past the monastery. From behind a corn-stook I saw Clubfoot pass in a car, and it occurred to me that he might be better informed as to your whereabouts than I was. So I followed him until I reached the monastery and saw his car standing outside on the road. I nipped into the church..."—he pointed behind him—"by the public entrance. It was just before the service and, seeing that no one was about, I helped myself to this habit which I found hanging on a hook in the sacristy, and hid in one of the side-chapels. I've been there ever since. Then, when you appeared..."

He broke off as a tall, cowed figure loomed up in the sanctuary and genuflected before the altar. Swiftly Nigel drew me back into the shadow under the organ gallery.

"It's Father Vedastus," I said, and went to meet him.

As the Father came down the aisle I saw that a long brown cloak hung over his arm, and that he carried a paper package in his hands. On catching sight of the monkish silhouette behind me, he stopped dead.

"Father," I cried softly, "it's my friend. He's found me after all!" I looked round. Nigel approached. "This is Nigel

Druce," I explained.

Pater Vedastus was smiling. "So that's where Brother Antonius's habit went to," he remarked drily. "The dear old man took it off to sweep out the sacristy. He is telling everybody that the devil must have flown away with it. But if, as I presume," he went on, addressing Nigel, "you propose to accompany this lady across the frontier the habit will serve you well. The members of the Community are familiar figures in this part of the Reichswald, and in the robe of the Order you are less likely to attract attention. See, I have brought a cloak for your friend." He handed me the cloak, hooded and of heavy brown serge like his habit. "You can leave the things with van Rossum," he suggested. "And here"—he gave Nigel the paper package—"I have put up such scraps of meat and bread as I could find! I fear you must be famished, both of you..."

Nigel stowed the parcel away in his pocket. "We can never thank you enough, sir," he said warmly.

The Capuchin sighed. "It must be nearly five-and-twenty years since anybody called me 'Sir,'" he observed pensively. He handed me a great key which he drew from his sleeve. "The key of the forest door," he announced. "The lame gentleman has taken his departure, the Community have retired for the night, and all seems quiet in the forest. I've explained to your friend," he continued, turning to Nigel, "exactly how to reach the frontier. I must warn you that, during the last few days, patrols of troops have been seen in the forest. But they keep mostly to the roads, and if you follow out my instructions, you should get across without great difficulty. Now be off with you, my children, and God speed you on your journey!"

Then Nigel spoke up: "You've gone the limit in helping us, sir," he declared, "but we've got to consider your position a little. This man, Grundt, who was here to-night, is a terrible enemy. We don't budge from here, Miss Dunbar and I, until you're safely back in your cell, with a good substantial alibi."

Pater Vedastus shook his head ruefully. "I'm afraid the rule of St. Francis takes no account of alibis," he rejoined. "I shall go to the Father Superior to-morrow and make a clean breast of the matter."

Nigel stuck out his chin. "That's your affair, sir. Grundt is mine. I shouldn't presume to interfere in your dealings with your spiritual skipper...."

The Pater started and gazed severely at the speaker. "So you were eavesdropping?"

"I'm afraid I couldn't help myself," Nigel replied.

The bearded face relaxed. "Then you will understand my interest," said the Father. "Tell me, is England going to fight?"

Nigel shrugged his shoulders. "This week-end should have decided it. The First Fleet, mobilised for manoeuvres was due to disperse. If the dispersal orders have been cancelled, I take it that the Cabinet intends to stand by France."

Pater Vedastus was strangely excited. "Haven't you read this morning's paper?" he demanded.

"I haven't seen a newspaper since Saturday."

"Hold that!" He thrust the taper he carried into Nigel's hand and, delving into a hidden pocket of his habit, dredged up a German newspaper. "I took morning Mass at Materborn village church to-day," he explained, "and the Küster—how do you say that? my English is so rusty; ah yes, the sacristan—gave me this paper."

He unfolded the journal and handed it to Nigel, pointing to a paragraph with his finger. In a hushed voice Nigel read out:

"London. Sunday night. Official. Orders have been given to the First Fleet, now concentrated at Portland, not to disperse for manoeuvre leave for the present. All ships of the Second Fleet are remaining at their home ports in

proximity to their balance crews."

Nigel crushed the paper up in his hands. His hands were shaking and his face was pale with excitement. "Poor old Vivian!" he murmured. "So we pulled it off, after all!"

"You think it means war, then?" the friar inquired.

Nigel started out of a brown study. "Yes, unless Germany and Austria give way...."

Pater Vedastus sighed. "How excited the wardrooms must be! Twenty-two years' service I had to my record with the Fleet when I heard the call of the religious life, and I never saw a shot fired in all that time." He relapsed into abstracted silence. "But you mustn't delay, my children," he said presently. "It's time you were off. I shall not forget you in my Masses, and you,"—almost for the first time since we had left the organ loft his eyes rested on my face—"remember, you promised to pray for me!"

Nigel was gazing intently at the Capuchin. His eyes were very blue. "Father," he declared very earnestly, and I noticed that he no longer called him 'Sir,' "Father, this lady here has promised to marry me. Would you, that is to say..."—he stumbled over his words—"before we say good-bye to you, I want you to hear us exchange that promise—I have a special reason for asking—and perhaps give us your blessing, if you will..."

I stared at him in wonder. I had never discerned any trace of religious feeling in him before. Besides, what could be the "special reason" of which he spoke?

He turned to me, "Olivia, you don't object?"

He was so eager that I let him have his way. "Not if it will make you happier, Nigel," I answered.

The Father's bass chimed in. "My son," he asked, "are either of you Catholics?"

"No," was the firm reply, "but I've set my heart on this. We haven't yet reached the end of our journey, and you will bless us as the knights of old were blessed when they went forth to war. We shan't desecrate your blessing, shall we, Olivia?" He put his hand in mine and led me forward. "I, Nigel Druce, do solemnly promise to take you, Olivia Dunbar, as my wedded wife. Do you, Olivia, promise to take me for your husband?"

The scene was strangely impressive. The brooding silence of the little chapel draped itself about us. Above our heads the last rays of daylight kindled the colours in the stained-glass windows, but below all was sombre, and the friar's tall figure was blurred by the shadows of the aisle. I was moved in spite of myself, and it was in a husky voice that I responded: "Yes."

Then, hand in hand, we knelt. Raising his large hand aloft, the Capuchin made the sign of the Cross over us, and blessed us in a whisper:

"Benedicat vos Omnipotens Deus, Pater, et Filius, et Spiritus Sanctus. Amen."

"And now, sir," said Nigel, as we rose up, "please go to your cell. We can find our way out alone."

"So be it," he replied. "May Almighty God have you two in His keeping! And ask Him in your prayers that I may be guided aright in the difficult times that stand before." Rather shyly he put out his hand, and Nigel grasped it. Then, with an abrupt motion, the Pater turned about, his sandals clacked softly on the flags of the nave, and the gloom of the sanctuary swallowed up the gaunt and lonely figure.

The baffling of the Beast

It was getting on for half-past nine when at length we stole forth from the chapel. The solemn hush of dusk rested over the monastery garden. The bats were twinkling to and fro, and in front of the little burial-ground the cypresses with their looped-up branches stood out like the furred umbrellas of some Eastern pageant against the greenly glowing sky. To any one who had observed the two hooded figures flit noiselessly along the twilight path to that inconspicuous door in the garden wall, we must have seemed like the wraiths of departed friars escaped from the tomb.

In the forest it was already quite dark, but we could distinguish the path opposite the gate snaking its way whitely under the trees. Nigel was moody and absorbed. I could see that something had upset him, although I found myself at a loss to fathom the cause of his depression. The news we had read in the paper surely proved that the copy of our precious report had reached London: whatever happened to us now, Nigel had, at any rate, fulfilled his mission, and I should have looked to find him exulting in our success.

I made no attempt to break in upon his thoughts, but trudged after him in silence along the narrow path. The evening was close, and for greater ease, as my heavy serge cloak was oppressively heavy, I threw it back, letting it dangle from my shoulders. All was profoundly still in the woods about us, but the distant throbbing of a car, which reached our ears from time to time, announced the proximity of a road, probably the road on the other side of the monastery of which Pater Vedastus had spoken.

We had not been walking long when Nigel slackened his pace to wait for me. As I came up I saw that beyond him the path went dipping down between high banks to a deep cutting. Here the trees were sparser, and when at the bottom Nigel stopped again I perceived in the grey half-light a forest track, running left and right, with patches of brown water in its ruts wanly reflecting the evening sky.

"This is where we cross the road," said Nigel in a low voice. "Don't linger, in case there's any one about. Dart straight over and up the path on the other side. I'll lead the way..."

He paused an instant to peer out from behind the protecting bank, then sprang out. Two bounds saw him across. I followed: and forthwith sank up to my ankles in slime. At the same instant I heard the stutter of a motor-engine, and a car hove in sight round a curve in the road not fifty yards away.

Frantically, I dragged my feet clear of the clinging mud, and with the next step was bogged again. My cloak fell off, and though I snatched it up and flung it about me at once, it was too late: I had been seen. There was a loud hail from the car, the scream of brakes, and then a burst of vivid flame as a pistol clanged through the cutting. I heard the bullet whistle past my head and spit viciously into the bank. Darting forward, Nigel grabbed my hand and hauled me, by sheer muscular force, on to the road's firm centre. In a second we were across and between the steep banks of the path on the other side. As we went I had a glimpse of the car, all blazing lamps and gleaming bonnet, in the act of stopping, and Clubfoot, erect in the tonneau, brandishing a pistol and shouting orders. While the car was yet under way two men in plain clothes tumbled out and started after us. As we reached the path, the pistol roared again.

We had, perhaps, thirty yards advantage of our pursuers. The path mounted sheerly up, but we were at the top before we heard them panting behind us. Now we were in the dark woods again. Immediately, Nigel quitted the path and struck a course parallel with it among the trees. An excited voice yelled: "This way, Herr Doktor, this way!" to which, in accents hoarse with rage, came back the answer: "Don't wait for me, zum Teufel, go on, go on!"

Their voices faded into the distance as we raced madly through the forest. "It's ... more than ... two kilometres!" I gasped out, as we blundered noisily along in the blackness, knowing that I, at least, could not sustain that crazy pace. But Nigel never slackened speed. With my heart pounding, with an agonising pain in my side, with the perspiration rolling down my face, I struggled forward in his wake.

It was not until a dense belt of undergrowth, with brambles shoulder-high, stretched an impenetrable barrier before us that my companion halted. With a gesture he motioned me down. Crouching behind a bush, we lay, looking towards a

faint lightening in the surrounding obscurity which, not more than fifty paces away, marked the trace of the path we had left. Very soon we heard the rustling of feet, and two dim figures went by at a shambling run.

Nigel raised a warning finger at me, and for perhaps two minutes we waited in absolute silence. Then his voice, softer than a sigh, breathed in my ear: "We've just one ghost of a chance. If these are Clubfoot's men from Berlin, they won't know the forest. We're going to gamble on their missing that left-hand fork which leads to van Rossum's farm. Ready?" He helped me to my feet, and at a stealthy jog-trot we regained the path.

Spent as I was with fatigue and lack of food, that brief breathing spell did little to rest my weary limbs. I was past speech, past hope, past sensibility almost, and Nigel with his arm linked in mine was literally supporting me, when at length, as we burst out upon a small clearing, the smooth face of some oak palings loomed up. They met in a V, and on either side of them the path branched.

There was no sign of the pursuit, and the gentle tremor of the slim and silvery birches within the copse was the only sound as we took the left-hand fork. Both of us, I think, realised that we had reached the last lap, and we hurried forward with a sort of desperate eagerness. Then suddenly, as we turned the angle of the copse, we saw before us a gate, set in a stone wall, spanning the path ahead.

At the same moment a twig snapped noisily under my foot. Instantly, from the darkness under the trees, a sharp challenge: "Halt! Wer geht?" rang out, and a soldier stepped smartly into the centre of the track, his rifle, with bayonet fixed, threateningly advanced.

That burly figure, barring the path, was the death of all our hopes. Behind it, not thirty paces distant, the gate seemed to beckon us to safety. We both stopped irresolute. I felt the quick, warning pressure of Nigel's hand upon my arm: then he went boldly forward. "Gelobt sei Jesus Christus, Freund," he said gravely—and I remember marvelling to find he had contrived to pick up the Capuchin greeting.

The sentry lowered his rifle. He was, as I recall it, a loutish peasant type, with fat cheeks bulging out beneath the brass strap of his Pickelhaube. "So," he remarked in some kind of thick, drawling patois, "di Patres, was?"

I knew that, to have eluded detection for so long as he had, Nigel Druce must possess unusual gifts for sinking his identity in a given rôle. But until that night in the Reichswald I had never realised what a superb character actor the stage lost in him. Without a second's hesitation he sprang into the part he had assumed and played it with a *maestria* which filled me with admiration. In the twinkling of an eye, he had it pat, every detail—voice, demeanour, gait, even, as it seemed to me, mentality, too—adjusted to the livery he wore. He was the young German friar to the life, excitable like all Germans, unpractical and world-shy as young clerics mostly are: the interpretation impressed me as being flawless and convincing.

His eyes were round with fright, and he was chattering with well-simulated fear as he laid his hands upon the sentry's tunic. "Thanks be to our holy Sankt Franziskus that we've found you," he gibbered. "We're been attacked in the forest, good Brother Anselmus here and I, by a gang of desperadoes armed with revolvers..."

The soldier started. "Na ja," he said uneasily, "there were shots a while back..."

"Murderous ruffians in a car, they were, no doubt belonging to the gang that killed the gendarme at Cleves last night. You must have heard about it?"

"Na und ob," was the phlegmatic rejoinder. "The greencoats have been buzzing like bees round and about the forest since dawn..." With an adroit movement he disengaged himself from the other's frantic clutch. His rifle now rested butt-end on the ground; but he was still between us and the gate. "When I heard the shooting just now, I made sure they'd bagged a prisoner. But you were attacked, you say? Which way did the revolver Fritzie's go?"

With every semblance of abject panic, my shameless young man wrung his hands. "But, du lieber Himmel," he lamented, "they're at our heels...."

The sentry recoiled and brought his rifle to the ready. "So?" he growled apprehensively.

"They chased us through the woods. At any moment now they may burst in upon us...."

"How many of them are there?"

"Half a dozen at least. The leader is a big brute, a lame man...."

"I will summon reinforcements," said the soldier importantly. He put a whistle to his lips and blew three piercing blasts.

"O weh, O weh," gibbered Nigel, "we shall be murdered before your comrades arrive!" He turned quickly to me. "Run to the farm, Brother Anselmus, and alarm the good van Rossum...." His eyelid fluttered, and he made an almost imperceptible backward movement of the head.

I perceived his drift and took a resolute step forward.

"Halt!" boomed the guard. "No crossing of the frontier, by special order of the Herr Hauptmann...."

"Mensch," came in a hysterical wail from Nigel, "d'you want us all to be butchered like the gendarme? This lame man, who is the leader, shoots to kill, I warn you. The good Brother will but arouse the farmer and his men and come straight back. Go, Brother Anselmus, hurry...."

So saying, he sought to hustle me past the soldier. The man, however, hoarsely muttering "Back!" elbowed me aside and at the same time raised his rifle. He was staring past me into the woods, where, as I now became aware, some one was crashing through the brush. The next moment, Clubfoot, hobbling grotesquely, came lurching at a smart pace from among the trees. "Halt da!" he roared, his voice, for very breathlessness, rattling in his throat, and advanced plunging over the grass bordering the path. And then he was brought up short by the sentry who, with a shout of "Hande hoch!" covered the intruder with his rifle.

Panting and blowing, Clubfoot halted, plainly discernible in such light as yet lingered in the clearing. He had lost his hat, and a wad of gauze, made fast to his shaven poll by means of strips of adhesive plaster, recalled our last meeting. His face, abundantly scratched and bleeding, was drenched with perspiration. About his neck an automatic dangled from a lanyard.

"Ass, idiot, sheepshead!" he bellowed, waving his stick at the guard. "Put down that rifle, verdammt!" He came on again.

"It's the lame man, their ringleader," said Nigel in purposely thrilled accents. "D'you see his revolver? Be careful, my friend. He's dangerous!" As he spoke, behind his back he signed to me vigorously to make for the gate.

The light in the clearing was going fast, and the two men on the path hid me from view. Under cover of them I began to edge away. As I went I heard Grundt's hoarse snarl echo across the open. "Wait till I get my hands on you, you thieving English spy!" His voice rose to an exasperated squeal: "I'm On His Majesty's service, you dolt. You stop me at your peril. I can have you shot for this, you hound. That man's a spy, and I hold a warrant for his arrest!"

"You tell that to the Herr Unteroffizier," came the sentry's reply in his thick German. "In the meantime, my boy, stick up your hands, or I blow your ugly head off...."

Favoured by the dimness, I had reached the gate unseen. Beyond loomed up the mass of a great barn with the roof of the farmstead, sunk in darkness and silence, not a stone's-throw away. Once through the gate, I turned to see whether Nigel was following. As I did so, Clubfoot's voice, part roar, part scream, like the cry of an angry elephant, reverberated through the clearing.

I saw him snatch at the pistol that rested on his chest. As his hand was raised, his arm was struck up and, with a report that went rolling endlessly along the quiet forest aisles, the shot departed in the air. A figure had sprung out from the bushes at his back and had him by the throat. Shouts now resounded from among the trees. Clubfoot was plunging madly in the grip of his assailant.

"Well done, comrade," I heard the sentry cry. Then, "You there, stand still, will you? or I fire!"

"Himmelkreuzsakrament...!"

Grundt's bellow of rage, trumpeted furiously into the night, cut across the guard's warning. But he had ceased to struggle. He remained, panting audibly, his wrists firmly grasped behind him by the soldier who stood there.

All the woods were now astir with footsteps. The measured, slightly unctuous voice, which Nigel had adopted for his rôle, rang hollow through the glade: "Guard him well, friends," he said, "while I fetch the good van Rossum and his men with ropes to bind your prisoner." He took a pace backwards. "And you, wretched man," he added, addressing Grundt in solemn tones, "blaspheme not, but repent of your sins. And Brother Anselmus and I will remember you in our prayers!" With that he turned and, hands tucked modestly in his capacious sleeves, walked with slow deliberation towards the gate.

A strangled shriek of rage rang out. Despite our peril, I was smiling. For once I regretted the gathering darkness that prevented me from seeing Clubfoot's face. A gabble of incoherent words broke from the cripple's lips.

"Stop him ... don't let him escape ... I'll show you my papers ... let go my hands, verdammt...!"

I knew that Nigel Druce was brave; but not until that moment did I realise what nerves of steel were his. He never hurried his pace, but with head bowed down as though in meditation, marched composedly to where I cowered, in a tremor of anxiety, under the shadow of the high barn. With a steady hand he unlatched the gate and passed through. "Now quick!" he whispered. His face wore a delighted grin.

I gave one look back. The figures, indistinct now in the shades of night, were as we had left them: the sentry, firm as a rock, straddling the path, with rifle levelled; opposite him Grundt, still shouting incoherently, the outline of a Pickelhaube behind.

It was the last glimpse I was to have of Clubfoot, and I have never forgotten it. The failing light obscured his features; but the rugged silhouette was unmistakable, and every line of it spelt menace and defiance. With his head raised challenging in the air, and all that massive body in an attitude of enraged revolt, he was like a wild beast held back in its spring; and, on the very threshold of safety, I trembled, wondering whether he might not yet leap forth and rend me.

As I turned to follow Nigel, a party of soldiers burst from the woods and surrounded the prisoner and his captors. But we did not wait on further developments. We darted through the yard. A ray of light now fell through the half-open door of the farmhouse, and by its radiance I saw that above the lintel a shield, divided into two parts, was painted. The near side showed the German colours, black, white, red: the farther—how my heart bounded at the sight!—the Dutch, red, white, blue. One pace, and we were in Holland!

There was no one about. "No time for van Rossum," Nigel whispered, and whisked his habit over his head. He tossed it, together with my cloak, under the farmhouse porch. Then we ran across the yard and out through a gate on to a road running through a rickyard. Suddenly a light showed between the haystacks, and an oldish man, bearded and forbidding, confronted us. He was wearing nothing but his coat and trousers, and his bare feet were thrust into clogs, as though he had been aroused from his bed.

"Van Rossum?" Nigel asked.

The bearded man eyed him suspiciously. "Ja!" he replied impassively.

"We are friends of Pater Vedastus...."

The farmer nodded ponderously. "I know the Pater: he is a good man," he answered in his thick German.

"Then you'll help us? He said you would...."

"Ja," was the toneless reply.

"We're in Holland here, nicht wahr?"

"Ja!"

"Is there any chance of the German frontier guards coming over in pursuit of us?"

At that moment there was the clatter of accoutrements among the ricks. The farmer pointed and, twenty yards away, we saw a file of soldiers in vaguely unfamiliar silhouette doubling towards the yard gate.

"Dutch," explained the farmer. "I roused them when I heard the shot." He raised his hand to enjoin silence. "They're only just in time...."

A terrible hubbub had broken out in the quadrangle of low buildings surrounding the farmhouse. Voices were raised in angry discussion.

"The friends of the Pater are my friends," van Rossum declared gravely. "Don't linger. The Dutch officer has a German wife." He indicated the path running through the rickyard. "Follow that: it leads to Beek, the first frontier village."

Nigel held out his hand. "Pater Vedastus has good friends," he said, with his bright smile.

"We who live on the frontier don't like our neighbours," the farmer replied impassively. He nodded casually and plodded off in the direction of the house, swinging his lantern. The din of the dispute continued in the distance.

A minute later we emerged upon a quiet country road. Facing us was a barn, its door plastered with notices. They were all in Dutch.

"Oh, Nigel," I sighed blissfully, "safe at last!"

"Yes," he answered absently; and with that we set off at a swinging pace along the road.

His voice had a sombre ring; and I noticed that he had ceased to smile.

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"Come! says the drum"

By the time we arrived at the inn to which Nigel brought me, in a rambling, red village, two or three miles on the Dutch side of the frontier, I had reached that pitch of exhaustion where falling asleep is like dropping through a hole in the world.

I have a vague remembrance of ham and eggs and coffee, and of a compassionate, chubby woman who kept on appearing, quite unaccountably in a gold crown and ermine robes—(I was too tired to reason it out then, but next day I saw the large oleograph of Queen Wilhelmina upon the parlour wall); of a clean, white-washed bedroom, which Nigel told me was next to his; of casting coat and waistcoat and shoes aside to collapse, half-dressed, upon the bed, and of sliding forthwith into deep and delicious sleep.

But not into oblivion. Strange phantoms pursued me through the dreams that haunted my slumber. I fancied myself back in the study at Schlatz, correcting proofs in my corner, with my dear Lucy Varley placidly knitting under the lamp, and the little Doctor reading the *Kreuz-Zeitung* in the armchair. Suddenly the window burst open, and a pallid figure rushed in, crying "Save me, save me!" It was Vivian Abbott, with his tawny hair and wary, fearless eyes. But when, in

my dream, I looked at him more closely, I perceived that one of his feet was encased in a monstrous, misshapen boot: and there was Grundt confronting me, his huge form shaken with silent laughter.

Then I dreamed that I was at Schippke's once more, surrounded by the Prince and other officers in their sky-blue tunics. Rudi was not there, but presently the Pellegrini, resplendent with her gorgeous hair and shining white frock like a bride, came threading her way through the crowd. "I've got a lovely surprise for you," she said, but my heart sank, for her face was livid, evil. As she spoke the ranks parted, and I saw Rudi dead on a stretcher with blood on his golden curls, and a revolver clasped in his limp hand. I shrieked, and instantly a gigantic, hairy paw stretched up out of the press and descended upon me. I fled away.

Now I was running through a forest inky-black, amid trees so tall that their branches vanished in the sky. As I hastened along there came to my ears the note of the bird I had heard at daybreak in the woods: toc-toc, toc-toc! And then I was seized with the terrifying certainty that this was no bird-call, but the rhythmic tapping of a stick. Fearfully, I glanced round and saw Clubfoot hobbling after me. We were in the narrow stone passage now, dim and endless, and without a door, of which I had dreamed before, the night after our first encounter in the garden at Schlatz.

His face was distorted with rage, his nostrils twitching, his eyes hotly blazing. "Olivia, Olivia!" he kept calling, and all the time his stick rapped the flags. He was gaining on me: he had grasped me by the shoulder. I tried in vain to scream....

Shuddering from head to foot, I sat up. The white walls of my room had a bluish tinge in the russet shades of dawn filtering in through the window. Below in the smoky greyness a cock crowed stridently.

Some one was tapping insistently at the door. I heard Nigel's voice, hurried, uneasy. "Olivia, Olivia..." it cried softly. I got up and unlocked the door, then, conscious of my déshabillé, jumped into bed and pulled the clothes over me.

Nigel entered quickly. "You screamed," he explained, "so I came to see what had happened...." Catching sight of my face—I suppose I still looked terrified—he sat down on the bed and took my hands in his. "Why," he declared, "your hands are as cold as ice...."

I flung my arms about him and hugged him to me. "Oh, Nigel," I exclaimed, "I've been so frightened. I've had such an awful nightmare. But now you're here I know that it was only a dream...."

He gathered me up in his arms. "You poor child! You're trembling all over...."

I drew back to survey him, wondering to find him fully dressed. "Nigel, don't tell me you haven't been to bed?"

He tried to smile at me. His face was deathly pale. "I had some writing to do...."

"It could have waited. You should have got some sleep. To whom had you to write so urgently to-night?"

He paused, looking away. There was something very odd about his manner. "To you among other people," he replied.

"To me?"

He was silent, his face averted.

"To me?" I repeated.

He nodded, his eyes steadfastly averted from mine. "But, Nigel dear," I persisted gently, "why to me?"

He hesitated, clearing his throat. His expression was desperately miserable. "To say good-bye..." he answered huskily.

"*To say good-bye?*" I echoed in a dazed voice. Now that we were in safety, could it be that he had changed his

mind? A woman can always tell when a man tires of her, they say. But I knew so little about it: this was the first man I had ever cared a rap about. "And you were going to write to me?" I said. "Couldn't you ... wouldn't it have been more honest to come to me yourself?"

He caught his breath. "I hadn't the courage. If I'd gone to you and told you, I was afraid I shouldn't be able to go through with it...." He put his hands on my shoulders and faced me squarely. "Olivia, dearest heart, I've got to go back!"

The caress in his voice told me everything which in that particular instant I wanted to know. He was the first, the only lover of my life, and for that one fleeting second of time the most important thing in the world to me was the rapturous discovery that he still cared. I twined my arms about his neck and drew him to me. "Oh, Nigel," I whispered, "and I thought you were trying to break it off...."

"God forbid, my darling," he murmured brokenly, "if you're willing to wait..."

And then the full purport of his words became clear to me. Our strange betrothal in the Capuchin chapel, his sombre fit thereafter, persisting even after we were in safety: now I perceived the meaning of it all. "Nigel," I burst out in an agony of fear, "you're never going back *there*?" I made a vague gesture in the direction of the woods.

"Don't make it harder for me than it is already," he pleaded sadly.

"But ... but he's waiting, hunting for you, there, across the frontier, Clubfoot, this ruthless savage! You'll be arrested immediately. Why, why, why?" I was distraught.

"I shall make my way back through Charlemagne's Ride," he said gravely. "There'll be no great danger about that. The getting into Germany is simple enough: it's the getting out that's the difficulty...."

"Why should you want to go back?" I clamoured frantically. "What for? If this news in the paper is true, the copy of the report has reached London, hasn't it? And even if it hasn't, we shall be there ourselves with the original within the next twenty-four hours. Your work in Germany is over. What earthly reason can you have for wishing to return?"

He gazed fixedly into my eyes. "If it weren't for you, Olivia," he answered earnestly, "I, too, should count my mission at an end. But you've promised to be my wife, and that makes a tremendous difference...."

"Why, for Heaven's sake?"

Very gently, as was his way, he drew me down and pillowed my head against his breast. "Listen, dearest," he said quietly. "It's war this time. These people mean to fight. If that report were not enough, to-day's news—I have seen the Rotterdam papers here—amply confirms it. The Emperor is back in Berlin: Austria is massing troops on the Danube: there has been a panic on the Berlin exchange: the Vienna Bourse is shut. By this time to-morrow Austria will have started hostilities against Servia, and the peace of Europe will have been definitely broken. And Germany is preparing to mobilise. Some German Customs officers from Goch were drinking downstairs here to-night, and from what they were saying amongst themselves, it's quite clear to me that the unofficial warnings for 'War Danger,' as they call it, the first stage of mobilisation, have already gone out...." He paused, a far-away look in his eyes. Outside, in the grey mists of morning, the village was stirring to life. From end to end barnyard challenged barnyard with triumphant crowings, and beneath the window a farm cart went rumbling by.

"This is our moment," he said, "the high noon of the Secret Service. In normal times they ignore us, snub us, repudiate us, stint us of funds; but when diplomacy breaks down and war comes, they rely on us to keep them posted. Wars are decided during the mobilisation period. The fate of nations depends on the success with which their leaders are able to cover up their concentration and prevent their strategic plan from being prematurely disclosed through the forward march of the troops. Once war is declared, the Secret Service can sit back for a breathing spell and let events take their course. But mobilisation is its opportunity to justify years of patient preparations, of expenditure without apparent results. I'm on the spot. I can get across into Germany into the very thick of mobilisation. It's my chance, Olivia. *I've got to go back!*"

I was growing desperate. I had to put a stop to this mad enterprise, I told myself. The tears were very near the

surface as I answered him. "Why should you?" I cried hotly. "You've done your part, and more than your part. There are other men in the Service besides you. Why should you risk your life again?"

"To win back my good name," he said tensely. His voice was unsteady. He paused an instant to control it, then added: "I've thought it all out, Olivia. I could never let you marry me with that stain on my record. Active service is my one chance of rehabilitating myself, of regaining the commission they took away from me. If war breaks out within a day or two, as I think it will, no agent will have such opportunities as will then be mine. To-day I can still go back: to-morrow it may be too late. Have I the right to hesitate?"

I was sobbing now, for I knew that I had failed. "Oh, my dear," I cried, "what do I care about your commission? If you fall into Grundt's hands he will have no mercy. If they should kill you, what will become of me?" And I broke down utterly.

He took me in his arms again and kissed my eyes, trying to console me with loving words. If the war crisis passed he would soon be back in England, within ten days or a fortnight: meanwhile, he would communicate with me through a special channel he had proposed in a letter he had written to his Chief, which he gave me. If war broke out... The blue eyes shone with their old light as he assured me of his ability to "keep clear of old Clubfoot."

*"The mouse that only turns to one poor hole
Can never be a mouse of any soul."*

he quoted gaily, with that debonair air which became him so well. I divined that he was only trying to cheer me up, and that, under his laughing mask, he was almost as moved as I: the inexpressible tenderness of his eyes told me as much.

But he was still keeping something back, and presently, when I was calmer, it came out.

We were to part at once, within half an hour.

Numb with grief, I listened to him: by that time, I think, all my tears were shed. Now that this thing had been decided, it mattered little to me when we parted or how. It was clear, he said, that, almost hourly, the political situation was growing more critical, and he could not afford to risk the frontier control being suddenly tightened up. Once mobilisation was proclaimed, and perhaps twenty-four hours before the formal notices went out, the barriers would come down. He dared not delay. His plan was to make a wide detour of the frontier on foot, reaching his objective on the far side of the forest towards the close of day. Then at nightfall he would slip across the line through the ravine which emerged into Charlemagne's Ride.

In half an hour's time, at five o'clock, the first tram left the village for Nymwegen, about eight miles distant, the nearest big town, where I could get the train for the Hook. He gave me German money and written instructions for my journey. He had settled our score at the inn on the previous night. The sooner I was clear of the frontier the better, he declared, for Clubfoot was quite capable of crossing into Holland in search of us. As it would be difficult to procure an outfit and change my clothes *en route* without attracting attention, Nigel suggested that I should travel in my disguise straight through to London, to my sister's house. He advised me to sew the report and his letter to his Chief in the lining of my jacket, and produced needle and thread which he had borrowed for this purpose from the woman of the inn.

In fact, he had thought of everything, and seeing him so brave and practical, I determined to try to put my grief away and show him a courageous face at our parting. Even at that late date—it was the morning of the 28th of July—I did not clearly realise that Europe was sliding over the precipice, inevitably, irresistibly; and I don't think I anticipated, such was my confidence in Nigel's pluck and resourcefulness, that our separation would be more than temporary, at the worst a matter of a few weeks. As we paced up and down the *chaussée* at the end of the village, waiting for the big steam tram to start, with the early morning mists rising from the fields and every blade of grass sparkling with dew, it was a mercy that neither he nor I could guess what the future had in store for us.

"And did you really intend to go away and leave me without saying good-bye?" I asked him.

He pressed my hand. "If it had come to the point, I don't think I could have done it," he said. "But I was afraid of myself. Since I met you life has been worth living again, dearest, and I didn't think I should have the strength to let you

go...."

I looked into his face. "Tell me, Nigel, did you always mean to go back, once you had brought me into safety?"

He shook his head. "It came to me suddenly last night in the chapel. Up to then, I suppose, I was only thinking of getting that document out of Germany. But when the Father showed me that newspaper, and I knew we had won through, I suddenly seemed to see my duty like a bright light piercing through the darkness in which I have walked for all these years. Look, like the sun there...." And he pointed to the red ball gleaming dully over the steaming plain.

"Then that was why you asked Pater Vedastus to bless us?"

He grew rather embarrassed. "You must have thought me devilish sentimental. But I wanted to feel, when I am back there again"—he made a gesture of the arm towards the blueish blur on the horizon where the great forest lay—"that you are waiting for me...."

"Didn't you know it without that?"

He nodded wistfully. "Yes, but..." His voice grew warm: "Oh, sweetheart, I wanted so desperately to go with you to England, this England of ours that, when I came out of prison, I never wanted to see again. I thought that if I could hear you repeat your promise there before the altar in the presence of that good old priest, it would give me strength to do what was right...." He broke off abashed.

"I felt as though we were being married," I said. "I'm glad you had the idea, Nigel. Now I know that we belong to one another for always...."

Two large Dutch vrouws, with shawls and market-baskets, were hoisting themselves into the empty tram. The driver and conductor appeared on the road. We had halted, Nigel and I, under a lime tree a little distance away.

Nigel caught up my two hands in his. "God bless you for saying that," he murmured brokenly. "Then you'll wait for me?"

My eyes were moist. "You know I will...."

"Even if it's months?"

"Even if it's years. To the end of my life, Nigel!" Only Fate knew, God help me, what a true prophet I was.

Now we became aware that the driver was clanging his bell impatiently. The conductor shouted from the platform. "I suppose I'll have to go," I said despairingly. We exchanged a wistful smile, realising that a hand-clasp was all my disguise would allow, and walked slowly to the tram.

"Oh, my dearest dear," I whispered, as I stood on the step, "take care of yourself. I shall die if you don't come back to me...."

I have often wondered since whether he had a premonition of what Fate had in store for us. For one instant those eyes, with their turquoise sheen, rested on my face as though he wished to stamp my features on his memory. His expression in that moment was stern, grim almost, and the touch of his hand in mine was like the touch of ice. "Good-bye, beloved," he murmured in a choking voice, and, dropping my hand, turned away. Then, with a jerk, the tram started and the tears blinded my sight. When I had dried my eyes, they showed me that spare, lonely figure still standing as I had left it, face to the frontier and the creaming line of the woods, head bowed, motionless, upon the dusty *chaussée*....

I never saw Nigel Druce again.

Aftermath

That is my story.

The last chapter is soon told....

I had an uneventful journey home until I reached the Hook. There the first person I saw on going on board the Harwich boat was Jim. My brother-in-law was returning from Berlin, of all places. Dulcie, distracted, as I knew she would be, at my disappearance, had sent him out in search of me. I shall never forget Jim's face when I went up to him in my shabby boy's clothes and touched him on the shoulder.

He was very stiff with me at first, and no wonder. In Berlin the Embassy could tell him nothing about me, and referred him to the police. At Police Headquarters he was received by a very polite gentleman who explained that, in police experience, most disappearances of this kind were voluntary, and advised him to return to England and await a letter from me. Pressed for further enlightenment, the official eventually produced the English police record of Nigel Marston-Gore, and with a great show of consideration, informed my horrified relative that, on the night of 21st July, the day I had arrived in Berlin from Schlitz, Nigel had fetched me away from Kemper's Hotel, where I had registered in a false name, and the pair of us had left for an unknown destination. Although I had rendered myself liable to a severe penalty, the police did not wish to bring disgrace upon my respectable family, and proposed to let the matter rest there. Completely nonplussed, Jim took the next train back to London to report to Dulcie. He was extremely scandalised and, until he had heard my story, inclined to be pompous; and recognising the hand of Grundt, I could not but admire the uncanny knowledge of human nature displayed in this device for putting a stop to inconvenient inquiries.

Then London, where the imperturbable stolidity of the City, with its roaring traffic and large, good-humoured policemen, seemed to cast an air of unreality about my strange adventure. Dulcie, warned by telegram, and between joy and curiosity almost hysterical, met us at Liverpool Street with the car. I appalled her by insisting, before I did anything else, on going just as I was, in my old cloth cap and shabby flannel suit, to the address on the letter Nigel had given me for his Chief.

Dulcie stayed with the car while I made my way to that queer little office which I was to come to know so well, perched high above the curve of the Thames at Charing Cross. I was rather nervous as to my reception in my ragamuffin attire; but they must have been used to odd visitors there: at any rate, my appearance seemed to attract no remark. I presumed the Chief would know my name, but, in order not to bewilder the messenger by announcing myself as "Miss Dunbar," I wrote a little note. I was ushered in at once.

A grim, oldish man, with tremendous shoulders and an indomitable air, rose up from the desk to greet me. With his beak-like nose, massive chin, and fierce, imperious eye, I found him rather alarming. But he had a very kindly smile, and he smiled broadly when his glance fell upon me. "My word," he said drily, "this looks like business, eh?"

I borrowed the scissors from the desk to slit up the lining of my jacket and remove the report and Nigel's letter. The big man made no comment as he took them from me, but merely asked me to sit down. With perfectly impassive features he drew the report from its envelope, glanced at it, and laid it aside. Then he opened Nigel's letter.

There was a twinkle in his steely grey eye when, his reading done, he glanced up across at me. "I took a chance on you," he remarked, "and our friend tells me it came off. Thank you!"

"Tell me," I said, and tried to cover up my frightful eagerness, "have you heard from him yet?"

He shook his head. "But if you leave your address with my secretary, I'll see that you're informed as soon as there's any news. He makes a special point of that in his letter." He picked up the report from the blotter and fell to studying it abstractedly. "You builded better than you knew when you finished Abbott's job for him," he observed at last.

"You *did* receive the copy that went by post, didn't you?" I could not help asking.

"Yes," was the calm rejoinder, "and very glad we were to get it. And now," he added briskly, "though I'm sure you're longing to get back into your pretty clothes, my dear, I'm going to fetch in one of my young men who'll have some questions to ask you." His hand moved to a row of electric bells.

"I wish you'd tell me how you knew I was at Schlatz?" I put in.

He grinned. "Once we had located Abbott," he answered, "we made it our business to find out what English folk were in the town."

"Apart from him I think I was the only English person at Schlatz," I volunteered.

"You were. And you were the right one. You see, we looked up your family record. And you ran true to form. Now tell me about young Druce...."

It was four days before I had word of Nigel, four days of torturing anxiety, during which, it seems to me, I neither slept nor ate. On the Saturday evening following my return, I was sitting alone in the garden at Dulcie's, listening to the thud of balls on the tennis-court next door, and thinking about Nigel. The sands of peace were running out. All Europe was in a turmoil: Germany and Russia were mobilising: and I seemed to hear the tramp of legions above the pleasant medley of peaceful sounds from the neighbouring garden. Then the telephone rang, and I went indoors to answer it.

"A message for Miss Dunbar," said a well-bred voice, and then: "He's all right, and he says you're not to worry."

"Oh, please," I pleaded, "won't you tell me where I can write to him?"

"I'm sorry, but we have no address." A click: they had rung off.

Three days afterwards we were at war, and for the Allied peoples Germany became a hermit land, more remote, more inaccessible, than Tibet. And my Nigel was shut up there. In those early days officious Germans flooded their British acquaintances with propaganda of all kinds. One of these brochures came addressed to me: from Schlatz, I surmised. Recognising its purpose, I was about to throw it away when a scrap of writing on the margin of the cover caught my eye. "My love, my love, my love," was written there....

Thereafter, the fog of war descended, and Nigel Druce was swallowed up as utterly as though he had never lived. Weeks of torture passed: the Marne was fought and won; and the battle for the Channel Ports was raging before I heard again. A second mysterious telephone call, this time to the hospital where I was working at Dover, informed me that "he" was "doing very well," and asked to be remembered; just that, and nothing more. A month later I received a German newspaper, with a Stockholm postmark. At the foot of a column was scrawled: "My heart's love to my heart's love. God bless you, dearest!"

Thereafter, at irregular intervals, but usually about once a month, a meagre message from the office, or a cryptic line of loving greeting, forwarded by some such means as those I have described, told me at least that he was still alive. The hardest part of our separation was that I could not write to him. The office, where I called whenever I was in town, professed, with how much truth I don't know, to be unable to communicate with him. Every message I received I acknowledged in the Agony Column of *The Times*, in the hope that Nigel might see it.

And then all tidings ceased. Up to the Armistice eight months had elapsed since his last message. It was a few days before the great German offensive in France that I received it. It came to me from the office, a grubby fragment of paper, on which two lines were scribbled in faded characters. The paper was crinkled and reeked of chemicals; it looked as if it had been written in sympathetic ink.

"Patience, sweetheart," it ran. "I shall come back to you, never fear. Fit and happy and longing to see you."

There was no signature—there never was.

Thereafter a blank. At first, the office was hopeful: sometimes agents, I was told, were unable to communicate for months at a stretch. The weeks dragged on. In the late spring Jim was killed, and I had poor Dulcie's agony to add to my own. I was distracted. I pestered the office. They hinted at inquiries made through odd, subterranean channels; but they would not let me inquire outside.

And then one day in June the Chief sent for me. He was very gentle; but he made it quite clear that I must give up hope. If I wished I was free to approach the Red Cross and the other organisations which endeavoured to trace the missing: he would help me in any way he could. I think he knew something; but whatever it was, he kept it to himself. What he did tell me was that he had reason to believe that Nigel had been in Occupied Belgium in March. There had been a great drive against our agents there. Many had been shot. It was greatly to be feared...

I have tried every source in vain. Silence.

Is it the silence of death? I told him, that morning we said good-bye, that I should die if he did not come back to me. How sentimental it sounds now! We know, Dulcie and I, that in war women's is the harder lot, to live: only the men are privileged to die....

I had so greatly hoped that peace would bring us news. But the Armistice was signed six weeks ago, and still there is no tidings. It is two days to Christmas when Bill is coming for his answer.

Last night I read through what I have written, and as I read I had the feeling as though from my pages my Nigel stepped back into my life.

I cannot believe that he is dead....

Poor Bill! Dulcie will be furious; but what can I do?

Postscript

He is alive and on his way home to me....

To-night I have had his wireless from Constantinople, so tender, so full of love, that I seem to hear the echo of his dear voice crying out to me from the air above the sleeping Downs.

The Chief brought me the first news. This afternoon, the last day of the old year which has brought peace back to the earth, I was digging in my garden, easier in my mind since I had sent poor Bill away. I heard the gate clang, and looking up, saw that odd old man from Whitehall standing on the path.

He had never been down to the cottage before. At the sight of him my heart seemed to stop. Had he brought me proof of that certainty which I would not admit to myself?

But his greeting gave me hope. "Hullo there," he cried jovially, "are you good at standing surprises? Nice ones, I mean....?"

I stared at him blankly. A mad idea had crept into my head, so crazy that I was ashamed to voice it.

He thrust a sheet of foolscap into my hand. "Read that!" he bade me.

It was the typewritten copy of a Constantinople despatch.

"American Red Cross at Angora," I read, "reports typhoid patient in Turkish Ambulance, admitted under name of Jakob Koch, on return to consciousness gave name as Nigel Druce, of British Intelligence Corps. Evacuated Constantinople. Message ends."

That cable was nine days old. It had been delayed *en route*. The Chief had later news. Nigel was in hospital at Constantinople. From a statement he had given to the British Mission there, it appeared that, during the March offensive, he had been compelled to flee from Belgium and had made his way down to the Balkans as a drover accompanying a cattle train. Thence he had drifted to Adrianople, where he was arrested as a suspect and sent to a civilian internment camp in Asia Minor. He had escaped from there, but was wounded in the foot by a sentry, and had lain hidden for months in a Turkish village, where eventually a Red Crescent unit had found him delirious with typhoid. He was now convalescent, and by this, the Chief added, on his way home to England.

"He'll have something to tell us, I shouldn't wonder," the big man said placidly, "and I'll have something to tell him. I've been thinking it's time he had a commission...." He paused and cocked his grizzled head at me.

I gasped. "You mean ... you mean he'll be reinstated?"

He held me with his eye. "So you know about that old business, do you?"

"He told me before he asked me to marry him," I replied.

The Chief grinned genially. "So that's the way of it, eh? Well, we're making a fresh start. The only fellow I know about is Nigel Druce, and he's getting a commission in the Intelligence with the rank of Major. And, by the way, have a look through the New Year's Honours in to-morrow's papers. I shouldn't wonder if you found his name there, something to do with a D.S.O...."

I flung my arms round the old Chief's neck and kissed him. "You've made me so happy," I said.

"Wait," he put in. "Since I can't get you a D.S.O., much as you have deserved it, I've asked Cartier's to send you along a bangle...."

On that, of course, I had to kiss him again.

He was not greatly put out. "Lucky beggar, Druce," he rumbled. "What I say about this job of ours is that the young fellows have all the fun...."

And now I am waiting for my Nigel.

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