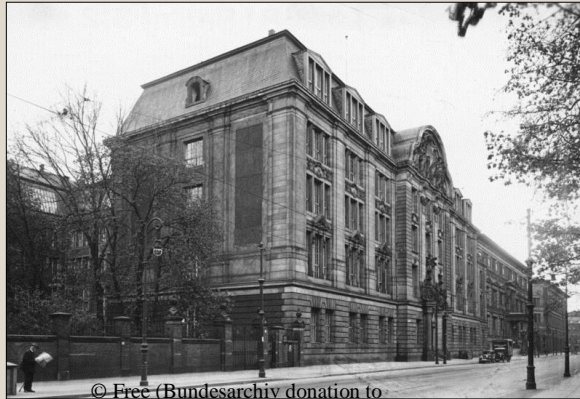


Czernin Case.

(Failure by Austrian Counterintelligence to detect and halt a *femme fatale* operation run by Nazi Germany's Gestapo and Foreign Office, targeting the Austrian Chancellor in Vienna, Austria).



INSIDE THE GESTAPO: HITLER'S SHADOW OVER THE WORLD

(An extract from a wartime & partly-censored [blacked-out pages / lines] book)

by

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CHAPTER XI

THE FATAL FILE

When I entered Heydrich's room, the chief of the Gestapo introduced me to the tall, fair gentleman sitting at his desk:

" This is the man whom you'll find very useful in Vienna, Herr von Papen. ..."

It was the first time I had met Hitler's former Vice-Chancellor, although I had felt his influence (and his blunders) in my work in the Saar.

I knew that the most contradictory rumours were connected with his person. Some said that he was one of the most bitter enemies of the present system and was doing his best to engineer Hitler's fall; others maintained that he was in reality one of the mainstays of the Nazi regime, and attained his results because Hitler's enemies trusted him and thought that he belonged to them.

We in the Gestapo were intrigued by him and felt a certain respect for his achievements. Everybody knew that it was he who, during the war, had organized the formidable

German espionage system in the United States—and it was only a minor blemish on his efficiency that his brief-case had been stolen in the New York "L", and rather important documents discovered.

The Americans called him Secret Agent No. 7000—and now when I was facing him I felt a pardonable curiosity what work I was expected to do under him.

At that time von Papen was Germany's ambassador in Austria.

Everybody thought that in such chaotic times Germany could not have chosen a better man for the position. They did not choose a diplomat of the old school; for von Papen, even if he had been an attache in Washington before and during the war, was nothing if not up-to-date. He had to be.—the new Germany expected everyone to turn over a new leaf and begin on a virgin page.

His task was much more than a simple diplomatic representation of his country. The new ambassador to Vienna had to keep up good and amiable relations with the Chancellor of Austria, and at the same time conduct the underground movement which had almost died in consequence of Schuschnigg's energetic measures. He had to know what was going on in Schuschnigg's closest retinue and to follow all the plans of the Austrian Government.

No, an old-fashioned diplomat certainly wouldn't do in Vienna. This was no ordinary embassy. Only a man who knew what a secret agent had to do could cope with the situation ; a man who had done such work in the past. When Hitler appointed von Papen ambassador to Austria in 1934 he could not have chosen a better man.

Three years passed and von Papen had done excellent work. The brilliant methods which he employed were such outstanding movements of underground diplomacy that they were destined to become shining examples of double-crossing and intrigue, to be taught in the future schools of Macchiavellism.

His first action was to create a pleasant and almost friendly relationship, a neighbourly contact, with Schuschnigg. This went smoothly ; von Papen succeeded in a very short time in working out the first agreement between Austria and Germany. Now he no longer was the spy of an enemy state, but the likeable representative of a friendly country.

The second task was to remove from Schuschnigg's closest circle all those who might prove obstacles to his later plans. One of the first was Prince Stahremberg, Germany's stubborn and dangerous enemy. In every speech he held, in every article he wrote, he repeated :

" Austria will never become a German colony. . . ."

But Stahremberg failed just at the moment and had to be satisfied with a minor part in the future, when everybody had thought that he would succeed in ousting Schuschnigg and take the helm of Austria.

Von Papen did brilliant work when he engineered Stahremberg's fall and reduced him to the status of a private individual.

Nor did he fail in his third task. By stubborn and tenacious work he slowly organized his agents at the police, the law courts, the different state institutions, and even in the Chancellery. He had someone everywhere on whom he could count, " just in case. . . ."

This was the moment when Germany changed her policy towards Austria. The ground was well

enough prepared to start a decisive action on a large scale. And then—suddenly it seemed as if everything was lost. . . .

That was the reason why von Papen returned to Germany and had a long conference with Himmler and Heydrich.

It was almost a catastrophe.

What had happened ?

Heydrich only gave the answer to this question when I was left alone with him in the privacy of his office.

" This Jesuit Schuschnigg," he said, " wants to — blackmail the Fuehrer. I really wouldn't have thought that he had it in him. . . . He has a file containing data against Adolf Hitler and now he threatens to publish it in a 'White Book.' "

" Well, what are the contents of this file ? "

Heydrich shrugged.

" This impudent Schuschnigg is so sure of his position, so sure of the data contained in the file that he sent a copy through Mussolini to Hitler himself. Your task will be—and that's why I sent for you—to get the original documents of the file ... at any cost."

" But . . ."

" There is no but. This file has cost three lives up to now. It doesn't matter if it costs a dozen more ... we have to get it."

He took a blue file from his desk and gave me the copy of the tragic Schuschnigg documents.

" Sit down here in my room and go through it," he told me. " These copies are all typewritten, which seems to prove that they have not been photographed. This is our only hope, because otherwise not only the originals but the negatives would have to be destroyed."

I sat down and began to read. I want to emphasize here and now that I have never seen the originals of these documents. They may have been forgeries. I have no proof that they were genuine. But they certainly caused such a havoc as no file in the world has ever caused before.

Heydrich had prepared three groups. The first was headed :

Documents collected by General Schleicher

General Schleicher, who was the last Chancellor of pre-Nazi Germany, and who had so tenaciously withstood Hitler's demands, wanted to prevent the Fuehrer's coming to power. At the last moment when the Nazis had become the strongest political party in Germany, he tried to make Gregor Strasser Chancellor in Hitler's place. During his own chancellorship he began to collect the documents against Hitler.

His file dealt mostly with Hitler's war service.

Adolf Hitler was an Austrian subject. On the 3rd August, 1914, he sent a petition to Louis III, King of Bavaria, asking permission to serve in the Munich 16th Regiment, as he was living at Munich and did not want to go to Linz for mobilization.

The different propaganda books of Nazism have always maintained that Hitler had spent the four years of the war in the front-line trenches, and fought in such a heroic way that he had earned the First Class Iron Cross.

But the investigations conducted by Schleicher purported to have ascertained the following facts:

Hitler never served in a trench or in the front line.

After he had been attached to the 16th Munich Regiment (called the Lister Regiment after its commanding officer) he was trained and sent with his troop to the Western Front. There he was attached to the Regimental Staff, where he served as a runner.

Naturally the Regimental Staff was never in the front line; according to the lie of the land it took up a position at a distance of 4-5 or 10-15 kilometres from the trenches. Here they constantly needed a few efficient and trusted men. These runners had two kinds of service. First they had to care for the comfort of the officers and to do all the dull office work; second — and this was the most dangerous, but also the most coveted work— they had to remit orders to the different company commanders. The runners liked this work best, because such errands sometimes took them to the hinterland or the neighbouring regiments. Of course, sometimes such work could become very dangerous if the runners had to pass through ground shelled by the enemy taking the orders to the front lines.

"There is no doubt," the report continued, " that such service can well be construed as front line service. But contrary to the romantic legends that Hitler had fought in the trenches, it has been ascertained that he never spent a day there."

The Schleicher documents also dealt with Hitler's rank of corporal.

Whoever knew what a terrible scarcity of N.C. officers there was in the German Army about the end of the war, must find it highly mysterious that Hitler, being a good and efficient soldier, was still a corporal after four years.

There was only one answer. If he had been promoted to a sergeant he could not have remained a runner. The Regiment Staff had a strictly limited strength; all supernumerary men, especially N.C.O.s and officers, had to be sent at once to the front line.

Now either his superiors liked Hitler so much that they did not want to promote and thereby lose him; or it was Hitler himself who avoided promotion to keep his comparatively safe berth.

The file included the results of the investigation which Schleicher had ordered to ascertain how Hitler received the Iron Cross, first class. About the end of the war it was comparatively easy to get the second class Iron Cross if a soldier served at the front and was honest. If Hitler had got that, nobody would have been surprised. But he owns the first class Iron Cross. . . .

This could be given only by the Kaiser, or the High Command of the Army, to whom the Kaiser relegated his prerogative during the war. Even officers received it only for outstanding achievements, great personal bravery, and if a corporal became the proud owner of it he must have done something quite extraordinary and be a hero of the first rank.

Immediately after the war the history of the Lister Regiment was published. It enumerated all the outstanding deeds of privates and non-commissioned officers and recounted the heroic deeds of all the officers. But there was no mention of Hitler's name in this imposing book.

Now all the Nazi propaganda pamphlets and books told the story in great detail of how Hitler was awarded the Iron Cross, first class, because single-handed, with only a revolver in his hand, he captured twelve French soldiers with their machine-gun. But why this reticence of the official history of the Lister Regiment about such a wonderful exploit when much less worthy deeds were described at considerable length ?

Careful investigation—during which all the comrades of Hitler were questioned.—elucidated the fact that Hitler had received this high German decoration not during, but after the war. It was Field-Marshal Ludendorff, whose connections with the Fuehrer were well known, who awarded the Iron Cross, first class, to the Fuehrer, some time after the war.

These were the contents of the Schleicher file. Hitler and his staff knew very well that the General was collecting these documents against him. A great many attempts were made to rob Schleicher of them. When, a year after his coming to power, on the 30th June, 1934, the time came to " eliminate " the enemies of the Nazi regime, Schleicher and his wife were among the victims. This file was not the least reason for Schleicher's death.—but afterwards when the Gestapo went carefully through his papers, they discovered to their dismay that the original documents were no longer in his possession.

He had sent them to Dolfuss, Chancellor of Austria. . . .

Documents collected by Dolfuss

The second bundle in the blue file contained the documents collected by Dolfuss. The small-statured but big-hearted Austrian Chancellor must have known that by such a personal file he might be able to check Hitler. The great number of the documents showed what care and energy he spent on gathering them together.

When Dolfuss became Chancellor of Austria, Hitler had been the cynosure of the world's interest for a considerable time, yet strangely enough little was known about him. Nobody could explain how he came to bear the name Hitler, as his father had been called Schueckelgruber. Nobody knew how many brothers or sisters he had . . . the greatest mystery enveloped the Fuehrer's private life, family relations, origin.

Chancellor Dolfuss, after receiving the documents collected by Schleicher, started to investigate Hitler's secret. His task was not very difficult; as ruler of Austria he could easily find out about the personal data and family of Adolf Hitler, who had been born on Austrian soil.

Through the original birth-certificates, police registration cards, protocols, etc., all contained in the original file, the Austrian Chancellor succeeded in piecing together the disjointed parts of the puzzle, creating a more or less logical entity.

And there was one thing—whether true or not.—which might have been a dangerous weapon in Dolfuss' hands.

This was what he had ascertained:

A little servant maid from Upper Austria called Matild Schueckelgruber came to Vienna and became a domestic servant, mostly working for rather rich families. But she was unlucky; having been seduced, she was about to bear a child. She went home to her village for her confinement. Her little son, being illegitimate, received his mother's name and was called Alois Schueckelgruber. (In some documents, Schickelgruber).

In spite of his origin he grew up to be an honest, kindly man entering the civil service and becoming a minor clerk in a tax office. He married very early; his first wife was Anna Glaser-Hoyer. Their only child, Ida Schueckelgruber, died in infancy; Alois Schueckelgruber buried her at the side of his first wife in the graveyard of Braunau.

His second wife was Franciska Malzsalberger. Their union was blessed with one son who bore his father's name. He became a waiter, emigrated to England and there married Brigid Dowling, daughter of an Irish cobbler. Later he divorced her and returned to Berlin, where he opened a restaurant. He also adopted the Hitler name when his father changed his own name. The second child, born of Alois Schueckelgruber senior's second marriage was called Angela ; she married a Viennese named Raupal.

Alois Schueckelgruber was rather unlucky with his wives. Franciska also died; the honest clerk was not very young when he met his third wife, Clara Poltzl.

Clara's father was a well-to-do farmer. He did not want his only daughter who was quite a heiress to marry a middle-aged man, but Clara insisted stubbornly. Alois was still a handsome man, and he had such a nice uniform. At last rich Poltzl relented; but when his future son-in-law showed him his birth certificate, he was rather horrified to see that Alois was illegitimate. The certificate said that the father's name was unknown, his mother was Matild Schueckelgruber.

After that Poltzl demanded that Alois should give up his " shameful name " and take a new one.

And Alois Schueckelgruber wrote a petition himself (this was also contained in Dolfuss' file) asking the " hochwohl-georen " Ministry to permit him to change his name. Instead of " Schueckelgruber " he would like to become " Hitler."

But why Hitler ?

This was a totally unusual name among Upper Austrian peasants. It was no more familiar in Galicia where several Jewish families called Hitler were living. How did the honest Alois hit on this rather Jewish name ?

Schueckelgruber himself gave the answer in his petition when he mentioned that the maiden name of his mother-in-law was Johanna Hitler, and he chose it at the request of his father-in-law.

The Ministry granted the petition of the well-deserving minor clerk in the tax office. His original name was a rather funny one in Austria, hardly fitting a " civil servant."

After the legal formalities had been complied with, Alois Hitler married Clara Poltzl. She bore

him three children: Gustav, Adolf, and Paula. All three of them bore the name Hitler.

Gustav died young and was buried in the Linz public cemetery. The second boy became the "Fuehrer," while Paula had been living in Vienna for a long time before she joined her brother in Berchtesgaden.

Now followed the most important and perhaps most compromising piece of the Dolfuss "collection." I must repeat that I have no proof of its genuineness. It may have been manufactured as a fitting weapon against the Nazi chief, who was not squeamish about his own weapons.

Certainly it was rather shattering in all its consequences.

This document aimed at clearing up the great life tragedy of a small Upper Austrian maid—after more than sixty years. Matild Schueckelgruber, grandmother of Adolf Hitler, had come to Vienna to get a job. And there something happened to her which was a common thing in the great capital, and yet a private catastrophe; she was bearing a child under her heart; she had to go home to her village and face the disgrace.

Where was the little maid serving in Vienna? This was not a very difficult problem. Very early Vienna had instituted the system of compulsory police registration. Both the servants and the employers were exposed to heavy fines if they neglected this duty. Chancellor Dolfuss managed to discover the registration card.

The little, innocent maid had been a servant at the..... Rothschild Mansion. . .

...and Hitler's unknown grandfather must be probably looked for in this magnificent house.

The Dolfuss file stopped at this statement. But in the margin of the protocol there was a note in the Chancellor's characteristic handwriting :

" These data ought to cheer the writers of history who may want to publish some time in the future the true life story of Hitler. Here is the psychological explanation of Hitler's fanatical hate of the Jews. Hitler, born in peaceful Upper Austria where there was hardly any anti-semitism, was filled already in his childhood with a burning hatred of the Jews. Why? This may be the answer. ..."

And now I was reading the third bunch of documents in the file, the data collected by Schuschnigg.

He had continued the work started by Schleicher and Dolfuss. He knew very well that this file had an immense importance for Hitler. Hadn't it already cost the life of two eminent politicians? And Schuschnigg wanted to continue his investigations in the most dangerous directions. His collection was in two parts.

The first consisted of documents trying to elucidate the origin of Johanna Hitler, the Fuehrer's grandmother, and the facts of when and how the Hitlers came to Upper Austria.

The second part contained documents referring to the mysterious suicide of Hitler's niece, Greta Raupal. Schuschnigg had succeeded in finding out more about this tragic affair than anyone else, although even he could not discover all the motives and details.

These were the main contents of the blue file which I read in Heydrich's room. I must confess that I was rather shocked when I closed it. This file had killed men and now I had read it. What would be my fate—after being initiated into all these uncomfortable secrets ?

Only four living persons knew its contents—Schuschnigg, Mussolini, Heydrich, and myself.

Who would be the first to suffer for this dangerous knowledge ?

For the time being I " only " had the seemingly impossible task of robbing Schuschnigg of the original documents.

Twenty-four hours later a Berlin stamp merchant, Karl Krause, took a room in the Viennese Hotel Metropole. It was a very modest room. Karl Krause—your humble servant —had arrived with a regular passport in the Austrian capital; he had a bona fide Austrian visa; he was an honest stamp merchant standing above all suspicion. Should they search his hotel room during his absence they would find nothing incriminating ; just a man interested in stamps who intended to spend a few weeks on business in Vienna.

I met von Papen at the German embassy. He explained the situation frankly.

Up to the time he had succeeded in getting two members of Schuschnigg's closest entourage into his services. One of them was the Baron Froehlichstal of whom it was common knowledge that he was not only Schuschnigg's friend, but his intimate, personal secretary and alter ego.

The Chancellor did not make a single step without him; he could not bear the absence of the well-dressed, suave, gay young man for a single day. They had become friends during their student days. Schuschnigg had been educated at the famous Stella Matutina College of Feldkirch; when he became Chancellor he recruited his closest collaborators from the former pupils of this ancient institution.

Baron Froehlichstal was known everywhere as the most devoted soldier of the Austrian ideology who proudly wore the red-white-red emblem of the Vaterlaendische Front; he was known as a man ready to die for the ideals of Dolfuss, the great thought of an independent Austria and who enjoyed the fullest confidence of the Chancellor. When von Papen told me that he had " won over " this man to our side, I could hardly restrain my admiration for his diplomatic talents.

The other man was none other than Guido Schmidt, the young diplomat, also a former pupil of the Stella Matutina. He was the son of a very rich family. While in the case of Baron Froehlichstal I could not imagine what had made him change his loyalty, I realized what good reasons Guido Schmidt had for such a step. The family estates and factories of the Schmidts were all situated in the Sudeten German territories of Czechoslovakia. Germany was already preparing her drive and Guido Schmidt wanted to be sure that his patrimony would be safe in case of a German annexation.

The situation was rather difficult at the moment. Both Guido Schmidt and Baron Froehlichstal informed von Papen that Schuschnigg kept the fatal file in his own flat. My task was to find out the best way to open the small safe in the Chancellor's study and to steal the famous documents.

All this had to happen without attracting attention.

But for the time being our plans were foiled before we began. It was Mrs. Schuschnigg who proved the obstacle with an almost miraculous intuition. Once one of my men succeeded in getting into the Chancellor's study disguised as a telephone mechanic, but Mrs. Schuschnigg would not leave the room for a moment till he had finished his " work."

At the same time Froehlichstal and Schmidt brought disquieting news to von Papen.

" Something's wrong," both of them said. " Schuschnigg trusts us, but he's sensing some danger.

Up to now he has written even his most confidential letters in the Chancellery and conducted his most secret discussions there ; but of late he has taken his important papers home and either he writes his letters himself or dictates them to his wife. His private conferences are at his flat, the only witness his wife.

The same applies to the confidential telephone conversations he has with Paris, London, Rome ..."

The counter-measures we took against Schuschnigg's new tactics proved only partially successful. I succeeded in organizing a " watchers group " in the Viennese telephone exchange, but its efficiency was not continuous. Only when our people were on duty could we control the telephone talks ; the same applied in the General Post Office. Sometimes we managed to get one of Schuschnigg's personal letters for an hour, to copy it before sending it on—but this was not enough. Nor did we succeed in placing a microphone into Schuschnigg's study or in tapping his telephone line.

Our progress was extremely slow and I was afraid of losing Heydrich's confidence and favour. I returned to Berlin to report to him and he gave me advice—almost classic in its simplicity.

" If a man doesn't succeed, use a woman. Why didn't you try it ? You must find someone who can win Schuschnigg's confidence—or his wife's."

The idea was brilliant. It conformed to the best standard of spy stories. The beautiful blonde spy who spins her silken net around her victim, ferreting out all his secrets. . . . Yes, the idea was brilliant, but there was no way to realize it. We could have easily found a lady—but Schuschnigg was the type of man who was completely unassailable even by the charms of the loveliest woman on earth. A strong believer, a deeply religious Catholic, an intimate friend of Prelate Seipel, he lived almost a monkish life; he was a recluse who seldom went to parties, did not drink ... he was almost a priest himself.

And greatest of all our trouble ; he was in love with his .. deeply in love. She was the only being with whom he discussed everything, to whom he dictated his confidential letters. Sometimes when he talked to Rome or Paris, his wife went along to the telephone exchange and watched the operator to ensure absolute secrecy.

As for Mrs. Schuschnigg—she lived almost exactly like her husband. She was suspicious, reserved; it would be very difficult for the most cunning woman to gain her confidence.

And yet I had already found the woman who was destined to seal Schuschnigg's fate.

She was the ideal choice for the difficult part.

Countess Vera von Fugger. . . .

This lovely woman in the early thirties had almost been born into high politics. Her uncle was the famous Count Czernin, the last Foreign Secretary of the Emperor Francis Joseph. Before the war he was considered as one of the chief actors in European politics. Countess Vera was educated in the atmosphere of high diplomacy—but after the war the famous family became very poor indeed. Only the illustrious name and the high rank were left. The Czernins had trusted the Monarchy too much—they forgot to send their money to neutral states. Czechoslovakia confiscated all their estates. It was the duty of the lovely Vera to re-gild the somewhat faded glory of the Czernins. And so she married Count Leopold Fugger von Babenhausen.

The Count was also the scion of an ancient family. His people were very rich, but Vera's husband would only become so after his mother's death, and the old lady kept a tight hold on the purse-strings. Nora von Fugger, the mother, gave him an allowance on which he could barely subsist—if he wanted to live according to his rank. His mother did not like Vera very much; she would have preferred a better match and rather despised the poverty-stricken Czernins.

So after all this marriage was not a success. Vera did not attain the goal she had set herself. She was thirty-two . . . and old Countess Nora clung so tenaciously to life that she seemed likely to hold on for another thirty years. Would she have to live in poverty for all that time ? Countess Vera had other plans—one day she simply left Countess Fugger. When a woman is thirty-two she cannot afford to wait if she wants to realize her dreams. . . .

But what could a divorced lady do if she had no money ? The war had ended; standards had changed and work was no disgrace for ladies of the aristocracy. The name of Czernin sounded well enough to get a job for Countess Vera with the Phoenix Insurance Company where she became a department leader. No work was expected of her ; she simply " loaned out" the Czernin name so that the salesmen could do better business in the circles of landowners and monarchists.

I could pride myself on my choice.

Vera Fugger-Czernin was ideal from every point of view. Excellent family, wonderful manners, great beauty, widespread connections. She had a cunning, refined brain—and, as for the most important part, the whole family was very poor and so she would be willing to play the part which we set her.

Still Schuschnigg was unapproachable. Von Papen gave a big party at the embassy and presented the two to each other. But they exchanged only a few, commonplace words. Nothing more. . . .

" A very difficult task . . ." said Vera. " This man's defences are too strong."

" Yes, even she may fail," said von Papen,

But fate came to our aid.

Next day startled Vera read the tragic news of Schuschnigg's motor accident. Mrs. Schuschnigg, his devoted wife and faithful helpmate, was killed. . . .

I know perfectly well that to this very day many people attribute this stupid and inexplicable accident to the Gestapo. But although I know that apart from Himmler and Heydrich nobody

could tell what the Gestapo had done, I must maintain that in this case it was pure accident which cost Mrs. Schuschnigg's life. The Gestapo had nothing to do with it.

On July 13th Schuschnigg lost his wife. While the whole of Austria sympathized with him in his bereavement; while von Papen visited him officially to offer the condolences of the Third Reich—we knew that we had made a great step forward. ...

That hidden safe and the fatal file would be ours as soon as the Chancellor, suffering from a heavy spiritual depression left his flat for the first time. His study would remain unguarded—and we could get the documents at last.

For long days Schuschnigg did not leave his rooms. When at last, he returned to the Chancellery, we were startled to find out that he had cautiously removed the file himself and taken it along—not to the Chancellery, but to the Vienna branch of an important American bank.

Short of burgling the vaults of the bank and killing a great many people we could not get hold of the coveted documents.

Twenty-four hours later I left Vienna, disappointed in my hopes. There was nothing I could do and Heydrich had new work awaiting me.

It looked as if all our work had failed.

But three months later I was again in Vienna. And now I could see with satisfaction that we were again making progress.

Von Papen had again worked brilliantly.

After Mrs. Schuschnigg's death the road was more or less open for Countess Vera; now she had been able to get into Schuschnigg's confidence.

During my second visit I met von Papen only for a short time. I gave him Heydrich's message; Countess Vera was not to forget for a moment the fatal file ; she had to find some pretext and persuade Schuschnigg to remove it from the safe of the American bank.

Her relation to the Chancellor was close enough by this time to make such a request possible . . . she could even find some plausible reason for it.

Her task had been not so difficult after all. Even a woman of less brains and beauty could have tackled it.

The Chancellor was a lonely man, almost broken by the blows of fate ; he was living helplessly, unhappily in a large town ; he still guarded the memory of his wife and took care of his ailing little son. . . .

It was child's play for a skilful woman to spin a net for him. And Vera solved her problem in less than four weeks.

She visited the Chancellor ostensibly on behalf of the League of Austrian Catholic Women and expressed the deep sympathy of her whole sex. Next day she had a discussion with Schuschnigg representing a committee of distinguished ladies who wanted to take care of the orphaned little boy. ... A new orphanage had been built by the League of Austrian Catholic Women—they

wanted to call it after Mrs. Schuschnigg who had died so tragically and, of course, needed the consent of the Chancellor. . . . The home for crippled children wanted to invite the little Schuschnigg boy to a party. The Chancellor was very busy—and Countess Vera, who had brought the invitation, took the small boy in her own car. . .

She was inexhaustible in producing new and new ideas. Old General Schuschnigg felt very flattered when the beautiful Countess Vera Czernin visited him in his villa at the shores of Lake Garda and asked him to accept the presidency of a new patriotic association. The retired father of the Chancellor was happy that he had not been wholly forgotten; a warm and pleasant friendship was born between him and the young Countess. After a few weeks she was a familiar guest at the villa . . . and when the Chancellor visited his father, he found Countess Vera there in the company of his brother, Walter Schuschnigg, manager of the Radio Ravag. The lovely young woman almost belonged to the family; the old general addressed her as his daughter, little Kurt had come to love her dearly. . . .

It was fine and highly skilful work. . . . Countess Vera had reason to be proud. She had certainly earned her reward. Her " act" would become a classic example.

Vienna began to take notice. There was no doubt about it; a fine and gentle romance was being born at the Belvedere. The jovial Viennese were not at all shocked by the behaviour of their popular Chancellor. They had shared his misery and now when he seemed to find new interest in life, they did not grudge him his happiness. They thought that with the lovely, gay Countess Vera at his side he would be better able to carry on the fight for an independent Austria.

And the later news coming from the Belvedere seemed to confirm the idea . . . this lonely man, who had nobody to support and befriend him, had found the great romance of his life. He hardly made a secret of his feelings.

The Chancellor and Countess Vera spent three weeks together in St. Gilgen. ... It was only for appearance' sake that she kept her flat on the Graben; she spent most of her time in the Belvedere. Schuschnigg bought her a beautiful villa near Vienna where they stayed over the week-ends.

And Vienna slowly got used to the idea ; after the year of mourning Schuschnigg would marry the beautiful Countess. After all there could be no difficulty. Schuschnigg was a widower, the Countess legally divorced. Of course, the Church did not acknowledge such a divorce—but the Pope was free to give his consent in exceptional cases.

Would Schuschnigg, the Roman Catholic Chancellor, create such an example ? Yes, he would.- He started the necessary proceedings. The Archbishop of Vienna was the first forum; he sent it on to the Primate of Salzburg and then the petition went on to Rome. No doubt, the Holy See will understand

An idyllic time followed—the finest months in Schuschnigg's tragic life. There was no cloud on Austria's sky. Quiet and order within the frontiers. Since von Papen had become ambassador, Germany had behaved herself. He reassured Austria again and again that Germany did not want the Anschluss; she only wanted to live in peace with her Austrian kinfolk.

Guido Schmidt, the Foreign Secretary, gave optimistic interviews to the Press. There was no danger; Austria's independence had been guaranteed—not by the Western Powers, but by Mussolini. Mussolini had already shown Hitler that ten millions of Italian soldiers would occupy

the Brenner if the German Fuehrer dared to attack Austria.

Schuschnigg seemed to have changed. Those who met him during these months noticed the change. His face became brighter, he could laugh again, he had new plans and ideas ... the horizon seemed to have opened to him, showing far and fine vistas.

He was only in his late thirties and on the pinnacle of his career. Did the thin, bespectacled law-student who was taken a prisoner by the Italians during the War ever dream that twenty years later he would become the dictator of Austria ?

Austrian school-children were already learning his life-story. It was a brilliant career. When he returned from the Italian prison-camp, most of his fellow-students were idling helplessly, trying to find some place in the new life. He had already finished his studies in law ; a few years later he became an M.P.—and the favourite of Prelate Seipel. It was Seipel who raised him from the rank and file; and when he lay dying he nominated Schuschnigg as his successor.

He was hardly thirty when he became Minister of Justice in the Buresch cabinet. When Dolfuss was killed, he was a member of the triumvirate guiding Austria's destiny. He seemed to be the weakest, the softest of the three—everybody thought so and the newspapers voiced the same opinion. But a short time afterwards this weak man was holding the helm of the ship of state alone. Who could doubt that Schuschnigg was Austria's real ruler ?

During these happy months he went about his work with an easy heart. Everything seemed to be quiet and settled.

A happy and contented man is always less suspicious—less cautious—than one oppressed by grief. That was the only explanation why the Chancellor did not notice the things going on around him.

Von Papen had continued his tremendous work. A few months passed and there was hardly a man in Schuschnigg's closest circle who was not in Papen's pay. There was no magic about it; such things could be organized quite simply with some money and more tact. Schuschnigg had no conference, did not write a letter about which Germany would not have known.

Appointments of civil servants were subject to von Papen's secret approval. If Schuschnigg chose someone, either his secretary, Baron Froehlichstal, or Countess Vera or Guido Schmidt notified von Papen ; and the German ambassador always found ways and means to win the candidate for his purposes. If he did not knuckle under, the Countess could easily prevent his appointment.

" This man visited von Papen yesterday," she would say.

" He is an agent of the Nazis . . . you cannot give him the position."

This was all. Schuschnigg smiled gratefully; he thought he had found a wonderful collaborator in the lovely Countess.

Now the problem of the fatal file became important again.

" The documents have been taken back to Schuschnigg's flat ... I hope your trip will have better results now," Heydrich told me when he again gave me the task of procuring the compromising

documents.

The next day Karl Krause, a Berlin stamp merchant, arrived again at the Hotel Metropole and started to live the quiet, busy life of an honest business-man.

Twenty-four hours later the microphone was rigged up in Schuschnigg's study which we could never install in there during the life of his wife. We had tapped his telephone-wire ; it was only the question of days or even hours before the plot which we had prepared so carefully and systematically would finally succeed.

But even now something went wrong.

The first sign of trouble was when the microphone in Schuschnigg's room became suddenly silent. Someone had taken it away and we knew very well that it was not Schuschnigg himself.

This had happened at the moment when the Chancellor announced that he was going to marry the Countess Vera Fugger.

We knew perfectly well that this must not happen. If Countess Vera and the Chancellor became man and wife we would not only lose our best agent but no doubt she would unmask the whole plot. We had to prevent that—at all costs.

Von Papen had enough dummies in high positions to make the necessary moves. Schuschnigg suddenly noticed that everybody was against his marriage. Mayor Schmeitz—a loyal follower of the Chancellor—voiced it first.

" This marriage cannot take place. There are a million unhappy matches in Vienna and husbands and wives all bear their crosses. All these people will say; if Schuschnigg can do it, why can't we do it, too ? Schuschnigg must not marry a divorced woman ... at least not so long as he is Chancellor . . ."

The intelligent Vera soon discovered that this counter-campaign had been started at the German embassy.

I was in Papen's room when Countess Fugger was announced. So I became the witness of the most dramatic encounter I ever saw during my rather chequered career.

Vera Fugger had to experience the same thing as was experienced by a thousand different secret agents if they revolted against their employers.

I had to formulate her death warrant.

" Countess, I am deeply sorry, but if you refuse to cooperate, I shall be forced to present the Chancellor with the proof of your past activity. ..."

It was a painful scene; the most distressing I ever lived through.

But von Papen the diplomat spoke a different language. He offered a seat to the Countess and tried to reassure her.

" You must understand, Countess," he said. " Don't you love the Chancellor ? You do, don't you

? Well, then you must know that you can't become his wife as long as he holds this office. Our aims are identical. Go on helping us and you'll see ; in a few weeks Schuschnigg will become a private individual and there won't be any obstacle to your marrying him. ... Or do you want him to share the fate of Dolfuss ? " he added significantly.

The unhappy woman raised her eyes, deeply startled. But the ambassador continued mercilessly:

" You're a clever woman and know as much about the situation as we do. Schuschnigg may still resist—signing his own death-warrant by his obstinacy. You love him—I understand your feelings, but you must make sacrifices for this love ... all of us have the same goal. Schuschnigg must leave his place and in that moment both of us have attained our aims."

Three days later the famous meeting at Berchtesgaden took place.

Historians and publicists describing the tragedy of Austria mostly maintained that the catastrophe was caused by Schuschnigg's acceptance of Hitler's invitation. The Fuehrer received him, their version ran, as a real dictator, he showed him brutally the mobilization plan of the German troops and then presented him with his ultimatum.

The truth—at least according to my knowledge—was quite different.

The fate of ancient Austria was in a woman's hand.

After many delays Schuschnigg decided to go to the fatal meeting, accompanied by Guido Schmidt and von Papen.

He went calmly and composedly because he knew that he could balance Hitler's exaggerated demands.

Schuschnigg knew that Hitler had realized what a fatal weapon that file could be. Should Schuschnigg publish the documents in a " White Book " he would deal Hitler a mortal blow.

Even if he did not succeed in bringing him to fall (it was hardly probable that such a book could be smuggled in a large number of copies into Germany) any Nazi movement abroad would be discredited in the moment when the Fuehrer was shown in the merciless limelight of cold facts . . . not at all complimentary to him.

Schuschnigg had no other aims beyond that. After the White Book had been published there would hardly be a substantial group of Austrians belonging to the underground Nazi movement.

This file, this thick bundle of documents, all original, was in Schuschnigg's study between the steel walls of his safe.

And it was guarded by Countess Vera Fugger.

Himmler and Heydrich were both at Berchtesgaden and in constant touch with the Viennese events. Heydrich's instructions were outspoken, decisive, and strict.

I myself had to open the safe, take the file and prevent even Countess Vera from looking into it.

Early in the morning of the momentous day a member of the Special Service had arrived from

Berlin who was an artist in burglary and could open almost any safe within a few minutes—and without leaving any traces.

I confess that I felt a strange excitement when I arrived with this man at Schuschnigg's flat. His valet led us into the drawing-room. A little later the Countess Vera appeared, behaving as if she already were the mistress of the house. She greeted us pleasantly ; but there was some strange expression on her lovely face which I could not at first fathom.

I was burning with impatience to fulfil my duty and said rather rudely when she sent the servant for some refreshments :

" For God's sake, Countess, we haven't got any time for polite small talk. Everything has been prepared for the transfer of the documents."

She seemed to be surprised.

" The file ? Don't you know that von Papen has made other arrangements ? "

I felt my hands growing cold ; there was a clammy feeling around my heart. For heaven's sake, what had happened— just now when I believed that everything would be all right ?

Countess Vera seemed to be rather startled at my lack of information.

" Baron von Kettler, von Papen's secretary, was here some time ago. I gave him the file and as far as I know he has left Vienna already. Von Papen thought that the documents would be in a much safer place in his secretary's courier's bag which won't be opened at the frontier, than in your hands. Even if you had perfectly organized the smuggling of the file into Germany, you might be exposed to the danger of an over-zealous customs officer."

I thought she had some particularly deep game of her own.

" I ... I don't believe you," I stammered. " How could you open the safe ? "

She smiled and showed me a key.

" Here it is ... the Chancellor gave me the key. The poor man told me that if there should be any danger I should take them away to a safe hiding-place."

In order to convince us she led the way to Schuschnigg's study, opened the safe and showed us the empty inner drawer.

What could we do ?

I had to get in touch with Heydrich ... at once. The whole story was extremely suspicious . . . von Papen must have prepared some devilish intrigue. Perhaps his secretary had already left the country and now, instead of Schuschnigg, Papen would be able to threaten and blackmail Hitler. . .

I rushed to the German embassy to ring up Heydrich. He was furious and almost roared in his despair. But he still had enough presence of mind to give me the instructions : I had to find out which route von Kettler had taken.

We knew that he was travelling by car and I knew its number. But I did not want to alarm the Austrian authorities. What if von Kettler was really going to Berchtesgaden ? Our organization was not strong enough to have an agent in every town on the Vienna-Berchtesgaden route, whom I could have instructed to watch out for von Kettler's car. We were more or less helpless. Hours went on in nerve-racking waiting.

The same tension reigned during the famous meeting at Berchtesgaden, described so often by different minor actors in the drama. Heydrich told me himself it was not true that Hitler treated Schuschnigg rudely and brusquely. But the Fuehrer seemed to be very nervous. He asked Himmler every thirty minutes whether there was any news about the file.

Schuschnigg, of course, had no idea what was going on behind his back. He behaved in a rather superior manner. He knew that he had a weapon in his hand which he could use to the fullest advantage if Hitler should prove difficult.

The forenoon passed and lunch was served.

In the afternoon Hitler broke off the conference; he refused to continue the discussion till the fatal file should have arrived.

We had figured out in the meantime that von Kettler—in case he was trying to reach Berchtesgaden at all.—had to pass the frontier about half-past eight in the evening.

But it was nine o'clock and he had still not crossed the border.

There was deep consternation both at the Viennese embassy and in the mountain chalet of the Fuehrer.

Another hour passed.

Still no news of von Kettler.

Another difficult, tense, painful thirty minutes went by.

And at last, after thirty more minutes the news came: Kettler's car had reached the frontier and . . .

The fate of Austria was sealed.

About 11 p.m., when Hitler knew that we were in the possession of the accursed documents, the discussions could begin again. But they soon took a tragic turn.

" . . . and if you do not fulfil my conditions, German troops will occupy Austria," Hitler ended.

And now tragi-comedy followed.

Schuschnigg replied . . . alluded cautiously to the publication of a " White Book," which would . . .

" Consist of empty pages," the Fuehrer interrupted him ruthlessly. He walked to a cupboard in the wall, opened it . . . and Schuschnigg paled. He recognized the file which he thought safely in his own study. . . .

" What happened ? " he asked himself, losing all his poise and assurance.

At the moment when Hitler received the file, my mission had ended. I had succeeded and Karl Krause, the Berlin stamp merchant, could return to his home.—or rather to the desk in the Gestapo building.

In Austria, history marched on with gigantic strides. On a memorable day Heydrich gave the command with a beaming face:

" Start for Vienna . . ."

And he added, laughing :

" But this time you can leave Karl Krause at home."

No, there was no need of any camouflage now.

The Anschluss had taken place.

It was rather a strange coincidence that I stayed again in the Hotel Metropole. This during these first, feverish days became the headquarters of the Gestapo.

One of the first victims of the Anschluss was.—Baron von Kettler, Papen's secretary. As I found out later, Heydrich had given instructions from Berchtesgaden. A few trusted men were detailed to find out why the secretary had been late —by almost two and a half hours.

The unlucky man tried to explain it by a motor accident. But Heydrich's investigation soon found out that there had been no accident at all. Von Papen had again organized a brilliant coup.

It was at the German ambassador's orders that the secretary received the file in my place. Von Kettler drove to Salzburg where he took a suite in an hotel (the Gestapo found out all about it) and there, in a hundred and fifty minutes, he photographed all the secret documents of the file with the intention of creating a formidable weapon for von Papen's hand. . . .

A few days after the Anschluss von Kettler's bruised body was discovered in the Danube.

The Gestapo knew how to punish.

As for von Papen, everybody knows about his fate. Just before the Anschluss all the German papers announced that he would be appointed Germany's envoy to Turkey. But since the Anschluss no German paper ever mentions his name. According to my information—which may or may not be reliable—von Papen succeeded in sending the photo-copies to London where they are safely guarded. Probably this fact explains why von Papen is still alive. But he had to leave politics and was more or less exiled.

The file had cost the life of another man . . . unhappy von Kettler. A strange and fatal bunch of

documents ; there is hardly anything in world-history to which it can be compared.

During my Vienna days I renewed my contacts with Buerckel and talked over our past co-operation in the Saar. He offered me a job in Austria, but I refused; I felt that my place was in Berlin, in the Prinz Albrechtstrasse. Of course I did not speak to him about the file—it would have been sheer suicide. But anyhow, Buerckel was a much-occupied man in these days and beyond exchanging a few memories and giving me some encouraging words we did not speak much.

My story would not be complete unless I tried to finish it with the little I know about the beautiful Countess Vera's fate.

Her really great task began when Schuschnigg returned to the Austrian capital after the tragic meeting at Berchtesgaden.

Soon after his car drove up to the Belvedere, Schuschnigg and his fair traitress faced each other. It must have been a scene worthy of any romantic novelist's pen. She stood there, without tears in her eyes, and looked at the man who had trusted her so much.

And she bowed her head.

" Yes, it was I ... I who deceived you ... a thousand times in every hour of every day ..."

Schuschnigg looked at her and felt: it must have been the strange will of Fate that ancient Austria should fall because he trusted this lovely woman.

But why wasn't she fleeing ? Now that she had done her task so well, fulfilled the command—why didn't she go to Germany and claim her reward?

The tragedy had taken a curious turn. Only the real expert in feminine psychology could fathom Vera Fugger's heart.

" Everybody is a traitor around you ... all whom you trust. . . Guido Schmidt . . . your secretary and intimate friend . . . the Cardinal with whom you talk every day ... I ... and all the others."

Schuschnigg listened almost dazed to this terrible confession. " But why . . . why did you do it, Vera ? " And now there were tears in her eyes. " This was the only way to save you ... for myself. I didn't want you to share the fate of Dolfuss ... I didn't want you to remain Chancellor . . . and never to be able to marry me . . ."

Schuschnigg may have bent his head too and murmured: " A woman who sacrifices a country for her love . . ." Was everything lost or could the country be saved ?

" A limit must be set," Schuschnigg gave the new parole. And he wanted to save in the last moment whatever there was to be saved. . . .

His whole day was a terrible chase for help; he telephoned to London and Paris; conferred with the Socialists whom he had once sent to prison; he tried to get Stahremberg who had been such an enemy of Hitler; he tried to fight. . . . A plebiscite. . . . But it was too late, the last hour of Austria's thousand-year-old history had arrived. And all through the tense hours Vera, repentant

Vera was at his side. . .

Yes, Countess Fugger was there, trying to do her utmost for Schuschnigg who had forgiven her.

She encouraged him to make his last stand, and when the Nazi troops surrounded the Belvedere, these two were alone ... the Chancellor and Vera. . . .

The Anschluss had taken place ; parades, festivals, and long speeches . . . Guido Schmidt, who was now bragging openly that he had been the secret agent of Germany, went off blithely to Berlin to accept the decorative position which the Fuehrer gave him. The others, Schuschnigg's former associates, all unmasked themselves ... for months they had been obeying the Fuehrer and dancing to the tune of von Papen's pipe. . . .

And Schuschnigg ?

Schuschnigg, the prisoner, received the Papal dispensation and married Countess Vera. As he could not leave the prison of the Hotel Metropole, his father, the old general, led the bride to the altar.

Is Schuschnigg still in the prison established on the third floor of the Hotel Metropole ? Or has he been taken to the Dachau concentration camp ? Will he face a charge of high treason or.—just as von Papen has been interned on his estates —will he have to live in a certain, prescribed circle ?

I am afraid I cannot supply the answer to any of these questions.
