had confronted me that night in the study at Schlatz, casual almost, yet oddly watchful. So strong was my impression of him, that he seemed to be standing there by my chair, contemplating us with that spry air of his and faintly amused smile.

Druce's thin, brown hand touched mine. "Tell me about it," he said. And so, in that drab, cool place, under Bismarck's sombre stare, I told my story.

CHAPTER XVI

A COUNCIL OF WAR ABOUT A COUNCIL OF WAR

One of the rarest of human powers is the art of compelling confidence. Those few people who possess this gift seemed to be endowed with a magnetic force which attracts sympathy without effort, and immediately creates an atmosphere of intimacy. So it was with Nigel Druce. I could see that he made friends easily: indeed, when I look upon my first meeting with him that morning, I have the impression that we were never strangers to one another he and I.

Unconsciously, I must have been drawn to him from the outset. At any rate, it appeared to me the natural thing to tell him the whole story. I omitted nothing, from the Major's escape two nights before, down to my adventure that morning in Florida von Pellegrini's apartment. When I had done he remained lost in thought, his eyes fixed on the table, his chin propped up on his hand.

A subtle change had come over him. When, at the finish of my narrative, my eyes sought his face, I found the blue eyes unsmiling, the lean countenance stern and even haggard. Gone was that imperturbable, faintly bantering manner which I had seen him flaunt like a panache at the Café zur Nelke. Now I was aware of a
desperately unhappy air in him, a haunted, hunted, forlorn sort of mien which—I don't know why—made my heart ache. I felt I wanted to help him.

"The Pellegrini, eh?" he said, breaking silence at length. "I've heard of her, but only as the mistress of Prince Karl, never as an agent. Poor old Vivie! I knew there was a woman in the background. He told me in London about some marvellous creature he had met abroad: he was ruining himself for her, too, spending every cent he'd got. I had no idea she was in Berlin. He always was a wild devil. But what madness can have possessed him to go to that woman's flat with the report on him! By the way, have you got that blue letter with you?"

I nodded and put my hand to my frock. The next instant Druce's hand fastened on my wrist like a clamp, staying me. A loutish pair of lovers, hand in hand, peasants in their Sunday best of dusty black, grasping enormous umbrellas, came round the corner of the Versailles group. They gaped at Bismarck, at the old Grand Duke of Baden calling, with sword uplifted, for three "Hochs" for the newly-proclaimed Emperor; they gaped at us; and, gaping still, meandered off along the gallery, leaving us once more under the stern eyes of our waxen sentinels.

"Now," said Druce quickly. I drew forth the envelope and gave it to him. For an instant he held it in his hands, turning it over to scrutinise it back and front, then thrust it into the inside pocket of his shabby jacket.

The waiter shambled up with a dish of fruit and changed our plates. When he had gone: "Did Vivian, did Abbott tell you where they arrested him?" Druce asked.

"No," I replied, "but you must remember how little time he had to tell me anything. I assumed it was at this woman's flat as he had hidden the envelope there."

My companion shook his head. "Like all Germans, old
Clubfoot is thorough. If he had searched the flat, he'd have found the report all right. The fact that he didn't look for it at the Pellegrini's means that he didn't know Abbott had been there. Yet from what you overheard at the Hohenzollern-Allee this morning, it's obvious that Grundt and the fair Floria are in this together. Do you know what I think? The Pellegrini, like other women of her type, may be working for the German Secret Service; but I believe she kept her affair with Vivian Abbott dark, even, or I might say, particularly, from Clubfoot, for fear it should reach the ears of the Prince. It's quite apparent to me that Vivian, who was always a harum-scarum sort of chap where women were concerned, had arranged to spend the night at the Hohenzollern-Allee. Grundt used this woman as the decoy; but she, on her side, took devilish good care that, if Abbott was to be nabbed, it would not be at her apartment. What poor old Vivie told you about having left his honour behind in Berlin seems to bear out my theory, don't you think?"

I nodded. "Yes. But how did Clubfoot know that Major Abbott was coming to Berlin?"

Druce's mouth set in a grim line. "We have Bale to thank for that. You can't insure against the risk of double-crossing: that's the trouble about our game. Bale's a Galician Jew, naturalised British. Until just the other day, he has been regarded as perfectly reliable. But Grundt got hold of him—money or threats, it's always the one thing or the other—and made him squeal. The only fortunate part of the whole of this business, except for your most gallant intervention, is that Clubfoot didn't squeeze the truth out of Bale until after Abbott had arrived in Berlin: otherwise, it would have been the simplest thing in the world to have shadowed our poor friend and pinched him with the goods on him." He broke off as the waiter appeared with the coffee. "Well," he remarked bluntly,
when we were once more alone, "old Clubfoot has bagged his man." He tapped his pocket. "But we, thanks to you, we've got the report..."

"You mean you think that Major Abbott is... dead?" I asked.

He nodded, lips pursed up. "Grundt would never have left Schlatz if Vivie were still alive."

"Why not?"

He paused. "This is how I see it. Abbott didn't have the report on him when he was arrested! This may have led Clubfoot to believe that, by clapping the poor old boy into solitary confinement at Schlatz, he had headed him off. Grundt didn't guess the truth until he heard that his man had escaped, and that, instead of legging it while the going was good, he'd hung about an hour or more in your garden. Clubfoot then realised that, after all, Abbott must have collected that report before his arrest; and managed to secrete it somewhere; that, prevented from fetching it himself—he had no money, as we know—he was trying to pass word of the hiding-place to a confederate. This confederate, in a community as small as Schlatz, was most likely to be you. Grundt intended to make sure. So he had you sent away from Schlatz, meaning to have you shadowed to see whether you would lead him to where the report was concealed..."

"Before you say any more," I put in, "there's one thing I wish you'd tell me. Who and what is this man they call Clubfoot, who can dictate to a high official like Dr. von Hentsch, and have a Guardsman struck off the active list?"

"Ah," said Druce, "I was waiting for that question. And in answering it, Miss Dunbar, I'm going to treat you as one of us. Listen!" He pushed away his coffee cup and leaned across the table towards me. "A fortnight ago I arrived in Germany to look for Vivian Abbott.
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I volunteered for the job, because he was my friend. It was pretty much of a forlorn hope, and the old man—the Chief, you know—didn't want me to go: I think he guessed he could wipe poor Vivie off the slate. I've been in this country often enough before, but the moment I crossed the frontier on this trip I seemed to sniff something queer, something thundery, about the atmosphere. I'm fairly intuitive, and I hadn't been an hour in Berlin before I had the sensation of being under a kind of latent surveillance, like a man in the jungle who feels that unseen eyes are watching him from behind every bush. Mind you, my 'cover,' as we call it in this game of ours, was flawless, or so we thought. I had a perfectly good business pretext for visiting Berlin: proper credentials, regular line of talk, suite at the Adlon, everything O.K. But when I started to look up our resident agents—you know, the Secret Service people who collect information for us in Berlin in the ordinary way . . . whew!"

He paused and, with a distracted gesture, ran his fingers through his crisp, dark hair. "My dear, they were in a panic. Gibbering, that's the only word for it. Most of them simply shut their doors on me; and those whom I contrived to see wouldn't talk, all except one that is, and he was drunk, who let on that Bale had blabbed. Our old man must have suspected something of the kind, for I was expressly cautioned against revealing my identity to Bale. Without being actually molested, I was conscious of being shadowed. Inquisitive strangers tried to get into talk with me at the hotel: I moved to the Atlantic; and in my absence my luggage was rifled. I changed my hotel again, my identity, my appearance, even; but it was no good. Some secret force, skilfully concealed but immensely powerful, blocked me at every turn. One after the other, I was driven from every position until at last I took refuge in this underworld of prostitutes and dope-
peddlers, where you saw me to-day. For the time being I seem to have eluded the chase, but . . ."—he shook his head sagely—"Oh, I'm wise to it now. The moment I entered Germany the net was let down behind me: as I shall very quickly discover when I try to get out again."

His voice died away, as though his thoughts had wandered off along the dark road his words opened up. "Not until this morning," he went on presently, "when the man himself appeared on the scene—I've never set eyes on him before, well as I know him by repute—and I heard your story, did I realise who was behind this stubborn effort to defeat my mission. Now I can understand, as I never understood before, for Headquarters kept me completely in the dark, the importance of this document," —his hand brushed his pocket—"for which poor Vivian Abbott gave his life. The fact that Clubfoot is in charge means that the one man that matters in this country is vitally interested in the recovery of this report. That man is . . ."

He checked himself suddenly, his eyes bright with suspicion, for at that moment a heavy footstep rang along the gallery. A policeman with spiked helmet, sabre and revolver all complete, was advancing smartly towards us between the double line of waxen figures. I felt a chill premonition of evil.

My companion sat like an image, watching the policeman approach. His right hand, I observed, was thrust inside his coat just above the pocket where that precious letter lay.

From the near distance in the recesses of the Panoptikum a noisy electric piano began to jangle out a military march very rapidly. Instinctively, the iron-shod boots fell into step. Now the intruder was almost level with where we sat looking along the gallery from our table in the refreshment-room. Druce's right hand moved ever so slightly: there was the dull glint of metal between
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palm and waistcoat, and I saw that he was grasping a pistol.

And then I breathed again. Without so much as deigning to glance at us, the intruder went straight on and disappeared from view at the end of the gallery. Druce withdrew his hand from his pocket, and waved it towards where, somewhere out of sight, the busy piano hammered out its trills and shakes. "It's only the Schützmann on duty at the kinema," he explained. "They have a show in the afternoons for the kids."

I uttered a sigh of relief. "About Clubfoot," I said. "I believe I know what you mean. He spoke to me of his Imperial master, as he called him."

"Clubfoot is the Kaiser's man of confidence," rejoined my companion sombrely, "the head of the Emperor's personal secret service. When Clubfoot speaks, it is the Emperor speaking: when Clubfoot strikes, the whole German autocracy is behind the blow. You've been long enough in this country to have seen something of the working of German discipline: can you wonder, then, at the man's power? At least the official espionage and counter-espionage services, like the secret police, are controlled by responsible Ministers. But Clubfoot is a law unto himself, responsible to none but his master, this wretched mountebank who is the greatest existing menace to the world's peace..."

His mouth was bitter as, with a quick, nervous movement, he scratched a match and lighted a crumpled cigarette which he dredged up from a pocket of his shabby jacket.

"Clubfoot always works in the dark," he went on. "That's part of his strength. The vast majority of Germans have never heard of him. In his real capacity he has no official status; but in the Ministry of Education List you will find the name of Dr. Adolf Grundt, Inspector
of secondary schools. His rare public appearances at the Palace are explained by the fiction that he occupied himself with certain charities in which the Emperor is interested. The service he directs is a branch of the famous Section Seven of the Prussian Police, the Political Section, you know. . . ."

"He's in the police, then?"

"Only nominally. 'G' branch, of which he's the head, takes its orders from the Palace. No one but Kaiser Bill himself, they say, dares interfere with old Clubfoot. . . ."

"The Prince certainly seemed terrified of him," I put in.

"He would be. Grundt wants nothing, you see, nothing except power, that is. He's the most powerful figure in modern Germany, and quite the most unscrupulous. The most feared and hated, too, for his spies are everywhere: at Court, in the Army, in the Ministries, as well as in the underworld. Indeed, he's better known in the 'Kaschemmen,' as they call the thieves' kitchens here, than in the salons, for his work takes him into strange places, by all accounts, and he's not particular about soiling his hands. Ministers, Court officials, generals, crooks, they're all scared to death of him as he lurks in the shadow ready to pounce, and none can say who'll be the next victim. They call him 'The Crouching Beast' . . . ."

I shuddered. "What a dreadful name! But it suits him. . . ."

"So I've been told. I've heard tales about him, at the Café zur Nelke and elsewhere. . . ." He broke off, his eyes clouded. "Well, my dear," he concluded, "there's old Clubfoot's portrait for you. And you can take it from me, he's out to do his damnedest to prevent this paper from ever reaching its destination."

I thought of Grundt as he had confronted me in the garden of the Kommandanten-Haus, hirsute, vital and
compelling. I shivered and tried to put him from my mind.

"This report," I questioned, "do you know what it is?"
"Not definitely," said Druce, "but I've a pretty good idea. I've been putting two and two together since we've been sitting here." He contemplated me with a whimsical air. "Has it occurred to you that we are on the verge of a European war?" he asked suddenly.

My strange talk with the postman came back to me. "Of course, I know about this trouble between Austria and Servia," I answered. "But surely the Powers will patch it up?"

He sniffed resentfully. "If they’re allowed to! Austria, strongly backed by Germany, has made up her mind to twist the Serbians’ tail so devilish hard that they’ll lose all taste for the sort of agitation against the Habsburg Monarchy that led to the murder of the Archduke. Austria can do it, too, if Russia will let her. That’s where the danger of war comes in. One can’t say yet that Germany intends to provoke war. But she’s out to humiliate Russia and Russia’s ally, France. If Russia stands up to Austria and Germany, it’ll be war..."

You, who read this, are wise after the event. But at the time I was not greatly impressed. In those days one was always meeting people who talked darkly about the danger to European peace. As a matter of fact, a succession of war scares had made most people at home apathetic. After all, to our generation the peace of Europe was not a very tangible thing. It was one of those abstract conceptions like the British Constitution which one took for granted. And for the moment I was far more interested in my own position than in the general situation in Europe.

"On 5th July," Druce went on, "exactly a week after the Archduke’s assassination, the Austro-Hungarian
Ambassador in Berlin lunched with the Kaiser at Potsdam, and handed over an autograph letter from old Francis Joseph. Immediately after luncheon, in the Potsdam Sabbath calm, all the heads of the German war machine, the Prussian War Minister, the Chief of the Emperor's Military Cabinet, and bigwigs from the Great General Staff and the Admiralty, met the Kaiser in council. It's morally certain that the punitive measures which Vienna is planning against Servia, and their possible outcome, were discussed. In other words, this meeting was a council of war. It took place, as I've said, on 5th July. . . ."

He paused significantly and held me with his eye.

"On the morning of that day Vivian Abbott arrived in Berlin!"

"Then the report in your pocket . . .?"

He nodded. "Look here. If Austria goes for Servia, there's a good chance of a general flare-up. Our German friends leave nothing to chance. Since they're backing their Austrian ally to the limit, they've got to reckon with the possibility of mobilisation. Now mobilisation consists of a whole series of graduated preliminaries, each involving a mass of preparations. If we assume that Austria's plan for action against Servia is cut and dried, we may take it that Germany is losing no time about synchronising the different stages of her mobilisation with the progressive steps of the Austrian programme. When I tell you that success in war largely depends on the speed with which mobilisation takes place, you will realise the importance of the report of a meeting at which its timetable is discussed. That at the Potsdam meeting it was not only discussed, but also decided upon, is shown by the fact that two days later the Emperor left Germany on his annual Norwegian cruise. . . ."

"Like most women, politics have always bored me. And I never knew anything about foreign affairs,
"I don't see what it's got to do with England," I said carelessly. "Austria is perfectly justified in punishing the Servians for that horrible murder. . . ."

"It's got this to do with us," my companion retorted. "If Russia supports Servia, France is bound to be drawn in. In that case, we can hardly stand aloof. . . ."

I laughed. "I don't see why not. We're an island, thank God. If Germany and the rest of them do go to war, it can't affect England. . . ."

"Germany has a Fleet," said Druce quietly. "If she mobilises her Army, she mobilises her Fleet at the same time. Before that happens, we've got to know where we stand. That's why we're vitally interested in this Potsdam meeting. That's why Clubfoot is making every effort to prevent this report from reaching London. And that's why,"—he gave me one of his bright smiles—"we've got to get you out of this country quick!"

This realm of high politics into which he had led me filled me with awe. His sketch of Clubfoot, combined with all I had already undergone, seemed to blunt in me every instinct save that of self-preservation. Now that I had got rid of the blue envelope, my one desire was to return to my native shores with all possible speed. I yearned for the staid monotony of Purley and St. Mary Axe with the eagerness of the hunted outlaw heading for sanctuary. Selfish, I know; but fear makes us selfish.

"I'm all for the idea," I replied promptly. "I've had quite enough of Germany, thank you. I shall take the first train back to England, as soon as I can get money from home, that is. . . ."

The grave air with which he shook his head made me vaguely uneasy. "I can let you have what money you want," he said. "But believe me, it's not going to be as easy as that. With luck you might get as far as the frontier by train. But you'd never cross it; not by
train, at any rate, or even by motor-car, for the matter of that. I don't think you realise how serious this is. The fact that Grundt in person is after this report shows that it must have emanated, in the first instance, from some member of the Kaiser's immediate entourage, if not from His Nibs himself: it wouldn't be the first leak in that quarter, by any manner of means. Unless Grundt is convinced in his own mind that you are not implicated in this affair, and until he has ascertained just why you didn't travel on to London this morning—for, of course, he knows you haven't gone—and what exactly you have been doing with yourself all day, you'll not get out of Germany by any ordinary channel. He'll see to that. By this time Clubfoot's net is spread; and you can take it from me, my dear, it don't let much through its meshes. . . ."

His words, spoken without any dramatic emphasis, brought back my fears with a rush. But I made a last effort to battle with them. "I can't help thinking you exaggerate the difficulties," I replied, as stoutly as I might. "It's not as though I'd broken the law. If any one tries to stop me, I shall go to the Embassy. . . ."

He gave a dry laugh. "My dear Miss Dunbar! I don't want to scare you, but you've got to get this right. I'm a properly accredited secret agent, as much a salaried servant of the Crown as our Ambassador over there in the Wilhelm-Strasse. But he wouldn't lift a finger to help me. He's not allowed to. It's one of the rules of the game. When we're on the job, my dear, we're the untouchables, pariahs, with every man's hand against us. And now that fate has made you one of us, you've got to get used to the fact that you're a pariah, too!"

"But I'm not one of you . . ." I protested in alarm.

"Clubfoot thinks you are: it amounts to the same thing. . . ."

"But what am I going to do? I've got no money, and
the friends I was going to stay with have gone to Switzerland. Even if you lend me money I can't remain in Berlin. I haven't registered at my hotel yet; but as soon as I do, I shall have the police on my track.

"You're not going to remain in Berlin," was the calm rejoinder. "You're coming away with me. But I've got to make certain arrangements which will take time. And we can't leave before dark, anyway. What had you intended to do if we hadn't met?"

"I was going to dine with a friend of mine, one of the officers from Schlatz. He was to fetch me at the Continental at eight o'clock—and afterwards show me round some of the night restaurants. Of course, that's all off now."

"Nothing of the kind," cried Druce. "You will most certainly dine with your friend. In this country uniform is the most perfect guarantee of respectability. No one will say a word to you as long as you are accompanied by an officer. But you won't be able to go bummeling. Stop a minute!" He paused doubtfully. "An officer isn't allowed to visit these night places in uniform,"—once more I was impressed by his extraordinary grasp of detail. "Your friend is bound to be in plain clothes. Tell me, what's his regiment?"

"At present he's in the infantry, the 56th Regiment. But he's really in the Foot Guards."

Druce rubbed his hands delightedly. "A Guardsman, eh? Then in mufti he'll look the part every bit as much as though he were in uniform. What do you say? Am I right?"

I laughed, thinking of Rudi's elegant waist and stiff, angular movements. "I dare say you are..."

"You bet I am," was the gay rejoinder. "You dine with your Guardee, my dear. But after dinner you must make an excuse and slip away. And you'll have to
dissuade your young man from driving you home." He smiled at me. "It won't be so easy, I expect, but I must leave that to you. For you're not going back to the hotel, d' you see? You can tell them at Kemper's that you're leaving by the evening train, and pay your bill before you go out to dinner. And, oh yes, send your luggage—you have only a suit-case, I think you said?—up to the cloakroom at the Friedrich-Strasse station by the boots this afternoon, and let him bring you back the ticket. We'll pick up your case on the way out..."

"But how are we going?" I asked.

"By car. We shall have to make a latish start, for I've a terrible lot to do before we leave. I shan't be ready much before eleven, I expect—better say half-past. That'll give you plenty of time to get through dinner and shake your friend. Where are you dining, by the way?"

I shook my head blankly. He knit his brow. "Awkward. Know this town at all?"

"Only what I've seen of it to-day."

"We can't have you losing yourself. And taxis are so easily traced. Unless we met right in the centre. You'll dine somewhere central, I expect?"

"Herr von Linz said something about the Wintergarten..."

"That's central enough: just by the Friedrich-Strasse station. If you had to walk, I suppose you could find your way back from there to your hotel, couldn't you?"

"Oh yes. . . ."

"Then we'll make it Kemper's. The Mauer-Strasse is quiet at that time of night, and we're not likely to be observed. It won't give anything away if you take a taxi back there, as long as your young man don't come with you. But it's just as well to have a rendezvous that you can reach on foot, if needs be. Kemper's then, at 11.30: I'll be outside with a car. Wait! You'll want money
for your hotel bill. . . .” He handed me a hundred mark note from his purse. “If I were you, I’d be at the Continental a little ahead of time—they’ve a lounge where you can wait—so that your officer pal won’t need to ask for you at the desk. One never knows: if Clubfoot’s busy bees were buzzing around for you there this morning, it might be awkward, don’t you know? And I think I’d wear that unusually hideous veil, at any rate until you’re clear of the Continental. Was there anything else?”

There was, and it was worrying me terribly. “They’ll make me register before I leave the hotel,” I said. “I can’t give my real name, can I?”

He rubbed his nose reflectively. “No, I don’t suppose you can. There isn’t any very great risk, really, for the hotels send in these forms to the police only once a day, in the mornings, and by the time yours goes in to-morrow, we shall be over the hills and far away. But there’s always a chance of the police making a round of the hotels looking up the names of the latest arrivals. Is your dressing-case labelled or marked with your initials?”

“No. . . .”

“Good. Your German sounds A1 to me, but just in case you’ve a touch of accent, I should take a foreign name, I think. Anything but English, anyway. What about being a German Swiss? That would explain any unusual intonation, besides being eminently dull and respectable. Let’s see: how would Maria . . . Maria Hübel from, say, Zurich, do?”

“Anything you like,” I agreed forlornly, for this registration business frightened me.

His hand pressed mine softly under the table: he had a gentle way with him in everything he did. “You’ve been splendid up till now,” he said. “Be brave a little longer! I’m ever so glad I met you, my dear. It’s going to make a lot of difference having a partner. The
loneliness has been the worst part up till now. Buck up! You and I together are going to put rings round old Clubfoot . . . ."

The pressure of that firm, strong hand steadied me. Again I was conscious of the desire to help him. His blue eyes smiled into mine. They were shining now as though he were elated at the prospect of beating our terrible adversary on his own ground. Slowly my confidence flowed back. This strange young man’s undaunted assurance seemed to protect me like a shield. I felt that Nigel Druce would see us through.

"A bold face now," he counselled, "and we'll have you home in two ticks. Kemper's is only just around the corner from here. Hold up your head, and remember there are three million people besides ourselves in this city!"

He rapped with a coin upon the marble slab of the table. "Kellner, zahlen!"

CHAPTER XVII

AT SCHIPPKE'S

It was ten minutes to eight when my cab deposited me beneath the glass awning of the Hotel Continental, which loomed large in a short, quiet street behind Unter den Linden. I felt rested and refreshed: my nerves, too, were relaxed, for the afternoon had passed off without the slightest incident.

From the wax-works Nigel Druce had driven me back in a taxi to Kemper's, where I slipped out of my clothes, and lay down on the bed in my room, meaning to rest for a couple of hours. I must have fallen asleep, however, for when I next caught sight of the time it was past six.

The nap did me good. By the time I had had a bath and a cup of tea, put on the change of linen I had laid out