"Plans?" he repeated rather grimly, as he took his seat at the table. He paused, and in the twilight silence a train, far below, rushed screaming by. "I'm afraid we can't make any plans for the present. We're treed in this garret, you and I!"

CHAPTER XXVII

NEWS OF A FRIEND

With that he began to eat. Because I saw that he was famished, I questioned him no further but busied myself with my cooking. When I brought the cutlets he wanted me to join him. But I told him I had only just had the food he had left ready, and retired to the alcove to freshen myself up with the eau de cologne and put on a dab of powder. There were not many men, I reflected as I creamed my face, who, hunted, as he had been that day, would have been so thoughtful. In all the crowded hours we had passed together nothing he had done touched me quite so much as this.

When I returned to the table he had finished his meal, and sat quietly in the dark smoking a cigarette. He gave me one and, fetching a cup, poured me out some tea. For a little spell, while the darkness slowly deepened, we faced each other across the littered table, and smoked in silence.

"Well," he remarked at last, "we're cornered right enough. For how long, the Lord knows. I was lucky to-day, devilish lucky. But I did what I meant to do, anyway."

I thought he was alluding to his shopping excursion.

"I've not thanked you yet for the powder and things..." I began.

"I wasn't thinking of that," he rejoined hastily.

"What I really went out to do was to get rid of you know what..."
My thoughts flashed back to that thundery evening at Schlatz. Had my little Major fulfilled his mission after all? And was his honour redeemed?

"You don't mean to say you've managed to send it home?" I cried, agog.

Thoughtfully he flaked the ash from his cigarette. "I wish I could be sure. If I know anything of Clubfoot's methods, nothing has left this country by post for a foreign address—no letter, at any rate—without being first opened and read. I had to risk that. Seeing that we're bunkered for the time being, I made a copy of that report this morning while you were asleep and posted it, rolled up in a newspaper, to a safe address in Brussels. Our people there will know what to do with it... if ever it reaches them." His voice trailed away. "In the meantime," he resumed, fixing his blue eyes on me, "I'm afraid you'll have to put up with me here. I hope it won't be for more than a day or two. I'll rig up a curtain across the room, and see to it that you have as much privacy as possible... ."

I felt the colour coming into my cheeks. "This is your room," I told him, "and rather than turn you out again, I should leave myself. If you'll let me stay, I shall be grateful. I'm sure that any arrangement you make will be satisfactory." And then, to bridge the awkward pause that ensued, I changed the subject. "This document," I queried, "was it what you suspected?"

The gathering gloom obscured his features; but there was a certain grimness in his affirming nod. "Yes... ."

He was staring moodily in front of him. Then his feelings seemed to burst out in a cry of pent-up exasperation: "God, to think of my being caged here while they're preparing to spring this on us!"

"Why," I exclaimed, bewildered by the sudden change in him, "what do you mean?"
"What do I mean?" he echoed bitterly. "I mean that this time it's war. They've made up their minds to have their war all right, at any costs, on any pretext, against all comers... now. If only my warning gets through to London..."

He rose to his feet and began to pace up and down.

"If war should break out," I tried to pacify him, "it won't affect us surely? At any rate, not at once..."

"You don't understand," he answered sombrely. "The Fleet is partly mobilised for manoeuvres. Manoeuvres finish this week, and ships and crews will automatically disperse over the week-end. Unless..." He pounded his open palm with his fist. "This delay in presenting the Austrian Note fills me with anxiety. I can't help fearing that they're waiting for the dispersal of the Fleet..."

Like other people in those bewildering days, I was still far from conjuring up out of the mass of newspaper verbiage about the "demands of the Ballplatz," "démarches at Belgrade," judicial investigation, guarantees, punitive measures, the spectre of the awful tragedy which was hanging over our heads.

"Must this Austrian Note necessarily lead to war?" I said.

"It's the starting gun. They're going to make their demands so utterly unacceptable that Servia must reject them. If Russia and France stir a finger in protest, they'll find Germany in all her military might drawn up behind Austria. They can eat humble pie or fight. That's the sort of Hobson's choice our French and Russian friends will be up against!"

The scene at Schippke's came back to me. "Soldiers always want to fight," I suggested. "It's their job. But the common people! I have so many good friends in Germany. I'm sure they don't dream of attacking any one..."
Duce halted in his stride and faced me. "They don't. But they 'll be told, already they 're being told, that this is a war of defence. Germany's a military State,"—the old recurrent phrase! "The great General Staff possesses a potential instrument of propaganda in every German who has performed his service with the colours, and that, as you know, is the bulk of the male population. For years now the German people, egged on by the Kaiser's incessant craving for personal glorification, have been told that Germany is surrounded by enemies ready to fall upon her. The whole nation is drunk with power. As long as the Kaiser kept his hand on the throttle, there was a chance for peace, for the man's a coward at heart, and always runs away from the logical consequences of his words and deeds. But he 'll not wriggle out of it this time. Moltke and Tirpitz and the rest of the gang, they 'll see to that. They 've packed H.M. off to Norway to play whilst they 're getting on with the work. When they 're ready for him to sign the mobilisation decree, they 'll bring him home and not before. As soon as friend Wilhelm reappears in Berlin, you mark my words, war will be only a matter of days."

He moved to the window and stood there in silhouette, gazing out, past the cowled company of chimneys, at the first stars trembling in the evening blue. "We shall mobilise, we must mobilise," he murmured, as though to himself, "and I,"—he struck the window-frame with the flat of his hand—"I am cooped up here!"

There was a moment's silence, then he sighed and, going to the door, switched on the light. "I don't know why I 'm gassing high politics to you," he said, smiling in his old, placid way, "when there's so much you have to tell me." His keen eyes searched my face. "You look upset. Has anything happened since I 've been away?"

I could not trust myself to speak. I picked up the news-
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paper and showed him the paragraph about Rudi. He read it through in silence. "By George," he ejaculated, almost with an air of admiration, "the old man certainly is thorough. What did he have against your friend? But perhaps"—his voice was suddenly very gentle—"you'd prefer to speak of this at some other time?"

I shook my head and, gulping back the tears, told him poor Rudi's story and the rest of my adventures on the preceding night.

It was the 22nd of July, a Wednesday, when Nigel Druce brought me to the garret. The house reared its six storeys in the Mahl-Strasse, one of the narrow, teeming streets which abut on the lower Friedrich-Stadt. The weather was magnificent, and in the sunshine of a glorious summer Europe lay at peace. It was stiflingly hot in our eyrie under the roof. The heat and the confinement, together with the atmosphere of breathless suspense in which we lived, produced in me a curiously unreal state of mind, so that, when I look back upon those four days I spent with Nigel Druce in his attic, it seems to me that I must have heard, above the restless stir of the city, the sullen growling of the approaching storm.

I saw little of Druce. A pair of sheets now curtained the room into two. The improvised kitchen, with the sink, was on my side of the partition, so Druce, who had spread himself a bed of blankets on the floor of his domain, would get up first in the morning, whilst I was still abed in the curtained alcove, and wash and shave, and prepare the coffee. He would have done all the cooking; but I insisted that I should take my share of the house work.

He was always courteous, always good-tempered with me. As far as any man could, he studied my comfort. Thus, on the morning after our arrival, when Ottilie had come with supplies and the newspapers, he pushed a flat
packet through the curtain. It contained nightgowns, stockings, and underwear, dainty and, as any woman could see at a glance, expensive, a boon which my enforced separation from my baggage made most welcome.

Ottilie called every day, usually very early, before I was out of bed. She remained on Druce's side of the curtain, and I never saw her, though I heard her husky voice. I suspected that Druce had asked her so to time her visits that we should not meet. Druce and I took our meals together at the only table, which remained in his territory. At first, at any rate, he chatted with me unconcernedly enough, discussing the day's news, and telling me stories of the Berlin underworld, with which he appeared to have an extraordinarily wide acquaintance. But he never alluded again to that secret of his I had surprised. I was conscious of a certain austerity in his manner towards me, an air of reserve which, albeit never stressed, I felt to hang like a fireproof curtain between us, ready to descend, at the first renewal of the old intimacy, between him and me.

In truth, the memory of the cruel words I had spoken was a barrier more effectual than any improvised partition. I was no longer at my ease with this partner of mine. My peep into his past had shocked me terribly: less the discovery of his disgrace than his cynical admission of the truth: and the Ottilie situation irked me. In vain I told myself that the private affairs of this man, with whom fate had thrown me into temporary association, were no concern of mine. I could not help remembering that he had made no attempt to explain Ottilie; and his indifference humiliated me almost as much as his resolute evasion of my proffered atonement for my ungenerous outburst.

The most important thing in life, Daddy used to tell me, is to be honest with oneself. I have tried to set down
here my feelings towards Nigel Druce in order to explain what came after. Candidly, I don't think I was in love with him at this time, though I dare say I was jealous of Ottilie. I admired him for his pluck, his loyalty, his splendid unselfishness; and I was overwhelmingly, desperately sorry for him. If there can be no jealousy without love, then perhaps my resentment at Ottilie's intrusion sprang from a feeling of disappointment. I might suspend judgment on that old and bitter passage in my friend's life: but his relations with this waif of the streets were an ever-present fact which I could not evade.

He, too, it sometimes struck me, was conscious of and regretted, the tension between us. When we were together, and he thought I was not looking, his eyes would rest on my face. A word from me, then, I dare say, would have broken the ice between us. But I was too proud to speak it. Desperately, I longed to be free and never to see him again.

I was worrying, too, about Dulcie. She would have received Dr. von Hentsch's telegram announcing my return to England; and by this she must be distracted with anxiety about me. I wanted Druce to let Ottilie send her a wire, not necessarily signed, just a word to bid her not to be alarmed. But he would not hear of it. The telegram might be traced, he declared, and it was essential that Clubfoot should have no grounds for thinking we were still in Berlin. The argument was sound, and I did not insist.

Our neighbours in that great bee-hive of a tenement left us severely alone. Most of the tenants, Druce told me, were girls frequenting the dance-hall next door. The landlord of the house was the proprietor of the dance-hall, and depended on these "Damen" to bring custom to his establishment. He was doubtless willing to pay heavily for the privilege of shielding his clients
from troublesome inquiries: at any rate the house, Druce said, was singularly immune from police supervision. Rent at the Mahl-Strasse was paid six-monthly in advance, and Druce had secured his room by means of a lump sum down to his predecessor, a Galician anarchist, who had to leave Germany in a hurry.

Druce was restless, restless. He could not sit still. All day long, and often far into the night, I would hear him pacing up and down beyond the curtain. The delivery of the Austrian Note to Servia—the Berlin newspapers published the text on the Friday after our arrival, if I remember rightly—seemed to redouble his furious anxiety. That morning he made Ottilie wait while he scribbled off a letter for her to take.

"It's war all right," he told me at the mid-day meal. "Even if the Belgrade Government is willing to accept Austria's terms, Russia will never permit it." He complained bitterly of the scarcity of news from London. "They should have received the report by this," he declared sombrely. "It must have gone astray. When it comes to hand, we're bound to see its reflection in the news despatches." But all the news from England was of civil war in Ulster.

Late that evening Ottilie came back. I was already in bed when I heard her whispering with Druce. For the first time she seemed badly scared. "He wouldn't even open your letter," she said. "He sent out word that, if I bothered him again, he'd fetch the police." They talked in undertones far into the night, and I fell asleep on the murmur of their voices.

When I rose next morning, Druce still lay like a log among his blankets. Ottilie had left an evening paper, and while the water boiled for the coffee, I glanced over the day's news. The tone of the newspaper was truculent. It seemed to be assumed that Servia would reject the Note
and that the Austrian Army would occupy Belgrade. The Ulster Conference at Buckingham Palace was still muddling on. And then, under the heading "Society," I came upon an announcement which made my heart leap within me for gladness.

"Herr Geoffrey Transome, Secretary of the American Embassy," I read, "has returned to Berlin from Lausanne."

CHAPTER XXVIII

DEAR old Geoff! He wasn't a bit like a "Botschaftsrat," as the Berliner Tageblatt called him. It always struck me, when we used to meet in London, that Geoff, in his dry American way, got a lot of quiet fun out of his diplomatic duties amid the stiff and glittering magnificence of the Imperial Court. This is not to say that, like most sensible people, he did not have at heart a very real respect for the many excellent qualities of the Germans.

But the Court set, especially the military, with their titles, and gold lace, and ribands, and their portentous, mandarin-like formality, filled him with ribald glee. At Palace functions he was entranced when some spangled official would mistake him in his plain evening clothes for a wafer. He used to complain to me that he had never succeeded in "thinking up," as he called it, a really suitable rejoinder for use on such occasions. Geoff seemed to me like a haven of refuge in my present dilemma. Grundt would have no fears for him.

I did not impart my news to Druce: at least not then. I was unpleasantly and increasingly aware of being a drag on him, and, while I knew that he would never desert me of his own accord, I could not help feeling that he would have a much greater chance of making his way out of the