

The Man with the Clubfoot eBook

The Man with the Clubfoot

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*** Start of this project gutenber EBOOK the man with the clubfoot ***

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The man with the clubfoot

By Valentine Williams

Author of "The secret hand," "The yellow streak," "The return of clubfoot," "The Orange divan," "Clubfoot the avenger"

1918

WHAT THIS STORY IS ABOUT

"The Man with the Clubfoot" is one of the most ingenious and sinister secret agents in Europe. It is to him that the task is assigned of regaining possession of an indiscreet letter written by the Kaiser.

Desmond Okewood, a young British officer with a genius for secret service work, sets out to thwart this man and, incidentally, discover the whereabouts of his brother.

He penetrates into Germany disguised, and meets with many thrilling adventures before he finally achieves his mission.

In "The Man with the Clubfoot," Valentine Williams has written a thrilling romance of mystery, love and intrigue, that in every sense of the word may be described as "breathless."

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The Man with the Clubfoot

CHAPTER I

I SEEK A BED IN ROTTERDAM

The reception clerk looked up from the hotel register and shook his head firmly. "Very sorry, saire," he said, "not a bed in ze house." And he closed the book with a snap.

Outside the rain came down heavens hard. Every one who came into the brightly lit hotel vestibule entered with a gush of water. I felt I would rather die than face the wind-swept streets of Rotterdam again.

I turned once more to the clerk who was now busy at the key-rack.

"Haven't you really a corner? I wouldn't mind where it was, as it is only for the night. Come now..."

"Very sorry, saire. We have two gentlemen sleeping in ze bathrooms already. If you had reserved..." And he shrugged his shoulders and bent towards a visitor who was demanding his key.

I turned away with rage in my heart. What a cursed fool I had been not to wire from Groningen! I had fully intended to, but the extraordinary conversation I had had with Dicky Allerton had put everything else out of my head. At every hotel I had tried it had been the same story—Cooman's, the Maas, the Grand, all were full even to the bathrooms. If I had only wired....

As I passed out into the porch I bethought myself of the porter. A hotel porter had helped me out of a similar plight in Breslau once years ago. This porter, with his red, drink-sodden face and tarnished gold braid, did not promise well, so far as a recommendation for a lodging for the night was concerned. Still...

I suppose it was my mind dwelling on my experience at Breslau that made me address the man in German. When one has been familiar with a foreign tongue from one's boyhood, it requires but a very slight mental impulse to drop into it. From such slight beginnings do great enterprises spring. If I had known the immense ramification of adventure that was to spread its roots from that simple question, I verily believe my heart would have failed me and I would have run forth into the night and the rain and roamed the streets till morning.

Well, I found myself asking the man in German if he knew where I could get a room for the night.

He shot a quick glance at me from under his reddened eyelids.

“The gentleman would doubtless like a German house?” he queried.

You may hardly credit it, but my interview with Dicky Allerton that afternoon had simply driven the war out of my mind. When one has lived much among foreign peoples, one’s mentality slips automatically into their skin. I was now thinking in German—at least so it seems to me when I look back upon that night—and I answered without reflecting.

“I don’t care where it is as long as I can get somewhere to sleep out of this infernal rain!”

“The gentleman can have a good, clean bed at the Hotel Sixt in the little street they call the Vos in’t Tuintje, on the canal behind the Bourse. The proprietress is a good German, jawohl ... Frau Anna Schratt her name is. The gentleman need only say he comes from Franz at the Bopparder Hof.”

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I gave the man a gulden and bade him get me a cab.

It was still pouring. As we rattled away over the glistening cobble-stones, my mind travelled back over the startling events of the day. My talk with old Dicky had given me such a mental jar that I found it at first wellnigh impossible to concentrate my thoughts. That's the worst of shell-shock. You think you are cured, you feel fit and well, and then suddenly the machinery of your mind checks and halts and creaks. Ever since I had left hospital convalescent after being wounded on the Somme ("gunshot wound in head and cerebral concussion" the doctors called it), I had trained myself, whenever my brain was *en panne*, to go back to the beginning of things and work slowly up to the present by methodical stages.

Let's see then—I was "boarded" at Millbank and got three months' leave; then I did a month in the Little Johns' bungalow in Cornwall. There I got the letter from Dicky Allerton, who, before the war, had been in partnership with my brother Francis in the motor business at Coventry. Dicky had been with the Naval Division at Antwerp and was interned with the rest of the crowd when they crossed the Dutch frontier in those disastrous days of October, 1914.

Dicky wrote from Groningen, just a line. Now that I was on leave, if I were fit to travel, would I come to Groningen and see him? "I have had a curious communication which seems to have to do with poor Francis," he added. That was all.

My brain was still halting, so I turned to Francis. Here again I had to go back. Francis, rejected on all sides for active service, owing to what he scornfully used to call "the shirkers' ailment, varicose veins," had flatly declined to carry on with his motor business after Dicky had joined up, although their firm was doing government work. Finally, he had vanished into the maw of the War Office and all I knew was that he was "something on the Intelligence." More than this not even *he* would tell me, and when he finally disappeared from London, just about the time that I was popping the parapet with my battalion at Neuve Chapelle, he left me his London chambers as his only address for letters.

Ah! now it was all coming back—Francis' infrequent letters to me about nothing at all, then his will, forwarded to me for safe keeping when I was home on leave last Christmas, and after that, silence. Not another letter, not a word about him, not a shred of information. He had utterly vanished.

I remembered my frantic inquiries, my vain visits to the War Office, my perplexity at the imperturbable silence of the various officials I importuned for news of my poor brother. Then there was that lunch at the Bath Club with Sonny Martin of the Heavies and a friend of his, some kind of staff captain in red tabs. I don't think I heard his name, but I know he was at the War Office, and presently over our cigars and coffee I laid before him the mysterious facts about my brother's case.

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"Perhaps you knew Francis?" I said in conclusion. "Yes," he replied, "I know him well." "Know him," I repeated, "*know* him then ... then you think ... you have reason to believe he is still alive...?"

Red Tabs cocked his eye at the gilded cornice of the ceiling and blew a ring from his cigar. But he said nothing.

I persisted with my questions but it was of no avail. Red Tabs only laughed and said: "I know nothing at all except that your brother is a most delightful fellow with all your own love of getting his own way."

Then Sonny Martin, who is the perfection of tact and diplomacy—probably on that account he failed for the Diplomatic—chipped in with an anecdote about a man who was rating the waiter at an adjoining table, and I held my peace. But as Red Tabs rose to go, a little later, he held my hand for a minute in his and with that curious look of his, said slowly and with meaning:

"When a nation is at war, officers on *active service* must occasionally disappear, sometimes in their country's interest, sometimes in their own."

He emphasised the words "on active service."

In a flash my eyes were opened. How blind I had been! Francis was in Germany.

CHAPTER II

THE CIPHER WITH THE INVOICE

Red Tabs' sphinx-like declaration was no riddle to me. I knew at once that Francis must be on secret service in the enemy's country and that country Germany. My brother's extraordinary knowledge of the Germans, their customs, life and dialects, rendered him ideally suitable for any such perilous mission. Francis always had an extraordinary talent for languages: he seemed to acquire them all without any mental effort, but in German he was supreme. During the year that he and I spent at Consistorial-Rat von Mayburg's house at Bonn, he rapidly outdistanced me, and though, at the end of our time, I could speak German like a German, Francis was able, in addition, to speak Bonn and Cologne *patois* like a native of those ancient cities—ay and he could drill a squad of recruits in their own language like the smartest *Leutnant* ever fledged from Gross-Lichterfelde.

He never had any difficulty in passing himself off as a German. Well I remember his delight when he was claimed as a fellow Rheinlaender by a German officer we met, one summer before the war, combining golf with a little useful espionage at Cromer.

I don't think Francis had any ulterior motive in his study of German. He simply found he had this imitative faculty; philology had always interested him, so even after he had gone into the motor trade, he used to amuse himself on business trips to Germany by acquiring new dialects.

His German imitations were extraordinarily funny. One of his "star turns", was a noisy sitting of the Reichstag with speeches by Prince Buelow and August Bebel and "interruptions"; another, a patriotic oration by an old Prussian General at a Kaiser's birthday dinner. Francis had a marvellous faculty not only of *seeming* German, but even of almost looking like a German, so absolutely was he able to slip into the skin of the part.

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Yet never in my wildest moments had I dreamt that he would try and get into Germany in war-time, into that land where every citizen is catalogued and pigeonholed from the cradle. But Red Tabs' oracular utterance had made everything clear to me. Why a mission to Germany would be the very thing that Francis would give his eyes to be allowed to attempt! Francis with his utter disregard of danger, his love of taking risks, his impish delight in taking a rise out of the stodgy Hun—why, if there were Englishmen brave enough to take chances of that kind, Francis would be the first to volunteer.

Yes, if Francis were on a mission anywhere it would be to Germany. But what prospect had he of ever returning—with the frontiers closed and ingress and egress practically barred even to pro-German neutrals? Many a night in the trenches I had a mental vision of Francis, so debonair and so fearless, facing a firing squad of Prussian privates.

From the day of the luncheon at the Bath Club to this very afternoon I had had no further inkling of my brother's whereabouts or fate. The authorities at home professed ignorance, as I knew, in duty bound, they would, and I had nothing to hang any theory on to until Dicky Allerton's letter came. Ashcroft at the F.O. fixed up my passports for me and I lost no time in exchanging the white gulls and red cliffs of Cornwall for the windmills and trim canals of Holland.

And now in my breast pocket lay, written on a small piece of cheap foreign notepaper, the tidings I had come to Groningen to seek. Yet so trivial, so nonsensical, so baffling was the message that I already felt my trip to Holland to have been a fruitless errand.

I found Dicky fat and bursting with health in his quarters at the internment camp. He only knew that Francis had disappeared. When I told him of my meeting with Red Tabs at the Bath Club, of the latter's words to me at parting and of my own conviction in the matter he whistled, then looked grave.

He went straight to the point in his bluff direct way.

"I am going to tell you a story first, Desmond," he said to me, "then I'll show you a piece of paper. Whether the two together fit in with your theory as to poor Francis' disappearance will be for you to judge. Until now I must confess—I had felt inclined to dismiss the only reference this document appears to make to your brother as a mere coincidence in names, but what you have told me makes things interesting—by Jove, it does, though. Well, here's the yarn first of all.

"Your brother and I have had dealings in the past with a Dutchman in the motor business at Nymwegen, name of Van Urutius. He has often been over to see us at Coventry in the old days and Francis has stayed with him at Nymwegen once or twice on his way back from Germany—Nymwegen, you know, is close to the German frontier. Old Urutius has been very decent to me since I have been in gaol here and has been over several times, generally with a box or two of those nice Dutch cigars."

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“Dicky,” I broke in on him, “get on with the story. What the devil’s all this got to do with Francis? The document—”

“Steady, my boy!” was the imperturbable reply, “let me spin my yarn my own way. I’m coming to the piece of paper....

“Well, then, old Urutius came to see me ten days ago. All I knew about Francis I had told him, namely, that Francis had entered the army and was missing. It was no business of the old Mynheer if Francis was in the Intelligence, so I didn’t tell him that. Van U. is a staunch friend of the English, but you know the saying that if a man doesn’t know he can’t split.

“My old Dutch pal, then, turned up here ten days ago. He was bubbling over with excitement. ‘Mr. Allerton’ he says, ‘I haf a writing, a most mysterious writing—a I think, from Francis Okewood.’

“I sat tight. If there were any revelations coming they were going to be Dutch, not British. On that I was resolved.

“‘I haf received; the old Dutchman went on, from Gairemany a parcel of metal shields, plates—what you call ‘em—of tin, *hein?* What I haf to advertise my business. They arrife las’ week—I open the parcel myself and on the top is the envelope with the invoice.’

“Mynheer paused; he has a good sense of the dramatic.

“‘Well’, I said, ‘did it bite you or say “Gott strafe England?” Or what?’

“Van Urutius ignored my flippancy and resumed. ‘I open the envelope and there in the invoice I find this writing—here!’

“And here,” said Dicky, diving into his pocket, “is the writing!”

And he thrust into my eagerly outstretched hand a very thin half-sheet of foreign notepaper, of that kind of cheap glazed notepaper you get in cafes on the Continent when you ask for writing materials.

Three lines of German, written in fluent German characters in purple ink beneath the name and address of Mynheer van Urutius ... that was all.

My heart sank with disappointment and wretchedness as I read the inscription.

Here is the document:

* * * * *



Herr Willem van Urutius,
Automobilgeschaeft,
Nymwegen.
Alexandtr-Straat 81 bis.

Berlin, Iten Juli, 16.

O Eichenholz! O Eichenholz!
Wie leer sind deine Blaetter.

Wie Achilles in dem Zelte.

Wo zweie sich zanken
Erfreut sich der Dritte.

* * * * *

(Translation.)

Mr. Willem van Urutius,
Automobile Agent,
Nymwegen.
81 bis *Alexander-Straat*.

Berlin, 1st July, 16.

O Oak-tree! O Oak-tree,
How empty are thy leaves.

Like Achilles in the tent.

When two people fall out
The third party rejoices.

* * * * *

I stared at this nonsensical document in silence. My thoughts were almost too bitter for words.

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At last I spoke.

“What’s all this rigmarole got to do with Francis, Dicky?” I asked, vainly trying to suppress the bitterness in my voice. “This looks like a list of copybook maxims for your Dutch friend’s advertisement cards....”

But I returned to the study of the piece of paper.

“Not so fast, old bird,” Dicky replied coolly, “let me finish my story. Old Stick-in-the-mud is a lot shrewder than we think.

“‘When I read the writing,’ he told me, ‘I think he is all robbish, but then I ask myself, Who shall put robbish in my invoices? And then I read the writing again and once again, and then I see he is a message.’”

“Stop, Dicky!” I cried, “of course, what an ass I am! Why *Eichenholz*....”

“Exactly,” retorted Dicky, “as the old Mynheer was the first to see, *Eichenholz* translated into English is ‘Oak-tree’ or ‘Oak-wood’—in other words, Francis.”

“Then, Dicky....” I interrupted.

“Just a minute,” said Dicky, putting up his hand. “I confess I thought, on first seeing this message or whatever it is, that there must be simply a coincidence of name and that somebody’s idle scribbling had found its way into old van U.’s invoice. But now that you have told me that Francis may have actually got into Germany, then, I must say, it looks as if this might be an attempt of his to communicate with home.”

“Where did the Dutchman’s packet of stuff come from?” I asked.

“From the Berlin Metal Works in Steglitz, a suburb of Berlin: he has dealt with them for years.”

“But then what does all the rest of it mean ... all this about Achilles and the rest?”

“Ah, Desmond!” was Dicky’s reply, “that’s where you’ve got not only me, but also Mynheer van Urutius.”

“‘O oak-wood! O oak-wood, how empty are thy leaves!’.... That sounds like a taunt, don’t you think, Dicky?” said I.

“Or a confession of failure from Francis ... to let us know that he has done nothing, adding that he is accordingly sulking ‘like Achilles in his tent.’”

“But, see here, Richard Allerton,” I said, “Francis would never spell ‘Achilles’ with one ‘l’ ... now, would he?”

“By Jove!” said Dicky, looking at the paper again, “nobody would but a very uneducated person. I know nothing about German, but tell me, is that the hand of an educated German? Is it Francis’ handwriting?”

“Certainly, it is an educated hand,” I replied, “but I’m dashed if I can say whether it is Francis’ German handwriting: it can scarcely be because, as I have already remarked, he spells ‘Achilles’ with one ‘l.’”

Then the fog came down over us again. We sat helplessly and gazed at the fateful paper.

“There’s only one thing for it, Dicky,” I said finally, “I’ll take the blooming thing back to London with me and hand it over to the Intelligence. After all, Francis may have a code with them. Possibly they will see light where we grope in darkness.”

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“Desmond,” said Dicky, giving me his hand, “that’s the most sensible suggestion you’ve made yet. Go home and good luck to you. But promise me you’ll come back here and tell me if that piece of paper brings the news that dear old Francis is alive.”

So I left Dicky but I did not go home. I was not destined to see my home for many a weary week.

CHAPTER III

A VISITOR IN THE NIGHT

A volley of invective from the box of the cab—bad language in Dutch is fearfully effective—aroused me from my musings. The cab, a small, uncomfortable box with a musty smell, stopped with a jerk that flung me forward. From the outer darkness furious altercation resounded above the plashing of the rain. I peered through the streaming glass of the windows but could distinguish nothing save the yellow blur of a lamp. Then a vehicle of some kind seemed to move away in front of us, for I heard the grating of wheels against the kerb, and my cab drew up to the pavement.

On alighting, I found myself in a narrow, dark street with high houses on either side. A grimy lamp with the word “Hotel” in half-obliterated characters painted on it hung above my head, announcing that I had arrived at my destination. As I paid off the cabman another cab passed. It was apparently the one with which my Jehu had had words, for he turned round and shouted abuse into the night.

My cabman departed, leaving me with my bag on the pavement at my feet gazing at a narrow dirty door, the upper half of which was filled in with frosted glass. I was at last awake to the fact that I, an Englishman, was going to spend the night in a German hotel to which I had been specially recommended by a German porter on the understanding that I was a German. I knew that, according to the Dutch neutrality regulations, my passport would have to be handed in for inspection by the police and that therefore I could not pass myself off as a German.

“Bah!” I said to give myself courage, “this is a free country, a neutral country. They may be offensive, they may overcharge you, in a Hun hotel, but they can’t eat you. Besides, any bed in a night like this!” and I pushed open the door.

Within, the hotel proved to be rather better than its uninviting exterior promised. There was a small vestibule with a little glass cage of an office on one side and beyond it an old-fashioned flight of stairs, with a glass knob on the post at the foot, winding to the upper stories.

At the sound of my footsteps on the mosaic flooring, a waiter emerged from a little cubby-hole under the stairs. He had a blue apron girt about his waist, but otherwise he

wore the short coat and the dicky and white tie of the Continental hotel waiter. His hands were grimy with black marks and so was his apron. He had apparently been cleaning boots.

He was a big, fat, blonde man with narrow, cruel little eyes. His hair was cut so short that his head appeared to be shaven. He advanced quickly towards me and asked me in German in a truculent voice what I wanted.

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I replied in the same language, I wanted a room.

He shot a glance at me through his little slits of eyes on hearing my good Bonn accent, but his manner did not change.

“The hotel is full. The gentleman cannot have a bed here. The proprietress is out at present. I regret....” He spat this all out in the offhand insolent manner of the Prussian official.

“It was Franz, of the Bopparder Hof, who recommended me to come here,” I said. I was not going out again into the rain for a whole army of Prussian waiters.

“He told me that Frau Schratt would make me very comfortable,” I added.

The waiter’s manner changed at once.

“So, so,” he said—quite genially this time—“it was Franz who sent the gentleman to us. He is a good friend of the house, is Franz. Ja, Frau Schratt is unfortunately out just now, but as soon as the lady returns I will inform her you are here. In the meantime, I will give the gentleman a room.”

He handed me a candlestick and a key.

“So,” he grunted, “No. 31, the third floor.”

A clock rang out the hour somewhere in the distance.

“Ten o’clock already,” he said. “The gentleman’s papers can wait till to-morrow, it is so late. Or perhaps the gentleman will give them to the proprietress. She must come any moment.”

As I mounted the winding staircase I heard him murmur again:

“So, so, Franz sent him here! Ach, der Franz!”

As soon as I had passed out of sight of the lighted hall I found myself in complete darkness. On each landing a jet of gas, turned down low, flung a dim and flickering light a few yards around. On the third floor I was able to distinguish by the gas rays a small plaque fastened to the wall inscribed with an arrow pointing to the right above the figures: 46-30.

I stopped to strike a match to light my candle. The whole hotel seemed wrapped in silence, the only sound the rushing of water in the gutters without. Then from the darkness of the narrow corridor that stretched out in front of me, I heard the rattle of a key in a lock.



I advanced down the corridor, the pale glimmer of my candle showing me as I passed a succession of yellow doors, each bearing a white porcelain plate inscribed with a number in black. No. 46 was the first room on the right counting from the landing: the even numbers were on the right, the odd on the left: therefore I reckoned on finding my room the last on the left at the end of the corridor.

The corridor presently took a sharp turn. As I came round the bend I heard again the sound of a key and then the rattling of a door knob, but the corridor bending again, I could not see the author of the noise until I had turned the corner.

I ran right into a man fumbling at a door on the left-hand side of the passage, the last door but one. A mirror at the end of the corridor caught and threw back the reflection of my candle.

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The man looked up as I approached. He was wearing a soft black felt hat and a black overcoat and on his arm hung an umbrella streaming with rain. His candlestick stood on the floor at his feet. It had apparently just been extinguished, for my nostrils sniffed the odour of burning tallow.

“You have a light?” the stranger said in German in a curiously breathless voice. “I have just come upstairs and the wind blew out my candle and I could not get the door open. Perhaps you could ...” He broke off gasping and put his hand to his heart.

“Allow me,” I said. The lock of the door was inverted and to open the door you had to insert the key upside-down. I did so and the door opened easily. As it swung back I noticed the number of the room was 33, next door to mine.

“Can I be of any assistance to you? Are you unwell?” I said, at the same time lifting my candle and scanning the stranger’s features.

He was a young man with close-cropped black hair, fine dark eyes and an aquiline nose with a deep furrow between the eyebrows. The crispness of his hair and the high cheekbones gave a suggestion of Jewish blood. His face was very pale and his lips were blueish. I saw the perspiration glistening on his forehead.

“Thank you, it is nothing,” the man replied in the same breathless voice. “I am only a little out of breath with carrying my bag upstairs. That’s all.”

“You must have arrived just before I did,” I said, remembering the cab that had driven away from the hotel as I drove up.

“That is so,” he answered, pushing open his door as he spoke. He disappeared into the darkness of the room and suddenly the door shut with a slam that re-echoed through the house.

As I had calculated, my room was next door to his, the end room of the corridor. It smelt horribly close and musty and the first thing I did was to stride across to the windows and fling them back wide.

I found myself looking across a dark and narrow canal, on whose stagnant water loomed large the black shapes of great barges, into the windows of gaunt and weather-stained houses over the way. Not a light shone in any window. Away in the distance the same clock as I had heard before struck the quarter—a single, clear chime.

It was the regular bedroom of the *maison meublee*—worn carpet, discoloured and dingy wallpaper, faded rep curtains and mahogany bedstead with a vast *edredon*, like a giant pincushion. My candle, guttering wildly in the unaccustomed breeze blowing dankly through the chamber, was the sole illuminant. There was neither gas nor electric light laid on.

The house had relapsed into quiet. The bedroom had an evil look and this, combined with the dank air from the canal, gave my thoughts a sombre tinge.

“Well,” I said to myself, “you’re a nice kind of ass! Here you are, a British officer, posing as a brother Hun in a cut-throat Hun hotel, with a waiter who looks like the official Prussian executioner. What’s going to happen to you, young feller my lad, when Madame comes along and finds you have a British passport? A very pretty kettle of fish, I must say!

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“And suppose Madame takes it into her head to toddle along up here to-night and calls your bluff and summons the gentle Hans or Fritz or whatever that ruffianly waiter’s name is to come upstairs and settle your hash! What sort of a fight are you going to put up in that narrow corridor out there with a Hun next door and probably on every side of you, and no exit this end? You don’t know a living soul in Rotterdam and no one will be a penny the wiser if you vanish off the face of the earth ... at any rate no one on this side of the water.”

Starting to undress, I noticed a little door on the left-hand side of the bed. I found it opened into a small *cabinet de toilette*, a narrow slip of a room with a wash-hand stand and a very dirty window covered with yellow paper. I pulled open this window with great difficulty—it cannot have been opened for years—and found it gave on to a very small and deep interior court, just an air shaft round which the house was built. At the bottom was a tiny paved court not more than five foot square, entirely isolated save on one side where there was a basement window with a flight of steps leading down from the court through an iron grating. From this window a faint yellow streak of light was visible. The air was damp and chill and horrid odours of a dirty kitchen were wafted up the shaft. So I closed the window and set about turning in.

I took off my coat and waistcoat, then bethought me of the mysterious document I had received from Dicky. Once more I looked at those enigmatical words:

O Oak-wood! O Oak-wood (for that much was clear), How empty are thy leaves. Like Achilles_ (with one “I”) in the tent. When two people fall out The third party rejoices.

What did it all mean? Had Francis fallen out with some confederate who, having had his revenge by denouncing my brother, now took this extraordinary step to announce his victim’s fate to the latter’s friends? “Like Achilles in the tent!” Why not “in *his* tent”? Surely ...

A curious choking noise, the sound of a strangled cough, suddenly broke the profound silence of the house. My heart seemed to stop for a moment. I hardly dared raise my eyes from the paper which I was conning, leaning over the table in my shirt and trousers.

The noise continued, a hideous, deep-throated gurgling. Then I heard a faint foot-fall in the corridor without.

I raised my eyes to the door.

Someone or something was scratching the panels, furiously, frantically.

The door-knob was rattled loudly. The noise broke in raucously upon that horrid gurgling sound without. It snapped the spell that bound me.

I moved resolutely towards the door. Even as I stepped forward the gurgling resolved itself into a strangled cry.

“Ach! ich sterbe” were the words I heard.

Then the door burst open with a crash, there was a swooping rush of wind and rain through the room, the curtains flapped madly from the windows.

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The candle flared up wildly.

Then it went out.

Something fell heavily into the room.

CHAPTER IV

DESTINY KNOCKS AT THE DOOR

There are two things at least that modern warfare teaches you, one is to keep cool in an emergency, the other is not to be afraid of a corpse. Therefore I was scarcely surprised to find myself standing there in the dark calmly reviewing the extraordinary situation in which I now found myself. That's the curious thing about shell-shock: after it a motor back-firing or a tyre bursting will reduce a man to tears, but in face of danger he will probably find himself in full possession of his wits as long as there is no sudden and violent noise connected with it.

Brief as the sounds without had been, I was able on reflection to identify that gasping gurgle, that rapid patter of the hands. Anyone who has seen a man die quickly knows them. Accordingly I surmised that somebody had come to my door at the point of death, probably to seek assistance.

Then I thought of the man next door, his painful breathlessness, his blueish lips, when I found him wrestling with his key, and I guessed who was my nocturnal visitor lying prone in the dark at my feet.

Shielding the candle with my hand I rekindled it. Then I grappled with the flapping curtains and got the windows shut. Then only did I raise my candle until its beams shone down upon the silent figure lying across the threshold of the room.

It was the man from No. 33. He was quite dead. His face was livid and distorted, his eyes glassy between the half-closed lids, while his fingers, still stiffly clutching, showed paint and varnish and dust beneath the nails where he had pawed door and carpet in his death agony.

One did not need to be a doctor to see that a heart attack had swiftly and suddenly struck him down.

Now that I knew the worst I acted with decision. I dragged the body by the shoulders into the room until it lay in the centre of the carpet. Then I locked the door.

The foreboding of evil that had cast its black shadow over my thoughts from the moment I crossed the threshold of this sinister hotel came over me strongly again.

Indeed, my position was, to say the least, scarcely enviable. Here was I, a British officer with British papers of identity, about to be discovered in a German hotel, into which I had introduced myself under false pretences, at dead of night alone with the corpse of a German or Austrian (for such the dead man apparently was)!

It was undoubtedly a most awkward fix.

I listened.

Everything in the hotel was silent as the grave.

I turned from my gloomy forebodings to look again at the stranger. In his crisp black hair and slightly protuberant cheekbones I traced again the hint of Jewish ancestry I had remarked before. Now that the man's eyes—his big, thoughtful eyes that had stared at me out of the darkness of the corridor—were closed, he looked far less foreign than before: in fact he might almost have passed as an Englishman.

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He was a young man—about my own age, I judged—(I shall be twenty-eight next birthday) and about my own height, which is five feet ten. There was something about his appearance and build that struck a chord very faintly in my memory.

Had I seen the fellow before?

I remembered now that I had noticed something oddly familiar about him when I first saw him for that brief moment in the corridor.

I looked down at him again as he lay on his back on the faded carpet. I brought the candle down closer and scanned his features.

He certainly looked less foreign than he did before. He might not be a German after all: more likely a Hungarian or a Pole, perhaps even a Dutchman. His German had been too flawless for a Frenchman—for a Hungarian, either, for that matter.

I leant back on my knees to ease my cramped position. As I did so I caught a glimpse of the stranger's three-quarters face.

Why! He reminded me of Francis a little!

There certainly was a suggestion of my brother in the man's appearance. Was it the thick black hair, the small dark moustache? Was it the well-chiselled mouth? It was rather a hint of Francis than a resemblance to him.

The stranger was fully dressed. The jacket of his blue serge suit had fallen open and I saw a portfolio in the inner breast pocket. Here, I thought, might be a clue to the dead man's identity. I fished out the portfolio, then rapidly ran my fingers over the stranger's other pockets.

I left the portfolio to the last.

The jacket pockets contained nothing else except a white silk handkerchief unmarked. In the right-hand top pocket of the waistcoat was a neat silver cigarette case, perfectly plain, containing half a dozen cigarettes. I took one out and looked at it. It was a Melania, a cigarette I happen to know for they stock them at one of my clubs, the Dionysus, and it chances to be the only place in London where you can get the brand.

It looked as if my unknown friend had come from London.

There was also a plain silver watch of Swiss make.

In the trousers pocket was some change, a little English silver and coppers, some Dutch silver and paper money. In the right-hand trouser pocket was a bunch of keys.

That was all.

I put the different articles on the floor beside me. Then I got up, put the candle on the table, drew the chair up to it and opened the portfolio.

In a little pocket of the inner flap were visiting cards. Some were simply engraved with the name in small letters:

Dr. Semlin

Others were more detailed:

Dr. Semlin, Brooklyn, N.Y.
The Halewright Mfg. Coy., Ltd.

There were also half a dozen private cards:

Dr. Semlin, 333 E. 73rd St., New York.
Rivington Park House.

In the packet of cards was a solitary one, larger than the rest, an expensive affair on thick, highly glazed millboard, bearing in gothic characters the name:

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Otto von Steinhardt.

On this card was written in pencil, above the name:

“Hotel Sixt, Vos in’t Tuintje,” and in brackets, thus: “(Mme. Anna Schratt.)”

In another pocket of the portfolio was an American passport surmounted by a flaming eagle and sealed with a vast red seal, sending greetings to all and sundry on behalf of Henry Semlin, a United States citizen, travelling to Europe. Details in the body of the document set forth that Henry Semlin was born at Brooklyn on 31st March, 1886, that his hair was Black, nose Aquiline, chin Firm, and that of special marks he had None. The description was good enough to show me that it was undoubtedly the body of Henry Semlin that lay at my feet.

The passport had been issued at Washington three months earlier. The only *visa* it bore was that of the American Embassy in London, dated two days previously. With it was a British permit, issued to Henry Semlin, Manufacturer, granting him authority to leave the United Kingdom for the purpose of travelling to Rotterdam, further a bill for luncheon served on board the Dutch Royal mail steamer *Koningin Regentes* on yesterday’s date.

In the long and anguishing weeks that followed on that anxious night in the Hotel of the Vos in’t Tuintje, I have often wondered to what malicious promptings, to what insane impulse, I owed the idea that suddenly germinated in my brain as I sat fingering the dead man’s letter-case in that squalid room. The impulse sprang into my brain like a flash and like a flash I acted on it, though I can hardly believe I meant to pursue it to its logical conclusion until I stood once more outside the door of my room.

The examination of the dead man’s papers had shown me that he was an American business man, who had just come from London, having but recently proceeded to England from the United States.

What puzzled me was why an American manufacturer, seemingly of some substance and decently dressed, should go to a German hotel on the recommendation of a German, from his name, and the style of his visiting card, a man of good family.

Semlin might, of course, have been, like myself, a traveller benighted in Rotterdam, owing his recommendation to the hotel to a German acquaintance in the city. Still, Americans are cautious folk and I found it rather improbable that this American business man should adventure himself into this evil-looking house with a large sum of money on his person—he had several hundred pounds of money in Dutch currency notes in a thick wad in his portfolio.

I knew that the British authorities discouraged, as far as they could, neutrals travelling to and fro between England and Germany in war-time. Possibly Semlin wanted to do

business in Germany on his European trip as well as in England. Knowing the attitude of the British authorities, he may well have made his arrangements in Holland for getting into Germany lest the British police should get wind of his purpose and stop him crossing to Rotterdam.

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But his German was so flawless, with no trace of Americanism in voice or accent. And I knew what good use the German Intelligence had made of neutral passports in the past. Therefore I determined to go next door and have a look at Dr. Semlin's luggage. In the back of my mind was ever that harebrain resolve, half-formed as yet but none the less firmly rooted in my head.

Taking up my candle again, I stole out of the room. As I stood in the corridor and turned to lock the bedroom door behind me, the mirror at the end of the passage caught the reflection of my candle.

I looked and saw myself in the glass, a white, staring face.

I looked again. Then I fathomed the riddle that had puzzled me in the dead face of the stranger in my room.

It was not the face of Francis that his features suggested.

It was mine!

* * * * *

The next moment I found myself in No. 33. I could see no sign of the key of the room; Semlin must have dropped it in his fall, so it behoved me to make haste for fear of any untoward interruption. I had not yet heard eleven strike on the clock.

The stranger's hat and overcoat lay on a chair. The hat was from Scott's: there was nothing except a pair of leather gloves in the overcoat pockets.

A bag, in size something between a small kit-bag and a large handbag, stood open on the table. It contained a few toilet necessities, a pair of pyjamas, a clean shirt, a pair of slippers, ... nothing of importance and not a scrap of paper of any kind.

I went through everything again, looked in the sponge bag, opened the safety razor case, shook out the shirt, and finally took everything out of the bag and stacked the things on the table.

At the bottom of the bag I made a strange discovery. The interior of the bag was fitted with that thin yellow canvas-like material with which nearly all cheap bags, like this one was, are lined. At the bottom of the bag an oblong piece of the lining had apparently been torn clean out. The leather of the bag showed through the slit. Yet the lining round the edges of the gap showed no fraying, no trace of rough usage. On the contrary, the edges were pasted neatly down on the leather.

I lifted the bag and examined it. As I did so I saw lying on the table beside it an oblong of yellow canvas. I picked it up and found the under side stained with paste and the brown of the leather.

It was the missing piece of lining and it was stiff with something that crackled inside it.

I slit the piece of canvas up one side with my penknife. It contained three long fragments of paper, a thick, expensive, highly glazed paper. Top, bottom and left-hand side of each was trim and glossy: the fourth side showed a broken edge as though it had been roughly cut with a knife. The three slips of paper were the halves of three quarto sheets of writing, torn in two, lengthways, from top to bottom.

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At the top of each slip was part of some kind of crest in gold, what, it was not possible to determine, for the crest had been in the centre of the sheet and the cut had gone right through it.

The letter was written in English but the name of the recipient as also the date was on the missing half.

Somewhere in the silence of the night I heard a door bang. I thrust the slips of paper in their canvas covering into my trousers pocket. I must not be found in that room. With trembling hands I started to put the things back in the bag. Those slips of paper, I reflected as I worked, at least rent the veil of mystery enveloping the corpse that lay stiffening in the next room. This, at any rate, was certain: German or American or hyphenate, Henry Semlin, manufacturer and spy, had voyaged from America to England not for the purposes of trade but to get hold of that mutilated document now reposing in my pocket. Why he had only got half the letter and what had happened to the other half was more than I could say ... it sufficed for me to know that its importance to somebody was sufficient to warrant a journey on its behalf from one side to the other of the Atlantic.

As I opened the bag my fingers encountered a hard substance, as of metal, embedded in the slack of the lining in the joints of the mouth. At first I thought it was a coin, then I felt some kind of clasp or fastening behind it and it seemed to be a brooch. Out came my pocket knife again and there lay a small silver star, about as big as a regimental cap badge, embedded in the thin canvas. It bore an inscription. In stencilled letters I read:

O2 G
Abt. VII.

Here was Dr. Semlin's real visiting-card.

I held in my hand a badge of the German secret police.

You cannot penetrate far behind the scenes in Germany without coming across the traces of Section Seven of the Berlin Police Presidency, the section that is known euphemistically as that of the Political Police. Ostensibly it attends to the safety of the monarch, and of distinguished personages generally, and the numerous suite that used to accompany the Kaiser on his visits to England invariably included two or three top-hatted representatives of the section.

The ramifications of *Abteilung Sieben* are, in reality, much wider. It does such work in connection with the newspapers as is even too dirty for the German Foreign Office to touch, comprising everything from the launching of personal attacks in obscure blackmailing sheets against inconvenient politicians to the escorting of unpleasantly truthful foreign correspondents to the frontier. It is the obedient handmaiden of the

Intelligence Department of both War Office and Admiralty in Germany, and renders faithful service to the espionage which is constantly maintained on officials, politicians, the clergy and the general public in that land of careful organisation.

Section Seven is a vast subterranean department. Always working in the dark, its political complexion is a handy cloak for blacker and more sinister activities. It is frequently entrusted with commissions of which it would be inexpedient for official Germany to have cognizance and of which, accordingly, official Germany can always safely repudiate when occasion demands.

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I thrust the pin of the badge into my braces and fastened it there, crammed the rest of the dead man's effects into his bag, stuck his hat upon my head and threw his overcoat on my arm, picked up his bag and crept away. In another minute I was back in my room, my brain aflame with the fire of a great enterprise.

Here, to my hand, lay the key of that locked land which held the secret of my lost brother. The question I had been asking myself, ever since I had first discovered the dead man's American papers of identity, was this. Had I the nerve to avail myself of Semlin's American passport to get into Germany? The answer to that question lay in the little silver badge. I knew that no German official, whatever his standing, whatever his orders, would refuse passage to the silver star of Section Seven. It need only be used, too, as a last resource, for I had my papers as a neutral. Could I but once set foot in Germany, I was quite ready to depend on my wits to see me through. One advantage, I knew, I must forgo. That was the half-letter in its canvas case.

If that document was of importance to Section Seven of the German Police, then it was of equal, nay, of greater importance to my country. If I went, that should remain behind in safe keeping. On that I was determined.

"Never before, since the war began," I told myself, "can any Englishman have had such an opportunity vouchsafed to him for getting easily and safely into that jealously guarded land as you have now! You have plenty of money, what with your own and this ..." and I fingered Semlin's wad of notes, "and provided you can keep your head sufficiently to remember always that you are a German, once over the frontier you should be able to give the Huns the slip and try and follow up the trail of poor Francis.

"And maybe," I argued further (so easily is one's better judgment defeated when one is young and set on a thing), "maybe in German surroundings, you may get some sense into that mysterious jingle you got from Dicky Allerton as the sole existing clue to the disappearance of Francis."

Nevertheless, I wavered. The risks were awful. I had to get out of that evil hotel in the guise of Dr. Semlin, with, as the sole safeguard against exposure, should I fall in with the dead man's employers or friends, that slight and possibly imaginative resemblance between him and me: I had to take such measures as would prevent the fraud from being detected when the body was discovered in the hotel: above all, I had to ascertain, before I could definitely resolve to push on into Germany, whether Semlin was already known to the people at the hotel or whether—as I surmised to be the case—this was also his first visit to the house in the Vos in't Tuintje.

In any case, I was quite determined in my own mind that the only way to get out of the place with Semlin's document without considerable unpleasantness, if not grave danger, would be to transfer his identity and effects to myself and vice versa. When I saw the

way a little clearer I could decide whether to take the supreme risk and adventure myself into the enemy's country.

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Whatever I was going to do, there were not many hours of the night left in which to act, and I was determined to be out of that house of ill omen before day dawned. If I could get clear of the hotel and at the same time ascertain that Semlin was as much a stranger there as myself, I could decide on my further course of action in the greater freedom of the streets of Rotterdam. One thing was certain: the waiter had let the question of Semlin's papers stand over until the morning, as he had done in my case, for Semlin still had his passport in his possession.

After all, if Semlin was unknown at the hotel, the waiter had only seen him for the same brief moment as he had seen me.

Thus I reasoned and argued with myself, but in the meantime I acted. I had nothing compromising in my suit-case, so that caused no difficulty. My British passport and permit and anything bearing any relation to my personality, such as my watch and cigarette case, both of which were engraved with my initials, I transferred to the dead man's pockets. As I bent over the stiff, cold figure with its livid face and clutching fingers, I felt a difficulty which I had hitherto resolutely shirked forcing itself squarely into the forefront of my mind.

What was I going to do about the body?

At that moment came a low knocking.

With a sudden sinking at the heart I remembered I had forgotten to lock the door.

CHAPTER V

THE LADY OF THE VOS IN'T TUINTJE

Here was Destiny knocking at the door. In that instant my mind was made up. For the moment, at any rate, I had every card in my hands. I would bluff these stodgy Huns: I would brazen it out: I would be Semlin and go through with it to the bitter end, aye, and if it took me to the very gates of Hell.

The knocking was repeated.

"May one come in?" said a woman's voice in German.

I stepped across the corpse and opened the door a foot or so.

There stood a woman with a lamp. She was a middle-aged woman with an egg-shaped face, fat and white and puffy, and pale, crafty eyes. She was in her outdoor clothes, with an enormous vulgar-looking hat and an old-fashioned sealskin cape with a high

collar. The cape which was glistening with rain was half open, and displayed a vast bosom tightly compressed into a white silk blouse. In one hand she carried an oil lamp.

“Frau Schratt,” she said by way of introduction, and raised the lamp to look more closely at me.

Then I saw her face change. She was looking past me into the room, and I knew that the lamplight was falling full upon the ghastly thing that lay upon the floor.

I realized the woman was about to scream, so I seized her by the wrist. She had disgusting hands, fat and podgy and covered with rings.

“Quiet!” I whispered fiercely in her ear, never relaxing my grip on her wrist. “You will be quiet and come in here, do you understand?”

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She sought to shrink from me, but I held her fast and drew her into the room.

She stood motionless with her lamp, at the head of the corpse. She seemed to have regained her self-possession. The woman was no longer frightened. I felt instinctively that her fears had been all for herself, not for that livid horror sprawling on the floor. When she spoke her manner was almost business-like.

"I was told nothing of this," she said. "Who is it? What do you want me to do?"

Of all the sensations of that night, none has left a more unpleasant odour in my memory than the manner of that woman in the chamber of death. Her voice was incredibly hard. Her dull, basilisk eyes, seeking in mine the answers to her questions, gave me an eerie sensation that makes my blood run cold whenever I think of her.

Then suddenly her manner, arrogant, insolent, cruel, changed. She became polite. She was obsequious. Of the two, the first manner became her vastly better. She looked at me with a curious air, almost with reverence, as it seemed to me. She said, in a purring voice:

"Ach, so! I did not understand. The gentleman must excuse me."

And she purred again:

"So!"

It was then I noticed that her eyes were fastened upon my chest. I followed their direction.

They rested on the silver badge I had stuck in my braces.

I understood and held my peace. Silence was my only trump until I knew how the land lay. If I left this woman alone, she would tell me all I wanted to know.

In fact, she began to speak again.

"I expected *you*," she said, "but not... *this*. Who is it this time? A Frenchman, eh?"

I shook my head.

"An Englishman," I said curtly.

Her eyes opened in wonder.

"Ach, nein!" she cried—and you would have said her voice vibrated with pleasure—"An Englishman! Ei, ei!"

If ever a human being licked its chops, that woman did.

She wagged her head and repeated to herself:

“Ei, ei !” adding, as if to explain her surprise, “he is the first we have had.

“You brought him here, eh! But why up here? Or did der Stelze send him?”

She fired this string of questions at me without pausing for a reply. She continued:

“I was out, but Karl told me. There was another came, too: Franz sent him.”

“This is he,” I said. “I caught him prying in my room and he died.”

“Ach!” she ejaculated ... and in her voice was all the world of admiration that a German woman feels for brute man.... “The Herr Englander came into your room and he died. So, so! But one must speak to Franz. The man drinks too much. He is always drunk. He makes mistakes. It will not do. I will...”

“I wish you to do nothing against Franz,” I said. “This Englishman spoke German well: Karl will tell you.”

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"As the gentleman wishes," was the woman's reply in a voice so silky and so servile that I felt my gorge rise.

"She looks like a slug!" I said to myself, as she stood there, fat and sleek and horrible.

"Here are his passport and other papers," I said, bending down and taking them from the dead man's pocket. "He was an English officer, you see?" And I unfolded the little black book stamped with the Royal Arms.

She leant forward and I was all but stifled with the stale odour of the patchouli with which her faded body was drenched.

Then, making a sheaf of passport and permit, I held them in the flame of the candle.

"But we always keep them!" expostulated the hotel-keeper.

"This passport must die with the man," I replied firmly. "He must not be traced. I want no awkward enquiries made, you understand. Therefore ..." and I flung the burning mass of papers into the grate.

"Good, good!" said the German and put her lamp down on the table. "There was a telephone message for you," she added, "to say that der Stelze will come at eight in the morning to receive what you have brought."

The deuce! This was getting awkward. Who the devil was Stelze?

"Coming at eight is he?" I said, simply for the sake of saying something.

"Jawohl!" replied Frau Schratt. "He was here already this morning. He was nervous, oh! very, and expected you to be here. Already two days he is waiting here to go on."

"So," I said, "he is going to take ... *it* on with him, is he?" (I knew where he was "going on" to, well enough: he was going to see that document safe into Germany.)

There was a malicious ring in the woman's voice when she spoke of Stelze. I thought I might profit by this. So I drew her out.

"So Stelze called to-day and gave you his orders, did he?" I said, "and ... and took charge of things generally, eh?"

Her little eyes snapped viciously.

"Ach!" she said, "der Stelze is der Stelze. He has power; he has authority; he can make and unmake men. But I ... I in my time have broken a dozen better men than he and yet he dares to tell Anna Schratt that ... that ..."

She raised her voice hysterically, but broke off before she could finish the sentence. I saw she thought she had said too much.

“He won’t play that game with me,” I said. Strength is the quality that every German, man, woman and child, respects, and strength alone. My safety depended on my showing this ignoble creature that I received orders from no one. “You know what he is. One runs the risk, one takes trouble, one is successful. Then he steps in and gathers the laurels. No, I am not going to wait for him.”

The hotel-keeper sprang to her feet, her faded face all ravaged by the shadow of a great fear.

“You wouldn’t dare!” she said.

“I would,” I retorted. “I’ve done my work and I’ll report to head-quarters and to no one else!”

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My eyes fell upon the body.

“Now, what are we going to do with this?” I said. “You must help me, Frau Schratt. This is serious. This must not be found here.”

She looked up at me in surprise.

“That?” she said, and she kicked the body with her foot. “Oh, that will be all right with die Schratt! ‘It must not be found here’” (she mimicked my grave tone). “It will not be found here, young man!”

And she chuckled with all the full-bodied good humour of a fat person.

“You mean?”

“I mean what I mean, young man, and what you mean,” she replied. “When they are in a difficulty, when there are complications, when there is any unpleasantness.. like *this* ... they remember die Schratt, ‘die fesche Anna,’ as they called me once, and it is ‘gnadige Frau’ here and ‘gnadige Frau’ there and a diamond bracelet or a pearl ring, if only I will do the little conjuring trick that will smooth everything over. But when all goes well, then I am ‘old Schratt,’ ‘old hag,’ ‘old woman,’ and I must take my orders and beg nicely and ... bah!”

Her words ended in a gulp, which in any other woman would have been a sob.

Then she added in her hard harlot’s voice:

“You needn’t worry your head about *him*, there! Leave him to me! It’s my trade!”

At those words, which covered God only knows what horrors of midnight disappearances, of ghoulish rites with packing-case and sack, in the dark cellars of that evil house, I felt that, could I but draw back from the enterprise to which I had so rashly committed myself, I would do so gladly. Only then did I begin to realize something of the utter ruthlessness, the cold, calculating ferocity, of the most bitter and most powerful enemy which the British Empire has ever had.

But it was too late to withdraw now. The die was cast. Destiny, knocking at my door, had found me ready to follow, and I was committed to whatever might befall me in my new personality.

The German woman turned to go.

“Der Stelze will be here at eight, then,” she said. “I suppose the gentleman will take his early morning coffee before.”

"I shan't be here," I said. "You can tell your friend I've gone."

She turned on me like a flash.

She was hard as flint again.

"Nein!" she cried. "You stay here!"

"No," I answered with equal force, "not I ..."

"... Orders are orders and you and I must obey!"

"But who is Stelze that he should give orders to me?" I cried.

"Who is...?" She spoke aghast.

"... And you yourself," I continued, "were saying ..."

"When an order has been given, what you or I think or say is of no account," the woman said. "It is an order: you and I know *whose* order. Let that suffice. You stay here! Good night!"

With that she was gone. She closed the door behind her; the key rattled in the lock and I realized that I was a prisoner. I heard the woman's footfalls die away down the corridor.

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That distant clock cleaved the silence of the night with twelve ponderous strokes. Then the chimes played a pretty jingling little tune that rang out clearly in the still, rain-washed air.

I stood petrified and reflected on my next move.

Twelve o'clock! I had eight hours' grace before Stelze, the man of mystery and might, arrived to unmask me and hand me over to the tender mercies of Madame and of Karl. Before eight o'clock arrived I must—so I summed up my position—be clear of the hotel and in the train for the German frontier—if I could get a train—else I must be out of Rotterdam, by that hour.

But I must *act* and act without delay. There was no knowing when that dead man lying on the floor might procure me another visit from Madame and her myrmidons. The sooner I was out of that house of death the better.

The door was solid; the lock was strong. That I discovered without any trouble. In any case, I reflected, the front-door of the hotel would be barred and bolted at this hour of the night, and I could scarcely dare hope to escape by the front without detection, even if Karl were not actually in the entrance hall. There must be a back entrance to the hotel, I thought, for I had seen that the windows of my room opened on to the narrow street lining the canal which ran at the back of the house.

Escape by the windows was impossible. The front of the house dropped sheer down and there was nothing to give one a foothold. But I remembered the window in the *cabinet de toilette* giving on to the little air-shaft. That seemed to offer a slender chance of escape.

For the second time that night I opened the casement and inhaled the fetid odours arising from the narrow court. All the windows looking, like mine, upon the air-shaft were shrouded in darkness; only a light still burned in the window beneath the grating with the iron stair to the little yard. What was at the foot of the stair I could not descry, but I thought I could recognize the outline of a door.

From the window of the *cabinet de toilette* to the yard the sides of the house, cased in stained and dirty stucco, fell sheer away. Measured with the eye the drop from window to the pavement was about fifty feet. With a rope and something to break one's fall, it might, I fancied, be managed....

From that on, things moved swiftly. First with my penknife I ripped the tailor's tab with my name from the inside pocket of my coat and burnt it in the candle; nothing else I had on was marked, for I had had to buy a lot of new garments when I came out of hospital. I took Semlin's overcoat, hat and bag into the *cabinet de toilette* and stood them in readiness by the window. As a precaution against surprise I pushed the massive

mahogany bedstead right across the doorway and thus barricaded the entrance to the room.

From either side of the fireplace hung two bell-ropes, twisted silk cords of faded crimson with dusty tassels. Mounting on the mantelpiece I cut the bell-ropes off short where they joined the wire. Testing them I found them apparently solid—at any rate they must serve. I knotted them together.

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Back to the *cabinet de toilette* I went to find a suitable object to which to fasten my rope. There was nothing in the little room save the washstand, and that was fragile and quite unsuited for the purpose. I noticed that the window was fitted with shutters on the outside fastened back against the wall. They had not been touched for years, I should say, for the iron peg holding them back was heavy with rust and the shutters were covered with dust. I closed the left-hand shutter and found that it fastened solidly to the window-frame by means of massive iron bolts, top and bottom.

Here was the required support for my rope. The poker thrust through the wooden slips of the shutter held the rope quite solidly. I attached my rope to the poker with an expert knot that I had picked up at a course in tying knots during a preposterously dull week I had spent at the base in France. Then I dragged from the bed the gigantic eiderdown pincushion and the two massive pillows, stripping off the pillow-slips lest their whiteness might attract attention whilst they were fulfilling the unusual mission for which I destined them.

At the window of the *cabinet de toilette* I listened a moment. All was silent as the grave. Resolutely I pitched out the eiderdown into the dark and dirty air shaft. It sailed gracefully earthwards and settled with a gentle plop on the stones of the tiny yard. The pillows followed. The heavier thud they would have made was deadened by the billowy mass of the *edredon*. Semlin's bag went next, and made no sound to speak of; then his overcoat and hat followed suit.

I noticed, with a grateful heart, that the eiderdown and pillows covered practically the whole of the flags of the yard.

I went back once more to the room and blew out the candle. Then, taking a short hold on my silken rope, I clambered out over the window ledge and started to let myself down, hand over hand, into the depths.

My two bell-ropes, knotted together, were about twenty feet long, so I had to reckon on a clear drop of something over thirty feet. The poker and shutter held splendidly firm, and I found little difficulty in lowering myself, though I barked my knuckles most unpleasantly on the rough stucco of the wall. As I reached the extremity of my rope I glanced downward. The red splash of the eiderdown, just visible in the light from the adjoining window, seemed to be a horrible distance below me. My spirit failed me. My determination began to ebb. I could never risk it.

The rope settled the question for me. It snapped without warning—how it had supported my weight up to then I don't know—and I fell in a heap (and, as it seemed to me at the time, with a most reverberating crash) on to the soft divan I had prepared for my reception.

I came down hard, very hard, but old Madame's plump eiderdown and pillows certainly helped to break my fall. I dropped square on top of the eiderdown with one knee on a pillow and, though shaken and jarred, I found I had broken no bones.



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Nor did my sense leave me. In a minute I was up on my feet again. I listened. All was still silent. I cast a glance upwards. The window from which I had descended was still dark. I could see the broken bell-ropes dangling from the shutter, and I noted, with a glow of professional pride, that my expert join between the two ropes had not given. The lower rope had parted in the middle

I crammed Semlin's hat on my head, retrieved his bag and overcoat from the corner of the court where they had fallen and the next moment was tiptoeing down the ladder.

The iron stair ran down beside the window in which I had seen the light burning. The lower part of the window was screened off by a dirty muslin curtain. Through the upper part I caught a glimpse of a sort of scullery with a paraffin lamp standing on a wooden table. The room was empty. From top to bottom the window was protected by heavy iron bars.

At the foot of the iron stair stood, as I had anticipated, a door. It was my last chance of escape. It stood a dozen yards from the bottom of the ladder across a dank, little paved area where tins of refuse were standing—a small door with a brass handle.

I ducked low as I clambered down the iron ladder so as not to be seen from the window should anyone enter the scullery as I passed. Treading very softly I crept across the little area and, as quietly as I could, turned the handle of the door.

It turned round easily in my hand, but nothing happened.

The door was locked.

CHAPTER VI

I BOARD THE BERLIN TRAIN AND LEAVE A LAME GENTLEMAN ON THE PLATFORM

I was caught like a rat in a trap. I could not return by the way I had come and the only egress was closed to me. The area door and window were the only means of escape from the little court. The one was locked, the other barred. I was fairly trapped. All I had to do now was to wait until my absence was discovered and the broken rope found to show them where I was. Then they would come down to the area, I should be confronted with the man, Stelze, and my goose would be fairly cooked.

As quietly as I could I made a complete, thorough, rapid examination of the area. It was a dank, dark place, only lit where the yellow light streamed forth from the scullery. It had a couple of low bays hollowed out of the masonry under the little courtyard, the one filled with wood blocks, the other with broken packingcases, old bottles and like

rubbish. I explored these until my hands came in contact with the damp bricks at the back, but in vain. Door and window remained the only means of escape.

Four tall tin refuse tins stood in line in front of these two bays, a fifth was stowed away under the iron stair. They were all nearly full of refuse, so were useless as hiding places. In any case it accorded neither with the part I was playing nor with my sense of the ludicrous to be discovered by the hotel domestics hiding in a refuse bin.

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I was at my wits' end to know what to do. I had dared so much, all had gone so surprisingly well, that it was heartbreaking to be foiled with liberty almost within my grasp. A great wave of disappointment swept over me until I felt my very heart sicken. Then I heard footsteps and hope revived within me.

I shrunk back into the darkness of the area behind the refuse bins standing in front of the bay nearest the door.

Within the house footsteps were approaching the scullery. I heard a door open, then a man's voice singing. He was warbling in a fine mellow baritone that popular German ballad:

"Das haben die Maedchen so gerne
Die im Stuebchen und die im *Salong*."

The voice hung lovingly and wavered and trilled on that word "*Salong*": the effect was so much to the singer's liking that he sang the stave over again. A bumping and a rattle as of loose objects in an empty box formed the accompaniment to his song.

"A cheery fellow!" I said to myself. If only I could see who it was! But I dare not move into that patch of yellow light from which the only view into the scullery was afforded.

The singing stopped. Again I heard a door open. Was he going away?

Then I saw a thin shaft of light under the area door.

The next moment it was flung back and the waiter, Karl, appeared, still in his blue apron, a bucket in either hand.

He was coming to the refuse bins.

Pudd'n Head Wilson's advice came into my mind; "When angry count up to four; when very angry, swear." I was not angry but scared, terribly scared, scared so that I could hear my heart pulsating in great thuds in my ears. Nevertheless, I followed the advice of the sage of Dawson's Landing and counted to myself: one, two, three, four, one, two, three, four; while my heart hammered out: Keep cool, keep cool, keep cool! And all the time I remained crouching behind the first two refuse bins nearest the door.

The waiter hummed to himself the melody of his little ditty in a deep bourdon as he paused a moment at the door. Then he advanced slowly across the area.

Would he stop at the refuse bins behind which I cowered?

No, he passed them.

The third? The fourth?

No!

He walked straight across the area and went to the bin beneath the stairs.

I muttered a blessing inwardly on the careful habits of the German who organizes even his refuse into separate tubs.

The man had his back to the door.

Now or never was my chance.

I crawled round my friendly garbage tins, reached the area door on tip-toe and stepped softly into the house. As I did so I heard the clank of tin as Karl replaced the lid of the tub.

A dark passage stretched out in front of me. Immediately to my right was the scullery door wide open. I must avoid the scullery at all costs. The man might remain there and I could not risk him driving me before him back to the entrance hall of the hotel.

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I crept down the dark passage with hands outstretched. Presently they fell upon the latch of a door. I pressed it, the door opened inwards into the darkness and I passed through. As I softly closed the door behind me I heard Karl's heavy step and the grinding of the key as he locked the area door.

I stood in a kind of cupboard in pitch darkness, hardly daring to breathe.

Once more I heard the man singing his idiotic song. I did not dare look out from my hiding-place, for his voice sounded so near that I feared he might be still in the passage.

So I stood and waited.

* * * * *

I must have stayed there for an hour in the dark. I heard the waiter coming and going in the scullery, listened to his heavy tramp, to his everlasting snatch of song, to the rattle of utensils, as he went about his work. Every minute of the time I was tortured by the apprehension that he would come to the cupboard in the passage.

It was cold in that damp subterranean place. The cupboard was roomy enough, so I thought I would put on the overcoat I was carrying. As I stretched out my arm, my hand struck hard against some kind of projecting hook in the wall behind me.

"Damn!" I swore savagely under my breath, but I put out my hand again to find out what had hurt me. My fingers encountered the cold iron of a latch. I pressed it and it gave.

A door swung open and I found myself in another little area with a flight of stone steps leading to the street.

* * * * *

I was in a narrow lane driven between the tall sides of the houses. It was a cul-de-sac. At the open end I could see the glimmer of street lamps. It had stopped raining and the air was fresh and pleasant. Carrying my bag I walked briskly down the lane and presently emerged in a quiet thoroughfare traversed by a canal—probably the street, I thought, that I had seen from the windows of my bedroom. The Hotel Sixt lay to the right of the lane: I struck out to the left and in a few minutes found myself in an open square behind the Bourse.

There I found a cab-rank with three or four cabs drawn up in line, the horses somnolent, the drivers snoring inside their vehicles. I stirred up the first and bade the driver take me to the Cafe Tarnowski.

Everyone who has been to Holland knows the Cafe Tarnowski at Rotterdam. It is an immense place with hundreds of marble-topped tables tucked away among palms under

a vast glazed roof. Day or night it never closes: the waiters succeed each other in shifts: day and night the great hall resounds to the cry of orders, the patter of the waiters' feet, the click of dominoes on the marble tables.

Delicious Dutch cafe au lait, a beefsteak and fried potatoes, most succulent of all Dutch dishes, crisp white bread, hot from the midnight baking, and appetizing Dutch butter, largely compensated for the thrills of the night. Then I sent for some more coffee, black this time, and a railway guide, and lighting a cigarette began to frame my plan of campaign.

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The train for Berlin left Rotterdam at seven in the morning. It was now ten minutes past two, so I had plenty of time. From that night onward, I told myself, I was a German, and from that moment I set myself assiduously to *feel* myself a German as well as enact the part.

“It’s no use dressing a part,” Francis used to say to me; “you must *feel* it as well. If I were going to disguise myself as a Berliner, I should not be content to shave my head and wear a bowler hat with a morning coat and get my nails manicured pink. I should begin by persuading myself that I was the Lord of creation, that bad manners is a sign of manly strength and that dishonesty is the highest form of diplomacy. Then only should I set about getting the costume!”

Poor old Francis! How shrewd he was and how well he knew his Berliners!

There is nothing like newspapers for giving one an idea of national sentiment. I had not spoken to a German, save to a few terrified German rats, prisoners of war in France, since the beginning of the war and I knew that my knowledge of German thought must be rusty. So I sent the willing waiter for all the German papers and periodicals he could lay his hands on. He returned with stacks of them, *Berliner Tageblatt*, *Kelnische Zeitung*, *Vorwärts*; the alleged comic papers, *Kladderadatsch*, *Lustige Bletter* and *Simplicissimus*; the illustrated press, *Leipziger Illustrierte Zeitung*, *Der Weltkrieg im Bild*, and the rest: that remarkable cafe even took in such less popular publications as Harden’s *Zukunft* and semi-blackmailing rags like *Der Roland von Berlin*.

For two hours I saturated myself with German contemporary thought as expressed in the German press. I deliberately laid my mind open to conviction; I repeated to myself over and over again: “We Germans are fighting a defensive war: the scoundrelly Grey made the world-war: Gott strafe England!” Absurd as this proceeding seems to me when I look back upon it, I would not laugh at myself at the time. I must be German, I must feel German, I must think German: on that would my safety in the immediate future depend.

I laid aside my reading in the end with a feeling of utter amazement. In every one of these publications, in peace-time so widely dissimilar in conviction and trend, I found the same mentality, the same outlook, the same parrot-like cries. What the *Cologne Gazette* shrieked from its editorial columns, the comic (God save the mark) press echoed in foul and hideous caricature. Here was organization with a vengeance, the mobilization of national thought, a series of gramophone records fed into a thousand different machines so that each might play the selfsame tune.

“You needn’t worry about your German mentality,” I told myself, “you’ve got it all here! You’ve only got to be a parrot like the rest and you’ll be as good a Hun as Hindenburg!”

A Continental waiter, they say, can get one anything one chooses to ask for at any hour of the day or night. I was about to put this theory to the test.

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"Waiter," I said (of course, in German), "I want a bag, a handbag. Do you think you could get me one?"

"Does the gentleman want it now?" the man replied.

"This very minute," I answered.

"About that size?"—indicating Semlin's. "Yes, or smaller if you like: I am not particular."

"I will see what can be done."

In ten minutes the man was back with a brown leather bag about a size smaller than Semlin's. It was not new and he charged me thirty gulden (which is about fifty shillings) for it. I paid with a willing heart and tipped him generously to boot, for I wanted a bag and could not wait till the shops opened without missing the train for Germany.

I paid my bill and drove off to the Central Station through the dark streets with my two bags. The clocks were striking six as I entered under the great glass dome of the station hall.

I went straight to the booking-office, and bought a first-class ticket, single, to Berlin. One never knows what may happen and I had several things to do before the train went.

The bookstall was just opening. I purchased a sovereign's worth of books and magazines, English, French and German, and crammed them into the bag I had procured at the cafe. Thus laden I adjourned to the station buffet.

There I set about executing a scheme I had evolved for leaving the document which Semlin had brought from England in a place of safety, whence it could be recovered without difficulty, should anything happen to me. I knew no one in Holland save Dicky, and I could not send him the document, for I did not trust the post. For the same reason I would not post the document home to my bank in England: besides, I knew one could not register letters until eight o'clock, by which hour I hoped to be well on my way into Germany.

No, my bag, conveniently weighted with books and deposited at the station cloak-room, should be my safe. The comparative security of station cloak-rooms as safe deposits has long been recognized by jewel thieves and the like and this means of leaving my document behind in safety seemed to me to be better than any other I could think of.

So I dived into my bag and from the piles of literature it contained picked up a book at random. It was a German brochure: *Gott strafe England!* by Prof. Dr. Hugo Bischoff, of the University of Goettingen. The irony of the thing appealed to my sense of humour. "So be it!" I said. "The worthy Professor's fulminations against my country shall have



the honour of harbouring the document which is, apparently, of such value to *his* country!" And I tucked the little canvas case away inside the pages of the pamphlet, stuck the pamphlet deep down among the books and shut the bag.

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Seeing its harmless appearance the cloak-room receipt—I calculated—would, unlike Semlin's document, attract no attention if, by any mischance, it fell into wrong hands *en route*. I therefore did not scruple to commit it to the post. Before taking my bag of books to the cloak-room I wrote two letters. Both were to Ashcroft—Ashcroft of the Foreign Office, who got me my passport and permit to come to Rotterdam. Herbert Ashcroft and I were old friends. I addressed the envelopes to his private house in London. The Postal Censor, I knew, keen though he always is after letters from neutral countries, would leave old Herbert's correspondence alone.

The first letter was brief. "Dear Herbert," I wrote, "would you mind looking after the enclosed until you hear from me again? Filthy weather here. Yours, D.O." This letter was destined to contain the cloak-room receipt. To conceal the importance of an enclosure, it is always a good dodge to send the covering letter under separate cover.

"Dear Herbert," I said in my second letter, "If you don't hear from me within two months of this date regarding the enclosure you will have already received, please send someone, or, preferably, go yourself and collect my luggage at the cloak-room of the Rotterdam Central Station. I know how busy you always are. Therefore you will understand my reasons for making this inordinate claim upon your time. Yours, D.O." And, by way of a clue, I added, inconsequently enough: "*Gott strafe England!*"

I chuckled inwardly at the thought of Herbert's face on receiving this preposterous demand that he should abandon his dusty desk in Downing Street and betake himself across the North Sea to fetch my luggage. But he'd go all right. I knew my Herbert, dull and dry and conventional, but a most faithful friend.

I called a porter at the entrance of the buffet and handing him Semlin's bag and overcoat, bade him find me a first-class carriage in the Berlin train when it arrived. I would meet him on the platform. Then, at the cloak-room opposite, I gave in my bag of books, put the receipt in the first letter and posted it in the letter-box within the station. I went out into the streets with the second letter and posted it in a letter-box let into the wall of a tobacconist's shop in a quiet street a few turnings away. By this arrangement I reckoned Herbert would get the letter with the receipt before the covering letter arrived.

Returning to the railway station I noticed a kind of slop shop which despite the early hour was already open. A fat Jew in his shirt-sleeves, his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, stood at the entrance framed in hanging overcoats and bats and boots. I had no umbrella and it struck me that a waterproof of some kind might not be a bad addition to my extremely scanty wardrobe. Moreover, I reflected that with the rubber shortage rain-coats must be at a premium in Germany.



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So I followed the bowing son of Shem into his dark and dirty shop and emerged presently wearing an appallingly ugly green mackintosh reeking hideously of rubber. It was a shocking garment but I reflected that I was a German and must choose my garb accordingly.

Outside the shop I nearly ran into a little man who was loafing in the doorway. He was a wizened, scrubby old fellow wearing a dirty peaked cap with a band of tarnished gold. I knew him at once for one of those guides, half tout, half bully, that infest the railway termini of all great Continental cities.

"Want a guide, sir?" the man said in German.

I shook my head and hurried on. The man trotted beside me. "Want a good, cheap hotel, sir? Good, respectable house.... Want a ..."

"Ach! gehen sie zum Teufel!" I cried angrily. But the man persisted, running along beside me and reeling off his tout's patter in a wheezing, asthmatic voice. I struck off blindly down the first turning we came to, hoping to be rid of the fellow, but in vain. Finally, I stopped and held out a gulden.

"Take this and go away!" I said.

The old fellow waved the coin aside.

"Danke, danke," he said nonchalantly, looking at the same time to right and left.

Then he said in a calm English voice, utterly different from his whining accents of a moment before:

"You must be a dam' cool hand!"

But he didn't bluff me, staggered though I was. I said quickly in German:

"What do you want with me? I don't understand you. If you annoy me any more I shall call the police!"

Again he spoke in English and it was the voice of a well-bred Englishman that spoke:

"You're either a past master at the game or raving mad. Why! the whole station is humming after you! Yet you walked out of the buffet and through the whole lot of them without turning a hair. No wonder they never spotted you!"

Again I answered in German:

"Ich verstehe nicht!"

But he went on in English, without seeming to notice my observation:

“Hang it all, man, you can’t go into Germany wearing a regimental tie!”

My hand flew to my collar and the blood to my head. What a cursed amateur I was, after all! I had entirely forgotten that I was wearing my regimental colours. I was crimson with vexation but also with a sense of relief. I felt I might trust this man. It would be a sharp German agent who would notice a small detail like that.

Still I resolved to stick to German: I would trust nobody.

But the guide had started his patter again. I saw two workmen approaching. When they had passed, he said, this time in English:

“You’re quite right to be cautious with a stranger like me, but I want to warn you. Why, I’ve been following you round all the morning. Lucky for you it was me and not one of the others....”

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Still I was silent. The little man went on:

"For the past half-hour they have been combing that station for you. How you managed to escape them I don't know except that none of them seems to have a very clear idea of your appearance. You don't look very British, I grant you; but I spotted your tie and then I recognized the British officer all right.

"No, don't worry to tell me anything about yourself—it is none of my business to know, any more than you will find out anything about me. I know where you are going, for I heard you take your ticket; but you may as well understand that you have as much chance of getting into your train if you walk into the railway hall and up the stairs in the ordinary way as you have of flying across the frontier."

"But they can't stop me!" I said. "This isn't Germany...."

"Bah!" said the guide. "You will be jostled, there will be an altercation, a false charge, and you will miss your train! *They* will attend to the rest!

"Damn it, man," he went on, "I know what I'm talking about. Here, come with me and I'll show you. You have twenty minutes before the train goes. Now start the German again!"

We went down the street together for all the world like a "mug" in tow of one of those black-guard guides. As we approached the station the guide said in his whining German:

"Pay attention to me now. I shall leave you here. Go to the suburban booking-office—the entrance is in the street to the left of the station hall. Go into the first-class waiting-room and look out of the window that gives on to the station hall. There you will see some of the forces mobilized against you. There is a regular cordon of guides—like me—drawn across the entrances to the main-line platforms—unostentatiously, of course. If you look you will see plenty of plain-clothes Huns, too...."

"Guides?" I said.

He nodded cheerfully.

"Looks bad for me, doesn't it? But one gets better results by being one of them. Oh! it's all right. In any case you've got to trust me now.

"See here! When you have satisfied yourself that I'm correct in what I say, take a platform ticket and walk upstairs to platform No. 5. On that platform you will find a train. Go to the end where the metals run out of the station, where the engine would be coupled on, and get into the last first-class carriage. On no account move from there until you see me. Now then, I'll have that gulden!"



I gave him the coin. The old fellow looked at it and wagged his head, so I gave him another, whereupon he took off his cap, bowed low and hurried off.

In the suburban side waiting-room I peered out of the window on to the station hall. True enough, I saw one, two, four, six guides loafing about the barriers leading to the main-line platforms. There seemed to be a lot of people in the hall and certainly a number of the men possessed that singular taste in dress, those rotundities of contour, by which one may distinguish the German in a crowd.

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I now had no hesitation in following the guide's instructions to the letter. Platform No. 5 was completely deserted as I emerged breathless from the long staircase and I had no difficulty in getting into the last first-class carriage unobserved. I sat down by the window on the far side of the carriage.

Alongside it ran the brown panels and gold lettering of a German restaurant car.

I looked at my watch. It was ten minutes to seven. There was no sign of my mysterious friend. I wondered vaguely, too, what had become of my porter. True, there was nothing of importance in Semlin's bag, but a traveller with luggage always commands more confidence than one without.

Five minutes to seven! Still no word from the guide. The minutes ticked away. By Jove! I was going to miss the train. But I sat resolutely in my corner. I had put my trust in this man. I would trust him to the last.

Suddenly his face appeared in the window at my elbow. The door was flung open.

"Quick!" he whispered in my ear, "follow me."

"My things ..." I gasped with one foot on the foot-board of the other train. At the same moment the train began to move.

The guide pointed to the carriage into which I had clambered.

"The porter ..." I cried from the open door, thinking he had not understood me.

The guide pointed towards the carriage again, then tapped himself on the chest with a significant smile.

The next moment he had disappeared and I had not even thanked him.

The Berlin train bumped ponderously out of the station. Peering cautiously out of the carriage, I caught a glimpse of the waiter, Karl, hurrying down the platform. With him was a swarthy, massively built man who leaned heavily on a stick and limped painfully as he ran. One of his feet, I could see, was misshapen and the sweat was pouring down his face.

I would have liked to wave my hand to the pair, but I prudently drew back out of sight of the platform.

Caution, caution, caution, must henceforward be my watchword.

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH A SILVER STAR ACTS AS A CHARM

I have often remarked in life that there are days when some benevolent deity seems to be guiding one's every action. On such days, do what you will, you cannot go wrong. As the Berlin train bumped thunderously over the culverts spanning the canals between the tall, grey houses of Rotterdam and rushed out imperiously into the plain of windmills and pollards beyond, I reflected that this must be my good day, so kindly had some fairy godmother shepherded my footsteps since I had left the cafe.

So engrossed had I been, indeed, in the great enterprise on which I was embarked, that my actions throughout the morning had been mainly automatic. Yet how uniformly had they tended to protect me! I had bought my ticket in advance; I had given my overcoat and bag to a porter that I now knew to have been my saviour in disguise; I had sallied forth from the station and thus given him an opportunity for safe converse with me. The omens were good: I could trust my luck to-day, I felt, and, greatly comforted, I began to look about me.

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I found myself, the only occupant, in a first-class carriage. On the window was plastered a notice, in Dutch and German, to the effect that the carriage was reserved. Suddenly I thought of my bag and overcoat. They were nowhere to be seen. After a little search I found them beneath the seat. In the overcoat pocket was a black tie.

I lost no time in taking the hint. If any of you who read this tale should one day notice a ganger on the railway between Rotterdam and Dordrecht wearing the famous colours of a famous regiment round his neck you will understand how they got there. Then, wearied out with the fatigues of my sleepless night, I fell into a deep slumber, my verdant waterproof swathed round me, Semlin's overcoat about my knees.

* * * * *

I was dreaming fitfully of a mad escape from hordes of wildly clutching guides, led by Karl the waiter, when the screaming of brakes brought me to my senses. The train was sensibly slackening speed. Outside the autumn sun was shining over pleasant brown stretches of moorland bright with heather. The next moment and before I was fully awake we had glided to a standstill at a very spick and span station and the familiar cry of "Alles aussteigen!" rang in my ears.

We were in Germany.

The realization fell upon me like a thunderclap. I was in the enemy's country, sailing under false colours, with only the most meagre information about the man whose place I had taken and no plausible tale, such as I had fully intended to have ready, to carry me through the rigorous scrutiny of the frontier police.

What was my firm? The Halewright Manufacturing Company. What did we manufacture? I had not the faintest idea. Why was I coming to Germany at all? Again I was at a loss.

The clink of iron-shod heels in the corridor and an officer, followed closely by two privates, the white cross of the Landwehr in their helmets, stood at the door.

"Your papers, please," he said curtly but politely.

I handed over my American passport.

"This has not been vised," said the officer.

With a pang I realized that again I was at fault. Of course, the passport should have been stamped at the German Consulate at Rotterdam.

"I had no time," I said boldly. "I am travelling on most important business to Berlin. I only reached Rotterdam last night, after the Consulate was closed."

The lieutenant turned to one of his guards.

“Take the gentleman to the Customs Hall,” he said and went on to the next carriage.

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The soldier appropriated my overcoat and bag and beckoned me to follow him. Outside the platform was railed off. Everyone, I noticed, was shepherded into a long narrow pen made with iron hurdles leading to a locked door over which was written: Zoll-Revision. I was going to take my place in the queue when the soldier prodded me with his elbow. He led me to a side door which opened in the gaunt, bare Customs Hall with its long row of trestles for the examination of the passengers' luggage. In a corner behind a desk was a large group of officers and subordinate officials, all in the grey-green uniform I knew so well from the life in the trenches. The principal seemed to be an immense man, inordinately gross and fat, with a bloated face and great gold spectacles. He was roaring in a loud, angry voice:

"He's not come! There you are! Again we shall have all the trouble for nothing!"

I thought he looked an extraordinarily bad-tempered individual and I fervently prayed that I should not be brought before him.

The doors were flung open. With a rush the hall was invaded with a heterogeneous mob of people huddled pellmell together and driven along before a line of soldiers. For an hour or more babel reigned. Officials bawled at the public: the place rang with the sounds of angry altercation. After a furious dispute one man, wildly gesticulating, was dragged away by two soldiers.

I never saw such a thorough examination in my life. People's bags were literally turned upside down and every single object pried into and besnuffled. After the customs' examination passengers were passed on to the searching-rooms, the men to one side, the women to the other. I caught sight of a female searcher lolling at a door ... a monstrous and grim female who reminded me of those dreadful bathing women at the seaside in our early youth.

The fat official had vanished into an office leading off the Customs Hall. He was, I surmised, the last instance, for several passengers, including a very respectably dressed old lady, were driven into the side office and were seen no more.

During all this scene of confusion no one had taken any notice of me. My guard looked straight in front of him and said never a word. When the hall was all but cleared, a man came to the office door and made a sign to my sentinel.

At a table in the office which, despite the sunshine outside, was heated like a greenhouse, I found the fat official. Something had evidently upset him, for his brows were clouded with anger and his mastiff-like cheeks were trembling with irritation. He thrust a hand out as I entered.

"Your papers!" he grunted.



I handed over my passport.

Directly he had examined it, a red flush spread over his cheeks and forehead and he brought his hand down on the table with a crash. The sentry beside me winced perceptibly.

"It's not vised," the fat official screamed in a voice shrill with anger. "It's worthless... what good do you think is this to me?"

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"Excuse me ..." I said in German.

"I won't excuse you," he roared. "Who are you? What do you want in Germany? You've been to London, I see by this passport."

"I had no time to get my passport stamped at the Consulate at Rotterdam," I said. "I arrived there too late in the evening. I could not wait. I am going to Berlin on most important business."

"That's nothing to do with it," the man shouted. He was working himself up into a fine frenzy. "Your passport is not in order. You're not a German. You're an American. We Germans know what to think of our American friends, especially those who come from London."

A voice outside shouted: "Nach Berlin alles einsteigen." I said as politely as I could, despite my growing annoyance:

"I don't wish to miss my train. My journey to Berlin is of the utmost importance. I trust the train can be held back until I have satisfied you of my good faith. I have here a card from Herr von Steinhardt."

I paused to let the name sink in. I was convinced he must be a big bug of some kind in the German service.

"I don't care a rap for Herr von Steinhardt or Herr von anybody else," the German cried. Then he said curtly to a cringing secretary beside him:

"Has he been searched?"

The secretary cast a frightened look at the sentry.

"No, Herr Major," said the secretary.

"Well, take him away and strip him and bring me anything you find!"

The sentry spun on his heel like an automaton.

The moment had come to play my last card, I felt: I could not risk being delayed on the frontier lest Stelze and his friends should catch up with me. I was surprised to find that apparently they had not telegraphed to have me stopped.

"One moment, Herr Major," I said.

"Take him away!" The fat man waved me aside.

"I warn you," I continued, "that I am on important business. I can convince you of that, too. Only ..." and I looked round the office. "All these must go."

To my amazement the fat man's anger vanished utterly. He stared hard at me, then took off his spectacles and polished them with his handkerchief. After this he said nonchalantly: "Everybody get outside except this gentleman!" The sentry, who had spun round on his heel again, seemed about to speak: his voice expired before it came out of his mouth: he saluted, spun round again and followed the rest out of the room.

When the place was cleared I pulled my left brace out of the armhole of my waistcoat and displayed the silver star.

The fat man sprang up.

"The Herr Doktor must excuse me: I am overwhelmed: I had no idea that the Herr Doktor was not one of these tiresome American spies that are overrunning our country. The Herr Doktor will understand.... If the Herr Doktor had but said ..."

"Herr Major," I said, endeavouring to put as much insolence as I could into my voice (that is what a German understands), "I am not in the habit of bleating my business to every fool I meet. Now I must go back to the train."

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"The Berlin train has gone, Herr Doktor, but..."

"The Berlin train gone?" I said. "But my business brooks no delay. I tell you I must be in Berlin to-night!"

"There is no question of your taking the ordinary train, Herr Doktor," the fat man replied smoothly, "but unfortunately the special which I had ready for you has been countermanded. I thought you were not coming again."

A special? By Jove! I was evidently a personage of note. But a special would never do! Where the deuce was it going to take me?

"The Berlin train was to have been held back until your special was clear," the Major went on, "but we must stop her at Wesel until you have passed. I will attend to that at once!"

He gave some order down the telephone and after a brisk conversation turned to me with a beaming face:

"They will stop her at Wesel and the special will be ready in twenty-five minutes. But there is no hurry. You have an hour or more to spare. Might I offer the Herr Doktor a glass of beer and a sandwich at our officers' casino here?"

Well, I was in for it this time. A special bearing me Heaven knows whither on unknown business...! Perhaps I might be able to extract a little information out of my fat friend if I went with him, so I accepted his invitation with suitable condescension.

The Major excused himself for an instant and returned with my overcoat and bag.

"So!" he cried, "we can leave these here until we come back!" Behind him through the open door I saw a group of officials peering curiously into the room. As we walked through their midst, they fell back with precipitation. There was a positive reverence about their manner which I found extremely puzzling.

A waggonette, driven by an orderly, stood in the station yard, one of the Customs officials, hat in hand, at the door. We drove rapidly through very spick-and-span streets to a little square where the sentry at an iron gate denoted the Officers' Club. In the anteroom four or five officers in field-grey uniform were lounging. As we entered they sprang to their feet and remained stiffly standing while the Major presented them, Hauptmann Pfahl, Oberleutnant Meyer ... a string of names. One of the officers had lost an arm, another was very lame, the remainder were obvious dug-outs.

"An American gentleman, a good friend of ours," was the form in which the Major introduced me to the company. Again I found myself mystified by the extraordinary demonstrations of respect with which I was received. Germans don't like Americans,

especially since they took to selling shells to the Allies, and I began to think that all these officers must know more about me and my mission than I did myself. A stolid orderly, wearing white gloves, brought beer and some extraordinary nasty-looking sardine sandwiches which, on sampling, I realized to be made of “war bread.”

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While the beer was being poured out I glanced round the room, bare and very simply furnished. Terrible chromo-lithographs of the Kaiser and the Crown Prince hung on the walls above a glass filled with war trophies. With a horrible sickness at heart I recognized amongst other emblems a glengarry with a silver badge and a British steel helmet with a gaping hole through the crown. Then I remembered I was in the region of the VIIth Corps, which supplies some of our toughest opponents on the Western front.

Conversation was polite and perfunctory.

"It is on occasions such as these," said the lame officer, "that one recognizes how our brothers overseas are helping the German cause."

"Your work must be extraordinarily interesting," observed one of the dug-outs.

"All your difficulties are now over," said the Major, much in the manner of the chorus of a Greek play. "You will be in Berlin to-night, where your labours will be doubtless rewarded. American friends of Germany are not popular in London, I should imagine!"

I murmured: "Hardly."

"You must possess infinite tact to have aroused no suspicion," said the Major.

"That depends," I said.

"Pardon me," replied the Major, in whom I began to recognize all the signs of an unmitigated gossip, "I know something of the importance of your mission. I speak amongst ourselves, is it not so, gentlemen? There were special orders about you from the Corps Command at Muenster. Your special has been waiting for you here for four days. The gentleman who came to meet you has been in a fever of expectation. He had already left the station this morning when ... when I met you, I sent word for him to pick you up here."

The plot was thickening. I most certainly was a personage of note.

"What part of America do you come from, Mr. Semlin?" said a voice in perfect English from the corner. The one-armed officer was speaking.

"From Brooklyn," I said stoutly, though my heart seemed turned to ice with the shock of hearing my own tongue.

"You have no accent," the other replied suavely.

"Some Americans," I retorted sententiously, "would regard that as a compliment. Not all Americans talk through their noses any more than we all chew or spit in public."

"I know," said the young man. "I was brought up there!"

We were surrounded by smiling faces. This officer who could speak English was evidently regarded as a bit of a wag by his comrades. I seized the opportunity to give them in German a humorous description of my simplicity in explaining to a man brought up in the United States that all Americans were not the caricatures depicted in the European comic press.

There was a roar of laughter from the room.

"Ach, dieser Schmalz!" guffawed the Major, beating his thigh in ecstasy. "Kolossal!" echoed one of the dug-outs. The lame man smiled wanly and said it was "incredible how humorous Schmalz could be."

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I had hoped that the conversation might now be carried on again in German. Nothing of the kind. The room leant back in its chairs, as if expecting the fun to go on.

It did.

"You get your clothes in London," the young officer said.

He was a trimly built young man, very pale from recent illness, with flaxen hair and a bright, bold blue eye—the eye of a fighter. His left sleeve was empty and was fastened across his tunic, in a button-hole of which was twisted the black and white ribbon of the Iron Cross.

"Generally," I answered shortly, "when I go to England. Clothes are cheaper in London."

"You must have a good ear for languages," Schmalz continued; "you speak German like a German and English ..." he paused appreciably, "... like an Englishman."

I felt horribly nervous. This young man never took his eyes off me: he had been staring at me ever since I had entered the room. His manner was perfectly calm and suave.

Still I kept my end up very creditably, I think.

"And not a bad accomplishment, either," I said, smiling brightly, "if one has to visit London in war-time."

Schmalz smiled back with perfect courtesy. But he continued to stare relentlessly at me. I felt scared.

"What is Schmalz jabbering about now?" said one of the dug-outs. I translated for the benefit of the company. My resume gave the dug-out who had spoken the opportunity for launching out on an interminable anecdote about an ulster he had bought on a holiday at Brighton. The story lasted until the white-gloved orderly came and announced that "a gentleman" was there, asking for the Herr Major.

"That'll be your man," exclaimed the Major, starting up—I noticed he made no attempt to bring the stranger in. "Come, let us go to him!"

I stood up and took my leave. Schmalz came to the door of the anteroom with us.

"You are going to Berlin?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied.

"Where shall you be staying?" he asked again.



“Oh, probably at the Adlon!”

“I myself shall be in Berlin next week for my medical examination, and perhaps we may meet again. I should much like to talk more with you about America ... and London. We must have mutual acquaintances.”

I murmured something about being only too glad, at the same time making a mental note to get out of Berlin as soon as I conveniently could.

CHAPTER VIII

I HEAR OF CLUBFOOT AND MEET HIS EMPLOYER

As we went down the staircase, the Major whispered to me:

“I don’t think your man wished me to know his name, for he did not introduce himself when he arrived and he does not come to our Casino. But I know him for all that: it is the young Count von Boden, of the Uhlans of the Guard: his father, the General, is one of the Emperor’s aides-de-camp: he was, for a time, tutor to the Crown Prince.”

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A motor-car stood at the door, in it a young man in a grey-blue military great-coat and a flat cap with a pink band round it. He sprang out as we appeared. His manner was most *empresse*. He completely ignored my companion.

"I am extremely glad to see you, Herr Doktor," he said. "You are most anxiously expected. I must present my apologies for not being at the station to welcome you, but, apparently, there was some misunderstanding. The arrangements at the station for your reception seem to have broken down completely ..." and he stared through his monocle at the old Major, who flushed with vexation.

"If you will step into my car," the young man added, "I will drive you to the station. We need not detain this gentleman any longer."

I felt sorry for the old Major, who had remained silent under the withering insolence of this young lieutenant, so I shook hands with him cordially and thanked him for his hospitality. He was a jovial old fellow after all.

The young Count drove himself and chatted amiably as we whirled through the streets. "I must introduce myself," he said: "Lieutenant Count von Boden of the 2nd Uhlans of the Guard. I did not wish to say anything before that old chatterbox. I trust you have had a pleasant journey. Von Steinhardt, of our Legation at the Hague, was instructed to make all arrangements for your comfort on this side. But I was forgetting, you and he must be old acquaintances, Herr Doktor!"

I said something appropriate about von Steinhardt's invariable kindness. Inwardly, I noted the explanation of the visiting card in the portfolio in my pocket.

At the station we found two orderlies, one with my things, the other with von Boden's luggage and fur *pelisse*. The platforms were now deserted save for sentries: all life at this dreary frontier station seemed to die with the passing of the mail train.

I could not help noticing, after we had left the car and were strolling up and down the platform waiting for the special, that my companion kept casting furtive glances at my feet. I looked down at my boots: they wanted brushing, certainly, but otherwise I could see nothing wrong with them. They were brown, it is true, and I reflected that the German man about town has a way of regulating his tastes in footgear by the calendar, and that brown boots are seldom worn in Germany after September 1st.

Our special came in, an engine and tender, a brakesman's van, a single carriage and a guard's van. The stationmaster bid us a most ceremonious adieu, and the guard, cap in hand, helped me into the train.

It was a Pullman car in which I found myself, with comfortable arm-chairs and small tables. One of the orderlies was laying the table for luncheon, and here, presently, the



young Count and I ate a meal, which, save for the inevitable "*Kriegsbrot*," showed few signs of the stringency of the British blockade. But by this time I had fully realized that, for some unknown reason, no pains were spared to do me honour, so probably the fare was something out of the common.

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My companion was a bright, amusing fellow and delightfully typical of his class. He had seen a year's service with the cavalry on the Eastern front, had been seriously wounded and was now attached to the General Staff in Berlin in what I judged to be a decorative rather than a useful capacity, for, apart from what he had learnt in his own campaigning he seemed singularly ignorant of the development of the military situation. Particularly, his ignorance of conditions on the Western front was supreme. He was full to the brim with the most extraordinary fables about the British. He solemnly assured me, for example—on the faith of a friend of his who had seen them—that Japanese were fighting with the English in France, dressed as Highlanders—his friend had heard these Asiatic Scotsmen talking Japanese, he declared. I thought of the Gaelic-speaking battalions of the Camerons and could hardly suppress a smile.

Young von Boden was superbly contemptuous of the officers of the obscure and much reduced infantry battalion doing garrison duty at Goch, the frontier station we had just left, where—as he was careful to explain to me—he had spent four days of unrelieved boredom, waiting for me.

“Of course, in war time we are a united army and all that,” he observed unsophistically, “but none of these fellows at Goch was a fit companion for a dashing cavalry officer. They were a dull lot. I wouldn't go near the Casino. I met some of them at the hotel one evening. That was enough for me. Why, only one of them knew anything at all about Berlin, and that was the lame fellow. Now, there is one thing we learn in the cavalry...”

But I had ceased to listen. In his irresponsible chatter the boy used a word that struck a harsh note which went jarring through my brain. He had mentioned “the lame fellow,” using a German word “der Stelze.” In a flash I saw before me again that scene in the squalid bedroom in the Vos in't Tuintje—the candle guttering in the draught, the livid corpse on the floor and that sinister woman crying out: “Der Stelze has power, he has authority, he can make and unmake men!”

The mind has unaccountable lapses. The phrase had slipped out of my German vocabulary. I had not even recognized it until the boy had rapped it out in a context with which I was familiar and then it had come back. With it, it brought that tableau in the dimly lit room, but also another—a picture of a vast and massive man, swarthy and sinister, with a clubfoot, limping heavily after Karl, the waiter, on the platform at Rotterdam.

That, then, was why the young lieutenant had glanced down at my feet at the station at Goch, The messenger he had come to meet, the bearer of the document, the man of power and authority, was clubfooted, and I was he!

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But seeing I was free of any physical deformity, to say nothing of the fact that I in no way resembled the clubfooted man I had seen on the platform at Rotterdam, why had the young lieutenant accepted me so readily? I hazarded the reason to be that he had orders to meet a person who had not been further designated to him except that he would arrive by a certain train. The Major at the station would be responsible for establishing my *bona fides*. Once that officer had turned me over to the emissary, the latter's sole responsibility consisted in conducting me to the unknown goal to which the special train was rapidly bearing us. Such are the marvels of discipline!

My companion was, indeed, the model of discretion in everything touching myself and my business. Curiosity about your neighbour's affairs is a cardinal German failing, yet the Count manifested not the slightest desire to learn anything about me or my mission to Berlin. You may be sure that I, for my part, did nothing to enlighten him. It was not, indeed, in my power to do so. Yet the young man's reserve was so marked that I was convinced he had his orders to avoid the topic.

As the train rushed through Westphalia, through busy stations with glimpses of sidings full of trucks loaded to the brim, past towns whose very outlines were blurred by the mirk of smoke from a hundred factory chimneys, my thoughts were busy with that swarthy cripple. I had broken away from him with one portion of a highly prized document, yet he had made no attempt to have me arrested at the frontier. Clearly, then, he must still look upon me as an ally and must therefore be yet in ignorance of the identity of the dead man lying in my chamber at the Hotel Sixt. The friendly guide had told me that the party "combing out" the station at Rotterdam for me did not appear to know what I looked like.

Was it possible, then, that Clubfoot did not know Semlin by sight?

The fact that Semlin had only recently crossed the Atlantic seemed to confirm this supposition.

Then the document. Semlin had half. Who had the other half? Surely Clubfoot.... Clubfoot who was to have called at the hotel that morning to receive what I had brought from England. Perhaps, after all, my random declaration to the hotel-keeper had not been so far wrong; Clubfoot wanted to take the whole document to Berlin and reap all the laurels at the cost of half the danger and labour. That would explain his present silence. He suspected Semlin of treachery, not to the common cause, but to him!

It looked as if I might have a free run until Clubfoot could reach Berlin. That, unless he also took a special, could not be until the next evening at earliest. But, more redoubtable than a meeting with the man of power and authority, hung over me, an ever-present nightmare, the interview which I felt awaited me at the end of my present journey ... the interview at which I must render an account of my mission.

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Evening was falling as we ran through the inhospitable region of sand and water and pine that engirdles Berlin. We glided at diminished speed through the trim suburbs, skirted the city, on whose tall buildings the electric sky-signs were already beginning to twinkle, crashed heavily over a vast network of metals at some great terminus, then tore off again into the gathering darkness. In a little, we slowed down again. We were running through wooded country. From the darkness ahead a lantern waved at us and the train stopped with a jerk at a little wayside station, a tiny box of an affair. A tall, solid figure, wearing a spiked helmet and grey military great-coat, stood in solitary grandeur in the centre of the little platform, the wavering rays of a flickering gas lamp reflected in his brilliantly polished top-boots.

"Here we are at last!" said my companion.

I stepped out to meet my fate.

* * * * *

The young lieutenant was rigid at the salute before the figure on the platform.

I heard the end of a sentence as I alighted "... the gentleman I was to meet, Excellency!"

The other looked at me. He was a big man with a crimson face. He made no attempt at greeting, but said in a hoarse voice: "Have the goodness to come with me. The orderlies will attend to your things." And, with clinking spurs, he strode out through some big kind of anteroom, swathed in wrappings, into a yard beyond, where a big limousine was throbbing gently.

He stood aside to let me get in, then mounted himself, followed, rather to my surprise, by the young Count, whose responsibility for myself had ended, I imagined, on "delivering the goods." My surprise was of short duration, for once in the car the young Uhlan dropped all the formality he had displayed on the platform and addressed the elder officer as "papa." This, then, was old General von Boden, of whom the Major had spoken, Aide-de-Camp to the Kaiser and formerly tutor to the Crown Prince.

Father and son chatted in a desultory fashion across the car, and I took the opportunity of studying the old gentleman. His face was of the most prodigious purple hue, and so highly polished that it continually caught the reflection of the small electric lamp in the roof. Huge gold spectacles with glasses so thick that they distorted his eyes, straddled a great beak-like nose. He had doffed his helmet and was mopping his brow, and I saw a high perfectly bald dome-like head, brilliantly polished and almost as red as his face. He was clean shaven and by no means young, for the flesh hung in bags about his face. Long years of the habit of command had left their mark in an imperiousness of manner which might easily yield to ruthlessness I judged.



“I thought I should have had orders before I left the Villa,” the General said to his son, “then you could have gone straight there. I suppose he means to see him here: that is why he wanted him brought to the Villa. But he’s always the same: he never can make up his mind.” And he grunted.

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"Perhaps there will be something waiting at home," he added in his hoarse barrack-yard voice.

We drove through a white gate into a little drive which brought us up in front of a long, low villa. Neither father nor son had opened their lips to me during the drive from the station and I had not ventured to put a question to either of them, but I knew we were in Potsdam. The little station in the woods was Wild-Park, I suspected, the private station used by the Emperor on his frequent journeys and situated in the grounds of the New Palace. All the officials of the Prussian Court have villas at Potsdam, though why I had been brought there in connection with an affair that must surely rather interest the Wilhelm-Strasse or the Police Presidency was more than I could fathom.

There was a frightful scene in the hall. Without any warning the General turned on the orderly who had opened the door and screamed abuse at him. "Camel! Ox! Sheep's-head!" he roared, his face and shining pate deepening their vermilion hue. "Do I give orders that they shall be forgotten? What do you mean? You ass...." He put his white-gloved hands on the man's shoulders and shook him until the fellow's teeth must have rattled in his head. The orderly, white to the lips, hung limp in the old man's grasp, muttering apologies: "Ach! Exzellenz! Exzellenz will excuse me...."

It was a revolting spectacle, but it did not make the least impression on the son, who, putting down his cap and great-coat and unhooking his sword, led me into a kind of study. "These orderlies are such thickheads!" he said.

"Rudi! Rudi!" a hoarse, strident voice screamed from the hall. The lieutenant ran out.

"You've got to take the fellow to Berlin to-night. The message was here all the time—that numskull Heinrich forgot it. And we've got to keep the fellow here till then! An outrage, having the house used as a barrack for a rascally detective!" Thus much I heard, as the door had been left open. Then it closed and I heard no more.

As I had heard this much, there was a certain irony in the invitation to dinner subsequently conveyed to me by the young Uhlán. There was nothing for it but to accept. I knew I was caught deep in the meshes of Prussian discipline, every one had his orders and blindly carried them out, from the garrulous Major on the frontier to this preposterous *Exzellenz*, this Imperial aide-de-camp of Potsdam. I was already a tiny cog in a great machine. I should have to revolve or be crushed.

His Excellency left me in no doubt on this point. When I was ushered into his study, after a much-needed wash and a shave, he received me standing and said point-blank: "Your orders are to stay here until ten o'clock to-night, when you will be taken to Berlin by Lieutenant Count von Boden. I don't know you, I don't know your business, but I have received certain orders concerning you which I intend to carry out. For that reason

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you will dine with us here. After you have seen the person to whom you are to be taken to-night, Lieutenant Count von Boden will accompany you to the railway station at Spandau, where a special train will be in readiness in which he will conduct you back to the frontier. I wish you clearly to understand that the Lieutenant is responsible for seeing these orders carried out and will use all means to that end. Have I made myself clear?"

The old man's manner was indescribably threatening. "This is the machine we are out to smash," I had said to myself when I saw him savaging his servant in the hall and I repeated the phrase to myself now. But to the General I said: "Perfectly, Your Excellency!"

"Then let us go to dinner," said the General.

It was a nightmare meal. A faded and shrunken female, to whom I was not introduced—some kind of relative who kept house for the General, I supposed—was the only other person present. She never opened her lips save, with eyes glazed with terror, to give some whispered instruction to the orderly anent the General's food or wine. We dined in a depressing room with dark brown wallpaper decorated with dusty stags' antlers, an enormous green-tiled stove dominating everything. The General and his son ate solidly through the courses while the lady pecked furtively at her plate. As for myself I could not eat for sheer fright. Every nerve in my body was vibrating at the thought of the evening before me. If I could not avoid the interview, I was resolutely determined to give Master von Boden the slip rather than return to the frontier empty-handed. I had not braved all these perils to be packed off home without, at least, making an attempt to find Francis. Besides, I meant if I could to get the other half of that document.

There was some quite excellent Rhine wine, and I drank plenty of it. So did the General, with the result that, when the veins starting purple from his temples proclaimed that he had eaten to repletion, his temper seemed to have improved. He unbent sufficiently to present me with quite the worst cigar I have ever smoked.

I smoked it in silence whilst father and son talked shop. The female had faded away. Both men, I found to my surprise, were furious and bitter opponents of Hindenburg, as I have since learnt most of the old school of the Prussian Army are. They spoke little of England: their thoughts seemed to be centred on Russia as the arch-enemy. They pinned their faith on Falkenhayn and Mackensen. They had no words strong enough in their denunciation of Hindenburg, whom they always referred to as "the Drunkard" ... "der Saeufer." Nor were they sparing of criticism of what they called the Kaiser's "weakness" in letting him rise to power.



The humming of a car outside broke up our gathering. Remembering that I was but a humble servant before this great military luminary, I thanked the General with due servility for his hospitality. Then the Count and I went out to the car and presently drove forth into the night.

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We entered Berlin from the west, as it seemed to me, but then struck off in a southerly direction and were soon in the commercial quarter of the city, all but deserted at that hour, save for the trams. Then I caught a glimpse of lamps reflected in water, and the next moment the car had stopped on a bridge over a canal or river. My companion sprang out and hurried me to a small gate in an iron railing enclosing a vast edifice looming black in the night, while the car moved off into the darkness.

The gate was open. Half a dozen yards from it was a small, slender tower with a pointed roof jutting out from the corner of the building. In the tower was a door which yielded easily to my companion's vigorous push as a clock somewhere within the building beat a double stroke—half-past ten.

The door led into a little vestibule brilliantly lit with electric light. There a man was waiting, a fine, upstanding bearded fellow in a kind of green hunting costume.

“So, Payer!” said the young Uhlan. “Here is the gentleman. I shall be at the west entrance afterwards. You will bring him down yourself to the car.”

“Jawohl, Herr Graf!” answered the man in green, and the lieutenant vanished through the door into the night.

A terrifying, an incredible suspicion that had overwhelmed me directly I stepped out of the car now came surging through my brain. That vast, black edifice, that slender tower at the corner—did I not know them?

Mechanically, I followed the man in green. My suspicions deepened with every step. In a little, they became certainty. Up a shallow and winding stair, along a long and broad corridor, hung with rich tapestries, the polished parquet glistening faintly in the dim light, through splendid suites of gilded apartments with old pictures and splendid furniture... here a lackey with powdered hair yawning on a landing, there a sentry in field-grey immobile before a door...I was in the Berlin Schloss.

The Castle seemed to sleep. A hushed silence lay over all. Everywhere lights were dim, staircases wound down into emptiness, corridors stretched away into dusky solitude. Now and then an attendant in evening dress tiptoed past us or an officer vanished round a corner, noiselessly save for a faint clink of spurs.

Thus we traversed, as it seemed to me, miles of silence and of twilight, and all the time my blood hammered at my temples and my throat grew dry as I thought of the ordeal that stood before me. To whom was I thus bidden, secretly, in the night?

We were in a broad and pleasant passage now, panelled in cheerful light brown oak with red hangings. After the desolation of the State apartments, this comfortable corridor had at least the appearance of leading to the habitation of man. A giant trooper

in field-grey with a curious silver gorget suspended round his neck by a chain paced up and down the passage, his jackboots making no sound upon the soft, thick carpet with which the floor was covered.

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The man in green stopped at the door. Holding up a warning hand to me, he bent his head and listened. There was a moment of absolute silence. Not a sound was to be heard throughout the whole Castle. Then the man in green knocked softly and was admitted, leaving me outside.

A moment later, the door swung open again. A tall, elegant man with grey hair and that indefinite air of good breeding that you find in every man who has spent a life at court, came out hurriedly. He looked pale and harassed.

On seeing me, he stopped short.

“Dr. Grundt? Where is Dr. Grundt?” he asked and his eyes dropped to my feet. He started and raised them to my face.

The trooper had drifted out of earshot. I could see him, immobile as a statue, standing at the end of the corridor. Except for him and us, the passage was deserted.

Again the elderly man spoke and his voice betrayed his anxiety.

“Who are you?” he asked almost in a whisper. “What have you done with Grundt? Why has he not come?”

Boldly I took the plunge.

“I am Semlin,” I said.

“Semlin,” echoed the other, “—ah yes! the Embassy in Washington wrote about you—but Grundt was to have come....”

“Listen,” I said, “Grundt could not come. We had to separate and he sent me on ahead....”

“But ... but ...”—the man was stammering now in his anxiety—“... you succeeded?”

I nodded.

He heaved a sigh of relief.

“It will be awkward, very awkward, this change in the arrangements,” he said. “You will have to explain everything to him, everything. Wait there an instant.”

He darted back into the room.



Once more I stood and waited in that silent place, so restful and so still that one felt oneself in a world far removed from the angry strife of nations. And I wondered if my interview—the meeting I had so much dreaded—was at an end.

“Pst, Pst!” The elderly man stood at the open door.

He led me through a room, a cosy place, smelling pleasantly of leather furniture, to a door. He opened it, revealing across a narrow threshold another door. On this he knocked.

“Herein!” cried a voice—a harsh, metallic voice.

My companion turned the handle and, opening the door, thrust me into the room. The door closed behind me.

I found myself facing the Emperor.

CHAPTER IX

I ENCOUNTER AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE WHO LEADS ME TO A DELIGHTFUL SURPRISE

He stood in the centre of the room, facing the door, his legs, straddled apart, planted firmly on the ground, one hand behind his back, the other, withered and useless like the rest of the arm, thrust into the side pocket of his tunic. He wore a perfectly plain undress uniform of field-grey, and the unusual simplicity of his dress, coupled with the fact that he was bare-headed, rendered him so unlike his conventional portraits in the full panoply of war that I doubt if I should have recognized him—paradoxical as it may seem—but for the havoc depicted in every lineament of those once so familiar features.

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Only one man in the world to-day could look like that. Only one man in the world to-day could show, by the ravage in his face, the appalling weight of responsibility slowly crushing one of the most vigorous and resilient personalities in Europe. His figure, erstwhile erect and well-knit, seemed to have shrunk, and his withered arm, unnaturally looped away into his pocket, assumed a prominence that lent something sinister to that forbidding grey and harassed face.

His head was sunk forward on his breast. His face, always intensely sallow, almost Italian in its olive tint, was livid. All its alertness was gone; the features seemed to have collapsed, and the flesh hung flabbily, bulging in deep pouches under the eyes and in loose folds at the corners of the mouth. His head was grizzled an iron-grey but the hair at the temples was white as driven snow. Only his eyes were unchanged. They were the same grey, steely eyes, restless, shifting, unreliable, mirrors of the man's impulsive, wayward and fickle mind.

He lowered at me. His brow was furrowed and his eyes flashed malice. In the brief instant in which I gazed at him I thought of a phrase a friend had used after seeing the Kaiser in one of his angry moods—"His icy, black look."

I was so taken aback at finding myself in the Emperor's presence that I forgot my part and remained staring in stupefaction at the apparition. The other was seemingly too busy with his thoughts to notice my forgetfulness, for he spoke at once, imperiously, in the harsh staccato of a command.

"What is this I hear?" he said. "Why has not Grundt come? What are you doing here?"

By this time I had elaborated the fable I had begun to tell in the corridor without. I had it ready now: it was thin, but it must suffice.

"If your Majesty will allow me, I will explain," I said. The Emperor was rocking himself to and fro, in nervous irritability, on his feet. His eyes were never steady for an instant: now they searched my face, now they fell to the floor, now they scanned the ceiling.

"Dr. Grundt and I succeeded in our quest, dangerous though it was. As your Majesty is aware, the ... the ... the object had been divided...."

"Yes, yes, I know! Go on!" the other said, pausing for a moment in his rocking.

"I was to have left England first with my portion. I could not get away. Everyone is searched for letters and papers at Tilbury. I devised a scheme and we tested it, but it failed."

"How? It failed?" the other cried.

"With no detriment to the success of our mission, Your Majesty."

“Explain! What was your stratagem?”

“I cut a piece of the lining from a handbag and in this I wrapped a perfectly harmless letter addressed to an English shipping agent in Rotterdam. I then pasted the fragment of the lining back in its place in the bottom of the bag. Grundt gave the bag to one of our number as an experiment to see if it would elude the vigilance of the English police.”

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A light of interest was growing in the Emperor's manner, banishing his ill-temper. Anything novel always appealed to him.

"Well?" he said.

"The ruse was detected, the letter was found and our man was fined twenty pounds at the police court. It was then that Dr. Grundt decided to send me...."

"You've got it with you?" the other exclaimed eagerly.

"No, Your Majesty," I said. "I had no means of bringing it away. Dr. Grundt, on the other hand ...". And I doubled up my leg and touched my foot.

The Emperor stared at me and the furrow reappeared between his eyes. Then a smile broke out on his face, a warm, attractive smile, like sunshine after rain, and he burst into a regular guffaw. I knew His Majesty's weakness for jokes at the expense of the physical deformities of others, but I had scarcely dared to hope that my subtle reference to Grundt's clubfoot as a hiding-place for compromising papers would have had such a success. For the Kaiser fairly revelled in the idea and laughed loud and long, his sides fairly shaking.

"Ach, der Stelze! Excellent! Excellent!" he cried. "Plessen, come and hear how we've diddled the Englander again!"

We were in a long room, lofty, with a great window at the far end, where the room seemed to run to the right and left in the shape of a T. From the big writing-desk with its litter of photographs in heavy silver frames, the little bronze busts of the Empress, the water-colour sea-scapes and other little touches, I judged this to be the Emperor's study.

At the monarch's call, a white-haired officer emerged from the further end of the room, that part which was hidden from my view.

The Kaiser put his hand on his shoulder.

"A great joke, Plessen!" he said, chuckling. Then, to me:

"Tell it again!"

I had warmed to my work now. I gave as drily humorous an account as I could of Dr. Grundt, fat and massive and podgy, hobbling on board the steamer at Tilbury, under the noses of the British police, with the document stowed away in his boot.

The Kaiser punctuated my story with gusty guffaws, and emphasized the fun of the *denouement* by poking the General in the ribs.

Plessen laughed very heartily, as indeed he was expected to. Then he said suavely:

“But has the stratagem succeeded, Your Majesty?”

The monarch knit his brow and looked at me.

“Well, young man, did it work?”

“... Because,” Plessen went on, “if so, Grundt must be in Holland. In that case, why is he not here?”

My heart sank within me. Above all things, I knew I must keep my countenance. The least sign of embarrassment and I was lost. Yet I felt the blood fleeing from my face and I was glad I stood in the shadow.

A knock came to the door. The elderly chamberlain who had met me outside appeared.

“Your Majesty will excuse me ... General Baron von Fischer is there to report....”

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"Presently, presently," was the answer in an irritable tone. "I am engaged just now...."

The old courtier paused irresolutely for a moment.

"Well, what is it; what is it?"

"Despatches from General Head-quarters, Your Majesty! The General asked me to say the matter was urgent!"

The Kaiser wakened in an instant.

"Bring him in!" Then, to Plessen, he added in a voice from which all mirth had vanished, in accents of gloom:

"At this hour, Plessen? If things have again gone wrong on the Somme!"

An officer came in quickly, rigid with a frozen face, helmet on head, portfolio under his arm. The Kaiser walked the length of the room to his desk and sat down. Plessen and the other followed him. I remained where I was. They seemed to have forgotten all about me.

A murmur rose from the desk. The officer was delivering his report. Then the Kaiser seemed to question him, for I heard his hard, metallic voice:

"Contalmaison ... Trones Wood ... heavy losses ... forced back ... terrific artillery fire ..." were words that reached me. The Kaiser's voice rose on a high note of irritability. Suddenly he dashed the papers on the desk from him and exclaimed:

"It is outrageous! I'll break him! Not another man shall he have if I must go myself and teach his men their duty!"

Plessen hurriedly left the desk and came to me. His old face was white and his hands were shaking.

"Get out of here!" he said to me in a fierce undertone. "Wait outside and I will see you later!" Still, from the desk, resounded that harsh, strident voice, running on in an ascending scale, pouring forth a foaming torrent of menace.

I had often heard of the sudden paroxysms of fury from which the Kaiser was said to suffer of recent years, but never in my wildest daydreams did I ever imagine I should assist at one.

Gladly enough did I exchange the highly charged electrical atmosphere of the Imperial study for the repose of the quiet corridor. Its perfect tranquillity was as balm to my



quivering nerves. Of the man in green nothing was to be seen. Only the trooper continued his silent vigil.

Again I acted on impulse. I was wearing my grass-green raincoat, my hat I carried in my hand. I might therefore easily pass for one just leaving the Castle. Without hesitation, I turned to the left, the way I had come, and plunged once more into the labyrinth of galleries and corridors and landings by which the man in green had led me. I very soon lost myself, so I decided to descend the next staircase I should come to. I followed this plan and went down a broad flight of stairs, at the foot of which I found a night porter, clad in a vast overcoat bedizened with eagles and seated on a stool, reading a newspaper.

He stopped me and asked me my business. I told him I was coming from the Emperor's private apartments, whereupon he demanded my pass. I showed him my badge which entirely satisfied him, though he muttered something about "new faces" and not having seen me before. I asked him for the way out. He said that at the end of the gallery I should come to the west entrance. I felt I had had a narrow squeak of running into my mentor outside. I told the man I wanted the other entrance ... I had my car there.

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"You mean the south entrance?" he asked, and proceeded to give me directions which brought me, without further difficulty, out upon the open space in front of the great equestrian statue of the Emperor William I.

It was a clear, starry night and I heaved a sigh of relief as I saw the Schloss-Platz glittering in the cold light of the arc lamps. So pressing had been the danger threatening me that the atmosphere of the Castle seemed stifling in comparison with the keen night air. A new confidence filled my veins as I strode along, though the perils to which I was advancing were not a whit less than those I had just escaped. For I had burnt my boats. My disappearance from the Castle must surely arouse suspicion and it was only a matter of hours for the hue and cry to be raised after me. At best it might be delayed until Clubfoot presented himself at the Castle.

I could not remain in Berlin, that was clear. My American passport was not in order, and if I were to fall back upon my silver badge, I should instantly come into contact with the police with all kinds of unwelcome consequences. No, I must get out of Berlin at all costs. Well away from the capital, I might possibly utilize my silver badge or by its help procure identity papers that would give me a status of some kind.

But Francis? Baffled as I was by that obscure jingle of German, something seemed to tell me that it was a message from my brother. It was dated from Berlin, and I felt that the solution of the riddle, if riddle it were, must be found here.

I had reached Unter den Linden. I entered a cafe and ordered a glass of beer. The place was a blaze of light and dense with a blue cloud of tobacco smoke. A noisy band was crashing out popular tunes and there was a loud buzz of conversation rising from every table. It was all very cheerful and the noise and the bustle did me good after the strain of the night.

I drew from my pocket the slip of paper I had had from Dicky and fell to scanning it again. I had not been twelve hours in Germany, but already I was conscious that, for anyone acting a part, let anything go wrong with his identity papers and he could never leave the country. If he were lucky, he might lie doggo; but there was no other course.

Supposing, then, that this had happened to Francis (as, indeed, Red Tabs had hinted to me was the case) what course would he adopt? He would try and smuggle out a message announcing his plight. Yes, I think that is what I myself would do in similar circumstances.

Well, I would accept this as a message from Francis. Now to study it once more.

O Eichenholz! O Eichenholz!
Wie leer sind deine Blaetter.
Wie Achilles in dem Zelte.

*Wo zweie sich zanken
Erfreut sich der Dritte.*

The message fell into three parts, each consisting of a phrase. The first phrase might certainly be a warning that Francis had failed in his mission.

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"O Okewood! how empty are thy leaves!"

What, then, of the other two phrases?

They were short and simple. Whatever message they conveyed, it could not be a lengthy one. Nor was it likely that they contained a report of Francis' mission to Germany, whatever it had been. Indeed, it was not conceivable that my brother would send any such report to a Dutchman like van Urutius, a friendly enough fellow, yet a mere acquaintance and an alien at that.

The message carried in those two phrases must be, I felt sure, a personal one, relating to my brother's welfare. What would he desire to say? That he was arrested, that he was going to be shot? Possibly, but more probably his idea in sending out word was to explain his silence and also to obtain assistance.

My eye recurred continually to the final phrase: "When *two* people fall out, the *third* party rejoices."

Might not these numerals refer to the number of a street? Might not in these two phrases be hidden an address at which one might find Francis, or at the worst, hear news of him?

I sent for the Berlin Directory. I turned up the streets section and eagerly ran my eye down the columns of the "A's." I did not find what I was looking for, and that was an "Achilles-Strasse," either with two "I's" or with one.

Then I tried "Eichenholz." There was an "Eichenbaum-Allee" in the Berlin suburb called West-End, but that was all. I tried for a "Blaetter" or a "Blatt-Strasse" with an equally negative result.

It was discouraging work, but I went back to the paper again. The only other word likely to serve as a street remaining in the puzzle was "Zelt."

"Wie Achilles in dem Zelte."

Wearily I opened the directory at the "Z's."

There, staring me in the face, I found the street called "In den Zelten."

I had struck the trail at last.

In den Zelten, I discovered, on referring to the directory again, derived its name "In the Tents," from the fact that in earlier days a number of open-air beer-gardens and booths had occupied the site which faces the northern side of the Tiergarten. It was not a long

street. The directory showed but fifty-six houses, several of which, I noticed, were still beer-gardens. It appeared to be a fashionable thoroughfare, for most of the occupants were titled people. No. 3, I was interested to see, was still noted as the Berlin office of *The Times*.

The last phrase in the message decidedly gave the number. *Two* must refer to the number of the house: *third* to the number of the floor, since practically all dwelling-houses in Berlin are divided off into flats.

As for the “Achilles,” I gave it up.

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I looked at my watch. It was twenty past eleven: too late to begin my search that night. Then I suddenly realized how utterly exhausted I was. I had been two nights out of bed without sleep, for I had sat up on deck crossing over to Holland, and the succession of adventures that had befallen me since I left London had driven all thought of weariness from my mind. But now came the reaction and I felt myself yearning for a hot bath and for a nice comfortable bed. To go to an hotel at that hour of night, without luggage and with an American passport not in order, would be to court disaster. It looked as though I should have to hang about the cafes and night restaurants until morning, investigate the clue of the street called In den Zelten, and then get away from Berlin as fast as ever I could.

But my head was nodding with drowsiness. I must pull myself together. I decided I would have some black coffee, and I raised my eyes to find the waiter. They fell upon the pale face and elegant figure of the one-armed officer I had met at the Casino at Goch ... the young lieutenant they had called Schmalz.

He had just entered the cafe and was standing at the door, looking about him. I felt a sudden pang of uneasiness at the sight of him, for I remembered his cross-examination of me at Goch. But I could not escape without paying my bill; besides, he blocked the way.

He settled my doubts and fears by walking straight over to my table.

"Good evening, Herr Doktor," he said in German, with his pleasant smile. "This indeed is an unexpected pleasure! So you are seeing how we poor Germans are amusing ourselves in war-time. You must admit that we do not take our pleasures sadly. You permit me?"

Without waiting for my reply, he sat down at my table and ordered a glass of beer.

"I wish you had appeared sooner," I exclaimed in as friendly a tone as I could muster, "for I am just going. I have had a long and tiring journey and am anxious to go to an hotel."

Directly I had spoken I realized my blunder.

"You have not got an hotel yet?" said Schmalz. "Why, how curious! Nor have I? As you are a stranger in Berlin, you must allow me to appoint myself your guide. Let us go to an hotel together, shall we?"

I wanted to demur, difficult as it was to find any acceptable excuse, but his manner was so friendly, his offer seemed so sincere, that I felt my resolution wavering. He had a winning personality, this frank, handsome boy. And I was so dog-tired!

He perceived my reluctance but also my indecision.



"We'll go to any hotel you like," he said brightly. "But you Americans are spoilt in the matter of luxurious hotels, I know. Still, I tell you we have not much to learn in that line in Berlin. Suppose we go to the Esplanade. It's a fine hotel ... the Hamburg American line run it, you know. I am very well known there, quite the *Hauskind* ... my uncle was a captain of one of their liners. They will make us very comfortable: they always give me a little suite, bedroom, sitting-room and bath, very reasonably: I'll make them do the same for you."

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If I had been less weary—I have often thought since—I would have got up and fled from the cafe rather than have countenanced any such mad proposal. But I was drunk with sleep heaviness and I snatched at this chance of getting a good night's rest, for I felt that, under the aegis of this young officer, I could count on any passport difficulties at the hotel being postponed until morning. By that time, I meant to be out of the hotel and away on my investigations.

So I accepted Schmalz's suggestion.

"By the way," I said, "I have no luggage. My bag got mislaid somehow at the station and I don't really feel up to going after it to-night."

"I will fix you up," the other replied promptly, "and with pyjamas in the American fashion. By the by," he added, lowering his voice, "I thought it better to speak German. English is not heard gladly in Berlin just now."

"I quite understand," I said. Then, to change the subject, which I did not like particularly, I added:

"Surely, you have been very quick in coming down from the frontier. Did you come by train?"

"Oh, no!" he answered. "I found that the car in which you drove to the station ... it belonged to the gentleman who came to meet you, you know ... was being sent back to Berlin by road, so I got the driver to give me a lift."

He said this quite airily, with his usual tone of candour. But for a moment I regretted my decision to go to the Esplanade with him. What if he knew more than he seemed to know?

I dismissed the suspicion from my mind.

"Bah!" I said to myself, "you are getting jumpy. Besides, it is too late to turn back now!"

We had a friendly wrangle as to who should pay for the drinks, and it ended in my paying. Then, after a long wait, we managed to get a cab, an antique-looking "growler" driven by an octogenarian in a coat of many capes, and drove to the Esplanade.

It was a regular palace of a place, with a splendid vestibule with walls and pavement of different-hued marbles, with palm trees over-shadowing a little fountain tinkling in a jade basin, with servants in gaudy liveries. The reception clerk overwhelmed me with the cordiality of his welcome to my companion and "the American gentleman," and after a certain amount of coquettish protestations about the difficulty of providing accommodation, allotted us a double suite on the entresol, consisting of two bedrooms with a common sitting-room and bathroom.



In his immaculate evening dress, he was a Beau Brummell among hotel clerks, that man. The luggage of the American gentleman should be fetched in the morning. The gentleman's papers? There was no hurry: the Herr Leutnant would explain to his friend the forms that had to be filled in: they could be given to the waiter in the morning. Would the gentlemen take anything before retiring? A whisky-soda—ah! whisky was getting scarce. No? Nothing? He had the honour to wish the gentlemen pleasant repose.

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We went to the lift in procession, Beau Brummell in front, then a waiter, then ourselves and the gold-braided hall porter bringing up the rear. One or two people were sitting in the lounge, attended by a platoon of waiters. The whole place gave an impression of wealth and luxury altogether out of keeping with British ideas of the stringency of life in Germany under the British blockade. I could not help reflecting to myself mournfully that Germany did not seem to feel the pinch very much.

At the lift the procession bowed itself away and we went up in charge of the liftman, a gorgeous individual who looked like one of the Pope's Swiss Guards. We reached the centresol in an instant. The Lieutenant led the way along the dimly lighted corridor.

"Here is the sitting-room," he said, opening a door. "This is my room, this the bathroom, and this," he flung open the fourth door, "is your room!"

He stood aside to let me pass. The lights in the room were full on. In an arm-chair a big man in an overcoat was sitting.

He had a heavy square face and a clubfoot.

CHAPTER X

A GLASS OF WINE WITH CLUBFOOT

I walked boldly into the room. All sense of fear had vanished in a wave of anger that swept over me, anger with myself for letting myself be trapped, anger with my companion for his treachery.

Schmalz stood at my elbow with a smile full of malice on his face.

"There now!" he cried, "you see, you are among friends! Am I not thoughtful to have prepared this little surprise for you? See, I have brought you to the one man you have crossed so many hundreds of miles of ocean to see! Herr Doktor! this is Dr. Semlin. Dr. Semlin: Dr. Grundt."

The other had by now heaved his unwieldy frame from the chair.

"Dr. Semlin?" he said, in a perfectly emotionless voice, *une voix blanche*, as the French say, "this is an unexpected pleasure. I never thought we should meet in Berlin. I had believed our rendezvous to have been fixed for Rotterdam. Still, better late than never!" And he extended to me a white, fat hand.

"Our friend, the Herr Leutnant," I answered carelessly, "omitted to inform me that he was acquainted with you, as, indeed, he failed to warn me that I should have the pleasure of seeing you here to-night."

“We owe that pleasure,” Clubfoot replied with a smile that displayed a glitter of gold in his teeth, “to a purely fortuitous encounter at the Casino at Goch, as, indeed, it would appear, I am similarly indebted to chance for the unlooked-for boon of making your personal acquaintance here this evening.”

He bowed to Schmalz as he said this.

“But come,” he went on, “if I may make bold to offer you the hospitality of your own room, sit down and try a glass of this excellent Brauneberger. Rhine wine must be scarce where you come from. We have much to tell one another, you and I.”

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Again he bared his golden teeth in a smile.

“By all means,” I said. “But I fear we keep our young friend from his bed. Doubtless, you have no secrets from him, but you will agree, Herr Doktor, that our conversation should best be tete-a-tete.”

“Schmalz, dear friend,” Clubfoot exclaimed with a sigh of regret, “much as I should like ... I am indeed truly sorry that we should be deprived of your company, but I cannot contest the profound accuracy of our friend’s remark. If you could go to the sitting-room for a few minutes....”

The young lieutenant flushed angrily.

“If you prefer my room to my company ... by all means,” he retorted gruffly, “but I think, in the circumstances, that I shall go to bed.”

And he turned on his heel and walked out of the room, shutting the door with rather more force than was necessary, I thought.

Clubfoot sighed.

“Ach! youth! youth!” he cried, “the same impetuous youth that is at this very moment hacking out for Germany a world empire amidst the nations in arms. A wonderful race, a race of giants, our German youth, Herr Doktor ... the mainspring of our great German machine—as they find who resist it. A glass of wine!”

The man’s speech and manner boded ill for me, I felt. I would have infinitely preferred violent language and open threats to the subtle menace that lay concealed beneath all this suavity.

“You smoke?” queried Clubfoot. “No!”—he held up his hand to stop me as I was reaching for my cigarette case, “you shall have a cigar—not one of our poor German Hamburgers, but a fine Havana cigar given me by a member of the English Privy Council. You stare! Aha! I repeat, by a member of the English Privy Council, to me, the Boche, the barbarian, the Hun! No hole and corner work for the old doctor. *Der Stelze* may be lame, Clubfoot may be past his work, but when he travels *en mission*, he travels *en prince*, the man of wealth and substance. There is none too high to do him honour, to listen to his views on poor, misguided Germany, the land of thinkers sold into bondage to the militarists! Bah! the fools!”

He snarled venomously. This man was beginning to interest me. His rapid change of moods was fascinating, now the kindly philosopher, now the Teuton braggart, now the Hun incorporate. As he limped across the room to fetch his cigar case from the mantelpiece, I studied him.

He was a vast man, not so much by reason of his height, which was below the medium, but his bulk, which was enormous. The span of his shoulders was immense, and, though a heavy paunch and a white flabbiness of face spoke of a gross, sedentary life, he was obviously a man of quite unusual strength. His arms particularly were out of all proportion to his stature, being so long that his hands hung down on either side of him when he stood erect, like the paws of some giant ape. Altogether, there was something decidedly simian about his appearance his squat nose with hairy, open nostrils, and the general hirsuteness of the man, his bushy eyebrows, the tufts of black hair on his cheekbones and on the backs of his big, spade like hands. And there was that in his eyes, dark and courageous beneath the shaggy brows, that hinted at accesses of ape-like fury, uncontrollable and ferocious.

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He gave me his cigar which, as he had said, was a good one, and, after a preliminary sip of his wine, began to speak.

"I am a plain man, Herr Doktor," he said, "and I like plain speaking. That is why I am going to speak quite plainly to you. When it became apparent to that person whom it is not necessary to name further greatly desired a certain letter to be recovered, I naturally expected that I, who am a past member in affairs of this order, notably, on behalf of the person concerned, would have been entrusted with the mission. It was I who discovered the author of the theft in an English internment camp; it was I who prevailed upon him to acquiesce in our terms; it was I who finally located the hiding place of the document ... all this, mark you, without setting foot in England."

My thoughts flew back again to the three slips of paper in their canvas cover, the divided crest, the big, sprawling, upright handwriting. I should have known that hand. I had seen it often enough on certain photographs which were accorded the place of honour in the drawing room at Consistorial-Rat von Mayburg's at Bonn.

"I therefore had the prior claim," Clubfoot continued, "to be entrusted with the important task of fetching the document and of handing it back to the writer. But the gentleman was in a hurry; the gentleman always is; he could not wait for that old slowcoach of a Clubfoot to mature his plans for getting into England, securing the document, and getting out again.

"So Bernstorff is called into consultation, the head of an embassy that has made the German secret service the laughing-stock of the world, an ambassador that has his private papers filched by a common sneak-thief in the underground railway and is fool enough to send home the most valuable documents by a jackass of a military attache who lets the whole lot be taken from him by a dunderheaded British customs officer at Falmouth! *This* was the man who was to replace *me*!

"Bernstorff is accordingly bidden to despatch one of his trusty servants to England, with all suitable precautions, to do *my* work. You are chosen, and I will pay you the compliment of saying that you fulfilled your mission in a manner that is singularly out of keeping with the usual method of procedure of that gentleman's emissaries.

"But, my dear Doktor ... pray fill your glass. That cigar is good, is it not? I thought you would appreciate a good cigar.... As I was saying, you were handicapped from the first. When you reach the place indicated to you in your instructions, you find only half the document. The wily thief has sliced it in two so as to make sure of his money before parting with the goods. They didn't know, of course, that Clubfoot, the old slowcoach, who is past his work, was aware of this already, and had made his plans accordingly. But, in the end, they had to send for me. 'The good Clubfoot,' 'old chap,' 'sly old fox,' and all the rest of it—would run across to England and secure the other half, while

Count Bernstorff's smart young man from America would wait in Rotterdam until Herr Dr. Grundt arrived and handed him the other portion.

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“But Count Bernstorff’s young man does nothing of the kind. He is one too many for the old fox. He does not wait for him. He runs away, after displaying unusual determination in dealing with a prying Englander—whose fate should be a lesson to all who interfere in other people’s business—and goes to Germany, leaving poor old Clubfoot in the lurch. You must admit, Herr Doktor, that I have been hardly used—by yourself as well as by another person?”

My throat was dry with anxiety. What did the man mean by his veiled allusions to “all who interfere in other people’s business?”

I cleared my throat to speak.

Clubfoot raised a great hand in deprecation.

“No explanation, Herr Doktor, I beg” (his tone was perfectly unconcerned and friendly), “let me have my say. When I found out that you had left Rotterdam—by the way, you must let me congratulate you on the remarkable fertility of resource you displayed in quitting Frau Schratt’s hospitable house—when I found you were gone, I sat down and thought things out.

“I reflected that an astute American like yourself (believe me, you are very astute) would probably be accustomed to look at everything from the business standpoint. ‘I will also consider the matter from the business standpoint,’ I said to myself, and I decided that, in your place, I too would not be content to accept, as sole payment for the danger of my mission, the scarcely generous compensation that Count Bernstorff allots to his collaborators. No, I should wish to secure a little renown for myself, or, were that not possible, then some monetary gain proportionate with the risks I had run. You see, I have been at pains to put myself wholly in your place. I hope I have not said anything tactless. If so, I can at least acquit myself of any desire to offend.”

“On the contrary, Herr Doktor,” I replied, “you are the model of tact and diplomacy.”

His eyes narrowed a little at this. I thought he wouldn’t like that word “diplomacy.”

“Another glass of wine? You may safely venture; there is not a headache in a bottle of it. Well, Herr Doktor, since you have followed me so patiently thus far, I will go further. I told you, when I first saw you this evening, that I was delighted at our meeting. That was no mere banality, but the sober truth. For, you see, I am the very person with whom, in the circumstances, you would wish to get in touch. Deprived of the honour, rightly belonging to me, of undertaking this mission single-handed and of fulfilling it alone, I find that you can enable me to carry out the mission to a successful conclusion, whilst I, for my part, am able and willing to recompense your services as they deserve and not according to Bernstorff’s starvation scale.

“To make a long story short, Herr Doktor ... how much?”

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He brought his remarks to this abrupt anticlimax so suddenly that I was taken aback. The man was watching me intently for all his apparent nonchalance, and I felt more than ever the necessity for being on my guard. If I could only fathom how much he knew. Of two things I felt fairly sure: the fellow believed me to be Semlin and was under the impression that I still retained my portion of the document. I should have to gain time. The bargain he proposed over my half of the letter might give me an opportunity of doing that. Moreover, I must find out whether he really had the other half of the document, and in that case, where he kept it.

He broke the silence.

"Well, Herr Doktor," he said, "do you want me to start the bidding? You needn't be afraid. I am generous."

I leant forward earnestly in my chair.

"You have spoken with admirable frankness, Herr Doktor," I said, "and I will be equally plain, but I will be brief. In the first place, I wish to know that you are the man you profess to be: so far, you must remember, I have only the assurance of our excitable young friend."

"Your caution is most praiseworthy," said the other, "but I should imagine I carry my name written on my boot." And he lifted his hideous and deformed foot.

"That is scarcely sufficient guarantee," I answered, "in a matter of this importance. A detail like that could easily be counterfeited, or otherwise provided for."

"My badge," and the man produced from his waistcoat pocket a silver star identical with the one I carried on my braces, but bearing only the letter "G" above the inscription "Abt. VII."

"That, even," I retorted, "is not conclusive."

Clubfoot's mind was extraordinarily alert, however gross and heavy his body might be.

He paused for a moment in reflection, his hands crossed upon his great paunch.

"Why not?" he said suddenly, reached out for his cigar-case, beside him on the table, and produced three slips of paper highly glazed and covered with that unforgettable, sprawling hand, a portion of a gilded crest at the top—in short, the missing half of the document I had found in Semlin's bag. Clubfoot held them out fanwise for me to see, but well out of my reach, and he kept a great, spatulate thumb over the top of the first sheet where the name of the addressee should have been.

"I trust you are now convinced, Herr Doktor," he said, with a smile that bared his teeth, and, putting the pieces together, he folded them across, tucked them away in the cigar-case again, and thrust it into his pocket.

I must test the ground further.

"Has it occurred to you, Herr Doktor," I asked, "that we have very little time at our disposal? The person whom we serve must be anxiously waiting...."

Clubfoot laughed and shook his head.

"I want that half-letter badly," he said, "but there's no violent hurry. So I fear you must leave that argument out of your presentation of the case, for it has no commercial value. The person you speak of is not in Berlin."

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I had heard something of the Kaiser's sudden appearances and disappearances during the war, but I had not thought they could be so well managed as to be kept from the knowledge of one of his own trusted servants, for such I judged Clubfoot to be. Evidently, he knew nothing of my visit to the Castle that evening, and I was for a moment unpatriotic enough to wish I had kept my half of the letter that I might give it to Clubfoot now to save the coming exposure. "A thousand dollars!" Clubfoot said.

I remained silent.

"Two? Three? Four thousand? Man, you are greedy. Well, I will make it five thousand—twenty thousand marks...."

"Herr Doktor," I said, "I don't want your money. I want to be fair with you. When the ... the person we know of sends for you, we will go together. You shall tell the large part you have played in this affair. I only want credit for what I have done, nothing more...."

A knock came at the door. The porter entered.

"A telegram for the Herr Doktor," he said, presenting a salver.

Somewhere near by a band was playing dance music ... one of those rousing, splendidly accented Viennese waltzes. There seemed to be a ball on, for through the open door of the room, I heard, mingled with the strains of the music, the sound of feet and the hum of voices.

Then the door closed, shutting out the outer world again.

"You permit me," said Grundt curtly, as he broke the seal of the telegram. So as not to seem to observe him, I got up and walked across to the window, and leaned against the warm radiator.

"Well?" said a voice from the arm-chair.

"Well?" I echoed.

"I have made you my proposal, Herr Doktor: you have made yours. Yours is quite unacceptable. I have told you with great frankness why it is necessary that I should have your portion of the document and the sum I am prepared to pay for it. I set its value at five thousand dollars. I will pay you the money over in cash, here and now, in good German bank-notes, in exchange for those slips of paper."

The man's suavity had all but vanished: his voice was harsh and stern. His eyes glittered under his shaggy brows as he looked at me. Had I been less agitated, I should have noted this, as a portent of the coming storm, also his great ape's hands picking nervously at the telegram in his lap.

"I have already told you," I said firmly, "that I don't want your money. You know my terms!"

He rose up from his seat and his figure seemed to tower.

"Terms?" he cried in a voice that quivered with suppressed passion, "terms? Understand that I give orders. I accept terms from no man. We waste time here talking. Come, take the money and give me the paper."

I shook my head. My brain was clear, but I felt the crisis was coming. I took a good grip with my hands of the marble slab covering the radiator behind me to give me confidence. The slab yielded: mechanically I noted that it was loose.

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The man in front of me was shaking with rage.

“Listen!” he said. “I’ll give you one more chance. But mark my words well. Do you know what happened to the man that stole that document? The English took him out and shot him on account of what was found in his house when they raided it. Do you know what happened to the interpreter at the internment camp, who was our go-between, who played us false by cutting the document in half? The English shot *him* too, on account of what was found in letters that came to him openly through the post? And who settled Schulte? And who settled the other man? Who contrived the traps that sent them to their doom? It was *I*, Grundt, *I*, the cripple, *I*, the Clubfoot, that had these traitors despatched as an example to the six thousand of us who serve our Emperor and empire in darkness! You dog, I’ll smash you!”

He was gibbering like an angry ape: his frame was shaking with fury: every hair in the tangle on his face and hands seemed to bristle with his Berserker frenzy.

But he kept away from me, and I saw that he was still fighting to preserve his self-control.

I maintained a bold front.

“This may do for your own people,” I said contemptuously, “but it doesn’t impress me, I’m an American citizen!”

He was calmer now, but his eyes glittered dangerously.

“An American citizen?” he said in an icy tone. Then he fairly hissed at me:

“You fool! Blind, besotted fool! Do you think you can trifle with the might of the German Empire? Ah! I’ve played a pretty game with you, you dirty English dog! I’ve watched you squirming and writhing whilst the stupid German told you his pretty little tale and plied you with his wine and his cigars. You’re in our power now, you miserable English hound! Do you understand that? Now call on your fleet to come and save you!

“Listen! I’ll be frank with you to the last. I’ve had my suspicions of you from the first, when they telephoned me that you had escaped from the hotel, but I wanted to make *sure*. Ever since you have been in this room it has been in my power to push that bell there and send you to Spandau, where they rid us of such dirty dogs as you.

“But the game amused me. I liked to see the Herr Englander playing the spy against *me*, the master of them all. Do you know, you fool, that old Schratt knows English, that she spent years of her harlot’s life in London, and that when you allowed her a glimpse of that passport, your own passport, the one you so cleverly burned, she remembered the name? Ah! you didn’t know that, did you?

“Shall I tell you what was in that telegram they just brought me? It was from Schratt, our faithful Schratt, who shall have a bangle for this night's work, to say that the corpse at the hotel has a chain round its neck with an identity disc in the name of Semlin. Ha! you didn't know that either, did you?

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"And *you* would bargain and chaffer with me! *You* would dictate your terms, you scum! *You* with your head in a noose, a spy that has failed in his mission, a miserable wretch that I can send to his death with a flip of my little finger! You impudent hound! Well, you'll get your deserts this time, Captain Desmond Okewood ... but I'll have that paper first!"

Roaring "Give it to me!" he rushed at me like some frenzied beast of the jungle. The veins stood out at his temples, his hairy nostrils opened and closed as his breath came faster, his long arms shot out and his great paws clutched at my throat.

But I was waiting for him. As he came at me, I heard his clubfoot stump once on the polished floor, then, from the radiator behind me, I raised high in my arms the heavy marble slab, and with every ounce of strength in my body brought it crashing down on his head.

He fell like a log, the blood oozing sluggishly from his head on to the parquet. I stopped an instant, snatched the cigar-case from the pocket where he had placed it, extracted the document and fled from the room.

CHAPTER XI

MISS MARY PRENDERGAST RISKS HER REPUTATION

The rooms of our suite were intercommunicating so that you could pass from one to the other without going into the corridor at all. Schmalz had retired this way, going from my room through the bathroom to his own room. In the excitement of the moment I forgot all about this, else I should not have omitted such an elementary precaution as slipping the bolt of the door communicating between my room and the bathroom.

As I stepped out into the corridor, with the crash of that heavy body still ringing in my ears, I thought I caught the sound of a light step in the bathroom; the next moment I heard a door open and then a loud exclamation of horror in the room I had just left.

The corridor was dim and deserted. The place seemed uninhabited. No boots stood outside the rooms, and open doors, one after the other, were sufficient indication that the apartments they led to were untenanted.

I didn't pause to reason or to plan. On hearing that long drawn out cry of horror, I dashed blindly down the corridor at top speed, followed it round to the right and then, catching sight of a small staircase, rushed up it three steps at a time. As I reached the top I heard a loud cry somewhere on the floor below. Then a door banged, there was the sound of running feet and ... silence.



I found myself on the next floor in a corridor similar to the one I had just left. Like it, it was desolate and dimly lit. Like it, it showed room after room silent and empty. Agitated as I was, the contrast with the bright and busy vestibule and the throng of uniformed servants below was so marked that it struck me with convincing force. Even the hotels, it seemed, were part and parcel of the great German publicity bluff which I had noted in my reading of the German papers at Rotterdam.

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I had no plan in my head, only a wild desire to put as much distance as possible between me and that ape-man in the room below. So, after pausing a moment to listen and draw breath, I started off again. Suddenly a door down the corridor, not ten paces away from me, opened and a woman came out. I stopped dead in my headlong course, but it was too late and I found myself confronting her.

She was young and very beautiful with masses of thick brown hair clustering round a very white forehead. She was in evening dress, all in white, with an ermine wrap.

Even as I looked at her I knew her and she knew me.

“Monica,” I whispered.

“Why! Desmond!” she said.

A regular hubbub echoed from below. Voices were crying out, doors were banging, there was the sound of feet.

The girl was speaking, saying in her low and pleasant voice phrases that were vague to me about her surprise, her delight at seeing me. But I did not listen to her. I was straining my ears towards that volume of chaotic noises which came swelling up from below.

“Monica!” I interrupted swiftly, “have you any place to hide me? This place is dangerous for me.... I must get away. If you can’t save me, don’t stay here but get away yourself as fast as you can. They’re after me and if they catch you with me it will be bad for you!”

Without a word the girl turned round to the room she had just left. She beckoned to me, then knocked and went in. I followed her. It was a big, pleasant bedroom, elegantly furnished with a soft carpet and silk hangings, and I know not what, with shaded lights and flowers in profusion. Sitting up in bed was a stout, placid-looking woman in a pink silk kimono with her hair coquettishly braided in two short pigtails which hung down on either side of her face.

Monica closed the door softly behind her.

“Why, Monica!” she exclaimed in horror—and her speech was that of the United States —“what on earth ...?”

“Not a word, Mary, but let me explain....”

“But for land’s sake, Monica....”

“Mary, I want you to help....”

“But say, child, a man ... in my bedroom ... at this time o’ night....”

“Oh, shucks, Mary! let me talk.”

The distress of the woman in bed was so comic that I could scarcely help laughing. She had dragged the bed-clothes up till only her eyes could be seen. Her pigtails bobbed about in her emotion.

“Now, Mary dear, listen here. You’re a friend of mine. This is Desmond Okewood, another, a very old and dear friend of mine too. Well, you know, Mary, this isn’t a healthy country these times for an English officer. That’s what Desmond here is. I didn’t know he was in Germany. I don’t know a thing about him except what he’s told me and that’s that he’s in danger and wants me to help him. I met him outside and brought him right in here, as I know you would want me to, wouldn’t you, dear?”

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The lady poked her nose over the top of the bed-clothes.

“Present the gentleman properly, Monica!” she said severely.

“Captain Okewood ... Miss Mary Prendergast,” said Monica.

The lady’s head, pigtails and all, now appeared. She appeared to be somewhat mollified.

“I can’t say I approve of your way of doing things, Monica,” she observed, but less severely than before, “and I can’t think what an English officer wants in my bedroom at ten minutes of two in the morning, but if those Deutschers want to find him, perhaps I can understand!”

Here she smiled affectionately on the beautiful girl at my side.

“Ah! Mary, you’re a dear,” replied Monica.

“I knew you’d help us. Why, a British officer in Germany ... isn’t it too thrilling?”

She turned to me.

“But, Des,” she said, “what do you want me to do?”

I knew I could trust Monica and I resolved I would trust her friend too... she looked a white woman all right. And if she was a friend of Monica’s, her heart would be in the right place. Francis and I had known Monica all our lives almost. Her father had lived for years ... indeed to the day of his death ... in London as the principal European representative of a big American financial house. They had lived next door to us in London and Francis and I had known Monica from the days when she was a pretty kid in short skirts until she had made her debut and the American ambassadress had presented her at Buckingham Palace. At various stages of our lives, both Francis and I had been in love with her, I believe, but my life in the army had kept me much abroad, so Francis had seen most of her and had been the hardest hit.

Then the father died and Monica went travelling abroad in great state, as befits a young heiress, with a prodigiously respectable American chaperon and a retinue of retainers. I never knew the rights of the case between her and Francis, but at one of the German embassies abroad—I think in Vienna—she met the young Count Rachwitz, head of one of the great Silesian noble houses, and married him.

It was not on the usual rock—money—that this German-American marriage was wrecked, for the Count was very wealthy himself. I had supposed that the German man’s habitual attitude of mind towards women had not suited the girl’s independent spirit on hearing that Monica, a few years after her marriage, had left her husband and

gone to live in America. I had not seen her since she left London, and, though we wrote to one another at intervals, I had not heard from her since the war started and had no idea that she had returned to Germany. Monica Rachwitz was, in fact, the last person I should ever have expected to meet in Berlin in war-time.

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So, as briefly as I could and listening intently throughout for any sounds from the corridor, I gave the two women the story of the disappearance of Francis and my journey into Germany to look for him. At the mention of my brother's name, I noticed that the girl stiffened and her face grew rigid, but when I told her of my fears for his safety her blue eyes seemed to me to grow dim. I described to them my adventure in the hotel at Rotterdam, my reception in the house of General von Boden, and my interview at the Castle, ending with the experiences of that night, the trap laid for me at the hotel and my encounter with Clubfoot in the room below. Two things only I kept back: the message from Francis and the document. I decided within myself that the fewer people in those secrets the safer they would be. I am afraid, therefore, that my account of my interview with the Emperor was a trifle garbled, for I made out that I did not know why I was bidden to the presence and that our conversation was interrupted before I could discover the reason.

The two women listened with grave faces. Only once did Monica interrupt me. It was when I mentioned General von Boden.

"I know the beast," she said. "But, oh, Des!" she exclaimed, "you seem to have fallen right among the top set in this country. They're a bad lot to cross. I fear you are in terrible danger."

"I believe you, Monica," I answered, dolefully enough. "And that's just where I feel such a beast for throwing myself upon your mercy in this way. But I was pretty desperate when I met you just now and I didn't know where to turn. Still, I want you to understand that if you can only get me out of this place I shall not trouble you further. I came to this country on my own responsibility and I'm going through with it alone. I have no intention of implicating anybody else along with me. But I confess I don't believe it is possible to get away from this hotel. They're watching every door by now. Besides..."

I stopped abruptly. A noise outside caught my listening ear. Footsteps were approaching along the corridor. I heard doors open and shut. They were hunting for me, floor by floor, room by room.

"Open that wardrobe," said a voice from the bed: a firm, business-like voice that was good to hear. "Open it and get right in, young man; but don't go mussing up my good dresses whatever you do! And you, Monica, quick! Switch off those lights all but this one by the bed. Good! Now go to the door and ask them what they mean by making this noise at this time of night with me ill and all!"

I got into the wardrobe and Monica shut me in. I heard the bedroom door open, then voices. I waited patiently for five minutes, then the wardrobe door opened again.

"Come out, Des," said Monica, "and thank Mary Prendergast for her cleverness."

“What did they say?” I asked.

“That reception clerk was along. He was most apologetic—they know me here, you see. He told me how a fellow had made a desperate attack upon a gentleman on the floor below and had got away. They thought he must be hiding somewhere in the hotel. I told him I’d been sitting here for an hour chatting with Miss Prendergast and that we hadn’t heard a sound. They went away then!”

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"You won't catch any Deutschers fooling Mary Prendergast," said the jovial lady in the bed; "but, children, what next?"

Monica spoke—quite calmly. She was always perfectly self-possessed.

"My brother is stopping with me in our apartment in the Bendler-Strasse," she said. "You remember Gerry, Des—he got all smashed up flying, you know, and is practically a cripple. He's been so much better here that I've been trying to get an attendant to look after him, to dress him and so on, but we couldn't find anybody; men are so scarce nowadays! You could come home with me, Des, and take this man's place for a day or two ... I'm afraid it couldn't be longer, for one would have to register you with the police—every one has to be registered, you know—and I suppose you have no papers that are any good—now."

"You are too kind, Monica," I answered, "but you risk too much and I can't accept."

"It's no risk for a day or two," she said. "I am a person of consequence in official Germany, you know, with my husband A.D.C. to Marshal von Mackensen: and I can always say I forgot to send in your papers. If they come down upon me afterwards I should say I meant to register you but had to discharge you suddenly ... for drink!"

"But how can I get away from here?" I objected.

"I guess we can fix that too," she replied. "My car is coming for me at two—it must be that now—I have been at a dance downstairs—one of the Radolin girls is getting married to-morrow—it was so deadly dull I ran up here and woke up Mary Prendergast to talk. You shall be my chauffeur! I know you drive a car! You ought to be able to manage mine ... it's a Mercedes."

"I can drive any old car," I said, "but I'm blessed ..."

"Wait there!" cried this remarkable girl, and ran out of the room.

For twenty minutes I stood and made small talk with Miss Prendergast. They were the longest twenty minutes I have ever spent. I was dead tired in any case, but my desperate position kept my thoughts so busy that, for all my endeavours to be polite, I fear my conversation was extremely distraught.

"You poor boy!" suddenly said Miss Mary Prendergast, totally ignoring a profound remark I was making regarding Mr. Wilson's policy, "don't you go on talking to me! Sit down on that chair and go to sleep! You look just beat!"

I sat down and nodded in the arm-chair.



Suddenly I was awake. Monica stood before me. She drew from under her cape a livery cap and uniform.

“Put these things on,” she said, “and listen carefully. When you leave here, turn to the right and take the little staircase you will find on the right. Go down to the bottom, go through the glass doors, and across the room you will find there, to a door in a corner which leads to the ballroom entrance of the hotel. I will give you my ermine wrap to carry. I shall be waiting there. You will help me on with my cloak and escort me to the car. Is that clear?”

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“Perfectly.”

“Now, pay attention once more, for I shall not be able to speak to you again. I shall have to give you your directions for finding the way to the Bendler-Strasse.”

She did so and added:

“Drive carefully, whatever you do. If we had a smash and the police intervened, it might be most awkward for you.”

“But your chauffeur,” I said, “what will he do?”

“Oh, Carter,” she answered carelessly, “he’s tickled to death ... he’s American, you see ... he drove me out into the Tiergarten just now and took off his livery, then drove me back here, hopped off and went home.”

“But can you trust him?” I asked anxiously.

“Like myself,” she said. “Besides, Carter’s been to Belgium ... he drove Count Rachwitz, my husband, while he was on duty there. And Carter hasn’t forgotten what he saw in Belgium!”

She gave me the key of the garage and further instructions how to put the car up. Carter would give me a bed at the garage and would bring me round to the house early in the morning as if I were applying for the job of male attendant for Gerry.

“I will go down first,” Monica said, “so as not to keep you waiting. My, but they’re rattled downstairs—all the crowd at Olga von Radolin’s dance have got hold of the story and the place is full of policemen. But there’ll be no danger if you walk straight up to me in the hall and keep your face turned away from the crowd as much as possible.”

She kissed Miss Prendergast and slipped away. What a splendid pair of women they were: so admirably cool and resourceful: they seemed to have thought of everything.

“Good night, Miss Prendergast,” I said. “You have done me a good turn. I shall never forget it!” And as the only means at my disposal for showing my gratitude, I kissed her hand.

She coloured up like a girl.

“It’s a long time since any one did that to a silly old woman like me,” she said musingly. “Was it you or your brother,” she asked abruptly, “who nearly broke my poor girl’s heart?”

"I shouldn't like to say," I answered; "but I don't think, speaking personally, that Monica ever cared enough about me for me to plead guilty."

She sniffed contemptuously.

"If that is so," she said, "all I can say is that you seem to have all the brains of your family!"

With that I took my leave.

* * * * *

I reached the ballroom vestibule without meeting a soul. The place was crowded with people, officers in uniform, glittering with decorations, women in evening dress, coachmen, footmen, chauffeurs, waiters. Everybody was talking sixteen to the dozen, and there were such dense knots of people that at first I couldn't see Monica. Two policemen were standing at the swing-doors leading into the street, and with them a civilian who looked like a detective. I caught sight of Monica, almost at the detective's elbow, talking to two very elegant-looking officers. I pushed my way across the vestibule, turned my back on the detective and stood impassively beside her.

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“Ah! there you are, Carter!” she said. “Gute Nacht, Herr Baron! Auf wiedersehen, Durchlaucht!”

The two officers kissed her hand whilst I helped her into her wrap. Then I marched straight out of the swing-doors in front of her, looking neither to right nor to left, past the detective and the two policemen. The detective may have looked at me: if so, I didn't perceive it. I had made up my mind not to see him.

Outside Monica took the lead and brought me over to a chocolate-coloured limousine drawn up at the pavement. I noted with dismay that the engine was stopped. That might mean further delay whilst I cranked up. But a friendly chauffeur standing by seized the handle and started the engine whilst I assisted Monica into the car, and the next moment we were gliding smoothly over the asphalt under the twinkling arc-lamps.

The Bendler-Strasse is off the Tiergarten, not far from the Esplanade, and I found my way there without much difficulty. I flatter myself that both Monica and I played our parts well, and I am sure nothing could have been more professional than the way I helped her to alight. It was an apartment house and she had the key of the front door, so, after seeing her safely within doors, I returned to the car and drove it round to the garage by a carriage-way leading to the rear of the premises.

As I unlocked the double doors of the garage, a man came down a ladder outside the place leading to the upper room.

“Did it work all right, sir?” he asked.

“Is that Carter?” I said.

“Sure that's me,” came the cheery response. “Stand by now and we'll run her in. Then I'll show you where you are to sleep!”

We stowed the car away and he took me upstairs to his quarters, a bright little room with electric light, a table with a red cloth, a cheerful open fire and two beds. The walls were ornamented with pictures cut from the American Sunday supplements, mostly feminine and horsy studies.

“It's a bit rough, mister,” said Carter, “but it's the best I can do. Gee! but you look that dawg-gorn tired I guess you could sleep anywheres!”

He was a friendly fellow, pleasant-looking in an ugly way, with a button nose and honest eyes.

“Say, but I like to think of the way we fooled them Deutschers,” he chuckled. He kept on chuckling to himself whilst I took off my boots and began to undress.

“That there is your bed,” he said, pointing; “the footman used to sleep there but they grabbed him for the army. There’s a pair of Mr. Gerry’s pyjamas for you and you’ll find a cup of cocoa down warming by the fire. It’s all a bit rough, but it’s the best we can do. I guess you want to go to sleep mortal bad, so I’ll be going down. The bed’s clean... there are clean sheets on it....”

“But I won’t turn you out of your room,” I said. “There are two beds. You must take yours.”

“Don’t you fret yourself about me,” he answered. “I’ll make myself comfortable down in the garage. I don’t often see a gentleman in this dawg-gorn country, and when I do I know how to treat him.”

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He wouldn't listen to me, but stumped off down the stairs. As he went I heard him murmuring to himself:

"Gee! but we surely fooled those Deutschers some!"

I drank this admirable fellow's cocoa; I warmed myself at his fire. Then with a thankful heart I crawled into bed and sank into a deep and dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER XII

HIS EXCELLENCY THE GENERAL IS WORRIED

I sat with Monica in her boudoir, which, unlike the usual run of German rooms, had an open fireplace in which a cheerful fire was burning. Monica, in a ravishing kimono, was perched on the leather railed seat running round the fireplace, one little foot in a satin slipper held out to the blaze. In that pretty room she made a charming picture, which for a moment almost made me forget the manifold dangers besetting me.

The doughty Carter had acquitted himself nobly of his task. When I awoke, feeling like a giant refreshed, he had the fire blazing merrily in the fireplace, while on the table a delicious breakfast of tea and fried eggs and biscuits was spread.

"There ain't no call to mess yourself up inside with that dam' war bread of theirs," he chirped. "Miss Monica, she lets me have biscuits, same like she has herself. I always calls her Miss Monica," he explained, "like what they did over at her uncle's place in Long Island, where I used to work."

After breakfast he produced hot water, a safety razor and other toilet requisites, a clean shirt and collar, an overcoat and a Stetson hat—all from Gerry's wardrobe, I presumed. My boots, too, were beautifully polished, and it was as a new man altogether, fresh in mind and clean in body, that I presented myself, about ten o'clock in the morning, at the front door and demanded the "Frau Graefin." By Carter's advice I had removed my moustache, and my clean-shaven countenance, together with my black felt hat and dark overcoat, gave me, I think, that appearance of rather dour respectability which one looks for in a male attendant.

Now Monica and I sat and reviewed the situation together.

"German servants spend their lives in prying into their masters' affairs," she said, "but we shan't be interrupted here. That door leads into Gerry's room: he was asleep when I went in just now. I'll take you into him presently. Now tell me about yourself ... and Francis!"

I told her again, but at greater length, all I knew about Francis, his mission into Germany, his long silence.

“I acted on impulse,” I said, “but, believe me, I acted for the best. Only, everything seems to have conspired against me. I appear to have walked straight into a mesh of the most appalling complications which reach right up to the Throne.”

“Never mind, Des,” she said, leaning over and putting a little hand on my arm, “it was for Francis; you and I would do anything to help him, wouldn’t we? ... if he is still alive. Impulse is not such a bad thing, after all. If I had acted on impulse once, maybe poor Francis would not now be in the fix he is....”

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And she sighed.

"Things look black enough, Des," she went on. "Maybe you and I won't get the chance of another chat like this again and that's why I'm going to tell you something I have never told anybody else. I am only telling you so as you will know that, whatever happens, you will always find in me an ally in your search ... though, tied as I am, I scarcely think I can ever help you much.

"Your brother wanted me to marry him. I liked him better than anybody else I had ever met ... or have ever met since, for that matter.... Daddy was dead, I was absolutely free to please myself, so no difficulties stood in the way. But your brother was proud ... his pride was greater than his love for me, I told him when we parted ... and he wouldn't hear of marriage until he had made himself independent, though I had enough for both of us. He wanted me to wait a year or two until he had got his business started properly, but his pride angered me and I wouldn't.

"So we quarrelled and I went abroad with Mrs. Rushwood. Francis never wrote: all I heard about him was an occasional scrap in your letters. Mrs. Rushwood was crazy about titles, and she ran me round from court to court, always looking for what she called a suitable *pari* for me. At Vienna we met Rachwitz ... he was very good looking and very well mannered and seemed to be really fond of me.

"Well, I gave Francis another chance. I wrote him a friendly letter and told him about Rachwitz wanting to marry me and asked his advice. He wrote me back a beastly letter, a wicked letter, Des. 'Any girl who is fool enough to sell herself for a title,' he said, 'richly deserves a German husband.' What do you think of that?"

"Poor old Francis," I said. "He was terribly fond of you, Monica!"

"Well, his letter did it. I married Rachwitz ... and have been miserable ever since. I'm not going to bore you with a long story about my matrimonial troubles. No! I'm not going to cry either! I'm not crying! Karl is not a bad man, as German men go, and he's a gentleman, but his love affairs and his drunken parties and his attitude of mind towards me ... it was so utterly different to everything I had been used to. Then you know, I left him...."

"But, Monica," I exclaimed, "what are you doing here then?"

She sighed wearily.

"I'm a German by marriage, Des," she said, "you can't get away from that. My husband's country ... my country ... is at war and the wives must play their part, wherever their heart is. Karl never asked me to come back, I'll give him the credit for that. I came of my own accord because I felt my place was here. So I go round to

needlework parties and sewing bees and Red Cross matinees and try to be civil to the German women and listen to their boasting and bragging about their army, their hypocrisy about Belgium, their vilification of the best friends Daddy and I ever had, you English! But doing my duty by my husband does not forbid me to help my friends when they are in danger. That's why you can count on me, Des."

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And she gave me her hand.

"I want to be frank with you, too," I said, "so, whatever happens to me, you won't feel I have deceived you about things. I can't say much because my secret is not healthy for anyone to share, and, should they trace any connection between you and me, if they get me, it will be better for you not to have known anything compromising. But I want to tell you this. There is a consideration at stake which is higher than my own safety, higher even than Francis'. I don't believe I am afraid to die: if I escape here, I shall probably get killed at the front sooner or later: it is because of this consideration I speak of that I want to get away with my life back to England."

Monica laughed happily.

"Why do men always take us women to be fools?" she said. "You're a dangerous man to have around, Des, I know that, without worrying my head about any old secret. But you are my friend and Francis' brother and I'm going to help you."

"Now, listen! Old von Boden was at that party last night: he came in late. Rudi von Boden, he told me, is going to take despatches to Rumania, to Mackensen's headquarters. Well, I telephoned the old man this morning and asked him if Rudi would take a parcel for me to Karl. He said he would and the General is coming here to lunch to-day to fetch it."

"Von Boden is an old beast and runs after every woman he meets. He is by way of being partial to me, if you please, sir. I think I should be able to find out from him what are the latest developments in your case. There's nothing in the paper this morning about the affair at the Esplanade. But then, these things are always hushed up."

"He'll hardly say much in the circumstances," I objected "After all, the Kaiser is involved...."

"My dear Des, opinion of feminine intelligence in military circles in this country is so low that the women in the army set at Court are very often far better informed than the General Staff. Von Boden will tell me all I want to know."

What a girl she was!

"About your friend, the clubfooted man," she went on, "I'm rather puzzled. He must be a person of considerable importance to be fetched by special train straight into the Emperor's private apartments, where very few people ever penetrate, I assure you. But I've never heard of him. He's certainly not a Court official. Nor is he the head of the Political Police ... that's Henninger, a friend of Karl's. Still, there are people of great importance working in dark places in this country and I guess Clubfoot must be one of them."



“Now, I think I ought to take you into Gerry. I want to speak to you about him, Des. I daren’t tell him who you are. Gerry’s not himself. He’s been a nervous wreck ever since his accident and I can’t trust him. He’s a very conventional man and his principles would never hear of me harbouring a ... a ...”

“Spy?” I suggested.

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"No, a friend," she corrected. "So you'll just have to be a male nurse, I guess. A German-American would be best, I think, as you'll have to read the German papers to Gerry—he doesn't know a word of German. Then, you must have a name of some kind...."

"Frederick Meyer," I suggested promptly, "from Pittsburg. It'll have to be Pittsburg: Francis went there for a bit, you know: he wrote me a lot about the place and I've seen pictures of it, too. It's the only American city I know anything about."

"Let it be Meyer from Pittsburg, then," smiled Monica, "but you've got a terrible English accent, Des. I guess we'll have to tell Gerry you were years nursing in London before the war."

She hesitated a moment, then added:

"Des, I'm afraid you'll find Gerry very trying. He's awfully irritable and ... and very spiteful. So you must be careful not to give yourself away."

I had only met the brother once and my recollection of him was of a good looking, rather spoilt young man. He had been brought up entirely in the States by the Long Island uncle whose great fortune he had inherited.

"You'll be quite safe up here for the present," Monica went on. "You'll sleep in the little room off Gerry's and I'll have your meals served there too. After I have found out from the General how things stand, we'll decide what's to be done next."

"I'll be very wary with Master Gerry," I said. "But, Monica, though he has only seen me once, he knows Francis pretty well and we are rather alike. Do you think he'll recognize me?"

"Why, Desmond, it's years since he saw you. And you're not much like Francis with your moustache off. If you're careful, it'll be all right! It isn't for long, either. Now we'll go in. Come along."

As we entered, a petulant voice cried:

"Is that you, Monica? Say, am I to be left alone all the morning?"

"Gerry dear," answered Monica very sweetly, "I've been engaging someone to look after you a bit. Come here, Meyer! This is Frederick Meyer, Gerry!"

I should never have recognized the handsome, rather indolent youth I had met in London in the pale man with features drawn with pain who gazed frowningly at me from the bed.

“Who is he? Where did you get him from? Does he know German?”

He shot a string of questions at Monica, who answered them in her sweet, patient way.

He was apparently satisfied, for, when Monica presently got up to leave us, he threw me an armful of German papers and bade me read to him.

I had not sat with him for ten minutes before I realized what an impossible creature the man was. Nothing I could do was right. Now he didn't want to hear the war news, then it was the report of the Reichstag debate that bored him, now I didn't read loud enough, then my voice jarred on him. Finally, he snatched the paper out of my hand.

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"I can't understand half you say," he cried in accents shrill with irritability; "you mouth and mumble like an Englishman. You say you are an American?"

"Yes, sir," I answered meekly, "but I resided for many years in England."

"Well, it's a good thing you're not there now. Those English are just plumb crazy. They'll never whip Germany, not if they try for a century. Why, look what this country has done in this war? Nothing can stand against her! It's organization, that's what it is! The Germans lead the world. Take their doctors! I have been to every specialist in America about my back and paid them thousands of dollars. And what good did they do me? Not a thing. I come to Germany, they charge me a quarter of the fees, and I feel a different man already. Before tackling the Germans, the English ..."

Thus he ran on. I knew the type well, the American who is hypnotized by German efficiency and thoroughness so completely that he does not see the reverse side of the medal.

He exhausted himself on the topic at last and bade me read to him again.

"Read about the affair at the Hotel Esplanade last night," he commanded.

I had kept an eye open for this very item but, as Monica had said, the papers contained no hint of it. I wondered how Gerry knew about it. Monica would not have told him.

"What affair do you mean?" I said. "There is nothing about it in the papers."

"Of course there is, you fool. What is the use of my hiring you to read the papers to me if you can't find news that's spread all over the place? It's no use giving me the paper ... you know I can't read it! Here, Josef will know!"

A man-servant had come noiselessly into the room with some clothes.

Gerry turned to him.

"Josef, where did you see that story you were telling me about an English spy assaulting a man at the Esplanade last night?"

"Dot ain't in de paper, sir. I haf heard dis from de chauffeur of de Biedermanns next door. He wass at de hotel himself wid hiss shentleman lars' night at de dance. Dey won't put dat in no paper, sir."

And the man chuckled.

I felt none too comfortable during all this and was glad to be told to read on and be damned.



I read to the young American all the morning. He went on exactly like a very badly brought up child. He was fretful and quarrelsome and sometimes abusive, and I had some difficulty in keeping my temper. He continually recurred to my English accent and jeered so offensively and so pointedly at what he called "your English friends" that I began to believe there was some purpose behind his attitude. But it was only part of his invalid's fractiousness, for when the valet, Josef, appeared with the luncheon tray, the American seemed anxious to make amends for his behaviour.

"I'm afraid I'm a bit trying at times, Meyer," he said with a pleasant smile. "But you're a good fellow. Go and have your lunch. You needn't come back till four: I always sleep after luncheon. Here, have a cigar!"

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I took the cigar with all humility as beseemed my role and followed the valet into an adjoining room, where the table was laid for me. I am keenly sensitive to outside influences, and I felt instinctively distrustful of the man Josef. I expect he resented my intrusion into a sphere where his influence had probably been supreme and where he had doubtless managed to secure a good harvest of pickings.

He left me to my luncheon and went away. After an excellent lunch, washed down by some first-rate claret, I was enjoying my cigar over a book when Josef reappeared again.

"The Frau Graefin will see you downstairs!" he said.

Monica received me in a morning-room (the apartment was on two floors). She was very much agitated and had lost all her habitual calm.

"Des," she said, "von Boden has been here!"

"Well!" I replied eagerly.

"I wasn't very successful," she went on "I'm in deep water, Des, and that's the truth. I have never seen the old General as he was to-day. He's a frightful bully and tyrant, but even his worst enemy never accused him of cowardice. But, Des, to-day the man was cowed. He seemed to be in terror of his life and I had the greatest difficulty in making him say anything at all about your affair.

"I made a joking allusion to the escapade at the hotel last night and he said:

"'Yesterday may prove the ruin of not only my career but that of my son's also. Yesterday gained for me as an enemy, Madam, a man whom it spells ruin, perhaps death, to offend.'

"'You mean the Emperor?' I asked.

"'The Emperor!' he said. 'Oh! of course, he's furious. No, I was not speaking of the Emperor!'

"Then he changed the subject and it took me all my tact to get back to it. I asked him if they had caught the author of the attack at the Esplanade. He said, no, but it was only a question of time: the fellow couldn't escape. I said I supposed they would offer a reward and publish a description of the assailant all over the country. He told me they would do nothing of the sort.

"'The public will hear nothing about the affair,' he said, 'and if you will take my advice, Countess, you will forget all about it. In any case, the Princess Radolin is writing to all her guests at the ball last night to urge them strongly to say nothing about the incident.

The employees of the hotel will keep their mouths shut. The interests at stake forbid that there should be any attempt whatsoever made in public to throw light on the affair.'

"That is all I could get out of him. But I have something further to tell you. The General went away immediately after lunch. Almost as soon as he had gone I was called to the telephone. Dr. Henninger was there: he is the head of the Political Police, you know. He gave me the same advice as the General, namely, to forget all about what occurred at the Esplanade last night. And then the Princess Radolin rang me up to say the same thing. She seemed very frightened: she was quite tearful. Someone evidently had scared her badly."

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"Monica," I said, "it's quite clear I can't stay here. My dear girl, if I am discovered in your house, there is no knowing what trouble may not come upon you."

"If there is any risk," she answered, "it's a risk I am ready to take. You have nowhere to go to in Berlin, and if you are caught outside they might find out where you had been hiding and then we should be as badly off as before. No, you stay right on here, and maybe in a day or two I can get you away. I've been thinking something out.

"Karl has a place near the Dutch frontier, Schloss Bellevue, it is called, close to Cleves. It's an old place and has been in the family for generations. Karl, however, only uses it as a shooting-box: we had big shoots up there every autumn before the war.

"There has been no shooting there for two years now and the place is overstocked with game. The Government has been appealing to people with shooting preserves to kill their game and put it on the market, so I had arranged to go up to Bellevue this month and see the agent about this. I thought if I could prevail on Gerry to come with me, you could accompany him and you might get across the Dutch frontier from there. It's only about fifteen miles away from the Castle. If I can get a move on Gerry, there is no reason why we shouldn't go away in a day or two. In the meantime you'll be quite safe here."

I told her I must think it over: she seemed to be risking too much. But I think my mind was already made up. I could not bring destruction on this faithful friend.

Then I went upstairs again to Gerry, who was in as vile a temper as before. His lunch had disagreed with him: he hadn't slept: the room was not hot enough ... these were a few of the complaints he showered at me as soon as I appeared. He was in his most impish and malicious mood. He sent me running hither and thither: he gave me an order and withdrew it in the same breath: my complacency seemed to irritate him, to encourage him to provoke me.

At last he came back to his old sore subject, my English accent.

"I guess our good American is too homely for a fine English gentleman like you," he said, "but I believe you'll as lief speak as you were taught before you're through with this city. An English accent is not healthy in Berlin at present, Mister Meyer, sir, and you'd best learn to talk like the rest of us if you want to keep on staying in this house.

"I'm in no state to be worried just now and I've no notion of having the police in here because some of their dam' plain-clothes men have heard my attendant saying 'charnce' and 'darncce' like any Britisher—especially with this English spy running round loose. By the way, you'll have to be registered? Has my sister seen about it yet?"

I said she was attending to it.

“I want to know if she’s done it. I’m a helpless cripple and I can’t get a thing done for me. Have you given her your papers? Yes, or no?”

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This was a bad fix. With all the persistence of the invalid, the man was harping on his latest whim.

So I lied. The Countess had my papers, I said.

Instantly he rang the bell and demanded Monica and had fretted himself into a fine state by the time she appeared.

“What’s this I hear, Monica?” he cried in his high-pitched, querulous voice. “Hasn’t Meyer been registered with the police yet?”

“I’m going to see to it myself in the morning, Gerry,” she said.

“In the morning. In the morning!” he cried, throwing up his hands. “Good God, how can you be so shiftless? A law is a law. The man’s papers must be sent in to-day ... this instant.”

Monica looked appealingly at me.

“I’m afraid I’m to blame, sir,” I said. “The fact is, my passport is not quite in order and I shall have to take it to the embassy before I send it to the police.”

Then I saw Josef standing by the bed, a salver in his hand.

“Zom letters, sir,” he said to Gerry. I wondered how long he had been in the room.

Gerry waved the letters aside and burst into a regular screaming fit. He wouldn’t have things done that way in the house; he wouldn’t have unknown foreigners brought in, with the city thick with spies—especially people with an English accent—his nerves wouldn’t stand it: Monica ought to know better, and so on and so forth. The long and the short of it was that I was ordered to produce my passport immediately. Monica was to ring up the embassy to ask them to stretch a point and see to it out of office hours, then Josef should take me round to the police.

I don’t know how we got out of that room. It was Monica, with her sweet womanly tact, who managed it. I believe the madman even demanded to see my passport, but Monica scraped me through that trap as well.

I had left my hat and coat in the entrance hall downstairs. I put on my coat, then went to Monica in the morning-room.

There was much she wanted to say—I could see it in her eyes—but I think she gathered from my face what I was going to do, so she said nothing.

At the door I said aloud, for the benefit of Josef, who was on the stairs:

“Very good, my lady. I will come straight back from the embassy and then go with Josef to the police.”

The next moment I was adrift in Berlin.

CHAPTER XIII

I FIND ACHILLES IN HIS TENT

Outside darkness had fallen. I had a vague suspicion that the house might be watched, but I found the Bendler-Strasse quite undisturbed. It ran its quiet, aristocratic length to the tangle of bare branches marking the Tiergarten-Strasse with not so much as a dog to strike terror into the heart of the amateur spy. Even in the Tiergarten-Strasse, where the Jewish millionaires live, there was little traffic and few people about, and I felt singularly unromantic as I walked briskly along the clean pavements towards Unter den Linden.

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Once more the original object of my journey into Germany stood clearly before me. An extraordinary series of adventures had deflected me from my course, but never from my purpose. I realized that I should never feel happy in my mind again if I left Germany without being assured as to my brother's fate. And now I was on the threshold either of a great discovery or of an overwhelming disappointment.

For the street called In den Zelten was my next objective. I knew I might be on the wrong track altogether in my interpretation of what I was pleased to term in my mind the message from Francis. If I had read it falsely—if, perhaps, it were not from him at all—then all the hopes I had built on this mad dash into the enemy's country would collapse like a house of cards. Then, indeed, I should be in a sorry pass.

But my luck was in, I felt. Hitherto, I had triumphed over all difficulties. I would trust in my destiny to the last.

I had taken the precaution of turning up my overcoat collar and of pulling my hat well down over my eyes, but no one troubled me. I reflected that only Clubfoot and Schmalz were in a position to recognize me and that, if I steered clear of places like hotels and restaurants and railway stations, where criminals always seem to be caught, I might continue to enjoy comparative immunity. But the trouble was the passport question. That reminded me.

I must get rid of Semlin's passport. As I walked along I tore it into tiny pieces, dropping each fragment at a good interval from the other. It cost me something to do it, for a passport is always useful to flash in the eyes of the ignorant. But this passport was dangerous. It might denounce me to a man who would not otherwise recognize me.

I had some difficulty in finding In den Zelten. I had to ask the way, once of a postman and once of a wounded soldier who was limping along with crutches. Finally, I found it, a narrowish street running off a corner of the great square in front of the Reichstag. No. 2 was the second house on the right.

I had no plan. Nevertheless, I walked boldly upstairs. There was but one flat on each floor. At the third story I halted, rather out of breath, in front of a door with a small brass plate inscribed with the name "Eugen Kore." I rang the bell boldly.

An elderly man-servant opened the door.

"Is Herr Eugen Kore at home?" I asked.

The man looked at me suspiciously.

"Has the gentleman an appointment?" he said.

"No," I replied.

“Then the Herr will not receive the gentleman,” came the answer, and the man made as though to close the door.

I had an inspiration.

“A moment!” I cried, and I added the word “Achilles” in a low voice.

The servant opened the door wide to me.

“Why didn’t you say that at once?” he said. “Please step in. I will see if the Herr can receive you.”

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He led the way through a hall into a sitting-room and left me there. The place was a perfect museum of art treasures, old Dutch and Italian masters on the walls, some splendid Florentine chests, a fine old dresser loaded with ancient pewter. On a mantelshelf was an extraordinary collection of old keys, each with its label. "Key of the fortress of Spandau, 1715." "Key of the Postern Gate of the Pasha's Palace at Belgrade, 1810," "House Key from Nuremberg, 1567," were some of the descriptions I read.

Then a voice behind me said:

"Ah! you admire my little treasures!"

Turning, I saw a short, stout man, of a marked Jewish appearance, with a bald head, a fat nose, little beady eyes and a large waist.

"Eugen Kore!" he introduced himself with a bow.

"Meyer!" I replied, in the German fashion.

"And what can we do for Herr ... Meyer?" he asked in oily tones, pausing just long enough before he pronounced the name I gave to let me see that he believed it to be a pseudonym.

"I believe you know a friend of mine, whose address I am anxious to find," I said.

"Ah!" sighed the little Jew, "a man of affairs like myself meets so many people that he may be pardoned.... What did you say his name was, this friend of yours?"

I thought I would try the effect of the name "Eichenholz" upon this enigmatic creature.

"Eichenholz? Eichenholz?" Kore repeated.

"I seem to know the name ... it seems familiar ... now let me see again.... Eichenholz, Eichenholz. ..."

While he was speaking he unlocked one of the oak cabinets and a safe came to view. Opening this, he brought out a ledger and ran his finger down the names. Then he shut the book, replaced it, locked the safe and the cabinet, and turned to me again.

"Yes," he said, "I know the name."

His reticence was disconcerting.

"Can you tell me where I can find him?" I asked.

“Yes,” was the reply.

I was getting a trifle nettled.

“Well, where?” I queried.

“This is all very well, young Sir,” said the Jew. “You come in here from nowhere, you introduce yourself as Meyer; you ask me ‘Who?’ and ‘What?’ and ‘Where?’—questions that, mark you, in my business, may have valuable answers. We private enquiry agents must live, my dear sir, we must eat and drink like other men, and these are hard times, very hard times. I will ask you a question if I may. Meyer? Who is Meyer? Everybody in this country is called Meyer!”

I smiled at this bizarre speech.

“This Eichenholz, now,” I said, “... supposing he were my brother.”

“He might congratulate himself,” Kore said, blinking his little lizard eyes.

“And he sent me word to call and see you to find out his whereabouts. You seem to like riddles, Herr Kore.... I will read you one!”

And I read him the message from Francis ... all but the first two lines.

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The little Jew beamed with delight.

“Ach! that is bright!” he cried, “oi, oi, oi, but he is smart, this Herr Eichenholz! Who’d have thought of that? Brilliant, brilliant!”

“As you say, Herr Kore, enquiry agents must live, and I am quite prepared to pay for the information I require....”

I pulled out my portfolio as I spoke.

“The matter is quite simple,” Kore replied. “It is already arranged. The charge is five hundred marks. My client said to me the last time I saw him, ‘Kore,’ he said, ‘if one should come asking news of me you will give him the word and he will pay you five hundred marks.’”

“The word?” I said.

“The word,” he repeated.

“You must take Dutch money,” I said. “Here you are ... work it out in gulden ... and I’ll pay!”

He manipulated a stump of pencil on a writing block and I paid him his money.

Then he said:

“Boonekamp!”

“Boonekamp?” I echoed stupidly.

“That’s the word,” the little Jew chuckled, laughing at my dumbfounded expression, “and, if you want to know, I understand it as little as you do.”

“But ... Boonekamp,” I repeated. “Is it a man’s name, a place? It sounds Dutch. Have you no idea? ... come, I’m ready to pay.”

“Perhaps ...” the Jew began.

“What? Perhaps what?” I exclaimed impatiently.

“Possibly....”

“Out with it, man!” I cried, “and say what you mean.”

“Perhaps, if I could render to the gentleman the service I rendered to his brother, I might be able to throw light....”

“What service did you render to my brother?” I demanded hastily. “I’m in the dark.”

“Has the gentleman no little difficulty perhaps? ... about his military service, about his papers? The gentleman is young and strong ... has he been to the front? Was life irksome there? Did he ever long for the sweets of home life? Did he never envy those who have been medically rejected? The rich men’s sons, perhaps, with clever fathers who know how to get what they want?”

His little eyes bored into mine like gimlets.

I began to understand.

“And if I had?”

“Then all old Kore can say is that the gentleman has come to the right shop, as his gracious brother did. How can we serve the gentleman now? What are his requirements? It is a difficult, a dangerous business. It costs money, much money, but it can be arranged ... it can be arranged.”

“But if you do for me what you did for my brother,” I said, “I don’t see how that helps to explain this word, this clue to his address!”

“My dear sir, I am as much in the dark as you are yourself about the significance of this word. But I can tell you this, your brother, thanks to my intervention, found himself placed in a situation in which he might well have come across this word....”

“Well?” I said impatiently.

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“Well, if we obliged the gentleman as we obliged his brother, the gentleman might be taken where his brother was taken, the gentleman is young and smart, he might perhaps find a clue ...”

“Stop talking riddles, for Heaven’s sake!” I cried in exasperation, “and answer my questions plainly. First, what did you do for my brother?”

“Your brother had deserted from the front—that is the most difficult class of business we have to deal with—we procured him a *permis de sejour* for fifteen days and a post in a safe place where no enquiries would be made after him.”

“And then?” I cried, trembling with curiosity.

The Jew shrugged his shoulders, waving his hands to and fro in the air.

“Then he disappeared. I saw him a few days before he went, and he gave me the instructions I have repeated to you for anybody who should come asking for him.”

“But didn’t he tell you where he was going?”

“He didn’t even tell me he was going, Herr. He just vanished.”

“When was this?”

“Somewhere about the first week in July ... it was the week of the bad news from France.”

The message was dated July 1st, I remembered.

“I have a good set of Swedish papers,” the Jew continued, “very respectable timber merchant ... with those one could live in the best hotels and no one say a word. Or Hungarian papers, a party rejected medically ... very safe those, but perhaps the gentleman doesn’t speak Hungarian. That would be essential.”

“I am in the same case as my brother,” I said, “I must disappear.”

“Not a deserter, Herr?” The Jew cringed at the word.

“Yes,” I said. “After all, why not?”

“I daren’t do this kind of business any more, my dear sir, I really daren’t! They are making it too dangerous.”

“Come, come!” I said, “you were boasting just now that you could smooth out any difficulties. You can produce me a very satisfactory passport from somewhere, I am sure!”

“Passport! Out of the question, my dear sir! Let once one of my passports go wrong and I am ruined. Oh, no! no passports where deserters are concerned! I don’t like the business ... it’s not safe! At the beginning of the war ... ah! that was different! Oi, oi, but they ran from the Yser and from Ypres! Oi, oi, and from Verdun! But now the police are more watchful. No! It is not worth it! It would cost you too much money, besides.”

I thought the miserable cur was trying to raise the price on me, but I was mistaken. He was frightened: the business was genuinely distasteful to him.

I tried, as a final attempt to persuade him, an old trick: I showed him my money. He wavered at once, and, after many objections, protesting to the last, he left the room. He returned with a handful of filthy papers.

“I oughtn’t to do it; I know I shall rue it; but you have overpersuaded me and I liked Herr Eichenholz, a noble gentleman and free with his money—see here, the papers of a waiter, Julius Zimmermann, called up with the Landwehr but discharged medically unfit, military pay-book and *permis de sejour* for fifteen days. These papers are only a guarantee in case you come across the police: no questions will be asked where I shall send you.”

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"But a fifteen days' permit!" I said. "What am I to do at the end of that time?"

"Leave it to me," Kore said craftily. "I will get it renewed for you. It will be all right!"

"But in the meantime...." I objected.

"I place you as waiter with a friend of mine who is kind to poor fellows like yourself. Your brother was with him."

"But I want to be free to move around."

"Impossible," the Jew answered firmly. "You must get into your part and live quietly in seclusion until the enquiries after you have abated. Then we may see as to what is next to be done. There you are, a fine set of papers and a safe, comfortable life far away from the trenches—all snug and secure—cheap (in spite of the danger to me), because you are a lad of spirit and I liked your brother ... ten thousand marks!"

I breathed again. Once we had reached the haggling stage, I knew the papers would be mine all right. With Semlin's money and my own I found I had about L550, but I had no intention of paying out L500 straight away. So I beat the fellow down unmercifully and finally secured the lot for 3600 marks—L180.

But, even after I had paid the fellow his money, I was not done with him. He had his eye on his perquisites.

"Your clothes will never do," he said; "such richness of apparel, such fine stuff—we must give you others." He rang the bell.

The old man-servant appeared.

"A waiter's suit—for the Linien-Strasse!" he said.

Then he led me into a bedroom where a worn suit of German shoddy was spread out on a sofa. He made me change into it, and then handed me a threadbare green overcoat and a greasy green felt hat.

"So!" he said. "Now, if you don't shave for a day or two, you will look the part to the life!"—a remark which, while encouraging, was hardly complimentary.

He gave me a muffler to tie round my neck and lower part of my face and, with that greasy hat pulled down over my eyes and in those worn and shrunken clothes, I must say I looked a pretty villainous person, the very antithesis of the sleek, well-dressed young fellow that had entered the flat half an hour before.

“Now, Julius,” said Kore humorously, “come, my lad, and we will seek out together the good situation I have found for you.”

A horse-cab was at the door and we entered it together. The Jew chatted pleasantly as we rattled through the darkness. He complimented me on my ready wit in deciphering Francis’ message.

“How do you like my idea?” he said, “‘Achilles in his Tent’... that is the device of the hidden part of my business—you observe the parallel, do you not?’ Achilles holding himself aloof from the army and young men like yourself who prefer the gentle pursuits of peace to the sterner profession of war! Clients of mine who have enjoyed a classical education have thought very highly of the humour of my device.”

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The cab dropped us at the corner of the Friedrich-Strasse, which was ablaze with light from end to end, and the Linien-Strasse, a narrow, squalid thoroughfare of dirty houses and mean shops. The street was all but deserted at that hour save for an occasional policeman, but from cellars with steps leading down from the streets came the jingle of automatic pianos and bursts of merriment to show that the Linien-Strasse was by no means asleep.

Before one of these cellar entrances the Jew stopped. At the foot of the steep staircase leading down from the street was a glazed door, its panels all glistening with moisture from the heated atmosphere within. Kore led the way down, I following.

A nauseous wave of hot air, mingled with rank tobacco smoke, smote us full as we opened the door. At first I could see nothing except a very fat man, against a dense curtain of smoke, sitting at a table before an enormous glass goblet of beer. Then, as the haze drifted before the draught, I distinguished the outline of a long, low-ceilinged room, with small tables set along either side and a little bar, presided over by a tawdry female with chemically tinted hair, at the end. Most of the tables were occupied, and there was almost as much noise as smoke in the place.

A woman's voice screamed: "Shut the door, can't you, I'm freezing!" I obeyed and, following Kore to a table, sat down. A man in his shirt-sleeves, who was pulling beer at the bar, left his beer-engine and, coming across the room to Kore, greeted him cordially, and asked him what we would take.

Kore nudged me with his elbow.

"We'll take a Boonekamp each, Haase," he said.

CHAPTER XIV

CLUBFOOT COMES TO HAASE'S

Kore presently retired to an inner room with the man in shirt-sleeves, whom I judged to be the landlord, and in a little the flaxen-haired lady at the bar beckoned me over and bade me join them.

"This is Julius Zimmermann, the young man I have spoken of," said the Jew; then turning to me:

"Herr Haase is willing to take you on as waiter here on my recommendation, Julius, See that you do not make me repent of my kindness!"

Here the man in shirt-sleeves, a great, fat fellow with a bullet head and a huge double chin, chuckled loudly.

“Kolossal!” he cried. “Herr Kore loves his joke! Ausgezeichnet!” And he wagged his head roguishly at me.

On that Kore took his leave, promising to look in and see how I was faring in a few days’ time. The landlord opened a low door in the corner and revealed a kind of large cupboard, windowless and horribly stale and stuffy, where there were two unsavoury-looking beds.

“You will sleep here with Otto,” said the landlord. Pointing to a dirty white apron lying on one of the beds, he bade me take off my overcoat and jacket and put it on.

“It was Johann’s,” he said, “but Johann won’t want it any more. A good lad, Johann, but rash. I always said he would come to a bad end.” And he laughed noisily.

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"You can go and help with the waiting now," he went on. "Otto will show you what to do!"

And so I found myself, within twenty-four hours, spy, male nurse and waiter in turn.

I am loth to dwell on the degradation of the days that followed. That cellar tavern was a foul sink of iniquity, and in serving the dregs of humanity that gathered nightly there I felt I had indeed sunk to the lowest depths. The place was a regular thieves' kitchen ... what is called in the hideous Yiddish jargon that is the criminal slang of modern Germany a "Kaschemme." Never in my life have I seen such brutish faces as those that leered at me nightly through the smoke haze as I shuffled from table to table in my mean German clothes. Gallows' birds, sneak thieves, receivers, bullies, prostitutes and harpies of every description came together every evening in Herr Haase's beer-cellar. Many of the men wore the soiled and faded field-grey of the soldier back from the front, and in looking at their sordid, vulpine faces, inflamed with drink, I felt I could fathom the very soul of Belgium's misery.

The conversation was all of crime and deeds of violence. The men back from the front told gloatingly of rapine and feastings in lonely Belgian villages or dwelt ghoulishly on the horrors of the battlefield, the mounds of decaying corpses, the ghastly mutilations they had seen in the dead. There were tales, too, of "vengeance" wreaked on "the treacherous English." One story, in particular, of the fate of a Scottish Sergeant ... "der Hochlaender" they called him in this oft-told tale ... still makes me quiver with impotent rage when I think of it.

One evening the name of the Hotel Esplanade caught my ear. I approached the table and found two flashily dressed bullies and a bedraggled drab from the streets talking in admiration of my exploit.

"Clubfoot met his match that time," the woman cried. "The dirty dog! But why didn't this English spy make a job of it and kill the scum? Pah!"

And she spat elegantly into the sawdust on the floor.

"I wouldn't be in that fellow's shoes for something," muttered one of the men. "No one ever had the better of Clubfoot yet. Do you remember Meinhardt, Franz? He tried to cheat Clubfoot, and we know what happened to him!"

"They're raking the whole city for this Englishman," answered the other man. "Vogel, who works for Section Seven, you know the man I mean, was telling me. They've done every hotel in Berlin and the suburbs, but they haven't found him. They raided Bauer's in the Favoriten-Strasse last night. The Englishman wasn't there, but they got three or four others they were looking for—Fritz and another deserter included. I was nearly there myself!"

I was always hearing references of this kind to my exploit. I was never spoken of except in terms of admiration, but the name of Clubfoot—der Stelze—excited only execration and terror.

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I lived in daily fear of a raid at Haase's. Why the place had escaped so long, with all that riff-raff assembled there nightly, I couldn't imagine. It was one of those defects in German organization which puzzle the best of us at times. In the meantime, I was powerless to escape. The first thing Haase had done was to take away my papers—to send them to the police, as he explained—but he never gave them back, and when I asked for them he put me off with an excuse.

I was a virtual prisoner in the place. On my feet from morning till night, I had indeed few opportunities for going out; but once, during a slack time in the afternoon, when I broached the subject to the landlord, he refused harshly to let me out of his sight.

"The street is not healthy for you just now. You would be a danger to yourself and to all of us!" he said.

My life in that foul den was a burden to me. The living conditions were unspeakable. Otto, a pale and ill-tempered consumptive, compelled, like me, to rise in the darkness of the dawn, never washed, and his companionship in the stuffy hole where we slept was offensive beyond belief. He openly jeered at my early morning journeys out to a narrow, stinking court, where I exulted in the ice-cold water from the pump. And the food! It was only when I saw the mean victuals—the coarse and often tainted horseflesh, the unappetizing war-bread, the coffee substitute, and the rest—that I realized how Germany was suffering, though only through her poor as yet, from the British blockade. That thought used to help to overcome the nausea with which I sat down to eat.

Domestic life at Haase's was a hell upon earth. Haase himself was a drunken bully, who made advances to every woman he met, and whose complicated intrigues with the feminine portion of his clientele led to frequent scenes with the fair-haired Hebe who presided at the bar and over his household. It was she and Otto who fared daily forth to take their places in the long queues that waited for hours with food cards outside the provision shops.

These trips seemed to tell upon her temper, which would flash out wrathfully at meal-times, when Haase began his inevitable grumbling about the food. As Otto took a malicious delight in these family scenes, I was frequently called upon to assume the role of peace-maker. More than once I intervened to save Madame from the violence she had called down upon herself by the sharpness of her tongue. She was a poor, faded creature, and the tragedy of it all was that she was in love with this degraded bully. She was grateful to me for my good offices, I think, for, though she hardly ever addressed me, her manner was always friendly.

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These days of dreary squalor would have been unbearable if it had not been for my elucidation of the word Boonekamp, which was said to hold the clue to my brother's address. On the wall in the cubby-hole where I slept was a tattered advertisement card of this *aperitif*—for such is the preparation—proclaiming it to be “Germany's Best Cordial.” As I undressed at night, I often used to stare at this placard, wondering what connection Boonekamp could possibly have with my brother. I determined to take the first opportunity of examining the card itself. One morning, while Otto was out in the queue at the butcher's, I slipped away from the cellar to our sleeping-place and, lighting my candle, took down the card and examined it closely. It was perfectly plain, red letters on a green background in front, white at the back.

As I was replacing the card on the nail I saw some writing in pencil on the wall where the card had hung. My heart seemed to stand still with the joy of my discovery. For the writing was in my brother's neat, artistic hand, the words were English, and, best of all, my brother's initials were attached. This is what I read:

(Facsimile.) 5.7.16.

“You will find me at the Cafe Regina, Duesseldorf—F.O.”

After that I felt I could bear with everything. The message awakened hope that was fast dying in my heart. At least on July 5th, Francis was alive. To that fact I clung as to a sheet-anchor. It gave me courage for the hardest part of all my experiences in Germany, those long days of waiting in that den of thieves. For I knew I must be patient. Presently, I hoped, I might extract my papers from Haase or persuade Kore, when he came back, to see me, to give me a permit that would enable me to get to Duesseldorf. But the term of my permit was fast running out and the Jew never came.

There were often moments when I longed to ask Haase or one of the others about the time my brother had served in that place. But I feared to draw attention to myself. No one asked any questions of me (questions as to personal antecedents were discouraged at Haase's), and, as long as I remained the unpaid, useful drudge I felt that my desire for obscurity would be respected. Desultory questions about my predecessors elicited no information about Francis. The Haase establishment seemed to have had a succession of vague and shadowy retainers.

Only about Johann, whose apron I wore, did Otto become communicative.

“A stupid fellow!” he declared. “He was well off here. Haase liked him, the customers liked him, especially the ladies. But he must fall in love with Frau Hedwig (the lady at the bar), then he quarrelled with Haase and threatened him—you know, about customers who haven't got their papers in order. The next time Johann went out, they arrested him. And he was shot at Spandau!”

“Shot?” I exclaimed. “Why?”

“As a deserter.”

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"But was he a deserter?"

"Ach! was! But he had a deserter's papers in his pockets ... his own had vanished. Ach! it's a bad thing to quarrel with Haase!"

I made a point of keeping on the right side of the landlord after that. By my unfailing diligence I even managed to secure his grudging approval, though he was always ready to fly into a passion at the least opportunity.

One evening about six o'clock a young man, whom I had never seen among our regular customers, came down the stairs from the street and asked for Haase, who was asleep on the sofa in the inner room. At the sight of the youth, Frau Hedwig jumped off her perch behind the bar and vanished. She came back directly and, ignoring me, conducted the young man into the inner room, where he remained for about half an hour. Then he reappeared again, accompanied by Frau Hedwig, and went off.

I was shocked by the change in the appearance of the woman. Her face was pale, her eyes red with weeping, and her eyes kept wandering towards the door. It was a slack time of the day within and the cellar was free of customers.

"You look poorly, Frau Hedwig," I said. "Trouble with Haase again?"

She looked up at me and shook her head, her eyes brimming over. A tear ran down the rouge on her cheek.

"I must speak," she said. "I can't bear this suspense alone. You are a kind young man. You are discreet. Julius, there is trouble brewing for us!"

"What do you mean?" I asked. A foreboding of evil rose within me.

"Kore!" she whispered.

"Kore?" I echoed. "What of him?"

She looked fearfully about her.

"He was taken yesterday morning," she said.

"Do you mean arrested?" I exclaimed, unwilling to believe the staggering news.

"They entered his apartment early in the morning and seized him in bed. Ach! it is dreadful!" And she buried her face in her hands.

"But surely," I added soothingly, though with an icy fear at my heart, "there is no need to despair. What is an arrest to-day with all these regulations...."

The woman raised her face, pallid beneath its paint, to mine.

“Kore was shot at Moabit Prison this morning,” she said in a low voice. “That young man brought the news just now.” Then she added breathlessly, her words pouring out in a torrent:

“You don’t know what this means to us. Haase had dealings with this Jew. If they have shot him, it is because they have found out from him all they want to know. That means our ruin, that means that Haase will go the same way as the Jew.

“But Haase is stubborn, foolhardy. The messenger warned him that a raid might be expected here at any moment. I have pleaded with him in vain. He believes that Kore has split; he believes the police may come, but he says they daren’t touch him: he has been too useful to them: he knows too much. Ach, I am afraid! I am afraid!”

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Haase's voice sounded from the inner room.

"Hedwig!" he called.

The woman hastily dried her eyes and disappeared through the door.

The coast was clear, if I wanted to escape, but where could I go, without a paper or passport, a hunted man?

The news of Kore's arrest and execution haunted me. Of course, the man was in a most perilous trade, and had probably been playing the game for years. But suppose they had tracked me to the house in the street called In den Zelten.

I crossed the room and opened the door to the street. I had never set foot outside since I had come, and, hopeless as it would be for me to attempt to escape, I thought I might reconnoitre the surroundings of the beer-cellar for the event of flight.

I lightly ran up the stairs to the street and nearly cannoned into a man who was lounging in the entrance. We both apologized, but he stared at me hard before he strolled on. Then I saw another man sauntering along on the opposite side of the street. Further away, at the corner, two men were loitering.

Every one of them had his eyes fixed on the cellar entrance at which I was standing.

I knew they could not see my face, for the street was but dimly lit, and behind me was the dark background of the cellar stairway. I took a grip on my nerves and very deliberately lit a cigarette and smoked it, as if I had come up from below to get a breath of fresh air. I waited a little while and then went down.

I was scarcely back in the cellar when Haase appeared from the inner room, followed by the woman. He carried himself erect, and his eyes were shining. I didn't like the man, but I must say he looked game. In his hand he carried my papers.

"Here you are, my lad," he said in quite a friendly tone, "put 'em in your pocket—you may want 'em to-night."

I glanced at the papers before I followed his advice.

He noted my action and laughed.

"They have told you about Johann," he said. "Never fear, Julius, you and I are good friends."

The papers were those of Julius Zimmermann all right.

We were having supper at one of the tables in the front room—there were only a couple of customers, as it was so early—when a man, a regular visitor of ours, came down the stairs hurriedly. He went straight over to Haase and spoke into his ear.

“Mind yourself, Haase,” I heard him say. “Do you know who had Kore arrested and shot? It was Clubfoot. There is more in this than we know. Mind yourself and get out! In an hour or so it may be too late.”

Then he scurried away, leaving me dazed.

“By God!” said the landlord, bringing a great fist down on the table so that the glasses rang, “they won’t touch me. Not the devil himself will make me leave this house before they come, if coming they are!”

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The woman burst into tears, while Otto blinked his watery eyes in terror. I sat and looked at my plate, my heart too full for words. It was bitter to have dared so much to get this far and then find the path blocked, as it seemed, by an insuperable barrier. They were after me all right: the mention of Clubfoot's name, the swift, stern retribution that had befallen Kore, made that certain—and I could do nothing. That cellar was a cul-de-sac, a regular trap, and I knew that if I stirred a foot from the house I should fall into the hands of those men keeping their silent vigil in the street.

Therefore, I must wait, as calmly as I might, and see what the evening would bring forth. Gradually the cellar filled up as people drifted in, but many familiar faces, I noticed, were missing. Evidently the ill tidings had spread. Once a man looked in for a glass of beer and drifted out again, leaving the door open. As I was closing it, I heard a muffled exclamation and the sound of a scuffle at the head of the stairs. It was so quietly done that nobody below, save myself, knew what had happened. The incident showed me that the watch was well kept.

The evening wore on—interminably, as it seemed to me. I darted to and fro from the bar, laden with mugs of beer and glasses of schnaps, incessantly, up and down. But I never failed, whenever there came a pause in the orders, to see that my journey finished somewhere in the neighbourhood of the door. A faint hope was glimmering in my brain.

Until the end of my life, that interminable evening in the beer-cellar will remain stamped in my memory. I can still see the scene in its every detail, and I know I shall carry the picture with me to the grave; the long, low room with its blackened ceiling, the garish yellow gaslight, the smoke haze, the crowded tables, Otto, shuffling hither and hither with his mean and sulky air, Frau Hedwig, preoccupied at her desk, red-eyed, a graven image of woe, and Haase, presiding over the beer-engine, silent, defiant, calm, but watchful every time the door opened.

When at last the blow fell, it came suddenly. A trampling of feet on the stairs, a great blowing of whistles ... then the door was burst open just as everybody in the cellar sprang to their feet amid exclamations and oaths from the men and shrill screams from the women. Outlined in the doorway stood Clubfoot, majestic, authoritative, wearing some kind of little skull-cap, such as duelling students wear, over a black silk handkerchief bound about his head. At the sight of the man the hubbub ceased on the instant. All were still save Haase, whose bull-like voice roaring for silence broke on the quiet of the room with the force of an explosion.

I was in my corner by the door, pressed back against the coats and hats hanging on the wall. In front of me a frieze of frightened faces screened me from observation. Quickly, I slipped off my apron.

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Clubfoot, after casting a cursory glance round the room, strode its length towards the bar where Haase stood, a crowd of plain-clothes men and policemen at his heels. Then quite suddenly the light went out, plunging the place into darkness. Instantly the room was in confusion; women screamed; a voice, which I recognized as Clubfoot's, bawled stentoriantly for lights ... the moment had come to act.

I grabbed a hat and coat from the hall, got into them somehow, and darted to the door. In the dim light shining down the stairs from a street lamp outside, I saw a man at the door. Apparently he was guarding it.

"Back!" he cried, as I stepped up to him.

I flashed in his eyes the silver star I held in my hand.

"The Chief wants lanterns!" I said low in his ear.

He grabbed my hand holding the badge and lowered it to the light.

"All right, comrade," he replied. "Drechsler has a lantern, I think! You'll find him outside!"

I rushed up the stairs right into a group of three policemen.

"The Chief wants Drechsler at once with the lantern," I shouted, and showed my star. The three dispersed in different directions calling for Drechsler.

I walked quickly away.

CHAPTER XV

THE WAITER AT THE CAFE REGINA

I calculated that I had at least two hours, at most three, in which to get clear of Berlin. However swiftly Clubfoot might act, it would take him certainly an hour and a half, I reckoned, from the discovery of my flight from Haase's to warn the police at the railway stations to detain me. If I could lay a false trail I might at the worst prolong this period of grace; at the best I might mislead him altogether as to my ultimate destination, which was, of course, Duesseldorf. The unknown quantity in my reckonings was the time it would take Clubfoot to send out a warning all over Germany to detain Julius Zimmermann, waiter and deserter, wherever and whenever apprehended.

At the first turning I came to after leaving Haase's, tram-lines ran across the street. A tram was waiting, bound in a southerly direction, where the centre of the city lay. I jumped on to the front platform beside the woman driver. It is fairly dark in front and the



conductor cannot see your face as you pay your fare through a trap in the door leading to the interior of the tram. I left the tram at Unter den Linden and walked down some side streets until I came across a quiet-looking cafe. There I got a railway guide and set about reviewing my plans.

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It was ten minutes to twelve. A man in my position would in all probability make for the frontier. So, I judged, Clubfoot must calculate, though, I fancied, he must have wondered why I had not long since attempted to escape back to England. Duesseldorf was on the main road to Holland, and it would certainly be the more prudent course, say, to make for the Rhine and travel on to my destination by a Rhine steamer. But time was the paramount factor in my case. By leaving immediately—that very night—for Duesseldorf I might possibly reach there before the local authorities had had time to receive the warning to be on the look-out for a man answering to my description. If I could leave behind in Berlin a really good false clue, it was just possible that Clubfoot might follow it up *before* taking general dispositions to secure my arrest if that clue failed. I decided I must gamble on this hypothesis.

The railway guide showed that a train left for Duesseldorf from the Potsdamer Bahnhof—the great railway terminus in the very centre of Berlin—at 12.45 a.m. That left me roughly three-quarters of an hour to lay my false trail and catch my train. My false trail should lead Clubfoot in a totally unexpected direction, I determined, for it is the unexpected that first engages the notice of the alert, detective type of mind. I would also have to select another terminus.

Why not Munich? A large city on the high road to a foreign frontier—Switzerland—with authorities whose easy-going ways are proverbial in Germany. You leave Berlin for Munich from the Anhalter Bahnhof, a terminus which was well suited for my purpose, as it is only a few minutes' drive from the Potsdamer station.

The railway guide showed there was a train leaving for Munich at 12.30 a.m.—an express. That would do admirably. Munich it should be then.

Fortunately I had plenty of money. I had taken the precaution of getting Kore to change my money into German notes before we left In den Zelten ... at a preposterous rate of exchange, be it said. How lost I should have been without Semlin's wad of notes!

I paid for my coffee and set forth again. It was 12.15 as I walked into the hall of the Anhalt station.

Remembering the ruse which the friendly guide at Rotterdam had taught me, I began by purchasing a platform ticket. Then I looked about for an official upon whom I could suitably impress my identity. Presently I espied a pompous-looking fellow in a bright blue uniform and scarlet cap, some kind of junior stationmaster, I thought.

I approached him and, raising my hat, politely asked him if he could tell me when there was a train leaving for Munich.

"The express goes at 12.30," he said, "but only first and second class, and you'll have to pay the supplementary charge. The slow train is not till 5.49."

I assumed an expression of vexation.

"I suppose I must go by the express," I said. "Can you tell me where the booking-office is?"

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The official pointed to a pigeon-hole and I took care to speak loud enough for him to hear me ask for a second-class ticket, single, to Munich.

I walked upstairs and presented my Munich ticket to the collector at the barrier. Then I hurried past the main-line platforms over the suburban side, where I gave up my platform ticket and descended again to the street.

It was just on the half-hour as I came out of the station. Not a cab to be seen! I hastened as fast as my legs would carry me until, breathless and panting, I reached the Potsdam terminus. The clock over the station pointed to 12.39.

A long queue, composed mostly of soldiers returning to Belgium and the front, stood in front of the booking-office. The military were getting their warrants changed for tickets. I chafed at the delay, but it was actually this circumstance which afforded me the chance of getting my ticket for Duesseldorf without leaving any clue behind.

A big, bearded Landsturm man with a kind face was at the pigeon-hole.

"I am very late for my train, my friend," I said, "would you get me a third-class single for Duesseldorf?" I handed him a twenty-mark note.

"Right you are," he answered readily.

"There," he said, handing me my ticket and a handful of change, "and lucky you are to be going to the Rhine. I'm from the Rhine myself and now I'm going back to guarding the bridges in Belgium!"

I thanked him and wished him luck. Here at least was a witness who was not likely to trouble me. And with a thankful heart I bolted on to the platform and caught the train.

Third-class travel in Germany is not a hobby to be cultivated if your means allow the luxury of better accommodation. The travelling German has a habit of taking off his boots when he journeys in the train by night—and a carriageful of lower middle-class Huns, thus unshod, in the temperature at which railway compartments are habitually kept in Germany, is an environment which makes neither for comfort nor for sleep.

The atmosphere, indeed, was so unbearable that I spent most of the night in the corridor. Here I was able to destroy the papers of Julius Zimmermann, waiter ... I felt I was in greater danger whilst I had them on me ... and to assure myself that my precious document was in its usual place—in my portfolio. It was then I made the discovery, annihilating at the first shock, that my silver badge had disappeared. I could not remember what I had done with it in the excitement of my escape from Haase's. I remembered having it in my hand and showing it to the police at the top of the stairs, but after that my mind was a blank. I could only imagine I must have carried it unconsciously in my hand and then dropped it unwittingly. I looked at the place where it

had been clasped on my braces: it was not there and I searched all my pockets for it in vain.

I had relied upon it as a stand-by in case there were trouble at the station in Duesseldorf. Now I found myself defenceless if I were challenged. It was a hard knock, but I consoled myself by the reflection that, by now, Clubfoot knew I had this badge ... it would doubtless figure in any description circulated about me.

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It was a most unpleasant journey. There was some kind of choral society on the train, occupying seven or eight compartments of the third-class coach in which I was travelling. For the first few hours they made night hideous with part-songs, catches and glees chanted with a volume of sound that in that confined place was simply deafening. Then the noise abated as one by one the singers dropped off to sleep. Presently silence fell, while the train rushed forward in the darkness bearing me towards fresh perils, fresh adventures.

* * * * *

A gust of fresh air in my face, the trample of feet, loud greetings in guttural German, awoke me with a start. It was broad daylight and through my compartment, to which I had crept in the night, weary with standing, filed the jovial members of the choral society, with bags in their hands and huge cockades in their buttonholes. There was a band on the platform and a huge choir of men who bawled a stentorian-voiced hymn of greeting. "Duesseldorf" was the name printed on the station lamps.

All the passengers, save the members of the choral society, had left the train, apparently, for every carriage door stood open. I sprang to my feet and let myself go with the stream of men. Thus I swept out of the train and right into the midst of the jostling crowd of bandsmen, singers and spectators on the platform. I stood with the new arrivals until the hymn was ended and thus solidly *encadres* by the Duesseldorfers, we drifted out through the barrier into the station courtyard. There brakes were waiting into which the jolly choristers, guests and hosts, clambered noisily. But I walked straight on into the streets, scarcely able to realize that no one had questioned me, that at last, unhindered, I stood before my goal.

Duesseldorf is a bright, clean town with a touch of good taste in its public buildings to remind one that this busy, industrial city has found time even while making money to have called into being a school of art of its own. It was a delightful morning with dazzling sunshine and an eager nip in the air that spoke of the swift, deep river that bathes the city walls. I revelled in the clear, cold atmosphere after the foulness of the drinking-den and the stifling heat of the journey. I exulted in the sense of liberty I experienced at having once more eluded the grim clutches of Clubfoot. Above all, my heart sang within me at the thought of an early meeting with Francis. In the mood I was in, I would admit no possibility of disappointment now. Francis and I would come together at last.

I came upon a public square presently and there facing me was a great, big cafe, white and new and dazzling, with large plate-glass windows and rows of tables on a covered verandah outside. It was undoubtedly a "*kolossal*" establishment after the best Berlin style. So that there might be no mistake about the name it was placarded all over the front of the place in gilt letters three feet high on glass panels—Cafe Regina.

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It was about nine o'clock in the morning and at that early hour I had the place to myself. I felt very small, sitting at a tiny table, with tables on every side of me, stretching away as it were into the *Ewigkeit*, in a vast white room with mural paintings of the crassest school of impressionism.

I ordered a good, substantial breakfast and whiled away the time while it was coming by glancing at the morning paper which the waiter brought me.

My eyes ran down the columns without my heeding what I read, for my thoughts were busy with Francis. When did he come to the cafe? How was he living at Duesseldorf?

Suddenly, I found myself looking at a name I knew ... it was in the personal paragraphs.

"Lieut.-General Count von Boden," the paragraph ran, "Aide-de-Camp to H.M. the Emperor, has been placed on the retired list owing to ill-health. General von Boden has left for Abbazia, where he will take up his permanent residence." There followed the usual biographical notes.

Of a truth, Clubfoot was a power in the land.

I ate my breakfast at a table by the open door, and surveyed the busy life of the square where the pigeons circled in the sunshine. A waiter stood on the verandah idly watching the birds as they pecked at the stones. I was struck with the profound melancholy depicted in his face. His cheeks were sunken and he had a pinched look which I had observed in the features of most of the customers at Haase's. I set it down to the insufficient feeding which is general among the lower classes in Germany to-day.

But in addition to this man's wasted appearance, his eyes were hollow, there were deep lines about his mouth and he wore a haggard look that had something strangely pathetic about it. His air of brooding sadness seemed to attract me, and I found my eyes continually wandering back to his face.

And then, without warning, through some mysterious whispering of the blood, the truth came to me that this was my brother. I don't know whether it was a passing mood reflected in his face or the shifting lights and shadows in his eyes that lifted the veil. I only know that through those features ravaged by care and suffering and in spite of them I caught a glimpse of the brother I had come to seek.

I rattled a spoon on the table and called softly out to the verandah.

"*Kellner!*"

The man turned.

I beckoned to him. He came over to my table. He never recognized me, so dull was he with disappointment ... me with my unshaven, unkempt appearance and in my mean German shoddy ... but stood silently, awaiting my bidding.

“Francis,” I said softly ... and I spoke in German ... “Francis, don’t you know me?”

He was magnificent, strong and resourceful in his joy at our meeting as he had been in his months of weary waiting.

Only his mouth quivered a little as instantly his hands busied themselves with clearing away my breakfast.

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“Jawohl!” he answered in a perfectly emotionless voice.

And then he smiled and in a flash the old Francis stood before me.

“Not a word now,” he said in German as he cleared away the breakfast. “I am off this afternoon. Meet me on the river promenade by the Schiller statue at a quarter past two and we’ll go for a walk. Don’t stay here now but come back and lunch in the restaurant ... it’s always crowded and pretty safe!”

Then he called out into the void:

“Twenty-six wants to pay!”

Such was my meeting with my brother.

CHAPTER XVI

A HAND-CLASP BY THE RHINE

That afternoon Francis and I walked out along the banks of the swiftly flowing Rhine until we were far beyond the city. Anxious though I was that he should reveal to me that part of his life which lay hidden beneath those lines of suffering in his face, he made me tell my story first. So I unfolded to him the extraordinary series of adventures that had befallen me since the night I had blundered upon the trail of a great secret in that evil hotel at Rotterdam.

Francis did not once interrupt the flow of my narrative. He listened with the most tense interest but with a growing concern which betrayed itself clearly on his face. At the end of my story, I silently handed to him the half of the stolen letter I had seized from Clubfoot at the Hotel Esplanade.

“Keep it, Francis,” I said. “It’s safer with a respectable waiter like you than with a hunted outcast like myself!”

My brother smiled wanly, but his face assumed the look of grave anxiety with which he had heard my tale. He scrutinized the slips of paper very closely, then tucked them away in a letter-case, which he buttoned up in his hip pocket.

“Fortune is a strange goddess, Des,” he said, his weary eyes roving out over the turgid, yellow stream, “and she has been kind to you, though, God knows, you have played a man’s part in all this. She has placed in your possession something for which at least five men have died in vain, something that has filled my thoughts, sleeping and waking, for more than half a year. What you have told me throws a good deal of light upon the

mystery which I came to this cursed country to elucidate, but it also deepens the darkness which still envelops many points in the affair.

“You know there are issues in this game of ours, old man, that stand even higher than the confidence that there has always been between us two. That is why I wrote to you so seldom out in France—I could tell you nothing about my work: that is one of the rules of our game. But now you have broken into the scramble yourself, I feel that we are partners, so I will tell you all I know.

“Listen, then. Some time about the beginning of the year a letter written by a German interned at one of the camps in England was stopped by the Camp Censor. This German went by the name of Schulte: he was arrested at a house in Dalston the day after we declared war on Germany. There was a good reason for this, for our friend Schulte—we don’t know his real name—was known to my Chief as one of the most daring and successful spies that ever operated in the British Isles.

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"Therefore, a sharp eye was kept on his correspondence, and one day this letter was seized. It was, I believe, perfectly harmless to the eye, but the expert to whom it was eventually submitted soon detected a conventional code in the chatty phrases about the daily life of the camp. It proved to be a communication from Schulte to a third party relating to a certain letter which, apparently, the writer imagined the third party had a considerable interest in acquiring. For he offered to sell this letter to the third party, mentioning a sum so preposterously high that it attracted the earnest attention of our Intelligence people. On half the sum mentioned being paid into the writer's account at a certain bank in London, the letter went on to say, the writer would forward the address at which the object in question would be found."

"It was a simple matter to send Schulte a letter in return, agreeing to his terms, and to have the payment made, as desired, into the bank he mentioned. His communication in reply to this was duly stopped. The address he gave was that of a house situated on the outskirts of Cleves.

"We had no idea what this letter was, but its apparent value in the eyes of the shrewd Mr. Schulte made it highly desirable that we should obtain possession of it without delay. Four of us were selected for this dangerous mission of getting into Germany and fetching it, by hook or by crook, from the house at Cleves where it was deposited. We four were to enter Germany by different routes and different means and to converge on Cleves (which is quite close to the Dutch frontier).

"It would take too long to tell you of the very exact organization which we worked out to exclude all risk of failure and the various schemes we evolved for keeping in touch with one another though working separately and in rotation. Nor does it matter very much how I got into Germany. The fact is that, at my very first attempt to get across the frontier, I realized that some immensely powerful force was working against me.

"I managed it, with half a dozen hairbreadth escapes, and I set down my success solely to my knowledge of German and to that old trick of mine of German imitations. But I felt everywhere the influence of this unseen hand, enforcing a meticulous vigilance which it was almost impossible to escape. I was not surprised, therefore, to learn that two of my companions came to grief at the very outset."

My brother lowered his voice and looked about him.

"Do you know what happened to those two gallant fellows?" he said. "Jack Tracy was found dead on the railway: Herbert Arbuthnot was discovered hanging in a wood. 'Suicide of an Unknown Individual' was what the German papers called it in each case. But I heard the truth ... never mind how. They were ambushed and slaughtered in cold blood."

"And the third man you spoke of?" I asked.

“Philip Brewster? Vanished, Des ... vanished utterly. I fear he, too, has gone west, poor chap!

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“Of the whole four of us I was the only one to reach our objective. There I drew blank. The letter was not in the hiding-place indicated. I think it never had been or the Huns would have got it. I felt all the time that they didn’t know exactly where the letter was but that they anticipated our attempt to get it, hence the unceasing vigilance all along the frontier and inside it, too.

“They damned nearly got me at Cleves: I escaped as by a miracle, and the providential thing for me was that I had never posed as anything but a German, only I varied the type I represented almost from day to day. Thus I left no traces behind or they would have had me long since.”

The sadness in my brother’s voice increased and the shadows deepened in his face.

“Then I tried to get out,” he continued. “But it was hopeless from the first. They knew they had one of us left in the net and they closed every outlet. I made two separate attempts to cross the line back into Holland, but both failed. The second time I literally had to flee for my life. I went straight to Berlin, feeling that a big city, as remote from the frontier as possible, was the only safe hiding-place for me as long as the hue and cry lasted.

“I was in a desperate bad way, too, for I had had to abandon the last set of identity papers left to me when I bolted. I landed in Berlin with the knowledge that no roof could safely shelter me until I got a fresh lot of papers.

“I knew of Kore—I had heard of him and his shirkers’ and deserters’ agency in my travels—and I went straight to him. He sent me to Haase’s ... this was towards the end of June. It was when I was at Haase’s that I sent out that message to van Urutius that fell into your hands. That happened like this.

“I was rather friendly with a chap that frequented Haase’s, a man employed in the packing department at the Metal Works at Steglitz. He was telling us one night how short-handed they were and what good money packers were earning. I was sick of being cooped up in that stinking cellar, so, more by way of a joke than anything else, I offered to come and lend a hand in the packing department. I thought I might get a chance of escape, as I saw none at Haase’s. To my surprise, Haase, who was sitting at the table, rather fancied the idea and said I could go if I paid him half my wages: I was getting nothing at the beer-cellar.

“So I was taken on at Steglitz, sleeping at Haase’s and helping in the beer-cellar in the evenings. One day a package for old van Urutius came to me to be made up and suddenly it occurred to me that here was a chance of sending out a message to the outside world. I hoped that old van U., if he tumbled to the ‘Eichenholz,’ would send it to you and that you would pass it on to my Chief in London.”

“Then you expected me to come after you?” I said.

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"No," replied Francis promptly, "I did not. But the arrangement was that, if none of us four men had turned up at Head-quarters by May 15th, a fifth man should come in and be at a given rendezvous near the frontier on June 15th. I went to the place on June 15th, but he never showed up and, though I waited about for a couple of days, I saw no sign of him. I made my final attempt to get out and it failed, so, when I fled to Berlin, I knew that I had cut off all means of communication with home. As a last hope, I dashed off that cipher on the spur of the moment and tucked it into old van U's invoice."

"But why 'Achilles' with one 'l'?" I asked.

"They knew all about Kore's agency at Head-quarters, but I didn't dare mention Kore's name for fear the parcel might be opened. So I purposely spelt 'Achilles' with one 'l' to draw attention to the code word, so that they should know where news of me was to be found. It was devilish smart of you to decipher that, Des!"

Francis smiled at me.

"I meant to stay quietly in Berlin, going daily between Haase's and the factory and wait, for a month or two, in case that message got home. But Kore began to give trouble. At the beginning of July he came to see me and hinted that the renewal of my *permis de sejour* would cost money. I paid him, but I realized then that I was absolutely in his power and I had no intention of being blackmailed. So I made use of his cupidity to leave a message for the man who, I hoped, would be coming after me, wrote that line on the wall under the Boonekamp poster in that filthy hovel where we slept and came up here after a job I had heard of at the Cafe Regina.

"And now, Des, old man," said my brother, "you know all that I know!"

"And Clubfoot?"

"Ah!" said Francis, shaking his head, "there I think I recognize the hand that has been against us from the start, though who the man is, and what his power, I, like you, only know from what he told you himself. The Germans are clever enough, as we know from their communiques, to tell the truth when it suits their book. I believe that Clubfoot was telling you the truth in what he said about his mission that night at the Esplanade.

"You and I know now that the Kaiser wrote that letter ... we also know that it was addressed to an influential English friend of William II. You have seen the date ... Berlin, July 31st, 1914 ... the eve of the outbreak of the world war. Even from this half in my pocket ... and you who have seen both halves of the letter will confirm what I say ... I can imagine what an effect on the international situation this letter would have had if it had reached the man for whom it was destined. But it did not ... why, we don't know. We do know, however, that the Emperor is keenly anxious to regain possession of his

letter ... you yourself were a witness of his anxiety and you know that he put the matter into the hands of the man Clubfoot."

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"Well," I observed thoughtfully, "Clubfoot, whoever he is, seems to have made every effort to keep my escapades dark...."

"Precisely," said Francis, "and lucky for you too. Otherwise Clubfoot would have had you stopped at the frontier. But obviously secrecy is an essential part of his instructions, and he has shown himself willing to risk almost anything rather than call in the aid of the regular police."

"But they can always hush these things up!" I objected.

"From the public, yes, but not from the Court. This letter looks uncommonly like one of William's sudden impulses ... and I fancy anything of the kind would get very little tolerance in Germany in war-time."

"But who is Clubfoot?" I questioned.

My brother furrowed his brows anxiously.

"Des," he said, "I don't know. He is certainly not a regular official of the German Intelligence like Steinhauer and the others. But I *have* heard of a clubfooted German on two occasions ... both were dark and mysterious affairs, in both he played a leading role and both ended in the violent death of one of our men."

"Then Tracy and the others...?" I asked.

"Victims of this man, Des, without any doubt," my brother answered. He paused a moment reflectively.

"There is a code of honour in our game, old man," he said, "and there are lots of men in the German secret service who live up to it. We give and take plenty of hard knocks in the rough-and-tumble of the chase, but ambush and assassination are barred."

He took a deep breath and added:

"But the man Clubfoot doesn't play the game!"

"Francis," I said, "I wish I'd known something of this that night I had him at my mercy at the Esplanade. He would not have got off with a cracked skull ... with one blow. There would have been another blow for Tracy, one for Arbuthnot, one for the other man ... until the account was settled and I'd beaten his brains out on the carpet. But if we meet him again, Francis, ... as, please God, we shall! ... there will be no code of honour for *him* ... we'll finish him in cold blood as we'd kill a rat!"

My brother thrust out his hand at me and we clasped hands on it.

Evening was falling and lights were beginning to twinkle from the further bank of the river.

We stood for a moment in silence with the river rushing at our feet. Then we turned and started to tramp back towards the city. Francis linked his arm in mine.

“And now, Des,” he said in his old affectionate way, “tell me some more about Monica!”

Out of that talk germinated in my head the only plan that seemed to offer us a chance of escape. I was quite prepared to believe Francis when he declared that the frontier was at present impassable: if the vigilance had been increased before it would be redoubled now that I had again eluded Clubfoot. We should, therefore, have to find some cover where we could lie doggo until the excitement passed.

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You remember that Monica told me, the last time I had seen her, that she was shortly going to Schloss Bellevue, a shooting-box belonging to her husband, to arrange some shoots in connection with the Governmental scheme for putting game on the market. Monica, you will recollect, had offered to take me with her, and I had fully meant to accompany her but for Gerry's unfortunate persistence in the matter of my passport.

I now proposed to Francis that we should avail ourselves of Monica's offer and make for Castle Bellevue. The place was well suited for our purpose as it lies near Cleves, and in its immediate neighbourhood is the Reichswald, that great forest which stretches from Germany clear across into Holland. All through my wanderings, I had kept this forest in the back of my head as a region which must offer facilities for slipping unobserved across the frontier. Now I learnt from Francis that he had spent months in the vicinity of Cleves, and I was not surprised to find, when I outlined this plan to him, that he knew the Reichswald pretty well.

"It'll be none too easy to get across through the forest," he said doubtfully, "it's very closely patrolled, but I do know of one place where we could lie pretty snug for a day or two waiting for a chance to make a dash. But we have no earthly chance of getting through at present: our clubfooted pal will see to that all right. And I don't much like the idea of going to Bellevue either: it will be horribly dangerous for Monica!"

"I don't think so," I said. "The whole place will be overrun with people, guests, servants, beaters and the like, for these shoots. Both you and I know German and we look rough enough: we ought to be able to get an emergency job about the place without embarrassing Monica in the least. I don't believe they will ever dream of looking for us so close to this frontier. The only possible trail they can pick up after me in Berlin leads to Munich. Clubfoot is bound to think I am making for the Swiss frontier."

Well, the long and the short of it was that my suggestion was carried, and we resolved to set out for Bellevue that very night. My brother declared he would not return to the cafe: with the present shortage of men, such desertions were by no means uncommon, and if he were to give notice formally it might only lead to embarrassing explanations.

So we strolled back to the city in the gathering darkness, bought a map of the Rhine and a couple of rucksacks and laid in a small stock of provisions at a great department store, biscuits, chocolates, some hard sausage and two small flasks of rum. Then Francis took me to a little restaurant where he was known and introduced me to the friendly proprietor, a very jolly old Rheinlander, as his brother just out of hospital. I did my country good service, I think, by giving a most harrowing account of the terrible efficiency of the British army on the Somme!

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Then we dined and over our meal consulted the map.

“By the map,” I said, “Bellevue should be about fifty miles from here. My idea is that we should walk only at night and lie up during the day, as a room is out of the question for me without any papers. I think we should keep away from the Rhine, don't you? As otherwise we shall pass through Wesel, which is a fortress, and, consequently, devilish unhealthy for both of us.”

Francis nodded with his mouth full.

“At present we can count on about twelve hours of darkness,” I continued, “so, leaving a margin for the slight detour we shall make, for rests and for losing the way, I think we ought to be able to reach Castle Bellevue on the third night from this. If the weather holds up, it won't be too bad, but if it rains, it will be hellish! Now, have you any suggestions?”

My brother acquiesced, as, indeed, he had in everything I had proposed since we met. Poor fellow, he had had a roughish time: he seemed glad to have the direction of affairs taken out of his hands for a bit.

At half-past seven that evening, our packs on our backs, we stood on the outskirts of the town where the road branches off to Crefeld. In the pocket of the overcoat I had filched from Haase's I found an automatic pistol, fully loaded (most of our customers at the beer-cellar went armed).

“You've got the document, Francis,” I said. “You'd better have this, too!” and I passed him the gun.

Francis waved it aside.

“You keep it,” he said grimly, “it may serve you instead of a passport.”

So I slipped the weapon back into my pocket.

A cold drop of rain fell upon my face.

“Oh, hell!” I cried, “it's beginning to rain!”

And thus we set out upon our journey.

* * * * *

It was a nightmare tramp. The rain never ceased. By day we lay in icy misery, chilled to the bone in our sopping clothes, in some dank ditch or wet undergrowth, with aching bones and blistered feet, fearing detection, but fearing, even more, the coming of night

and the resumption of our march. Yet we stuck to our programme like Spartans, and about eight o'clock on the third evening, hobbling painfully along the road that runs from Cleves to Calcar, we were rewarded by the sight of a long massive building, with turrets at the corners, standing back from the highway behind a tall brick wall.

"Bellevue!" I said to Francis, with pointing finger.

We left the road and climbing a wooden palisade, struck out across the fields with the idea of getting into the park from the back. We passed some black and silent farm buildings, went through a gate and into a paddock, on the further side of which ran the wall surrounding the place. Somewhere beyond the wall a fire was blazing. We could see the leaping light of the flames and drifting smoke. At the same moment we heard voices, loud voices disputing in German.

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We crept across the paddock to the wall, I gave Francis a back and he hoisted himself to the top and looked over. In a moment he sprang lightly down, a finger to his lips.

“Soldiers round a fire,” he whispered. “There must be troops billeted here. Come on ... we’ll go further round!”

We ran softly along the wall to where it turned to the right and followed it round. Presently we came to a small iron gate in the wall. It stood open.

We listened. The sound of voices was fainter here. We still saw the reflection of the flames in the sky. Otherwise, there was no sign or sound of human life.

The gate led into an ornamental garden with the Castle at the further end. All the windows were in darkness. We threaded a garden path leading to the house. It brought us in front of a glass door. I turned the handle and it yielded to my grasp.

I whispered to Francis:

“Stay where you are! And if you hear me shout, fly for your life!”

For, I reflected, the place might be full of troops. If there were any risk it would be better for me to take it since Francis, with his identity papers, had a better chance than I of bringing the document into safety.

I opened the glass door and found myself in a lobby with a door on the right.

I listened again. All was still. I cautiously opened the door and looked in. As I did so the place was suddenly flooded with light and a voice—a voice I had often heard in my dreams—called out imperiously:

“Stay where you are and put your hands above your head!”

Clubfoot stood there, a pistol in his great hand pointed at me.

“Grundt!” I shouted but I did not move.

And Clubfoot laughed.

CHAPTER XVII

FRANCIS TAKES UP THE NARRATIVE

I saw the lights flash up in the room. I heard Desmond cry out: “Grundt;” Instantly I flung myself flat on my face in the flower bed, lest Desmond’s shout might have alarmed

the soldiers about the fire. But no one came; the gardens remained dark and damp and silent, and I heard no sound from the room in which I knew my brother to be in the clutches of that man.

Desmond's cry pulled me together. It seemed to arouse me from the lethargy into which I had sunk during all those months of danger and disappointment. It shook me into life. If I was to save him, not a moment was to be lost. Clubfoot would act swiftly, I knew. So must I. But first I must find out what the situation was, the meaning of Clubfoot's presence in Monica's house, of those soldiers in the park. And, above all, was Monica herself at the Castle?

I had noticed a little estaminet place on the road, about a hundred yards before we reached the Schloss. I might, at least, be able to pick up something there. Accordingly, I stole across the garden, scaled the wall again and reached the road in safety.

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The estaminet was full of people, brutish-looking peasants swilling neat spirits, cattle drovers and the like. I stood up at the bar and ordered a double noggin of *Korn*—a raw spirit made in these parts from potatoes, very potent but at least pure. A man in corduroys and leggings was drinking at the bar, a bluff sort of chap, who readily entered into conversation. A casual question of mine about the game conditions elicited from him the information that he was an under-keeper at the Castle. It was a busy time for them, he told me, as four big shoots had been arranged. The first was to take place the next day. There were plenty of birds, and he thought the Frau Graefin's guests ought to be satisfied.

I asked him if there was a big party staying at the Castle. No, he told me, only one gentleman besides the officer billeted there, but a lot of people were coming over for the shoot the next day, the officers from Cleves and Goch, the Chief Magistrate from Cleves, and a number of farmers from round about.

"I expect you will find the soldiers billeted at the Castle useful as beaters," I enquired with a purpose.

The man assented grudgingly. Gamekeepers are first-class grumblers. But the soldiers were not many. For his part he could do without them altogether. They were such terrible poachers to have about the place, he declared. But what they would do for beaters without them, he didn't know ... they were very short of beaters ... that was a fact.

"I am staying at Cleves," I said, "and I'm out of a job. I am not long from hospital, and they've discharged me from the army. I wouldn't mind earning a few marks as a beater, and I'd like to see the sport. I used to do a bit of shooting myself down on the Rhine where I come from."

The man shrugged his shoulders and shook his head. "That's none of my business, getting the beaters together," he replied. "Besides, I shall have the head gamekeeper after me if I go bringing strangers in...."

I ordered another drink for both of us, and won the man round without much difficulty. He pouched my five mark note and announced that he would manage it ... the Frau Graefin was to see some men who had offered their services as beaters after dinner at the Castle that evening. He would take me along.

Half an hour later I stood, as one of a group of shaggy and bedraggled rustics, in a big stone courtyard outside the main entrance to the Castle. The head gamekeeper mustered us with his eye and, bidding us follow him, led the way under a vaulted gateway through a massive door into a small lobby which had apparently been built into the great hall of the Castle, for it opened right into it.

We found ourselves in a splendid old feudal hall, oak-lined and oak-raftered, with lines of dusty banners just visible in the twilight reigning in the upper part of the vast place. The modern generation had forborne to desecrate the fine old room with electric light, and massive silver candlesticks shed a soft light on the table set at the far end of the hall, where dinner, apparently, was just at an end.

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Three people were sitting at the table, a woman at the head, who, even before I had taken in the details I have just set down, I knew to be Monica, though her back was towards me. On one side of the table was a big, heavy man whom I recognized as Clubfoot, on the other side a pale slip of a lad in officer's uniform with only one arm ... Schmalz, no doubt.

A servant said something to Monica, who, asking permission of her companions by a gesture, left the table and came across the hall. To my surprise, she was dressed in deepest black with linen cuffs. Her face was pale and set, and there was a look of fear and suffering in her eyes that wrung my very heart.

I had shuffled into the last place of the row in which the head keeper had ranged us. Monica spoke a word or two to each of the men, who shambled off in turn with low obeisances. Directly she stopped in front of me I knew she had recognized me—I felt it rather, for she made no sign—though the time I had had in Germany had altered my appearance, I dare say, and I must have looked pretty rough with my three days' beard and muddy clothes.

"Ah!" she said with all her languor *de grande dame*, "you are the man of whom Heinrich spoke. You have just come out of hospital, I think?"

"Beg the Frau Graefin's pardon," I mumbled out in the thick patois of the Rhine which I had learnt at Bonn, "I served with the Herr Graf in Galicia, and I thought maybe the Frau Graefin ..."

She stopped me with a gesture.

"Herr Doktor!" she called to the dinner-table.

By Jove! this girl had grit: her pluck was splendid.

Clubfoot came stumping over, all smiles after his food and smoking a long cigar that smelt delicious.

"Frau Graefin?" he queried, glancing at me.

"This is a man who served under my husband in Galicia. He is ill and out of work, and wishes me to help him. I should wish, therefore, to see him in my sitting-room, if you will allow me...."

"But, Frau Graefin, most certainly. There surely was no need ..."

"Johann!" Monica called the servant I had seen before, "take this man into the sitting-room!"



The servant led the way across the hall into a snugly furnished library with a dainty writing-desk and pretty chintz curtains. Monica followed and sat down at the desk.

“Now tell me what you wish to say ...” she began in German as the servant left the room, but almost as soon as he had gone she was on her feet, clasping my hands.

“Francis!” she whispered in English in a great sob, “oh, Francis! what have they done to you to make you look like that?”

I gripped her wrist tightly.

“Frau Graefin,” I said in German, still in that hideous patois, “you must be calm.” And I whispered in English in her ear:

“Monica, be brave! And talk German whatever you do.”

She regained her self-possession at once.

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"I understand," she answered, sitting down at her desk again; "it is more prudent."

And for the rest of the time we spoke in German.

"Desmond?" I asked.

"Locked up in Grundt's bedroom," she replied. "I met them pushing him along the corridor—it was horrible! Grundt won't let him out of his sight. Oh, it was madness to have come. If only I could have warned you!"

"What is Grundt doing here?" I asked. "And those soldiers and that officer?"

"My dear," she answered, and her eyes flashed mischief in a sudden change of mood, "I'm in preventive arrest!"

"But, Monica...."

"Listen! Gerry and that spying man-servant of his made trouble. When Des went off that evening and didn't come back, Gerry insisted that we should notify the police. He made an awful scene, then the valet chipped in, and from what he said I knew he meant mischief. I didn't dare trust Gerry with the truth, so I let him send a note to the police. They came round and asked a lot of questions and went away again, so I thought we'd heard the last of it and came up here. Gerry wouldn't come. He's gone off to Baden-Baden on some new cure.

"About a week ago the Chief Magistrate at Cleves, who is an old friend of ours, motored over, and after a lot of talk, blurted out that I was to consider myself under arrest, and that an officer and a detachment of men from Goch were coming over to guard the house. The magistrate man would have told me anything I wanted to know, but he knew nothing: he simply carried out his orders. Then the lieutenant and his men arrived, and since that time I have been a prisoner in the house and grounds. I was terribly scared about Des until Grundt arrived suddenly, two nights ago, and I saw at once by his face that Des was still at large. But, Francis, that Clubfoot man came here to catch Des ... and he has simply walked into the trap."

"And Desmond?" I asked. "What is Clubfoot going to do about him?"

"He was with Des for about an hour in his room, and I heard him tell Schmalz he would 'try again' after dinner. Oh, Francis, I am frightened of that man ... not a word has he said to me about my knowing Desmond—not a word about my harbouring Des in Berlin ... but he knows everything, and he watches me the whole time."

I glanced through the open door into the hall. The candles still burnt on the dinner-table, where Clubfoot and the officer sat conversing in low tones.

"I have been here long enough," I said. "But before I go, I want you to answer one or two questions, Monica. Will you?"

"Yes, Francis," she said, raising her eyes to mine.

"What time is the shoot to-morrow?"

"At ten o'clock."

"Are Grundt and Schmalz going?"

"Yes."

"You too?"

"Yes."

"Could you get away back to the house by 12.30?"

"Not alone. One of them is always with me out of doors."

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"Could you meet me alone anywhere outside at that time?"

"There is a quarry outside a village called Quellenburg ... it is on the edge of our preserves ... just off the road. We ought to be as far as that by twelve. If it is necessary, I will try and give them the slip and hide in one of the caves there. Then, when you came, if you whistled I could come out."

"Good. That will do excellently. We will arrange it so. Now, another question ... how many soldiers have you here?"

"Sixteen."

"Are they all going beating?"

"Oh, no! Only ten of them. The other six and the sergeant remain behind."

"Have you a car here?"

"No, but Grundt has one."

"How many servants will there be in the house to-morrow?"

"Only Johann, the butler, and the maids ... a woman cook and two girls."

"Can you contrive to have Johann out of the house between 10 and 12:30 to-morrow morning?"

"Yes, I can send him to Cleves with a note."

"The maids too?"

"Yes, the maids too."

"Good. Now will you do one thing more—the hardest of all? I want you to send a message to Desmond. Can you arrange it?"

"Tell me what your message is, and I may be able to answer you."

"I want you to tell him that he must at all costs contrive to keep Grundt from going to that shoot to-morrow ... at any rate between ten and twelve. He must manage to let Grundt believe that he is going to tell him where Grundt may find what he is after ... but he must keep him in suspense during those hours."

"And after?"

"There will be no after," I said.

"I will see that Des gets your message," Monica replied, "for I will take it myself."

"No, Monica," I said, "I don't want..."

"Francis," ...she spoke almost in a whisper ... "my life in this country is over," ... and she touched her widow's weeds.... "Karl was killed at Predeal three weeks ago.... You know as well as I do that I am involved in this affair as much as you and Des ... and I will share the risk if only you will take me away with you ... that is if you ..." She faltered.

I heard the chairs scrape in the corner of the hall where the dinner-party was breaking up.

"The Frau Graefin has only to command," I said. "The Frau Graefin knows I have been waiting for years...."

Clubfoot was crossing towards the open door.

"... I never expected to find the Frau Graefin so gracious.... I had never hoped that the Frau Graefin would be willing to do so much for me ... the Frau Graefin has made me very happy."

Clubfoot stood on the threshold and listened to my halting speech.

"You can bring your things in when you come to-morrow ..." Monica said. "The keeper will tell you what time you must be here."

Then she dismissed me, but as I went I heard her say:



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“Herr Doktor! Can I have a word with you?”

CHAPTER XVIII

I GO ON WITH THE STORY

I was in the billiard-room of the Castle, a dusty place, obviously little used, for it smelt of damp. A fire was burning in the grate, however, and on a table in the corner, which was littered with papers, stood a dispatch box.

Clubfoot wore a dinner-coat and, as he laughed, his white expanse of shirt-front heaved to the shaking of his deep chest. For a moment, however, I had little thought of him or the ugly-looking Browning he held in his fist. My ears were strained for any sound that might betray Francis' presence in the garden. But all remained silent as the grave.

Clubfoot, still chuckling audibly, walked over to me. I thought he was going to shoot me, he came so straight and so fast, but it was only to get behind me and shut the door, driving me, as he did so, farther into the room.

The door by which he had entered stood open. Without taking his eyes off me or deflecting his weapon from its aim, he called out:

“Schmalz!”

A light step resounded, and the one-armed lieutenant tripped into the room. When he saw me, he stopped dead. Then he softly began to circle round me with a mincing step, murmuring to himself: “So! So!”

“Good evening, Dr. Semlin!” he said in English. “Say, I’m mighty glad to see you! Well, Okewood, dear old boy, here we are again. What? Herr Julius Zimmermann ...” and he broke into German, “*es freut mich!*”

I could have killed him where he stood, maimed though he was, for his fluency in the American and English idiom alone.

“Search him, Schmalz!” commanded Clubfoot curtly.

Schmalz ran the fingers of his one arm over my pockets, flinging my portfolio on the billiard-table towards Clubfoot, and the other articles as they came to light ... my pistol, watch, cigarette-case and so forth ... on to a leather lounge against the wall. In his search he brushed me with his severed stump ... ugh, it was horrible!

Clubfoot had snatched up the portfolio and hastily examined it. He shook the contents out on the billiard-table and examined them carefully.

“Not there!” he said. “Run him upstairs, and we’ll strip him,” he ordered; “and let not our clever young friend forget that I’m behind him with my little toy!”

Schmalz gripped me by the collar, spitefully digging his knuckles into my neck, and propelled me out of the room ... almost into the arms of Monica.

She screamed and, turning, fled away down the passage. Clubfoot laughed noisily, but I reflected mournfully that in my present sorry plight, unwashed and unshaven, in filthy clothes, haled along like a common pickpocket, even my own mother would not have recognized me.

There was a degrading scene in the bedroom to which they dragged me, where the two men stripped me to the skin and pawed over every single article of clothing I possessed. Physically and mentally, I cowered in my nudity before the unwholesome gaze of these two sinister cripples. Of all my experiences in Germany, I still look back upon that as almost my worst ordeal.

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Of course, they found nothing, search as they might, and presently they flung my clothes back at me and bade me get dressed again, “for you and I, young man,” said Clubfoot, with his glinting smile, “have got to have a little talk together!”

When I was once more clothed—

“You can leave us, Schmalz!” commanded Clubfoot, “and send up the sergeant when I ring: he shall look after this tricky Englishman whilst we are at dinner with our charming hostess.”

Schmalz went out and left us alone. Clubfoot lighted a cigar. He smoked in silence for a few minutes. I said nothing, for really there was nothing for me to say. They hadn’t got their precious document, and it was not likely they would ever recover it now. I feared greatly that Francis in his loyalty might make an attempt to rescue me, but I hoped, whatever he did, he would think first of putting the document in a place of safety. I was more or less resigned to my fate. I was in their hands properly now, and whether they got the document or not, my doom was sealed.

“I will pay you the compliment of saying, my dear Captain Okewood,” Clubfoot remarked in that urbane voice of his which always made my blood run cold, “that never before in my career have I devoted so much thought to any single individual, in the different cases I have handled, as I have to you. As an individual, you are a paltry thing: it is rather your remarkable good fortune that interests me as a philosopher of sorts.... I assure you it will cause me serious concern to be the instrument of severing your really extraordinary strain of good luck. I don’t mind telling you, as man to man, that I have not yet entirely decided in my mind what to do with you now that I’ve got you!”

I shrugged my shoulders.

“You’ve got me, certainly,” I replied, “but you would vastly prefer to have what I have not got.”

“Let us not forget to be always content with small mercies,” answered the other, smiling with a gleam of his golden teeth,... “that is a favourite maxim of mine. As you truly remark, I would certainly prefer the ... the jewel to the infinitely less precious and ... interesting ... casket. But what I have, I hold. And I have you ... and your accomplice as well.”

“I have no accomplice,” I denied stoutly.

“Surely you forget our gracious hostess, our most charming Countess? Was it not thanks to the interest she deigned to take in your safety that I came here? Had it not been for that circumstance, I should scarcely have ventured to intrude upon her widowhood....”

“Her widowhood?” I exclaimed.

Clubfoot smiled again.

“You cannot have followed the newspapers in your ... retreat, my dear Captain Okewood,” he replied, “or surely you would have read the afflicting intelligence that Count Rachwitz, A.D.C. to Field-Marshal von Mackensen, was killed by a shell that fell into the Brigade Head-quarters where he was lunching at Predeal. Ah, yes,” he sighed, “our beautiful Countess is now a widow, alone ...” he paused, then added, “... and unprotected!”

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I understood his allusion and went cold with fear. Why, Monica was involved in this affair as much as I. Surely they wouldn't dare to touch her....

Clubfoot leaned forward and tapped me on the knee.

"You will be sensible, Okewood," he said confidentially. "You've lost. You can't save yourself. Your life was forfeit from the moment you crossed the threshold of his Majesty's private apartments ... but you can save *her*."

I shook his huge hand off my leg.

"You won't bluff me," I answered roughly. "You daren't touch the Countess Rachwitz, an American lady, niece of an American ambassador, married into one of your leading families ... no, Herr Doktor, you must try something else."

"Do you know why Schmalz is here?" he asked patiently, "and those soldiers?... You must have passed through the cordon to come here. Your little friend is in preventive arrest. She would be in gaol (she doesn't know it), but that His Majesty was unwilling to put this affront on the Rachwitz family in their great affliction."

"The Countess Rachwitz has nothing whatever to do with me," ... rather a foolish lie, I thought to myself too late, as I was in her house.

But Clubfoot remained quite unperturbed.

"I shall take you into my confidence, my dear sir," he said, "to show that I know you to be stating an untruth. The Countess, on the contrary, is, to use a vulgar phrase, in it up to the neck. Thanks to the amazing imbecility of the Berlin police, I was not informed of your brief stay at the Bendler-Strasse, even after they were called in by the invalid American gentleman in the matter of your hasty flight when asked to have your passport put in order. But we are systematic, we Germans; we are painstaking; and I set about going through every possible place that might afford you shelter.

"In the course of my investigations I came across our mutual friend, Herr Kore. A perusal of his very business-like ledgers showed me that on the day following your disappearance from the Esplanade he had received 3,600 marks from a certain E. 2 ... all names in his books were in cipher. Under the influence of my winning personality, Herr Kore told me all he knew; I pursued my investigations and then discovered what the asinine police had omitted to tell me, namely, that on the date in question an alleged American had made a hurried flight from the Countess Rachwitz's apartment in the Bendler-Strasse. An admirable fellow ... Max or Otto, or some name like that ... anyhow, he was valet to Madame's invalid brother, was able to fill in all the lacunae, and I was thus enabled to draw up a very strong case against your well-meaning but singularly ill-advised hostess. By this time the lady had left Berlin for this charming old-

world seat, and I promptly took measures to have her placed in preventive arrest whilst I tracked *you* down.

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"You got away again. Even Jupiter nods, you know, my dear Captain Okewood, and I frankly admit I overlooked the silver badge which you had in your possession. I must compliment you also on your adroitness in leaving us that false trail to Munich. It took me in to the extent that I dispatched an emissary to hunt you down in that delightful capital, but, for myself, I have a certain *flair* in these matters, and I thought you would sooner or later come to Bellevue. You will admit that I showed some perspicacity?"

"You're wasting time with all this talk," I said sullenly.

Clubfoot raised a hand deprecatingly.

"I take a pride in my work," he observed half-apologetically. Then he added:

"You must not forget that your pretty Countess is not an American. She is a German. She is also a widow. You may not know the relations that existed between her and her late husband, but they were not, I assure you, of such warmth that the Rachwitz family would unduly mourn her loss. Do you suppose we care a fig for all the American ambassadors that ever left the States? My dear sir, I observe that you are still lamentably ignorant of the revolution that war brings into international relations. In war, where the national interest is concerned, the individual is nothing. If he or she must be removed, puff! you snuff the offender out. Afterwards you can always pay or apologize, or do what is required."

I listened in silence; I had no defence to offer in face of this deadly logic, the logic of the stronger man.

Clubfoot produced a paper from his pocket.

"Read that!" he said, tossing it over to me. "It is the summons for the Countess Rachwitz to appear before a court-martial. Date blank, you see. You needn't tear it up ... I've got several spare blank forms ... one for you, too!"

I felt my courage ebbing and my heart turning to water. I handed him back his paper in silence. The booming of a dinner gong suddenly swelled into the stillness of the room. Clubfoot rose and rang the bell.

"Here's my offer, Okewood!" he said. "You shall restore that letter to me in its integrity, and the Countess Rachwitz shall go free provided she leaves this country and does not return. That's my last word! Take the night to sleep on it! I shall come for my answer in the morning."

A sergeant in field-grey with a rifle and fixed bayonet stood in the doorway.

“I make you responsible for this man, Sergeant,” said Clubfoot, “until I return in an hour or so. Food will be sent up for him and you will personally assure yourself that no message is conveyed to him by that or any other means.”

* * * * *

I had washed, I had brushed my clothes, I had dined, and I sat in silence by the table, in the most utter dejection of spirit, I think, into which it is possible for a man to fall. I was so totally crushed by the disappointment of the evening that I don't think I pondered much about my own fate at all. But my thoughts were busy with Monica. My life was my own, and I knew I had a lien on my brother's if thereby our mission might be carried through to the end. But had I the right to sacrifice Monica?

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And then the unexpected happened. The door opened, and she came in, Schmalz behind her. He dismissed the sergeant with a word of caution to see that the sentries round the house were vigilant, and followed the man out, leaving Monica and me alone.

The girl stopped the torrent of self-reproach that rose to my lips with a pretty gesture. She was pale, but she held her head as high as ever.

"Schmalz has given me five minutes alone with you, Des," she said, "to plead with you for my life, that you may betray your trust. No, don't speak ... there is no time to waste in words. I have a message for you from Francis.... Yes, I have seen him here, this very night.... He says you must contrive at all costs to keep Grundt from going to the shoot at ten o'clock to-morrow, and to detain him with you from ten to twelve. That is all I know about it.... But Francis has planned something, and you and I have got to trust him. Now, listen ... I shall tell Clubfoot I have pleaded with you and that you show signs of weakening. Say nothing to-night, temporize with him when he comes for his answer in the morning, and then send for him at a quarter to ten, when he will be leaving the house with the others. The rest I leave to you. Good night, Des, and cheer up!"...

"But, Monica," I cried, "what about you?"

She reddened deliciously under her pallor.

"Des," she replied happily, "we are allies now, we three. If all goes well, I'm coming with you and Francis!"

With that she was gone. A few minutes after, a couple of soldiers arrived with Schmalz and took me downstairs to a dark cellar in the basement, where I was locked in for the night.

* * * * *

I was dreaming of the front ... again I sniffed the old familiar smells, the scent of fresh earth, the fetid odour of death; again I heard outside the trench the faint rattle of tools, the low whispers of our wiring party; again I saw the very lights soaring skyward and revealing the desolation of the battlefield in their glare. Someone was shaking me by the shoulder. It was my servant come to wake me.... I must have fallen asleep. Was it stand-to so soon? I sat up and rubbed my eyes and awoke to the anguish of another day.

The sergeant stood at the cellar door, framed in the bright morning light.

"You are to come upstairs!" he said.



He took me to the billiard-room, where Clubfoot, sleek and washed and shaved, sat at the writing-table in the sunshine, opening letters and sipping coffee. A clock on a bracket above his head pointed to eight.

“You wish to speak to me, I believe,” he said carelessly, running his eye over a letter in his hand.

“You must give me a little more time, Herr Doktor,” I said. “I was worn out last night and I could not look at things in their proper light. If you could spare me a few hours more....”



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I put a touch of pleading into my voice, which struck him at once.

"I am not unreasonable, my dear Captain Okewood," he replied, "but you will understand that I am not to be trifled with, so I give you fair warning. I will give you until...."

"It is eight o'clock now," I interrupted. "I tell you what, give me until ten. Will that do?"

Clubfoot nodded assent.

"Take this man upstairs to my bedroom," he ordered the sergeant. "Stay with him while he has his breakfast, and bring him back here at ten o'clock. And tell Schmidt to leave my car at the door: he needn't wait, as he is to beat: I will drive myself to the shoot."

I don't really remember what happened after that. I swallowed some breakfast, but I had no idea what I was eating, and the sergeant, who was a model of Prussian discipline, declined with a surly frown to enter into conversation with me. My morale was very low: when I look back upon that morning I think I must have been pretty near the breaking-point.

As I sat and waited I heard the house in a turmoil of preparation for the shoot. There was the sound of voices, of heavy boots in the hall, of wheels and horses in the yard without. Then the noises died away and all was still. Shortly afterwards, the clock pointing to ten, the sergeant escorted me downstairs again to the billiard-room.

Grundt was still sitting there. A hot wave of anger drove the blood into my cheeks as I looked at him, fat and soft and so triumphant at his victory. The sight of him, however, gave me the tonic I needed. My nerve was shaken badly, but I was determined it must answer to this last strain, to play this uncouth fish for two hours. After that ... if nothing happened ...

Clubfoot sent the sergeant away.

"I can look after him myself now," he said, in a blithe tone that betrayed his conviction of success. So the sergeant saluted and left the room, his footsteps echoing down the passages like the leaden feet of Destiny, relentless, inexorable.

CHAPTER XIX

WE HAVE A RECKONING WITH CLUBFOOT

I looked at Clubfoot.

I must play him with caution, with method, too.

Only by acting on a most exact system could I hope to hold him in that room for two hours. I had four points to argue with him and I would devote half an hour to each of them by the clock on the bracket above his head. If only I could keep him confident in his victory, I might hope to prevent him finding out that I was playing with him ... but two hours is a long time ... it would be a near thing.

One point in my favour ... my manner gave him the assurance of success from the start. There was nothing counterfeit about my tone of humility, for in truth I was very near despair. I was making this last effort at the bidding of my brother, but I felt it to be a forlorn hope: in my heart of hearts I knew I was down and out.

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So I went straight to the point and told Clubfoot that I was beaten, that he should have his paper. But there were difficulties about the execution of both sides of the bargain. We had deceived one another. What mutual guarantees could we exchange that would give each of us the assurance of fair play?

Clubfoot settled this point in characteristic fashion. He protested his good faith elaborately, but the gist of his remarks was that he held the cards and that, consequently, it was he who must be trusted, whilst I furnished the guarantee.

Whilst we were discussing this point the clock chimed the half-hour.

I switched the conversation to Monica. I was not at all concerned about myself, I said, but I must feel sure in my mind that no ill should befall her. To this Clubfoot replied that I might set my mind at ease: the moment the document was in his hands he would give orders for her release: I should be there and might see it done myself.

What guarantee was there, I asked, that she would not be detained before she reached the frontier?

Clubfoot was getting a little restless. With his eye on the clock but in a placid voice he again protested that his word was the sole guarantee he could offer.

We discussed this too. My manner was earnest and nervous, I know, and I think he enjoyed playing with me. I told him frankly that his reputation belied his protestations of good faith. At this he laughed and cynically admitted that this was quite possibly the case.

"Nevertheless, it is I who give the guarantee," he said in a tone that brooked no contradiction.

The clock struck eleven.

One hour to go!

"Come, Okewood," he added good-naturedly, "we waste time. Up to this you've had all the sport, you know. You wouldn't have me miss the first day's shooting I've had this year. Where have you got this letter of ours?"

He was an extraordinary man. To hear him address me, you would never have supposed that he was sending me to my death. He appeared to have forgotten this detail. It meant so little to him that he probably had.

I turned to my third point. He made things very hard for me, I said, but I was the vanquished and must give way. The trouble was that the document was still in two portions and neither half was here.

“You indicate where the halves are hidden,” said Clubfoot promptly. “I will accompany you to the hiding-places and you will hand them to me.”

“But they are nowhere near here,” I replied.

“Then where are they?” answered Clubfoot impatiently. “Come, I am waiting and it’s getting late!”

“It will take several days to recover both portions,” I muttered unwillingly.

“That does not matter,” retorted the other; “there is no particular hurry ... now!”

And he smiled grimly.

I dared not raise my eyes to the clock, for I felt the German’s gaze on me. An intuitive instinct told me that his suspicions had been awakened by my reluctance. I was very nearly at the end of my resources.

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Would the clock never strike?

"I tell you frankly, Herr Doktor," I said in a voice that trembled with anxiety, "I cannot leave the Countess unprotected whilst we travel together to the hiding-places of the document. I only feel sure of her safety whilst she is near me...."

Clubfoot bent his brows at me.

"What do you suggest then?" he said very sternly.

"You go and recover the two halves at the places I indicate," I stammered out, "and ... and ..."

A faint whirr and the silver chime rang out twice.

Half an hour more!

How still the house was! I could hear the clock ticking—no, that thudding must be my heart. My wits failed me, my mind had become a blank, my throat was dry with fear.

"I've wasted an hour and a half over you, young man," said Clubfoot suddenly, "and it's time that this conversation was brought to a close. I warn you again that I am not to be trifled with. The situation is perfectly clear: it rests with you whether the Countess Rachwitz goes free or is court-martialled this afternoon at Cleves and shot this evening. Your suggestion is absurd. I'll be reasonable with you. We will both stay here. I will wire for the two portions of the letter to be fetched at the places you indicate, and as soon as I hold the entire letter in my hands the Countess will be driven to the frontier. I will allow her butler here to accompany her and he can return and assure you that she is in safety."

He stretched out his hand and pulled a block of telegraph forms towards him.

"Where shall we find the two halves?" he said.

"One is in Holland," I murmured.

He looked up quickly.

"If you dare to play me false...."

He broke off when he saw my face.

The room was going round with me. My hands felt cold as ice. I was struggling for the mastery over myself, but I felt my body swaying.

“Ah!” exclaimed Clubfoot musingly, “that would be Semlin’s half.... I might have known.... Well, never mind, Schmalz can take my car and fetch it. He can be back by to-morrow. Where is he to go?”

“The other half is in Berlin,” I said desperately. My voice sounded to me like a third person speaking.

“That’s simpler,” replied Clubfoot. “Ten minutes to twelve now ... if I wire at once, that half should be here by midnight.... I’ll get the message off immediately....”

He looked up at me, pencil in hand.

It was the end. I had kept faith with Francis to the limit of my powers, but now my resistance was broken. He had failed me ... not me, but Monica, rather.... I could not save her now. Like some nightmare film, the crowded hours of the past few weeks flashed past my eyes, a jostling procession of figures—Semlin with his blue lips and livid face, Schratt with her bejewelled hands, the Jew Kore, Haase with his bullet head, Francis, sadly musing on the cafe verandah ... and Monica, all in white, as I saw her that night at the Esplanade ... my thoughts always came back to her, a white and pitiful figure in some dusty courtyard at lamplight facing a row of levelled rifles....

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"I am waiting!"

Clubfoot's voice broke stridently upon the silence.

Should I tell him the truth now?

It was three minutes to the hour.

"Come! The two addresses!"

I would keep faith to the last.

"Herr Doktor!" I faltered.

He dashed the pencil down on the table and sprang to his feet. He caught me by the lapels of my coat and shook me in an iron grip.

"The addresses, you dog!" he said.

The clock whirred faintly. There was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" roared Clubfoot and resumed his seat.

The clock was chiming twelve.

An officer stepped in briskly and saluted.

It was Francis!... Francis, freshly shaved, his moustache neatly trimmed, a monocle in his eye, in a beautifully waisted grey military overcoat, one white-gloved hand raised in salute to his helmet.

"Hauptmann von Salzmänn!" ... he introduced himself, clicking his heels and bowing to Clubfoot, who glared at him, frowning at the interruption. He spoke with the clipped, mincing utterance of the typical Prussian officer. "I am looking for Herr Leutnant Schmalz," he said.

"He is not in," answered Clubfoot in a surly voice. "He is out and I am busy ... I do not wish to be disturbed."

"As Schmalz is out," the officer returned suavely, advancing to the desk, "I must trouble you for an instant, I fear. I have been sent over from Goch to inspect the guard here. But I find no guard ... there is not a man in the place."

Clubfoot angrily heaved his unwieldy bulk from his chair.



“Gott im Himmel!” he cried savagely. “It is incredible that I can never be left in peace. What the devil has the guard got to do with me? Will you understand that I have nothing to do with the guard! There is a sergeant somewhere ... curse him for a lazy scoundrel ... I’ll ring ...”

He never finished the sentence. As he turned his back on my brother to reach the bell in the wall, Francis sprang on him from behind, seizing his bull neck in an iron grip and driving his knee at the same moment into that vast expanse of back.

The huge German, taken by surprise, crashed over backwards, my brother on top of him.

It was so quickly done that, for the instant, I was dumbfounded.

“Quick, Des, the door!” my brother gasped. “Lock the door!”

The big German was roaring like a bull and plunging wildly under my brother’s fingers, his clubfoot beating a thunderous tattoo on the parquet floor. In his fall Clubfoot’s left arm had been bent under him and was now pinioned to the ground by his great weight. With his free right arm he strove fiercely to force off my brother’s fingers as Francis fought to get a grip on the man’s throat and choke him into silence.

I darted to the door. The key was on the inside and I turned it in a trice. As I turned to go to my brother’s help my eye caught sight of the butt of my pistol lying where Schmalz had thrown it the evening before under my overcoat on the leather lounge.

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I snatched up the weapon and dropped by my brother's side, crushing Clubfoot's right arm to the ground. I thrust the pistol in his face.

"Stop that noise!" I commanded.

The German obeyed.

"Better search him, Francis," I said to my brother. "He probably has a Browning on him somewhere."

Francis went through the man's pockets, reaching up and putting each article as it came to light on the desk above him. From an inner breast pocket he extracted the Browning. He glanced at it: the magazine was full with a cartridge in the breech.

"Hadn't we better truss him up?" Francis said to me.

"No," I said. I was still kneeling on the German's arm. He seemed exhausted. His head had fallen back upon the ground.

"Let me up, curse you!" he choked.

"No!" I said again and Francis turned and looked at me.

Each of us knew what was in the other's mind, my brother and I. We were thinking of a hand-clasp we had exchanged on the banks of the Rhine.

I was about to speak but Francis checked me. He was trembling all over. I could feel his elbow quiver where it touched mine.

"No, Des, please ..." he pleaded, "let me ... this is my show...."

Then, in a voice that vibrated with suppressed passion, he spoke swiftly to Clubfoot.

"Take a good look at me, Grundt," he said sternly. "You don't know me, do you? I am Francis Okewood, brother of the man who has brought you to your fall. You don't know me, but you knew some of my friends, I think. Jack Tracy? Do you remember him? And Herbert Arbuthnot? Ah, you knew him, too. And Philip Brewster? You remember him as well, do you? No need to ask you what happened to poor Philip!"

The man on the floor answered nothing, but I saw the colour very slowly fade from his cheeks.

My brother spoke again.

"There were four of us after that letter, as you knew, Grundt, and three of us are dead. But you never got me. I was the fourth man, the unknown quantity in all your elaborate calculations ... and it seems to me I spoiled your reckoning ... I and this brother of mine ... an amateur at the game, Grundt!"

Still Clubfoot was silent, but I noticed a bead of perspiration tremble on his forehead, then trickle down his ashen cheeks and drop splashing to the floor.

Francis continued in the same deep, relentless voice.

"I never thought I should have to soil my hands by ridding the world of a man like you, Grundt, but it has come to it and you have to die. I'd have killed you in hot blood when I first came in but for Jack and Herbert and the others ... for their sake you had to know who is your executioner."

My brother raised the pistol. As he did so the man on the floor, by a tremendous effort of strength, rose erect to his knees, flinging me headlong. Then there was a hot burst of flame close to my cheek as I lay on the floor, a deafening report, a thud and a sickening gurgle.



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Something twitched a little on the ground and then lay still.

We rose to our feet together.

“Des,” said my brother unsteadily, “it seems rather like murder.”

“No, Francis,” I whispered back, “it was justice!”

CHAPTER XX

CHARLEMAGNE'S RIDE

The hands of the clock pointed to a quarter past twelve. Funny, how my eyes kept coming back to that clock! There was a smell of warm gunpowder in the room, and the autumn sunshine, struggling feebly through the window, caught the blue edges of a little haze of smoke that hung lazily in the air by the desk in the corner. How close the room was! And how that clock face seemed to stare at me! I felt very sick....

Lord! What a draught! A gust of icy air was raging in my face. The room was still swaying to and fro....

I was in the front seat of a car beside Francis, who was driving. We were fairly flying along a broad and empty road, the tall poplars with which it was lined scudding away into the vanishing landscape as we whizzed by. The surface was terrible, and the car pitched this way and that as we tore along. But Francis had her well in hand. He sat at the wheel, very cool and deliberate and very grave, still in his officer's uniform, and his eyes had a cold glint that told me he was keyed up to top pitch.

We slackened speed a fraction to negotiate a turn off to the right down a side road. We seemed to take that corner on two wheels. A thin church spire protruded from the trees in the centre of the group of houses which we were approaching so furiously. The village was all but deserted: everybody seemed to be indoors at their midday meal, but Francis slowed down and ran along the dirty street at a demure pace. The village passed, he jammed down the accelerator and once more the car sprang forward.

The country was flat as a pancake, but presently the fields fell away a bit from the road with boulders and patches of gorse here and there. The next moment we were slackening speed. We drew up by a rough track which led off the road and vanished into a tangle of stunted trees and scrub growing across the yellow face of a sand-pit.

Francis motioned me to get out, and then sprang to the ground himself, leaving the engine throbbing. His face was grey and set.

“Stay here!” he whispered to me. “You’ve got your pistol? Good. If anybody attempts to interfere with you, shoot!” He dashed into the tangle and was swallowed up. I heard a whistle, and a whistle in answer, and a minute later he appeared again helping Monica through the thick undergrowth.

Monica looked as pretty as a picture in her dark green shooting suit and her muffler. She was as excited as a child at its first play.

“A car!” she exclaimed. “Oh, Francis, I’ll sit beside you!”

My brother glanced at his watch.

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"Twenty to one!" he murmured. He had a hunted look on his face. Monica saw it and it sobered her.

They got up in front, and I sat in the body of the car.

"Hang on to that!" said Francis, handing me over a leather case. I recognized it at a glance. It was Clubfoot's dispatch-box. Francis was thorough in everything.

Once more we dashed out along the desolate country roads. We saw hardly a soul. Houses were few and far between and, save for an occasional greybeard hoeing in the wet fields or an old woman hobbling along the road, the countryside seemed dead. In the cold air the engine ran splendidly, and Francis got every ounce of horse-power out of it.

On we rushed, the wind in our ears, the cold air in our faces, until we found ourselves racing along an avenue of old trees that led straight as an arrow right into the heart of the forest. It was as silent as the grave: the air was dank and chill and the trees dripped sorrowfully into the brimming ruts of the road.

We whizzed past many tracks leading into the depths of the forest, but it was not until the car had eaten up some five kilometres of the main road that Francis slowed to a halt. He consulted a map he pulled from his pocket, then glanced at his watch with puckered brow.

"I had hoped to take the car into the forest," he said, "but the roads are so soft we shan't get a yard. Still we can but try."

We went forward again, very slowly, to where a track ran off to the left. It was badly ploughed up, and the ruts were fully a foot deep. Monica and I got out to lighten the car, and Francis ran her in. But he hadn't gone five yards before the car was bogged up to the axles.

"We'll have to leave it," he said, jumping out. "It's ten minutes to two ... we haven't a second to lose."

He pulled a cloth cap from the pocket of his military overcoat, then stripped off the coat, showing his ordinary clothes underneath, and very shiny black field-boots up to his knees. He put his helmet in the overcoat and made a roll of it, tucking it under his arm, and then donned his cap.

"Now," he said, "We'll have to run for it, Monica, I'm afraid: we must reach our cover while the light lasts or I shan't be able to find it and it will be dark in these woods in about two hours from now. Are you ready?"

We struck off the track into the forest. There was not much undergrowth, and the trees were not planted very close, so our way was not impeded. We jogged on over a carpet of wet leaves, stumbling over the roots of the trees, tearing our clothes on the brambles, bringing down showers of raindrops from the branches of pine or fir we brushed on our headlong course. Now a squirrel bolted up his tree, now a rabbit frisked back into his hole, now a soft-eyed deer crashed away into the bushes on our approach. The place was so still that it gave me confidence. There was not a trace of man now that we were away from the marks of his carts on the tracks, and I began to feel, in the presence of the stately, silent trees, that at last I was safe from the menace that had hung over me for so long.

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We rested frequently, breathless and panting, a hand to the side. Monica was a marvel of endurance. Her boots were sopping, her skirt wet to the waist, her face was scratched, and her hair was coming down, but she never complained. Francis was seemingly tireless and was always the one to lead the way when we started afresh.

It was heavy going, for at every step our feet sank deep in the leaves. The forest was undulating with deep hollows and steep banks, which tried us a good deal. It soon became evident that we could not keep up the pace. Monica was tiring visibly, and I had had about enough; Francis, too, seemed done up. We slackened to a walk. We were toiling painfully up on of these steep banks when Francis, who was leading, held up his hand.

“Charlemagne’s Ride!” he whispered as we came up. We looked down from the top of the bank and saw below us a broad forest glade, canopied by the thick branches of the ancient trees that met overhead, and leading up a slope, narrowing as it went, to a path that lost itself among the shadows that were falling fast upon the forest.

Francis clambered down the bank and we followed. Twilight reigned below in the glade under the lofty roof of branches and our feet rustled softly as we trod the leaves underfoot. It was a ghostly place, and Monica clutched my arm as we went quickly after Francis, who, striding rapidly ahead, threatened to be swallowed up in the shadows of the autumn evening. He led us up the slope and along the narrow path. A path struck off it, and he took it. It led us into a thicker part of the forest than we had yet struck, where there were great boulders protruding from the dripping bushes, and brambles grew so thick that in places they obscured the track.

The forest sloped up again, and in front of us was a steep bank, its sides dotted with great rocks and a tangle of brambles and undergrowth. Francis stooped between two boulders at the foot of the slope, then turning and beckoning us to follow, disappeared. Monica went in after him, and I came last. We were in a kind of narrow entrance, scooped out of the earth between the rocks, and it led down to a broad chamber, which had apparently been dug beneath some of the boulders, for, stretching out my hand, I found the roof was rock and damp to the touch.

Francis and Monica were standing in this chamber as I came down. Directly I entered I knew why they stood so still. A glimmer of light came from the farther end of the cave and a strange sound, a sort of strangled sobbing, reached our ears.

I crept forward in the dark in the direction of the light. My outstretched hands came upon a low opening. I stooped and, crawling round a rock, saw another chamber illuminated by a guttering candle stuck by its wax to the earthen wall. On the floor a man was lying, sobbing as though his heart would break. He was wearing some kind of military great-coat with a yellow stripe running down the back.

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"Pst!" I called to him, drawing my pistol from my pocket. As I did so, Francis behind me touched my arm to let me know he was there.

"Pst!" I called again louder.

The man swung round on to his knees with a sudden, frightened spring. When he saw my pistol, he jerked his hands above his head. Dirty and unshaven, with the tears all wet on his face, he looked a woe-begone and tragic figure.

"Kamerad! Kamerad!" he muttered stupidly at me. "Napoo! Kaput! Englander!"

I gazed at the stranger, hardly able to believe my ears. That trench jargon in this place!

"Are you English?" I asked him.

At the sound of my voice he stared about him wildly.

"Ay, I be English, zur," he replied with a strong West Country burr, "God help me!" And, heedless of me and my pistol, he covered his face with his hands and burst into a wild fit of sobbing again, rocking himself to and fro in his grief.

"Go back to Monica!" I whispered to Francis. "I'll see to this fellow!"

I managed to pacify him presently. Habit is a tenacious ruler and, grotesque figures though we were, the "zur" he had addressed to me brought out the officer in me. I talked to him as I would have done to one of my own men, and he quietened down at last and looked up at me.

He was only a lad—I could tell that by the clearness of his skin and the brightness of his eyes—but his face was wan and wasted, and at the first glance he looked like a man of forty. Under his great-coat, which was German, he was clad in filthy rags which once had been a khaki uniform, as the cut—and nothing else—revealed.

He told me his simple story in his soft Somersetshire accent, just the plain tale of the fate that has overtaken thousands of our fellow-countrymen since the war began. His name was Maggs, Sapper Ebenezer Maggs, of the Royal Engineers, and he was captured near Mons in August, 1914, when out laying a line with a party. With a long train of British prisoners—"zum of 'em was terrible bad, zur, dying, as you might say"—he had been marched off to a town and paraded to the railway station through streets thronged with jeering German soldiery. In cattle trucks, the fit, the wounded, the dying and the dead herded together, without food or water, they had made their journey into Germany with hostile mobs at every station, once the frontier was past, brutal men and shrieking women, to whom not even the dying were sacred.

It was a terrible tale, that lost nothing of its horror from the simple, unadorned style of this West Country farmer's son. He had been one of the ragged, emaciated band of British prisoners of war who had shivered through that first long winter in the starvation camp of Friedrichsfeld, near Wesel. For two years he had endured the filthy food, the neglect, the harsh treatment, then a resourceful Belgian friend, whom he called John, in happier days a contraband runner on this very frontier, had shown him a means to escape. Five days before they had left the camp and separated, agreeing to meet at Charlemagne's Ride in the forest and try to force the frontier together. "John" had never come. For twenty-four hours Maggs had waited in vain, then his courage had forsaken him, and he had crept to that hole in his grief.

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I went and fetched Francis and Monica. Maggs shrunk back as they came in.

"I bean't fit cumpany for no lady, zur," he whispered to me, "I be that durty, fair crawling I be ... We couldn't keep clean nohow in that camp!"

All the good soldier's horror of dirt was in his voice.

"That's all right, Maggs," I answered soothingly, "she'll understand!"

We sat down on the floor in the light of Sapper Maggs' candle, and Francis and I reviewed our situation. The cave we were in ... an old Smuggler's *cache* ... was where Francis had spent several days during his different attempts to get across the frontier. The border line was only about a quarter of a mile distant and ran right through the forest. There was no live-wire fencing in the forest, such as the Germans have erected along the frontier between Holland and Belgium. The frontier was guarded by patrols. These patrols were posted four men to every two hundred yards along the line through the forest, so that two men, patrolling in pairs, covered a hundred yards apiece.

It was now half-past five in the evening. We both agreed that we should certainly make the attempt to cross the frontier that night. Francis nudged me, indicating the sapper with his eyes.

"Maggs," I said, "we are all in a bad way, but our case is more desperate than yours. I shall not tell you more than this, that, if we are caught, any of us three, we shall be shot, and anyone caught with us will fare the same. If you will take my advice, you will leave us and start off by yourself: the worst that can happen to you is to be sent back to your camp. You will be punished for running away, but you won't lose your life!"

Sapper Maggs shook his yellow head.

"I'll stay," he answered stolidly; "it's more cumfortable-like for us four to 'old together, and it's a better protection for the lady. I bean't afear'd of no Gers, I bean't! I'll go along o' yew officers and the lady, if yew don't mind, zur!"

So it was settled, and we four agreed to unite forces. Before we set out Francis wanted to go and reconnoitre. I thought he had done more than his share that day, and said so. But Francis insisted.

"I know my way blindfold about the forest, old man" he said "it'll be far safer for me than for you. I'll leave you the map and mark the route you are to follow, so that you can find the way if anything happens to me. If I'm not back by midnight, you ought certainly not to wait any longer, but make the attempt by yourselves."

My brother handed me back the document and went over the route we were to follow on the map. Then he deposited his bundle in the cave and declared himself ready.

“And don’t forget old Clubfoot’s box,” he said by way of a parting injunction.

Monica took him out to the entrance of our refuge. She was dabbing her eyes with her handkerchief when she returned. To divert her thoughts, I questioned her about the events that had led to my rescue, and she told me how, at Francis’ request, she had got all the servants out of the Castle on different pretexts. It was Francis who had got rid of the soldiers remaining as a guard.

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"You remember the Captain of Koepenick trick," she said. "Well, Francis played it off on the sergeant and those six men. He slept at Cleves, had himself trimmed up at the barber's, bought those field-boots he is wearing, and stole that helmet and great-coat off the pegs in the passage at Schmidt's Cafe, where the officers always go and drink beer after morning parade. Then he drove out to the Castle—he knew that the place would be deserted once the shoot had started—and told the sergeant he had been sent from Goch to inspect the guard. I think he is just splendid! He inspected the men and cursed everybody up and down, and sent the sergeant out to the paddock with orders to drill them for two hours. Francis was telling me all about it as we came along. He says that if you can get hold of a uniform and hector a German enough, he will never call your bluff. Can you beat it?"

The hours dragged wearily on. We had no food, and Maggs, who had eaten the last of his provisions twenty-four hours before—the British soldier is a bad hoarder—soon consumed the last of my cigarettes. It was past ten o'clock when I heard a step outside. The next moment Francis came in, white and breathless.

"They're beating the forest for us," he panted. "The place is full of men. I had to crawl the whole way there and back, and I'm soaked to the skin."

I pointed to Monica, who was fast asleep, and he lowered his voice.

"Des," he said, "I've hoped as long as I dared, but now I believe the game's up. They're beating the forest in a great circle, soldiers and police and customs men. If we set out at once we can reach the frontier before they get here, but what's the use of that ... every patrol is on the look-out for us ... the forest seems ablaze with torches."

"We must try it, Francis," I said. "We haven't a dog's chance if we stay here!"

"I think you're right," he answered. "Well, here's the plan. There's a deep ravine that runs clear across the frontier. I spent an hour in it. They've built a plank bridge across the top just this side of the line, and the patrol comes to the ravine about every three minutes. It is practically impossible to get out of sight and sound along that ravine in three minutes, but ..."

"Unless we could drar the patrol's attention away!" said Sapper Maggs.

But Francis ignored the interruption.

"... We can at least try it. Come on, we must be starting! Thank God, there's no moon; it's as dark as the devil outside!"

We roused up Monica and groped our way out of the cave into the black and dripping forest. Somewhere in the distance a faint glare reddened the sky. From time to time I thought I heard a shout, but it sounded far away.

We crawled stealthily forward, Francis in front, then Monica, Maggs and I last. In a few minutes we were wet through, and our hands, blue and dead with cold, were scratched and torn. Our progress was interminably slow. Every few yards Francis raised his hand and we stopped.



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At last we reached the gloomy glade where, as Francis had told us, according to popular belief, the wraith of Charlemagne was still seen on the night of St. Hubert's Day galloping along with his ghostly followers of the chase. The rustling of leaves caught our ears; instantly we all lay prone behind a bank.

A group of men came swinging along the glade. One of them was singing an ancient German soldier song:

"Die Voeglein im Walde
Sie singen so schoen
In der Heimat, in der Heimat,
Da gibt's ein Wiederseh'n."

"The relief patrol!" I whispered to Francis, as soon as they were past.

"The other lot they relieve will be back this way in a minute. We must get across quickly." My brother stood erect, and tiptoed swiftly across Charlemagne's Ride, and we followed.

We must have crawled for an hour before we came to the ravine. It was a deep, narrow ditch with steep sides, full of undergrowth and brambles. Now we could hear distinctly the voices of men all around us, as it seemed, and to right and to left and in front we caught at intervals glimpses of red flames through the trees. We could only proceed at a snail's pace lest the continual rustle of our footsteps should betray us. So each advanced a few paces in turn; then we all paused, and then the next one went forward. We could no longer crawl; the undergrowth was too thick for that; we had to go forward bent double.

We had progressed like this for fully half an hour when Francis, who was in front as usual, beckoned us to lie down. We all lay motionless among the brambles.

Then a voice somewhere above us said in German:

"And I'll have a man at the plank here, sergeant: he can watch the ravine."

Another voice answered:

"Very good, Herr Leutnant, but in that case the patrols to right and left need not cross the plank each time; they can turn when they come to the ravine guard."

The voices died away in a murmur. I craned my neck aloft. It was so dark, I could see nothing save the fretwork of branches against the night sky. I whispered to Francis, who was just in front of me:

"Unless we make a dash for it now that man will hear us rustling along!"



Francis held up a finger. I heard a heavy footstep along the bank above us.

“Too late!” my brother whispered back. “Do you hear the patrols?”

Footsteps crashing through the undergrowth resounded on the right and left.

“Cold work!” said a voice.

“Bitter!” came the answer, just above our heads.

“Seen anything?”

“Nothing!”

The rustling began again on the right, and died away.

“They’re closing in on the left!” Another voice this time.

“Heard anything, you?” from the voice above us.

“Not a thing!”

The rustling broke out once more on the left, and gradually became lost in the distance.

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Silence.

I felt a hot breath in my ear. Sapper Maggs stood by my side.

“There be a feller a-watching for us up there?” he whispered.

I nodded.

“If us could drar his ’tention away, yew could slip by, next time the patrols is past, couldn’t ’ee?”

Again I nodded.

“It’d be worse for yew than for me, supposin’ yew’d be ca-art, that’s what t’other officer said, warn’t it?”

And once more I nodded.

The hot whisper came again.

“I’ll drar ‘un off for ee, zur, nex’ time the patrols pass. When I holler, yew and the others, yew run. Thirty-one forty-three Sapper Maggs, R.E., from Chewton Mendip ... that’s me... maybe yew’ll let us have a bit o’ writing to the camp.”

I stretched out my hand in the darkness to stop him. He had gone.

I leant forward and whispered to Francis:

“When you hear a shout, we make a dash for it!”

I felt him look at me in surprise—it was too dark to see his face.

“Right!” he whispered back.

Now to the left we heard voices shouting and saw torches gleaming red among the trees. To right and rear answering shouts resounded.

Again the patrols met at the plank above our heads, and again their departing footsteps rustled in the leaves.

The murmur of voices grew nearer. We could faintly smell the burning resin of the torches.

Then a wild yell rent the forest. The voice above us shouted “Halt!” but the echo was lost in the deafening report of a rifle.

Francis caught Monica by the wrist and dragged her forward. We went plunging and crashing through the tangle of the ravine. We heard a second shot and a third, commands were shouted, the red glare deepened in the sky....

Monica collapsed quite suddenly at my feet. She never uttered a sound, but fell prone, her face as white as paper. Without a word we picked her up between us and went on, stumbling, gasping, coughing, our clothes rent and torn, the blood oozing from the deep scratches on our faces and hands.

At length our strength gave out. We laid Monica down in the ravine and drew the undergrowth over her, then we crawled in under the brambles exhausted, beat.

Dawn was streaking the sky with lemon when a dog jumped sniffing down into our hiding-place. Francis and Monica were asleep.

A man stood at the top of the ravine looking down on us. He carried a gun over his shoulder.

“Have you had an accident?” he said kindly.

He spoke in Dutch.

CHAPTER XXI

RED TABS EXPLAINS

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From the Argyllshire hills winter has stolen down upon us in the night. Behind him he has left his white mantle, and it now lies outspread from the topmost mountain peaks to the softly lapping tide at the black edges of the loch. Yet as I sit adding the last words to this plain account of a curious episode in my life, the wintry scene dissolves before my eyes, and I see again that dawn in the forest ... Francis and Monica, sleeping side by side, like the babes in the wood, half covered with leaves, the eager, panting retriever, and myself, poor, ragged scarecrow, staring openmouthed at the Dutchman whose kindly enquiry has just revealed to me the wondrous truth ... that we are safe across the frontier.

What a disproportionate view one takes of events in which one is the principal actor! The great issues vanish away, the little things loom out large. When I look back on that morning I encounter in my memory no recollection of extravagant demonstrations of joy at our delivery, no hysteria, no heroics. But I find a fragrant remembrance of a glorious hot bath and an epic breakfast in the house of that kindly Dutchman, followed by a whirlwind burst of hospitality on our arrival at the house of van Urutius, which was not more than ten miles from the fringe of the forest.

Madame van Urutius took charge of Monica, who was promptly sent to bed, whilst Francis and I went straight on to Rotterdam, where we had an interview at the British Consulate, with the result that we were able to catch the steamer for England the next day.

As the result of various telegrams which Francis dispatched from Rotterdam, a car was waiting for us on our arrival at Fenchurch Street the next evening. In it we drove off for an interview with my brother's Chief. Francis insisted that I should hand over personally the portion of the document in our possession.

"You got hold of it, Des," he said, "and it's only fair that you should get all the credit. I have Clubfoot's dispatch-box to show as the result of my trip. It's only a pity we could not have got the other half out of the cloak-room at Rotterdam."

We were shown straight in to the Chief. I was rather taken aback by the easy calm of his manner in receiving us.

"How are you, Okewood?" he said, nodding to Francis. "This your brother? How d'ye do?"

He gave me his hand and was silent. There was a distinct pause. Feeling distinctly embarrassed, I lugged out my portfolio, extracted the three slips of paper and laid them on the desk before the Chief.

"I've brought you something," I said lamely.

He picked up the slips of paper and looked at them for a moment. Then he lifted a cardboard folder from the desk in front of him, opened it and displayed the other half of the Kaiser's letter, the fragment I had believed to be reposing in a bag at Rotterdam railway station. He placed the two fragments side by side. They fitted exactly. Then he closed the folder, carried it across the room to a safe and locked it up. Coming back, he held out his two hands to us, giving the right to me, the left to Francis.

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"You have done very well," he said. "Good boys! Good boys!"

"But that other half ..." I began.

"Your friend Ashcroft is by no means such a fool as he looks," the Chief chuckled. "He did a wise thing. He brought your two letters to me. I saw to the rest. So, when your brother's telegram arrived from Rotterdam, I got the other half of the letter out of the safe; I thought I'd be ready for you, you see!"

"But how did you know we had the remaining portion of the letter?" I asked.

The Chief chuckled again.

"My young men don't wire for cars to meet 'em at the station when they have failed," he replied. "Now, tell me all about it!"

So I told him my whole story from the beginning.

When I had finished, he said:

"You appear to have a very fine natural disposition for our game, Okewood. It seems a pity to waste it in regimental work ..."

I broke in hastily.

"I've got a few weeks' sick leave left," I said, "and after that I was looking forward to going back to the front for a rest. This sort of thing is too exciting for me!"

"Well, well," answered the Chief, "we'll see about that afterwards. In the meantime, we shall not forget what you have done ... and I shall see that it is not forgotten elsewhere."

On that we left him. It was only outside that I remembered that he had told me nothing of what I was burning to know about the origin and disappearance of the Kaiser's letter.

It was my old friend, Red Tabs, whom I met on one of our many visits to mysterious but obviously important officials, that finally cleared up for me the many obscure points in this adventure of mine. When he saw me he burst out laughing.

"Pon my soul," he grinned, "you seem to be able to act on a hint, don't you?"

Then he told me the story of the Kaiser's letter.

"There is no need to speak of the contents of this amazing letter," he began, "for you are probably more familiar with them than I am. The date alone will suffice ... July 31st, 1914 ... it explains a great deal. The last day of July was the moment when the peace

of Europe was literally trembling in the balance. You know the Emperor's wayward, capricious nature, his eagerness for fame and military glory, his morbid terror of the unknown. In that fateful last week of July he was torn between opposing forces. On the one side was ranged the whole of the Prussian military party, led by the Crown Prince and the Emperor's own immediate entourage; on the other, the record of prosperity which years of peace had conferred on his realms. He had to choose between his own megalomania craving for military laurels, on the one hand, and, on the other, that place in history as the Prince of Peace for which, in his gentler moments, he has so often hankered.

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“The Kaiser is a man of moods. He sat down and penned this letter in a fit of despondency and indecision, when the vision of Peace seemed fairer to him than the spectre of War. God knows what violent emotion impelled him to write this extraordinary appeal to his English friend, an appeal which, if published, would convict him of the deepest treachery to his ally, but he wrote the letter and forthwith dispatched it to London. He did not make use of the regular courier: he sent the letter by a man of his own choosing, who had special instructions to hand the letter in person to Prince Lichnowski, the German ambassador. Lichnowski was to deliver the missive personally to its destined recipient.

“Almost as soon as the letter was away, the Kaiser seems to have realised what he had done, to have repented of his action. Attempts to stop the messenger before he reached the coast appear to have failed. At any rate, we know that all through July 31st and August 1st Lichnowski, in London, was bombarded with dispatches ordering him to send the messenger with the letter back to Berlin as soon as he reached the embassy.

“The courier never got as far as Carlton House Terrace. Someone in the War party at the Court of Berlin got wind of the fateful letter and sent word to someone in the German embassy in London—the Prussian jingoes were well represented there by Kuehlmann and others of his ilk—to intercept the letter.

“The letter was intercepted. How it was done and by whom we have never found out, but Lichnowski never saw that letter. Nor did the courier leave London. With the Imperial letter still in possession, apparently, he went to a house at Dalston, where he was arrested on the day after we declared war on Germany.

“This courier went by the name of Schulte. We did not know him at the time to be travelling on the Emperor’s business, but we knew him very well as one of the most daring and successful spies that Germany had ever employed in this country. One of our people picked him up quite by chance on his arrival in London, and shadowed him to Dalston, where we promptly laid him by the heels when war broke out.

“Schulte was interned. You have heard how one of his letters, stopped by the Camp Censor, put us on the track of the intercepted letter, and you know the steps we took to obtain possession of the document. But we were misled ... not by Schulte, but through the treachery of a man in whom he confided, the interpreter at the internment camp.

“To this man Schulte entrusted the famous letter, telling him to send it by an underground route to a certain address at Cleves, and promising him in return a commission of twenty-five per cent on the price to be paid for the letter. The interpreter took the letter, but did not do as he was bid. On the contrary, he wrote to the go-between, with whom Schulte had been in correspondence (probably Clubfoot), and announced that he knew where the letter was and was prepared to sell it, only the purchaser would have to come to England and fetch it.

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"Well, to make a long story short, the interpreter made a deal with the Huns, and this Dr. Semlin was sent to England from Washington, where he had been working for Bernstorff, to fetch the letter at the address in London indicated by the interpreter. In the meantime, we had got after the interpreter, who, like Schulte, had been in the espionage business all his life, and he was arrested.

"We know what Semlin found when he reached London. The wily interpreter had sliced the letter in two, so as to make sure of his money, meaning, no doubt, to hand over the other portion as soon as the price had been paid. But by the time Semlin got to London the interpreter was jugged and Semlin had to report that he had only got half the letter. The rest you know ... how Grundt was sent for, how he came to this country and retrieved the other portion. Don't ask me how he set about it: I don't know, and we never found out even where the interpreter deposited the second half or how Grundt discovered its hiding-place. But he executed his mission and got clear away with the goods. The rest of the tale you know better than I do!"

"But Clubfoot," I asked, "who is he?"

"There are many who have asked that question," Red Tabs replied gravely, "and some have not waited long for their answer. The man was known by name and reputation to very few, by sight to even fewer, yet I doubt if any man of his time wielded greater power in secret than he. Officially, he was nothing, he didn't exist; but in the dark places, where his ways were laid, he watched and plotted and spied for his master, the tool of the Imperial spite as he was the instrument of the Imperial vengeance.

"A man like the Kaiser," my friend continued, "monarch though he is, has many enemies naturally, and makes many more. Head of the Army, head of the Navy, head of the Church, head of the State—undisputed, autocratic head—he is confronted at every turn by personal issues woven and intertwined with political questions. It was in this sphere, where the personal is grafted on the political, that Clubfoot reigned supreme ... here and in another sphere, where German William is not only monarch, but also a very ordinary man.

"There are phases in every man's life, Okewood, which hardly bear the light of day. In an autocracy, however, such phases are generally inextricably entangled with political questions. It was in these dark places that Clubfoot flourished ... he and his men ... 'the G gang' we called them, from the letter 'G' (signifying *Garde* or *Guard*) on their secret-service badges.

"Clubfoot was answerable to no one save to the Emperor alone. His work was of so delicate, so confidential a nature, that he rendered an account of his services only to his Imperial master. There was none to stay his hand, to check him in his courses, save only this neurotic, capricious cripple who is always open to flattery...."

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Red Tabs thought for a minute and then went on.

“No one may catalogue,” he said, “the crimes that Clubfoot committed, the infamies he had to his account. Not even the Kaiser himself, I dare say, knows the manner in which his orders to this black-guard were executed—orders rapped out often enough, I swear, in a fit of petulance, a gust of passion, and forgotten the next moment in the excitement of some fresh sensation.

“I know a little of Clubfoot’s record, of innocent lives wrecked, of careers ruined, of sudden disappearances, of violent deaths. When you and your brother put it across der Stelze, Okewood, you settled a long outstanding account we had against him, but you also rendered his fellow-Huns a signal service.”

I thought of the comments I had heard on Clubfoot among the customers at Haase’s, and I felt that Red Tabs had hit the right nail on the head again.

“By the way?” said Red Tabs, as I rose to go, “would you care to see Clubfoot’s epitaph? I kept it for you.” He handed me a German newspaper—the *Berliner Tageblatt*, I think it was—with a paragraph marked in red pencil. I read:

“We regret to report the sudden death from apoplexy of Dr. Adolf Grundt, an inspector of secondary schools. The deceased was closely connected for many years with a number of charitable institutions enjoying the patronage of the Emperor. His Majesty frequently consulted Dr. Grundt regarding the distribution of the sums allocated annually from the Privy purse for benevolent objects.”

“Pretty fair specimen of Prussian cynicism?” laughed Red Tabs. But I held my head ... the game was too deep for me.

* * * * *

Every week a hamper of good things is dispatched to 3143 Sapper Ebenezer Maggs, British Prisoner of War, Gefangenen-Lager, Friedrichsfeld bei Wesel. I have been in communication with his people, and since his flight from the camp they have not had a line from him. They will let me know at once if they hear, but I am restless and anxious about him.

I dare not write lest I compromise him: I dare not make official enquiry as to his safety for the same reason. If he survived those shots in the dark, he is certainly undergoing punishment, and in that case he would be deprived of the privilege of writing or receiving letters....

But the weeks slip by and no message comes to me from Chewton Mendip. Almost daily I wonder if the gallant lad survived that night to return to the misery of the

starvation camp, or whether, out of the darkness of the forest, his brave soul soared free, achieving its final release from the sufferings of this world.... Poor Sapper Maggs!

Francis and Monica are honeymooning on the Riviera. Gerry, I am sure, would have refused to attend the wedding, only he wasn't asked. Francis is getting a billet on the Intelligence out in France when his leave is up.

I have got my step, antedated back to the day I went into Germany. Francis has been told that something is coming to him and me in the New Year's Honours.

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I don't worry much. I am going back to the front on Christmas Eve.

THE END

THE RETURN OF CLUBFOOT

By Valentine Williams.

Whilst spending a holiday in a small Central American Republic, Desmond Okewood, of the Secret Service, learns from a dying beach-comber of a hidden treasure.

With the assistance of a millionaire, he sets out for Cock Island, in the Pacific. To his astonishment he discovers that the Man with the Clubfoot, whom he had regarded as dead, has anticipated him. It is obvious to Okewood that his old enemy is also in search of the hidden gold, and there ensues a thrilling sequence of adventures, in which the millionaire's pretty niece takes a prominent part.

Okewood has the cipher, and the Man with the Clubfoot determines to secure it, for without that cipher it is impossible to discover the hiding-place of the treasure; but there is something that the Man with the Clubfoot does not know, whereas Okewood does.