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 dealings with me. What could this man have told him?

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

With a grunt Franziska plumped her rotund person down 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
seemed to be merely the extension, so pink and smooth was it, was suffused with a perennial flush like the Alps at sunset.

I found him pacing up and down the study, smoking a cigarette with quick, nervous puffs. When he caught sight of me, he hastened to bring me into the room, shutting the door after me.

"Please to be seated, Olifa," he said in his rather stilted English. "I have something to say to you."

With his wonted gravity he placed himself with his back to the unlighted stove, his little paunch stuck out, his hands tucked away beneath the tails of his black morning-coat. His manner was extremely embarrassed. Behind their rimless pince-nez his eyes were troubled. He looked like a distracted cupid.

"I must tell you, my dear," he began, "that I... that we,"—he stammered for the word—"that my wife and I find it necessary to make a change."

My face fell. I had not anticipated this. At twenty-two one does not worry much about the future; but now that I was installed at Schlatz and had fallen into Frau von Hentsch’s ways, I had expected to make my home with her more or less indefinitely. Horrid memories of Purley and its red-brick villas, of my desk under the grimey, reflector-lit window of St. Mary Axe, the evening fight for trains at London Bridge, poured, jostling, into my mind... .

"Oh!" I exclaimed in dismay. "I hope you’re not dissatisfied with me, Herr Doktor?"

"No, no," he answered at once. "We shall be most sorry to lose you, Olifa." His mouth set in an obstinate line. "But my wife will have to engage another secretary."

"Has Frau von Hentsch any fault to find with my work?" I put in.

"On the contrary," he made haste to assure me in his
pedantic way, "she has never had a more efficient amanuensis."

"Then why do I have to go?"

He was silent, studying the pattern of the carpet.

"Does Frau von Hentsch know about this?" I asked suddenly.

He kept his eyes to the ground; but his ears became very red. "As a matter of fact," he said reluctantly, "I have not as yet discussed the matter with her. But she will recognise that the change is inevitable. . . ."

All this, I was well aware, was only so much beating about the bush. It was not hard to see what had happened. The moment I entered the study I divined from the Judge’s manner that his visitor had spoken to him against me. I had always regarded Dr. von Hentsch as a fair-minded person, and, though I realised that I was getting only what I deserved, I was surprised to find him thus willing to condemn me unheard. Not from hypocrisy, but merely to discover, if I might, the extent of the man’s suspicions against me, I assumed an injured air and said: "I can guess what it is. The person who was here just now has poisoned your mind with his suspicions. I know it. Do you believe I had anything to do with this Englishman’s escape, Herr Doktor?"

"Not for one instant!" he declared emphatically, and with such honest indignation that I felt a secret twinge of shame. "I accepted your word implicitly, my dear, as I told this gentleman not five minutes ago." He cleared his throat. "This is a hard task for me, mein Kind. We have grown very fond of you since you have been here, my wife and I. With our daughter married on the other side of the Atlantic, and our son so much away, our house was lonely until you came. You brought back the joy of youth under our roof, and we are grateful to you." He whipped off his pince-nez, breathed on the lenses, and
started to polish them with a sort of furious industry.
"We . . . we shall miss you, Olifia."
"Yet you send me away?" I said.
He threw up his hands helplessly and turned aside.
"Of what does this man accuse me?" I demanded.
"He brings no specific charge, save that you are a
foreigner. On that ground he objects to your presence
here, practically within the precincts of a State prison."
"And you admit his objection?"
The little Judge coloured up. "I have no choice," he
muttered.
"Good gracious," I exclaimed, "even if this isn't a free
country, I should have thought a man in your position . . ."
"Gott . . . !" His manner was deprecatory. He
was staring miserably out through the open window.
"You don't understand. This gentleman has influence
which I find myself unable to withstand."
"Influence?" I repeated contemptuously. "What
influence does a vulgar creature like this possess, I'd like
to know?"
"Enough, at any rate, to have had Major von Unge-
mach placed on half-pay. And von Ungemach is in the
Guards Cavalry, with a father who is a General. I may
be the next victim for all I know."
"I don't believe it," I cried. "The man was boasting!"
The Herr Doktor shook his head. "I have only too
good reason for knowing he was not," he replied.
"But who is this man?" I demanded.
The Judge did not reply at once. In the silence that
fell between us, a symphony of quiet, unobtrusive sounds,
as it were the pulse-beat of this tranquil, German house-
hold, drifted into the room: Franziska's voice in the
kitchen, rather flat, and monotonous, raised in song; the
distant squeak of a pump; the hollow rattle of wood-
blocks in the cellar where, on this hot afternoon, with
characteristic Teuton foresight, the winter supplies were being laid in. Gravely the Judge adjusted his pince-nez and looked at me.

"Oliřia," he said, "I take the privilege of a friend who is old enough to be the father you have lost to offer you a piece of advice. Through no fault of your own, you have touched the fringe of a disagreeable, an unfortunate, business. It is perhaps natural that you are inquisitive about it: curiosity is the principal weakness of your sex; but believe me, if you indulge this propensity you run the risk, the serious risk, of deepening those suspicions which—quite blamelessly, I admit—you have aroused. Ask no questions, my dear, but forget the whole affair and return to your own country without delay!"

Dr. von Hentsch liked to orate, and this rather pompous speech appeared to raise his morale. It was with a certain briskness that he stepped over to the desk and picked up an envelope which lay there.

"Here," he went on, "is your salary for six months, together with your fare to London. The last train for Berlin leaves here at 11.12 to-night. It reaches the Stettiner Bahnhof at 6.21 in the morning. That will give you plenty of time to have a bath and some breakfast before going on to London by the noon train from the Friedrich-Strasse. I can give you the name of a quiet, respectable hotel . . ."

"But, Herr Doktor," I broke in, rather agitated, "you surely don't expect me to leave right off like this, this very evening?"

He looked terribly uncomfortable. "Believe me, it would be best," he murmured.

"But I'm going to Berlin on Friday, anyway, and this is Monday. The Transomes can't have me before Friday as they've got friends stopping with them until then. And I can't return to England. As you know, my sister
and her husband are meeting me in Berlin on the first for our holiday in the Black Forest. Surely it can’t make any difference if I stay on here until . . . until the night train on Thursday, say?"

"I am sorry, Olitia," he answered testily, "but it is impossible. . . ."

Then I knew that the lame man must have demanded my instant dismissal. If he suspected me, that was not surprising; but what filled me with consternation was my host’s meek acquiescence. Dr. von Hentsch came of old Pomeranian Junker stock, a class which, as he was fond of telling me, for all its disciplined loyalty, had always jealously defended its prerogatives, even in defiance of the throne; and he was not the man to be bullied into acting against his conscience. Who was this mysterious cripple, and what strange power did he wield to be able to sweep the unfortunate von Ungemach, for all his aristocratic connection, into ignominious retirement, to impose his orders upon a highly-placed and usually by no means tractable Prussian judge. If he were of the police, then he must be a very important official, perhaps the Chief. In any case I had made a dangerous enemy. . . .

Dr. von Hentsch was speaking again: "According to your agreement with my wife," he said, "you are entitled to your first-class fare home. You are, of course, mistress of your own plans; but if you will be guided by me, Olitia, you will put your friends off, give up this holiday, and go straight back to England."

"Give up our trip to the Black Forest?" I exclaimed. "Who on earth should I?"

Nervously Dr. von Hentsch pounded the knuckles of his right hand into the palm of his left. He cast a despairing glance to right and left of him like a frightened rabbit.

"I have said as much as I ought," he rejoined testily. "But this much I will add: if you remain in Germany,
the consequences to you may be disagreeable. Even
dangerous, perhaps.”

He mentioned no name, but I knew what he meant.
He was warning me against “der Stelze,” the second
warning, within twenty-four hours, I had received against
this enigmatic figure. A sensation of despair suddenly
assailed me, the sort of feeling some people have in a tunnel
or one of those slimy, stalactite caves which tourists are
dragged to see—claustrophobia, don’t the doctors call it?
I felt as though unseen hands were weaving a web about
me, an intricate mesh which was slowly but surely closing
in to stifle me. I had a vision of the man with the club-
foot as a great, hairy spider, obese and horrible, crawling
laboriously, menacingly, athwart the web he was spinning
about me, patient and implacable. And I was afraid, af
aid.

At that moment, I think, I had fully decided to take
the Judge’s advice and return straight to England. I
picked up the envelope.

“Oh, all right,” I said listlessly. “But I can’t accept
all this money, Herr Doktor. Six months’ salary is
excessive. You are far too generous.”

An immense relief appeared in his face. He beamed
through his glasses, and coming over, put his arm about
me and patted my shoulder. “Not at all, not at all,” he
declared. “It is the least we could do, my dear. We are
greatly in your debt, Olifia. You have brought the sun-
shine back to our house and made my wife so happy.”

With a deeply perplexed air he rubbed his eyebrow. “Weiss
der Teufel, what she’s going to say!” He took my two
hands in his. “Think kindly of us, when you are once more
in your own country,” he said very earnestly. “We . . .
we have loved you, Olifia, and I am ashamed to have to
treat you thus. Aber . . .” He broke off and hunched
up his shoulders in a forlorn shrug. “I have telephoned
for my wife," he went on. "She is on her way here now. I have been called to Wiesenfeld,"—Wiesenfeld is the large town nearest Schlatz—"but I shall see Lucy before I leave. And I shall telegraph your sister to expect you to-morrow evening in London. You will, perhaps, explain matters to her when you see her. As I shall not be back from Wiesenfeld to-night, I will say good-bye to you now." He hesitated. "I shall ask permission to embrace you, Olisia. . . ."

I couldn't help it; my eyes filled with tears. The simple little Judge had always been kind to me. I stooped to him, for I was by half a head the taller, and he solemnly kissed my cheek. Then he stepped back and blew his nose loudly. "There's a receipt in the envelope," he announced in a mournful voice.

I signed the docket he had prepared and went to my room to pack. I never saw Dr. von Hentsch again.

Half an hour later my dear Lucy Varley came to me in my little green and white bedroom, all littered with my preparations for departure. "My dear, my dear," she cried, as she took me in her arms, "I don't know what I'm going to do without you! Oh, these men and their wretched politics! It's at moments like this that I realise that Germany is no country for a woman. I've had to get used to it, and it hasn't always been so easy. But this is the hardest blow of all."

She plumped down on my bed, her fat face all wrinkled with dismay.

"They object to an Englishwoman being here, right alongside their old Castle," she explained. "We're in Germany, and I guess they have the right. You don't want to feel sore with Dr. von Hentsch, honey. People in Berlin are very jumpy about the international situation just now, he tells me. If it comes to a war between
Austria and these wretched Servians, Russia will never stand for it, he says, and that would mean the French and, maybe, you British as well, being dragged in."

"Who is this lame man who's been making all the fuss?" I demanded.

"I don't know," she answered frankly. "My husband didn't tell me. And when Fritz von Hentsch doesn't tell me a thing, I just don't ask. Some time, or other every woman who marries a Prussian official has to learn that lesson. But I can tell you his name: it's Grundt, Dr. Adolf Grundt. . . ."

"Is he in the police or what?"

"I haven't any idea. But he's some one high up, mighty high up, or my husband would never have let you go, child. I can tell you that."

"What became of this Englishman who escaped?" I asked. "Did they catch him again?" And I told her about the blood-stained collar, which the clubfooted man had shown me in the garden.

Frau von Hentsch shuddered. "My husband knows, I think," she answered; "but he hasn't told me. Something happened in the garden last night, but what it was I have no idea. Since they won't let you stay on here," she added, "I suppose it means that they've recaptured this poor creature. Or that he's dead. Unless, of course, there are other English spies imprisoned in the Schloss. . . ."

I felt my pulses quicken. I bent down over my open trunk so as to hide my face as I asked, as nonchalantly as I could contrive: "He was a spy, then?"

"Dr. von Hentsch calls him a political prisoner. But I guess that's just a polite way of saying the same thing. . . ."

So much for Grundt's stupid lie, I thought . . . !

"A great many queer things go on in this country that
nobody knows anything about," Frau von Hentsch pro-
ceeded. "The discipline is wonderful. If the word goes
forth that a certain scandal is to be hushed up, well, it 's
as if it never had been, and that 's all there is to it, I 'll say.
With the exception of Major von Ungemach I don't
believe a soul in this town knew that an Englishman was
interned in the Castle. Dr. von Hentsch certainly didn't,
or I feel sure he would have made difficulties about your
staying on here. This affair is one of their secrets, and a
mighty big secret, judging by the almighty rumpus they 've
made about it. It 's not healthy for foreigners to get
mixed up in these things. That 's why Dr. von Hentsch
is anxious to get you back home as quickly as possible.''

There by my open trunk, a crepe-de-chine nightdress
in my hand, I fell a-musing. Once more that staccato
whisper was in my ear: "If anything should happen to me,
can I rely on you to redeem a ghastly folly of mine?"
"If anything should happen to me . . ."

In all the fog of mystery that imprisoned me, was not
the only tangible feature looming up through the gloom
the fact that Major Abbott was out of the running, either
back in his fortress cell, or deep in a nameless grave? And
he had entrusted me with the redemption of his honour,
the good name he had left behind him in Berlin where, so
be it I had the pluck to defy the lame man and his un-
spoken threats, I might, with luck, carry out my mission
between trains.

If I took the night train I should reach Berlin on the
morrow, which was Tuesday. A little dash of courage,
and an hour on the following morning, should see my
mission accomplished. I reckoned on having enough
time between trains to retrieve the envelope and deliver
it to Mr. Joseph Bale, of 97 Tauben-Strasse—the names
and addresses my little man had given me were firmly
fixed in my memory. And did I miss the noonday train
for London, there was one in the evening I could take. On reflection, my mission seemed simple. And yet, when I thought of "der Stelze" . . .

It would be more prudent, I knew, to wash my hands of the whole affair and spend the few hours I should have in Berlin with Molly Transome, to whom, over breakfast, I would explain my change of plan. But Daddy, sprung from a long line of Empire-builders, always bade me avoid the easy thing. Most of the trouble in my life has been due to my trying to follow that stout-hearted counsel. And so, too, this time it was to befall . . .

"I declare you're not listening to a word I say," Frau von Hentsch's voice, gently reproachful, cut across my meditation. "Why, child, you look as though your thoughts were miles away. . . ."

"They were," I told her, "I was thinking of my journey. . . ."

But not, merciful Heaven—for I still groped in darkness—of what that journey was to bring forth!

CHAPTER IX

I AM KISSED BY A NICE YOUNG MAN AND MAKE AN ALARMING DISCOVERY

Under the frigid beams of the arcs the long Berlin train stood at the platform. At that late hour Schlatz station was almost deserted, and so quiet that, as I followed the sleepy attendant into the compartment he allotted me in the single Schlafwagen, I could hear the engine's hoarse and rhythmic panting beat upon the still night air.

A certain stealthy hush about the sleeping-car suggested that my fellow-passengers were already asleep. Only one other person besides me joined the train at Schlatz, a nondescript German in a mustard-coloured overcoat, who