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 Schlutz will be buzzing with it in the morning: have you thought of that?”

The judge coughed discreetly. “There have been night alarms at Schlutz in the past to test the preparedness of the garrison. This time, instead of the barracks, it was the turn of the Schluss 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
imagined that my visitor might have been shot down and killed. In those halcyon days of peace the Reaper was a less familiar companion than—in how short a span of weeks!—he was destined to become.

Nor was I at this time so much concerned for myself as for my little man. Most devoutly I wished him safe; but I also had a sort of subconscious hope that, were he still at large, he would contrive to send word and relieve me of the necessity of carrying out his embarrassing errand which, on cooler contemplation, I was most reluctant to undertake. Regardless of Dr. von Hentsch's injunction, I was determined not to rest until I had discovered the truth. I thought I should be able to find out something from one or other of my friends among the young officers of the garrison; and I made up my mind to set to work next day.

On which resolution I fell asleep at last. But it was only to slide into a ghastly nightmare in which I seemed to be fleeing along an endless, stone passage, very narrow, with towering walls on either hand, pursued by a gigantic same man who waved a blue envelope above his head. Already he was gaining on me, and I could hear him drawing ever closer, his heavy limp thumping rhythmically on the flags, when, with a stifled cry, I awoke to find my room flooded with sunshine, and Franziska, the housemaid, rapping at the door and crying: "Sieben Uhr, Fräulein!"

I hurried over my bath and dressing in order to have an early breakfast, and polish off the typing I had left over from the night before. A batch of the new story we were engaged upon had to be despatched to New York by the afternoon mail. Right up to the lunch hour I was fully occupied. Frau von Hentsch always worked in the mornings. Breakfast over, and the Doctor packed off to the Courts, she and I would settle down in the study, where she would dictate to me until one o'clock, when the Judge
came home for the mid-day meal. She used to dictate straight on to the machine, afterwards revising the typescript chapter by chapter. Then—usually in the evenings, for we went out little at night—I would make the final fair copy.

Frau von Hentsch was wonderful at dictation, clear-minded and precise, rarely at a loss. But on this morning she was, for her, curiously distraught. I wondered what Dr. von Hentsch could have confided to her after I had left them on the previous evening. Her manner towards me, however, was as kindly as ever; and I sought to dismiss my suspicions from my mind by telling myself that probably she was simply worried, as she sometimes would be, about the development of her plot.

Luncheon brought no elucidation of the mystery which so greatly intrigued me. Indeed, there was no allusion of any kind to the events of the preceding night. Dr. von Hentsch, who had been talking with a colleague fresh from Berlin, was in his most ponderous political mood. He treated us to a long lecture on the misdeeds of the Servians whom, he solemnly assured us, the Austrians would chastise as such "murder ruffians" merited.

After lunch he and Frau von Hentsch disappeared for their customary nap whilst I returned to the study to finish typing out the chapters which had to catch the afternoon post. I had told Frau von Hentsch, who seldom went out during the heat of the day, that I would walk down to the station with her batch of MS. and post it in the mail train which left Schlatz at 4.35. After my bad night I thought a turn in the fresh air would do me good. But I also remembered that, between the hours of four and five, the Hohe Strasse, which is the main street of Schlatz, was full of people; and I hoped to run across some acquaintance who might throw some light on the mysterious happenings up at the Schloss.
Accordingly, the chapters completed and sealed up in their envelope, soon after four o’clock I was descending the leafy avenue of lime-trees that curved down to the town. It was a serene afternoon of sunshine, the air heavy with the perfume of lime-blossom, and as I walked slowly down the hill, my eye rested pleasurably on the sang-de-bœuf roofs of the old houses which, stepped one behind the other down the precipitous hillside, seemed to glow under the bright blue sky.

The siesta hour was over. The Hohe Strasse was stirring into life. At their doors the shopkeepers, most of whom greeted me impressively, were sunning themselves and watching with never-failing interest the unchanging pageant of the small garrison town.

How I loved it all, finding it always fresh, always picturesque, after the smug drabness of Purley! Little did I think, that sunny afternoon, that I was gazing for the last time upon that scene: the old-world street, smooth-cobbled, winding down to the tiny square where the tubby little Rathaus, baroque survival of the city’s ducal heyday, with its turrets and pinnacles and rounded windows, seemed to be snoozing in the sunshine over against the ancient inn with its swinging sign, “Zur Ewigen Lampe”; the groups of strolling officers, all moustaches and pomade, high-collared and tight-laced in their blue military frocks, caps set at a rakish angle, desperate dogs every one, ogling the women and saluting each other punctiliously with many bendings from the waist; a party of recruits tramping wearily back from the parade-ground, impassive, loutish peasants for the most part, in coarse canvas suits; soldier servants with market baskets; the Lutheran pastor in sober black; the Frau Bürgermeister in bugles, chatting with the Frau Post-Direktor in a dreadful pork-pie hat; Colonel Dörner, the grizzled garrison commander, at whose passage the
whole street was of a sudden alive with salutes and bows, driving himself back to the office in his dog-cart.

There seemed no place for tragedy in that peaceful landscape; yet, had I but known it then, tragedy hung poised above us all as surely as the tall tower of Castle Schlatz that reared itself above the little town.

I was passing the Einhorn Apotheke when the apothecary, a chubby, pink young man, with a brushed-up Kaiser moustache, ran out.

"The gnädiges Fräulein will excuse me," said he, "but I have received the drops for the Frau Landgerichtsrat. If the gnädiges Fräulein were going home, the bottle is there!"

Herr Apotheker Lachwitz knew all the gossip of Schlatz. So, as I had plenty of time before the train, I followed him into the shop. With the Herr Apotheker no need for me to disobey Dr. von Hentsch's injunction: he opened fire at once.

"What doings up at the Schloss last night, Fräulein!" he began as he wrapped up the bottle.

"You heard the racket, too, then?" said I.

His cherubic face creased itself into a good-humoured smile. "Na, and who didn't? Unless it were my neighbour, the corn-chandler, who's so deaf that he'll miss the Last Trump." He chuckled at his joke. "Every one thought that war had broken out. But I happen to know that it was only a false alarm, a surprise, as you might say, to test the vigilance of these gentlemen up at the Schloss. But they didn't catch them napping, eh, Fräulein?"

"Rather terrifying if one isn't used to that kind of thing, isn't it?" I ventured to put in.

"Tchah," remarked the chemist dispassionately, handing me my package, "with a great army such things must be." His voice waxed sonorous. "Encircled as we are with enemies, we Germans must continually satisfy ourselves that our good sword is sharp. What did der alte Fritz say...?"
But I had ceased to listen. I was not interested in the
dictum of the great Frederic. Dr. von Hentsch’s version
was going the rounds, then. I was surprised to find it
thus implicitly accepted.

And then, resuming my walk, as I crossed the Rathaus-
Platz, whom should I run into but Sonia von Wiltsche,
whose husband was rather a nice major on the Staff at
Schlatz? Of all the women I knew at Schlatz, Sonia was
the only one who had any pretence to looks or elegance,
the only one, apart from my dear Frau von Hentsch, I
cared anything about. She was a Rumanian by birth,
young and dark and vivacious, with plenty of pretty
frocks, wherefore she was secretly envied and publicly
sniffed at by the dowdy frumps who composed the feminine
section of the military set.

“Olivia, my dear, you ’look lovely,” she cried in her
impulsive way—Sonia always raved about her friends.
“I adore your big, shady hat. No wonder all the young
officers are dying of love for you. Rudi von Linz will
talk of nobody else. Only at dinner last night . . .”

“Rubbish!” I said. “Rudi’s a nice boy, but much
too sentimental. Walk up to the station with me, Sonia,
if you’re not in a hurry. I’ve got a letter for the train,
and I don’t want to miss it!”

“Volontiers, ma chérie,” she answered: Sonia de-
tested German and spoke French whenever she could.
“How’s our darling Lucy Varley? I saw the Judge
going into the Headquarters office this morning, looking
frightfully important. By the way,” she added, “what
exactly did happen up at the Schloss last night?”

I shrugged my shoulders. “I don’t quite know. All
I can tell you is that there was a terrible hullabaloo which
scared me stiff. Dr. von Hentsch says it was a surprise
alarm, to test the garrison, you know.”

Sonia gave a contemptuous laugh. “Et avec ça?”
she exclaimed derisively. "You don’t believe that cock-and-bull story, do you, ma chère?"

"For want of a better I have to. What is supposed to have been going on, anyway?"

"They say one of the prisoners escaped."

I received a sudden thrill. Had my little man won his way to freedom after all?

"Did your husband tell you this?" I asked.

She threw back her head and laughed. "Grand Dieu, no! Franz tells me nothing. I had it from Anna, my maid, who got it out of Anton, my husband’s orderly. I asked Franz about it, but..."—she laid a finger on her lips and flashed her dark eyes mischievously—"not a word! He said I was not to listen to such nonsense. But for all that, I think it’s true."

"Why?" I demanded eagerly. We had now reached the Kaiselin Augusta-Strasse, the broad boulevard that ran straight to the station. Sonia glanced at the clock above the station and stopped.

"Twenty past four! Good gracious, chérie, I can’t come any farther. I promised to be at the Dörner’s at four for bridge. I’m going to hop into that little carriage." She waved her gay parasol at a passing droschke.

I followed her to the kerb where the cab had drawn up.

"What makes you think that this story’s true?" I asked, doing my best to appear unconcerned.

Her foot on the carriage step, she turned back to me and answered impressively: "Because there was the most frightful row at Headquarters this morning. The General was over from Wiesenfeld. This poor von Urgemach, it appears, was on the carpet. Anton told Anna he had never seen the General in such a fury." The long suede gloves she carried gave my arm an affectionate tap. "Au revoir, ma petite. Come and see us soon again. Franz, the monster, is in love with you, too, you know!"
"Everybody knows whom Franz is in love with," I laughed back. She fluttered her hand at me, the driver whipped up his ancient horse and she drove away. Almost gaily, for her news had lightened my heart, I continue on my way to the station.

The long mail train was in when I went on the platform. Having posted my letter in the postal van, behind the engine, I was making for the exit through a press of passengers and porters, when a man standing at the door of one of the compartments, lifted his hat to me.

It was Major von Ungemach. At first I did not know him, for he was wearing plain clothes, and hitherto I had seen him only in his smart uniform, sky-blue with pink facings, of the Dragoons of the Guard. Now in an appalling suit of black-and-white check and very yellow shoes, he looked shapeless and shabby and undistinguished.

He came towards me at once and ceremoniously kissed my hand.

"Just now I have thought of you," he said, in his stiff English. "Dear Miss Olivia, of all my friends at Schlatz, you are the only one I was sorry to part from without making my adieu...!"

Sonia was right then. The prisoner had got away. Was it possible that the unfortunate von Ungemach had been relieved of his command? At once I thought of the von Hentsches and their lease. Oh dear, how upset they would be.

"But, Major," I exclaimed, "you're not leaving us for good, I hope?"

He nodded sombrely. "Yes," he said, "I do not come back any more to Schlatz."

It struck me, then, that all his ebullience had left him, as though, with his gay uniform, he had stripped off that buoyant air of his which at times I had found rather
tiereome. Loose in the ill-fitting tweeds, his big body had a deflated look, and his voice was tired and toneless.

"Dear me," I remarked, "I shall miss you, Major! But surely it's very sudden, isn't it? Have you got another job? Or are you going back to your regiment?"

"Neither," he answered huskily. And then, to my horror, his face contracted and his bushy mustache began to tremble. "I must tell you now, my dear," he said brokenly, "that I leave the Army. I am..."—he turned from me and stared at the train with tragic eyes—"I am sent away!"

The spectacle of this fat man on the verge of tears was incredibly grotesque. But I had no inclination to laugh. By contrast with his wonted self-sufficient sprightliness, there was something genuinely pathetic about his utter moral abasement. Besides, his statement surprised me considerably. It looked to me as if my little man had been a prisoner of war.

"Oh, dear," I rejoined, "I'm very sorry to hear that. But what's happened? Is it over the pris...?"

He threw up his hands to stop me, glancing rapidly about him. "Um Gottes Willen," he exclaimed in a low voice, "you must forget what I told you last night. For that indiscretion, for that and for... other things, they have retired me..."

I stared at him aghast. "It isn't possible!"

He nodded mournfully. "By special decree of the Emperor's Military Cabinet. No trial and no appeal."

"But what have you done to merit such a terrible sentence?"

"I must not say. But it is nothing that goes against my honour. You'll believe me when I tell you that, won't you, Miss Olivia?"

"Of course," I assured him.

"Eighteen years' service and then to be thrown away
like some old hat. It is hard," he sighed. "Now I go
to my estates in Pomerania to be a farmer and grow swines.
Can you imagine me as a dealer of swines, Miss Olivia?"
There was a passing touch of the old gaiety in his voice.
"But at home among my peasants," he went on dramati-
cally, "I will think to myself: 'When these old cats at
Schlatz shall start pulling my reputation to pieces, the so
beautiful Olivia will speak up and tell them all that this
poor von Ungemach may have been a stupid fellow, but
he did nothing that went against his honour.' You'll
say as much for me, my dear, nicht wahr?"
"Indeed I will."
"Hand darauf!" he cried, already more cheerful. As
we shook hands on our bargain, a whistle shrilled, doors
slammed. The Major made a flying leap for his carriage,
and, as the train began to move, thrust his head out of the
window and kissed his hand to me with the utmost
gallantry. . . .

Without further encounters I returned to the Kom-
mandanten-Haus. Outside the front door an enormous
scarlet racing car, smothered in white dust, was parked
under the limes. A chauffeur with a hard face, grimy and
unshaven, sprawled in a death-like slumber at the wheel.
Franziska, who answered my ring at the bell, explained
the presence of the car. It belonged to a gentleman who
had called to see the Herr Landgerichtsrat and, finding
him from home, though momentarily expected back, had
elected to wait. The Herr was in the study now. The
gnädige Frau, the servant added, was also out: I
remembered, then, that Frau von Hentsch had spoken of
going to the Dörners' bridge party.

I had started to mount the stairs to go to my room,
when the idea came to me to avail myself of the absence of
the von Hentsches to have a look round the garden. I was
certain now that Major Abbott had got away; for, since he had contrived to elude the ring of his pursuers, I made sure he would be fully capable of eluding ultimate recapture: and I thought I should like to see for myself his route of escape. Anyway, I should have to go into the garden some time before the evening meal to cut flowers for the table: Frau von Kentsch always left the arrangement of the flowers to me. So I fetched the flower-basket and the garden scissors from their place in the pantry (everything in Lucy Varley's household had its place) and, going out by the front door, entered the garden through the gate on the road.

I have always loved a garden, and on this perfect summer afternoon my mind, weary from the harassed hours I had passed, seemed to drink in the peace of this old-world pleasance. Years of neglect had effaced almost the last semblance of arrangement from what had once been a stiffly formal park, with patterned flower-beds laid out upon the hillside to contrast with the dark verdure of the trees behind where the Schloss was piled up against the sky. Now between the phalanxes of luxuriant rhododendrons sentinelling the garden on either hand, the flowers ran riot everywhere, insolently trailing out upon the moss-grown paths, and making of what once had been a precise mosaic a crazy quilt of many colours.

It was a place of vivid hues, of drowsy insect noises, of busy bird chatter, of fragrance, of solitude, of oblivion. Deliberately, to give myself up to its enchantment, I put off the real errand which had brought me there, wandering haphazard, my basket on my arm, along the paths and stopping from time to time to pluck a flower.

I felt very happy that evening in the garden. I was twenty-two, romantic and eager: I had had the most picturesque adventure: and I possessed a secret, a delightful, exciting secret, to browse over and be thrilled by
in moments of depression. Luxuriously, I let my mind slide back over the events of the past twenty-four hours, and smiled out of sheer relief that all—for Major Abbott and me, at least—had passed off so well.

I had left the path I had been following and, smiling happily to myself, was bending over a rose-bush which grew apart in front of a laurel thicket, when a harsh voice spoke suddenly almost in my ear.

"It is so mournful to be mirthful alone," it said in German.

Considerably startled, I sprang back. From the other side of a laurel bush a man with a heavy, square face was smirking at me most ingratiatingly.

"I beg your pardon?" I said rather hastily.

He had doffed his hard, black felt hat, disclosing a very short crop of wiry, grizzled hair. His head was shaved at the sides so as to reveal the scalp greasily. He was one of the most hirsute individuals I had ever seen. There were pads of black hair on his projecting cheek-bones, and little tufts at his nostrils, and a velvety thatch darkened the backs of his large and spade-like hands. He was half-hidden by the laurel bush; but from what I could see of him he was a most massively-built person, with curiously long arms and an amazingly broad shoulder span. Altogether, what with his remarkable build, his great bushy eyebrows shadowing hard and rather fierce eyes and his general hairiness, there was more than a suggestion of some gigantic man-ape about him.

At my rather stiff rejoinder, he cocked his head at me, narrowing his eyes. Then he smiled more expansively than ever, baring under his coarse and close-clipped moustache big yellow teeth set with gold that glinted in the sun.

"A quotation," he said in his grating voice. "Minna von Barnhelm. The masterpiece of our national poet, Lessing. A classic. You, as a foreigner, mein teures Fräulein, you should study our great German writers!"
THE CROUCHING BEAST

His familiar air offended me, besides, I was growing uncomfortable under his persistent stare. So I said very distantly: "This is a private house. Were you looking for anybody?"

For an instant his mouth was grim and rather frightening. Then he smiled again, but this time his smile was less engaging.

"Aye, that I am. And the goddess, Fortune, who, like all women—with your permission, dear lady!—never spurns those who absolutely show themselves independent of her caprices, has come to my aid. Jawohl!"

He broke off with a sort of irascible grunt and, still clasping his hat, folded his hairy hands across his great paunch to rest on the crutch handle of his walking-stick.

"I come a long and fatiguing journey by automobile to pay a call on our esteemed friend, Herr Landgerichtsrat von Hentsch..."

He must have been watching me more closely than I realised. For, as though he could read my thoughts, he rapped out sharply: "You saw my automobile outside, hein? Na, schön," he resumed, "I find the worthy Judge from home. Do I sit down to repose myself in the cool of the house? Do I loiter idly to await his coming? Nein, Fräulein. I..."—he touched his chest with impressive forefinger—"I never rest. 'If I rest, I rust!'—you know the proverb? So I step out into this beautiful garden to see what gift Fortune has in store for me. And, sehen Sie, the fickle jade meets me with open arms!"

His great body shook in a silent chuckle.

All this time he had been eyeing me with his probing and vaguely menacing glance. And I was seized with an almost uncontrollable panic of fear. For suddenly Major Abbott's warning had come into my mind: "If a big German, an enormous man, with a clubfoot, comes inquiring
after me, be on your guard! Don't let him suspect you or 
... beware!" Instinctively my eyes dropped to the 
stranger's feet. But the bushes concealed them.

Meanwhile, the rasping, guttural voice went on:

"And then, while I walk behind the laurels here, medit-
ating upon the vicissitudes of human fortune, I raise my 
eyes and what do I see? The most exquisite picture of 
English girlhood approaching. Like some beautiful 
butterfly, most gracious young lady, you moved from 
flower to flower, smiling at your thoughts,"—he made a 
little pause, and my heart seemed to miss a beat—"the 
happy thoughts of innocent and guileless youth, no doubt," 
he added blandly. "How does your great Shakespeare 
put it? 'In maiden meditation, fancy free.'"

I was racking my brains feverishly for an excuse to 
break away and leave him. This man was playing with 
me. He knew something. But, oh God, how much?

"Once more," the snarling tones proceeded, "Fortune 
was kind to me. For, sehen Sie, liebes Fräulein, it 
happens that I am in need of your assistance. . . ."

He broke off deliberately. And I was silent, tongue-
tied through fear.

With an ungainly movement he thrust his hand slowly 
into the pocket of the black alpaca coat he was wearing 
and produced a man's collar. It was a soft collar, one of 
the double kind, with a blue and white stripe, and all 
stained with earth.

I knew the collar at once. Major Abbott had worn 
one like it.

The stranger held out the collar across the laurel bush.

"Will you have the great kindness, my dear young 
lady," he said sleekly, "to tell me whether you have ever 
seen a collar like that before?"

I tried to answer nonchalantly, for his challenging eye 
was on me.
"I'm sure I don't know," I retorted. "Heaps of men wear collars similar to this."

"But not in Germany," was the quick rejoinder. "This is a collar made in London." He opened it out. "See, the makers' name, Maitland & Chard, Jermyn Street..."

His thick finger dabbed at the lettering on the inner band.

But I was not looking at the lettering. My eyes were riveted on a long, dark brown smear that stained the linen through and through. And I knew that the stain was not of earth, but of blood.

With a brusque thrust of his huge body, the stranger burst through the laurel bush and stood before me.

He limped as he went and, as he emerged from the thicket, I saw that one of his feet was misshapen and encased in a monstrous boot.

CHAPTER VII

"AUF WIEDERSEHEN!"

But for the surprising intervention of Franziska, I believe my face would have betrayed me. I was numb with horror. My little man was once more a prisoner, then, if not dead, and here already, hot on the track, appeared "der Stelze," against whom he had so impressively cautioned me: I was not likely to forget the odd expression that had come into his eyes when he spoke the name.

I thought of the travel-stained car, the weary chauffeur, at the door. "The Lame One" had lost no time. The memory of Major Abbott's warning descended upon me like a cold douche: "There's the worst kind of trouble in store for any one suspected of aiding me to escape..."; and my sense of security collapsed like a house of cards.

Franziska's appearance, I say, gave me a brief respite. I had not heard her approach, and the first thing I knew