"And if she has been," I flamed back, "what good can you do?"
"Not a great deal. But I can leave money to get her decent food and provide for her defence."
"Oh," I cried out contemptuously, "you only think of her. I understand now why you’re so anxious to go out. The rest is just a pretext. . . ."

The shadows in the blue eyes seemed to darken. "I should have thought you too intelligent to be jealous," he answered, and it struck me that his voice was wistful rather than reproachful.
"Jealous?" I gasped wrathfully.

But my exclamation was cut off by the closing of the door. He had turned on his heel and walked out. I noticed that this time he did not lock the door behind him.

CHAPTER XXIX
THE MAN ON THE STAIRS

If he had called me selfish, unreasonable: if he had reminded me, as well he might have, that his duty came before any consideration of my comfort or safety, I should have cared less. But jealous; I who had been willing to overlook his disgrace, and even to humble myself to the dust to tell him so, and jealous of a street waif at that!

Well, it was finished now. I was beholden enough to this man. I would leave him to his friends and go to mine. With me out of the way he would be free to accept the Lynx’s offer. After all, it was best so. Though I would not have admitted it to Druce, I had an uneasy feeling that it was going to be a little difficult to explain him to Molly and Geoff.

In point of fact, however, I did not stop to think things out properly at all. My stupid pride was bitterly offended
and my sole impulse was to get away from my companion at all costs. My anger overcame my fear; and I lost not a moment in bundling my few possessions—even for those, I reflected wrathfully, I was indebted to him—into a brown paper parcel.

It was nearly half-past eleven, my watch told me. But the hour didn’t matter. Geoffrey Transome, thank Heaven, was the sort of friend one could appeal to at any hour of the day or night. Molly too. I had their address. They lived in the Viktoria-Strasse, a street which, as I had discovered from the map of Berlin at the von Hentsches, abutted on the busy Potsdamer-Strasse, near the canal bridge. I should have to inquire my way there, for I dared not venture on a cab. But for the time being, uplifted by a wonderful sense of freedom, I was content to leave these details on the knees of the gods.

I put on my hat and adjusted my veil and, my parcel under my arm, made for the door. There I paused. I owed it to Druce to let him know that our partnership was dissolved. I found a piece of paper in the drawer of the table and scribbled him a note:

"I am deeply grateful for all you have done for me. But you must accept your friend’s offer. I am going to Geoffrey Transome. I can find my way to England alone."

This bald message of farewell I left upon the table, propped up against the water-jug, where he would see it when he returned. As I turned towards the door, the sight of the orderly pile of blankets on the floor below the window, where he was wont to make his bed, gave me a momentary pang, and I wondered whether I would ever set eyes on Nigel Druce again. But I fought down the feeling of great loneliness that suddenly assailed me. I was only a pawn in the dangerous game he played so blithely; and now that I had done my part, I meant to show him that I could get on without him. I set my
teeth and switched off the light. The next moment, with a thumping heart, I was tiptoeing my way down in the fetid, lurking obscurity of the staircase.

The house was sunk in a profound hush. No sound, other than the distant bourdon of the street, disturbed the stillness... The darkness of the stairs was clammy, with evil, ancient reeks, and permeated, as it seemed to me, with all the sin and misery that dwelt within that place. I dared not strike a match, but let the greasy hand-rail guide me.

And then suddenly, from somewhere below, a shimmer of light and the murmur of voices brought me to a shuddering full stop. I peered over the balustrade. Two floors down the door of one of the flats had opened. From it a dim radiance shone out upon the figure of a man who was half-way across the threshold. He seemed to be taking his leave.

I heard a woman's voice speaking in German, throaty and rather harsh. "Wie gesagt, we keep ourselves to ourselves. They might have the flat next door for aught I know. Last year a girl hanged herself in a room upstairs. It was three months before they found her. . . ."

"There are single rooms here, then, as well as flats?" The echo of the staircase absorbed and muffled the man’s deep tones.

"Three, on the top. Two are store-rooms. A Russian student had the other; but I haven’t seen him for weeks . . .""

"Keep your eyes skinned anyway, d’ you hear?" said the man. "There’s money in this for you, my lass. They’re somewhere in the neighbourhood, that’s certain."

There was a hoarse, chuckle from beyond the threshold of the open door. "So are half the murderers the Blue-coats would like to get their claws into and can’t. The quarter’s a rabbit-warren, like this house. But I can’t stick here jawing all night, zum Donnerwetter. I was due at the dance-hall this hour gone. . . ."
Swiftly I mounted a few stairs as I heard the door close. The staircase groaned and the banister shook in my grasp. Holding my breath, I peeped over. I could see nothing in that pitchy darkness, but the woodwork creaked under a heavy tread. Merciful Heaven, the man was coming upstairs!

I turned about and on tiptoe fled upward. The darkness was in my favour. Behind me I could hear the unseen visitant stumbling and puffing as he laboured his way aloft in the dark. In an instant I had gained the top and, darting along the corridor, regained my haven under the rafters. Even as, with infinite precaution, I shut the door behind me, the awful truth dawned upon me. Druce had carried away the key. I had no means of securing the door.

There was nothing heavier than the table with which to barricade it: besides, there was no time. I was caught in a cul-de-sac.

I sprang for the window farthest from the door, the one at the end of the room. It was a dormer window, small and low-pitched, that projected from the precipitous slope of the roof. Outside a broad gutter which ran below afforded the only foothold. I hesitated at the sight of it, guessing that, like everything else about the house, it was probably old and ramshackle, wondering whether it would support my weight.

The harsh shriek of a train speeding between the houses far below rasped across the sultry night. As the din died down, an irregular footfall, a sort of muted thud, followed by a softer sound, in the corridor without, came to my straining ears. Some one with a heavy limp was advancing stealthily along the passage.

I delayed no longer. Steadying myself on one wing of the casement windows, I swung myself out, dropping my feet to the gutter. One glance below, where the bright lights of the Mahl-Strasse lay like a narrow yellow riband
at the foot of a canyon of darkness, sent such a sickening wave of giddiness over me that I shut my eyes and lay back against the rough, crenellated tiles of the roof, unable to move, to think, even to pray. The vibration of the open window to ponderous tread on the bare boards within brought me to my senses. Stemming my back against the steep pitch of the roof, while the gutter sagged nauseatingly under my weight, I began to edge precariously along the tiles away from the window.

I had not recognised the voice on the stairs; but I knew to whom that heavy, halting step, now moving with cumbrous caution about the room below me, belonged. Somehow it had never occurred to me that Grundt, with all the forces of the police at his command, would thus come scouting in person.

For so far he was only scouting. The scraps of conversation I had overheard made that much clear. How had he tracked us down? Perhaps Ottilie had been shadowed: if not to the house, at least to the street. The Mahlstrasse was quite short, and there would be no great difficulty about ransacking it, house by house. Perhaps . . .

I went cold with fear. Merciful God, what if they had captured Druce? He was not five minutes gone. If they had been watching the street, he must have walked straight into them. And with Druce in his power, Clubfoot had come in search of me. Too well I knew the deadly thoroughness, the infinite patience, of the man. He would sit down and wait for me. And I should be trapped here on the tiles until the first peep of day, now but a few hours distant, should reveal me clinging to the roof to anybody who chanced to look aloft from the street.

And then I remembered the message I had left for Druce. All the effects I possessed were in the parcel which I still clutched under my arm. My note, coupled with the absence of any trace of me in the garret, surely.
this should suffice to convince Clubfoot that I had gone for good?

But what mattered I if Druce had fallen into their hands? Before the imminent, deadly peril threatening us both, all my stupid pique melted away. Of a sudden my mind was flooded with the glamour of the old camaraderie that had borne us high-hearted through so many vicissitudes together. I thought of the tenderness with which he had spoken of Abbott, his dead friend: of his unflinching courage: of the sparkle in those blue eyes of his which no challenge of danger, but only my heartless taunts, had been able to dispel.

As I cowered there in the soft, velvety darkness of the summer night, with every nerve vibrant, every sense awake, bitter remorse assailed me. I realised that, almost from the moment of my meeting with this man who had come so strangely into my life, I had lived only for the day when our ripening friendship should rend the veil between us, and he should open his heart to me. Now it was too late. We had parted in anger, and I felt that I should never see him again. Over the city spread out far below me, whose rumour mounted to my ears like some distant ocean surge, my thoughts soared out in quest of him on the wings of an unspoken, fervent prayer that he might still be safe.

The sounds within the garret had died away. Keeping my head well back, lest that glimpse of the vertiginous depths beneath should dizzy me again, I opened my eyes. Above my head the night sky was glorious with stars. Enthroned in the heavens, serene and cold, they seemed to be as aloof from the world on their perches as I on mine. But the next moment the creaking of a board, so close at hand that my heart almost ceased to beat, brought me swiftly back to earth.

A dim glow in the window I had left warned me that the
light had been switched on within the room. A plank groaned again, and Clubfoot stepped into the embrasure. I saw his face, under the black wide-awake hat, clearly framed in the pane of the open casement, the features terrible with implacable resolve, the eyes, peering out from under the tangle of the projecting ape-like brows, flinging the menace of their dark and merciless regard at the dark windows across the way, the massive jaw thrust forward, as solid and as immovable as the Rock of Gibraltar. Numb with fear, I flattened myself against the roof, tucking my hands behind me, lest their light colour might betray me, thanking Heaven for my veil and my dark clothes.

With grim deliberation that ogre countenance slowly turned in my direction, and the measured scrutiny of the hot and angry eyes seemed to burn me. But the dark night was my friend, and in a little Clubfoot withdrew from the window. I heard his monstrous boot thump heavily on the planking, saw the room sink into darkness. Once more the window jarred to that ponderous tread: then silence.

Tense with expectation, I waited. I strained my ears for the sound of the door that should tell me he was gone. But the stillness of death reigned within the attic. In vain I sought to muster up the courage to make my way back along the gutter to the window; but each time my nerve failed me. The thought that that sinister cripple might yet be lurking there in the darkness of the garret, isolated at the top of this evil house, paralysed my will.

I watched the stars pale and wisps of grey steal into the sky behind the line of tall chimney-pots that, with their fantastic cowls, stood up like an array of Manchu war-braves on the house-tops across the street. At most an hour was left to me in which to screw up my courage to the sticking-point. Between the chance of stumbling upon Clubfoot now, and the certitude that dawn would
discover me either to him or to the neighbours, there was not much choice; but I could not bring myself to do more than edge a few paces nearer the window. There I stuck fast, and with death in my heart witnessed the relentless approach of dawn.

There was a lemon light in the Eastern sky when, very distinctly, I heard a step within the room, and thereon the hollow slam of the door. At last! I squirmed my way along the gutter and laid my hand upon the window. I had to watch my feet, and it was not until I had steadied myself on the window-frame that I ventured to glance into the room.

What I saw there seemed to turn my blood to ice.

CHAPTER XXX

"HEUTE MIR, MORGEN DIR"

With his hands raised above his head and his back to the door, Nigel Druce confronted me. In the foreground, between him, as he faced the window where I precariously balanced myself—it looked straight along the room to the door—and me, Grundt's vast back bulked enormous. The attic was mysterious with the russet shades of dawn, though in the corners the darkness yet lurked, and in the leaden half-light I could clearly distinguish every detail of the two motionless figures.

Druce was smiling; but his eyes were wary. He did not see me, for he was watching Grundt and the great hairy paw, held level with the waist, which I knew must be grasping a pistol, though from where I was I could not see it. Thus they stood in silence, eyeing one another, whilst I watched them fascinated.

The half-drawn curtain before the bed told me at a glance what had happened. Clubfoot had concealed him-