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

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

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

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

CHAPTER X

I ARRIVE IN BERLIN AND SCORE THE FIRST TRICK

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

Inexorably the train rocked on Berlinwards. Culverts roared thunderously beneath our wheels: spick-and-span stations whizzed frantically past in a dazzle of black and
white. A pale sun came out and peeped at its reflection in the irrigation channels that gleamed like knives among the low-lying fields. Like the mists of morning melting on the steaming plain, the fog which had hidden the truth from my eyes suddenly seemed to lift, and I saw the peril of my position stand out as clear-cut and hard as the telegraph posts that flashed by.

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

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

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

That Grundt did not know that the blue envelope was
deposited in Berlin, his rush to Schlatz and the raid on my suit-case indicated. But he could scarcely have believed that Major Abbott had contrived to retain possession of the document while incarcerated at the Schloss. Might it not rather have been that, on learning of the prisoner's escape, Grundt feared that the Englishman had used his little hour of freedom, if not to communicate verbally to an accomplice the substance of the document, at least to tell him where it was concealed?

As this accomplice, I, the prisoner's fellow-countrywoman, alone, on the night of the escape, in a house abutting on his place of custody, I was, of course, the most clearly-marked object of suspicion. Hence Grundt's cross-examination of me, hence his veiled threats, hence his demand that I should return to England forthwith.

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

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

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

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

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

My neighbour of the mustard-coloured overcoat—a hideous garment it was, curry yellow, with a green stripe!—was in the corridor outside his compartment when I left mine, such a commonplace German traveller, with his pince-nez, his sage-green hat with a feather stuck in the band, his umbrella, and his imitation leather suit-case, that I began to ask myself whether, after all, I had not been mistaken. In any case, he paid not the slightest attention to me and, as soon as the train had come to rest in the big, bare station, sprang smartly to the ground and was quickly lost to view in the crowd on the platform.

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

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

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

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

* * * * *

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Because I’m in a hurry,” I explained.

“Don’t we go fast enough for you?” he asked.

“No,” I told him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER XI
HOHENZOLLERN-ALLEE, 305

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

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

But the appearance of the street reassured me. In the bright sunshine it ran its length to where the brown fields swallowed it up as quiet and deserted as you may find any