you where the paper was hidden; and you recovered it and
gave it to his accomplice. That was the way of it, was?"

He drew my gaze. I looked up to find his hard, fierce
face eagerly thrust forward, his eyes glittering behind the
big spectacles, his strong hands clutching the arm of his
chair, as though he were about to spring at me and claw
the truth from my throat. Then came an interruption.
Hansemann’s pallid countenance appeared in the doorway.
He displayed a slip of paper.

Grundt swung round to face the intruder. Anger
blazed in his face. "Get out!" he ordered savagely.
"And don’t interrupt me again!"
The man wavered and held up the slip.

But before Hansemann could withdraw he was rudely
elbowed aside, and Rudi von Linz stormed into the room.

CHAPTER XXI

IN WHICH I AM UNPLEASANTLY REMINDED OF AN
UNIMPORTANT PERSONAGE

"OLIVIA," the boy exclaimed breathlessly, "I came the
moment I received your message. . . ."

"I’m glad you’re here, Rudi," I said. "But I sent you
no message. . . ."

"Strange! They brought word to me at Schippke’s
that you had telephoned for me to come on immediately
to this address. It was most urgent, they said. But
what’s happened? How did you get here?" The
charming face was full of solicitude: as the result of Frau
Hulda’s mauling, I suppose I did look a bit ruffled. Seeing
that I made no reply, he glared provocatively at Clubfoot.
"Has this fellow been annoying you? And what have
you done with the . . ."
AN UNIMPORTANT PERSONAGE

Behind the desk Grundt, as motionless, as grotesquely forbidding as one of those strange island images of the Pacific, was contemplating the intruder in a silence more oppressive than the airless summer night. The very atmosphere seemed impregnated with the menace of that black and icy stare. But now he spoke, and his bass growl struck terror into my heart. "Who are you?" he demanded, bending his bushy eyebrows at the young officer. "And what the devil do you mean by forcing my door?"

The boy stiffened to attention and, clicking his heels, outlined a perfunctory bow. "Leutnant von Linz, Fifth Regiment of Foot Guards, attached to the 56th Infantry at Schlatz," he announced, introducing himself in the German fashion. "And," he added sternly, "you will have the goodness to remember, Herr, that you are addressing an officer!"

Clubfoot's face relaxed, and a flicker of interest stole into the wary eyes. He laughed noiselessly. "So, so, the flirt of the English Miss?" he said, with gentle raillery. "Well, with the greatest possible respect I must request the Herr Leutnant to oblige me,"—of a sudden his tone was harsh and commanding again—"by removing his high-well-born presence from my study this instant. You can wait in the ante-chamber," he rasped. "I'll ring when I want you. . . ."

Rudi's face flamed, and I saw his gloved hand flash to his left side, where the hilt of his sword made a bulge below the slim waist-line of his long military frock. You must remember that Prussian officers, as Rudi had often explained to me, were not only permitted but, under the military Code of Honour, also compelled, to use their swords against civilians who showed disrespect for the King's uniform. "Herr . . ." he cried threateningly.

"No brawling here!" Clubfoot thundered. "Why, you poor worm, don't you know who I am?" His great
chest seemed to swell. "I," he boomed, and his deep voice seemed to linger on the pronoun, "I am Dr. Grundt!"

Rudi laughed contemptuously. "Highly honoured! But for all I care, your name may be Lehmann or Schultze, like every second person in this town. What is certain is that you’re either mad or drunk..." He turned to me. "Come on, Olivia, I’ll take you home."

"A little moment, if you please," Clubfoot intervened in velvety tones. He lifted the receiver from the telephone that stood on the desk. "The Fifth Foot Guards is your regiment, I think you said?" He spoke briskly into the instrument. "Official. Fräulein, give me Potsdam! I want the house of Major-General von Kessel... jawohl, the Commander of the Guards Corps..."

I saw Rudi’s face change. There was rather a long pause, then Clubfoot at the telephone said: "Is that you, Excellency? Dr. Grundt here. Good evening! I have with me one of your young officers. Would your Excellency be good enough to tell him who I am? Your Excellency is too kind..."

A brusque movement of the bullet head signed to Rudi to approach. With a perfectly impassive face, the boy went forward and took the receiver. "Leutnant von Linz, Fifth Foot Guards, speaking." His voice was metallic, military. "Zu Befehl, Excellenz..." There was a moment of stillness in the room. Clubfoot sprawled back in his chair, complacently smoking his cigar, his head cocked at the ceiling. The silent attendant loomed large in the dim background, guarding the door.

There was a little click as Rudi restored the telephone receiver to its hook. The action was listless. He had his back to me, and it looked dejected, as though all the spring had gone out of that elegant figure. As he turned half round, I caught sight of his face. It was ashen.

He glanced hesitatingly towards the man at the desk.
“I . . . I owe the Herr Doktor an apology,” he stammered. “I . . . I had no idea . . . I’ve been so long away from Berlin. I was upset when I arrived, on account of Miss Dunbar. When I found that she had left the restaurant, I naturally assumed . . . Gott, the Herr Doktor knows the Prince’s reputation . . .”

Clubfoot frowned and bared his yellow teeth, clamped upon the stump of his cigar. “Do you mind telling me what you’re talking about?” he said icily.

The boy floundered. “I . . . I thought the Prince had brought her here against her will. That message to me . . .”

“I sent it,” Grundt snapped. “And who might this Prince be?” He glanced at me. “Or perhaps Miss Dunbar will . . .” He broke off suddenly, and sat up in his chair with a jerk. I knew what was coming. It was as though I was looking into the mechanism of that rapid brain, cog moving cog, setting in motion a progression of thought: Schippke’s, the Pellegrini, the Prince, myself . . .

From under his overhanging eyebrows, as he crouched, with head bent forward in thought, at the desk, Clubfoot balefully mustered the young officer. “Not . . . not Prince Karl-Albrecht?” he queried softly.

“Jawohl . . .”

Grundt’s fingers Hammered softly upon the blotter. “Do I understand that His Highness dined with the lady and yourself?”

“No . . . .”

“He joined you after dinner, then?”

Rudi looked at me uncomfortably. “I think Miss Dunbar can answer that question better than I can.”

“Possibly,” was Clubfoot’s imperturbable rejoinder. “But I’m asking you. We’ll hear the lady later.”

The boy made a helpless gesture of the hands. “I didn’t see the Prince myself. I had to leave after dinner.
Colonel Westfried, who was being entertained in one of the private rooms, sent for me. . . .

"His Highness's Commanding Officer, do you mean?"

"Colonel Westfried has been promoted to command the regiment. The officers of his old battalion, the 2nd, in which the Prince is serving, gave him a farewell dinner to-night."

"At which, no doubt, His Highness was present?"

"They told me so, but I didn't see him. But when, on leaving the Colonel, I went to look for Miss Dunbar, the head waiter told me that she had been sitting with the Prince. Since they had both disappeared, I naturally assumed . . . " He broke off awkwardly, and looked towards me. "You . . . you were sitting with the Prince, weren't you?" he said.

The lamplight glinted on the lenses of Clubfoot's thick glasses as he pivoted his glance round to me. Behind the glitter his eyes were a blank, but merely from the angle at which his head was canted I was conscious of their suspicious scrutiny. With an effort I pulled myself together to meet this fresh development. "Certainly," I rejoined, addressing myself to Rudi. "Your friend, the Baron, presented me. . . ."

"A chance meeting, then?" said Grundt.

"Oh yes . . . !"

"And did the Baron present you to the lady, too?"

"What lady?"

"Was His Highness not accompanied by a lady?"

"No!"

I answered boldly, for now I was on firm ground, and with no less boldness met the long, challenging stare that followed on my reply.

"When you left the restaurant, did the Prince go with you?" was Clubfoot's next question.

"No! I went alone. The Prince remained behind. . . ."
"Pardon me, Herr Doktor," Rudi put in, "but, since the Prince did not leave with Miss Dunbar, he must have joined his . . . na, the lady you alluded to just now. . . ."

"You saw her, then?"

"Only from the distance. She came into the restaurant while we were having dinner."

"Alone?"

"Jawohl!"

"And when you came back?"

"She was no longer there. I presume she left with the Prince. . . ."

Clubfoot emitted an enigmatic grunt and scribbled something on a block. Tearing off the sheet, he held it up in his hand. Hansemann stepped out of the shadow and took the message. "Wait!" Grundt ordered, as the man was about to withdraw. With a jerk of his thumb he indicated Rudi. "This officer is not to quit the house without my permission. He will remain in the antechamber until I send for him." He gave Rudi a freezing stare. "I'll deal with you later, my friend." An almost imperceptible move of the head dismissed the boy.

With an appealing glance at me, Rudi slowly followed the messenger out.

I found myself in two minds. I could not help feeling that Druce had abandoned me; and the evidence of that photograph had shaken me terribly. And yet, in spite of all, I clung to my faith in these two friends and their story. Now the moment had arrived for me to decide. Was I to make a clean breast of it and tell the truth to this pitiless inquisitor, or should I continue to pretend ignorance? As long as the Prince and his lady-love were kept out of it, the only thing I had to explain away was Grundt's discovery of my meeting with Druce at the café. Subconsciously, throughout the foregoing interview, my brain
had been busy trying to hit upon some story that would serve to account for this embarrassing piece of evidence. . . .

But Clubfoot was speaking, suavely bland once more. This man's unwearying persistence appalled me. More than once, since I had been in that room, I had seen a sort of berserker fury flame up in his eyes, and that huge form rocked by a gust of primitive passion, like a great oak shaken by the storm. . . . But to me he had scarcely raised his voice. There was something unspeakably sinister about his patient politeness, his iron self-control.

"To err is human," he remarked sententiously. "We all make mistakes. But now that I have shown you the character of the men who took advantage of your . . . your . . . inexperience and good nature, I trust, liebes Fräulein, that you will waste no more time, but tell me just what this scoundrel, Abbott, said to you. . . ."

"I had chosen my part. "Herr Doktor," I answered firmly, "I can only repeat what I've told you already, that I did not see or speak with this prisoner of yours. . . ."

He made no sign save that, like a cat stretching its paws, he suddenly flexed the fingers of his right hand as it rested on the blotter, and I saw the blotting-paper sag under the tense pressure. The heavy face, however, remained as hard, as blankly unrevealing, as a block of ice.

"Then how did you happen to go to the café and ask for this gaol-bird, this Max?" he questioned evenly.

I can abridge the tale I had concocted, into which I now resolutely plunged, for it was destined to be swept away almost as soon as it was told. It was thin, but it had the merit of being based on a fact of which Grundt had independent evidence, the fact that I had lost my purse. I am afraid I stressed the helpless maiden rôle pretty hard while describing how, walking along the Tauben-Strasse, I missed my purse and, thinking I had dropped it, went back to look for it. I introduced Nigel Druce as a casual
passe-by who had helped me in my search and, discovering that I was English, had offered to lend me the sum necessary for my hotel bill and fare back to England. I went on to narrate how my unknown friend had proposed that I should wait for him at the Café zur Nelke while he went home to fetch the money.

Grundt made a note or two of my story, and at its close put a string of questions to me,—what time was it when I met the young man?—how much money did he advance me?—where did we part and when?—to all of which I made what seemed to me to be adequate replies. But I was by no means sure that he was convinced. His air was restless and distraught, as though he had no heart in the business, and it puzzled me. He seemed to be waiting for something. Or somebody.

And then came the murmur of voices without and Hansemann’s livid face peered round the door. On the instant Grundt bristled into life. “Well?” he was fiercely eager.

“They hadn’t come back,” was the stolid rejoinder.

“Herr Gott!” Clubfoot roared, and his fist crashed down upon the desk.

“But I brought the maid along. She knows something...”

“Die Zofe” was the German word he used to describe her, and “Zofe” in German means a lady’s maid. In a flash I realised what had happened, and grasped the full extent of the catastrophe which had overtaken me. They had got hold of Hedwig, the Pellegrini’s maid. I had forgotten Hedwig.

Clubfoot chuckled and ground his palms together softly. “Send her in, my good Hansemann, send her in!” he shortled. He looked at me, and there was the light of triumph in his face.