

THE LIBERAL SHORT STORY
LISELOTTE MAKES A KILLING

By Marie Brett-Perring

Liselotte sat stiffly on the edge of her chair, two large red hands reposing, palms upward, on her lap, her mouth grim, her eyes smoldering. She spoke out of stiff lips.

"It is quite natural, gnadige Frau," she said, "and I am not surprised. I have seen it coming for the past six months, ever since that Klara arrived here. She is a very superior person and much better suited to Charles than I am."

I am afraid that I sniffed inelegantly, as I thought of the "superior person" in question. It was all very well for Liselotte to take it so philosophically, but I happened to dislike Klara, and I felt bitterly disappointed in Charles.

Klara was companion to a harmless old Russian doctor who had descended upon Berne a few months after the Bolshevik revolution, and she gave herself aid. She was in the early thirties, a canary-birdish kind of person, with daring, beady eyes and narrow, sardonic mouth; what is usually called vivacious, which means that she talked incessantly and laughed much and too loudly. An offensive type, I thought.

"Charles has ambition, gnadige Frau," Liselotte went on evenly, though that fitful glitter in her eyes indicated emotion, "and you must admit that this Klara is just the mate for an ambitious man. She knows languages — she has mixed with interesting people—she is not just a servant—she has travelled much with the doctor..."

An epidemic of political lectures and meetings had broken out. There were interesting people staying at the Berne Volkshaus, Angelica, Babanova, the old Russian revolutionary, among others, and Liselotte haunted those meetings. I had a shrewd idea that the urge to study her rival, Klara, was not one of the lesser motives for her interest, for the old doctor and his nurse also attended these gatherings and even joined in the debates.

I saw little of Charles these days. To all intents and purposes, our service had been disbanded almost immediately after the maid and lesser agents, like him, paid off and discharged. We were still working, however, trying to piece up the puzzle of post-armistice politics and finding it a heartbreaking game.

Samuel Clot, the Lausanne detective, called on me that day and to him I confided my disappointment in Charles.

"Ambitious is he?" he snorted. Well, if he is ambitious in the right way, he cannot find a better helpmeet than Liselotte: faithful and hard working, full of common sense—a woman in a million she is..."

"But just a wee bit on the stupid side," I said.

"That is as may be," he said darkly, "lately I have had my doubts. But this is not the object of my visit. You know, of course, what is going on? Switzerland is flooded with subversive propaganda and there are certain secret activities which point to a systematically organized revolutionary movement. Very dangerous especially at this moment when peace treaties are in the making, while the whole of Europe is in a state of post-war ferment and nobody knows how and

when things will settle down.

"The Germans will certainly make their profit from it, and they'll do nothing to hamper the tendency, except in their own country. But, on the whole, we of the police believe that the source is somewhere else. Berne is a hotbed of intrigue—that Volkshaus, now—it would be of the greatest interest to know what exactly is going on there."

I knew that the Volkshaus was peopled with Bolsheviks soon after the Treaty of Brest Litovsk had been safely signed and who were orating and propagandizing strenuously.

"It is a fact," Samuel Clot went on ponderously, "that a lot of criminally subversive literature is being distributed all over the country and we are almost certain that the fountain-head is the Berne Volkshaus. But how it is printed and how it is carried away we have no idea."

"Well, what do you want me to do? I presume that you are not telling me all this merely in order to hear yourself speaking, but how I can help I fail to see..."

"You might make an effort," he murmured, "you might remember that I have never had any illusions as to your activity here during the war..."

"Oh, Clot, Clot, blackmail? How naughty of you!" I said flippantly.

"The most dangerous leaflets are printed on a duplicator — mimeographed in fact," he went on. "We have hunted for that machine all over Switzerland. First we thought we had traced it to Lucerne, then to Zurich, and now to Berne..."

"And what does—that you say—look like?" It was Liselotte, who had entered noiselessly and had listened attentively to Clot's last sentences. He turned to her with a wide smile of welcome.

"Ah, ma Liselotte!" he exclaimed. "Now, I'll tell you all about it and you bend your great brain to the task and you may make a killing," he told her and she listened, brow furrowed.

Then, irrelevantly: "Charles is learning electric massage. That Klara teaches him — every evening late, in their suite — and the massage machine goes thump-thump-thump." She withdrew as abruptly as she had come. Clot shot me a glance of mingled amusement and hopelessness.

"Not exactly bright," he murmured, "but the poor girl is worrying about that scoundrel Charles."

She was, undoubtedly. She was tortured, I guess, by the vision of her former fiancee alone with the hated Klara, late at night, in the mezzanine suite which the doctor and his nurse occupied. She must have spied and eavesdropped for hours at their door, secure in that knowledge that none could catch her, since the suite was tucked away in a corner of the floor, on which there were only offices of the Swiss General Staff, and had been expressly given to the invalid doctor because of its privacy and of the fact that the mezzanine floor opened direct on the back terrace of the hotel, at a point where a slight gradient led down into the garden, which made it convenient for his wheelchair.

Fully dressed, Liselotte stood over me that night and shook me gently, whispering:

"Gnadige Frau—come—I have already asked that Samuel Clot—he is curious to know how Charles is learning electric massage — come quick..."

The Lausanne detective, I found, had requested the presence of the manager and had also roped in two of the soldiers who always watched at night in the basement. In silent procession, we crept along the mezzanine floor corridor, to the door of the doctor's suite.

The stillness was complete in that part of the hotel and we stood there, straining our ears for any suspicious sounds. Faintly, we heard the rhythmic thump-thump Liselotte had spoken of.

"That's no electric machine — that's unmistakably the noise the cranking of a handle would make," Clot whispered, puzzled but suddenly excited. He made a sign to the worried manager, who, inserted a pass key into the lock of the door and turned it noiselessly, flinging the door wide at the same time.

We trooped into the narrow hall, Liselotte and I well at the back, the four men in front. An amazing sight greeted our eyes as we stood on the threshold of the sitting room.

Undersized and misshapen, but sturdy looking, now he was standing on his feet, with a curiously fat face, from the middle of which his large nose jutted out like a prom-

ontory, spectacles clinging to his doomed forehead, the Russian doctor leaned over what was unmistakably a small extremely modern duplicator. Charles, in shirt-sleeves, was busy rhythmically cranking a handle and Klara, standing near the receiving tray, deftly collected the falling sheets of printing.

It was easy to reconstruct at a glance the whole camouflaged history of that secret duplicator; the invalid chair, partly dismantled, stood near by—it was obvious that the various parts of the machine fitted snugly into it and none the wiser.

"Clever- neat," Samuel Clot said aloud and took two steps into the room.

Three startled cries greeted him and the pseudo-cripple darted into the bedroom, or rather towards it. But Clot was quicker than he and had him by the collar of his loose house coat and down in an arm-chair in the twinkling of an eye. Klara threw herself on the manager and clawed at his face, with an inarticulate cry of rage. One of the soldiers, grunting something under his breath, seized her by the arm and held her squirming and struggling in a firm grip.

Charles was unmoved. He had seen Liselotte and glared at her. "Ah," he spat out, "a woman scorned—I might have foreseen this..."

"You might have also foreseen other things, my friend," Clot had overpowered his quarry and slipped a pair of handcuffs on the doctor's wrists, for instance that it is unhealthy to be mixed up with Bolsheviks. Sure I knew they were Bolsheviks," he turned to me, "and when I heard of the electric massage machine I began having hopes. Liselotte, my girl, you have made a killing."

But Liselotte had slipped out and I found her rocking herself to and fro on the edge of my bed.

"So poor Charles had joined these Bolsheviks," she wailed as I came in. "I knew something was wrong that way, of lately he was always talking big about the rights of the proletariat and the evils of the capitalist systems. That Clot—he says I have made a killing. I wonder — what have I killed?" The rest was an indistinct murmur, but I caught it and shivered, for she said, brokenly, "Maybe only my heart."

TELEPHONE CALL COSTS \$171.00

Murray-Brighton Telephone Company, Frankford, had its first overseas call terminating on its lines on Thursday morning of last week. This call originated in Czechoslovakia to the Bata Shoe Company, Frankford. The transmission of the conversation was routed through New York City and was first class in every way, according to Mr. J. A. Austin the Manager. The rate is \$24.00 for three minutes, with overtime of \$7.00 a minute. This particular call cost \$171.00.

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