"Then, with the gracious Fräulein's permission, I will take a look round. We'll start with the study, as that gives on the garden...

Familiar as he was with the house, he led the way without hesitation along the passage and through the dining-room, his lamp flinging a shaft of white light before him as he went. I followed, my mind a medley of conjectures and fears. Had my visitor left any trace behind? And what story was I going to tell if the Major took it into his head to cross-examine me as to my movements during the evening?

We had reached the study threshold when a single shot rang out from the garden. With a muttered exclamation von Ungemach dashed into the room and plucked open the window. There fell another deafening explosion without; guttural voices shouted incoherently, heavy footfalls grated on the gravel.

The Major darted out, taking his torch with him, and I was left alone in the dark.

Sick with fear, I leaned back against the door-post, afraid to ask myself what those shots portended. . . .

CHAPTER V

DR. VON HENTSCH CHANGES HIS MIND

Doubtless you who have lived through the amazing Iliad of the Great War will count it as nothing that a rifle should crack out across the peace of a German garden, and a man disappear thereafter as completely as though he had never existed. But at the time of which I write the world at large still knew not what manner of thing was this Prussian military system which the spirit that sets liberty before death was to undertake to smash. . . .

I least of all. I was of that generation of the English
to the bulk of whom a European war, as a reality of every-
day life, appeared a catastrophe as fantastically remote
as a volcanic eruption in our Surrey hills. Before that
thundery July evening and the events it brought in its
train, it never occurred to me that the military atmosphere
I found, so entertaining at Schlatz—the elegant officers,
the bright uniforms, the many parades, with hundreds of
stiff legs moving as one in the goose step, and the bands
crashing out through the red dust,

"Ich bin ein Preuße,
Kennt Ihr meine Farben? . . ."

—I never discerned, I say, that all this brave show was
merely the fair cover of a ruthless and deadly machine
which, while peace endured, crushed those who opposed
it at home as mercilessly as later it was to seek to over-
throw the world that sprang to arms to destroy it . . .

Two shots and then silence, but for the growing hubbub
of voices under the trees. And I, standing there by the
open window in the dark, as Major von Ungemach had
left me, trying in vain to read the riddle, wondering
apprehensively what I should do next . . .

The muffled throbbing of a car, the sound of an angry
altercation in the hall, and the violent slamming of the
front door, decided the question for me. A light glimmered
in the passage, and Dr. von Hentsch, in a high state of
nervous indignation, burst into the study. He was engaged
in a furious argument with his wife, who followed after.
He carried the paraffin lamp from the lobby in his hand.

"Shots in my own garden, Donnerwetter," he exclaimed
shrilly, "and I'm not to be told what it means, I'll let von
Ungemach know exactly what I think of him, keeping me out of my own grounds with his damned sheepsheds of guards!" He set the lamp down on the desk
and caught sight of me. "Ach, Olifia," he cried, "what'}
happening here? Have they all gome mad up at the Schloss?"

"A prisoner's escaped," I replied rather weakly, for I was feeling terribly upset. "Major von Ungemach came round about it. He's out there in the garden now..."

"Quatsch! Bödsinn! Ridiculous rubbish!" squeaked my host. "A nice state of things, I must say, if they're going to open fire from the Schloss and picket my garden every time one of these good-for-nothing gentlemen chooses to stay out all night with his mistress...."

"Once and for all, Fritz," his wife intervened, but not severely—I don't think Frau von Hentsch could have been really severe with any one—"once and for all, I won't have you say such things in front of Olivia...!"

"Olfa's not a child," the Doctor snapped back. "Like everybody else at Schlatz, I presume she knows that all these fellows in fortress arrest keep women down in the town. But, zum Teufel," he went on in an access of exasperation, "if von Ungemach thinks I'm going to put up with his tomfool melodramatic nonsense, he's very much mistaken. Es ist unerhört! I shall certainly complain to the General."

With a furious gesture he dashed his hands together, and his tubby form vanished through the open window into the garden.

Frau von Hentsch shook her head compassionately, an indulgent smile on her plain but rather charming face. She came across and put her large arm about me.

"Poor Fritz is very cross," she explained. "A soldier tried to prod him in the stomach with his bayonet. Such a stupid man not to know him! One of these Polish recruits, I expect: some of them scarcely seem to understand German. Dear child," she added, looking at me anxiously, "I'm afraid you must have been dreadfully alarmed?"
"I was rather scared," I admitted, very ill at ease.
"Tell me what happened!" she urged...

Dear Frau von Hentsch! How I hated to lie to her! Here was one of the sweetest, most unselfish natures I have ever known. I always thought that the popularity of the Lucy Varley books, those simple tales of American farm life that everybody has read, was largely due to the fact that they were infused with something of my dear friend's Christian kindliness.

Somehow she had contrived to impart this radiant spirit of hers to her German husband. With a wife of his own race I suspect that Dr. von Hentsch, caste-bound, dogmatic, fussy, as he was, would have developed into a bully like so many of his fellow-countrymen. But Lucy von Hentsch, without hectoring or fault-finding, but solely as I read it, by virtue of her great affection for her husband, appeared to have brought out the best in him. Through all the bitterness of the war years I held fast to my memory of Fritz von Hentsch as an upright and honourable man.

Poor Frau von Hentsch! The war killed her as surely as it killed Kurt von Hentsch, their only son. When Kurt fell on the Somme, Lucy Varley, laid aside her pen and wrote no more. But America's declaration of war was the coup de grâce for her who, during more than thirty years of exile, had always remained the staunchest of Americans. Fended by the conflict between her love of country and her affection for her husband, that loyal heart broke, and she died.

I can see her now as I saw her that evening in the study, the last night I was to spend at Schlatz, with her beautiful white hair and her ample, motherly figure moulded in a black velvet gown, exquisitely draped (Frau von Hentsch always bought her frocks in Paris, despite sundry pan-German jeremiads of the Doctor's)—that plump body of
hers that used to give her so much anxious thought.
("Child, I know I'm getting to look like a regular, stout old German Frau. It's because I'm just greedy, I guess. But my! their cooking is so delicious!")

I set my teeth and fibbed. What else could I do? The secret I held was not mine to share with another living soul. So I explained that, growing sleepy over my typing, I had gone off to bed, to be awakened out of my first sleep by the firing of the Castle gun. Lest von Ungemach should mention the fact that he had been kept waiting at the front door, I was careful to add that, when he first rang, I had put my head under the bedclothes, too frightened to go downstairs and see who sought admittance.

As I warmed to my tale, my fears began to leave me. My story was quite plausible, I felt, and, glancing obtrusively about the study, I could not discover that my visitor had left behind any trace of his presence. But I wished I knew what had become of him! I should have no peace of mind, I felt, until I found out. The echo of those two shots seemed to go reverberating down my memory.

"Well, I declare," exclaimed Frau von Hentsch, when I had done, "I'm not surprised at Fritz getting mad! If I know anything of these Deutschers, there's going to be one mighty row over this! That von Ungemach must be plumb crazy! I could understand one of those dumb Poles losing his head if he were alone in charge and a prisoner broke loose. But the Major was here himself, you say, when those shots were fired in the garden?"

"Yes," I replied. "He was talking to me here in the study."

Frau von Hentsch went over to the window and peered into the night. A lantern shone among the trees, and there were voices at the gate.
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"I wonder what Fritz is doing," she said. "I hope this man wasn't hit. Did the Major tell you who it was?"

"No...."

"If it were that von Krachwitz creature I shouldn't worry," was her caustic rejoinder. "But I expect the Commandant's doing some thinking. If anything's happened to this man, Major von Ungemach can go out and buy himself a suit of plain clothes, I'll say! He won't want his uniform any more. My goodness, I hope his successor isn't married! I'd just hate to leave this dear old house...."

"But why should Major von Ungemach get into trouble?" I asked. "If a prisoner escapes he has to try and catch him again, hasn't he?"

"You've got to remember that all these prisoners are German officers," said Frau von Hentsch, gazing out into the darkness. "And an officer in this country is a little tin god on wheels, even if he is in fortress arrest. This is a military State, my dear. . . ."

Her words touched a responsive chord in my memory. Where had I heard that phrase before that night? Suddenly I remembered my talk with Franz, the postman. What had he said, again? "This is a military State, Fräulein . . ."—Frau von Hentsch's identical words—"... the civilian doesn't count ...." Then, in a flash, the rest of our conversation came back to me: Franz's forebodings, his tale of preparations for war; and I thought of my little man and his mission. For the first time I began to speculate about the contents of this envelope, the recovery of which had seemed to be of such vital importance to my odd visitor.

Frau von Hentsch had taken a cigarette from her bag. She stooped and lit it at the lamp.

"And," she went on, "the officer is its highest social
unit, the only class that matters. The Government never lets the Army down. That is why this von Krachwitz brute, instead of being handed over to the police to stand his trial for murder, as would have happened in your country or mine, is judged by a military court and gets a nominal sentence. . . .” She began to walk up and down the study, like she used to do when she was dictating her stories to me. “If Dr. von Hentsch had been wounded by that sentry to-night, do you suppose he’d have got any satisfaction, although, as you know, he’s a judge, a high Prussian official? No, child, not on your life! As like as not, the Major would have been commended and the sentry promoted. That’s the way they handle things in Deutschland. The Army can do no wrong. It’s the Prussian system, and if you live here, as I do, you’ve got to get used to it.” She paused and abstractedly flaked the ash from her cigarette into the wastepaper-basket beside the desk. “Not that I ever have, Olivia,” she continued rather wistfully. “Dr. von Hentsch knows it, and we’ve agreed to differ. It’s the only real difference of opinion we’ve had in the twenty-eight years we’ve been married. In my heart I believe that my husband thinks as I do, for he’s good and just and God-fearing. But he’s an officer himself, an officer of the reserve, and he has to support the existing order. . . .”

There was a step on the gravel outside the window, and Dr. von Hentsch came in. I am pretty intuitive, and the moment I saw him I was aware of a sort of tension existing between us. His first glance was towards me, an odd, questioning glance delivered with a faint air of embarrassment. I felt myself go cold all over.

Frau von Hentsch divined at once that something unpleasant had happened.

“Ah, there you are at last!” she said. “I hope that no one’s been hurt, Fritz?”
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Before he replied the Doctor turned his back on us to close the window and draw the curtains across.

"Nothing of any consequence," he remarked non-chalantly, picking up the letters which Franz had left on the desk.

"But the gun, the alarm bell, this shooting?" his wife demanded.

"A misunderstanding, it would appear," rejoined the Doctor, who was glancing through his mail.

"But the Major told Olivia that one of the prisoners had escaped," Frau von Hentsch persisted.

"As a matter of fact," retorted her husband rather testily, "the Major was not in the Castle at all when it happened. He was down in the town at Schmidt’s Weinstube. With your permission, my dear Lucy," he went on quickly, seeing that Frau von Hentsch was about to speak again, "I don’t propose to discuss it. The matter is best forgotten, unless you want to get von Ungemach into serious trouble with the General. . . ."

"But, Fritz, you said yourself that you intended to make a complaint to the General . . . !"

The little Doctor clicked with exasperation.

"It is human nature to make rash statements in moments of irritation," he remarked pedantically. "I have received the Major’s apology. I am content to let the matter rest there. And I do not wish you, Lucy, or you, Oliña,"—his small, vivacious eyes flashed to my face—"to gossip about this affair. We don’t want to get von Ungemach into hot water, if only for the reason that if he’s transferred we shall probably have to leave this comfortable house. . . ."

Frau von Hentsch laughed.

"Most immoral reasoning from a judge, I call it," she chafed him. "It’s all very mysterious, but if our staying on at the Kommandanten-Haus depends on our
discretion, Olivia and I will be silent as the tomb, won’t we, Olivia?” She broke off, wrinkling her brow. “But, by all accounts, the noise to-night was enough to wake the dead. The whole of Schlatz will be buzzing with it in the morning: have you thought of that?”

The judge coughed discreetly. “There have been night alarms at Schlatz in the past to test the preparedness of the garrison. This time, instead of the barracks, it was the turn of the Schloss to be aroused. There’s no need for the public to be told more than that.” He made a deliberate break as though to intimate that the subject was exhausted. “But,” he continued in a more matter-of-fact tone, “it’s close on midnight. Time we were all in our beds!”

Usually Frau von Hentsch went upstairs with me, leaving the Doctor to make all fast for the night. But on this evening she remained behind. She kissed me warmly, and for an instant I clung to that affectionate embrace, so anxious, heart-sick, and lonely was I.

The Doctor’s “Good-night!” was kindly enough. But, as he gave me his hand, once more his eye, the stern, probing eye of the judge, rested tentatively on my face. And again I felt a quick stab of fear.

CHAPTER VI

THE MAN WITH THE CLUBFOOT

I passed a wretched night. For pondering over the enigma of those shots in the garden I scarcely closed my eyes. Dr. von Hentsch’s attitude made it clear that the authorities meant to hush the matter up; but whether this was because the prisoner had been recaptured, or because he had got clean away, I was at a loss to determine. At this juncture I don’t think I ever seriously