"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
of her presence was when a solid mass of flesh, tightly packed into blue and white check, tripping over a root, was precipitated between us. Franziska, a strapping peasant wench, with scarlet cheeks and hair screwed up into a close bun at the back of her head, was always falling over things, moving through life like an elephant in the jungle. I helped her to her feet.

“Herr Je,” she panted, one red hand pressed to her enormous bosom. “I ran so fast... the Herr Landgerichtsrat is so nervös. He’s waiting in the study now to receive the gentleman. Ach, du lieber Gott...!” She gasped, puffing, for breath.

I busied myself with brushing the pine needles from her dress; for I was conscious of the jealous challenge of those disquieting eyes. Anything to gain time. . . .

“Tell the Herr Landgerichtsrat I will see him presently,” was the clubfooted man’s surly rejoinder. “And you, get out!”

The maid goggled at him. “But the Herr Landgerichtsrat is impatient, Herr,” she blurted out. “He ordered me to find you immediately and bring you to the study...”

“The Herr Landgerichtsrat will await my pleasure,” announced the cripple, with dignity. The crutch-handled stick described a gesture of dismissal. “Do as you’re told, my girl!”

The action seemed to terrify Franziska, for she staggered back, her china-blue eyes starting from her head. “Aber, Herr...”

“Go...”

Sharp as the bark of a dog and as fierce, the order rang out. At the same time the lame man lurched forward a pace, determined, ominous, with stick uplifted. Franziska did not wait for him. Unceremoniously she took to her heels and fled. A distant crash of glass among the cucumber frames marked her headlong retreat to the
house. Then once more all was still, and the drohe of the bees and the chatter of the birds resumed possession of the garden.

I had myself in hand now. I knew the danger, and I was prepared to meet it. Boldly I faced the man with the clubfoot. I saw him holding out the collar to me. But I fêigned to ignore it.

"Dr. von Hentsch isn't used to receiving orders," I explained, laughing.

The cripple bent his bushy eyebrows at me. "Then he'll find he'll have to change his habits. Like certain other self-complacent individuals in this town.""

As he said this, he shot me a mustering glance out of the corner of his eyes. His manner was frankly threatening; and I resented it. After all, I was a British subject, the guest of one of the highest officials at Schlatz. Who was this man that I should be afraid of him? I could not gainsay his unmistakable air of authority; but, for the rest, his manner, and particularly his sober if rather nondescript clothes, suggested the small Prussian functionary. In that case, it seemed to me, he would not bounce Dr. von Hentsch very successfully. So I smiled politely and said: "Perhaps you don't know that the Herr Landgerichtsrat is the highest judicial authority in the district?"

He bowed. "Notwithstanding that, even . . ." With a thoughtful air he began to roll up the collar between his fingers.

"Then you can't identify this collar?" he asked presently.

"No," I answered. "It's English, you say?"

"You saw the makers' name . . ." he pointed out.

"I didn't know there was such a thing as an Englishman at Schlatz," I told him. "I've never met one, at any rate. . . ."
"AUF WIEDERSEHEN!"

"Nevertheless, there was one here," he rejoined, stuffing the collar away in his pocket. "A prisoner in the Castle. . . ."

"But I thought that only German officers were interned at Schlatz?" I interposed.

"As a rule, yes. But this was the exception. A desperate criminal, my gracious young lady, a . . . a murderer, a man who would stop at nothing, arrested by the German authorities and held at the request of your British Government. . . ."

All the time he was speaking his tigerish eyes kept boring into my face. Not for an instant did I believe his tale. My game little Major was no murderer, of that I was convinced. But I grew nervous, scenting a pitfall.

"You knew that a prisoner had escaped, didn't you?" he added casually.

I thought rapidly. If this man were charged, as he appeared to be, with the investigation of the affair, he must be acquainted with my story as I had given it to Major von Ungemach and the von Hentsches. So I said, yes, I had heard so.

"Did this Major Ungeheuer, Ungeziefer, na, whatever the Kommandant fellow's name is, did he tell you that the prisoner was English?"

For the fraction of a second I paused. I was not afraid to tell him the truth; but some instinct bade me beware of a trap.

"No," I answered very decidedly, and left it at that.

"So, so," said the lame man musingly. "Then you've only just heard from me that it was an Englishman who escaped, nicht wahr?"

"That is so. . . ."

His gleaming gums were flesched in an expansive smile. "What a wonderful thing is the phlegm of the English!" he exclaimed in a softly purring voice. "What non-
chalance! What self-control! You, a charming young girl, are startled out of your beauty sleep by the firing of cannon, the ringing of bells, the hue and cry, in a word, the whole *klimbim* of the alarm, and learn that a prisoner has escaped! What more thrilling than an escape, mein Fräulein! What more dramatic! The historic and inevitable file, the rope ladder, the breathless wait for the sentries to pass, the bold dash into freedom, the scurrying in the dark like a hunted rat! Tell me, don’t you find it exciting?

I felt very much like a hunted rat myself, a poor, little, frightened rat, worried by a savage, bristling dog. Rather hurriedly, and not knowing much what I was saying, I agreed absently that it was most exciting.

“‘And yet,’” he went on reflectively, cocking his clipped head at a thrush swaying on a pine-branch, “and yet you display no emotion. Mein Kompliment, Fräulein! Your English upbringing, no doubt. Had I been asked, I should have said that an English girl like you, alone in a foreign land, would have been amazed and thrilled to learn that the hero of this romantic episode was an Englishman, one of her own flesh and blood. . . .”

My throat was dry; my hands burned. I had blundered, and blundered badly. Of course, I should have manifested surprise, interest, and plied him with questions about the prisoner. But his allusive manner, and, above all, the persistent inquisition of those suspicious eyes, had quite flustered me out of my rôle.

“After all,” the velvety voice proceeded, “if he had known, when he was skulking in this very garden, that one of his compatriots was only a few yards away, he might have sought you out and implored your assistance. . . .”

“Oh,” I cried, “I’m thankful he didn’t. I should have died of fright. A murderer, you said he was, I think?”

“Jawohl. A redoubtable assassin. . . .”
"And did he get away? I mean, did he make good his escape? Or was he recaptured and brought back?"

A cloud seemed to pass over my companion’s hard features. He gave me another of his piercing glances.

“You’d better ask your friend, Major... Major...” he snapped his fingers—“na, this imbecile of a Kommandant!”

I laughed, though, God knows, I felt little like mirth. “Ah, but the Major won’t talk. Besides, he’s gone away...”

The big cripple seemed to take a deep breath; his sprouting nostrils opened and shut; and his eyes flamed up suddenly, like a kindling fire. “Yes,” he growled irascibly, his sleek accents forgotten, “and lucky he is to get off so lightly. If I’d had my way, I’d have clapped the infernal, bungling fool into the lowest range of the solitary confinement cells at Spandau and left him to rot there, verdammt!” His great chest swelled out. “Himmelkreuzdonnerwettersakrament nochmal,” he boomed in a crescendo of expletive—he was chattering now like an angry baboon, grinding his teeth and rolling his eyes—“am I to plan, to toil, to slave, to follow my goal unswervingly, heedless of the enemies, the powerful enemies, I make, in order that some clumsy sheephead of a cavalry Major shall come blundering in and upset my careful calculations? Herr Gott,”—he rolled out the oath raising his hairy paws aloft and shaking them at the sky of cloudless blue—“it’s enough to drive a man out of his mind. Pah!” He spat raucously, and then, drawing an enormous red and yellow handkerchief from his pocket, blew his nose with the noise of a trumpeting elephant. This dual operation appeared to pacify him, for presently his large, rather pudgy hand went out, and he would have stroked my bare arm if I had not shrunk back.

“Na ja,” he remarked in a silky voice, “it’s a hard life,
a very hard life, my dear. More kicks than pfennigs, is old Clubfoot's portion. But I can learn from you, jawohl. You 've given me a lesson in self-control. An excellent thing, self-control, an invaluable quality . . ."—he broke off to plunge his searching regard again into my face—"provided you 're sure of yourself. A bold front, that 's the secret of success. How do the smart Yankees put it? 'It 's a good life if you don't weaken!'" He paused, and then, lingeringly, as though he were smacking his chops over the words, repeated the phrase. "If you don't weaken, my dear young lady!" He made me a ceremonious bow. "I have the honour to wish you a very good evening!"

"Good . . . good-bye!" I said falteringly.

"Auf wiedersehen!" he countered.

With a grave deliberation that to my fevered imagination had in itself a faint air of menace, he clapped his bowler hat on his head and, leaning heavily on his stick and hauling his monstrous foot along in a painful limp, hobbled briskly off in the direction of the house.

I stayed behind in the sun-lit garden. Picking up my basket, I returned to my flowers. I realised that I was still in the dark as to Major Abbott's fate, and asked myself, without finding an answer, how far I had compromised myself in the eyes of this sinister man. I wondered whether his parting words had any ulterior meaning. This mysterious cripple terrified me; and I resolved, his confident "auf wiedersehen!" notwithstanding, to keep out of his way as long as he remained in Schlatz . . . .

For perhaps half an hour I lingered among the roses until the mighty roar of a motor engine in the distance told me that the racing car had taken the road again. Of course I could not be sure that the clubfooted man had gone with it, so I carried my roses indoors by the kitchen,
making for the pantry, where I was accustomed to arrange
the flowers. As I entered the pantry, Franziska appeared
from the adjoining dining-room.

"I was just coming to look for the gnädiges Fräulein,"
she announced. "The Herr Landgerichtsrat wished to
see the Miss in the study immediately."

Her words gave me an unpleasant sensation. Never
before had Dr. von Hentsch been thus formal in his deal-
ings with me. What could this man have told him?

"Has the visitor gone, Franziska?" I asked.

With a grunt Franziska plumped her rotund person
donw upon a chair, planting her hands on her knees.
"Jawohl, and a good riddance," she declared. "You
should have heard him in the study, that's all! Shouted
and raged like a Turk, he did. I thought murder was
being done. And when the study bell went for me to
show him out, there was the Herr Landgerichtsrat, God
help me, as white as a shroud; handing old hop-and-go-
kick his hat as it might be the Pope! Such insolence!
I wish the gnädige Frau had been here! She'd have put
the great ape in his place. . . ."

Her vehement indignation brought a smile to my face.
But, as I crossed the dining-room to the study, I, too,
wished with all my heart that dear Frau von Hentsch
would come back. I sorely lacked her gentle presence in
this atmosphere of storm. . . .

CHAPTER VIII
IN WHICH I LOSE MY JOB

Dr. von Hentsch always reminded me of an elderly
cherub. Short and plump and round, he had a tight little
tummy spanned by a watch-chain as taut as a telegraph
wire. His chubby face, of which a gleaming bald pate