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 be fall.

"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
looked like a commercial traveller. He was given the berth next to mine.

There was no one to see me off. Frau von Hentsch wanted to come, but I would not let her. Having made up my mind to deceive her, I was feeling pretty badly about it; and I was afraid of my resolution weakening under the ordeal of a prolonged station farewell. I bought a ticket to London, as I was going to register my heavy luggage through to Victoria: I had only my dressing-case with me in the carriage. The ticket allowed me to break my journey at Berlin if I wished.

The attendant had retired, and I was thinking about going to bed when from the outside an enormous sheaf of pink roses was pressed against the window. A signet ring rapped upon the glass. I let it down and saw Rudi von Linz. The sight of him reminded me of how lonely I was feeling. His bright and boyish face looked rather white: but perhaps it was only the effect of the ghastly, mauvish light.

"Olivia," he cried breathlessly, "I was so afraid I'd miss you! I heard only just now at the Officers' Casino that you were leaving." His voice was reproachful. "I wasn't sure you'd want me to come and say good-bye, as you never let me know you were going away. . . ."

"I'm sorry, Rudi," I answered, genuinely enough, for I had always liked him tremendously, "but, honestly, it wasn't my fault. I had barely time to get my packing done and catch the train. . . ."

"But what's the hurry?" he demanded. "I thought you weren't going to Berlin until Friday. . . .?"

"Haven't you heard what's happened?"

"No. . . ."

I looked at him inquiringly; but his face was blankly ignorant.

"Then how did you know I was leaving to-night?"

"One of the mess waiters told me. I gave him a note to take round to you, and he said you were going back to England by the Berlin train to-night. He'd heard it up at the Kommandanten-Haus, it appears,"—I remembered that Franziska was walking out with one of the waiters at the Casino. "I came straight to the station. I stopped only to wake up the florist and get you a few flowers. I'm going to bring them into the carriage. We've got lots of time. . . ."

He whipped round so suddenly that he cannoned into a man who was mooning up and down the platform after the manner of people waiting for a train to start. I saw that it was my neighbour in the mustard-coloured overcoat. With a muttered apology, Rudi raced down the train and burst tempestuously into my compartment.

"Oh, beautiful Olivia," he exclaimed—that, by the way, was what he always called me—"if you only knew what a supreme disaster this is! Here, take your flowers! In the night that is bearing you away from me they shall tell you of my despair and whisper very quietly in your ear, perhaps, what I never had the courage to tell you myself!"

Spoken by Bill Bradley, or any other man of my own race, this flowery speech would have sounded preposterous. But as this charming, eager boy—he was only twenty-two—handsome and gallant in his trim uniform, uttered it, it rang so genuine that I was touched.

He gave me the roses which, nestling in their cincture of damp maidenhair fern, filled the compartment with their fragrance. I was never to inhale the scent of roses again without thinking of poor Rudi and that night at Schlatz station.

I buried my face in the blooms. "They're adorable, my dear. Every time I see them during the night, they'll remind me of you. But we must give the poor darlings some water."
I let down the wash-basin, filled it, and placed the bouquet there. When I turned round I saw the boy with his hands outstretched towards me. He had flung aside his high-crowned uniform cap, and his crisp, flaxen hair shone like fine gold under the light. He took my two hands in his and kissed them, then made me sit down beside him on the narrow bed.

"What's happened?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "There's been this fuss up at the Schloss about the Englishman escaping...

"Englishman, did you say?"

"Yes. Didn't you know?"

Rudi shook his head. "All we heard was that one of the prisoners got out, and that this-ass of an Ungemach had lost his job..."

"He's been retired from the Army!"

The boy stared at me in astonishment. "Then you know more about it than I do. Poor devil! Between ourselves, Olivia, the battalion commander sent for all us officers to the orderly-room this afternoon and forbade us to speak about the matter. But, Um Gottes Willen, what's it got to do with you?"

"It seems they object to an English subject living so close to the prison."

"They? Who's they?"

"A man called Grundt, Adolf Grundt. Who is he, Rudi?"

My companion shook his head. "Never heard of him. Is he from the Corps Command?"

"No. He's a civilian."

Rudi's lip curled. "A policeman, was?"

"He seems very important. Dr. von Hentsch paid me six months' salary and advised me to go back to England at once, or the consequences might be disagreeable."

The boy looked at me rather strangely, as I thought,
and did not speak for a moment. Then he groaned aloud. "What am I doing to do without my beautiful Olivia, will you tell me that?" he declaimed tragically. "Only you have rendered my life endurable in this damned, dull hole. It's enough to make a fellow want to blow out his brains. And to think that I'm stuck in this accursed village for another year at least. Unless . . ."

He broke off and looked up quickly. A shadow fell between us and the platform lights outside. It was my neighbour of the sleeper passing along the corridor to his berth.

"You're too hard on Schlatz," I said. "I think it's a dear little place. And the people are charming."

Rudi made a face. "You say that because you've never seen Berlin. . . ."

The officers at Schlatz were always raving about Berlin. They talked incessantly of it as the zenith of all their ambitions, with its theatres and restaurants, its dancing places, and its 'Weiber,' its women. The glitter of the Weltstadt dazzled them, middle-class provincials as most of them were. But with Rudi von Linz it was different. He was of good family, and had held a commission for eighteen months in one of the regiments of Foot Guards in garrison in the capital. He had never told me the cause of his transfer to the Line, and I had never asked him; but Sonia von Wiltsche confided to me once that Master Rudi had lost more money than he could afford at écarté and had been banished to the infantry at Schlatz as a punishment.

There was a pause. "I suppose," said Rudi slowly, "that you must go straight through to London?"

I gave him a quick look; but his face told me nothing. "I'm afraid so," I replied.

He nodded sombrely. "I never have any luck. Do you know what was in that note I wrote you to-night?"

"Tell me. . . ."
"It was to ask you to give me without fail your address in Berlin before you went away."

"Why?"

He glanced towards the door, then, standing up, peeped cautiously into the corridor. To my surprise he shut the door before coming back to the bed.

"My dear Rudi," I laughed, "are you sure it's quite proper?"

He jerked his head in the direction of the adjoining compartment. "Solche Frechheit! The fellow who has the berth next door was out there in the corridor listening to every word we say."

The incident was to recur to me later. But at the moment it made little impression on my mind, for your average German bourgeois, especially when travelling, is the most pestilentially inquisitive creature alive.

Rudi glanced at his wrist. "We have five minutes left. Listen, Olivia, I'm going to tell you a secret. I've got to go up to Berlin on duty to-morrow."

"Oh, Rudi!" I exclaimed.

He nodded glumly. "I may be there for a week, and I meant to give you such a good time. I had it all planned out. One day I was going to take you to lunch at the Bristol—it's very chic and amusing there; and afterwards drive you round and show you the Kaiser's Palace and all the sights. Then we'd have done a thé dansant at one or other of the hotels, the Adlon or the Esplanade, and dined, perhaps, one night at the Wintergarten on the terrace—that's the big music-hall, you know, with a tremendous blue roof like the night-sky, all dotted with stars. And, of course, we'd have had a grand bummel some evening round the night restaurants, the Palais de Danse, the Mascotte, the Gala—I know them every one. . . ."

"My dear, it sounds entrancing!"
His eyes sought mine pleadingly. "Can't we fix it? I shall be in Berlin by dinner-time to-morrow evening. Why not stay over and dine with me?"

I was silent for a little spell, thinking. The prospect of being given a whirl round Berlin by Rudi was certainly attractive. It would be a last pleasant remembrance to take back to the dreaded monotony of my life at home.

"I might," I said at last.

With a sort of boyish glee he flung his arms about me. "Olivia, you're a darling!"

"Behave yourself, Rudi, you're squashing my frock!" I reproved him. "If I agree to stay over a day, you're not to tell a soul, do you hear? And particularly not the von Hentsches. They're... they're rather old-fashioned, you know, and they'd be horrified at the idea of my going round Berlin with you alone."

Rudi began to laugh. "They'd be worse than horrified if they knew that you and I were going to bummel until daylight. . . ."

I shook my head at him. "Now, Rudi," I said, "I didn't promise that. . . ."

He caught my hands. "Beautiful Olivia, you wouldn't be so unkind. The Palais de Danse doesn't get going until after midnight. You shall see how amusing it is. You can easily stop over: what does one day matter?"

"And the disagreeable consequences that Dr. von Hentsch spoke of?"

"Unsinn! Twenty-four hours won't make any difference. The main thing was for you to leave Schlatz. . . ."

I drew my hands away. It was hard to refuse Rudi anything. "I shall make no promises." I glanced out of the window. "We shall be starting in another minute. Hadn't you better be getting back to the platform?"

"Not till I know where we are to meet. Where shall you put up in Berlin?"
"At the Continental. Do you know it?"
"Of course. May I fetch you there at eight o'clock?"
I nodded. The adventure began to please me. It looked as though I should have a full time in Berlin.
"I've registered my heavy luggage through to London. I shall have to come as I am. Does it matter?"
"Not in the least. In Berlin we are not so stiff as you are in London." He stood up. "Beautiful Olivia, you don't know how happy you've made me. I shall be eating my heart out until I see you again." He put his arms on my shoulders. "Auf wiedershen, my dear. You promise me it's 'auf wiedershen'?"
"I promise," I said....
Yes, I let him kiss me. After the strain of the past twenty-four hours I yearned for sympathy; and, seeing him go, I felt suddenly oppressed by the prospect which my journey unfolded. Of course, I wasn't in love with him: he was too young; besides, I had never fallen in love with any man then. But he was youthful and beautiful and compelling. And I gave him back his kiss.
Immediately thereon a harsh voice outside shouted, "Abfahren!" Crying " Auf wiedershen!" the boy snatched up his cap and gloves and hurried out.
Clanking heavily over the points, the Berlin train bore me away into the Unknown....

As I was going to get up so early, it did not seem worth while undressing. But I had changed into the kimono which I had in my suit-case and, propping up my silver mirror on the little folding table, began to cream my face for the night.

I was wondering about this Floria von Pellegrini, who she was, and how I should gain access to her. She was an opera singer, Major Abbott had said, and he had suggested that, if I called early, pretending to have something to sell,
I might succeed in being left alone in the salon long enough to retrieve the envelope from the gramophone cabinet.

Well, the plan sounded all right. But suppose it went wrong? What if the maid—Hedwig, wasn't that her name?—what if Hedwig demanded to see what I was offering for sale and left me on the mat while she went to submit it to her mistress? Obviously, I should have to take some article or other with me.

But what? Wouldn't it have to be something rather luxurious to interest an opera singer? The only thing I could think of belonging to me was my Manila shawl that Daddy gave me; and I shouldn't dream of selling that. Perhaps if I were to put a stiff price on it...

As my fingers mechanically worked the skin-food into my face, I felt a little tremor of excitement gain me. The adventure was beginning to interest me. I was never able to withstand the lure of romance. It must be in the Dunbar blood. Our family is one of those which have helped to lay out the Empire, like a golfer professional laying out a course, only instead of putting down greens we have left graves. Ancestors of mine are buried all along the trail of Empire, from that Major Dunbar who was killed with Braddock in America, to my father's elder brother, dead of dysentery, whom Daddy buried at Wady Halfa, on the way up to Khartum with Kitchener. All we have to show for it are some swords on the wall, a few trophies, and a line of medals in a glass case. But, though the last of our branch of the Dunbars is out of the Army List now, I expect the old strain endures.

Daddy used to say that my character was Nature's attempt to compensate her blunder in giving him daughters instead of sons. I should have been a soldier if I had been a boy; for I spent my childhood at Aldershot, so brave, in those pre-war days, with scarlet and gold, symbols of the blood and glory of Britain's fighting past.
I revelled in the perpetual stir of the Lines, the rolling drums, the gay bugles, the musical cavalry calls, the gallant din of Grand Reveille that, on summer mornings, would pluck me, a little maid, from my bed, and at night the skirling pipes of Daddy’s Highlanders at Tattoo, and, in the ensuing silence, the high notes of the Last Post wailing out of the dark. When I was not yarning with old MacTavish, Daddy's soldier servant who had seen the square break at Tel-el-Kebir, I was browsing among the books in the study, hunting adventure, always adventure.

And now, for the first time in my life, adventure, a Secret Service adventure, had come my way. As the train went roaring through the night, a flutter of pride stirred me at the thought that Fate had made me the comrade of my gallant little Major. I had a curious feeling that with me rode in escort dead-and-gone Dunbars who, in their day, had set out on missions far lonelier and, as it seemed to me then, more desperate, than that towards which the Berlin express was bearing me.

I wanted to prove myself worthy of the family record; but my heart sank when I thought of that club-footed man...

I wiped my face clean and put the mirror away. I left my suit-case unlocked against the morning, but I tucked the glass out of sight, as was my custom when travelling; for once, in a Paris hotel, a silver mirror which I had left exposed to view in a valise had been stolen. Then, making sure that I had bolted the door, I got into bed and turned out the light.

It was broad daylight when I awoke. A knocking at the door aroused me. I heard a key grate in the lock. The attendant appeared with a tray.

"Donnerwetter," he remarked cheerfully, "the gnädiges Fräulein sleeps sound. I thought you were never going to hear me. So, we reach Berlin in thirty-five minutes, and I have made you a cup of coffee."
I looked out of the window. The train was rushing through a dreary region of sand and pine and water, the landscape bathed in the sickly light of a clouded and unfriendly morning. I drank up my coffee, and it did me good. I sprang out of bed and began to dress.

When I opened my suit-case to take out my toilet things, I found my hand-glass lying on the top. The discovery sent me instantly to the table where I had left my purse with the money, my entire available capital, which Dr. von Hentsch had given me. The purse was as I had left it, and the money intact.

But when I examined my suit-case more closely it was to discover that everything in it was topsy-turvy. Nothing appeared to be missing. I realised at once that some one must have visited my compartment in the night and rifled my suit-case. The attendant had, unlocked my bolted door from the outside; therefore, armed with the proper key, anybody else could have gained admission. And worn out as I was, I had slept dreamlessly, heavily. But who? Why . . . ?

With a horrid sense of misgiving I suddenly thought of my neighbour in the next berth, the man in the yellow overcoat, whom Rudi had surprised eavesdropping.

CHAPTER X

I ARRIVE IN BERLIN AND SCORE THE FIRST TRICK

I was fully alive to the gravity of my discovery. Blankly I sat down again upon the bed, the mirror in my hand, while ripple on ripple of chill, nauseating fear swept over me.

Inexorably the train rocked on Berlinwards. Culverts roared thunderously beneath our wheels: spick-and-span stations whizzed frantically past in a dazzle of black and