

BOOKS BY  
JEAN MALAQUAIS

*Planète sans Visa*

*Journal de Guerre*

*Coups de Barre*

*Les Javanais*

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IN ENGLISH

*World without Visa*

(TRANSLATION OF "PLANÈTE SANS VISA")

*War Diary*

(TRANSLATION OF "JOURNAL DE GUERRE")

*Men from Nowhere*

(TRANSLATION OF "LES JAVANAIS")

JEAN MALAQUAIS

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WORLD

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WITHOUT

VISA

TRANSLATED BY PETER GRANT

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AT THE FRINGE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN, AT THE EDGE of the hot sunlight playing on the front of the squares and street crossings, piers and docks, the world smelled of musty vaults and cellars. The man, then, took off his smoked glasses, sniffed several times quickly at the air of the narrow street, then cursed between his teeth, which were long and yellow. "*Sacrédié!*" he muttered through his nose. He struck the curbstone a couple of times with his cane and, raising his hand to his menacing hooked mustache, breathed in the odor of his fingers. "*Sacrédié!*" Though for several months he had come this way every day, reaching the same narrow street at the stroke of noon, he had not been able to reconcile himself to the stench of stew and black sweat which crawled in dense effluvia along the walls of this quarter. Not anywhere in the vast world over which he had traveled during his already long life, not in the Modena of his birth nor the low quarters of Alexandria, not in the sooks of Morocco nor the typhus-ridden Odessa of the civil war, nowhere had the old man been conscious of breathing in such inexhaustible exhalations of pestilence and rat poison; exhalations which here seemed to rise from the depths of the Greek middle ages, from the time of the adventurous Phoenician who first had set foot on these shores.—I'm getting choosy, he mused, sniffing his knuckles as one would a phial of smelling salts. My nose is getting particular. It seemed to him that the flavor and smell of all the humanities which had been distilled by the ages came upward to the surface of the present, as if this corner of Marseilles constituted the valley of election, the trunk sewer of the universal purulence.

The man, therefore, had taken off his glasses, had sniffed, had cursed, had struck the curbstone with the iron tip of his cane, had cursed again. Standing still, he delved into his waistcoat pocket, looked at the time—sheltering the flat watchcase in his hand as if it were an animal of great price. He waited, counting the seconds, tall, erect—waited until the sirens had howled over the roofs of the city, a call of hate and panic, a voracious call, desperately thrown back from beyond the deserted and now useless wharves of the great port. Then, as satisfied as if the mechanical shriek had been his own work, his alone out of all the swarming masses of the

city, the man nodded his head in approval and plunged the watch back into the depths of his waistcoat.—Noon, he mused, putting his glasses on again. Noon.

From the door of her kitchen, where an electric bulb shed its vague light, Madame Babayû greeted her customer with a resounding "Hello, Colonel, how's everything today?" The Colonel's answering wave of the hand said that everything was all right. Attentively he chose a place to set down his cane, seated himself with his back to the wall, took off his glasses, rubbed his dry, brittle fingers together. Garlic and squash, braised cabbage and the ferment of overripe melons blended their strong breaths in a rotten-egg smell which impregnated the tiny restaurant, the Bon Aloi, from end to end. "Soup, Colonel?" Madame Babayû intoned in the heroic mode of a cavalry charge. "Soup?" The old man raised a consenting forefinger, soup of course; then he waved his hand in a wide circle, answering the friendly salute of a customer whose leonine visage—so leonine that it always evoked in the old man's mind the leprous physiognomy of Gauguin—sometimes took on the dimensions of a monstrous mask of Christ, swollen with indescribable desolation. Having set out in a round and cordial gesture of greeting, the Colonel's hand came full circle at the Colonel's goatee, and smoothed its point in a caress of familiar protection; and continuing to stir with the other hand the sienna-colored soup which Madame Babayû had served him, he faced the man opposite him.

"*Caro mio*," said the Colonel as though he were resuming an interrupted conversation, "*caro mio*, your generosity is leading you astray—unless it is your appetite."

Cautiously he sipped a spoonful of soup, and another, then passed the back of his hand under his goatee and blew out of his nose. The other, the disillusioned feline, chewed on in silence. The Colonel sipped another spoonful of his soup, presented his patrician face to his vis-à-vis, whose abundant mat of hair all too readily suggested the mane of a bored lion, and, having studied him thoughtfully for a moment, continued:

"My dear friend, you are an omophagist; that's all right—I would even say it's very fine if you have the stomach for it—but why the devil do you have to eat yourself? Remember what Aeneas said to Lausus, son of Mezentius: 'Whither hurriest thou, O man destined to die, and wherefore hardest thou things that are beyond thy powers?'"

He stopped, and turned his attention to his fluid and steaming sienna. The other, without haste, drained a glass of water. One would have said that in his head, the head of a sorely tried lion, a question of grave import was unraveling itself slowly. In the street, in front of the entrance to the restaurant, a half-breed child had squatted in the gutter. The lion put his glass down on the table, seized a fork, and pointed it in the direction of the old Italian.

"*Qué maravilla!*" he exclaimed in the voice of an adolescent. "Wonderful, Señor y Coronel. But who is this Aeneas who dares—*caramba!*—to talk that way? I'm an . . ."

He aimed his fork at Madame Babayû, who was standing at the kitchen door, opened his mouth as one would open a double door, and shouted:

"An omophagist with onions! And make it rare, madame!"

Madame Babayû went "tsk, tsk" to the world at large. Withdrawn in a shadowy corner, a customer, ruminating in solitude, picked up the penciled menu as if to check the spelling of the dish which the man with the face of a worried lion had ordered. The Colonel was preparing to quote another verse of Vergil, but several persons came in one after the other and stamped about, and soon the six or seven tables which Madame Babayû's establishment boasted were occupied, although no one of the customers could be said to enjoy a full share of space. Four persons, two men and two women, installed themselves at the Colonel's table: Marianne Davy—whom the old Italian had nicknamed the Infanta Incantada—a tall, big-boned girl with a nose like a movable pivot, and black hair tied up in a shoelace; Yvonne Tervielle, a blonde with somber, luminous eyes and tanned, almost olive skin; Ivan Stepanoff, stocky, clean-shaven, with a gray and mischievous eye behind his convex rimless glasses; and Youra, Stepanoff's son, a handsome, wild-haired youth who was dressed in a velvet coat and carried a drawing pad under his arm. The Colonel had left his seat, had kissed the women's hands and shaken the men's, had recited two verses of Sophocles which no one understood or made any show of understanding. Four guests had also come and sat down at the table with the man of the leonine visage, who was wearing a plaid shirt open on a chest innocent of hair, and whose fork still seemed to be in his way. Five or six more clients crowded in, blocking the passage between the tables while they waited for an empty place, all calling to each other, exchanging news in French and Spanish, Italian and Russian, German and Polish. With her thumbs half drowned in dishes running over with grease-streaked gravy, Madame Babayû faced the situation bravely, and outside, at the door of the shop, the half-breed infant dipped his behind in the gutter.

"I never saw such a crowd at the consul's office," said Yvonne Tervielle. "You'd have thought a shipment of visas had come in, like a shipment of eggs you didn't need coupons for. You know, Ivan, you might ask Smith if he could get me an appointment. I wasted four good hours there. It's so exhausting."

With his head bent over his plate, Ivan Stepanoff listened in silence.—Four hours . . . He had waited four years—was it only four?—in the Soviet isolation camps, waited for what?—Nothing is exhausting, as long as one is alive, he thought to himself. He slid an oblique glance toward his son, who was munching a radish as he sketched on the drawing pad resting on his knees.—As long as one is alive. The restaurant hummed with voices, with the sound of mastication, with staggering ideas—the Germans at Smolensk, at Tobruk, at Lhassa—and Stepanoff found himself filled with a childlike astonishment: it was so prodigious to be there, to find a taste in this bread made of ground beans and sawdust, to be

making plans to travel, to work, to live.—We aren't worth our share of good fortune, he thought; any more than our share of suffering. An indeterminate sensation of gratitude mounted in him, ridiculous, preposterous, yet tenacious, for this bread that tasted like putty, for the difficult journey, for the possible work—possible in the absolute. He looked at his companion and was about to say something to her regarding Smith and the appointment she wanted to obtain at the consulate; but above the hubbub of conversation, mastication, and staggering ideas the young voice of the man with the face of an abandoned lion climbed to the low ceiling of the room:

"Say there, Colonel! How do you eat an omophagist?"

The Colonel, absorbed by Marianne Davy's account of a film she had been to see the day before, did not hear the question. Marianne Davy talked in fits and starts, breaking off to season her vegetable, to ask for water, to wave to an acquaintance, then took up her story again in the manner of a distracted reader who skips several lines of his text. The tip of her pointed nose had the mobility of a caudal appendage cut on the bias and snipped off at the base. The Colonel followed the young woman's verbal gymnastics with an application both joyous and laborious. She spoke an apparently possible French, and yet her speech seemed to belong to an idiom which was bizarre, to say the least. "Transparent Colonel I'm telling you a fairy . . ." she said with sublime contempt for punctuation. "Transparent never touches the ground six francs it's crazy for a seat how everything's going up the sort of woman Colonel I'd like for you when he takes her away from the san she might be made of crystal you ought to go Chamonix under the snow what a picture I never saw salt like this it's all thing Madame Babayû an order of mashed potatoes please you'll like it Colonel you understand . . ." But the Colonel did not understand. He was not sure whether the Infanta Incantada had bade him see a film, or admire crystals in a sanatorium, or visit Chamonix under the snow, or if she had ordered mashed potatoes for herself or for him—and he did not like mashed potatoes. "An order of spaghetti with tomato sauce, Madame Babayû!" he called, as a precaution, in case his neighbor really intended to pass him the dish which at that moment Madame Babayû was carrying in over the heads of the customers.

"Marianne," he said, "you're an adorable girl. Not very transparent, but adorable. May an old man like me ask your age—I mean ask what age you own to?"

He had met her right here, over a plate of beans prepared by Madame Babayû; here and at the Fier Chasseur Café, a small establishment on the Old Port which had become the meeting place of the bohemian world that had escaped from Montparnasse and the concentration camps. She had amused him immediately, immediately aroused his interest in persons and things that rose above the common monotony; toward her he felt the sharp, pure covetousness of a collector of rarities. He would truly have liked to appropriate her, to keep her under glass as he would have done

with an object worthy of being preserved, and take her out from time to time and make her talk, make her talk.

Marianne talked. Her large blue eyes roved this way and that, she wiggled her nose as someone else would threaten a person with a finger, and she talked. "Twenty-six a pretty blouse Yvonne let me see Youra it's me my word what a curious man you are I'm twenty-six years old you made my mouth too thing I'll be twenty-seven soon where did you buy it . . ." She stopped her sentence as one stops a car going full speed, with a sharp kick on the brake—and the Colonel was delighted. The words she had pronounced were perfectly intelligible in themselves, she had said blouse, curious, mouth, the Colonel knew the meaning and etymology of these words, he could have talked at some length on their derivation in relation to their roots and their simple forms, and yet he did not understand. He did not understand but he was delighted, as positively delighted as when, in his young years, he had heard the gypsy organ grinders on the badly paved squares of Modena.

Marianne swallowed a mouthful of water and said no more.—Where shall I sleep Georges won't let me I'll go to Paris what a brute . . . She was thinking of shelter for the coming night, because Katty Braun, with whom Marianne had been living for the last three weeks, had just been arrested; she thought of Georges, who would not give her a divorce, who refused to give her the matrimonial authorization that she needed to be able to leave the country—this Georges Davy whose name she bore but who was almost unknown to her and less a matter of concern than the cat meowing under the table.—Concern? . . . She detested him, the militant royalist, the connoisseur of Persian art, the bridge fiend, the pig. He would not give her his consent, his signature, why wouldn't he? the—husband. She grimaced, and the tip of her nose wiggled desperately. Maybe if she went to Paris and laid siege to this man who retained so absurd a power at the end of his pen, the—the illiterate. She thought of the trip to Paris, of how to go about it, of the zones, the people who got you through the lines, the currencies, and where to sleep tonight, and tomorrow night. Beneath the high-arched curve of her eyebrows her slightly prominent eyes sped over the customers whose voices crossed each other in the stale odors of warmed-over vegetables; no one, no one she could ask for a corner to sleep in. She rummaged in her purse for her change and her ration card—from now till evening there was still a long series of hours, each hour stuffed with great possibilities. She arose, shook the table in her effort to get free, and, while using her hip as a prow to open a passage, said:

"I'm going to the Chasseur are you giving me this drawing to have a coffee will you come what time is it Colonel . . ."

The Colonel dabbed at his mustache with his handkerchief, pausing to inhale the spirit of his knuckles. He caressed his beard from underneath, softly.

"If I had been Caligula," he said, carefully folding his handkerchief, "if I had been Caligula, I would have made her my Sunday parrot."

Marianne had got into the open and was discussing a fat-ration coupon with Madame Babayû. Ivan Stepanoff smiled into his plate of chick-peas, a smile so fleeting that only Yvonne Tervielle caught it. She too smiled, not less imperceptibly than Stepanoff, as though to assure him that they were in this, and in everything, together. She knew Ivan's reactions better than she knew her own, she understood them in advance and as completely as if they had been explained to her once and for all. She manifested an insight into his actions and attitudes, even the most commonplace, the most natural, the most evidently unmotivated, which induced in Stepanoff a vague feeling of boarding-school comfort, of day-nursery security; and this sometimes caused him brief flurries of impatience. The feeling was not disagreeable in itself: all his life Stepanoff had had a confused, undefined yearning for a shadow of security, of banal bourgeois tranquillity—a mattress without bedbugs, a lump of sugar in his tea, a chunk of coal in his stove; but what annoyed him was Yvonne's faintly ostentatious fashion of displaying her loyalty to him. In her, he was sure, it was an adhesion, without reserve and constantly renewed, to every instant of his existence, past, present, and future.—As if I needed her to approve of me, he thought; as if she could have been, could have become, my wife, unless a mutual loyalty had borne us toward each other always, since the beginning of things. He scanned her secretly, indirectly, her image reflected in his glasses rather than herself: her skin was smooth and lusterless and from her light hair rose an odor of brushed fur, an odor which he perceived with the exactness of a touch.—As if I needed . . . he mimicked himself in thought. He shifted on his chair, trying to get away from the Colonel's pointed knees under the table.—Because, thought Stepanoff, of the two of us it is she who experiences the need—the need to wrap me in the cotton of her kindnesses, in the slightly binding swaddling clothes of her kindnesses. And this is what is important—important to her. The tendency to begin everything and to end everything at oneself. I, me—these are the first words that the first man must have learned to stutter. A proof of strength, of self-affirmation, of divinity perhaps—and surely of blindness. The truth, he thought further, the truth is the "we": the world, and after that the ego. The day and instant I understood that, I was wholly committed to the only humanism there is.

Someone touched him on the shoulder.—Collective egoism, he thought, is an absurdity; that is, egoism in the bosom of the collectivity—provided one is in it and of it. As soon as there are a number of individuals, each one is bound to feel, to be, in function of the others. He smiled, this time so imperceptibly that Yvonne Tervielle herself did not notice it. With a complacency of which he was vaguely aware, he abandoned himself to the course of his reflections, prone despite himself to formulate, in memorable precepts, thoughts which ten years back he might have labeled gems from an almanac.—The difficult apprenticeship of living in common, he

formulated. And even when one is alone, in the deepest desert of solitude, it is still the innumerable presence of others—of all the others—which gives substance to our life. And if I am here, at this table, in this apocalyptic city of Marseilles, if I am here corporally, biologically . . .

Suddenly he opened his mouth wide, so wide that the Colonel, who was opposite him, could see clear into his throat. Youra withdrew his hand, which he had placed on his father's shoulder.

"I'm on my way," he said, with a lock of hair in his eyes. "You hit a pebble in your peas, that happens, there's nothing to make a face about. I leave you the privilege and pleasure of paying the check."

He went off with long strides, fanning himself with his drawing pad. At the door he turned back to his father:

"Not a coupon left. The soup merchant will trust you, since you're solvent."

Rubbing his injured gum with his finger, the man watched his son step over the half-breed child squatting in the gutter. Yvonne put her hand on Stepanoff's arm, as though to keep him from thinking badly of the youth. She knew how much Stepanoff was irritated by the manners which the young man had affected for some time toward his father and herself; how much he was vexed by his clumsily cavalier ways, even while they engaged his interest as an attentive observer. Sometimes, in the evening of a hollow day filled with jolting trams and trolley-buses, with wasted running around and marking time, when came the hour of the slow quietudes before sleeping, it happened that among the half-dozen sentences which they exchanged in undertones they dropped a reticent comment on some one of the boy's attitudes, or one of his particularly striking rejoinders. Stretched out beside each other opposite the open window of their hotel room, lulled gently by the heavy, surging silence that came to them from the undernourished city, and across the city from the most distant of the deserted lands beyond, from the farthest corners of shamed and sunken France, they spoke to each other in short, simple words which bore them up for a long time on the surface of a lucidity filled with peace. In these moments it seemed that the mute voices of Europe stricken to her knees, of the Russias weltering in their blood, flowed in in unreal tides through the open window, into their midst, into their room, attenuated and reflected by the wide, pitying sky. At times Yvonne was so violently conscious of it that she marveled that anyone could survive it. Eyes closed, cheek slashed by a finger of moonlight or a finger of shadow, she listened, she heard the tenacious humming of life, of death, mounting in waves and coming to break within herself, and it was as if under the swell of her breast her heart beat by the sole force of an acoustical reverberation. Arms stretched along her motionless body, hands flat on the warm linen of the bed, she experienced the intolerable sensation of impounding, for herself alone, the low, monotonous trickling of a vast collective agony. She moved a finger, another finger, touched Ivan's thigh: "Do you hear that, Ivan? Do you feel it?" He heard, he felt, since he was not yet asleep either, not

entirely, but like her was teetering on the uncertain boundary where sleep invades, then laps over, the waning clarity of the mind. But sometimes Stepanoff's sensations shredded out in different winds than Yvonne's, and she knew it, it was enough for her to touch him with her finger tips, as in this moment: no, he was not thinking of Youra, for good or for ill, he was thinking of his bad teeth. That he should still have teeth, kidneys, lungs, she thought, that he should still have the strength of an oak that one sees in him, divines in him . . . For the nth time she recapitulated his life, in terms of chapter headings, in terms of strokes of a gong—two years in a cell in the Fortress of Peter and Paul, five years in Siberia, the imperialist war, the civil war, famine in the siege of Leningrad, typhoid in the siege of Rostov-on-the-Don, hunger strike at Oranienburg, scurvy at Irkutsk, deportation to the farthest reaches of the North, isolation cells in the farthest corners of inhumanity, three ounces of fats a week in Marseilles. That he should have lived through it, should have survived all that, and kept this drumlike chest, these barely stooping shoulders, this scarcely graying hair, was what struck Yvonne as prodigious. Merely touching him, merely feeling him alive, she felt herself infused with strength.—In the fifty-three years of his existence, she thought, in fifty-three years, has he known as much as six months of real well-being? She wondered, and it was one of the few things about Stepanoff of which she was not entirely sure.

Jules Garrigue's broad back was reflected in the enormous rust-spotted mirror which masked the back of his small café. With the point of his knife he flicked out a clove of garlic, which was stuck in the smoking joint of roast lamb before him, and munched it pensively. He had a view of the room and, through the plate-glass windows, of the terrace of his establishment, and beyond that of a section of the water in the Old Port, and still farther beyond of the vast stretches of the seas, which of course he could not see but which he was free to imagine. Two years ago, one year ago, at this time of day, crowds of customers were racing for the last inch of sitting room; they jostled each other at the bar, they circulated between the tables, the house swarmed with an uninterrupted coming and going, and resounded with a continuous burst of voices mingled with the glug-glug of drinking. It had been prosperity, real and false at the same time, somewhat like the prosperity of a region invaded by prospectors in search of gold—a prosperity which promised to last as long as a gold strike lasts, as long as the war lasted. During the weeks following the debacle, when Marseilles saw its population double, Jules Garrigue's modest café had the sudden good fortune of welcoming at its small round tables a category of refugees of whom the greater number had long been accustomed to sop their boredom in a glass of white wine frequently refilled. The clientele of the Dôme and the Deux Magots, the Rotonde and the Flore, retiring like the armies to new positions, spontaneously chose Jules Garrigue's café as a place in which to resume their traditional ethico-

aesthetic debates, interrupted by the defeat and the exodus. In fact, Jules Garrigue had thought that at last the time had come to take his turn and enjoy life—a time he had waited for, day after day, during fifteen years of patient servitude, of patient tenacity, fifteen years of mopping the bar and "A small rum, *patron!*" One day last year he had even had the honor of being written up in the columns of one of the Marseilles dailies; the reporter on the job had spoken of "all Montparnasse at the Fier Chasseur," a witty story, embellished with a sketch which was not bad either. Madame Garrigue had had it framed and hung it over the cashier's desk.

Jules Garrigue cut himself a fresh slice of lamb and jabbed his fork into a delicately browned potato.—Fifteen years, for God's sake! he thought. He looked at his rouged, self-satisfied wife.—Fifteen years! He felt himself well on the other side of fifty, exactly as one finds oneself back in the hollow of one's bed upon awakening from a nightmare. Yes, his appetite was all he had left of his youth—his appetite and, of course, naturally, his daughter Josette, who insisted that everyone call her "Daddy," God knew why. He looked at her, perched on a stool behind the cash register, smiling at that awful fellow with the head of a sick lion. Slowly he chewed a mouthful of meat; he wasn't even so sure that he still had the good appetite of yore. He had asked too much of life, had been too overjoyed to see his place filled with people, and now the crowd was thinning out as if the war had gone out of fashion. With his elbow he touched the bulging bust of his wife, who was seated at his right.

"Count them," he said. "Every day there's fewer of them. Soon we won't take in a hundred francs, if this keeps up."

"Bah . . ." said Madame Jules. She produced a series of short sucking sounds, to dislodge a thread of lamb from between her teeth. "Bah . . . It's the summer, Jules. By now a lot of them have gone to the country."

He shrugged his shoulders, helped himself to a slice of Gruyère.—If there's anyone who never understands anything, it's that one, he thought. Yes, indeed, they're gone to the country. . . . To the country, between two gendarmes, with handcuffs on their wrists. He, Garrigue, knew something about that, he had turned in three or four, chosen more or less at random among those who had formed the habit of hanging around his place without ever buying a drink, or almost; turned them in to keep in with the Legion, which demanded discipline, or community of effort, as they called it.—If it's their idea, he thought, that they'll help business along by putting the customers behind bars . . . Some because they're Jews, some because they run off at the mouth too much, others because they're Degaulists, all because of politics. He sighed, carefully spreading a layer of mustard on the Gruyère. If they'd only be satisfied with picking them up at home, as they jumped out of bed . . . But that wasn't enough for them, they had to raid the cafés, good houses, too, never a brawl in Garrigue's place, never a ruction. Again he counted the customers, one by one—seven, that showed how things were going, this time of day last year

there would have been mighty close to a hundred. He looked at his rouged and opulent wife.—Then the Boches and the Macaronis, walking off with everything, he thought. It's true, nothing to serve to a paying guest any more, burned-barley coffee and not even any saccharin, no beer, no wine, nothing but a sort of cask wash, ugh! if I think of it I'll throw up my lamb; still, I can't open up my cellar to them, it would be too bad, not to speak of the fact that I'd get myself thrown in the clink.

He swallowed a mouthful of chablis and said to his wife, mopping his lips the while:

"Marie Antoinette, if things go on the way they're going, I'll close up the place in a month."

She was cleaning her fingernails with the tip of a comb. Her platinum-gray hair smelled of lavender water. Without raising her eyes, she said:

"You'll get over it, my lad. You're tired out. Go play a hand of cards, it'll do you good."

He rolled his napkin and slipped a ring around it. A hand of cards with whom? There wasn't a soul in this saloon. . . . He looked once more toward the sun-bathed terrace, once more counted the persons seated there.—There's nothing wrong with them, he thought. They're lucky, *parbleu!* That old guy with the goatee, is he happy with that lump of sugar he's fishing out of a matchbox! There he is, screwing his monocle into his eye to drink his cup of coffee. . . . The old crackpot!

He rose, pulled down the ends of his vest, examined his nails. All of a sudden the thought flashed through his mind that the old fellow out there, whom the others called the Colonel, drank his coffee as if it were a genuine Mocha. It struck him as so strange that he wanted to call his wife's attention to it. But Madame Jules was patting her nose with her powder puff, and he could not break in on her. The waiter was clearing their table. A barefoot youngster was making the rounds of the empty room, offering peanuts for sale. The Colonel was drinking his coffee, with his monocle screwed into his eye, and a smile at the tips of his superlative mustache. No longer able to contain himself, Jules Garrigue asked:

"Marie Antoinette, do you want to see someone who understands the art of living?"

She bent her head and looked at him with one eye, like a startled fowl.

"What's eating you, Jules?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing," he said. "I'm going out to a Legion meeting."

He left her, her round eye circled with eye shadow, her bosom bursting with soft white flesh. Passing by the cashier's desk, he stopped to kiss Josette on the left cheek, then on the right cheek. He did not like her smiling so much at that hairy dago out there on the terrace. He pinched his daughter under the chin, looked into her pretty, slanting brown eyes, sighed:

"I'll be back in two hours, Josette."

"All right, Papa," she said. "But first, Papa, please, don't call me Josette."

"But why do you want to be called Daddy? You've been Josette for

pretty near sixteen years now, and all of a sudden you don't like it any more?"

"It's just an idea of mine," she said. "Let's say it amuses me to call myself Daddy. So I'd like it so much if you'd call me Daddy, Papa. Mama . . ."

"Sure, sure," said Jules Garrigue wearily. "I know your mother is delighted with it. Well then, see you soon, Daddy. . . ."

He walked across the terrace, nodding a greeting to the customers. Then, changing his mind suddenly, he retraced his steps and addressed the Colonel:

"How do you find our coffee, monsieur?"

"Excellent!" the Colonel answered in a high, loud voice. "Excellent! It may lack a bit of aroma, as it lacks sugar, it may be a shade too bitter, but apart from that, excellent. But tell me, monsieur, are you sure it's coffee?"

Stepanoff smiled with his eyes, imperceptibly. Yvonne Tervielle would have liked to do the same—and did not succeed: her smile was broad enough to tack to a wall. Marianne Davy's nose waved up and down. The man with the leonine face raised his hand, as if asking for the floor. A boat loaded with sea urchins warped into the quay just opposite. The water of the basin slept under a blanket of gentian blue. Jules Garrigue said, very distinctly:

"Quite sure, monsieur. It's National coffee."

The meeting had begun when Jules Garrigue arrived at the Legion quarters, situated on the Canebière, in the premises, expropriated in due form, of a late English bank. He felt a slight tightening of the stomach as he noted the presence of the big boss, Monsieur Adrien de Pontillac, regional chief of the Legion and a high official at the Prefecture, who at this moment was occupying the presidential chair at the end of the long, baize-covered table in the former directors' room of the bank. Garrigue's embarrassment turned to acute discomfort when, upon his arrival, the chief stopped speaking in the middle of a sentence and, with a cold eye, measured this companion of the Legion who had permitted himself such a violation of discipline. Of course Garrigue had not known that Pontillac would be present at this gathering of the block captains, since he presided only on great occasions; but naturally this was no excuse, and no legionnaire worthy of the name could adduce ignorance to justify a breach of the regulations. He had to overcome a moment of hesitancy in order to walk into the room, for the mute disapproval with which he was greeted, while of brief duration, weighed so heavily on his step that he had wondered whether the representative of the Service d'Ordre Légionnaire, standing near the door, might not forbid him access to the place. Indeed, the S.O.L. man made an alarming motion of the hand toward the pistol hanging at his side: his eye was fixed and his head thrown back, as if he were intercepting some message transmitted to him by telepathy. But apparently no message was received, and Jules Garrigue crossed the threshold of the room sound of life and limb. Garrigue had known this S.O.L. man for

a long time: he had been a café waiter, notably at the Fier Chasseur, and in the days when he was manipulating tray and table rag he had been a decent sort of fellow, and hardly a dangerous one. Pontillac had resumed his discourse, not without checking the time by his wrist watch, a small Swiss watch whose white gold case agreeably complemented an impeccable cuff, which was adorned with a button engraved with a *francisque*, the Frankish battle-ax. The meeting—it was secret and confidential—was for the purpose of preparing an enthusiastic popular climate for the approaching arrival of Marshal Pétain and Admiral Darlan in Marseilles. Garrigue was only half listening; he was not yet entirely at ease in his overstuffed chair, and he did not dare to move about too much. The chief's voice chopped the attentive silence of the companions of the Legion with short, sonorous syllables scanned in rhythmic measures—a flag for every house, a guard of honor for every flag, every guard with a Basque beret, every . . . Garrigue risked a rapid glance at the S.O.L. man—khaki shirt, Sam Browne belt, pistol, jaw at right angles—and once more he felt a pinch in the pit of his stomach, as if in the depths of his being roast lamb, browned potatoes, and Gruyère were having some difficulty settling down with a half liter of chablis 1932.—This, this what's-his-name . . . he thought with effort, suddenly unable to remember the name of his ex-waiter. As he stood there, ramrod-stiff and chest thrown out, he looked like a statue of hostility. Of hostility and duty. The S.O.L. corps was of recent formation, and according to what Garrigue knew of it, its members, screened through a fine mesh, subjected to physical and moral auscultation, offered every guarantee of devotion to the work of the Marshal. They had motorcycles, swift and earsplitting, Colt revolvers polished to perfection, fists trained to knock out two solidly rooted rows of teeth with a couple of punches, and the pay of a regular army officer. They were equipped and provided for in accordance with their devotion. Like any Frenchman worthy of being alive, the owner of the Fier Chasseur was a veteran of the other war, of the "Great War," as it was still called, and quite obviously the sight of a firearm held no terrors for him, but these S.O.L. men cut a somewhat singular figure, which to his eye made them resemble the wrestlers you see at a fair, who flex their plethoric biceps and invite you to come up and rub against them—if you dare. Alas, he was no longer of an age to dare.—This . . . this Jean Baptiste Mélodie . . . All at once he felt relaxed in his stuffed chair: of course, his name was Mélodie! He gave a low growl of satisfaction. Well, now, what was the boss talking about? He tried to hook onto the boss's speech as one boards a moving tram.—". . . apotheosis, comrades of the Legion!" said the boss.—Go to it, thought Garrigue. Go ahead, don't let anything stop you. Aspothebloody-osis . . . if you're speaking to me, you can just talk my language. He had another look at the S.O.L. man, this time serenely. Now that he had remembered Mélodie's background, he found him ordinary and inoffensive, inoffensive and rather a chump. Yet he had to admit that on second thought Mélodie was better fitted to play the plug-ugly than to be a waiter

in a pub.—You've got a crust, you faker! he thought condescendingly. He leaned slightly in the direction of his neighbor, Comrade Ignace Matthieu, to let him in on an idea that had just come into his head—what makes these S.O.L. guys look so fierce is that there is something of the grenade-eater about them, by gum. But Matthieu, with his nose in his mustache and his ears red, was bobbing his head in approval of each word the chief pronounced, and Garrigue perforce kept his ideas to himself. He put his elbows on the table, rested his chin in the hollow of his hands, and lodged a somnolent stare somewhere between a flag stuck on the wall and the determined bulk of Adrien de Pontillac.

Two dozen block captains rose as one man when Pontillac, having said, ". . . lippe Pétain, glorious leader of our eternal France," had indicated, with an expressive gesture, that his discourse was at an end. He had spoken these last words while he picked up his hat and brief case, and had taken advantage of the movement of his arm to glance quickly at his wrist watch: he had talked for three minutes more than he had intended, and these well-meaning boors were going to delay him with a barrage of schoolboy questions. He was in a devil of a hurry—meet Karen at three, at four-thirty the prefect, at five-forty the plane to Vichy. "Gentlemen," he said, "detailed instructions will be sent shortly to the Legion quarters." But they surrounded him just the same, smiling and eager, questioning, bustling with energy.—Parade starting from the Prefecture? Review on the Quai des Belges? Speech at the Overseas Monument? Mass at the Church of the Réformés? Loud-speak— . . . "Loud-speakers in every tree along the Canebière," Pontillac confirmed, advancing toward the door which Mélodie, the S.O.L. man, had thrown wide open. They accompanied him in a group, one bunch following him with mincing steps, another walking backward ahead of him.—School children? The Garde Mobile band? Firem— . . . ? "Firemen with full equipment," Pontillac confirmed. The room was abominably long, the next time he would preside at this end of the table, nearer the exit; and Karen might not wait for him! "We shall have two corvettes and a mine layer," he said, and the companions of the Legion, the block captains, seemed to congratulate one another with their looks, as if the presence of these vessels at the quay conveyed the promise of an excursion on the high seas for themselves and families. "Salvos of honor?" they said. "Twenty-one guns?" they said. "And two pursuit squadrons, monsieur?" But the crowning touch, the sensation of the day, which Pontillac could not yet divulge, was to be the special and extraordinary distribution of a quart of noodles per head of population. Suddenly, when he already had one foot on the landing, Block Captain Ignace Matthieu planted himself squarely in front of him, stammering and red with emotion:

"I . . . My daughter . . . Monsieur . . . I have something . . . A confidential matter . . . My daughter works . . ."

"Your daughter works?" said Pontillac, raising an eyebrow. He thought of Karen, of her hard virginal bosom. He looked at the legionnaire without

halting, looked at him as if he had never seen a scarlet visage planted with a thick black mustache. Steadying himself with one hand on the railing, Ignace Matthieu descended the stairs backward, hopping from one foot to the other before the chief's imperturbable advance. "How old is your daughter?" Pontillac asked. He went down the steps, thinking of Karen, thinking of the thoroughbred line of her leg. One step above him Mélodie the S.O.L. man, with the Sam Browne belt dividing his torso on the bias, watched Matthieu the legionnaire over the chief's hat.

"Seventeen and a half years old, monsieur," Matthieu enunciated.

"A fine age," said Pontillac. "I congratulate you."

The group of block captains approached the turn in the staircase, with nimble ankle and approving smile: the *chef régional* was right, it certainly was a fine age.

"Thank you, monsieur," said Matthieu. "I . . ."

His face turned magenta, then purple. He almost missed a step, caught himself. He brushed his mustache up with a jab of his free hand.

"I would like . . . I would like to request a private interview, monsieur. . . . My daughter . . . It concerns a plot against . . . against the security of the state. . . . I . . ."

"Your daughter is plotting against the security of the state?" said Pontillac. "Why, she's a precocious child, Matthieu."

Matthieu returned a mute gesture of disavowal. The ground floor was coming into sight. An immense pool of sunlight splashed upon the walls of the hall. Two legionnaires, who were in charge of selling terra-cotta statuettes of the Marshal, yawned as they watched the traffic on the Canebière. Gay clicking of wooden heels. Bare legs tinted with tan lotion. Light dresses, dresses blowing in the breeze. Karen's dress, a dress that shimmered like water rippling over sand.—Ten to three, I'll just make it, thought Pontillac.

"Gentlemen, I shall see you soon," he said.

"Very soon," chorused the block captains.

They had drawn back to let him go through the door. Abruptly Matthieu said, very loudly:

"It's not my daughter, monsieur. . . . I . . ."

Pontillac paused on the doorstep, drawing on his gloves. A tall, rather slender blonde was doing over her lips in the plate-glass window of the Legion quarters. With his eye on her he said over his shoulder:

"Ah, then it isn't your daughter, Comrade Legionnaire?"

Matthieu's face went from purple to white, and his thick black mustache made a dark hole in the white. He wanted to rush to the chief's side, this was a horrible misunderstanding, but Mélodie the S.O.L. man barred his way. He hoisted himself on his toes, almost shouting:

"No, monsieur! It's where she works, my Françoise . . ."

"Ah . . ." said Pontillac, turning back. A look at Mélodie the S.O.L. man, and Matthieu found his path free. "And where does your Françoise work, Comrade Matthieu?"

Hands and mustache forward, Matthieu stammered, "At the Sucror, monsieur. . . . That's where they make that stuff to eat. . . . Two francs fifty apiece. . . . They're not bad at all, monsieur. . . ."

"To eat?" said Pontillac. "Matthieu, give me a report covering exactly what you know. And come to see me at the Prefecture, two weeks from today, in the afternoon."

He went over the threshold and disappeared in the crowd. Ignace Matthieu turned a radiant visage to his colleagues.—In two weeks, at the Prefecture, private office of Monsieur Adrien de Pontillac. They all looked at him as if he were young and handsome. Garrigue was about to tap him on the shoulder, when Mélodie the S.O.L. man grabbed him by the forearm.

"Ho, ho, Jules! Don't you recognize your old pals?"

Garrigue repressed a start.—Getting familiar, the guttersnipe, the dressed-up dishwasher! Jules, he called him!

"Why sure, sure, Jean Baptiste!" he said. "Me, not recognize my old pals?"

He took Mélodie's hand, shook it warmly, and smiled with mouth and eyes, as though it were a good joke.

"That's fine, then!" roared Mélodie. "And your daughter, Josette, how's she doing? I got a peek at her the other day, at the Sector. Excuse me, but what a chick!"

"She's well, thanks. And yourself, you old son of a gun? You look as if you'd done all right, eh, since the time you . . ."

"Me?" Mélodie whacked himself on the thigh, then on the chest, where the Sam Browne belt crossed. "Me? . . . Yeah, Jules, after all, we're in the same boat now, see? It was something else when I was slaving in your saloon, hey? Now we're all just Frenchmen, Jules. Bosses and workmen, all equals. The Marshal said, you remember . . ." He winked and lowered his voice. "You remember the good old Pernod, the one on the third shelf to the left, the special stuff you kept for the good customers? How about a drop on you, if I come in one of these days, like to say hello to Madame? You must have a little left, Jules, enough to revive your friends?"

"Oh, sure, there's a drop or so left," said Jules Garrigue with a sigh.

ADRIEN DE PONTILLAC CULTIVATED TOWARD WOMEN the condescending benevolence of a man of subtle pleasures. A keen connoisseur, he knew that a woman is easy to take and easy to understand, and that her psychological problems oscillate between the lover that is and the lover that is to be. He had known women of Czechoslovakia and Poland, of Germany and Rumania and Spain, of Denmark and the other Scandinavian countries, and to him it was a game, an exercise in discernment, to classify them by region, by nationality. But Karen, who, as it happened, rounded out his map of Europe, his collection of the women of Europe—Karen Trinyi, of the warrior branch of the Trinyi family which is mentioned in the Magyar chronicles of the sixteenth century—Karen played havoc with his philosophy of women.

Karen allowed herself to be kissed. She permitted him to put his left arm around her waist, to lift her chin with his right hand, and she allowed herself to be kissed. She even consented to rest her head on his shoulder, but he felt somehow that she did this in order to study him better through her wide-open eyes. He was not fooled—to study him and to ignore him. He would have liked her to be more tractable, to open the lips which she held so obstinately closed and to mingle her breath with his. He felt that she must know how to kiss, how to offer herself, and yet at the same time he was not averse to this passivity, which gave him a strong sensation of possessing the young woman against her own will, as it were. He held her, warm and supple and almost abandoning herself, yet with non-presence in her intolerably open eyes, with non-joy in her intolerably lucid gaze. Sometimes—brief instants that were like scraps of memory emerging from oblivion and as quickly fading away again—he was struck by the hard perception that she was thinking of “something else,” even while he himself suffocated under the wild breath which her skin exhaled. In such moments he had a brusque, futile impulse to take her by the throat, closing his thumbs slowly on her throat until Karen’s lying eyes came out of their sockets, and with them, after them, the thoughts concerning that “something else” of which he was vaguely aware and which he hated. But his experience was real enough: he could not help seeing

that Karen softened at his caress. The odor of musk which he drank in from Karen’s neck, from behind Karen’s ear, was distilled in Karen’s blood, and it was he who made her blood flow faster and burn more hotly. There were moments when she seemed to him on the verge of offering herself, all he had to do was to open his hands and take her—and he did not dare. He was not afraid either of being brutal with her or of losing her: after all, she was merely one adventure among many, and still he did not dare. But what disconcerted him most was that he had not even succeeded in finding her place in his zoological classification of women. He knew his natural history: there were doe-women and tortoise-women and seal-women, and others were she-foxes, giraffes, flying fish, each variety calling for an appropriate treatment, an adequate preparation. Karen certainly was an animal, there was no question whatever that she was an animal, but of a genus which he had still not identified, of a rare or extinct species, perhaps an animal which could not be dominated, which could at the very most be broken.

“Kiss me, Karen,” he said, listening to his own voice. “Kiss me.”

The absurd idea that he loved her flashed through his mind. She turned her inordinately large eyes upon him—eyes so profound that he felt drawn into their depths. In the lost land of their pupils, far down at the bottom of their black light, every encouragement could be divined—and every refusal. Perhaps she was of the species that must be ravished—a prig, a prude. He wanted to ravish her; wanted to run his arm under her knees, sweep her from the floor, squeeze her until her bodice sprang open and her breasts spilled out. But these were pure velleities. She escaped him, this foreigner, whose papers he had minutely scrutinized, whose antecedents he had studied, whose smallest doings he knew—this Hungarian, single, rich, without ties, who had an entrance visa for the United States, who took Spanish lessons from an old Spanish woman and Italian lessons from an old Italian man: through some loophole which he could not find, she escaped him.

Karen moved a little to free herself, and instantly Pontillac released his hold. For a brief moment she remained motionless, lingering in the half-opened mold of his arms, then she smiled at him with her eyes, perhaps in affection, perhaps in thanks for his prompt obedience. That was the way he was with her—prompt and obedient. Once again the ridiculous thought came to him that he was in love with her. She went and sat down in the hollow of an enormous armchair upholstered in white leather—an indispensable adjunct to every apartment in this hotel—and crossed her legs.—Where in the world do her silk stockings come from? he thought, gazing at Karen’s ankles. Black market? He wanted to kneel down, wanted to kiss her feet.—Like a college boy, he thought. He saw himself again in Bordeaux, a college boy in love with a little dress-maker who had a nose like an exclamation point, saw himself writing her sonnets, quatrains, religiously rhymed epic alexandrines, all of which, he learned later, were intercepted by his honored mother, the Countess de

Pontillac. Karen was not a dressmaker, he himself no longer wrote verses, his honored mother, the Countess de Pontillac, was no more; but at this moment he felt quite as much the sophomore as he had been a quarter of a century ago. If Karen said no, said never, like the light ladies who think they should surrender only after a siege conducted by the book—fortresses asking only to fall . . . But Karen said neither yes nor no, her gaze was lucid, she allowed herself to be kissed on the mouth, surprised, it might be, that he adopted no tactics which would have constrained her to answer yes, to answer no; and in the four months of their acquaintance (he had seen her for the first time in his office at the Prefecture, where she had presented herself to ask for a visitor's permit), a kiss had been the utmost limit of his advances.

"How pensive you are, Adrien," she said. "It's not at all like you. Worried about money?"

She spoke French exquisitely, like a person nourished on the classics, but one felt the extreme care which she applied to her diction. Pontillac liked the inflections of her delicately shaded voice, the accent of her slow, attentive speech; he liked to see her seated there, within reach of his hand, of his desire, so close and at the same time so remote.—Now I'm beginning to find her "different," he thought coldly, different and "not like the others." Point-blank he said, "Karen, do you believe that I love you?"

Karen opened her mouth to emit a peal of Homeric laughter—and stopped, gaping. Immobile, his arms crossed behind his back, he watched her intently. He radiated health and a kind of recklessness, and a quality of distinction showed through his movements and his bearing which offset his *grand seigneur* manner. Karen wondered what this man's discreet mastery of his instincts availed, when, in his post of command at the peak of a pyramid of subalterns, wielding an arbitrary and well-nigh unlimited power, he manipulated the difficult virtues of the national revolution. The question was not entirely serious, because she knew so much about him, and also because his manner with her was far from justifying the odious reputation he bore among those who were opposed to the new regime, among the émigrés, among the hunted. With her he was—as he was at present—awkward almost, almost at the end . . . She bent her head to one side. Almost at the end of . . . She did not finish her thought. A smile flickered in her eyes, lost itself. She gave a short laugh, and the laugh was slow and deep.

"No, my dear. I don't believe it."

He put himself between Karen and the light, so as to see her better. He did not like the short sound of her laugh. He did not like. "Why don't you?" he said. Then, catching himself on the point of pleading, and a bad case at that, he changed his tone:

"You are too keen, and also—at least so it appears to me—you have too much . . . let's say *savoir-vivre*, to have failed to note that I have been traipsing like a tourist around your skirt, with the air of a wooer plucking

petals from a daisy. You have guessed already, I imagine, that this is hardly my style. What, in your opinion, does my conduct mean? It is not venturing too far, I trust, if I suppose that you must have wondered, if only in passing, what might, in fact, be my motives?"

She burst into laughter, with her head against the back of the enormous armchair. Deep flowing of her laughter. Deep and appealing. Motionless, he watched her put her hand to her throat, as if to repress a fit of merriment. She seemed to be enjoying herself immensely.

"Traipsing like a tourist around . . . ! What a wonderful description!" she said, still laughing. "You ought to have a fling at literature, Adrien. Really, it's easier to imagine you wearing a laurel wreath than plucking the . . . she loves me, she loves me not. But, my dear, your motives . . ."

She paused, holding his gaze as if she were hypnotized by it. It seemed to Pontillac that he could read Karen's deep eyes as he could an open book. What a foolish idea to quiz this woman. He had but to take a step and she would come, it was written in her pupils, a step and she would come and she would believe, as no woman had ever believed before. An accent of hesitation overcast his voice imperceptibly when he said:

"Continue, my dear. You interest me."

"I rather suspected it," she retorted. The light of her pupils was lively and transparent. "You're in a bellicose humor, monsieur. Or are you really worried, Adrien? Oh, if you want to work off your bad humor at my expense, don't hesitate in the least, make yourself at home."

Pontillac said nothing for a moment. He was not so sure that he had read her deep eyes correctly. He was not sure of her. He wanted to tell her to pull herself out of her ridiculous armchair, to come with him to the airport. To come.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "It's a fact that I have many things on my mind. They are expecting me in Vichy this evening. But you were about to say something, Karen. An idea that had come to you in regard to my question."

"Oh no, not the ghost of an idea, Adrien. A sensation, at the very most." She snuggled into a corner of the armchair, drew her legs up under her. A smile tempered the brilliance of her look, but her mouth was not smiling. "In a relationship like ours," she said, "a woman is guided less by ideas than by intuition. It's my turn not to surprise you, when I confess that I think I have divined the nature of what you so elliptically call your motives. Divined it intuitively, Adrien. Without having given much thought to it, in fact. As a modern woman I believe in this sudden, spontaneous knowledge, independent of any proof—something in the nature of the voice of the blood, or of breeding, or et cetera, you mustn't ask me to be too specific. You don't believe in it? Yes, you do, too. When you thought I had some idea or other, I was simply asking myself whether it was opportune to answer you. Because, you know, you are questioning me as if there were anything I could tell you about your own designs."

"What designs, Karen? Go on, I'm curious to hear." He did not like her

digression on the voice of the blood or et cetera. "Imagine that I'm the man of letters you want me to become, and that, having got into a story, I no longer know what it's leading to."

"Must I try to guess that the story in question is myself?" she said, bantering. "But look here, Adrien, you aren't trying to convince me that you're the man to lose the thread of so simple a tale? If I have the *savoir-vivre* you so generously concede me, it would be unpardonable of me to take a jest seriously."

Pontillac walked slowly toward the chair in which the young woman was engulfed. Her eyes had gone dark, and black lights glinted in her pupils—as when he kissed her on the mouth.—I shall tell her crudely that I want her, he thought suddenly. I won't even tell her. I shall . . .

"Come and sit here on the arm, Adrien." She smiled with her mouth, and it was as if she had said yes and said no in every language on earth. "So you're going to leave me alone and go off to Vichy?"

He did not sit down. What species of fauna did she belong to? Maybe she was a mineral, a vegetable. A jasmine, milky and caustic. All at once the picture of his older sister, Catherine Tournefeuille-Blas, came into his mind—a hymenopteran, of the class of ants, of the species of the Amazons. His voice was husky as he asked:

"So, then, you don't believe it?"

She slid her feet out along the rug, and took his hand. He made no move, watching Karen's finger stroke the golden hair on his knuckles. She was silent as she followed the veins of his hand with the pointed tip of her forefinger. A puff of air moved the curtains at the open window, stirring a mosaic of shadow on the floor. A lock of light brown hair hung loose on her neck. Without raising her head, she said:

"I don't know if you see how odd this is. You have not told me that you love me, and yet you ask me if I believe in your love. That isn't entirely fair play, Adrien." She let his hand go, drew her legs up under her. "Oh, don't think I want to hear you say it." She did not look at him; she was holding her hands locked before her, and her chin in her hands. "I prefer to spare you these little fibs, because I know just as well as you do that there is no question of love."

"Are you so convinced of that?" said Pontillac. He felt a trifle off balance, a little as if he really had lost the thread of his story. He could no longer say whether all this was not absurdly serious. "Are you so convinced?"

"Convinced of what?" She stood up abruptly, making him draw back a step. He was a head taller than Karen. She was slim, finely built, flexible as a reed in bright sunlight, and he was a head taller.—Like a reed, he thought. He looked at her mouth, her lower lip, the whiteness of her teeth. "Convinced of what?" she repeated. "Convinced that I don't want to hear you give your solemn word? Yes, I'm absolutely convinced, monsieur. I should not believe you in the least, and I prefer to spare you anything so ridiculous. You want to know why you are playing the

Saturn's ring around my skirt? Or rather you want me to tell you why? Very well. The reason, my dear friend, is that you and I are . . . we're in business. And, in that connection, today I received a cable from my bank in New York. A cable which can't help but interest you."

She slipped around him, went to a secretary, rummaged through a pile of papers. He followed her with his eyes, and without a word took the blue telegraph form which she handed him. She had spoken a bit hurriedly, with a slight trembling of the lip, and an unaccustomed raising of the pitch of her voice.—So that's the clue to the mystery, thought Pontillac. She imagines that I'm courting her for the sole purpose of using her to carry through this little transaction. And it looks as if it nettles her to think so, it wounds her pride, her . . . A sudden sensation of warmth pervaded him, for the woman who at this moment had her back turned to him, breathing the fresh air from the window. She had not thought for an instant, then, that, business aside, he could desire her for herself? And the way she had said that—"we are in business." No confession could have been more explicit, no disclaimer more affirmative. In the light of those few words Karen's attitude, Karen's reticences, suddenly became understandable to him; understandable the black fires that masked her look, and her reactions when he took her in his arms, and her feigned passivity.—If I've been doubtful about . . . He cast a rapid glance over the cablegram:

KAREN TRINITY HOTEL SPLENDIDE MARSEILLES FRANCE WE HAVE OBTAINED LICENSE AUTHORIZING OPENING OF ACCOUNT CLARISSE ORFANVILLE STOP CABLE AMOUNT OPERATION STOP YOUR BALANCE 49/872/22 DOLLARS INDUSTRIAL INVESTMENTS BANK NYC.

—If I've been doubtful about what category of fauna to put her in, he thought, it's because she's still in the moulting season, still in the formative period. She . . .

"Karen," he said.

She turned toward him, leaning on the window sill. Her silhouette was outlined against the thin foliage of a plane tree which rose from the sidewalk to the height of the window. Her expression was placid and expectant. Pontillac thought that perhaps he really was in love with her.

"I must leave you, Karen. I'm very late already." He came nearer, searching for the warm zones of her look. "I wish I could convince you that you are mistaken in thinking I wanted to be with you only because I was waiting for this telegram. Don't you believe me?"

He reached out as if to put his arm around her waist, but she did nothing to encourage him. Non-presence hollowed out the dilated pupils of her eyes.

"Don't be sentimental, Adrien," she said. "The text of the message fulfills your hopes, I think?"

He smiled, for the first time since they had embarked on this conversa-

tion. She was still pained, still hurt in her pride, he understood that. It was now his turn to take her hand. "Karen, there's more than this telegram. There is you."

"How much do you want credited to the account of this Orfanville person?" said Karen.

He took her other hand, trying to catch her eyes, which she kept averted from him. He smiled at her obstinacy, knowing now that she was about to come out, was about to come. Gently he closed his hands on her wrists.

"That can wait until I get back, Karen. Let it wait. It's too bad if you think me sentimental: I shall think of you for the two weeks I'll be away."

He kissed her on the mouth, and with long strides went out of the room.

The Colonel himself answered the doorbell. "*Contentissimo di vederla signorina,*" he said. He peered out on the dark landing over Karen's shoulder, then ushered the young woman over the threshold and closed the door behind her. "Welcome, mademoiselle," he said. He went before her down a long, dimly lighted corridor, turned off to the left, climbed four short steps. As he spoke, his voice had been a bit overloud, as if he wanted to make himself heard through the numerous doors of the rooming house. "Good evening, Professor, how are you?" Karen had replied in the same raised voice. With a satisfied clearing of his throat he stepped aside. The room was small and low-ceilinged, and violently lighted by a bright, shadeless electric bulb. It was crowded with furniture—a narrow divan, a table which had once been painted white, a rickety straight chair, an armchair with a caved-in seat, a piano. A closet was cut into the wall, and its yawning door exposed a number of articles of clothing to view. Divan, table, straight chair, armchair, and piano were strewn with books, brochures, music: under the divan, the table, the two chairs and the piano, and wherever the eye came to rest, books were piled—bound, unbound, folios, quartos, octavos, fascicules, opuscles, in stacks in heaps, in unstable equilibrium, as high as a man's waist—printed paper supporting printed paper, and propped up in turn by more printed paper. On the sill of the window, which was masked by an old cotton drape, patched and battered electric stove dripped flakes of chalky asbestos on the ancient binding of a massive book. A saucer, placed over the kettle in lieu of a cover, was sounding the alarm, while the reddened filaments of the stove whistled under the torture. The Colonel cleared the armchair, and Karen shut off the stove. Bending her head, she tried to decipher the title of the book underneath, but could not make it out: the inscription was in Greek, and a long time had passed since the bit of Greek she had learned in the *lycée* had faded from her memory. Yet the form and outline of the letters which made up the author's name were familiar to her. Silently, moving her lips, she spelled out the name, letter by letter, then put aside the kettle and the electric plate, and picked up the book. Rubbed dirty, blistered with burns as it was, the binding still showed traces

magnificence. Karen continued to tell off the letters, remembering little by little—*The Clouds, The Birds, The Knights* . . .

"Is Aristophanes a personal enemy of yours, Grandfather?" she asked, holding the heavy volume in both hands.

He trotted over to her. He was in slippers and Basque beret, the latter to hide his bald spot. Or to protect it. Being susceptible to bronchitis, he disapproved of having drafts play over the bare area of his scalp. Karen lifted the thick volume above her head, raised herself on her toes, and planted a kiss in the old man's white goatee. He took her by the shoulders and rubbed his nose against his granddaughter's, while the crow's-feet around his eyes fanned out joyously. "Ooph . . ." sighed Karen. She laid the thick volume gently on the old man's beret, holding it steady with both hands, as he, puffing out the thin torso of a man who had grown too much like an arrow, articulated:

"Mademoiselle, keep this in mind: Aristophanes, son of Philippus, has never had a more enthusiastic friend than I." With the points of his mustache faultlessly twisted upward, he recited, translating for the occasion:

*"They're always accusing the women,  
As a terrible plague to man;  
They say we're the root of all evil,  
And repeat it again and again."*

They looked at each other, restraining their laughter. The Colonel put his hands on Karen's, and she abandoned the thick folio to him. "Tea or coffee?" she asked in a muffled voice. "Tea," he replied in the same tone. She opened a small medicine cabinet, searched for a moment through a triple row of paper bags, tin boxes, bottles, and tubes. Still holding the Aristophanes on his head, he watched her.

"Everything's going fine, I think, Grandfather," she said as she made the tea in a milk pitcher.

He looked for a place to put down the book, but, discovering none, set it at his feet and sat down on it. Karen handed him a cup, then some lump sugar which she carried in a special box with a transparent cover—the last word in knickknacks adapted to circumstances. The Colonel gulped a sonorous mouthful, then another.

"Say on," he said.

She sat down on the edge of the armchair—the only part of it where one could sit down with any comfort. The square tips of her wooden-soled shoes touched her grandfather's slippers. He looked at her from below, with the cup of tea in the palms of his joined hands, and his pale eyes still paler in the shadow cast by the beret, which was pulled down over his forehead. Karen took a sip of tea, running her eyes distractedly over the title of a brochure.

"We were in the midst of a solemn conversation when I gave him the telegram," she said. "Nevertheless he found a chance to read it. I saw him

in the windowpane, sneaking a quick look at it. He's off to Vichy by plane and won't be back for two weeks. He took the telegram with him. I think he was enchanted with it."

She spoke in a low voice, enunciating carefully so that she would be clearly heard. Her speech had not the faintest trace of a foreign accent. The Colonel took three loud gulps of tea one after the other, drew a long breath, then treated himself to an extra gulp. With the toe of his right slipper he bore down lightly on the young woman's left foot.

"What makes you think he was enchanted with it?"

"Things . . ." she said. She smiled, recalling her discourse on intuition. "He went away thinking of his return. I'm certain—practically certain—that he will entrust the operation to me. Do you remember, Grandfather? At the beginning, when you told me to encourage his advances—his advances in the field of finance—I was terribly uneasy. Every time I was to see him it seemed to me that he would whip out a sheaf of documents to confound me. But now I haven't a worry—you can't imagine how sure of myself I am. He could have had the cable checked at the telegraph office, to see if the message was genuine. He's a sort of superdetective, you know—but he won't do anything of the kind. I'm sure he won't. If he ever had any suspicions about me, they were very . . . very special suspicions."

"I see," said the old man, putting the cup on the floor. "Tell me, Gervaise: he declared himself, didn't he?"

For a moment the young woman said nothing. Seen from below, the line of her mouth was fleshy and fleshy. She directed the dark gleam of her pupils into the old man's pale eyes.

"No," she said. "Not yet. Not entirely. But almost."

The Colonel smoothed his mustache, being careful not to disturb the hooked points, then sniffed at his knuckles. He drew up his legs, locked his overly long arms around them, and put his goatee out over his knees. His hunched position, the curve of his back, and the dryness of his extremities, gave him a droll appearance which belied the severity of his praetorian features. He blew through his nose, rubbed his chin on his sharp knees.

"Pontillac," he said, "is a man to be envied. He is learning that there is no greater joy on earth than love. No back talk, now; you know how deeply I am touched by romance, and the stupider the better. But credit where credit is due—he's a man of good taste." He sniffed, long, openly, to the utmost limit of his capacity. "If I were forty years younger, I should be madly in love with you, Gervaise." He looked at her gravely, with the hint of inspiration in his countenance which she had known since, as a little girl, she had spent half days at a time listening to him read Racine and declaim Dante. "Now you'll tell yourself that I'm a coward . . . that I'm making excuses for myself . . . a coward and a romantic. . . ." A thin smile deepened the crow's-feet around the orbits of his eyes. "Note, my darling, that I don't invoke kinship as an excuse. . . . But couldn't

it be that Pontillac is a romantic too? Not, of course, in the old-fashioned way, like my friend Novalis, but in the more recent fashion of the 'new order,' which goes so well with a certain Rotary Club romanticism?"

He was bothered by the uncomfortable position he had assumed. He stood up, long and bony, rubbing his crackling fingers together. Stepping back to gather up the folio, he kicked the cup which he had left on the floor, and then, turning toward the noise, he bumped against the chair, and the mountain of books cascaded to the floor. Karen's hand flew to her mouth to stifle a burst of laughter, and immediately, anticipating the old man, she slid to her knees; but seeing that he was about to kneel and help her, she shook her head in an emphatic no, then seized his two hands and kissed them one after the other. "You can't deny it, you've a grudge against your authors," she said. "Here's one all maltreated. Put him together, if you can, while I pile the rest away."

He took the volume, the pages of which were hanging together by a thread, and opened it at random. Apparently interested, he groped in his vest pocket for his monocle and put it to his eye: the book was a first edition of *Modest Proposal*, 1729. He closed the volume, keeping it in his hand. A broad smile drew back his lips over his long teeth. He sniffed suavely.

"My old friend Jonathan . . . Do you remember when we used to read Swift, Gervaise?"

Busy putting the finishing touches to her work, she answered with a grunt. He watched her for a minute, wagging his head.

"A fine solid job you're doing there. It's reinforced concrete. A bridge pier, darling. But the way it's arranged now, without order or selection, the next time I need a book I shall have to demolish the whole thing."

She sat on the floor with her fists on her hips, looking at him with feigned anger mixed with real despair. He smoothed his goatee.

"A place for everything, and everything . . . Franklin was the one who coined that. But you're too young to appreciate the good recipes. As for my friend Swift, he was a master, although in no sense a romantic." He pointed to the book he was holding in his hand. "A hound with a keen nose. 'A wise man,' he said once, 'a wise man should have money in his head, not in his heart.' Monsieur Adrien de Pontillac has certainly not read Swift."

"You're jealous, you old booby," said Karen. "Not long ago I mentioned Gulliver, and Pontillac appeared to be perfectly familiar with him. Wait while I think, now . . . yes, it was apropos of Hitler, Adolf. You see, of course—the big giant and the little dwarfs. Now and then I allow myself the inexpensive luxury of a sally—an entirely irrelevant one, you understand—like a fresh little minx who has read a dozen lines on Bergson, signed 'Tante Cunegonde,' in a Sunday supplement, and proceeds to ratiocinate on the mechanistic conception of existence. Don't scold me, Monsieur le Colonel, I can't help it. Pontillac has so little taste for it that he makes faces. So your friend Swift woke up at the wrong moment;

and for a giver of good advice, I seem to recall that he died in a garret. But you're joking, aren't you, Grandfather? You don't intend to propose seriously that a man like Adrien de Pontillac could be so naïve as to get himself swindled in . . . in . . . while he's lisping pretty nothings to a girl? He was taking care of his little business affairs before he came across me, you know. . . . I hardly imagine he's a novice: he hasn't quite the look of one, and he seems to know the routine too well. In fact it was he that showed us the way to go about it. If he himself had not sounded me out, feeling his way, studying my reactions, questioning me, a step at a time, on my supposed holdings in the United States, we never would have got the idea of playing his game. But what exactly is his game? Of course the New Europe—my goodness, doesn't that sound like the firm name of a neighborhood co-operative?—of course the New Europe is a sound ship, but the safe-deposit vaults on the other side of the Atlantic are less liable to go bankrupt. But what is he doing? Salting away his own cash? Going in for large-scale exportation of capital? Naturally, in the early days of our acquaintance, he was interested only in my golden curls. I followed your suggestions and let him flutter around in the sphere of my 'vital area,' as you so nobly put it. It could be useful to have so big a whale within reach of the harpoon." She aimed a threatening forefinger at the old Italian. "It was one of your inventions, Grandfather. One of your romantic inventions—romantic, and . . . May I, Grandfather?"

"By all means," he said magnanimously, knowing what she was about to say. "Romantic and stupid. . . . Isn't that it, Gervaise?"

"So terribly stupid," she said gravely. "So terribly that it couldn't fail to succeed."

"A bad rhetorical figure," the old man replied. He stood leaning slightly over the young woman squatting at his feet: his goatee was on his chest, his hands folded behind his back, and he was half smiling. "And a bad paradox. Ideas are seldom stupid, that's why there are so few of them, I mean of ideas; whereas little girls are stupid, and that's why there are so many of them, I mean of little girls." He was surprised that she had launched into a review of the adventure—or half surprised, as he half smiled, detecting a real note of reproach in the tone of her words. Without the hint of a question, almost impersonally, but with a trace of uncertainty in his voice, he said:

"Pontillac is a fine man. . . ."

Karen rose. The bright, bare light accentuated the fine pallor which marked the mounds of her cheekbones. There was a faint trembling in the wings of her nose. She smiled with her mouth, but there was no smile in her eyes.

"You see how stupid it is, you silly old man," she said.

Two violent rings of the doorbell made them look at each other. Karen's mouth ceased smiling.—Someone you're expecting? her pupils seemed to ask, dilating little by little as if the light had left them. The Colonel shook his head in a slow, repeated negation. She knew it anyway: no one

had ever come when she was there; and the only person whom her grandfather received at home, a Dominican friar studying Greek with him, had no reason to ring his bell at this time of day. The bell rang again, less violent but more sustained. With an ear to the sounds outside, the old man signaled with his goatee for Karen to pick up her handbag. She obeyed, feeling behind her without turning, without taking her eyes from the monocle which the Colonel had forgotten to remove. The ringing had ceased, confident, apparently, of the efficacy of its summons. Silence settled again over the rooming house, as if none of the lodgers, in any of the rooms, had expected or hoped for a visit. Karen opened her bag mechanically, closed it the same way. Timidly this time, timidly and insistently, the bell sounded again, a very short ring at first, isolated, like a false start, then a long, thin call.

"Suppose you go and see," said Karen.

He went to see. The ringing was for him. The Infanta Incantada, with one finger pressing the button of the bell, and one finger pointed at the old Italian, was standing at the head of the stairs. "I thought everybody was deaf or you were asleep in the house I . . ." she said. She noticed that she had not stopped ringing while she spoke, and put her hand behind her back. "I've been running the bell excuse me for hours won't you show me the way . . ."

He showed her the way. He wondered if it was after him that she had been running for hours, and in that case what she wanted of him. Such had been his surprise at seeing her that he had kept her on the threshold for a long minute without a word of greeting. He felt slightly confused, for she was visibly aware of his lack of courtesy.

"Let me go ahead of you, Marianne," he said, mounting the first of the four short steps which led to his room. "One of my pupils is here, but we have just finished our lesson. Come in, please."

He made the introductions, invited Marianne to take the armchair. The two young women exchanged nods. Marianne's large blue eyes examined Karen's person and attire in detail: the latter had turned her back with a brief word of apology and was leafing through a book from the top of the pile on the table.—Rutebeuf, *Le Miracle de Théophile*, she read. Without raising her eyes from her examination, she addressed the Colonel:

"I shall borrow this Manzoni, then, Professor; though I'm afraid that after the *Promessi Sposi*, the *Conte di Carmagnola* will seem rather tame to me. But I suppose I shall have to do as you say, as usual."

She went toward the door. From the sill she nodded good-by to Marianne. "Let me accompany you, mademoiselle," said the old man. "You don't mind, Marianne?" Marianne, trying to make herself comfortable in the broken-down armchair, answered him with a smile. In the long, poorly lighted corridor, the grandfather took his granddaughter by the elbow, guiding her between two rows of closed doors. They said nothing. He opened the door which led to the landing, and released Karen's arm. "My Gervaise," he whispered. Then, aloud:

"*A rivederci, signorina.*"

"*A rivederci,*" Karen answered. She raised herself on tiptoe and kissed him quickly on the goatee. He stood motionless, listening to Karen's steps as they died away in the distance. Then, lightheartedly, he returned to his room.

Marianne followed the Boulevard Chave in the direction of the tunnel. She watched the streetcars pass, wondering whether to get on or not; but the cars, crowded till the walls of the worn-out equipment threatened to burst, sped on, rocking along the rails, as if indeed no doubt could exist as to their destination. The sight of so much certainty in those hundreds of people, all having themselves transported in one direction or the other, each confident of arriving at his own keyhole, at his own nightshirt, relieved Marianne of some part of her own worries. She walked along the curbstone, stepping off into the street when a tree guard blocked her way, and chewing on pistachio nuts which she fished, one by one, out of her topcoat pocket. She decided not to take the tram, to go on foot as far as the Canebière, and to wind up at the Fier Chasseur.—The Colonel if I had known and that Lepage what a pain . . . she thought. She had run all over Marseilles looking for Francine Lepage, Aldous John Smith's secretary, in order to pry the old Italian's address out of her by sheer dint of pleading; and the old Italian could not put her up, even if he had wanted to. Her nose wiggled at the memory of her embarrassment. She felt mortified and stupid. That room, no bigger than a . . .—than a child's poot and even . . . she thought. All those books he had, stacked in there. Maybe he was in the business. A colonel. She did not like the military. Not above the rank of sergeant. Higher than sergeants, they get to be saber wavers.—On a pension and retired to books quite a girl that . . . Even if he had wanted to. And even then. They would have had to throw the books out the window. Then sleep between the legs of the table. But he had not appeared to want to. A room as big as . . .—As pf-ff . . . she thought, munching a pistachio nut. To read all those books. Time, a tortoise's lifetime. Poems. Dutt Tarulata, an author's name, or a title. Beside the armchair, in a white cover. The armchair. Even if they had been able to arrange somehow. She stumbled stepping off the sidewalk, almost fell flat, stepped back on the sidewalk. Strung between two rows of wires, the sorry-looking electric bulbs flickered at the level of the third stories, dribbling a night-light glimmer over the broad boulevard. Less frequent now, the streetcars were more crowded than ever, as they passed, reeking with pride and absolutely drunk with their loose-gaited speed. When she had found out that the Colonel's "apartment" consisted of a single book-crammed room, she had been on the verge of tears. Beyond the tunnel the wide square, with its dusty paving stones and its vacant spaces, was bare and hostile. She crossed it, choosing her direction by guesswork and looking for the spire of the Church of the Réformés in the black sky, then went down the steep slope of an alley. Near the door of a tenement a

man, fingering a key ring, turned as she came near, and watched her pass by.—What a cinch to sleep for men on the wharves damn no more pistachios . . . she thought. If little Katty Braun had told the concierge. A girl like that, a lunger. The concierge wouldn't have allowed it. Doesn't allow it. Climb on a bench and sing the *Marseillaise*. To the clink and good night. France. The open air. It was easy for the men. Or the brothels. It seemed one could. Two hundred francs solito, three hundred with a piece. Capital. Capitalism. Bloating with pride and filled to bursting, the streetcars went by buckling in the middle. Walk or croak.—It's crazy to sleep in the street I'm not going but how . . . she thought. Anything that looked like a mattress in Marseilles had been taken by storm by half a million refugees; a hundred thousand others, among them Marianne, were constantly on the lookout for a place to lay their heads. But miracles could happen, and there is no special time for miracles. Marianne was confident; life had been a series of miracles ever since she had landed in Marseilles eighteen months ago. When she came out into the Place des Mobiles a man with the prosperous air of a solvent merchant fell into step beside her. "*Merde,*" she said to him. He took it as final. A meager animation reigned on the Canebière, on the café terraces, at the entrances of the movie theaters, around the improvised kiosks where crusts of bean bread smeared with soya paste were sold to those presenting ration tickets. At the corner of the Boulevard Gambetta two plain-clothes men were checking the papers of a passer-by, and at the corner of the Rue Saint-Ferréol, Marianne went into a cinema.

The second film had begun. She found a seat, sat down, retied the black shoelace which held her hair. The theater was full; it smelled of feet and mothballs. At Marianne's left someone fidgeted continuously, from time to time uttering a sound, a dry laugh cut short, then repeated as before. Marianne tried to see and made out a feminine silhouette in the grip of lively excitement. Since the restaurants had been serving only rutabagas and Jerusalem artichokes, and the cafés saccharined lemon soda and Vichy water, the population went to the movies to feast its eyes on what the actors ate and drank on the screen. Pictures like *Robin Hood* scored a resounding and lasting success: in them the fruits of the chase were seen roasting on a spit, and quarters of mutton browning over a wood fire. All that was missing was the odor, and a long enough fork. But this time there was not much to chew on in the film. There was a little black dog which barked when Madame uttered the name of her lover. Monsieur, naturally, didn't get it at all. His only concern was that the little black dog prevented him from reading his paper. "Hee-hee-hee . . ." went the person at Marianne's left, accompanying her laugh with a series of bounds. The lover, who had just entered, and who was Monsieur's best friend, had the cuff of his trousers chewed to ribbons by the little black dog. Monsieur said they would have to get rid of the little black dog, otherwise their friends would never come near the house. The person at Marianne's side exploded with another of her strident, clipped-off laughs, then, in her

excitement, laid hold of her neighbor's forearm. Marianne turned, popping her great blue eyes, which by this time were accustomed to the darkness. The feminine silhouette belonged to a very young girl, and the very young girl had a high and well-set bosom. Marianne patted the hand which rested on her arm.

"Well well hello it's you Françoise how you jump around you like this puppydog stuff . . ."

"Oh, hello, Marianne, it's cute, hey?" She turned her eyes back to the screen so as not to miss anything, tightening her fingers on Marianne's sleeve. "Have you been there long? I saw this picture already, but it's fun to know what's coming, don't you think so?" She wriggled in her seat as she talked, meanwhile following the film. "That guy, the husband, what a sap." She guffawed, cut herself short as if she had been strangled. "Look at the dress she's wearing. You see the sofa, that's where she hides his letters, but the mutt will find them. I go to the pictures every night. I don't believe them, but it's fun and it don't cost much. It's fun at the dance hall, too, but I'm not allowed to go. And anyway there's hardly any of them left, since the amristice. Father says it's the national mourning, that's the reason, but he says the amristice will be over soon and then the dance halls will be open again. Look, Marianne, now comes the exciting part, the husband is telephoning his wife's fellow, but she's there with him with the pup and the pup is going to bark into the phone, you'll see, he'll jump on the table, but the husband . . ."

Someone in the row in front turned around and in a gruff voice demanded silence. "So what, there's no freedom any more?" Françoise retorted, ready for an argument. Marianne patted the girl's hand, which still rested on her forearm, as a signal to keep quiet.—Amristice this kid she says the movies all the same I never would have dreamed . . . she thought. She felt hardly any surprise at having met Françoise in this movie, where she had come without premeditation, in this place, at this hour, since she had had to meet someone, or something, here or there or somewhere, in order that the miracle might take place. Françoise loosed her laugh in the drowsy theater, where it exploded and died away like the distant crack of a whip. Marianne thought that miracles occur when you think of them the least, and the less you think of them the less genuine they appear, at any rate that had been her experience, although, obviously, she did not believe in miracles, being of the socialist persuasion. She held Françoise's hand and watched the screen.—Never not even chance no rather coincidence that Françoise she's hysterical or interlinking of causes . . . she thought. She recalled a sentence of Bukharin on the laws of chance, in reference to the game of heads and tails. The lover had lost a large sum at the baccarat table and was having words with Madame. Françoise wiggled around, uttering exclamations which sounded as if a knife had cut them off. Marianne reflected that if there were laws which governed chance, chance was perhaps not so completely inexistent.—I must reread damn the picture yet he writes . . . she thought. She remembered. Not

exactly, but she remembered. Or wasn't it rather the probabilities? The calculation of. One out of a million. Dull dish, this cuckoldry stuff. Poor Bukharin. Françoise. She had known, just to see the streetcars go by. All those people who knew where they were going. Or who looked as if they knew. One always knows something. Madame was shedding tears in front of her cheval glass, knowing at last that all he cared about was her money.—Quick let's get it over with and get out of here. The real miracle is that everything always come out right in the end. The trip to Paris likewise. And Georges. A royalist. If ever he won't sign . . .

"Now the husband comes in, he already knows all about it," said Françoise. "But he forgives her. Would you forgive in a case like that, Marianne? See, it's all over now, he consoles her, he says don't be upset, sweetie, we'll go for a drive in the old bus. But she keeps right on, see. It hurts her like anything. You'd think she was a widow." She gave a dry, high-pitched laugh. The audience was beginning to leave before the kiss of reconciliation. While the little black dog wagged what was left of his tail, the sonorous musical background faded out in a glorious potpourri of hymns and wedding marches. Marianne patted Françoise's hand a couple of times, as if to congratulate her for her endurance, then slipped her arm inside the girl's elbow and almost lifted her out of her seat. Françoise allowed herself to be dragged through the press of the crowd which, with much shuffling of feet, blocked the aisles. She turned back two or three times, but it was really the end: the protagonists of the story had taken it upon themselves to climb into an automobile and speed down a prewar road bordered with vegetables. A dirty oil-colored light bathed the theater as they reached the exit.

Arm in arm they went along the Canebière toward the Quai des Belges. Françoise talked in a high, animated voice, happy to attract attention and to catch passing remarks about her bosom and the line of her hips. She asked Marianne what people did with their evenings before there were any movies. They must have been as bored as old cats. Her cotton print dress hardly reached her knees, and her bare calves suggested vigorous and shapely thighs. Marianne had never gone for a walk with Françoise on her arm, and would not have imagined how supple and graceful the girl's stride would be, when her appearance, her attitudes, even her pretty face, showed a definite strain of vulgarity. She had a way of touching the ground first with her toe, then following with the foot, the leg, the hip, which freed her of weight. Marianne was silent and let Françoise talk, Françoise gesticulate, Françoise acknowledge the glances slung in their direction, Françoise flip the bottom of her dress, sway her rich black tresses, thrust out her faultlessly graceful silhouette. For all her jumpiness, she seemed to go forward on a rolling carpet. Desolate, mute in their sorrow, the waters of the Old Port merged into the nothingness beyond. Far away in the inky sky, the inky water, an indecent little red light flared and vanished in a jerky rhythm. Marianne felt a vague but painless tightening of the heart. Once, one night, on the beach at Saint-Malo, she had loved

Georges. There, as here, there had been a point of red, so far away. Georges had said that it was England. She had believed him. At that age. Twenty, just a little older than Françoise. Françoise was saying that her cousin Jean was a mechanic on the Pagnol movie lot, and that was how she knew that everything was faked, the fights, and the Tarzan scenes, and when a fellow carries a girl, and the hot love scenes. Everything. "Look, for instance, something's wrong with her heart and they tell her it would be best for her to . . ."

"It would be best Françoise to take me home to sleep in your house . . ." said Marianne.

"In whose house?" Françoise asked.

"Where you live in your house with you . . ."

From Françoise came her high, short, snapped-off chuckle. They were at the streetcar stop, facing the Fier Chasseur, which was deserted and shuttered. As she laughed she raised her hand toward her mouth, but the hand did not arrive in time. Marianne's idea seemed to tickle her exceedingly. In the tone of a grown person pretending to tease a child, she asked:

"Weren't you a good girl, Marianne? Did you get into trouble home?"

Marianne's answer was delayed a fraction of a second. "Oh yes, I got into a very lot of trouble . . ." she said finally, in the tone of a child pretending to have a grown-up secret. There was an ambiguous gleam in Françoise's slit eyes. She boarded her rolling carpet and came to rest right against Marianne. Her teeth shone in the perfumed shadow of her mouth. "It's swell with me, you know, but Father and Mother, they're awfully fussy, you know, narrow-minded and all that." Her laugh rang out so abruptly, so sharply, that the other people at the streetcar stop turned around to look at her. Marianne's nose quivered with annoyance. She was about to show her impatience when Françoise took her hand.

"Here comes the horsecar. I'll tell you how we can make ourselves snug without anyone knowing. Come on, let's go, if you don't want to hoof it. Come on."

Driven like wedges into the solid mass of their fellow passengers, they were unable to talk. The conductor, pinned in a system of elbows, buttocks, and bellies, with his ticket-canceling machine planted on his stomach, sweating black and breathing red, turned the handle of the machine as a Tibetan lama would his prayer wheel. The passengers could not help breathing down each other's necks, chewing each other's ears, exchanging mute and dreadful philippics. The gentlemen who enjoyed the privilege of sitting down pretended not to see the ladies who were standing, and the latter had eyes only for the former—the eyes of a woman who sees a hairy spider in her sewing basket. At each stop, when for one person who got off four others piled on, the passengers gave forth unintelligible rumblings, which were torn from them by the increased pressure on the solar plexus and by their vague reminiscences of a golden age when there were fiacres and taxis. When the car reached the first houses of the suburban area the cramming was such that words began to issue by them-

elves from the abdominal regions of the passengers. At first they were isolated words, cautiously released, hungrily seeking an echo: "Lord, it's hot" or "What d'you pay for a seat for?" or "Eight horses—forty men"; but little by little, no legionnaire's badge being on the horizon, tongues loosened and everyone began to have his say. "They've got no consideration for anybody," sighed an old lady who was squeezed in as tight as a maggot. "They sure haven't, madame," someone chimed in. "Know what I think? They take the wheels off and cut them square." Laughter. "And they take away the lubricating oil so their victory will skate along smoother," some well-informed person added. The laughter swelled. A little man with a blue jumper and a white mustache took the floor in the voice of a basso profundo. "Just give me a Boche to eat, right here on my thumb." He stuck out his thumb and showed it to the society. "Not as good as Brittany potatoes," protested a lady in an Empress Eugénie hat. "With garlic dressing," she added in deference to Marseilles cooking. "Don't talk about garlic dressing, my good woman," said the conductor, "it makes my mouth water." When Marianne and Françoise stepped off, the car resembled a fulling mill in which a lot of cookery was mixed with a good portion of politics.

Françoise's explanations were simple, her warnings numerous. She had the keys of the house door and the apartment. They would not turn on the light in the stairway. Françoise would give Marianne her hand, and Marianne would have nothing to do but follow her. Absolutely nothing but follow her. What did she have on her feet? Espadrilles? That was fine—no noise. There were two flights of eleven steps each, and Marianne had to watch out and not miss any of them. "I'll guide you, but count them anyway, so as not to trip. And step lightly, there are some squeaky spots." They had come within sight of the house. A suspicion of light filtered through two windows of the apartment, but it was easy to guess that there was brightness behind the double covering of the curtains and the blackout cloth. "That's the dining room," said Françoise. "For a block captain, Father does a pretty bad job, letting light come through that way. He'll get himself nabbed one of these days, Papa will, they're kind of peeved at him already around here. My room is at one side, the first on the left as you go in, where you see that dark window." She was holding Marianne by the hand, talking very low in the deserted street, and Marianne felt more stupid than she had at the Colonel's. And more humiliated. "I'll open the door," said Françoise, "and if there's nobody in the hall I'll wave and you dive in." She hiccupped, holding back a laugh with an effort of which Marianne would not have thought her capable. "You know how to dive, Marianne? Anyhow I'm only kidding, there won't be anybody in the hall. It'll go smooth as a breeze. I know what the old man and the old lady are up to, see. They got into an argument this afternoon, and they're still at it. And when they have a scrap, it's always in the dining room. She irons, and he marches around and talks. I know them, don't worry. Tough talk on both sides, but no harm done. The only

bad part is that you'll have to scam at the crack of dawn. Well, shall we go to it?"

They went to it. Françoise opened the door, shut it without a sound. Holding each other's hands, they climbed the stairs, Marianne counting them one by one, eleven and eleven, conscientiously. She moved the mobile tip of her nose back and forth, slowly and cautiously, but did not succeed in avoiding the squeaky spot. One step ahead of her, Françoise let herself be borne upward by an invisible escalator. On the landing she whispered, "First door to the left, don't forget. But once you're inside, don't move till I come back. I won't be long, just time enough to show them I'm in."

Everything went without a hitch. As soon as they were inside the door, Françoise made her presence known to all and sundry, in a high, merry voice. Marianne found herself in the opaque darkness of a badly aired room. She felt helpless and tired. The tip of her nose trembled slightly, like the muzzle of an animal sniffing out new surroundings. The room smelled of being closed up and of talcum powder. Quite distinctly, hardly diffused by the thick layer of darkness, words came to Marianne's ears from the other side of the apartment. In animated terms Françoise's voluble tongue extolled the marvelous exploits of a marvelous little black dog—"gee, I don't even know what breed he was."—Damn and double damn and life what a pain . . . Marianne thought, shifting her weight from one foot to the other. She turned around on the spot where she stood, slowly, her two hands sliding over the soft and tepid darkness. An odor of bedclothes and crisp horsehair tickled her nostrils and she held back a sneeze. "Go on now, go to bed, we'll have trouble enough getting you up," said a woman's voice. "I'm not worried, this time it won't be any trouble," Françoise said. Her laugh sounded and died—almost simultaneously. Marianne caught the vigorous sucking of a kiss, then a second sucking sound, doubled in this instance, then the suddenly drawn-out, rising and falling, unexpectedly singsong voice of Françoise:

"Goo-o-d n-i-i-ght . . . Sw-e-e-t dr-e-e-ams . . ."

When Françoise snapped on the electric switch Marianne was sitting on the floor. In her hand she held a black shoelace, and her tousled hair covered her temples. With her great blue eyes she held the slit eyes of Françoise, who took off her shoes and hurled them across the room. A broad smile lighted her young teeth. "Well, what are you waiting for, Marianne? Into the feathers, my pet," she breathed. She was resplendent, as if someone had made her a present of a box of chocolate cherries. Marianne stood up and began to undo her espadrilles, steadying herself with one hand on the wall. Françoise pulled her dress over her head with a couple of wriggles. "You won't get that idea out of here," came the woman's voice from the other room—and Marianne imagined a curved finger tapping repeatedly on the top of a head. "Get this straight. . . . These grand bosses of yours, I wouldn't give a hunk of cheese for the lot of them. Françoise makes good money at her job, right now she brings home more

than you do; and I'll see that she's left alone." In violet jersey pants with yellow stripes, Françoise came over to Marianne and helped her out of her skirt. They could hear masculine steps going up and down the nearby room. "Don't talk like that, Josephine, you've got us wrong," came a man's hollow voice. "Monsieur Adrien de Pontillac . . ." The woman's voice turned suddenly shrill. "So I'm the one who's got us wrong? Oh yeah? Well, have you got a crust, the pack of you! This Mr. Big of yours cares a lot for the likes of us, he does! You've got your head on backward just because he told you to come and see him. You're not so very smart, my poor Ignace." Françoise smothered a laugh in Marianne's bare shoulder. "Come on, let's go to bed," she whispered. Marianne watched her turn back the bed and slip between the sheets. "Shall I turn out the light?" she asked. Françoise nodded, taking off her pants under cover of the sheets. Marianne turned off the light, finished her undressing in the dark, then lay down beside Françoise. "Mamma don't agree with Papa about the Legion, so they just have to have it out," said Françoise in a languid voice. The man's speech had become hoarse and hesitant. "You blabber like a woman, Josephine. You know what we're doing? We're making France over, that's what. The Marshal, now, do you think he has it easy? It's that guy Laval who's in his way, but we're on the Marshal's side, the Legion is . . ." "First of all, Ignace, I'm not blabbering, I'm speaking. And then you're darn right I'm speaking like a woman. But if you want to know how people are talking, all you have to do is take a walk around the neighborhood. It's not funny what they think of your little schemes, I can tell you. All I know is that you'll be dirty a long time before your Mr. Thingummy will give you a soap ticket, block captain or no block captain. And what are you going to tell him, anyway? That they're Communists, or Jews, where Françoise works? And that the factory ought to be closed? And let your daughter go hanging around the corners with a lot of good-for-nothings? You don't think there's enough trouble already, so you want to get Françoise into trouble too, eh? Well, I'm telling you once and for all, Ignace, leave Françoise alone. So I forbid you to serve her up on a platter for this big-shot boss of yours to eat. Françoise brings in seventy-five francs a day, and that's more than your Legion do-nothings will ever give you, you understand that, don't you? Or don't you understand anything any more? And that's enough talk now. I've said what I think, and it's all the same to me if you don't like it. Drop in at the grocery store just once, I told you enough times, you and the Legion! You're as popular there as the seven years' itch. And I'm fed up with everybody looking at me cross-eyed every place I go, because you've gone nuts on this reform stuff."

There was silence. Marianne raised herself on her elbow, stretched out her hand to find her coat and a handkerchief. In one of the pockets there was a piece of paper folded in four. She unfolded it, tried vainly to identify it by its feel, folded it again, and dropped it on the bed. Leaning on her elbow, she blew her nose vigorously.

"There you are, Françoise caught a cold," said the woman's voice in the other room.

Marianne tucked the handkerchief under the bolster and lay down. Françoise took her hand and put it to her mouth to smother a laugh. Then she held it to her breast. Marianne could feel the heart beating underneath.

» 3 «

SEATED AT HIS MAHOGANY DESK, AT A POINT EXACTLY under the paternal smile of the Marshal, whose poster portrait spread over a good third of the wall, Pierre Musaraigne was slowly drawing lines and curves with a thick six-sided pencil, red at one end, blue at the other.—What a pack of noodles! he thought, while his hand hesitated over the rounding of a curve. His thoughts inched lazily across the surface of his brain, caterpillars looking for new epithets, as if this mental name calling would bring counsel and comfort.—A pack of noodles with cheese! Carrying a file of papers, Marion came into the office, trailing in after her the dull beat of the crushing machines, whose steel cylinders daily ground up a ton of dried dates, hard as pebbles. Pierre Musaraigne greeted his secretary with a blind stare, tore off the sheet on which he had just drawn all sorts of figures, threw it into the wastepaper basket, where it landed with other crumpled sheets, and began to draw again.—Pack of noodles with white cheese! he thought. He broke the red point of his pencil, brushed away the fragments with the back of his hand, continued to draw in blue.—Pack of noodles with white cheese, with no more guts than a slug! His mind pulled up at this image, laid hold of it, while a kind of stylized mollusk was born automatically from the blue point of his pencil.—Snails! he thought. Oysters! Suddenly he was enchanted with his comparisons, enchanted as he would have been at discovering a bank note in the pocket of a pair of pants bought from a secondhand clothes man—back when he wore secondhand trousers.—Mussels! he thought. He tore the sheet from his pad, crumpled it, sent it flying into the basket. He looked at the time by the wall clock, lit a cigarette, laid his hand flat on the beveled glass which covered the top of his desk.

"Marion," he said.

Marion stopped tapping on her typewriter, tucked a rebel strand of hair behind her ear, and turned a red face ornamented with a pair of ink-colored eyes toward Pierre Musaraigne.

"Go and get those two, Laverne and Stepanoff, if you please."

"You're not waiting for Cyril?" Marion asked with the voice of an angel of bliss.

"No," he said. "It's all a lot of noise over nothing. Go and get them."

He had decided not to wait for Cyril. Cyril had an appointment at the bank, it might be that he would not have time to drop into the office before tomorrow. And besides, Cyril was too hotheaded, sometimes he went off the deep end. And besides, Musaraigne wanted to get the whole thing off his mind, since he was taking the eleven-thirty train for Vichy. And besides, and besides. "I'll be able to handle it alone," he added, addressing himself to Marion.

Marion did not answer immediately. She rose, hauling up the heavy rump which was unequally distributed on her thick, varicose legs. Alas, the war was making her put on weight. Before the armistice, she used to take long walks every day; this had kept down her excess fat. But with the German occupation such journeys on foot had become almost as difficult as getting an extra ration of sugar. She looked at herself furtively in a sliver of mirror attached to the wall above her typewriter, straightened a crooked pleat in her muslin blouse embroidered with wild flowers.

"If you call them in now, you're holding up their team's production," she said in a voice so sweet that one was tempted to ask her if she were not about to swoon. "Cyril could see them after work. He promised me he'd be back after six."

"You get in my hair, Marion," said Pierre Musaraigne, stretching. "Haven't I told you again and again that I'm the one who wants to talk to them? And at this very moment, without waiting for Cyril. And don't worry, they'll catch up on their production tomorrow. Go on, Marion. Go."

She went through the wrapping and shipping department, smiled with the corner of her mouth at the head man of the afternoon shift; smiled at Moses Bergmann, Cyril's father-in-law, who was qualified by this relationship for the job of filling out the labels; smiled at Hirsch, the cashier; peeked through Hirsch's window toward the administration department, the holy of holies where bookkeepers and stenographers juggled figures, stacked bills, drew up statements; went down the corridor which led to the workrooms. On the way she cast an eye into the big crushing-machine room, where a dozen men, most of them bare to the waist, were up to their elbows in a brown, gluey paste, and there, too, Marion bestowed a smile on the man in charge of the afternoon shift. The grating, vibrant whirl of these machines, with their blades and grinders, produced in the young woman a pure and lasting joy, the aesthetic quality of which, she was absolutely sure, no one but she understood. More than Cyril, more than Pierre, she was . . . she felt herself a part of the House.

In the confection room thirty people were working around six white wood tables laid on horses, five manipulators to each table. The date paste came from the crushing room in rolls a foot and a half long, and here were cut into rounds, each round weighing a little less than an ounce. The round was then rolled into a pellet between the hand and the surface of the table, dressed in a layer of sesame seed, wrapped in a square of cellophane, packed in cardboard boxes, two hundred to the box, moved along

to the wrapping department through an opening with a window which could be raised and lowered. Marion stood still a moment at the door of the workroom; she loved the rhythm of this systematized labor, the rhythm of these arms molding the paste with the back-and-forth movement of a connecting rod, each manipulator having his well-defined task, each group of five workers forming a homogeneous team which daily turned out its thirty-five hundred pieces, free of impurities. She loved to watch them at work, hurried and diligent, and, all things considered, happy—happy in these times when happiness was rare. She knew them all, male and female, the thirty on the afternoon shift and the thirty on the morning shift, and she knew the others too, the men and women of the administration department, of the crushing room, of the storerooms, not far short of a hundred in all.—A hundred people who, were it not for us, would have done what, would have lived how? Marion thought "us"—us the directors—with the same peace of soul as she would have thought "I"—I, Marion, secretary general of the Société Sucror, twenty-four years old, single, five feet two in bare feet, French by nationality, can read and write; with the same peace of soul, because it was true and simple, and no four-way hairsplitting could prevail against the evidence: we, with our forty-two thousand pieces a day, keep them alive—yes, *mon Dieu*, we keep them alive.

She walked into a small office, partitioned off and glassed in, smiled at Steve Futeau, the general foreman of the factory. Futeau looked up from a card index filled with cards of different colors, and returned Marion's smile.

"What are you here for, my pretty one?" he asked with jovial cordiality. He pointed with his thumb at the card index. "I'm just bringing these cards up to date. That's something that's going to be mighty handy, take my word for it. Sit down, Marion, and tell me what's on your mind."

She remained standing, with her hands resting on the edge of the table. This lad had initiative, had the ideas of an organizer, and what looks! A head cut in pure geometric lines, like certain English fashion engravings; and gray eyes; and broad shoulders; and a nonchalant ruggedness in his movements and bearing which appealed to Marion. She looked through the window at the thin blond silhouette of Mimi Rippert, Futeau's wife, who with her magician's hands was rolling the pellets of candy in their cellophane wrappings at a dizzy pace.—"Mee-mee Rip-pert"—she formed the syllables with her rouged lips—"Mee-mee . . ."

"Steve," she said in her voice of pure mercy, "Steve, Pierre has got it into his head that he wants to talk to Laverne and Stepanoff. Will you bring them in to him? It would be better for you to tell them to go."

"A swell idea," said Futeau, rising. "Will I send them in to him, and how! I was just wondering why the delay in calling them on the carpet."

Marion saw him stride into the workroom and go toward table number 4, the very table at which he had made his start as confectioner. She followed him with her eyes: he walked like a champion, like a . . .

like an officer. From a distance she heard him say in a loud, assured voice: "Lavernel Stepanoff! Musaraigne wants you in his office!"

All eyes turned toward him and followed him until he reached the table where the two men he was addressing also watched him, the first continuing mechanically to cut off rounds of date paste, the second nibbling at a piece of the sweet. At a nearby table someone began to whistle a dance-hall tune. Futeau put his hand on Laverne's shoulder.

"Get going right away, you fellows."

With the stump of a cigarette hanging from his lips, Laverne lifted the arm that held the cutting knife and quietly pushed the foreman's hand away. Youra Stepanoff went on rolling pellets under the palm of his hand, meanwhile chewing on a morsel of the paste. At the neighboring table the whistling had stopped, and someone was singing a barrack-room ballad. Steve Futeau's voice swelled and thickened:

"I have already said that I don't want anyone smoking during work hours. Tomorrow an order will be posted, and it will have to be observed."

"In that case we'll see about it tomorrow," said Laverne.

Tranquilly he continued to cut off rounds of paste. Youra had finished gnawing on his piece of candy and prepared another, which he coated liberally with sesame.

"We've got work to do, foreman. You bother us," he said.

Steve Futeau looked at young Stepanoff as if he had been hit in the face by a projectile. It infuriated him to be called "foreman," almost as if he had been called a coward or a villain; and he reacted so visibly, showed the hit so clearly, that the others rarely abstained from addressing him by the title of his function. His arms swung loosely at his sides, like two dislocated levers.

"You refuse . . ." he said, almost suffocating. "I order you to go at once. . . ."

He hated these bantering gnomes who snapped at his ankles and plagued him like gnats with their dirty little tricks. He felt the strength in his arms to fell an ox with a flick of his wrist.

"Who said anything about refusing?" asked Laverne. He lingered over the words as if testing their quality. "You can't get that idea of 'refusal to obey' out of your head. Do you feel so unsure of your authority that you've got to shake it under our noses all the time? We'll go in to see Musaraigne, we'll go as soon as I have finished cutting this batch, in five minutes."

"We'll see about that!" shouted Futeau.

He went off almost on the run. By the ear, between thumb and forefinger, he could throw them out like the brats they were! The barrack-room song accompanied him, in chorus, a little heightened, a little forced. Some of the workmen left their job and came and stood around Laverne and Stepanoff. Seated in her place beside Futeau's wife, Marianne Davy wiggled her nose as a sign of deep disapproval. She knew this Steve, this Futeau, from a long way back: a fellow who wasn't capable of winning

a humble friendship, a humble handshake, who couldn't cultivate the slightest comradely relationship. She remembered how he had pursued her relentlessly for a long time, heaping her with his oafish attentions, with gallantries so uncouth that she had felt a kind of disgusted pity at them, and she had finally gone to bed with him, to get rid of him, or to make fun of him; ah!—ah, but he didn't even know that, didn't even know how to sleep with a girl.—And there he is the Grand Janissary and he found Mimi to marry the poor thing . . . she thought. She fished in her handbag and took out a bedraggled cigarette.

"Take a couple of puffs Mimi where they took Katty Braun I wonder that's all right it's a Chesterfield. . . ."

Mimi raised her eyelids, uncovering eyes that were the color of water rippling in an aquarium as a fish darts back and forth. One never knew, by the troubled light of her pupils, whether she was crying, had just stopped crying, or was just going to cry. She shook her head in negation, in a gesture of absolute relinquishment—at Marianne, who threw the cigarette back into her bag, at her fellow workers, at the glass-partitioned office where her husband reigned, at herself, too—a negation which could have been taken for a profession of faith against the universe, against marriage, against cigarettes, but which was probably no more than an admission of powerlessness. She lowered her head, the watery light of her pupils was extinguished, and everything in her went dead, except her slender hands which moved with their own motion, as if they were pursuing ends peculiar to themselves and outside of all contingency.

Preceded by Steve Futeau, who in turn preceded Marion, Pierre Musaraigne came silently into the room. The work had begun again at all the tables, it was piecework, at this rate time was worth twice its duration; but the comments were flying hither and thither, and once more Musaraigne was aware of the fact that his presence caused the workers no particular concern. This made no difference to him, it even gave him a certain satisfaction, since he saw in it the proof that they did not look on him as a boss—in the ordinary sense of the word. He came to a halt facing Laverne, waited in silence for the other to wipe the crust of paste from his hands, and looked around the group at the table. He needed this short space of time to neutralize the weight of all the eyes which he felt fixed on the back of his neck—as if the back of the neck were a spot particularly vulnerable to the staring eye. And as Laverne prepared to light his cigarette again, Musaraigne, jiggling one of the plates of the scale with his finger tips, said in a noncommittal tone:

"You refuse to come to the office when you are sent for?"

Laverne gave up the idea of relighting his cigarette. He left his stool, shook off the crumbs of candy which had stuck to his apron, rolled down his shirt sleeves. He cracked his knuckles one by one, meanwhile looking at Musaraigne as if the latter had just allowed himself a slightly dubious pleasantry. A smile pursed his lips.

"Refuse to go to the office?" he said, weighing each syllable. Pronounced by him, the most anodyne words seemed to gain in import and amplitude. "What are you talking about? What will you come up with next? You must admit that I save my breaches of discipline for better causes."

"Pierre, I declare and repeat that he and Stepanoff refused to answer your summons!" Steve Futeau interrupted forcefully, coming forward a step. "Marion was a witness!"

The work had stopped again, this time simultaneously at all the tables. Some abandoned their places, drew near, and formed a circle, ready to intervene in the discussion, the dispute, which they felt to be imminent. Hirsch the cashier showed his greenish face through the window of his office and quickly withdrew it. The same voice as before launched into a rabble-rousing march. Still not budging from his stool, nibbling into a piece of date paste sprinkled with sesame seed, Youra Stepanoff was staring at Futeau as if he were deformed from head to foot. Close to the general foreman, Marion was just about to furnish the testimony which was expected of her, when a piping adolescent voice arose suddenly, almost shouting:

"You lie, Futeau! And Marion is a false witness! I'm nothing but a dauber of canvases, it's even been said that I was an omophagist or something, but you, you're only a poor slob without a bone in your body! Come here till I eat you, I like liver and lights!"

A gale of gaiety swept through the huge room, swelling up under the slanting ceiling, where a rectangle of sky oozed through a sooty skylight, and Musaraigne himself could not suppress an involuntary smile. The explosion of laughter beat against Futeau, from the foundation to the summit of his being, and he swayed on his feet, while his arms, driven by the excess of their useless strength, fell into the motion of a badly balanced seesaw. One moment he was at the point of wondering what they wanted of him, and why they would not let him live his own life, and the moment after he was ready to punch someone's nose or to put a bullet in his own head; but Musaraigne's intervention came to his rescue, like the grip of a strong hand holding him back at the brink of the irreparable.

"That's enough! Whether you refused or did not refuse to obey Futeau, I stand behind him completely! He's in charge of production, and his orders are Cyril's and mine. Anyone who does not care to comply with them can get out of the Suc. Understand once and for all that without discipline in your work . . ."

" . . . we will have no more dates after tomorrow noon!" Anne Marie Jouvenet broke in. Her heavy hair in disorder, brandishing a handful of candies in either hand, she had assumed the pose of an inspired vestal. "And the little children of France will be deprived of our delicious and nourishing Sucror sweets, pure sugar and pure gold!"

A new gust of laughter drowned out this last outburst, a parody of the publicity style of the House. Everyone was standing except Françoise Matthieu, a little Marseillaise who had been hired over a month before,

no one knew by whom or for what reason, her only recommendation having been a card from the municipal employment office. Musaraigne's words had brought them up all together: never before had he permitted himself such brutally direct language. "Can get out of the Suc . . ." he had said, like that, without a quiver of the eyebrows; he felt so strong, so sure that they could not give him the answer that he deserved, knowing in advance that they would only put themselves in the wrong—wrong in the eyes of the law, of course. But no doubt he was right in counting on this; those who "had claims" knew it perfectly well, since they were aware that "their" Sucror was within the law—taxes and patent, bookkeeping and labor inspectors, portrait of the Marshal and "Winter Relief," things being what they were, dates being dates. "You're shirking all the time, and we have dates enough to keep us going for only twenty-four hours . . ." was the constant threat, the perpetual scarecrow that hung over their slumber, as if the supply of raw material depended on their willingness to obey rather than on the effects of the blockade and on the requisitions of the German and Italian commissions. And, in fact, the "directors" were counting on this, the notice posted yesterday was sufficiently explicit, and no one was entertaining any false hopes: the directors expected to put an end to what they called the "amateur spirit" in the factory, the spirit of co-operative enterprise, to any spirit whatever. Musaraigne was quite aware that the workers, and especially those who had been longest on the job—the "founding members" as they called themselves—had different views on the question, considering the work their work, and the House their House; he was quite aware of it, but what all these mollusks were far from imagining was that efficiency is obtained at the price of production. . . . He shrugged his shoulders, suddenly demoralized, disconcerted all at once to find himself thinking in terms of commercial formulas—the price of efficiency, or should he perhaps have said efficiency of prices, unless . . . "Come with me, Laverne and Stepanoff, I want to talk to you." He went out with bent head and heavy tread, leaving them all standing but already recaptured by the imperative call of their tasks. But Françoise Matthieu, who had not raised her eyes from her work, now left her place as a queen abandons her throne, and made her way toward Marianne. She took her hand, drew her aside. A shadow of perplexity parted her lips over her young teeth.

"Why are they at each other's throats all the time?" she asked. "Is it over this co-operative?" She tried to catch Marianne's great blue eyes. "Before the war there was a co-operative in our quarter. They sold soap and thread and things like that. They quarreled there too, and then they closed." She was silent a moment, and then, with a sudden uneasiness in her golden pupils, she asked, "What is a co-operative anyway, Marianne?"

Marianne pulled her hand away. She looked at Françoise's half-open lips. They were humid and warm and red against the white background of her teeth. "Don't worry about it too much you chatter I'll explain it to you without knowing anything keep quiet at home . . ."

A smile spread across Françoise's cheeks. Her flowered cotton dress clung closely to the mold of her thigh. "You'll come back and sleep at our house, Marianne? You will, won't you? And here, look, you left this on the bed. . . ."

Out of the pocket of her apron she took a sheet of paper folded in four, covered with small print. *Liberation—Organ of the United Resistance Movements*, Marianne read. She closed her eyes, trying to remember. Yesterday evening. The coat. The handkerchief. The sardine-packed tram. A young fellow brushed against her. Unpleasantly. Slipping propaganda tracts into people's pockets. Nice job. She smiled inwardly, without opening her eyes. The crowd—his good luck. Otherwise he'd get a kick in the shin with her heel. That was best, when someone put his hand where she didn't like it. "Hey, are you asleep on your feet, Davy? What is this, sleep-walking?" The playful voice of Steve Futeau made her jump. She went back to her seat, smiling to Françoise from a distance. Futeau, having got neither a word nor a look, strode across the vast room and slammed the door of his glassed-in closet of an office. Standing near the general foreman's worktable, Marion looked at him as if he had come from afar off.

"Marion," he said, fingering one of the daisies embroidered on the girl's blouse. "Marion, either they will apply the methods I recommended in my report, and order will reign in the joint, or else things are going to go from bad to worse until the whole business caves in, and in that case I prefer to resign right away." He put his hand on Marion's bare forearm. "Go back to Pierre, my pretty one, he will need you. You'll tell me later what good old Pierre dishes out to those two loafers."

Marion did not say a word. Steve's hand printed outlines of joy on her bare forearm. She did not say a word, but it was as if she had promised everything.

Seated in his revolving chair, playing with a paper knife, Pierre Musaraigne was talking like a comrade, like a friend, persuasive and persuaded. It was a thing that always astonished him, how you get to convince yourself of a proposition that at first looks unsure to you: all you have to do is talk about it—talk well, of course. He would have preferred that they sit down too: you talk better to people who are your equals in every respect; but they had scorned the chairs which he offered them and remained standing, with Marion behind them taking sentences, commas, periods, and repetitions in shorthand. Youra Stepanoff did not seem to be listening. He pretended to be interested in the aged Marshal, whose senile head rested under a gold-braided kepi like a bad plaster cast under a crystal globe; he studied the advertising chromos whose golds and scarlets covered the white walls of the room with a motley pattern of color—a butterfly drinking in the nectar of a Sucror sweet, Napoleon dismounting to receive a Sucror sweet, three Sucror sweets favorably compared to a beefsteak such as had not been seen since the defeat—he looked at all this and he yawned and he dandled from one foot to the other and he picked his nose.

While he went on developing his periods, Pierre Musaraigne watched Stepanoff out of the corner of his eye: the young fellow was bored, the time was dragging for him as at a music lesson—a lesson—lesson—lesson, he thought through the words he heard himself pronouncing—an idiotic lesson I'm handing them on date picking, date drying, date paste. This was to him another source of astonishment—how all of a sudden one ceases to believe in the solidity of one's own arguments.—It's like thinking that one is thinking, he mused, or like looking at oneself in a mirror, when there is no reason to be proud. He stammered for a moment, caught between the necessity of going ahead with his demonstration and a metaphysical doubt as to the value of demonstrations in general. Pencil suspended, Marion waited for him to extricate himself from his stammering, ready to resume her hieroglyphic scratchings. The beat of the crushing machines assailed the solidity of the air, like the vibration of the engines in a ship at sea. Youra Stepanoff was playing with the wastebasket with the toe of his shoe, frankly indifferent, it seemed to Musaraigne. Marc Laverne alone listened with patient and sustained attention, and the serenity of his look, which never left Pierre Musaraigne, restored to the latter a new flood of eloquence. His words strung themselves together, neatly and docilely, drawing toward a logically perfect and phonetically irrefragable conclusion.

"And then," he began again, crossing his legs, and the point of his paper cutter mirroring itself in the plate glass, "and then, you don't appear to take into account the fact that we are living in a world at war, in an invaded country, under a government of policemen, subject to all sorts of bureaucratic pettifogging, being short of everything, dates, sesame, wrapping paper, string, everything. Believe me, it's a mighty big job just to keep the business going. You also forget that among us we have close to twenty foreigners, of whom about ten are—are Hebrews, and we've got to keep our heads down. Yet we ask you to do this or that, any little thing, for instance not to smoke during work hours, and right away you kick over the traces. Do you want to know how much the price of dates has gone up per ton in the last three months? And at that, if we could only get as much as we wanted of them! And transportation, and workmen's compensation, and sicknesses, and . . . Look here, I defy you to find a single business in all of France, in the whole of Europe, where for five to six hours at a pretty soft job a worker gets a wage of seventy-five francs!"

He stopped talking, uncrossed his legs, drew his chest back into the depths of the armchair. Laverne had let him discourse for forty long minutes without interrupting him, and even over his last words he cast a doubtful silence, as if he wondered whether Musaraigne had really put the final period to his pleading. Taking advantage of the respite, Marion hastened to sharpen the point of her pencil, ready to catch on the fly, and to write down forever, the specious arguments which would be brought against the technical director's reasoning. She admired this Pierre Musaraigne.

raigne; she admired his patience, his need of arguing things out, of using logic, as if there were the slightest chance of convincing fellows who had no grasp of reality. She too was a leftist, she too longed for the death of the Germans and a return to democratic ways, but Laverne and all his type were stuffed with prejudices, sectarians who saw nothing but bossism, exploitation, class struggle, even where in reality there was only frank and loyal comradeship. Cyril, had he been present, would certainly not have bothered his head with verbal circumvolutions; he would have put it to them straight, take it or leave it. But Pierre, with his bemused, wandering eyes, with the forehead of a thinker belabored with scruples, Pierre was not big enough. She had read a book on Taylorism and a book on the division of labor, and she was as sure as she could be that Pierre Musaraigne did not have the stuff.—That's not the way to be an industrialist, that's not the way Steve . . .

"Very well," said Marc Laverne. "All very well."

. . . veriwelalveriwel, wrote Marion in shorthand . . . butalusahasnodirektbaringonthekwestion . . .

So, all that he, Pierre Musaraigne, had just set forth with the greatest attention to objectivity, the other, Marc Laverne, judged to have no direct bearing . . . According to him, it was not a matter of pushing production to four thousand pieces per team, nor of arrivals of ships, nor of bureaucracy, of string, of sesame, of dates, of the dates, the devil take the dates, but purely and simply of the management of the business. "You reproach us with forgetting that we are in the midst of a war. . . . I don't mean to say anything unkind, but your phraseology is that of a deputy on vacation. The Sacred Union in the Sucror is an out-and-out joke. Leave that to others, for others. What you seem to forget, you and your numerous 'codirectors,' is that the joint does not belong to you as your own—not to you nor to Cyril nor to Futeau—it belongs to us, to all of us. A bit of history, if you don't mind, so as to put things straight . . ."

"It's no use!" Musaraigne cut in, accompanying his words with a gesture of his hand. "I am in no humor to listen to stories which, in sober fact, have nothing to do with the case. What is asked of you—and what you are going to do—is to work without kicking up any more trouble. We have enough to contend with, without your adding your two cents' worth. Try to do your work properly . . ."

"Our work is absolutely above reproach," Laverne interrupted in his quiet voice. Every word he uttered seemed to have been thought out down to its very roots. "It would not be possible to say as much of yours. You must have a solid dose of effrontery, to dare to impugn the quality of our work."

"That's where you're wrong! I have reports . . ."

"I beg of you not to interrupt me, Musaraigne. I let you talk your fill, now have the patience to hear how we see things. This, then, is what you've come to: you have reports submitted to you—reports, you are the one who used the word—by that misfit top sergeant . . ."

"I forbid you to insult Futeau!" Musaraigne shouted, bringing his fist down on the beveled glass.

"Why?" asked Youra Stepanoff. "Why?" He was still nudging the wastebasket with his foot. "Isn't this Futeau of yours the perfect type of top kick with a couple of hash marks? There's hardly anyone but Marion in all Marseilles who can see an Arab prince in him."

. . . butmarioninalmarseilhoocanseanarabprinsinhim, Marion scribbled in shorthand. But her pencil ran so fast, her hieroglyphics unrolled at such speed, that she did not react until she had set down the young Russian's words. She rose brusquely and said, in a desperately sweet voice:

"Steve Futeau is worth more than the two of you together, standing here and belittling him in his absence."

"Let me take care of the discussion, Youra," said Laverne. He looked at Musaraigne with curiosity, as if the man sitting beneath the poster of the mustached Monsieur had struck a particularly bizarre pose. "As for you, Pierre, have the good sense not to give way to these outbursts of melodrama. You understand that pounding your fist on the table intimidates no one, nor do your prohibitions. To get back to Futeau, I am rather surprised that you, Pierre Musaraigne, are not the first to oppose the procedures which that fellow is introducing into the Suc. Don't you see that what I am bound to call his unspeakable conduct gives off an odor of police provocation? I agree that maybe he isn't entirely aware of it, but doesn't that prove an almost complete lack of good judgment? I have here one of his incomparable questionnaires, which he submits to us to be filled out and signed. Yes, yes, of course, you know this as well as Futeau does himself, but listen nevertheless, it sounds . . . it sounds fresher when it's read to you. 'Is it true that on Friday, August 14, Youra Stepanoff destroyed two wrapping boxes?' 'Were you present on August 10, when Anne Marie Jouvenet said that Sucror candy is not fit for pigs?' 'You are reported to have said, on Saturday afternoon at five forty-five, that you would like to change teams. Why? Is it not on account of Marianne Davy, who wraps the pieces badly?' 'Giving sickness as his excuse, Emilio Lopez missed three days last week. Did you not meet him the morning of the day before yesterday, at the corner of the Rue Thiers?' Et cetera, et cetera. Speaking of work, there's some of my Lord Futeau's. If that fellow were not lacking in common sense, to say nothing of moral sense, he would know that there isn't a shop on earth where people would put up with this stuff. Out of this sort of filth he manufactures unfavorable reports on anyone whose looks don't suit him; it's with the help of this filth that he has put together a whole file which points to the dismissal of my modest self. And you, have you got the courage to back him up in this work? Has all this nonsense about being 'directors' gone to your heads completely? But just to prove to you how far this little game can go, I in turn have carried out an investigation of Futeau. And although I don't have at my disposal the means of applying pressure that your general foreman uses, I have collected eighty-two signatures demanding that he be fired. And

if I wanted to indulge in this kind of amusement, I would get the same result without much trouble in regard to you yourself, Pierre Musaraigne, and Cyril, for that matter, and some others among your co-directors. But that is not the point at issue, and after all I'm not malicious— No, let me go on. Let me give you the details of a pretty curious situation. A little over eighteen months ago . . .”

Pierre Musaraigne let him talk. He took his chin in his hand, and he let him talk. Through the lids of his half-closed eyes he saw young Stepanoff's shoe maneuvering the wastebasket.—If only they would sit down, those two. Anne Marie Jouvenet said the Sucror was a pigsty. Ah, the fine lass, the fine can, the fine bitch. If only she would. A bold, obedient halo, the sound of the workrooms bumbled slowly around Laverne's voice. Musaraigne made an effort to listen to him—so what, a year and a half ago . . . —What is he talking about, who am I to put my fingers in my ears? he thought. He took his fingers out of his ears, coughed into his folded hands.—If only one could have a little bit of esteem for others, for oneself. A girl like that, good Lord. Now he was listening—listening because he couldn't help it. They were a small number who had been stranded in Marseilles as they might have been stranded elsewhere, anywhere at all in the vast expanse of a France cut up into zones, sown with concentration camps, crawling with spies; a small number who had known each other long before the day of divine panic, when ten million souls rushed clapping down the roads of the country. Demobilized and sound of limb, young and famished, they met in Marseilles instead of in Lyons, instead of in Toulouse, no doubt by reason of the sea, which comes up to its streets, up to its public squares, and because, being endless and bottomless, the sea is like hope. England, Gibraltar, Egypt, all the miraculous estuaries which, like beacons, like the finger of God, flashed in the uncertain sky, were at the edge of the water, the same water as theirs, all they had to do was to cross it. To cross it, or to drink it dry. Aboard a sailboat long since discovered in the little harbor of Cassis, three of them embarked one stormy night—marine charts stolen from the Geographical Institute, Boy Scout compass, secondhand sextant, a store of canned goods—ready and calm, putting their confidence in the first British submarine they would meet; but six days later they were back, swollen and green as watermelons, two on the rocks of the Madrague, the third at the mouth of the Rhone, and the sailboat, too, was back, dismasted and keel up. Two others got themselves pinched in the Pyrenees, on the way into Andorra; a sixth was shot as a hostage; a seventh had gone back into the occupied zone and was cutting telephone wires. Waters and frontiers, French gendarmes and German machine guns, plus hunger, plus feeling of rotting on your feet—France was well taken care of. Then, one fine morning, following a half-joking suggestion of Marc Laverne, who had always opposed the emigration venture, the four of them who were left got the phenomenal idea of going all out into ersatz foods. You could sell anything in this marvelously sheltered France, and in the first place anything that was reminiscent of food:

bread with clay in it, cheese with catnip in it, sausage made of ground fishbones, pepper made of psyllium seed. It was a genial idea, endless and bottomless, somewhat like the sea: they thought of manufacturing pilafs, mayonnaise, *foie gras*, jellies, preserves, fricassees, hashes; manufacturing them with dog's-tooth grass, nettles, darnel, dodder, wild clematis, costmary, wartwort, hedge hyssop. But they had to learn how to buy and how to sell, Hebrew or Sanskrit would have been as easy, one of them being a proofreader, another an electrician, another a poet, another an actress; and then how to distinguish between thyme and marjoram, between parsley and camomile. And yet it was a great idea, they were convinced of it, they felt an intimate mathematical certitude about it, as they might have, for instance, about the equality of races in the Federative Republic of Europe. And since this, like any other great project, was not easy of realization, they spent days discussing, weeks conspiring, months digesting cookbooks and treatises on herbs, until at last . . . the prodigious practical invention . . . the supergenial practical idea . . . to knead date meat . . . to dress it in almond powder . . . to scent it with chemical aromas, orange-flavored, myosotis-flavored, stew-flavored . . . And since they knew Pierre Musaraigne, who was a chemist, who sold evening papers on the Canebière, who slept in doorways, they let him into the secret. They decided to tax themselves, Marc Laverne sold his portable typewriter, Anne Marie Jouvenet her Musset and her Molière, the others their rags, Pierre Musaraigne contributed his day's earnings, and they bought ten pounds of dates, a quart of nuts, a bottle of orange extract. Six months later the Société Sucror was doing a hundred thousand francs a month gross.

Everything went well at first; so well that it was hard to believe it. They were five at the beginning, and soon fifteen, and soon fifty. All their pals who were loafing here and there, with flabby stomachs and soft muscles, were cordially invited to pitch in. One day Cyril Daubigny—the real name was D'Aubigny; but as he was a democrat, and married to a Jewess, he aspired to modesty—one day Cyril Daubigny came into the Sucror: he had obtained credit to buy a clandestine shipment of dates, to give, as he expressed it, “a new drive to the enterprise”; then one day soon thereafter came bookkeepers, cashiers, secretaries, advertising men, and general foremen. The joint went under the name of Musaraigne, but for themselves, among themselves, it was of absolutely no importance who was the front man—since they had to have a front man. For them, among them, in fact, the business was an egalitarian co-operative. All the rest—the director-administrator-secretaries and other generalships—was humbug and window dressing, intended to open the wholesalers' eyes and to close those of Vichy—co-operatives being illegal. In reality everyone drew an equal wage, whether he was a confectioner or an errand boy or a major-domo with his signature on file at the bank; and there was a Mutual Assistance Fund, and a Permanent Commission, and a Hiring Committee, and no one could be dismissed except by absolute majority—a quorum being obligatory. And although none of the “founders” had any idea of getting rich, and

felt hats and silk hose were not among their sartorial ambitions, a year later the monthly gross had climbed gaily over a hundred and fifty thousand francs, and neither the end nor the bottom was in sight, and it was truly staggering, truly like the sea.

Marion took down in shorthand what Laverne was saying, what Musaraigne was listening to, what Stepanoff was not listening to. Youra Stepanoff had finally drawn the wastebasket in between his legs and seemed extremely absorbed in exploring it. From the poster above them the aged Monsieur with the head festooned with oak leaves smiled down vaguely and with kindness.—If only something would happen, thought Musaraigne. It happened that one day the Permanent Commission had expressed a desire to put its nose into the account books, as was its strict right.—The accounts? the directors had said, lifting astonished eyebrows. The accounts? You know nothing about accounting.—Don't let that worry you, the Permanent Commission had answered. There's Laverne, who took political science, he's well up on plus value. Then, with wrinkled brow and hushed voice, the directors had explained that the books were doctored and the figures faked—you get it, to take Vichy in. But, while it was unanimously anti-Vichy, the Permanent Commission was not swallowing this story whole, and the directors were forced to admit that they had allotted themselves special emoluments, in view of the fact that their task was fraught with perils and responsibilities. The Permanent Commission made a fuss, demanded an accounting, called for an inventory, summoned a general assembly, spoke of amorality, proved that the Sucror bureaucracy was sitting in a tub of butter and that considerable sums of money had vanished in thin air, and awarded itself dictatorial powers. But the day after these majority decisions were made, a notice appeared on the walls of all the workrooms—a ukase signed and countersigned: by order of the office, and in view of the growing difficulty of procuring supplies, the Permanent Commission, the Mutual Assistance Fund, and the Hiring Committee were dissolved until further notice; and those who were not satisfied might make themselves known to Hirsch the cashier, who was supplied with instructions and some small change.

"Kissi-kissoo-kissa . . ." said Cyril Daubigny, tickling Georgette's chin with his forefinger. "Bib-boob-badaboob . . ." he said. He slid a sidewise look at the alarm clock standing on a console, called his wife, still looking into Georgette's face. "Zizi-zazoo-zabizoo . . ." he said, with his hands on his thighs, leaning over his daughter, whose tuft of blond hair, tied up in a red bow, quivered like a feather duster. The baby watched her father with the serious air of a grown person who is being asked for a loan of money. You'd think she was judging you, as if . . . He did not complete the formula, his mind being turned from it by Nelly, whose bedroom slippers with their clapping heels came scraping across the floor. She put her hand on her husband's shoulder.

"My, how she stares at you!" she said. "What did you do to her?"

"Me?" he said, straightening up. "Why, nothing."

Nelly touched her husband's jaw with her fingers.—Heavens, how homely you are, my poor Cyril, she thought. They had been married for seventeen months, but the man's ugliness struck her as strongly as it had when she first knew him. She bent over the crib, smoothed the pillow, patted the baby's hair.—How lucky that Georgette doesn't look like him, how lucky . . . She kissed the baby's fist, her eyes moving over its face methodically, as if for the first time—no, thank God, not prognathous nor myopic nor a chin like a powder flask nor a nose, what kind of a nose does he have, I know someone told me, Byzantine, no, orthodox, no, Gothic, yes, that's it, a Gothic proboscis. She breathed a sigh, tightened the cord of her dressing gown.

"I didn't expect to see you at this time of day," she said. "Are you going out again, Cyril?"

"Of course," he said. "And right away," he said. "And they are waiting for me at the Suc. And I've got to make it fast. And you're a swell fellow, Nelly."

His hand hungry for her hip, his Gothic nose pressed against his wife's, he drew her to him. She closed her eyes, letting him attack her with his knee, an old routine. Like this, with her eyes closed, she rather liked Cyril's low voice, with its unexpected vibrancy. She caressed his jaw with her open hand, knowing that he adored that, adored her petting the ugliest salient of his ugly head; and just now he was in fine humor, multiplying his ands—and they, and I, and you, and Suc. She risked a glance at Georgette through her barely opened eyelids; the little one was looking askance at them, like a bearded gaffer crammed with weighty apothegms.—Eight months old already, how fast the time goes, she thought. Gently she pushed Cyril away, and again adjusted the cord of her robe.—If I don't stop him, he'll . . . She made a little sign with her eyes, toward the baby, but he gathered that she was reminding him of the time. "Pa-pi-papoo . . ." he said, looking at the alarm clock. He grabbed his brief case, which was filled to bursting, and snapped open the lock.

"And catch this, Nelly!" he said. "And two liters! And at three hundred francs a liter! And there!"

He threw her a metal flask which she caught on the fly, high above her head, with a perilous little leap. Oil. At three hundred francs a liter. A bargain. She slipped her arm under Cyril's and walked with him to the gate. In the small front garden Madame Bergmann was sprinkling the lettuce, with a saucepan in one hand and a colander in the other. Cyril greeted her with a nod, and she returned a broad grimace, showing her porcelain teeth, then called him—my son; then—be careful of the cars; then—till this evening.—It's not for you, till this evening, old thing-in-law, thought Cyril, squeezing Nelly under the arm. Wasn't it in the Indies that they threw widows on the funeral pyre? Or used to, at any rate. In France it ought to be mothers-in-law. He felt in a bellicose humor, would have liked to pick up a stone, to thumb his nose; but a tram turned the corner with

a shriek of its ungreased brakes, and he had to leave. He plunged a kiss into Nelly's eye and set out on the run to catch the car, with his brief case slapping against his leg. He could not stand mothers-in-law. He could not stand them. Nelly waited until he had climbed the shaky step and the two coupled cars had disappeared around the turn, making the rail squeal. "Did Cyril bring anything good?" asked Madame Bergmann. "Some jam, maybe?" Nelly muttered an unintelligible answer. She knew that her mother annoyed Cyril like an itch. In the narrow garden walk the gravel crackled under her dragging slippers. Madame Bergmann began again to make rain over the dusty knobs of lettuce. Far away the voice of a newspaper hawker announced a new and inevitable German victory. At the base of the house the shadow of a cloud swallowed vast chunks of sunlight.

Hirsch the cashier was afraid and knew it. He knew that in the end all this bickering would bring bad luck to him, to him in particular, the last of the Hirsches, Gustave Henri Hirsch.—Charles killed at Dunkerque, Victor interned in a Stalag, Father in the Drancy camp, and they'll get me when it's my turn, when it's my turn. As some people can feel a storm coming, he could smell catastrophe. He had an intuitive sense of dirty work to come; and he could do nothing about it, it was born in him. But here, in what concerned the Sucror, he did not understand. Sincerely, honestly, he did not understand.—Here we are, living at a time when each hour threatens to be your last, when each day lived in peace is a sort of victory won over hell, and look at these meddlers, these troublemakers, these schemers, these hagglers for the hell of it, these dunce-cap delegates! Hirsch the cashier could not figure out what they were after, what was eating them, these every-day-is-Sunday workers, these revolutionaries smitten with the love of property. He cast a discouraged glance at the young people walking up and down outside Musaraigne's door, counted them off, three men and two women, coming and going as if they were mounting guard.—That Marc Laverne, a Jew like me perhaps, I wonder if there's anyone who is not a Jew nowadays, and that's what he's doing, he thought. He moistened his thumb and forefinger, began to count bills. A belch of distress started from his stomach and traveled the length of his trachea like an air bubble. He went off in his count, tried to catch the eye of Moses Bergmann, who was busy putting addresses on gummed labels, began counting the bills again. At his back, their eyes bunged with figures, four assistant bookkeepers wasted away at their scrivening.—Light out, disappear, pack my trunks for the desert islands . . . he thought with an effort. For some time now he had been musing about a desert island, and what he would have to take with him in his trunk in order to make himself a decent little life out there. He had never liked traveling, landing in an unfamiliar city gave him a sensation of drowning, but for some time the spirit of an explorer had been awakening in him. A couple of palm trees, a couple of banana trees, a beach to fish, lobsters under the rocks—and what more could he ask for? He was modest in his wants, modest

also in his possessions. Hirsch the cashier did not have much, about a hundred dollars bought little by little on the black market at the fantastic price of a hundred and fifty-six francs to the dollar, but he would have given everything, absolutely everything, including his gabardine, his tweed suit, his collection of the classics, provided he could get away, no matter where he went, no matter how, to Switzerland, to Sweden, even to Turkey, because it was useless to think of America.—Yet there are some who get out and go to the Americas, he thought; who manage somehow; who get out like letters in the mail, the lucky stiff. Me . . . what good am I? No luck. He wet the corners of the bills with saliva—thirty-two thousand, thirty-three, thirty-four . . .—Visa and all that, he thought, licking his thumb and forefinger. He would have coughed up a hundred dollars and ten years of his life, he had lost ten already as a professor, or anyway as a schoolteacher in a hole outside of Paris, only to be dropped at a time like this. He thought back to the good days when one could sell one's teeth if they were good-looking, or one's hair if it was the right length; and it really was too bad that we could not do the same now . . . with our years. There would have been regular businesses, special offices, on the lines of an insurance company; one would go there: Here you are, I offer you ten fine, healthy years, what? And here, this is my medical certificate, notarized and all: nothing, not a defect, barely a twitch of indigestion once in a while . . .—Something like that ought to be possible, he thought. With progress. Certainly a lot better than Voronoff. They would take a few good years from you by snipping off a bit of kidney or of intestine, or by pumping out a dram of your spinal fluid. There have been crazier ideas than that, and yet . . . Poor us, we were born too soon. He slipped a rubber band around the sheaf of bills he had just counted, yawned without conviction, pulled over an adding machine.—Over two hours they've been at it in Musaraigne's office. If only they don't kick up a row, the brutes. That Marc Laverne! He sighed, and turned the machine back to zero.—What of it? he thought. What of it? At a hundred thousand francs a year, I would have been very well fixed, O American marble God. . . .

Coming in from the corridor, Cyril Daubigny crossed through the wrapping and shipping department at the double, tossing out a short and sonorous hello. One glance was enough to take in the situation.—There's a wrangle going on in Musaraigne's office, these five are waiting to see what comes out of it, Hirsch the cashier is eating his heart out, and Papa-in-law Moses, innocent as Georgette, isn't aware of a thing. He pushed open the door and let it slam noisily behind him.

Marion was stabbing at the thirty-eighth page of her notebook. Standing with his back against the wall, Marc Laverne was listening to Pierre Musaraigne as he once more reviewed the difficulties proper to any directoral task in time of war and restrictions. "If you're going to make trouble every second minute," he was saying, "then it's perfectly simple: I wash my hands of it. The shop can go to the devil, and I go back to selling papers on the Canebière. . . ." Squatting comfortably on his heels, Youra

Stepanoff stopped burrowing in the wastebasket for a moment and stared at Musaraigne as if the latter had uttered a phrase worthy of appearing in an anthology. Cyril tossed his brief case on the desk and said in his most vibrant basso:

"It's final: the bank won't listen to a word. They refuse categorically to discount our paper. A pretty pass, as I see it. I don't know how I'll hold on until some money comes in, to say nothing of the notes due on the thirtieth. Nearly two hundred thousand to get our hands on before the end of the month. What are the swine trying to do? Knock us out cold?"

Musaraigne blinked his eyes. His baffled, questioning expression brought a faint smile to Laverne's prominent cheekbones. Cyril cleared his throat, as if to give more weight to his words, and all of a sudden Musaraigne understood.—A slick operator, he thought. What will he come up with next? . . . He could not help stealing a look at Laverne, who was still standing quietly against the wall and studying Daubigny with interest. Marion, ill at ease, crossed, then uncrossed, her heavy legs. Musaraigne slid down in his revolving chair and covered his face with his hands.—If only we could get away with it, he thought. He felt a little sickened, as on the morning after a heavy night. He saw himself leaving the room, going down the stairs, saw the street, the blue trolley-bus, the yellow sun, the indolent sea, the buoy red as an inflamed eye, the broad waters spilling out of the milky cup of the sky. He saw himself asleep at sea. A short silence fell upon the narrow office dominated by the paternal old Monsieur, a moment of indecision as disturbing as stage fright, and Marion inadvertently knocked against the keyboard of her typewriter. Like a prompter curled up in his box, Youra was flipping through the pages of a text known only to himself. Without changing his position, leaning far back in his chair and holding his face in his hands, Musaraigne spoke slowly, a word at a time, almost reciting:

"They won't agree. They judge that we do not have the moral right. The Sucror belongs collectively to all those who work for the House. It's up to the Commission to decide. We are not empowered to act. I . . . He spoke as if . . ."

Abruptly he jumped to his feet, pushing the chair back against the wall, and got to the door. Cyril Daubigny, blocking the exit, did not move an inch. His spatula-shaped jaw was thrust out perpendicular to his nose. He stood a head taller than Musaraigne. They weren't grown up yet, the sniveling brats. All that stuff was humbug. He had a wife and child, and this business was for them, his wife and child. The rest—what did he care for the rest? Marion dropped her notebook, but caught it as it fell, with a slapping sound. Pale and undone, Musaraigne got back to his place behind the beveled glass of his desk. With his arms folded across his chest, Laverne tried to catch Daubigny's myopic eye. On the poster the aged, gentle Monsieur smiled perseveringly.

"Very well," said Daubigny. "Very well. We do not have the moral right. Let's sit around and theorize about collective property. But as for

the right, I'm taking it: the Commission can go to hell, and collective property can go with it. That's that. Is it clear enough?"

"So that's that?" said young Stepanoff, standing up. "Well, Monsieur Daubigny, the Commission that you say can go to hell wants you to know that you can go faster and farther, Monsieur Daubigny. And for good, Monsieur Daubigny."

Marc Laverne moved toward the door without a word. Cyril Daubigny stepped out of the way. Youra Stepanoff shook the bundle of papers which he had fished out of the wastebasket.

"As for you, Pierre, I've got no grudge against you. If you want to learn to draw, I'll give you lessons. I'll teach you to sketch a pair of thighs and a behind that are worth the trouble. Free of charge, Monsieur le Directeur."

. . . behind that ar worth the trouble free of charge, Monsieur le Directeur, Marion wrote in shorthand.

AFTER A GOOD LOOK ALL AROUND THE PLACE, IVAN Stepanoff and Yvonne Tervielle sat down on two wicker chairs, painted red, white, and blue. There was no one on the terrace of the establishment, which was called the Café de la Victoire. The street—the avenue—had a Sunday air about it, although it was a working day, and the quiet and polite appearance of a county-seat boulevard, although this was a capital. The pace of life here seemed slow and measured: one could keep up without hurrying. A little to the right of them, the moving pivot of the Carrefour Foch, a policeman wearing the new uniform of the state police was directing traffic. To Yvonne there was something unusual—she was not sure what it was—in the way he did things, something that surprised her. He stopped a bicycle, gave priority to a veteran who had lost his leg. Then came a manner of ricksha, mounted on bicycle wheels, powered by two men who shifted their weight alternately from one pedal to the other; but the policeman made it wait, and gave priority to a pregnant woman. Followed a minute of respite, which gave the policeman a chance to scratch himself under the collar. Then, suddenly, one after the other, came a car driven by wood gazogene, a cart drawn by a genuine mule, a nursemaid pushing a perambulator. Priority went to the nursemaid. The suspicion of a smile slid over Stepanoff's convex glasses. "You'd think the infirm of the city all went by at this crossing," he said. Yvonne nodded silently. "The lame, the halt, and the liverish. A symbol," Stepanoff added. The waiter presented himself, asked what the lady and gentleman would have; asked gravely, seriously, as if anyone could expect to have his alimentary desires satisfied. "What have you got?" Yvonne inquired, meeting him halfway; but, bad habits being hard to lose, she added, "that's good?" The waiter studied them one after the other, calmly, without haste, as if he were gauging them. "If Madame has no objection to healthy beverages," he said imperturbably, "I would recommend Vichy water. It is a natural product, and a specialty of the town." He spoke his lines like a master of ceremonies. Yvonne divined the imperceptible smile of Stepanoff, the unexpressed smile of the waiter, and agreed to the specialty of the town. The policeman had detained another ricksha and was lending

the support of his protection to a diplomatic-corps automobile. At that moment Yvonne recognized what it was in the policeman's manner that had bothered her. "He carries his moral sense at arm's length," she said. "Who?" Stepanoff asked. "He," said Yvonne, with a glance in the policeman's direction. "He?" Stepanoff repeated. She left him in doubt. The waiter brought a bottle and two glasses. "Vichy-Etat," he said, popping the cap. "Grande Source."

He had hair in his ears and his nails were not very clean, but Yvonne could have given him a wholehearted smile. She moistened her lips in the glass, powdered her nose. They had come in on the noon train, Stepanoff carrying an identity card in the name of Jerome Auguste Cheval, commercial representative from Grenoble, and Yvonne carrying her authentic papers, since she was French on both her father's and mother's side, and therefore free to travel in Free France. They had undertaken this journey as a last resort, the efforts made in Marseilles to obtain an exit visa for Ivan having proved fruitless. The presence of a young and pretty woman at a man's side sometimes had the effect of neutralizing the touchiness of policemen, and they had decided, as a measure of precaution, that she would make the trip with him. They had an hour to wait before the opening of the Sûreté Nationale offices in the Hôtel de Russie.

"I must admit, Ivan, that I'm a little jittery about the whole thing," said Yvonne. "I can't stop wondering if it wouldn't be better to ask Smith's advice before taking a chance over there. Smith is in Vichy, you know, I got his hotel address from Lepage. Do you want to?"

Stepanoff shook his head negatively. "Smith is literally overwhelmed with work. Moreover, he could not give us any information we haven't got already. Lastly, it could be compromising, for him and for us, if we were seen with him. We'll have to face their Sûreté, Yvonne. Face them squarely, and stand up to them firmly." While he spoke he was watching the policeman's arm, as if he too had discovered something resembling a moral sense balanced on the back of his hand. He did not know what species of firmness he would have to display. He did not want to think of it. Their undertaking had no solid foundations. Risky as a throw of the dice, its outcome was incalculable. Stepanoff told himself that everything would depend on the humor of the people in the office, the thickness of the administrative ink, the ambiguity of the latest directives, and certain other imponderables of like magnitude. He observed the street, the passers-by, the wide avenue planted with trees and kiosks, the buildings in the distance, of which three out of every four were hotels.—Palace hotels, as they say, he thought. There is a stinging irony, his thought continued, in the destiny of this subgovernment: to find itself relegated to a position between the bathrooms and the service elevators of a watering place. An absurd idea came to him: they must at least have had the bidets taken out. . . . Thousands of bidets. Actually thousands. Moved out during the night. Out the back way. For decency's sake. For modesty's sake. Dispatched toward Baden-Baden. Toward Karlsruhe . . . He wondered what material

these articles were made of, and whether German ingenuity had found a way to use them in war industry. A street-sweeping machine went across the Carrefour Foch, its huge circular broom licking the pavement, and Stepanoff suddenly discovered an air of bizarre cleanliness in the cut of the stones, in the trim of the faces, in the colorless sky. He had the penetrating sensation of a hygienic cleanness oozing from all things, dripping from every object—a sensation rather similar to the one he had experienced the day he inaugurated a model maternity clinic at Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. But now, as on that occasion, he sought in vain the word, the image, that would define this impression, with its flavor of white paint and distilled water. He looked at Yvonne: this was the third or fourth trip she had made to the provisional capital, perhaps she had some idea on the subject. With his eyes on the motions of the policeman, who was holding up traffic for a stoop-shouldered nun, he asked:

"What is this hygienic odor you breathe here? Do you know?"

"You mean odor of hygiene," she said. "It may be the odor of chastity."

He smiled—almost openly. These niceties of grammar sometimes escaped him. "An odor of permanganate," he said.

"I don't know," said Yvonne. The wings of her nose dilated, as if she were sniffing. "Of starch, rather. Chastity does smell of starch, you know."

Perhaps she was not mistaken. An odor of starched incense. Or incense of starch.—The old France, he thought, where everything ended in a laugh . . . is it going to give way to a new France, where everything will expire in incense? Since Yvonne had said starch, he thought he could see it in every face. The old folks, it seemed to him, manifested an air of starched compunction; brought up on starch, the adolescents of the Chantiers de Jeunesse were without a wrinkle; the young girls passed two by two, starch in their collarettes and acne on their foreheads; the traffic policeman . . .

"The traffic policeman too?" he asked.

"The policeman too," said Yvonne.

She was accustomed to these questions, detached from their context, rising from the depths of his remote and solitary reflections. Simply by following the direction of his look, by observing the changes in his face, she knew the paths his thought was taking. "He too," she said. "It's as clear as can be: he's eaten his traffic code."

Perhaps she was not mistaken.—The drying machine of the "new order," he thought. The desiccative for pussy wounds. He was dissatisfied with his definitions. They were too general to suit him. Or not general enough. There was a particular something in the outward air of this town, something that deserved to be accurately situated. The town did really smell of antiseptic: good morals, honor, conjugal fidelity, fidelity to the Marshal.—One, there is the forbidden zone, he thought; two, the occupied zone; three, the free zone; four, the so-called Italian zone; then, five, there is Vichy. Vichy-Etat, as the waiter had said. It is . . . He began to discern an image, and he chased it with a sort of hurry in the thought. . . . It is

a zone apart. The zone of the furnished hotels. The red-light district. Permanganate, I suggested. Not radical enough.

"I've found what the odor is," he said. "Carbolic acid."

"Yes," said Yvonne. "A drop of carbolic acid on the lungs of France."

The waiter came out on the terrace and took his stand not far from them, napkin under his arm, hairs in his ear. Tall, skinny, livid of hue, he looked a good sixty years old. "The lady and gentleman aren't from these parts," he said, as though talking to himself. He was looking at the top of one of the round tables, where a number of flies were energetically sucking up traces of moisture. Stepanoff and Yvonne said nothing. "You don't seem to enjoy its specialties," the waiter continued impersonally. "I catch on to these things. Since I've been serving Vichy-Etat, I catch on." He spoke low, scarcely moving his lips, with his ivory eyelids sagging halfway down over his eyes. Yvonne watched Stepanoff, whose impassive expression meant: don't say a word. The traffic policeman twisted himself around, trying to scratch the back of his neck. "I was born here," said the waiter. "I remember when they installed electricity at the Grand Thermal. And when the railroad was built. Big times, those were." He stopped, watching the flies scrubbing their feet. Stepanoff stared straight ahead: the world looked spick and span, like a wood floor washed with floods of water after a gory crime. "Big times, there's always been plenty of them around here. The Romans came here, they say." He paused again, motionless and spectral. He no longer spoke his lines like a master of ceremonies. "They were chased out, but they came back. Now it's full of Romans around here. The bird with the kiss-curl mustache, over there, he's one of them." He marked another pause. "And Germans, it's full of them too. They're in disguise, but you can smell them. If you have the nose for it, you can smell them." He made no gesture, never raised his parchment eyelids, and Yvonne, like Stepanoff, manifested not the slightest interest. Yvonne was uncertain whether she owed some mark of complicity to this monologue.—Unless, like the actor of antiquity, she thought, he must be the only one on the stage. She saw his waxen profile, modeled like a mask in a traveling health exhibit, and, strangely enough, he gave her the impression of a cautious mummy, of a crafty cadaver, she could not be quite sure—pretty much as she would have imagined a man who had been wounded, feigning death. For all that, and despite his appearance, the stiff tufts of hair in his ears, the verdigris of his nails, he was becoming human to her. "If by chance the lady and gentleman are about to go abroad," said the waiter, "they might remember that in France . . ."

"The check, please," said Stepanoff sharply.

He tucked a ten-franc bill under the bottom of the bottle. The waiter stopped talking but did not budge. Just as he had not left off watching the flies swarming around the damp streaks on the table, Stepanoff had not taken his eyes off the policeman enmeshed in a shadowy semblance of city traffic. But, in fact, the whole vicinity was gradually shaking off its air of Sunday repose its atmosphere of drowsy small-town laziness. In the

street, under the trees of the broad avenue, at the Carrefour Foch, numbers of pedestrians appeared from all directions, emerging together from the penumbra of the *pensions de famille* whose aged and respectable ugliness climbed, from house to house, up the uneven little back streets which wandered in modest sequestration through the outskirts of the city; all of them coming out together, at the same fixed time, wearing the same Lenten face, walking with the same oblique step toward the same office work.—Why? thought Stepanoff. Why submit? He drank a mouthful of water, as if the insipid taste of the drink would wash away that of his reflections. He knew very well why. Why one goes out, and comes back, and why man is a biped. And why woman. And why the class struggle. And that nothing ended in a point so sharp that the why of doubt could not lodge on it. He recalled a phrase he had read long ago: "To ask the how and wherefore of this marvel would be to destroy the marvel." But maybe he wished for the destruction of marvels. In 1919, in the slums of Leningrad, in a cold that crackled the slings of the rifles, as he was ordering the hanging of four bearded peasants who had been caught burgling a collectivized firewood depot, a question no less absurd had assailed his certainty, final as it was: Why, why do they have beards? It had seemed to him that if they had been clean-shaven their guilt would have been more evident.—No answer to that kind of whys, he replied to himself. He was dissatisfied with his state of mind; he knew too well this inclination of his, which, from weariness or boredom, from nervousness or impatience, made him get himself out of a muddle by turning pirouettes. He glanced at Yvonne and was disturbed, so distinct was the look of disapproval on her face. Did she divine that he felt himself going over the side, as one steals away from one's own presence? Did she divine that more and more often he experienced this sensation of fleeing, of beating a bewildered retreat, as if the past—the sense and meaning of the past which had molded, yes, molded every cell in his body—was in the process of drowning him in its great difficult tides? He fought for a second, struggling with a vague and unpleasant sensation of dodging the difficulty even while holding it at his finger tips; but, almost without a stumble, by a sort of instinct of self-preservation whose underlying motives he did not like to recognize, he succeeded in bringing to the surface of his memory something for which he had not been looking at all—the thought of the bill slipped under the bottle, and of the scrawny old fellow whose nasal monologue he had cut short. A smile of reassurance marked and erased the pucker of his thin lips: what Yvonne had divined was his antipathy for the decidedly ambiguous advances of the waiter, for the inverted familiarity of the way he said "the lady and gentleman." He knew that although she had no liking for the hail-fellow-well-met type of liberties, Yvonne found it hard to adapt herself to the distrust in which he held everything and everybody of whose attitudes, actions, and explicit and virtual intentions he did not have certain knowledge. There was a difference of twenty-nine years between them, twenty-nine years of fairly exceptional experi-

ence, which, he agreed, could not but shock the young enthusiasms of his young companion. She did not even suspect that this café waiter might be an instigator, or an irresponsible troublemaker. This escaped her completely. Let the first crackbrain she met start to make fun of the government, saying that the Admiral can now light his pipe with a lighter because yesterday was his day to get gas; that the Marshal has taken his spoonful of cod-liver oil, and the belch is expected momentarily; that the Council will hasten to approve; that the Roman will say who knows; that the German will say no; that and that and that and so on—and she would throw her arms around the fellow's neck, without a thought for the cheap and dubious character of this kind of buffoonery. She was lacking in perspicacity, in practical psychology. But Stepanoff was no better satisfied with these speculations than he had been with the preceding ones. He detested these "states of soul," in which a kind of remorse rose up in him from the lost depths of his being and censured him. And yet his need of precise formulation forbade him to fool himself; and while not liking to heap reproaches upon himself, he feared his own dishonesty as one shrinks from a sign of degeneration.—It's too convenient, he thought. I let myself off lightly by blaming Yvonne for everything that bothers me. I evade. And I'm getting nervous. He shook his broad shoulders in an effort to recapture his serenity.—That's enough, that's enough abstractions, he said to himself. It's time to go.

It was time to go. The obedient herd of servants of the state formed diagonal lines across the provisory area of the resort capital. Clothed in green and with a pennant at their head, twelve young men paraded by in precise formation. At the Carrefour Foch the policeman gave priority to a profusely decorated man who had lost both legs. On the window of the Café de la Victoire a billposter was spreading an immense placard which proclaimed, for the benefit of the people of France, the articles of faith of a national socialism in the spirit of Jeanne d'Arc. Squirtling mineral water, the sweeping machine passed again with its quills bristling. The world exhaled a taste of marshmallow, of citrate of magnesia.—The taste of a poultice on the tongue, thought Stepanoff. He had a feeling of guilt, as if he had cheated. He was about to ask again for the check, when the waiter resumed his nasal drone.

There was no change in his attitude nor in the slow delivery of his words. He took up his monologue again, not moving his lips, hairy of ear, eyelid paralyzed. Yvonne watched him openly, as she would have watched a friend. She felt for him and accepted him with the sympathy of the spectator who makes the role of the protagonist his own. She told herself that the simile of the actor of antiquity, which he had brought to her mind, was an exact one. She told herself that his long pause had corresponded to the interlude of the chorus, the collective character to which she belonged, and Ivan, and the street, and the city, and all that the city symbolized—had corresponded to the epileptic character of which France was a part. Suddenly she was sure of his game: he was one of the innu-

merable links in the long, anonymous chain which was called the whispered propaganda. She wanted him to be part of it. "In the middle of the season," he was saying, "they closed the thermal springs. They opened the big hotels out of season. Such a thing was never seen before, *messieurs-dames*. What will they think of us abroad? That here in France we don't know any more what side the sun comes up on? Nor how good wine is made? If the lady and gentleman . . ."

"Keep the change," said Stepanoff.

He linked arms with Yvonne and dragged her away. She followed him, looking back over her shoulder. The waiter gathered up glasses and bottle, wiped the table. He looked like a man who was quite alive. A little girl had come to a halt before the freshly posted placard, and, with one hand to her cheek and the other on her bulging tummy, was doing her best to absorb a socialist philosophy pieced out with the spirit of the family. At the Carrefour Foch all traffic was suspended, and priority was given to a delegation of children flanked by a girl leader, they being the bearers of a formal address to the Hôtel du Parc, where the Marshal's headquarters were located. At the revolving doors of the palace hotels helmeted young men presented arms, as, in the recent past, the doormen—likewise helmeted—had presented their smiles.

The chief of the Central Distribution Office picked up the receiver, lent his ear to the bumbling of the instrument, hung up without a word. Eyes immobile, he sat pensive for some moments, as though going over the data of a problem in his mind, then laid a determined hand on the voluminous dossier of the Sucror affair. He stood up, medium of height, symmetrical of face, uncertain of age, buttoned his double-breasted waistcoat, rubbed the nails of his left hand on his right lapel. Raising his eyebrow, he fixed a round eye on the visitor seated on a sofa upholstered in red leather, then lifted and lowered his determined hand. He was not sorry that this battle had been won. This battle. Alas, that was what they had been doing for two years now, waging long and extenuating wars to try to save one kilowatt of electricity, two rhubarb stalks, three goat turds. Save them from being requisitioned. One of the rare victories, in sober fact. His glance slid over the window sill and dove into the hotel courtyard; there were the cool colors of a lawn down there, and a gardener barbering the green grass.—Dehydrate, preserve, stock up the blades of grass one by one. The chief of the Central Office had no doubt that rationing regulations were indispensable, no sensible person could doubt it, not even the enemies of the government; but the rapacity of the occupying authorities almost made him wish for the pure and simple distribution of remaining supplies to the French population. He especially resented the avidity of the Italians, who coveted everything, absolutely everything, no matter what it was: they were permanently lodged in the warehouses and freight stations, whisk broom in hand and truck motors running, ready to gather up the scraps which their Teutonic colleagues left behind. After all, the

Germans compelled the respect of a professional: they were remarkable technicians of expropriation. Almost Bolsheviks, in this sense. But the others—well, the others acted like moppets let loose in a toy store! The variety of the things exposed to their greed made them lose all sense of discernment. Cramming their pockets, without the slightest thought as to real usefulness . . . His indignation at these methods moved the chief of the Central Office to bitter meditations about the efficacy of a policy of collaboration with that sort of scoundrels. Since his duties had put him in contact with various agencies of the Italian administration he felt more and more often that he was in the embarrassing position of the gentleman who has been lured into a fraudulent marriage. Germany was what she was, and that was that, he didn't even try to understand her: but Italy, the Latin sister country! The giddiness of all these mincing young Blackshirts, their lack of dignity, their swaggering, their irresponsibility—all this he took, not entirely but almost, as the betrayal of a common ideal. Really, they did not belong. If these officials of the Fascio were given free rein, they would make their way even into the ministries, and snaffle everything down to the pencil sharpeners and the erasers, and it was questionable whether they would spare the stenographers' lipsticks. Without thinking, he put a warning finger to his lips, as if fearful that these dangerous ideas might leap from his mouth and set off an alarm gong. He was angry with the Italians for giving him reason to think so badly of them. Of course their armistice commission was not really representative of the great Fascist idea, these little military bureaucrats were, after all, nothing but poltroons, the yellow stripe showed too clearly in them, they belonged in Libya, in Russia, but even so, even so. The miserable twenty tons of dried, old dates, hardly fit for any use at all, how they had fought for them, on the specious pretext that they had been discovered in a secret black-market storehouse! He looked at his index finger, which he had taken away from his lips: let the occupying authorities exercise the right of seizure on all provisions confiscated from the black market, and France will die of starvation the following week. . . . No one knew it better than the chief of the Central Distribution Office, whose agents kept a day-by-day account of the figures quoted on the illegal market for merchandise which came straight from the hands of the distinguished occupants. Thus he felt a genuine satisfaction at having won this match against the Italian offices; yes, a genuine satisfaction. Especially since he, himself, he in person, had taken the matter in hand, had challenged them, as it were. Challenged them, that was it, he remembered very well: he had found out by an expert's report that the dates in question were not worth the cost of shipping them to Italy, and that consequently they would have been back on the black market the day after they had been surrendered. He looked at his visitor again—a very nice young man, he'll have his dates, he'll have them.

"Well then," he said. "Well then, this trip won't be time wasted, will it, Monsieur . . . Monsieur . . . ?"

"Musaraigne. Pierre Musaraigne."

"Monsieur Musaraigne. This time you won't be kept away from your business too long, too long."

"Too long? Of course not, monsieur. It's only four days. . . . Besides, even when I've had to spend four weeks in your waiting room, monsieur, I certainly have not complained."

"Quite right, Monsieur Mus—my dear monsieur. Never complain, never complain," said the chief of the Central Office. The thought of giving good news disposed him kindly toward the young man. It wasn't often that he had good news to give. "You stuck to your guns right to the end, and here is the result." He raised and lowered his hand in a gesture of decision. "I think I can tell you that we have won our case, won our case."

Pierre Musaraigne hopped off the overstuffed sofa. He peered into the spherical eye of the chief of the Central Distribution Office. "We'll . . . we'll get the dates?" he asked. The catch in his voice gave it an accent of incredulity. "Did you say we'd get them, monsieur?"

Taking care not to disturb the carnation which he wore as a boutonniere, the chief polished the nails of his right hand on his left lapel. No doubt about it, this young fellow was made of the right stuff. His eye round and immobile, he said:

"We'll get the dates, we'll get them."

Neither one of them noticed that they were using the "we" of connivance. The young fellow had handled himself very well, had been smart enough to clear a path all the way to the private office of the chief himself, building up his modest problem so cleverly that in the end the chief had taken a personal interest in it—an interest almost as great as he would have had in rounding out his own reserves of smoked bacon. He liked the young fellow's style, and also the tenacity of which he had given proof; he was grateful to him, in a way, for having shown constancy, for not having lost courage. He saw an analogy—a very slight one, it was true—between the young man's tactics and France's situation in the new Europe: waiting, going halfway, yielding on principles, holding onto the principal. But the fact was that if he himself had not helped him with his advice, aided him to make his way through the Chinese puzzle of the machinery governing the statute concerning matters subject to the 443 chapters, clauses, lines, paragraphs, prescriptions, and ordinances of the laws and decrees which regulated rationing in the metropolis in general and in detail, the young fellow would have foundered in it as surely as a fly in a pot of molasses.

"Have a seat on this divan," he said. "Have a seat, and be patient for a few minutes, Monsieur . . . Monsieur . . . ?"

"Musaraigne. Pierre Musaraigne."

"Monsieur Musaraigne. I have just been informed that the Intendant has come back to his office, to his office. I shall go myself and have him sign your authorization."

He picked up the Sucror file and adjusted it under his arm, with the

natural ease of a woman of the world managing her handbag. In the hotel courtyard a pretty pile of scythed grass gave promise of a pretty pile of hay. There was a project on foot regarding these lawns, the idea being to plant them with carrots, or radishes, the chief of the Central Office was not quite sure which. He personally would have preferred to have them decide on artichokes, a kitchen-garden plant which had the good taste to deck itself with flowers. He glanced at the carnation in his buttonhole.—Look at flowers, and you glimpse the smiling face of youth, he thought. He laid the Sucror file down on the desk again, took a tiny memo book stamped with his initials out of his pocket, opened it to the letter F, wrote down the aphorism he had just composed, and again picked up the Sucror file. It was a beautiful thought, and he was content with it. The young fellow on the sofa would be mighty surprised if he recited it to him. He crossed the room, his steps cushioned with rubber, and disappeared through a door decorated with false rococo flowers, gilded on the edges.

Von Klahm-Posetzky's imposing silhouette refused to go away. Respectable paunch roped in with a respectable chain, massive fist resting on an enormous thigh, a thigh no doubt hairy and certainly enormous, there he was, present like sin, in the back of the head of Xavier Tournefeuille-Blas, the Intendant General. Present like a leech. The official took his head in both hands, pressing his fingers into his eyes hard enough to squeeze them out, but Herr Doktor Ernst von Klahm-Posetzky was lodged behind his eyelids, at the geometrical center of his retina, whole and entire, paunch, chain, and fist, high black shoes with copper hooks, and rolls of flesh bulging around his wedding ring, stiff wing collar and vast skull smoother than a race-track floor. Half a century earlier, when Xavier Tournefeuille-Blas was in his seventh year, he had suffered a similar obsession: someone, something, had got into the interior of his sinus, behind the cornea of the eye, behind the vitreous humor, and the child had begun to vomit, then to squint, then to "unwind like a skein on a spinning wheel," in the words of Gasparine, Xavier's old nurse. "The Bohemians did it . . . the gypsies . . ." she proclaimed persistently, waving her skinny arms in anger; and along with her all the people of the château went around repeating, "The Bohemians the gypsies cast a spell on the young monsieur." It was known later that the young monsieur had had an attack of meningitis; at least that was the retrospective conclusion, there wasn't a better one handy and it put a stop to the servants' gossip. Long afterward, however, when the memory of the days preceding his illness came back to him, Xavier saw that old Gasparine had not been so witless after all. "The whole week that it took God to make the world, the young monsieur was battling with the Devil, and the Devil turned his eyes in the way I turn a shirt inside out," she used to say, this being her way of interpreting the comatose state into which the child had sunk. Pure superstition, obviously, although, strangely enough, Bohemians had been at the bottom of it, and a "spell" cast by the Bohemians. Xavier Tourne-

feuille-Blas recalled the facts: it was an Easter Sunday, toward the middle of the afternoon. He had eluded the watchfulness of his nurse, a young cardboard Englishwoman whose head, set on a flexible neck, wobbled under the weight of a magnificent bun. He had run at full speed until he was behind the outbuildings, where he knew Miss Parkinson would have a hard time finding him. The house staff was off to Dax and Mont-de-Marsan to celebrate the resurrection of the Lord, leaving behind them the broad acres spread with lime in preparation for the spring plowing and just beyond the walled farmyard the fallow fields and the fields striped with the first furrows succeeded each other till the eye confused them, under the measureless sky. Bundled up in galoshes and gaiters and mittens and a cap with earlaps and chin strap, alone in the yard cluttered with farm wagons, harrows, plows, Xavier had turned his steps toward the stables, a magic place where the master's children were never supposed to come, flying hoofs not being for them. There he knew a superb stallion called Bijou, a shiny and powerful beauty who was kept in a separate stall, and in a nearby stall two colts only a little higher than the young monsieur, also shiny and crimped like the curls on Miss Parkinson's neck. He was just about to slide back the bolt, his nostrils were already excited by the good warm animal odor, when all at once a loud tumult broke out in the barnyard. Standing on tiptoe to reach the latch, with his mittens dangling at the ends of the string around his neck, the lad turned quickly. Up to his knees in the little pond where the ducks played, elbows drawn in, bending over as if to admire his own reflection, an olive-skinned youth was holding a young drake in his locked hands. The other birds, honking their heads off, wings and rumps wild with distress, were skimming over the water, their yellow plumage streaming between the intruder's knees like straw under the punishment of the flail. Clinging to the stable door the child, swaddled in his wraps, had not moved any more than if he had changed into a block of ice, and the olive-skinned youth, too, was motionless, paralyzed, it would seem, by all the clamor; for hens, geese and turkeys had added their cackling to the alarm. The farm buildings could not have been entirely deserted, a few grooms, a few milkmaids were certainly on duty; but they were too absorbed in swigging the Barsac which the master had presented to compensate them for working on the holy day, and certainly were not going to be disturbed by any barnyard rumpus. Flat against the stable door, dumb with terror and ecstasy, the child looked at the scene through the thick fog of his breathing, and suddenly the swarthy pilferer, perhaps likewise stricken by the panic around him, perhaps disgusted with the spectacle of himself between his legs, was out of the pond with a leap. For a second he stood stiff, all tense with apprehension; then, as a stone is thrown, he hurled the drake in the direction of the feathered rout, slipped over the wall, and was swallowed up by the quiet stretches of the fields. When at last the little boy was able to free his stiffened fingers from the latch, the yard was calm again, and under the leaden vault of the sky the cawing of crows was heard.

The Intendant General lightened the pressure of his fingers on his eyes, then little by little allowed the light to filter through the slits of his eyelids. It was years, he did not know how many, thirty it might be, since he had thought of this episode. He looked first at the black box of the telephone, then at the russet rosewood of his desk, then at the light-colored, deep-piled rug, and at last, with a quick movement, at the window, as one plunges into cold water: the Calais lace curtains let through a light which blinded him.—Think again, think quickly of the barnyard. He stood up, took a turn around his office, with a pain at the back of his head, the taste of lees in his mouth, went and leaned backward against the radiator in the dark corner of the room.—Think of it quickly. Von Klahm-Posetzky was there, his image brushed onto the inside of the Intendant General's cranium, on the inner surface of his forehead, there astride the tissues of his brain. Once again he took his head in his hands, squeezing his temples, blowing through his nose, as if by this pressure and this exhalation he had hoped to expel from his body, as he might a clot, the presence of Oberherr Doktor Ernst von Klahm-Posetzky, high sorcerer in the economics department of the German Armistice Commission in Vichy. But Von Klahm-Posetzky did not yield. He yielded to nothing. Nothing beyond his own presence. There, with his fist on his enormous thigh, he was saying: "Your propaganda has to do only with your internal politics, gentlemen. It does not interest the Great German Reich in the least." Not in the least, he had said, *keineswegs und durchaus nicht*; and he had emphasized the personal pronoun "your," not by intonation or gesture, but with his paunch, with a sudden puffing of his respectable paunch. The gentlemen of the government had come running when the Oberherr rang for them, and they in turn had rung for the Intendant General; and once again Xavier Tournefeuille-Blas had been lining up railroad ties, non-ferrous metals, tag wool, when all of a sudden he had been hit with this—political propaganda, propagated politics, a jargon he didn't understand a word of. He had been working in an atmosphere of mutual confidence, as he had always worked, whether it was on Moroccan wheat, or Indo-Chinese rice, or Rambouillet sheep. They used to ask him, for instance, how beets would make out in a given corner of Picardy, and he would go and make a study of the problem, and if his conclusion was favorable there might be beets and a beet-sugar refinery and no cost to anyone. They might have asked him to see what would come of growing California poppies in the Tuileries Gardens, or cultivating silkworms under glass, or breeding hippopotami in the Seine, and he would have made his report: he had a passionate love of anything that grew, anything that multiplied. Thus, every year or every three years, depending on the plaintive appeals of some zealous colonial administrator, or on the fluctuations of the world peanut market, or again as a result of his own communications to one of the numerous scientific institutes of which he was a corresponding member, one fine day a dispatch from the ministry would come to pull him out of his provincial retreat, to dis-

tract him from his solitary labors, and off he went to experiment with copal in Lebanon, or with breadfruit in the Dahomy, planting a dammara here, a jack tree there, then getting back noiselessly to the vast estate located at the gates of Clermont-Ferrand, where, in a building on the domain which belonged to his wife, Catherine nee de Pontillac, he was allowed to have his laboratory and to work in peace. Time dripped away drop by drop, the ministry passed from hand to hand like a whore, and when a memorandum came addressed to it—no rubber in the breadfruit tree, excellent varnish from the dammara, signed Xavier Tournefeulle-Blas—nobody knew exactly what it was about, except perhaps some stenographer in the archives, whom nobody thought to ask. One of these periodic telegrams, marked very urgent, caught him as he jumped out of bed one morning in the second half of June 1940, but when he got to Paris he found the doors closed and the key under the mat: the ministries had decamped—according to what the people in the neighborhood were good enough to tell him—in the direction of Touraine. Touraine is a fine country, it wouldn't do any harm to ministry employees, and he set out in search of them. With a great deal of trouble—there were so many people out looking for their government—he went to Tours, but the ministries were not there, had taken off again and left no address. Tournefeulle-Blas took it upon himself to go back to Clermont-Ferrand, thinking logically that the ministries would finally choose a place to settle down in one or the other section of the sweet land of France, and that once they had unpacked they would remember having summoned someone for something. Events went as he had supposed they would: the ministries finally pitched camp, hoisting their streamers on the pinnacles of a series of furnished hotels with water in the sink and pots in the kitchen. Numerous, however, being the bundles in a move of this kind, considerable the unpacking, and difficult the re-pigeonholing, a year went by before Tournefeulle-Blas had any more news. He presented himself in Vichy, as indicated in the message, a couple of steps away, in the suburbs of Clermont-Ferrand, so to speak, an innovation which he appreciated because it saved him disagreeable trips to Paris. After a rather long wait he was ushered into the presence of a very elegant and very distinguished young man—"Antoine Moreau, chief assistant to the Secretary of State for Food Supply," as he introduced himself, taking his visitor's fingers in his delicate hand. The gentleman led him to a spacious armchair, offered cigarettes, held a light, very courteous, full of smiles, like a Jesuit on a confidential mission—and suddenly became talkative.

"I am happy, monsieur," he said, "to do the honors of the house. My pleasure is all the greater because your brother-in-law, Adrien de Pontillac, and I are very good friends." He blew a smoke ring, then another. "A man of great ability, monsieur. And with a great future."

"Adrien is all right," Tournefeulle-Blas agreed, accompanying his words with a shake of his head.

"Rightness itself," said the other. "A man of quality, sir. A noble heart. He has talked about you many times, and about your interesting work. You are a botanist, are you not? Everyone here is aware that you are an authority in matters of morphology and of etymology, and it is a great privilege for me . . ."

"No, no . . ." Xavier Tournefeulle-Blas put his hand in front of his face, palm outward, as if to ward off an invisible blow. "Please, I beg of you, not etymology. . . ."

Antoine Moreau cast a rapid glance over the file which lay open within eyeshot. In an instant the smile had faded and bloomed more richly around his hairless lips. He looked like a Jesuit washing his hands.

"Of course, of course!" he had exclaimed. "A slip of the tongue: I meant to say embryology. We laymen! . . ." As he spoke he ran his eye obliquely over the documents spread out on his desk. "*My lapsus linguae* is all the harder to understand, monsieur, since you have published some remarkable works, which are and should be the pride of our national science—a truly revolutionary essay on parthenogenesis, a study on the genetic continuity of the cell which has already become a classic, a brilliant treatise on the analysis . . ."

"You flatter me, you flatter me . . ." Tournefeulle-Blas protested, putting up both hands. He felt oppressed, and tired out all at once. The cigarette was burning out in his fingers, and the smoke, rising in a thin vertical column, was clouding his glasses.

It was the young chief assistant's turn to wave his hand in deferential protest. "Not at all. . . . We cannot adequately render homage to the eminent . . ."

The eminent rose and picked up his hat—and the young man stopped speaking. He stopped speaking, but he did not cease to smile. Xavier Tournefeulle-Blas was not very familiar with certain emotional manifestations such as affection or hatred; he had not observed them in the Hokkaido soya or in the common papaipemanitella, but in that instant he saw hatred swimming to the surface like an entozoon in Moreau's smiling eye—swimming to the surface, and as quickly losing itself in the opacity of his gaze. But the sprightly young chief assistant gave him no time to follow up his discovery: he laid hold of an ash tray, and, raising his eyebrow, exclaimed, "Your cigarette, monsieur! You'll burn your fingers. . . ."

A premature bald spot, shaped like a tonsure, was attacking the summit of his skull, and he smiled. He himself squashed the butt of his visitor's cigarette and put out the ashes. And he smiled. He was so sorry, he said. These American cigarettes, which burn out by themselves. The military attaché of the Yankee embassy had given them to him, he said. And he smiled. But if Monsieur Tournefeulle-Blas would be kind enough to follow him, the Secretary of State for Food Supply would be happy to receive him. He excused himself and went on ahead, with the air of a Jesuit leaving the table.

Being new at his job—his predecessor had been put in prison for speculating in foodstuffs—the Secretary of State for Food Supply displayed a coat that was too full and trousers that were too loose. In a department whose main work consisted in calculating units of protein multiplied by the number of beans on hand and divided by the number of the population, the new boss's excessive leanness was regarded as a model of frugality. To see him running up and down the different floors of his hotel, feverish of eye and haggard of complexion, swaddled in clothes so overly ample that they made him look like a stuffed wading bird which was losing its filling, those of his subordinates who had the bad luck to show an excess of embonpoint knew that they could not, as long as he reigned, look for promotion. With Tournefeuille-Blas he was precise, brief, strictly positive, careful to avoid any needless waste of calories. France, he said, needed men of ability, men of devotion, men, in a word. Was he, Xavier Tournefeuille-Blas, such a man? No need to ask the question, since there was no doubt whatever of the answer. His Food Supply Office needed, France needed, an Intendant General capable of co-ordinating the distribution of the country's resources, capable of tackling the problem as a technician, not as a mere administrator. Henceforth technocracy would rule the world—adjustment of the machine to human nature, and vice versa. He, the Secretary of State for Food Supply, was purely and simply a public administrator: he knew and recognized his own deficiencies. Talk of coal to him, and he saw nothing more than a black, dirty material which eventually was fit to put in a stove: talk of an egg and he saw only a white, ovoid object which eventually could be eaten in an omelet. But, it seemed, coal was hydrogen plus oxygen plus nitrogen and so on, and an egg, it was said, was sugar plus fat plus albumin plus casein and so on. Xavier Tournefeuille-Blas nodded approval, that was about—about right, and he took over his functions the next day. The first riddle submitted to his attention concerned the allocation of sheepskin to glovemakers holding the necessary letters patent. He spent the morning reading and rereading the document, with his head in his hands and a headache in his head, then finally put on his hat, went to a bookshop, and bought the *Petit Larousse Illustré*. "Sheepskin," he read, "a soft leather which partially covers cavalry breeches."

As though etched with a needle. As though etched with a needle, Oberherr Doktor Ernst von Klahm-Posetzky was there, engraved in the vision of the Intendant General, on the whites of his eyes, on the live tissue of his pupils, in high relief and full color, from the mortuary pink of his skull to the green sock edged with the black of the shoe top. Once more he put the tips of his fingers to his closed eyelids, in the hope of blinding, of emptying his memory; but quickly, dodging the trap, Von Klahm-Posetzky drew back out of reach, thigh and fist, respectable paunch and copper lace-hooks.—There, like the Barbary duck on that Easter Sunday, Counting his steps, the child crosses the empty yard, forgetting the stallion,

the colts, step by little step toward the pond of sleeping water. Suddenly he feels a great fault, a great sin. A thousand boys with olive skin plunge headfirst, plunge in Indian file, one behind the other headfirst into the frightening solitude of the gutted fields, and, streaming with water, their bare feet streak the leaden sky. The child does not know where the fault is, nor what the sin, the sensation is like that of pain before pain. He comes to the edge of the pool but does not stop there, he walks into the pool, first the galoshes, then the gaiters, then the kneepads, and he bends over and looks down where the boy had been admiring himself, he sees only his face and shoulders against the light, and below them the sullen vault of the sky which invites you like a bed. He bends a little farther over himself, over the faithful water paved with clouds, with bare prints of bare feet, and at that moment he sees reflected in the pond and coming from elsewhere, from a world beyond the familiar, he sees the Barbary duck, pure high barbaric breed, slashing sharp-beaked at the dead drake. Imaged between heaven and earth in the depths of the sleeping pond, belly up and webbed feet spread closer and closer to the child's face like two bats against his cheeks, the duck shakes and strikes and tears, superb in his tranquil rage, in his hate without hate, mandible sunk forever in the duckling's neck; and when, detaching himself from his own head, the drake will rise in a curve and will splash into the pool, the little boy will begin to scream, to scream, and will let himself fall, stretched full length, into the clotted water.

The telephone rang—and he let it ring. It had done him good to think again of that far-off event, to think of it for the first time in concrete images. Von Klahm-Posetzky, of course, viselike jaw contracted in a spasm, had not released his hold; but the weight of his presence seemed to be subsiding, to be dying away by imperceptible degrees. Leaning back in the shadowy corner between the radiator and a cupboard filled with archives, eyes closed and head down, he subjected the German official to an orderly anatomical examination: how, in what elements of his person, did the thick Prussian resemble a Barbary duck? It was hardly possible to question it, there was an affinity between these two beings, an air of relationship and common descent. True, by all appearance, they were not alike physically, rather dissimilar in the shape of the trunk, the volume of the skull, and the general design of the extremities, but their correlation at this moment was not simply a fortuitous one: at a distance of fifty years, Xavier Tournefeuille-Blas recognized the Barbary duck in the Oberherr Doktor Ernst von Klahm-Posetzky. They were interchangeable.

The telephone rang again—and he let it ring. He would have preferred a definition which expressed his thought more faithfully, but the word did not come. Interchangeable. When he had been fished out of the pond, where only his mittens, bound together by their string, had remained on the surface—flotsam which had made possible the finding of the shipwreck—and with a good deal of difficulty had been brought back to life, inside of his body, in the most inaccessible recess of his ego, the duck

had carved his niche, web of the feet and condyle of the beak and the duckling's shaggy head—as the chief of the economic department of the German Commission in Vichy had done an hour ago.

He left his shadowy corner and began to walk. Although unskilled at self-analysis, at psychological introspection, he did not fail to note that merely putting the two things side by side, remote as they were from each other, had relieved his distress, for Von Klahm-Posetzky was really melting away, as the heat softens under the tranquil touch of evening. He recalled how day after day for months, at the request of the President of the Council, he had studied, compared, boiled down a great number of reports, memoranda, and expert opinions, all bearing on the minimum of calories necessary to keep alive a whiff of breath in a body made of flesh and blood. He had had a respiratory calorimeter constructed, and had followed a course of systematic subnutrition, depriving himself successively of vitamins, fats, carbohydrates, mineral salts, carefully checking the curve of his red corpuscles and arterial tension, undergoing all sorts of disorders, neuralgias, and vertigoes, collating the results of his experiments with similar studies carried out beyond the Rhine and overseas, and finally had summarized his conclusions:  $x$  of vegetables, fruits, grain, equals  $y$  of cystine, histidine, lysine, tryptophan—without which there could be no life, not even a lingering glimmer. The calculations were so strict, so strict the measurements of  $x$  and  $y$ , that the Germans had to subscribe to them. Then other calculations were made, other volumes measured: it would take a given coefficient of sweet potatoes, of bulbous chervil, of odds and ends of veal, measured by rule and by compass, within the variation of a unit, to preserve the race scientifically, and the surplus—in bulk, the surplus—to preserve the charter of a frank and honest policy of collaboration. At the very last moment there had been some disagreement over priorities and practical procedures, but in the end the experts reached an accord, the competent authorities put their initials at the bottom of the documents, congratulations were given and received, and, in the expectation of certain approval from the Wilhelmstrasse, the prefects were notified to synchronize their speeches, the Legion to dust off its gala clarinet, the editors of the daily press to carve new gems in their prose; and the head of the government spoke to the people—people, you will not go hungry, you will not be cold, it's promised guaranteed signed and sealed, let everyone do his work as well. It was exactly one week since all this had happened—and today, a short while ago, this conference at the Hôtel Majestic . . .

The telephone sputtered three short rings—and he let it sputter. He saw himself again in Von Klahm-Posetzky's office: summoned in haste, he arrives in haste, great bare room decorated with a huge map of France dotted with colored thumbtacks, and a modest portrait of the Fuehrer dotted with flyspecks, and immediately, though familiar with the place, he has the impression of stifling for want of air. There are others present, lined up at regular intervals along the walls—the Secretaries of State for

Food Supply, for Agriculture, for Propaganda, the chief assistant of the President of the Council, German experts, stenographers—all seated and silent, each with his little papers spread out on his knees, silent and immobile as caryatids listening to the murmur of the past. Fleshless, hollow-cheeked, wasting away in his clothes like an anchorite in his hair shirt, the Secretary of State for Food Supply asks him to summarize in a few words the substance of his calorimetric researches. In a very few words the account takes forty minutes, during which time no one draws a deep breath, except perhaps Von Klahm-Posetzky, whose black shoe creaks from time to time. There being no chair vacant, he speaks standing, with his back to the window: he sees them all, with a lucidity that terrifies him, as they are in their substance, as they are to themselves, previous to and in contempt of their grim determination to seem something else. He expounds his data without thinking, by heart, but the dryness of his exposé burns him like a back eddy of flame: abruptly he feels the heart-rending certainty that, faced with the humble notion of bread, of peace, of sleep, the too perfect evidence of his postulates dissolves into a halo of limitless absurdities. Word upon word he continues to build the flawless synthesis, and it is like committing suicide step by step in a pool of stagnant water. With the ripples of his words he feels the black pond rising in him, carrying with it the wretched conviction that in this room—where the only vestige of palpitating life is the pale rectangle left in this corner of the floor, where not long ago twin beds lay arm in arm—that in this room neither he nor anyone else understands or knows or can know the Christian taste of soup.

The telephone shook with a long ring—and he let it shake. He came and went with a neutral step, his disturbance almost over. He did not remember how he had finished his speech, nor whether he had come to the end of his lesson, there was a hole in his memory, a blank, and immediately after—exclusive and without transition—the visual memory of Von Klahm-Posetzky. He hears the Secretaries of State taking the floor one after the other, but the one he sees is Von Klahm-Posetzky, no one but him, with his fist on his thigh and his stomach on his thigh and the chain on his stomach and his mask, the hermetic mask of a pontiff who has died of wisdom. The wisdom that comes to him from where. And why. Each Secretary of State speaks in his turn, then they all speak together, their arguments straddling one another; they get tangled in their little papers, scatter them, gather them, tap them together, and they speak faster and faster for this man who is convinced in advance, convinced of the contrary. The speech of the head of the government, they say. The speech, Monsieur l'Oberherr. A speech calibrated with a micrometer, screened by X rays, published in Vichy, in Berlin, in Rome, in Tokyo, delivered on the basis of agreements worked out at Montoire in the most loyal spirit of bilaterally reciprocal intercollaboration. The German official lets them talk, the longer they harangue him the more securely they're caught on their own hook, and he there, immobile and ventripotent and polished

as the moon with the green sock in the high black shoe with copper hooks and the vast pink skull stuffed with seven political brains.

Someone knocked at the door—and he let him knock. He paced the room at a tranquil gait, recalling things in their slow succession—so slow that he did not see the door open, and did not at first know where he was when Adrien de Pontillac, gloves and hat forward, addressed him:

"Well, dear relative, the least one can say of you is that you make it hard to reach you!"

"It's you, Adrien?" said Tournefeuille-Blas. He continued his pacing, not noticing Pontillac's outstretched hand. "It's you?" he repeated. "Did they make you wait?"

"Not exactly. But I asked for you several times on the phone. Still I had been assured that you were not in conference, nor out of the office." His eye followed his brother-in-law, noting the trace of disorder in his usually faultless attire. "It's dark in this room, don't you think? If you don't mind, my dear Xavier, I should like . . ."

Without waiting for permission, he snapped the light switch near the door. Tournefeuille-Blas stopped short, stoop-shouldered, taut with expectation of some unforeseeable danger.—Like a back-country actor, Pontillac thought. He examined his brother-in-law dispassionately, studying him minutely, inch by inch, with a dull, diffused gleam in his eye, the gleam of opaque glass, which aroused in those who talked with him the uncomfortable sensation of being stripped bare and left without defense. The first glance told him that Tournefeuille-Blas was bewildered. He knew the man, the life of the man: nothing could have put him in this condition except an event outside of the customary order, outside of the common denominator which ruled Xavier's existence. For an instant, almost involuntarily, he thought of Catherine, although a difficulty between his sister and his brother-in-law was as unlikely as a mix-up between the fingers of a hand, seeing that for many years they had been no closer to each other than the occupants of neighboring apartments. He knew that when Xavier first took over his functions in Vichy he had undergone a sort of crisis of conscience, being doubtful about his fitness for the position of Intendant; but once the period of organization was over, the initial confusion straightened out, and the statistical work divided among the regular staff of scribes, he had gradually begun to take an interest in certain tasks which excited the incorrigible explorer in him, if not in his post as such. Pontillac was not acquainted with the specific undertaking which had absorbed Tournefeuille-Blas for the past several months. On the rare occasions when they met, however, he had sensed that the scientist was moving in an atmosphere that was natural to him. He considered his "relative"—as he sometimes called him for his own amusement—impervious to all reality which was not conceived in terms of science, blind to anything that could not be reduced to a laboratory formula; and he reasoned that nothing not immediately connected with his work could arouse the least emotion in Xavier. Could it be that he had made some sensational

discovery? Had he perfected a substitute for insulin, for the lack of which fifty thousand diabetics in France were dying by inches? Or had he suddenly become aware that thirty-five years over a microscope had not taught him to operate a can opener?

"Something wrong?" he asked lightly. "Don't you feel well?"

Without answering, Tournefeuille-Blas put his hands behind his back. Dangling loosely from their sleeves, his thin wrists had the appearance of yellow wood. He had not crossed the invisible line of demarcation at which he had halted.—I would not have believed he was so old, thought Pontillac. He moved to a position where he could see his brother-in-law full face.

"Your doctor ought to prescribe a two-hour walk for you every day. Your color is bad, my dear Xavier."

He could not keep a shade of irony from creeping into his voice when he spoke to Xavier. Yet this man, whom he felt to be more abstracted, more remote from earthly sin than all the just, had become singularly close to him with the passage of years. A quarter of a century had passed since he had met Tournefeuille-Blas at a charity party given by his mother, the Countess de Pontillac; and in those years this man, now stooped and white-haired, had come to mean something to him.—Something, he thought. There had been a time when he was almost sincerely interested in Xavier's work: he had visited his laboratory frequently, following his experiments in grafting and hybridization, and had picked up a smattering of science which he was to utilize in his zoological classifications of women. He saw his brother-in-law facing him and on the point of speaking, weighing words he was not accustomed to use, dressed like a show-window dummy, unreal as an idea without an object, looking like the caricature of an absent-minded intellectual.

"Do you know Dr. von Klahm-Posetzky?" he asked brusquely. "Do you know him?"

He looked at Pontillac as if he were not sure the question had been heard. His hands opened and closed behind his back. Pontillac took time to light a cigarette before answering. Without taking his eyes off Tournefeuille-Blas, he said:

"I know who the gentleman is."

"You do, really? He's very keen, isn't he, very . . ." He brought his hands in front of him, then again crossed them behind his back. The pulsing of a vein could be seen in his neck, at the edge of his white collar.

"He's the typical German functionary, Xavier." Irony left a wavering note in Pontillac's voice. "The functionary who does what he's told." He went over and sat on a corner of the desk. "In fact, an extremely massive man."

He refrained from asking any questions in his turn, waiting for his brother-in-law to show more of what was on his mind. He watched him as he would watch a witness who was sure to give himself away sooner or later. Again Tournefeuille-Blas uncrossed his hands and brought them

around in front of him, in a vain effort to give them something to do, to give them a reason for existing, as if the simple fact of their being could not suffice to justify them. He took a step toward Pontillac, then another. His gray eyes, under their heavy brows, showed his fatigue. He spoke with an effort:

"I've worked for him. For his experts. He understands figures. I figured the coming harvests. The coal to be mined. Food oils. Antiscorbutic acids. You see, don't you? I had reached the limit. They asked me to. He accepted my data. He had to accept them. The limit. Down to the last drop. Barely enough to keep a glimmer alive."

"To keep what alive?" Pontillac asked.

He was a little uncomfortable, half sitting on the corner of the desk, under the unmoving eye of his brother-in-law. He would have liked to change position, but did not want to collide with Tournefeuille-Blas, who was almost brushing against him. He saw the trembling of his lip under the inert weight of his words. His speech was like a cough:

"I turned in my findings. Nothing hard to grasp. Sulphur. Calcium. Chlorine. Potential energy, kinetic energy. You see. Elementary. He understands elementary metabolism. They signed agreements. I know it, it was made public. This afternoon they called for me. There were a lot of them. Ministers, like schoolboys. And Von Klahm-Posetzky. They asked me to go through it again. A biology lesson. Physiochemical process of oxidization. Then the ministers. They pleaded with that man. For hours. He wanted milch cows. Fats. By the thousands of tons. He had a list. I didn't understand. He knows what can be done, the real and virtual possibilities. I . . . I said: 'We haven't got those things. You know we haven't got them.' I said: 'You can't question today what you admitted yesterday.'"

Pontillac took it upon himself to leave the corner of the desk. They were very close to each other. In his eyes was the gleam of opaque glass, and half tones of irony shaded the timbre of his voice.

"I didn't know you were mixed up in politics, my dear relative," he said slowly.

Xavier Tournefeuille-Blas looked at his useless hands. They were as heavy as if Von Klahm-Posetzky's vast forehead, complete with seven political brains, were lying on them. He looked at his useless hands, and all at once, dumbly, began to gesticulate.

ALDOUS JOHN SMITH RAN A WEARY EYE OVER HIS DESK.

The mail of the last four days, opened and annotated, lay piled in a cedar-wood basket, between the telephone and a small statue of Abraham Lincoln, a replica of the seated figure in the Lincoln Memorial in Washington. The curtains were pulled back, and through the two windows of the room streamed a torrent of raw, palpitating light which set the ridiculous little flowers of the wallpaper to dancing. Smith poured a glass of ice water from a thermos bottle which stood at his feet, and drank it, without opening his teeth, in small tranquil sips. His trip to Vichy had depressed and upset him, and he had brought back a fierce headache which neither a cold shower nor a rub with eau de cologne had succeeded in calming. On the left side of his desk were fifteen numbered slips, each one symbolizing a visitor who had succeeded in the difficult exploit of passing through the meshes of a conscientious screening—fifteen slips waiting to be read and identified. He glanced at the top slip—what a job to read this scribble: Arthur Papsky; object of visit: summons to appear at the Cuban consulate in Monte . . . Monteca . . . oh yes, Monte Carlo. . . . Followed more lines in an irregular handwriting, an unintelligible babbling of dancing letters, of drunken letters. Why did he want to see him, this what's-his-name, this Arthur Papsky? Why did he want to see *him*, Aldous John Smith, president of the A.R.S., the American Refugee Service, when there was a whole battalion of secretaries and interviewers to receive callers? He held his head in his hands, his elbows resting on the desk—Papsky, why, of course, how could he have forgotten, Papsky, University of Vienna, one of the greatest astronomers of his time. . . . He jumped, picked up the telephone: "Is Papsky there? Escaped? How? Transferred from Gurs to the Milles camp? Send him in. No, no, have him wait, I'll call back in a minute." He hung up and sat motionless, eyes half closed beneath the double weight of his headache and the blinding light. The next slip announced a Carlos Menendez Ascárate, the next a Hermann Walter Haenschel, the fourth a Ruth Bienstock, the fifth . . . A hundred other persons were received daily in the outer office, each with his dossier, his complaints, his kitbag of incomparable and incommuni-

cable ravages. Aldous John Smith's mind went back to his visit to Vichy—to the hotel of the presidency of the Council, where he and the representative of the Quakers were received standing, beneath a vast Venetian window covered with heavy gray drapery. Flaccid, careworn, the little man with the white tie peered at them over the violet circles under his eyes, mustache unkempt, fleshy nose, the collar of his black coat powdered with dandruff. The audience lasted five minutes at the most, the three of them standing under the tall, softly luminous window, the swarthy little white-tied man two steps away, facing them, a cigarette stuck to his lip, aging, and so inexplicably ugly. Behind him, behind his bare head with the hair parted on the side, two busts, natural size, decorated the wall of this room, which must formerly have been a *salon de thé*: Marshal Pétain, Admiral Darlan, both wearing caps, as was proper and fitting. Aldous John Smith remembered having thought "proper and fitting," almost spelling it out to himself, facing the dumpy little man, the lines of whose body, with its flabby and unequally distributed flesh, could be discerned beneath the exact creases of his suit. As he stood there his head fitted precisely into the empty space which separated the two portraits, his bare head between the two heads with caps; and Aldous John Smith had suddenly understood an extremely important thing: like machine guns, laws by decree, and concentration camps, a handsome cap with a visor full of gold embroidery figured in the arsenal of the indispensable accessories of power.

He poured himself another glass of ice water. A slow, heavy pulsation beat at the base of his skull, as if someone were working there with a crowbar. The rattle of the typewriters outside bumbled faintly in his ears. He lifted the telephone.

"Be good enough to send for a bottle of aspirin, please."

He stood up and began to walk up and down the room, carefully avoiding the pools of sunlight which reverberated from the floor. There were too many people waiting for him, too much work was late already; he could not feel free to return to his hotel and go to bed. He thought longingly of his hotel room over the Old Port, of his bed, of a hundred hours of slumber in a bed. He had passed a sleepless night standing in the corridor of the train, elbow to elbow with other passengers standing like himself, and trampling an accumulation of uneasy souls who lay on the floor amid an absurd quantity of suitcases and hampers, under the funereal glow of the blue-dipped night lights; and even in the toilet rooms men, women, and children had seized on the last square inch of level surface. Every time he had to take a train it was the same story—stations crammed with people, cars crowded to bursting. It seemed, two years after the fall of France, that the psychosis of flight, of the stampede for safety, was still driving huge numbers of people to move from place to place, as if the rails were indeed part of a universal panacea for the pain of living. Aldous John Smith's journeys were almost always in the nature of emergencies, mostly unforeseen, so that it was not possible for him to make reservations days, if not weeks, in advance. What was more, he was not anxious to

leave evidence of his movements in the booking offices: he besieged prefects and ministers, of course, but more frequently his visits were to hired smugglers and forgers of visas. The Quaker had stayed in Vichy, he had some business to settle at the embassy, as two ships loaded with layettes and vitamins were to dock at Marseilles shortly. His was the nice job, the job of playing American uncle; and he had a car at his disposal, on account of the layettes. His organization was managing to save several thousand French children from rickets, and putting off the collapse of several thousand others, and this was well worth the couple of drums of gasoline which the regional prefect handed out to the Quakers from time to time—with the benevolent consent of the Armistice Commission.

Aldous John Smith rubbed his eyes and his temples, wondering why the aspirin was so slow in coming. It was a nice trump, the layette and the tin of condensed milk—a nice string to have to one's fiddle. The embassy knew how to play that fiddle, how to finger that string, whose slightest vibration awakened echoes of nurseries in effervescence.—Children, he thought, are like personal letters in the hands of a master blackmailer. Up and down the room he walked, each step echoing at the base of his skull, and the light that flowed in through the two windows had the taste of torture. He went to the telephone and put it to his ear again, but the line was busy; he hung up, sat down, poured a glass of ice water. He had been badly received at the embassy, as usual, more coolly than usual, in fact. He was compromising himself, they said reproachfully, he was going too far. "Compromising himself in whose eyes?" he had been candid enough to ask. It was true, of course; he wasn't playing the game. His own game, the game of the A.R.S. organization he had created out of nothing, without official support, was to scorn boats loaded with vitamins, whose weight in the diplomatic scales could hardly be guessed; it was to round up a few refugees, whose lives could not possibly interest anyone, and get them across the frontier; it was to believe that it takes nine months to make a baby, but fifty years to make a pianist who's good, or an astronomer who's worth anything.

Someone knocked at the door. The aspirin had finally arrived, and with it a glass of water, which Francine Lepage presented to him on the flat of a book. Lepage was one of the A.R.S. secretaries, the most self-effacing and most remarkable of the secretaries, unlovely and hunchbacked, a university graduate and doctor of philosophy, with more kindness in her face and more sadness in her eyes than a Fouquet Madonna. Standing with the book held level in her hand, she waited patiently for Smith to drain the glass of water, in which he had dissolved two aspirins. She was like a rather old little girl, short and ill formed, with a knot of colorless hair at the back of her white neck. He saw her through his glass of water, through the screen of his eyelashes, as he sipped his repulsive drink; she had no trunk, this Lepage, only legs and a head, and in between something that resembled a bust. He wondered where she came from, out of

what past, what present, as if he didn't know, but his brain was working by itself, thinking for its own account, perhaps because of the crowbar which was pounding on it, up and down, in an unalterable rhythm. He put the glass back on the binding of the book, closed his eyes, opened them again. The light was as white as a stream of molten iron, he felt its burning throughout his body. At one moment he thought the walls of the room were out of plumb, that they had gone soft as wax, but all that had happened was that Francine Lepage had taken a step forward.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I had to go all the way up the Canebière. It's hard to find aspirin, Mr. Smith."

Smith looked at his watch, and started when he saw what time it was. A confused smile twisted his lips, a grimace he didn't know where to direct; so he directed it at Francine Lepage, as if to apologize for it. She blushed hotly, took a step backward, saw him rub his temples vigorously. He seemed to be trying to recall a name, a text.

"I've wasted an hour and a half daydreaming," he said. "Do you ever do that, Miss Lepage, dream when you're awake?"

She blushed quite violently and took another step back, with her head down. He did not notice this, studying his watch with an air of wonderment.

"Sometimes," she said. "When I've worked very late, and can't get to sleep. But it must be dark. In the dark you see things as if they were projected on a screen, in three dimensions, colors and . . ."

She broke off, clasped the book under her chin, then added hastily: "You ought to take a rest, a good day's rest, Mr. Smith . . ."

He looked at her as she stood with her hand on the doorknob, hunch-backed and frail, sad and humble. She spoke the Queen's English, and he envied her for it. All at once he felt a preposterous urge to kiss her on both cheeks.

As usual when he found himself in the presence of someone whom he knew only by name, Aldous John Smith was conscious of a feeling of embarrassment mingled with hostility. He generally had to make a real effort to find the word of greeting, the opening word which established a human contact. So he waited for Papsky to take the chair he had offered him, to spread his hands flat on his knees—the fine, strong hands of a capable craftsman—to settle his back comfortably against the back of the chair, hoping in these few moments to invent words which might put him at ease with this man, who looked like a shoemaker learning to write in an evening school, and yet was a scientist of world renown. He waited, keeping a silence which grew embarrassing, which might even be impolite, for Papsky had taken off his glasses and was polishing them with the end of his frayed necktie. His head was lowered—a head on which the shaved hair was growing back in thick, stiff needles—his light mustache was woven of white thread, his shoulders strong and vigorous. But at last, when the visitor had readjusted his glasses, put his hands back flat on his

knees, and raised his eyes to his host with a look of rather questioning confidence, Aldous John Smith came forth with the words:

"I am happy to see you, my dear sir."

"Hmm . . ." Papsky returned. "So am I."

Aldous John Smith skimmed through the papers in the file spread out in front of him. The first words were said—abominably useless ones; but others would come, less stilted, less impersonal, he knew it; words which would stir the humid warmth of living things, with a coursing of fresh blood in each of their syllables. He caught himself reading a press clipping dealing with the man sitting in his office, a sort of vehement declaration of solidarity signed by some twenty of the aristocrats of science in the two Americas. A short, violent burst of wrath seized him, reviving his headache instantly—a fit of fury against the Smiths and Joneses of his own country, against the blessed family of Babbitts nestling like nuggets of garlic in the thick meat of a State Department stuffed with paper pulp and preambles on immigration. He too had belonged to the Company, four years a clerk in the Company over there, a grub fed on quotas and affidavits—how ridiculous, this sublime convulsion of anger. But since then he had put in twenty-four months of frenzied work around the stinking holes of concentration camps, and sometimes these paroxysms of rage seized him and laid him low, like the headaches whose frequency was beginning to worry him. He stood up, rolling his shoulders, casting off a burden known to him alone, and began to pace the room. Inside his head the crowbar had multiplied its blows; it was a stone quarry, with the drills chewing in on all sides for the sheer love of chewing. He looked at the window open to the incandescent sky, then at Papsky, motionless, hands flat on his knees, indifferent, it seemed, content perhaps with this luminous silence, after his long stay in the dark waiting room with a group of taciturn men, gossipy women, and squealing children. Maybe not indifferent, either, for, his eyes trying to capture Smith's, he said:

"I feel—pardon me—I feel that you are torturing yourself unjustly. You have certainly done everything possible to set me free. That you have not succeeded . . ."

"Yes," said Smith, "we have done everything possible. But it's the impossible that we ought to be doing. I believe in the impossible. We've got to believe in it. Otherwise there would be nothing left but despair." He waved his hand vaguely. "I'm . . . we're terribly alone, Mr. Papsky."

The light was withdrawing through the two windows, sidling out with backward steps. Papsky's eyes were as green as the first shoots of spring. Smith went and sat down. His headache was ebbing away again, as if wearied with its own violence.

"I've been away several days," he said. "Your transfer to the Milles camp is a surprise, but I think the explanation is here in your file. A cable from our New York office informs us that the universities of Buenos Aires, Havana, and Bogotá have called for you, one on top of the other. Like bad news," he added, smiling, "good news comes in bunches."

Papsky raised his hands, put them back on his knees, and said nothing. The rustling of the typewriters outside sowed the silence with monotonous showers of unfruitful characters.

"When were you transferred to Milles?" Smith asked.

"About a week ago, thanks to the summons from the Cuban consulate. Today I have a pass for twenty-four hours. I am summoned to the consulate of Monte Carlo. Do you think it is to give me the visa?"

"I'm convinced of it," said Smith.

"I have heard it said," Papsky went on, "that it is quite impossible for an interned foreigner to obtain a safe-conduct which would permit him to take the train. Moreover, I have no passport."

"We'll ask Monte Carlo to forward your papers to the Cuban consulate in Marseilles, Mr. Papsky. After that we'll take the necessary steps. I'd like to have you leave at the earliest possible moment. Every day the sailings become a little more difficult, a little less likely. Tell me, how long have you been interned?"

"Since the first week of the war," Papsky replied. "In a few days it will be three years."

He stopped and leaned toward the American, trying to hold his breath as in the night one feels for a familiar thing. His pupils had hardened, their color was turning the green of weathered copper.

"Mr. Smith," he said, "do you know Otto van Lodevijck?"

Aldous John Smith nodded affirmatively. He knew Otto van Lodevijck and so many others, closely or distantly, by name or by fame—knew many that it took away his appetite and kept him awake at night. His eyes lighted a moment on the calendar adorned with an idiotic St. George breaking his spear in the maw of a good-looking dragon. Nineteenth of August, what was there about that date? . . . Something particular, something familiar . . . He made an effort to remember—engagement, hearing day before the prefect, national holiday, birthday . . . That was it, birthday, his own, thirty-eight today. In his head a jeweler's hammer was working on the teeth of a complicated clockwork. "I know Otto van Lodevijck," he said.

Papsky leaned a little farther forward. Two parallel wrinkles cut across the width of his forehead, from one temple to the other. His malachite pupils held the gray eyes of the American, as in the country at night the eye is caught by a glowworm. "You know his . . . his story?" he asked. He had not taken his hands from his knees. His bare feet were shod in canvas sandals. The sun drew back from the two windows, uncovering a great mass of overheated sky. Aldous John Smith nodded yes.

Arthur Papsky relaxed and sat back in his chair. The green of his eyes turned tender and distant. He took off his glasses and began to polish them with the end of his tie. Since he had come into the American office and sat down in that chair, his legs had not moved an inch. His eyes were faded and out at the elbows. He gave Smith the impression of a big placid animal, the deceptive impression of a big animal to which all

contingencies of time, of space, of death, meant nothing. He replaced his glasses on his nose and his hands on his knees.

"Mr. Smith," he said, "many young men followed my courses in the universities of Budapest, Prague, and Vienna. Two or three of them became famous in the world of science. I loved passionately my work and my students. Some of these have died in the war; others were killed in clandestine operations; others are waiting to be killed. One of them, an outstanding student, struck me in the face one day, when I had finished my lecture and was coming down the steps of the rostrum. This was in Vienna, the day after the Germans entered Austria. There is a Jewish grandfather in my ancestry, you know. I left the amphitheater, bleeding from the nose and mouth. The name of this boy was Gregor Wolfgang. But you could not have known this."

Aldous John Smith said nothing. He looked at Papsky as if the latter were out of his wits. His eyes were perfectly green and perfectly placid. High in the overheated sky a tuft of cloud forecast the mistral. He could not have known that Van Lodevijck, Otto van Lodevijck, whose real name was Gregor Wolfgang, had punched his professor's grandfather in the face—Gregor Wolfgang, whom the Gestapo was hunting through all the Germanics. This seemed to him quite as stupefying as if someone had told him that Francine Lepage was an agent provocateur.

"What you tell me is incredible . . ." he said.

"I found shelter in France," Papsky continued. "Friends, people I had not even known before, opened their homes to me, the higher schools opened their doors, and I went on working. I do not like France, Mr. Smith. I do not know why I do not like her. Perhaps it is because to my astronomer's eye she sprawls too insolently under her thin Cartesian sky. Perhaps it is resentment, because when the war came the so warm friends became frightened, and the so high schools also. You see, I do not know. But—how shall I say it?—this country had a heart. A heart and . . . guts. I have learned to think of 'guts' as a beautiful word. Guts. Then I was interned. Then came the debacle, and the camps turned into walking cemeteries, great funeral convoys looking for a burying place. We have been making, and we are still making, an extraordinary journey around our own common grave. I am on this journey nearly three years already. It is my life. Because that, too, is living, Mr. Smith. And so, do you see, I do not want to leave it."

He had been speaking in a slow, level voice, almost monotonous in its evenness. He did not seem to emphasize any particular word or phrase, yet to Aldous John Smith's ear certain subtle if undefinable accents came out clearly through Papsky's utterances. The two men were silent for some moments. At the left side of the desk the blackened slips waited to be read and identified, each of them summing up the life of a man. Papsky put on his glasses, which he had just wiped with the tip of his tie.

"I shall be finished soon, Mr. Smith," he said. "I suppose you see hundreds of people passing through this office. It is not difficult to imagine

what kind of people they are. We are all so much alike, in our destiny, I mean. I suppose that all believe they are in danger, that many claim to be pursued by the Germans. Today anyone who does not feel himself a victim of the Nazis, or marked to be a victim, looks like a traitor, isn't it? And this is understandable. If there was ever a time when to be on the side of the strongest meant dishonor, it is certainly our time. But among us, the condemned on reprieve, there are some whose summons may be delayed. I think I am one of them. Before my turn comes, the executioner's ax may have lost a little of its edge."

"You're not saying what's at the bottom of your thought, Mr. Papsky," said Aldous John Smith in a voice so rude that he himself was embarrassed. "I don't know your real reasons for refusing a chance to save yourself. They are your own business, but I would like to think that your decision is not final. You know very well that if you let this chance go by you will never get out of the concentration camps . . . never . . ."

"I know, I know," Papsky interrupted softly. "I have said that I loved passionately my work and my students. But even the passions die out. Or their objects change. Today I could no longer teach in the schools. Especially not schools in the shade of the palm trees. In the quiet of an oasis. After three years of day-by-day annihilation in the midst of a mass gathered from the four winds and as ill assorted as humanity itself, I cannot stand the thought of putting my feet in a pair of soft slippers. Other universities and other pupils are calling for me . . . are calling for us. Do you believe that what they call *esprit de corps* is a real thing, Mr. Smith? I mean the thing you find in any group of men drawn together by their professional interests, whether craftsmen, lawyers, or prisoners, that gradually forms in them an extremely—how shall I say it?—an extremely specialized attitude, the first acquiring it from their trade union, the second from their bar, the third from their jail. The pride of some soldiers, for instance, because they belong to this or that branch or unit, a pride that has very little to do with abstract notions of country, of war objectives . . . I do not know whether I make myself clear. In every place where men are herded together, herded and tied together in the strait jacket of a camp, free academies have sprung up, schools for—*for paralytics*. Sprung up spontaneously, in response to an almost incomprehensible thirst for learning, for knowledge—incomprehensible because there is no prospect of a return, a reasonably conceivable recompense. In the camps where I have been, in Vernet, in Argelès, in Gurs, and now in Milles, there are courses of political economy, psychiatry, world literature, applied arts . . . astronomy. Some of our 'auditors' are sick men, a few are dying, many have five, ten, fifteen years of prison and internment behind them. There are some of them who will certainly be handed over to the Germans tomorrow, who tomorrow will certainly be killed. But in the meantime they must live: live . . . that is, keep from falling into decay. It is not the physically strongest who resist the best. It is those who have the gift of forgetting themselves by becoming absorbed . . . let us say in Tycho

Brahe's system of the universe. Even for an hour, from time to time. When a dozen men listen in silence to a lecture on the fourth dimension, those twelve men are saved. Saved from themselves. They are remarkable pupils. Some curious tests could have been made in the concentration camps. It would have been found, for instance, that a talk on the customs of the Toltecs is as indispensable to the life of some internees as the hope of an American visa. So let me ask you this, Mr. Smith: are Yankee students clothed in English wool, or internees who strip a ragged jacket off the bodies of their dead, more in need of hearing about the Toltecs, or Plotinus, or the weight of the moon? That dilemma, Mr. Smith, does not even require an answer."

"Go on," said Aldous John Smith. For some minutes he had been walking up and down, with measured steps. Papsky's slow delivery acted on him as a sedative. He understood him perfectly, his slow sentences were meaningful to him beyond their formal sense, beyond their unexpressed projection. Listening, he drew from them a quiet so smooth, so restful, that his mind filled with images unrelated to each other, which did not connect him with Papsky, nor him and Papsky with the distant world, and suddenly his wife came before him, in relief, printed on his heart—Rosemary Smith, warm and light in her pale blue nightgown, in their Park Avenue apartment in New York, who wrote him letters such as a whimsical little girl would write—"come back please—what are you doing over there in Marseilles—come back—come back please . . ." "Go on," he repeated, halting in front of Papsky. "Go on."

"That is all," said Papsky. He cleaned his glasses with the end of his tie. As Smith saw his skull, covered with short, light, stiff bristles, it looked like a hedgehog rolled in a ball. Like a very young hedgehog rolled in a ball. Smith felt like putting his hand on Papsky's shoulder and leaving it there as long as the war lasted, as long as men would last. He began his pacing again, measuring his steps, peaceful and inexplicably happy. The sun, deceived by the nasty little flowers on the wallpaper, lingered in a corner of the room, as if in a last effort to open their faded corollas. Below, on the sidewalk opposite, women in wooden-soled shoes and men in straw hats stood in a long queue leading to a cherry vender's cart.

"What can I do for you, Professor?" he asked.

"Give me a package of tobacco," said Papsky. He raised his hands and put them back on his knees. "And if you are rich, you might add a few razor blades. That's all, Mr. Smith. So far as I am concerned. You see, I do not think I am in danger. Not immediately, anyway. When all is said, I feel, yes, I feel that I am where I belong." He hesitated a moment before continuing. "And now, if I may, I shall say one more thing. This Cuban visa which is offered to me, I should like to have someone use it. I would ask you to study the possibility of having someone leave in my place. Someone you know. Someone whose story you told me you knew. I speak of Gregor Wolfgang. Of Otto van Lodevijck, Mr. Smith. He is really, truly in danger of death. If he does not succeed to get away, sooner or later the

Germans will discover him. Try to get him aboard ship under my name. You will try, isn't it? This, Mr. Smith, is the principal reason why I came to see you."

He stood up, tall and robust. Smith interrupted his movement up and down the room. He halted a step away from Papsky, and gazed into the astronomer's eyes. They were bizarre in color, pale and luminous at once with more than a hint of leek green in them.—The eyes of an inspired alchemist, he thought confusedly. All at once a pang of regret struck him that he was not able to be one of the community of "auditors" who squatted in a circle around this man while he spoke to them of the weight of the moon.

"It will be a difficult undertaking," he said. "And dangerous. And besides, from what you tell me about Gregor Wolfgang, I suppose I have to look more deeply into his background and character."

"I shall vouch for him myself," Papsky answered. "I would not give him my name if I had any doubt of him. I would not put the responsibility on you. This man must be saved, Mr. Smith."

Smith was silent for a moment. He and Papsky were the same size, and could have been of the same mother, twenty years apart. He noticed that his heart was thumping a bit, as if he had been running. He looked at the pain inside his head, but the pain was gone. Suddenly he felt bereft of strength, and entirely at peace.

"Professor," he said, "you were speaking a while back of men who save themselves from themselves. In trying to get Wolfgang-van Lodeville out of the country with your visa, under your name, you are trying and—if not principally—to burn your bridges behind you; to cut off all roads of escape ahead of time; to save yourself from yourself. A visa is equivalent to a promise of departure, of a journey toward a . . . let's say a comfortable existence. You are afraid this might tempt you, and that you might succumb to the temptation. You do not want to succumb. I think I understand."

Papsky joined his fingers tip to tip, then interlaced them. Below, the line of customers, pulling its tail in, had rolled up on itself: there were no more cherries, but comments abounded.

"You are a man of perception, Mr. Smith," said Papsky, looking out of the window.

Pince-nez forward, the Haenschels looked as if they were posing for a photograph. The old lady had thrown a black mantilla over her frail shoulders, the old gentleman sported a red tie with green polka dots, and their faces wore a beatific smile. Aldous John Smith looked at them one after the other, Herr Haenschel and Frau Haenschel, sitting straight in their chairs like a couple of villagers on their first train ride, pleasure glowing through their wrinkles, the man's hand resting on the woman's, as if they had been married an hour ago. Without being absolutely sure of it, Smith suspected that Frau Haenschel had allowed herself the fri-

volity of powdering her cheeks, that Herr Haenschel had dropped in at the barber's, and that both were wearing the pick of their very best. He was filled with admiration and wonderment at the fact that life—that a double life covering thirteen decades—could so wreath itself in smiles. There was something fanciful in their bearing, a coquetry of which they certainly were not aware, and they shone like the faithful in the porch of a church after communion. He recalled Papsky, and the sensation of powerful repose which this man had produced in him—a repose so real that he felt its presence still, suspended in the air, in the light, as though it had changed their quality.—A calm which overturns the order of things, he thought. He did not understand what calm, what things—did not understand very clearly. Herr Haenschel and Frau Haenschel held each other by the hand, waiting for the paper for the shipping company, they were coquettish and so perfectly untroubled. They too were in repose, but not the same way as Papsky, rather in the way of people who were outside of time and the flight of time, as if the seasons had lost sight of them and forgotten them, the seasons marching down the long road of pain. He wondered if this was the compensation, the equivalent value for what is unique and without return in the days of man, for the gift of living without measure. He had thought "this," not knowing what image to associate with his idea—"this": security, resignation, ataraxia perhaps. Yet none of these terms suited the old Haenschels. On the contrary. They had fled from Germany, then from Austria, then from Czechoslovakia, now from France, nine years of running in circles in a hemophilic Europe wounded in the belly, she on her varicose legs, he with his asthmatic breathing, over the vertical walls of frontiers, on foot, on their knees, through briars and swamps and barbed wire and clots of blood, nine years in which migration had become a way of life, a conception of the world, from milestone to milestone, tenaciously and almost unhurriedly, toward Brazil, toward their sons who in distant Brazil monopolized the handbag industry—and here they were, the two of them, calm and free of misgivings. He looked at the old couple—what was it in them and on them which made them radiant as only children can be radiant?—It's not—at least not solely—that they're leaving tomorrow . . . or the day after tomorrow. No doubt, he thought, no doubt age brings with it a certain placidity, something like peace of soul, maybe even a sort of "philosophy" which expresses itself in shakings of the head accompanied by preenings of the beard. . . . Once again he looked at his visitors, attentively, with an insistence that almost disturbed their smile: the old lady did not shake her head, the old gentleman wore no beard, they did not look at all philosophical. There was too much real light playing behind the Haenschel pince-nez: the old folks could not be truly placid. Papsky, on the other hand, was not radiant.—Papsky is of unpolished material, he thought. Of metal still in work. And he lacks happiness, as others lack . . . lack education. Maybe he is too wise, yes, certainly he is too wise. It seemed to Smith that he was beginning to seize the difference. Papsky could not be happy—Papsky, meaning

souls struck from the same die as Papsky's.—What tortures such souls, he thought all at once, is the vanity of old age. The vanity of the bearer of a message. Whereas my friends the Haenschels . . . He smiled, seeing them smiling so persistently. The only message known to the Haenschels seemed to be the message of their own existence; and to them this message was natural and of no great import—so light, indeed, that they felt no need of delivering it. Their measure fitted them. "Come in . . ." he said in answer to a discreet knock at the door. He thought he understood now why the Haenschels deserved to be called a couple of fine old people: they had the gift of living. As on the day they first awoke to wonderment, they went from discovery to discovery. And swaggered as they went. In Brazil there are mangoes, papayas, a sugar loaf which is said to be a very large loaf: Smith was sure that the Haenschels would rediscover them. "Come in!" he repeated more loudly.

Francine Lepage's small face appeared in the crack of the door. She hesitated for a fraction of a second, long enough to fix her Madonna's eyes on Smith. It seemed that she never approached this room without a secret terror of being chased out of it. She opened the door just wide enough to put her face in, then a little wider to admit her frail body, attacking the room sidewise, shoulder ahead and arm extended, holding out a letter, a file of papers, her stenographer's notebook—as plausible motives for what in itself was inexcusable conduct. She closed the door without a sound, came forward silently (she had made herself a pair of slippers out of an old felt hat), and no one could hear her live or breathe. Smith had had her with him since the very first days of his activity in Marseilles, and in the beginning she had exasperated him more than a little: her mask of guilt, of expiation, of goodness, in a word, had often tried his patience. In his hours of extreme fatigue, when the pressure of work upset his nerves and made him inclined to rudeness, he had sometimes toyed with the temptation to be harsh with her, simply to see her stiffen. It had taken him a long time to become convinced that she was irreproachable—as irreproachable as if she had never lived. She was above petty angers, and seemed inaccessible to great ones. He avoided looking straight at her, fearing her customary expression, which was that of a sinful woman presenting herself before St. Peter. Yet there was nothing in her to remind one of a sinner, nor of a penitent for that matter, and Smith could not have said why this comparison had several times suggested itself to his mind.—Because of her deformity, probably, he thought. He tried to imagine her before St. Peter. St. Peter pushes aside his rich beard so as to see her clear to the ankles, a wisp of a thing who still has the boldness to try to lead him by his respectable nose. "It's on account of my sins that I'm an ugly duckling like this," she would say; and when the saint rattled his big keys to signify his incredulous joy, she might perhaps get angry, and it would be the one great anger of her life. "I dub you the Madonna of the Humpbacks," St. Peter would say, in the voice he would have used to sentence her to a stretch in Purgatory.—What non-

sense, he thought, taking the typed page from his secretary's hand. Bolt upright on their chairs, the Haenschels smiled as if they had assisted at the beatification of Francine Lepage.—Madonna of the Humpbacks . . . Smith mused, putting his signature at the bottom of the letter.

The Haenschels rose from their chairs. Alike in height and in health, they resembled twins who have spent their lives being careful not to hurt each other. The old gentleman had folded the letter twice, corner to corner, and they were about to depart. To depart once more. "Thanks, thanks very much to your American committee," said the old lady, smiling at her husband. "Yes, thanks most sincerely," said the old gentleman, speaking to his wife. Under the black mantilla Frau Haenschel's gray locks were tinted with pink reflections, and under Herr Haenschel's chin the red tie with the green polka dots took on the magnificence of a Brazilian corolla. "Well, good health and a pleasant journey," said Smith banally. This was another major difficulty in his dealings with people—bidding them farewell caused him as much embarrassment as greeting them. Besides, he could not have said anything to the Haenschels which would not seem banal: their horizon consisted of two arcs drawn with a compass, from her to him, from him to her, and they stood in the center of an area with spherical and impregnable walls, definitely beyond the reach of bullets, poisonous gases, and noise. "I hope your voyage will be calm and pleasant!" Smith said in a loud voice, having remembered that both of them were hard of hearing. The Haenschels exchanged a consultatory and affectionate glance: that was it, they had understood, the American was wishing them a good trip and good health. They grasped his wrist with their four hands, working his arm backward and forward with rhythm and caution, as they would have done with a badly fitted pump handle. "There, there now, good luck!" said Smith, forcing his voice. With their hands locked over Smith's, they smiled as they pumped his arm, and joy trickled out in drops of light behind their glasses.—You'd almost think they were a little batty, thought Smith; or, on the contrary, that they were endowed with a considerable degree of Socratic irony. But he knew them too well: if the expression "good luck" had any sense, its meaning could be learned by watching the old couple smile. "*Hermann, aber das Geschenk . . .*" said the little old lady suddenly, in a voice of alarm. "*Ach, Du lieber Gott . . .*" said Hermann Haenschel in the same voice, letting go of Smith's arm. He patted his pockets, his eyes on his wife, whose fingers continued to cling to Smith's hand.

They went out shoulder to shoulder, leaving the door open behind them, trotting the length of the adjacent room with gay little steps. Still standing, arms dangling at his sides, Smith followed them with his eyes. It was a tie. A *Geschenk*. A red tie with green polka dots. As they went along they said good evening and good night to the A.R.S. people in the office. "*Guten Abend, gute Nacht, schlafen Sie wohl,*" they said, he on his side, she on hers, as if they had just come off the stage. Smith wondered if he should not call them back, perhaps for a last suggestion, as for

instance that they should drop in tomorrow, one last time tomorrow; but already, one by one, his fellow workers were coming into his office and seating themselves in a circle for the conference.—Sentimental as a character in a pulp romance, Smith thought of himself. He crumpled the tie and stuck it in his pocket, stepped to the window, pushed back the edge of the curtain. All he saw was the reflection of the room and his own image traced on the dark panes.

Below, under the lowering menace of the sky, in the anemic half-light of the street lamps, the haughty boulevard wore a veil over its face. From time to time the beam of a searchlight kindled a fleeting spangle in the solid rampart of the night, and then the clapping of wooden soles on the asphalt became less eerie. "*So ein gebildeter Mann, der Amerikaner . . .*" said Herr Haenschel into Frau Haenschel's ear. "*Nun, Lieschen, ich habes schon erfahren: das Schiff soll sich Cabo de Buena Esperanza nennen . . .*" Syllable by syllable he articulated *Cabo de Buena Esperanza*, with pride ringing in his voice, as if from the height of a flying bridge he had sighted the promised land.

The luminous hands of the alarm clock pointed to four when Smith decided to get back into his clothes. He had tried to picture windmills, pendulums, locomotive shafts, and other mechanical contrivances whose rhythmical movement, he had heard, put one to sleep: he had exhausted himself in the vain effort to escape an invincible insomnia. Despite the patient perseverance of his efforts, the hypnotic virtues of things which revolve, rock, and shuttle to and fro had not come up to expectations. After the Haenschels' departure he had conferred for a long time with his collaborators: some good work had been done in his absence, and he had wanted to catch up with the details; and several questions relative to the work of the next two or three days had needed discussion. His trip to Vichy had left him with some rather disagreeable impressions. Something seemed to be boiling or about to boil in the revolutionary pot . . . From Lyons, Toulouse, Nice came confidential reports apprising the A.R.S. of a disturbing buzz of activity in the prefectures, police stations, gendarmeries, and detective agencies of every stripe, as if an uprising were imminent; and in Marseilles, too, an impalpable anxiety blotched the ashy faces of the people like smallpox. Smith wondered what new blow, what new dismemberment, threatened the humbled earth, since every path, every threshold, every uncertain step led to the gates of a single collective ghetto, where, with tenderness in their eyes and a million lice in their immortal souls, a pack of lovely brutes dispensed the future to the flesh of the murdered. Nothing seemed able to dim the brilliance of this enormous dislocation, this masterpiece of universal disruption; not even if the deluges and famines and epidemics and devastations and the great calamities of the ages should rise again in a single, immeasurable disaster, ready to burst the floodgates of legend and chronicle and the heavy earthworks of the centuries—to rise again, maw split from ear to ear, in the broad sunlight

of the public square, in the broad stretches of the wind-blown sea. Not even. Like distances in astronomy, the ossuaries in this year of grace were counted in abstract numbers. Death had entered into the current of daily life, it was in the innermost pulsations of being, more familiar than bread, than wine. Smith was not surprised to learn that for several days A.R.S. headquarters had been under strict police surveillance, and, as he returned to his hotel after midnight, he noted indifferently that a plain-clothes man with the innocent look of a night stroller fell into step behind him. He had undressed and gone to bed in the dark, nose to the wall and hands between his knees, the position in which he had always slept, ready to slip into the realm of slumber. But his muscles and nerves were taut from the excess of his fatigue, and he tried in vain to relax. As one strives to draw in an elusive thought, he strove to drain the draught of sleep, knowing the need of rest, of strength, of clarity of mind, to face the task he had taken on himself. From day to day he might be expelled, perhaps imprisoned; they might snatch away his helpers, decapitate the little organization which he had set up—and which was functioning. Over four hundred intellectuals—he had specialized in saving intellectuals—had got across the border due to the A.R.S., about a hundred of them illegally, bound for the Americas, or for Gibraltar; and several hundred others, scattered in concentration camps, in towns, in villages, were awaiting their turn. . . .

He dressed in the dark, in front of the window open on the abyss of the Old Port, where the waters and the roofs ran together into a single peaceful plane. He loved this old town with its antique bronze patina, its color of ochre-encrusted jade, its oriental flavor, the laziness and violence of its passions; loved it because he had come here with Rosemary—ah, the itineraries of travelers in love! Two weeks in Paris, two weeks on the Côte d'Azur, as much again in Venice and Rome, Baedeker in hand and travelers' checks in pocket. Buttoning the collar of his shirt, he stirred up memories close and remote at once, memories that went back beyond History. There, on the quai just to the left, they had eaten bouillabaisse, savored mussels in moselle wine, in a setting of Marseilles gangsters with a jovial laugh on their gold incisors, at Pascal's, where today *dorade au beurre fondu*, spaghetti Caruso, *canard à l'orange* were still served just as they were four years ago, except that the price of the meal had gone from twenty to three hundred and fifty francs, and that the gangsters, likewise subject to the law of time, had become honorable members of the Legion. The stop at Marseilles had been planned in their itinerary, they intended to spend only one day there, just long enough to climb the hill of Notre Dame de la Garde, whose cupola is like the pillar of heaven; but Rosemary at once made some astonishing discoveries in and around the city, and they lingered there. She discovered the Pont Transbordeur, the Château d'If, the coves of Cassis; had to take pictures of the fishwives with the voices of hawkers at a county fair and black-stockinged legs and hips wrapped in thousand-pleated skirts and fundamentals like the Acropolis; had to sketch the sailors' women sitting spread-legged in the entrances of

mysterious hallways, clad in pink jumpers, their fat breasts quivering like a well-made aspic; and the sailors themselves, Malays and Annamites, Chinese and Goyaves (in Rosemary's language "Goyave" stood for any obviously exotic race), and Arabs in their tarbooshes with the pompons hanging on their necks, Sicilians with their rainbow-ribboned straw hats leaning over one ear . . . Ever and always, untiringly, she had to see them all and touch them all, that was it, touch them, as if she had had a presentiment that they were living their last days, and that never again would the pools of sunlight and the pools of shadow trace so lovely a mosaic in these places. He looked out into the wide blackness of the night, into the small red light arching above the horizon, and he saw Rosemary in the swarming, narrow streets, blond and slender, excited and so grave, pushing open the doors of pubs, striking up friendships with bespectacled tramps and seagoing skippers who had never gone beyond the mouths of the Rhone, chatting in her murderous French with debonair policemen, followed by a flock of kids because she handed out bonbons, importuned by peddlers of peanuts, sweetmeats, and obscene post cards. Eiffel Towers, Chartres cathedrals, Nîmes arenas—any travel-agency folder spoke of these in dithyrambic prose: but this rampart of old stone warm to the touch, this backwater of old Marseilles scented with fish scales, this was her own discovery.—Her own, Smith thought, going down the stairs. Her own, like her generous mouth, like the down at the back of her neck. Besides, she had been just as enthusiastic in old Naples—old Marseilles being forgotten—and later she was just as mad over the Casbah in Algiers—having forgotten old Naples. But he was the one who made the real discovery in the course of their journey: he had discovered his wife.

The hotel foyer drowsed under the ghostly glimmer of the nights of fear. A man was snoring softly in the hollow of an armchair, head thrown back, hat down over his nose, mouth half open. Behind the long counter the compartments of the key rack yawned empty, cells in a monstrous beehive. Smith made the round of the foyer, looking for the night watchman. He found him sprawled on a chair in the elevator, in a gold-braided uniform and cap, with his beard on his chest and a flashlight at his feet. He woke up with a start when Smith's fingernail scratched the lacquered visor of his cap, and began to fumble nervously for his flashlight.

"It's me, Marcel. Open the door," said Smith.

The man straightened up, rubbing his hands on his thighs. "At this time of night, m'sieu?" he whispered. He might have been frightened of himself. In the bluish light which gave the place the feeling of a morgue, his eyes looked like a black wound. He took his nose in his fingers, as if to keep himself from falling.

"You saw him, m'sieu?" he murmured.

"Saw who?" Smith asked.

"Over there, the dick. He's on your trail. . . . If I was you, m'sieu, I wouldn't go out, you can't tell at this time of night . . ."

The man in the armchair was now awake, had pushed his hat back on

his neck, and was yawning. Smith looked at him for a moment, curiously.

"That's all right, Marcel. Open the door."

"I got to tell him, you know, the cop . . ." the watchman stammered. "It isn't up to me, m'sieu . . ." Releasing his grip on his nose, he added aloud, "Yes, M'sieu Smith. Right away, M'sieu Smith."

Wobbling on his benumbed legs, he hurried along, followed by Smith. The man in the armchair still sat with his mouth open, as if his yawning had dislocated his jaw. Stiff-necked and gasping, he stared at the watchman as he busied himself at the door which gave on the street. "Well, what's wrong with you? Ants in your breeches?" the watchman asked, coming toward him. "That's your man, that guy there. . . ."

"Shut up!" the policeman replied.

He jumped to his feet, pulled his hat over his eyes, and sped out into the street. Amplified in the dark echo of the night, Smith's steps resounded on the sonorous flags of the sidewalk.—The son of a bitch . . . thought the man, hurrying forward on tiptoe. He caught himself counting, one—two—three—four . . . setting his pace by Smith's as if the success of his mission depended on it. His ankles ached, his back and shoulders were stiff, the taste of coarse salt was in his mouth and around his eyes.—Thirteen—fourteen—fifteen—the son of a bitch . . . he counted mentally. He opened his lips, closed them on his thickly coated tongue, opened them again. Everything tasted of salt—his teeth, the inside of his cheeks, the air he breathed, the thoughts that rolled around under his hat.—Why can't he stay in bed, the whore's brat? he asked himself without conviction. Get some sleep himself and let everyone else get some. If he goes into a cat house I'll get my shoes off anyhow, these dogs are killing me—thirty-two—thirty-three—thirty-four . . . Always did have tender feet, yes, not too strong all around, really. A tough break, too, pounding pavement all the time, with feet like a pair of dumbbells. If the other headed for a bar, he'd get into a corner and toss off a drop of something. Some cognac. Do him good, a snifter of cognac. Old Armagnac, *par di*—fifty, he counted. Fifty francs for a small glass, the bastards, and hardly time to taste it, got to chuck it down your throat on the sly, making a face as if it was epsom salts, *par bleu*. He thought bitterly of Inspector Espinasse, and he could feel the swelling of his ankles clear up into his mouth.—Gets himself loaded on the cuff, the wise guy; and pays the same way. Knows his onions, that one. Never die of thirst, he won't. The big gun. He patted himself sharply on the right hip, his hand over the bulge of his revolver pocket. Where the hell was he going, the lousy cluck, the lousy son of a bitch, there were no cat houses this way, not the measliest back-room dive.—Taking somebody for a ride or what, seventy-five—seventy-six—seventy-seven . . .

Smith set off along the quais, in the direction of the Catalans and the beaches. Tied up sidewise, stem to stern, blind and chained by the neck, the ships exchanged their glorious memories. So calm was the surface of the water, so quiet the marine cemetery, that one seemed to hear the

working of the sap in the fibers of the ropes. Smith felt light and free, strolling through the soot-caulked town. A prodigious gag was jammed into the city's mouth, stuffing it to the bottom of the glottis—a gaping, gabbing mouth, too. Light and out of reach. The presence of the man dogging his footsteps did not bother him. The fellow lived by the credo of silence and blindness, preferring the thick of the shadows as the sea louse prefers damp places, by vocation, out of love, it might be. He vaguely remembered something he had once read on what, for want of a clearer term, was called rationalization, or sublimation—the sadist turning into a surgeon, the exhibitionist into an actor, the aggressive instincts in general doing their best to push past better-class portals under a socially acceptable banner. He forgot what serpent lay beneath the interesting profession of stool pigeon. As a child, like all children, he had played policeman, bandit, redskin of course, but policeman preferably.—Into the saddle and cloppety-clop, he thought. He would have liked to grasp the thread that connected the various forms assumed by the man-hunting instinct, the psychic parallels of coincidences which . . . Not just psychic, he corrected himself. Cowardice, a taste for violence, innate lack of sympathy . . . He shrugged his shoulders, lengthened his stride, provoking an instant of confusion behind him, a second of grinding in the stalking machine, until the synchronism was established once more, footfall for footfall. He varied his speed intentionally: how honest this dick was, how faithful, and so anxious not to lose him. The sound of their steps on the uneven pavement reverberated in the hollow night, echoing from building to building with a surprising sharpness. A window lighted up, went out, a pebble rolled into the water with a timid plop; and suddenly it occurred to Smith to hop to one side, no more than a single sidewise step—and have the other man follow him; or to go hippety-hop, or drag one foot, or walk crabwise—and make the other do the same.

He halted—and at his back the replica of his tread also halted, with the instant of delay that it takes an echo to die out. A flimsy gangplank, closed off with a length of rope, led from the stone jetty to the poop of a three-master—a flying bridge at the mercy of a bold stroke.—*Golondrina Azul*, home port Buenos Aires . . . He knew the vessel, which had been tied up there since the beginning of the war, a fine ship made for the high seas and high waves; and more than once the “technicians” of the A.R.S. had given thought to the project of making off with her. They had enough deep-sea captains and experienced crews on hand to man ten such craft and bring them safely to port, whether to Tierra del Fuego or to Greenland didn't matter. Gasoline for the auxiliary motor, foodstuffs, water—none of these presented any insurmountable difficulty. They simply had to be paid for. The taking aboard of a hundred or so fugitives in a deserted inlet of the Gulf of Lions had been proposed, examined, studied to the last detail, and this was not impossible either—merely a matter of going about it the right way. The major difficulty, the practically insuperable difficulty, would be in getting through the mouth of the harbor without running into

trouble. Two former pilots, born on the breakwater and capable of luffing blindfolded among the docks, buoys, and mine fields, had judged—although they were ready to undertake the adventure—that in the most favorable conditions the *Golondrina* did not have five chances in a hundred of escaping unseen. It would have called for a wind at the stern, impenetrable darkness, a fairly calm sea, a blinding downpour of rain, a torrent of rain that would cut and break up the beams from the lighthouses, plus the luck of an Irishman. The temptation was a strong one: it would have been a master stroke, and what sweet rejoicing if they had succeeded in bringing it off. The whole coast would have split its sides laughing. But it was decided that the risks were too high. In case of failure the whole A.R.S. was finished, inevitably. Sometimes, as an old but ever young joke is revived, the mad idea turned up again in their conversations, usually late in the evening, after an exhausting day's toil, when they had barely avoided a false step or won a hard battle. In the meantime, for the want of better, they were satisfied with less spectacular but more certain successes. In a few hours an A.R.S. delegate was going to start a good job rolling in the Milles camp, another in the Bompard camp, a third was expected back from Paris during the day with two hundred thousand francs, the return on a little speculation in gold, as illegal as it was fruitful. Far down in the concrete sky, almost within reach of his hand, an impalpable glow was struggling out of the womb of the night. Smith came upon the iron mass of a mooring bitt and sat down gently. He had rarely felt calm to this degree, or in this way. Everything in him bespoke peace, as if with the day that was whitening behind the invisible hills a little of the great sweetness of living was promised him. Things were all right. Everything was all right in his accounts with himself. Rosemary in her pale blue nightgown, he opposite this three-master, whose gear was beginning to come out of its slumber. On the gangplank the outline of the length of rope was becoming more distinct.—“Come back darling—come back—come back—what are you doing over there in Marseilles?” He watched the black water as it became a shade less black.—Well, if you would like me to tell you what I'm doing . . . He had come to France to cable some sensational news stories to a Chicago syndicate, and now he wanted to steal a ship. *Golondrina Azul* emerged slowly from the half-light of the dawn, stretched her long spars, puffed out her flanks; and from the other side of the basin the ancient barricade of the old town drew into the misty grayness of the newborn day. Everything was all right. There had been no bombs over the city. Not yet. Every man who would have boarded this three-master would have had a million horrific news stories to tell. A Cabinet of Dr. Caligari coasting before the breeze. The little woman in the blue gown would not have understood. How could she? She was not made to understand, any more than certain watches are made to keep good time. The sky lifted and broadened, and in the oily sea the hull of the three-master played with its reflection. Would not have understood that something has happened. Happened to him, Aldous John Smith. How

could she, with her mouth, her pretty mouth? Something that's been on its way a long time, coming to meet you, and comes up inside you and happens.

He stood up and lighted a cigarette. One after the other, the stool pigeon's feet had planted themselves behind the wheels of a dumpcart. The light came on in great waves and the sky climbed and climbed, sending the dazzled clouds back home. On the opposite bank a streetcar appeared, no larger than a beetle, and no faster. The policeman, with his elbow on the side of the cart and his nose in his elbow, was asleep on his feet. His coattail was pulled up, and the handle of his revolver peeped from beneath it. Smith threw his cigarette at the man's feet and started back to his hotel. The first rays of the sun kindled torches in the last clouds. A little fog scurried across the gleaming pavement. The night, with a bound, toppled over the horizon.

## » 6 «

LEANING SHOULDER TO SHOULDER OVER THE PIECES OF paper which were all they had for passports, the Haenschels peered admiringly at the stamps, large and small, of the Spanish transit visa, the fourth in order after the Brazilian, the Portuguese, and the visa of the Banque de France, the last authorizing the bearers to export four hundred pesetas each in a check negotiable at the border. It cheered them to look at the papers, to turn them over and over in their hands, now that these safe-conducts were at last beginning to look as such documents should. At once one felt their weight, their fleshy quality. At first they had been nothing but two pieces of paper, undistinguished in appearance, with a photograph held on by a sort of pushpin, a double red line running diagonally across them, and a thirty-eight-franc stamp affixed to the upper left-hand corner by the fiscal authorities. But even with their stamp the papers did not inspire confidence. It was difficult to accept the idea that they stood for a passport, or even the metaphysical principle of a passport. To the eye of a prospective traveler with a moderately lively imagination, they were lacking in watermarks, perforations, swallow-tail flourishes. They lacked magic. And yet, as the variegated tapestry of visas was added, bringing their polyglot endorsement to the official paper and illuminating it with signatures and numbers like a registered stock certificate, a sensation of security gradually replaced the holder's uncertainty: as tattooing lends pseudo virility to a man who is wanting in the genuine, the superabundance of stamps and seals stripped the document of its dubious look. With Frau Haenschel's aid, Herr Haenschel compared the two transit visas letter by letter, and the numbering, and the location of the rubber stamps: it took so little to furnish a pretext for last-minute pettifoggery, for in spite of all their decorations the safe-conducts still had something *ersatz* about them. With their papers spread out on the ledge of the clerk's window at the consulate, the Haenschels articulated, syllable by syllable, "*bu-e-no-pa-ra-en-trar-en-Es-pa . . .*" while a military personage with a doll-like face and carefully trimmed mustache looked down on them from his frame on the wall, with the Caesarish expression common to persons of importance who are exposed under glass in government offices. The

Haenschels liked the visa, it was well proportioned and in the grand style, everything was provided for—the importation and exportation of capital, the frontier points, the country of destination, and then three revenue stamps, one overlapping the other, two red, one green.

"Nun, Lieschen," said Herr Haenschel, folding the papers, "*alles ist schon fertig.*" He looked around the waiting room for a clock and, seeing none, stood on tiptoe and pushed his head and shoulders into the consular window. "Ten o'clock soon, Lieschen. Now we shall go and close the valises. At three we must be at the Prefecture for the exit visas. And tomorrow morning . . ."

He finished with a sweeping, frolicsome gesture of the hand, that spoke of being on the way, of traveling, of flying through the stratosphere. Frau Haenschel watched her husband's lips as if she expected to see pearls dropping from them. They went down the street arm in arm, pince-nez to the front, carefully keeping away from the curb because the trams shaved it so closely. On the Canebière the Commerce Exchange thrust out its ugly weather-pitted columns. All these people coming and going as if at the end of the pier there were not the sea, and at the end of the sea Brazil. People don't know, they go about their business and don't know. Frau Haenschel would have had everybody know.—Heinz, Fritz, Joseph—three sons like three heroes, in Brazil ten years now. They must be a lot taller, a lot stouter. Heinz had wanted to be a violinist, Fritz an explorer, Joseph a builder of roads. Today they're in bags, God keep them. Handbags, knapsacks, day bags, evening bags. In crocodile skin, rattlesnake skin, baobab skin. No, not baobab—that's something else. Sachets, purses, reticules. She squeezed her husband's hand and leaned over to his ear.

"Hermann, how do you call the snake that coils itself around you?"

"The boa," answered Herr Haenschel expansively.

The boa it was. Billfolds, tobacco pouches, make-up kits, in boa. Three sons like the wise men of Greece. Frau Haenschel would have liked to stop people and tell them, and then take them with her, so that they could see with their own eyes. Heinz, the eldest, who was forty years old; Joseph, who was thirty; and Fritz between the two, which was as it should be. If you had known them, *meine Herren*. Joseph, for instance. Roads, bridges, auto highways, that was all he thought about. "Straight, without crossroads," he would explain to the uninitiated. Frau Haenschel did not understand how a road running from Berlin to Vienna could help crossing the road from Cologne to Bucharest, but she had confidence in Joseph. Her memories made her smile, and the boulevard smiled back at her. When Joseph was a little boy and she woke him up to have him make pee-pee, he reared himself on his little legs and pee-peed straight out, quite, quite straight out. And Fritz. Fritz had promised her a letter every day, even if there was nothing happening, even if he was in the jungle. As if it were possible to have a letter every day from Brazil, when it takes the boat three weeks to get from there to Hamburg. She remembered that he had wanted to draw a sketch to show her how it could be done. But

Heinz, now, Heinz was dignified and serious, as befits an eldest son. He would take his violin, a Guarnerius that had cost eighteen hundred marks, and shut himself in his room, and if anyone dared to bother him he would get very angry. She went ahead on her husband's arm, and people turned around as they passed. People didn't know, and yet they turned around to look at the old couple trotting along step for step down the middle of the sidewalk.

"It's true, isn't it, Hermann?" said Frau Haenschel, squeezing Herr Haenschel's arm so that he would know she was speaking. "Isn't it true?"

"How could it be otherwise, Lieschen?" the old man replied, shaking his head. "They never said so, but it is certainly true."

"Yes, yes, you're right," said Frau Haenschel. It was her own idea, but since Hermann thought it was true, Hermann was right: Heinz, Fritz, and Joseph had never taken wives because they did not wish to marry until their father and mother were present. She went along on her husband's arm as if he had led her to the king's court. Oh, the children could have married, Hermann and she would not have had the least objection, not even the thought of it, God forbid. Yet how sweet it was to think that the children were so . . . so considerate. No day passed that the old couple did not talk about it, in terms that had become a rite, a ceremonial, the little old lady always beginning, "It's true, isn't it, Hermann?" and the old gentleman always answering, "How could it be otherwise, Lieschen?" And every time the question and the answer sounded fresh and exquisite to their ears. Here it was forty years ago that she had had Heinz—and it was yesterday. Hermann was beside her then, exactly as he was today, exactly as he would be tomorrow. There were so many people in this city, and nobody knew, nobody even suspected what a husband Hermann was, what children Heinz, Fritz, and Joseph were. She wanted to say to the people, "Come with us, come to Brazil with us, don't you want to come with us to Brazil?"

They climbed the stairs of the building where they had a room on the fifth floor. A breath of damp air greeted them at the door of their dwelling, a mustiness as old as the walls themselves. Herr Haenschel took off his coat and started to empty out the contents of a chest of drawers. "Make us some tea, Lieschen!" he cried gaily. Frau Haenschel pulled back a small cretonne curtain concealing a gas stove and a sink, filled a teapot with water, struck a match. Hands on her hips, a little ashamed, she surveyed the disorder of the place. She was not sorry to leave this room. It was blinded by a blank wall that pressed its dark mass against the single window, through which the wan and heat-limp light filtered only by reflection. It was scarcely two steps from the bed to the kitchen table. She had kept the place clean and neat, for after all it had been their home, the blessed isle which had afforded them a year of relative tranquillity. But the endless running hither and thither of the last few days had kept her from her housekeeping, and it pained her, as if she were somehow guilty.

"Don't touch those dishes!" cried her husband, seeing her about to go to work. "We won't take those things to Brazil, Lieschen. They'd get there all in pieces. And would you be kind enough to sit down and take a rest? Getting the baggage ready is a man's job, madame. . . . Are we taking these shoes?"

He was holding a pair of scuffed and battered shoes, testing the soles with his thumb. Without knocking, a man who looked about thirty came into the room, pushing two boys, one seven, the other eight, ahead of him, and followed by a young woman whose hair had come undone, and who began to sniffle vehemently as soon as she crossed the threshold.

"So you made it. You're off tomorrow, Herr Haenschel?" the man said with a note of envy in his voice. The young woman looked around her, laughing and sniffing, with her hands locked in front of her mouth. She looked as if she had just come out of a long sleep.

"Yes, yes, we're off tomorrow," said Herr Haenschel with a sigh of happiness. He was still holding the shoes in his hand. "What size shoe do you wear, Herr Krantz?" "Why? Why? Oh, let's see them. Ten, ten and a half . . . You want to sell?"

"No, not sell, Herr Krantz," Frau Haenschel interrupted hurriedly. "Take them if they fit you. You'll have a cup of tea, Frau Krantz? The children will have some tea too. I have some sugar left."

Sonia Krantz laughed and sniffled. She never stopped looking around her, with the expression of an animal in a trap.

"It's so nice that you're getting away," she said absent-mindedly. "Pawel, see what the children are doing. And us, you understand. I gave the concierge two hundred francs. Is that enough?" She pushed back a wisp of her hair with a sudden movement of her hand and gave a sniffle which shook her head. "And two months' rent in advance, so that she wouldn't put us out tomorrow, or the day after, or in . . ."

She sat down on the corner of the bed and began to cry soundlessly. Great tears coursed down her cheeks one after the other, but she did not sniff them back. Her husband, who had taken off his shoes, stood by her and patted her hair. "There, there, calm yourself, Sonia. Nobody will put us out of here, I swear to you." Squatting on the floor, the children were digging busily through the pile of things scattered there. Frau Haenschel handed a cup of tea to the young woman.

"You'll be leaving soon too," she said. "Would you like to have the dishes? When you go, soon, very soon, you will leave them to someone else. It isn't much, but you know . . . Hermann, why are you packing that jacket? What will I ever do with it? Look, Frau Krantz, it would suit you very nicely, especially if you have it turned. Look, the lining is new, and it's good wool. . . ."

Sonia Krantz sniffled loudly, and the tea slopped over on her skirt. Again her eyes started to wander wildly over the room. She did not answer, nor did she raise the cup to her lips. Krantz was wiggling his toes in Herr Haenschel's shoes. "How much does gas cost you a month?" he asked,

with one eye on his host's valise. Sonia had not told him that she had given the concierge a tip of two hundred francs. She always did things handsomely, the fine lady; and since she had become so nervous, she spent money lavishly, taking advantage of the fact that he dared not cross her. "Come on, Sonia, drink your tea. You know the doctor warned you not to get upset." It was on the tip of his tongue to add that for two hundred francs the concierge would have gone to bed, but he caught himself in time. Just the same, Sonia forgot that for two years he had not earned a cent—well, practically. "What's the idea of taking those sweaters with you, Herr Haenschel? From Lisbon on you'll be sweating, and in Brazil snow is rarer than a decent cup of coffee here. And this pullover? Especially since it's worn, you know. The less baggage you're carting the better off you'll be, take it from a man who's traveled a lot." Good thing Sonia didn't get mixed up in his business affairs. Did she even know he had any? Rag-picking, five-and-ten stuff, worse luck. If people weren't leaving the country he would be eating up his capital, dollar by dollar. He wasn't asking for presents, no one gave anything away except his wife Sonia, he bought for cash and then sold on the black market, in behind the Rue d'Aix. That did the emigrants a good turn by relieving them of a heap of old junk, and it did him a good turn, too, helped him to wait for the visa, the visas, curse them. He slipped his hand up the sleeve of a sweater and examined the knit, figuring the price he could get for it.

"Why of course, Hermann," said Frau Haenschel. "What would we be doing with sweaters? I ask you. Take them, Herr Krantz, take them."

Pawel Krantz took them. He rolled them up with the shoes and the jacket. He was not asking the Haenschels to give them to him, but he was not going to insist on paying for them, either. The boys were playing choo-choo, slamming the bureau drawers open and shut. "Pawel, Pawel, look after the children!" begged Sonia Krantz, with her mind elsewhere. Pawel thought that Mietek and Salek needed no one to look after them, they found lots of things to do all alone; in fact, when it came to inventing things to do, they were nothing short of extraordinary. Everyone sat drinking tea with sugar, except Sonia Krantz, whose eyes knew no rest. When Frau Haenschel took her cup away, she never noticed it. Her fingers played a rapid and monotonous tattoo on her knees, and she sniffled vehemently.

Someone knocked at the door, and Krantz opened it. Herr Haenschel took off his glasses, which were clouded by the steam from his cup.

"Hello, Hirsch, hello!" he called happily. "Come in, Hirsch. Come in and have a cup of tea. Tea with sugar. Get acquainted, please do. From tomorrow on you'll be neighbors, the Krantzes are going to live in our room."

He spoke in French, the only language Hirsch understood. The cashier of the Sucror politely declined the tea, inquired for the Haenschels' health, asked Sonia Krantz if the two boys were hers. Leaning with his back against the door, he looked at the young woman. He saw her in

profile, against the light; she was as slim as a young girl, and almost beautiful in the poor light. She did not reply to his question, and Hirsch was not sure that she was aware of his presence. The children had invented another railroad game; they were blowing down the neck of a bottle, and stamping and shuffling their feet to simulate the sound of the wheels on the track. Krantz plucked a number of butts out of a tin box, broke them up, and rolled a fresh cigarette. Frau Haenschel brought a cup of tea to Hirsch in spite of his refusal, and Herr Haenschel went back to arranging socks in the gaping valise.

"Here are the two letters," said Hirsch as he handed the empty cup back to Frau Haenschel. "I left them unsealed. You won't forget, will you? You will be kind enough to mail the letter addressed to the United States in Lisbon; the other, for Argentina, I would ask you to send from Rio de Janeiro as soon as you land. Air mail, both of them, you'll remember? If you please, madame."

He spoke in a loud voice, to overcome the children's railroad and the old lady's deafness. He looked completely worn out, and there were sunken, bluish circles under his eyes. Smiling and nodding her agreement, Frau Haenschel tucked the two letters into her handbag, among other unsealed envelopes.

"Don't forget mine either, Frau Haenschel," said Krantz, chewing the smoke of his cigarette. "Eight of them, you remember? Two for Havana City, three for Mexico City, and three for New York City. It's very important. I'm counting on you. . . ."

Hirsch laughed. First he laughed like someone who thinks he ought to laugh, then like someone who is enjoying a joke, then like someone who is being tickled. His head was thrown back against the door, and he laughed with a small, hysterical voice, his nostrils pinched, his eyes dry. The youngsters forgot to blow into the neck of the bottle, and the young woman forgot to sniffle. Herr Haenschel and Frau Haenschel, somewhat puzzled, glanced affectionately at each other. Holding his cigarette in the hollow of his hand, Krantz drew back a couple of steps. All at once Sonia Krantz was upon Hirsch, with her hair in her eyes, and her eyes rolling like a steel ball in a saucer. She seized him by the shoulders, crying, "What's the matter with you? What are you thinking?"

Hirsch exhaled sharply and stopped laughing. The young woman's face was close to his: he felt its warmth and its twitching, and saw the tip of her tongue between her white teeth. It seemed to the cashier of the Sucror that a furnace had been lighted in his chest and was burning his lungs to ashes. He felt himself deprived of air, of light, of support, seeing nothing but the upturned face of the woman and the hungry look in her eyes. He thought he would collapse, that he would crumble to dust like a cinder; but he put his lips upon the lips of Sonia Krantz and she left them there, holding him by the shoulders, with her eyes open and suddenly riveted. There was a moment of silence, an instant in which nothing moved. They might have been listening to the dizzy whistle of a bomb

coming nearer and nearer, and hoping for its fall with a sort of wondering recollection.

"Hey, you, monsieur!" barked Pawel Krantz, coming to himself.

He grasped his wife by the shoulders and pulled her violently to him. Without weight and without resistance she fell into his arms. Now completely undone, her black hair floated on her temples and her neck. Pale, motionless, she stared at Hirsch. Holding her tightly to his bosom, Krantz stuttered:

"Ruff-f-f-ian! Sc-c-c-oundrell! P-p-p-pimp! I'll s-s-s-smash your f-f-f-ace in!"

Mietek, the younger of the boys, suddenly tumbled backward on his behind and started to howl, quickly followed by Salek, the older. The old lady went to pick them up, and seeing this they redoubled their howling. His back to the door, tugging at his shirt collar as if he still had not recovered his ration of air, Hirsch was breathing with his mouth open. Krantz had exhausted his repertory, and now hurled insults at his enemy in Polish, German, and finally Yiddish. Despite himself, the curses of the Jews, rising from the depths of his childhood, bloomed again on his nimble tongue. "A black year in your guts!" he said. "Typhus and the thirty-six plagues in the roots of your teeth!" he said. "A tumor in both eyes and galloping consumption. . . ." Having helped his wife back to her place on the corner of the bed, he went on cursing Hirsch while he slapped Mietek and Salek, one after the other, to make them keep quiet. Hirsch did not understand a word, but as the monotonous stream of maledictions grew in volume, a grimace of hatred twisted his features. What was the matter with this Jew, who smelled of the Ghetto despite his blondish mustache, that he had to intone his psalms in this manner? It was because of him and his like that France was no longer France, and life no longer fit to live. Hirsch was not an anti-Semite: how could he be, feeling so little that he was a Jew, feeling it not at all? In fact anti-Semites to him were a disgusting lot of bloodsuckers, all too glad to take out their domestic squabbles, their conjugal crack-ups, their whole mean, squalid existence, on a Jew who was down; but as for him, the mere sight of his coreligionists was the red rag before the bull—or at any rate the sight of these khassidim of yesterday, these Brummells of today, who like an oriental plague had invaded the West. The West, where life had been soft indeed since 1805, when Napoleon had emancipated the Jews. . . . Hirsch knew his history of France. Before them, before the invasion of the Orientals, he had never heard the word "Jew," except perhaps in relation to a certain Dreyfus case. Of course he was aware of a race of witch hunters who were always ready to rekindle the fires around the stakes of old; but you knew of these things only by hearsay, as you knew of cannibals, people who ate swallows' nests, or other such oddities. He looked at Krantz, who, while he wiped the drip from his sons' noses with his handkerchief, still mouthed his abominable incantations, whatever they meant. A vague but painful sense of guilt grew upon Hirsch, and with it his rage mounted. He

resented this blond Talmudist as though he were a Nazi. He resented his having a wife and children, his being there, his very being. If instead of playing the lawyer in Berlin, the doctor in Paris, the businessman all over, the revolutionary in every latitude, all the Krantzkes had stayed in their Ukraines and their Bukovinas, with the phylactery on their foreheads and their beards in the Torah, the Hirschkes of France would not now be running like wild rabbits with a charge of buckshot in their rear ends. And without even a place to run to. All Europe had become a sort of Bukovina, the whole earth a sort of Ukraine, and Jews at every step with the pogrom coming out of their eyes. . . . Eight letters . . . Eight letters he was getting off by fraud, the stinking rabbi's nephew. London City, Batavia City, Citycity . . . The worst of these biblical cousins was that they never did things by halves. Radicals, right away they've got to get into a Soviet; conservatives, they must be chairmen of the board. That was how they brought catastrophe on themselves, and got themselves into such a bloody mess.—Even when they get their throats cut, they do it wholesale. The trouble with us is that we have no sense of moderation. We are the victims of our . . . He caught himself thinking us, we, our, as if he too were part of it, of the phylactery, of the pogrom, but he no longer had the heart to become angry again. All this was false—his rages, his anti-Judaism—false as a joke at a funeral. He was not fooled. The truth was—he knew it, it was inside him, behind his belly button—that he was afraid, and afraid of being afraid. It was his tough luck, his physiological flaw. He exuded anxiety at every pore, and he could do nothing about it. At this very moment his thoughts went limping around a terrifying thing—this woman whom he had just kissed on the mouth, who had let him kiss her on the mouth, she . . . she . . . Almost with horror he looked at her, tousled and haggard, sniffing with a vehemence that made the veins stand out in her neck. Suddenly he gave a start so violent that the children left off their blubbering and Pawel Krantz his cursing. Of course! Of course, she was marked for death, death was in her wandering eyes, and he had known it instantly, that was why he had laughed, that was why. She also knew, she had seen herself dying in his face, that was why she had . . . that was why . . . He wanted no more of them, of their nearness, of their shadow over his shadow. He opened the door and bounded down the stairs four at a time.

At the head of the line which was strung out in the dark corridor of the Service des Passeports et Visas in the Marseilles Prefecture, the Haenschels were the first to be admitted to the window, the grille of which was flung open noisily a minute or so after three o'clock. They knew the place, with its smell of paper and dust, and the faces of the men in the office, since they had been there countless times to comply with countless formalities; even the gendarme on guard was not unfamiliar to them, with his cap on the tip of his cranium and the wide belt around his paunch. The window was a little high for the Haenschels, coming down

exactly to their lower lip, but they were accustomed to this. "Nun, Lieschen, this is the last time you will come here," said the old gentleman into his wife's ear. She nodded joyfully. Everything was finished and ready, they would put on a seal or two, perhaps stick on a stamp, and that would be that, and bon voyage. Their exit visa had been granted some weeks before, Mr. Smith himself had seen the authorization in Vichy, and besides, the prefect in person had taken the trouble to notify them by letter. The same clerk to whom at this moment Herr Haenschel was passing his identity papers had said to him, "Yes . . . that's right . . . the visas have been granted by the ministry. But we can't put them on unless all visas of transit and destination appear on the safe-conducts." And this was the same clerk, and certainly he would remember his promises today, when their visas were lined up in a row, one after the other, down to the very last. They were very fond of this young man, who was so tall that he had to bend over to talk to them; he was courteous, and undoubtedly came of a good family. They stood with their noses level with the window, watching him as he flipped the pages of a large folio, then went over to one of the many metal cabinets which stood along the wall and fished out a folder full of documents—their folder. Fortunately nothing had been lost, the young man found everything in order, their visa had not been delivered to someone named Herschel, or Werschel, or God knows what. There, now he will take one of those rubber stamps, make sure it's the right one, apply it carefully to the backs of the safe-conducts, press it down with both hands so that everything will be visible and legible. They followed him with their eyes, anticipating his movements one by one; it was too bad the young man seemed a little sad, and that, kind as he was, he never smiled. They anticipated his actions so completely, saw the bureaucratic ritual so far ahead in their imagination, that they were surprised to see him all at once on his side of the window, with the two safe-conducts in his hand, and a square slip of paper pinned to them. Looking up at him, they displayed their confident smile and their solidary pince-nez, and stood attentive, anxious not to miss a word of what he had to say to them.

The tall young clerk was glad to see the two old folks again, with their unfailing air of self-possession and their simple graciousness. Amid the crowd of the fugitives miraculously pulled from the water, this old couple stood out strangely: both of them always seemed to have stepped out of a bath the minute before. Their clothes did not smell of the slime of the drowned, their smile had the genuineness of conviction, they created the impression of facing the deluge bravely, or of crossing it dry-shod, in a bark equipped with the latest improvements. It was impossible not to single them out from the wrecks which the raging torrent of events carried along and cast up in the ground-floor office of the Marseilles Prefecture. In the vast multitude of runaways, the Haenschels looked like apostates. They were neither smart nor dingy. Very simply, they were an old couple who were going to Brazil, who had been on their way there for nine years—there was so much water between here and there. And so,

very simply, he was glad to see them. All these people who passed before him at the window had taught him the art of divination. There were some people whose destiny was barely hidden: you glimpsed it in the way they spoke, in their gestures and their walk. The way an ear stuck out from the head, the line of an eyebrow, the cut of the fingernails, the way a man knotted his necktie or spread out his identity papers, but especially the expression of the eyes—all these things were signs: this man will never get his visa, this other may get it but it will be too late, this other will get it but still will not leave. People—these people—carried the bundle of their future in their hands. As for the Haenschels, they will get away and they will arrive, visa or no visa, nine years more or not. If their destination had been the moon, they would have got there quite as well, quite as naturally, still smiling: of this the sad young clerk had no doubt. A ladder would have been built expressly for them, or else the moon would have come down to meet them, also smiling. The slip of paper which he was about to hand them would not, he knew, disturb them in the least. The paper—he was not mistaken, he knew the machinery too well—the paper was a collective death sentence levied against tens of thousands of souls. But not against the Haenschels. The Haenschels were exempt: the rifles fired at them will be loaded with blanks, the nooses put about their necks will be woven of spider's silk.

"You will have to go to the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs and get these two papers signed. Rue du Docteur Roux, number seven." Leaning over the old couple's pince-nez, he enunciated his words slowly and in a loud voice. "As soon as you bring them back to me, I shall give you your exit visas."

Herr Haenschel nodded his approval. Commissariat for Jewish Affairs, Rue du Docteur Roux. He knew where the street was. He asked the long, sad young clerk whether there would be any delay in getting the papers signed, because they were leaving tomorrow and had already given up their room to Monsieur and Madame Krantz, who were very fine people. The clerk watched them gathering up their papers, tranquilly and serenely, "It's a formality that won't take long," he said. In their place anyone else would have been alarmed, turned pale, asked questions, insisted, with a threat in his manner, on being given information which no one could give him—if this is another setback, if it's another double-crossing kick in the pants, just say so right away, so I'll know where I stand, and then I'll go and throw myself off the dock. But the Haenschels neither threatened nor felt threatened, very carefully they folded their papers, corner to corner. Still another signature, still another rubber stamp, well, why not? He saw them go off so perfectly at ease, so unconcerned about commissariats of any sort whatever, that he did not put their dossier back in the files, and told the guard to bring them in as soon as they returned. For they were going to come back, he was sure of it. They were going to come back smiling and peaceable, after having stepped lightly over the most insurmountable of barriers.

And back they came, within a short hour. They spread out their slips and sheets and safe-conducts, and waited, with their noses on the counter of the window, for the clerk to deign to take notice of them. The tall, sad young man felt no more than a moderate satisfaction over the exactness of his forecast. He allowed himself no special credit for having foreseen that the old couple would pass through hell without losing their composure. His perspicacity was nothing to boast about, because all this was "written"—written beforehand, in ineffaceable letters. In ineffaceable letters he stamped the safe-conduct of Haenschel Hermann Walter—exit visa number . . . the frontier must be crossed before the . . . through . . . destination . . . authorization of the Minister of the Interior, dated . . . His writing was meticulous, more meticulous than usual, as he filled in the blanks: it was a pleasure to take care of these old clients of his. He affixed a ten-franc stamp—another stamp, red over blue—applied three or four supplementary rubber stamps over the principal one, and went on to the next safe-conduct. The Germans would have sent home the prisoners of war, the man named Hitler would once again have drained the cup of friendship with the man named Stalin, before the road to Brazil was closed to the Haenschels. . . . He was so convinced of this, so certain indeed, that he barely missed making an error which would have set him on the no less certain road to imprisonment with hard labor: Haenschel Liese Maria Rahel, nee Burgermayer, was declared non-Aryan, and, as a consequence, her exit visa was automatically annulled, by the terms of telegraphic directive number this and that, dated as of this morning at twenty-seven minutes past ten o'clock.

He could not believe his eyes. Though, by merely carrying out his orders, he had done his part in cooking people over a slow fire, he had not for one instant ceased to believe, to cling desperately to the belief, that God had not entirely abandoned the earth; that some few of His children, touched by the grace of which the Gospels speak, would survive His wrath, and, by the very fact of their existence, would save mankind. Then, one day, the Haenschels had presented themselves at his window, and he had recognized that these two old people symbolized that something against which the villainy of the world was of no avail. Against them Evil could do nothing, and for that very reason Evil was not omnipotent. And now the Haenschels themselves stood on the brink of the Devil's pit. He approached the window with fearful steps, feeling his temples throbbing, hearing the drums roll out the summons for the massacre of the innocents. The new directive was not hell, but all the associated hells, the real ones and the imaginary ones, the Beelzebubs and Gorgons and Harpies and Lamias and Larvae and Djinns in a single circle of fire and brimstone. Could it be true that there was no possible pardon, no possible remission?

"Madame Haenschel," he asked, "are you Jewish?"

"No," answered the old lady, shaking her pince-nez, "I am not Jewish."

The young, tall, sad clerk found it hard to swallow his saliva. Madame

Haenschel said she was not. There was not a trace of saliva in the young man's mouth, not a trace of blood in his face. Madame Haenschel said. He looked around him, as if seeking help from his fellow workers, male and female. They looked like clay imps, and the gendarme on duty looked like a primitive deity in Brazil wood. Other infernal spirits were taking their places at the round table of pandemonium—the Ashtoreths and Asmodeuses and Belials and Baphomets and Farfadets. Demonomania filled the very air, it oozed from the surface of things, and each written word, the strokes of each letter, were shaken with convulsions. He leaned over the two white heads which appeared in the window as if cut off neatly at the collar.

"And you did not protest? Ah, madame, what have you done? Why didn't you protest?"

Frau Haenschel looked questioningly at her husband. What should she protest about, when she had lived sixty-five years, more than forty of them with Hermann, and had three sons, and was going to Brazil to be with them there? At the Rue du Docteur Roux, in the offices of the Commissariat, a Commissioner with an absolutely yellow face had fingered their papers for quite some time. "What is your profession?" he had asked Hermann Haenschel. "Egyptologist," the old gentleman had replied with some embarrassment, knowing that this was not a trade which a public administrator would look upon with approval. The Commissioner fixed a crusty eye on Herr Haenschel. "Egypt is an English colony," said he in an expectant voice. The old man did not answer. "A victim of British imperialism," the Commissioner for Jewish Affairs continued. He was as yellow as a solution of picric acid. "You work for the English?" he inquired. "Excuse me, monsieur, I can't hear you," said Hermann Haenschel. "I would appreciate it if you would speak louder." "Are you deaf?" shouted the other, his fibrin-streaked eye popping out of his head. The old gentleman nodded that he was: a little deaf, indeed. "And you? Are you deaf too?" Frau Haenschel nodded: she too. "I say you work for the English! What have you to say for yourself? What *is* your work exactly?" "I have devoted myself to the study of the monuments of ancient Egypt," said Herr Haenschel. He had folded his hands, and spoke quietly and without hurry. "And besides that?" "I have published a few works on hieratic and demotic writing." "And besides that? What other business did you have besides that?" Herr Haenschel drew back a step, and his wife stepped back an equal distance; this Commissioner spoke so loud. "No," he said, "I had no other business besides that. But I have worked for twenty years on a comparative anthology of ideographic texts." The Commissioner held his lighter to a cigarette, after picking at the wick for a long minute. "And you? What was your occupation?" he inquired of the old lady. "Well, answer me! Did you embalm mummies?" He laughed, exposing gums as yellow as lead monoxide. "No, monsieur," she replied, "I am not learned enough." "What, you did nothing over there in Nuremberg, while your husband was deciphering his papyri?"

"I brought up my sons, monsieur. They are in Brazil. We are leaving tomorrow to join them. And as the grant the state gave my husband was not sufficient to support my family, I ran a children's toy business." "Well, well, you ran a business?" said the Commissioner for Jewish Affairs. One would have said that he had come upon a bone. "How very interesting, indeed!" He looked her up and down, with something resembling a smile in his pulverous eye. "And you say you are leaving tomorrow, Liese Maria Rahel Burgermayer?" he dragged out her name, pausing on each syllable. "Is it Ra-hel or Ra-chel? May-er or Mey-er?" he asked at the top of his lungs. Not waiting for an answer, he dashed a couple of words across each paper and whacked a stamp on both of them. "There! That's all, you may go," he said. The Haenschels picked up their documents and went down the stairs. At the door they examined the rectangular slips of paper: the man was declared to be Aryan by race, the woman non-Aryan. They exchanged glances in silence. Should they go up and explain to this yellow-as-worry Commissioner that there had been a misdeal, since she, Liese Maria Rahel Burgermayer, was the Aryan, and he, Hermann Walter Haenschel, the non-Aryan? But the thought of again facing the gentleman with the thunderous voice was not a pleasant one. Anyway, they were leaving tomorrow in the morning, so this slight error would hardly hurt the Commissioner. And if he absolutely insisted on having a Jew in the Haenschel family, he had one in any case, and might it do him much good.

The young clerk was holding onto the shelf of the window with both hands, his face distraught, the sweat running down his forehead. Had they known that this mistake would cause him such distress, they would have retraced their steps and disabused the Commissioner. Frau Haenschel raised herself on the tips of her toes and patted the young man's fingers. He was so upset about it, the poor young man. A cup of tea with a little lemon would certainly have done him good. He had Joseph's spirited look, this boy had, a look as straight as roads which do not cross, and also he was of Joseph's age, God bless them both. She caressed the back of his hand, and said, "I am quite an old lady, monsieur. Do you really think I should have protested?"

Behind her glasses her eyes shone clear and young. The tall, sad clerk straightened his long figure. A touch of color lighted the peaks of his cheekbones. "I . . . I shall protest for you," he said, although they did not hear him. "Wait here, don't go away, I shall be back in a moment."

He left the office through an inner door, sped up the stairs, and strode across the waiting room, which was hung with burgundy velours. There must have been something unusual in his appearance, because, though they knew him well, the two gendarmes on duty in Adrien de Pontillac's antechamber stared after him as he passed at full speed, with hair flying and necktie awry. He paid no attention to the doorman's frantic warning, neglected to knock at the door, ignored the visitor who stood facing the boss's desk. He spread out the papers of Haenschel Hermann Walter under Pontillac's nose. His body was stiff and his gestures brusque, and

he looked straight ahead of him, straight ahead at Marshal Pétain's glorious kepi. A threefold cramp twisted and knotted his flesh, he felt that he was turning into a ganglion, a knot of sinewy ligaments. The honorable kepi, the popular kepi, the eminent kepi on the Marshal's head was revolving in the gilded wooden frame. The notable, the noted kepi. Turning, turning. Backward and forward, spinning like a wheel, spinning like a kepi. Esteemed kepi. It seemed to the young clerk that he was being garroted, and that if anyone touched him or as much as said a word to him, he could stand it no longer, he would simply scream.

Pontillac spoke, and the young man did not scream. He did not scream, but he yawned. Yawned with his whole body, with his arms and the muscles of his neck, with his legs and his spinal column. His joints unlocked one by one, with the dry click of an old bolt or a dislocated clavicle slipping back into place. He could feel his superior's cold look, the cold anger of his silence; but despite his desire to observe the proprieties, the yawn forced his jaws and held his mouth wide open.

"I just said that this signature could have waited," said Pontillac. "And stop yawning, if you don't mind."

"I beg your pardon, monsieur," said the clerk.

He turned away and launched a monstrous yawn into the face of the visitor, whose profound mental concentration was indicated by the redness of his ears and the burying of his nose in his mustache. "I beg your pardon," he repeated, turning again to Pontillac. "It's . . ." He put his hand to his mouth, then turned away again to exhale an immense yawn. "It's like . . ." He bit his lip a hard, savage nip, and spoke fast, as if he had but little time to live. "The parties . . . I mean the party concerned is leaving tomorrow at dawn. He begs that there may be no . . ." He covered his mouth, this time with both hands, but turned all the same and yawned into the visitor's mustache. Far down in the depths of his being a force awakened and crackled joyously. ". . . no delay. He's an old man, monsieur. He has his visa from the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs."

Pontillac looked through the papers of the man named Haenschel Hermann Walter with interest. So there it was, the form from the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs. The first since the enforcement of the new regulations. He ran his eye over it: name . . . age . . . nationality . . . is declared . . . by race: seal and signature. Filthy business, all this. They were not serious about it, they would let out lots of Jews made up as pure Aryans. It would have been better to close the frontiers once and for all. He did not like rickety, halfway measures. Every emigrant, foreigner or Frenchman, especially a Frenchman, was a potential enemy. He picked up the telephone and asked for the Commissioner for Jewish Affairs.

"Pontillac speaking. Who is this? Good. I have the form you just sent over for the benefit of one Haenschel. How did you determine his Aryan origin?"

He listened to the embarrassed explanations of the Commissioner, who

addressed him as "Monsieur le Préfet." Lacking precise instructions, he said, and until the procedure was straightened out, he was using his own judgment. "A matter of experience, Monsieur le Préfet," he said. "A matter of intuition. You can smell a Jew, Monsieur le Préfet, I especially. I've tracked down hundreds of them at the Paris Commissariat . . ."

"You will oblige me by no longer trusting to your intuition," Pontillac cut him short. He detested the quackery and blind routine of the government offices. "Until you receive formal instructions as to procedure, I shall ask you to turn down all applicants consistently. I shall give orders to the visa department at headquarters to suspend . . ."

He hung up. A policy of national renovation should have begun by the radical remodeling of the civil service, among other things. If there was one thing that needed to be permanently extirpated, it was the overripe mentality of these gentlemen. This particular artist in divination would quite as readily have issued titles of nobility after reading the lines of the hand. The whole zealous crowd of armchair Solons! They had heard of inspiration, and thought it was in their blood. And these two, one yawning in the other's face, what fine specimens of incurable nonentities! He seized his pen and signed the exit visa of the Aryan Hermann Walter Haenschel.

Yawning wide enough to spring his jawbone out of its sockets, the sad, long young man took the papers. Whatever force it was in him that smashed through impregnable defenses had arrested the gyratory motion of the kepi. In the gilded wooden frame the important kepi had lost its visor, and in the vast burgundy-hung waiting room the demon kneeling behind the drapes was silently vomiting clots of black blood. The demon who thinks he is so clever. Who invented Commissariats for Christian Affairs, for cloven visas, for signatures with tails. The tall young man flew down the stairs and back to his desk, laid hold of a pen, dipped it, and signed the second safe-conduct—the one belonging to the non-Aryan Liese Maria Rahel Burgermayer, Haenschel by marriage: signed Pontillac, with the hook under the lac and the dot over the ac. The demon who knows everything. The gendarme looked like a gendarme, his fellow workers, male and female, looked like fellow workers. Everything was as it should be. Hanging crookedly, the Marshal rocked on the wall. As it should be and within the law. He yawned so terrifically that those who were dictating and those who were taking dictation looked up with a single movement of their heads. He retouched the boss's signature slightly, shading the downstroke of the P more heavily, so that it would look more like the forgery. The demon who. He folded the documents and, spying an envelope, slipped them into it. Just above the sill of the window, the Haenschel eyeglasses observed him with a friendly air.

"Everything's in order," he said, leaning over the old couple. His voice had the pure accent of clean things. "In order and according to law."

They took the envelope. How could it be otherwise than in order and according to law? They thanked him: he was a very nice young man, this

young man was. Frau Haenschel would have liked to take his hand, but it was too high. "*Hermann, aber das Geschenk . . .*" she said. Hermann called upon God and took out a tin of sardines. "If you please . . ." he said, placing the tin on the window shelf. They went away arm in arm, trotting along with equal steps. The gendarme cast an envious eye on the tin of sardines. "In olive oil, 'pon my soull!" he said admiringly. The forger who had conquered the demon broke into a yawn as wide as life.

## » 7 «

BLOCK CAPTAIN IGNACE MATTHIEU CLOSED THE DOUBLE-upholstered door of the office of Monsieur Adrien, Comte de Pontillac, lord and master at the Prefecture of the Bouches-du-Rhône Department and regional chief of the Legion, and stopped outside to pull himself together. His greatest need of the moment was to gulp down a liberal whiff of air, more or less as you swallow a shot of cordial to put your heart back where it belongs. The last ten minutes of his interview with the big chief had not been what Matthieu would have called a tea party. The one to blame was the screwball who had butted in on him and Pontillac. This was not the only interruption, far from it; there had been calls and countercalls all the time, you can't imagine the number and diversity of jobs the man at the top has on his mind at once, but anyway he had succeeded, between two telephone conversations, in putting across the main points of his business. He had drawn up a report, on five pages, legal size, which he produced at the psychological moment, when the chief, obviously speaking to a person of the gentler sex, had concluded the conversation by making a date for a pleasant day in the country—the psychological moment indeed, though Matthieu had been assailed at the last minute by doubts as to the spelling and composition of his document. But the thought of losing the fruit of his literary labors prevailed over his grammatical scruples. It would be unfair, really, if his report did not go into the files—a report constructed after mature reflection, and destined to serve as the written foundation, so to speak, in an affair which was certainly going to have widespread repercussions. The chief had not appeared at his best, he was brusque and on the curt side, maybe because he was not too pleased that his first inkling of so important an affair should come from a humble block captain. This last hypothesis tickled Matthieu to death. He, he alone had got wind of a gang of conspirators who, under cover of what pretended to be a food industry, were hatching plots which endangered the security of the state. He pulled on his Basque beret, ran his thumb over his mustache. It was understandable that a big shot like Pontillac didn't like to have someone come along and say to him, "Hey, look what's going on right under your nose." After all, human nature—

and the flesh, likewise human—are weak: everybody has his little vanities, his pusillanimiti . . . his pusillanimiti . . . well, his tender spots. Pontillac could get impatient, Pontillac could cut in on the block captain's story with his ill-timed remarks as much as he liked: the block captain was none the less certain that he, Ignace Matthieu, enrollment number 102, he, and nobody else, was the man of the hour. He snapped a military salute to the two gendarmes and they returned a military salute, following him with their eyes as if they did not want to forget him.

On the square in front of the Prefecture the sun baked the pavement and made him thirsty. It was a good enrollment number, 102, not the number of one who had galloped up at the last moment to jump on the bandwagon. The number of one of the old guard. What had made it tough was that the chief was not a man to show that he was impressed, even by a really big piece of business. On the contrary, it was a snap for him to intimidate the one he was talking to, and the truth was you didn't feel at ease in his presence. He had his own way of looking at you, staring you in the eyeball while he listened, which started your eyelids fluttering and dumped a ton of lead on your tongue. But the block captain, sustained by his sense of duty, had done the best he could, and all in all he figured he had met the demands of the occasion. The stupid part of the whole thing had been that screwball with his story about some chump who didn't want to wait for a visa or something. From the minute he had interrupted the conference, everything had gone wrong. On occasions like these, when you've got your heads together on really important matters, there ought to be an arrangement which—click! would lock the door and cut off the phones. Because, although the screwball had cleared out of the office bag and baggage, he left his yawn behind him like a skunk leaves his smell. Matthieu's mustache bristled at the thought of the incident. He didn't believe in the evil eye, in four-leaf clovers, in betting more on Friday the thirteenth than on Saturday the fourteenth—but yawning, now . . . Although he was pretty obstinate in his ideas, Matthieu prided himself on not being pedantic; he knew that even the most stubborn head ought to bow to the evidence; and it was perfectly evident that yawning was not an old wives' tale, not by a long shot. The minute the screwball had started to yawn like an open furnace in the block captain's face, the block captain knew he was licked so far as his hold on the big chief was concerned. If he saw someone yawn, he yawned too, inevitably. And the screwball, damn him, certainly didn't try to hide his gapping: he would have infected a whole regiment. The last straw, though, was that the big chief in turn . . . Matthieu poked at his mustache with his thumb, at the thought of the chief when the latter, too, began to yawn. Of course he yawned with all delicacy, patting himself lightly on the mouth, not opening it wide. But the humor it had put him in . . . Nevertheless, going back over the situation, reviewing it without prejudice, it was clear that there was nothing to feel humiliated about. . . . At any rate, he had been glad to get away. Toward the end the conference had taken a

distinctly unpleasant turn—so unpleasant, in fact, that he had lost his composure completely. A devil of a man, the big chief. There had been so much curiosity in his look, and so much inattention at the same time, that Matthieu had begun to talk in verse—well, almost in verse. "I have taken the liberty in detail the charges to enumerate regarding this affair . . ." he had stammered, the way Françoise, when she was still a little girl, used to say, "I am taking some strawberries to my mummy who is sick in a little basket. . . ."—A devil of a man!

All this, and the sunlight on the pavement, and the shimmering crowd, made him thirsty.—Thirst, one of the worst enemies of honest people. To quench it, these sticky, hot days, required a lot of connections and quite a bit of know-how. In the old days, when everything was easy for the citizen but disastrous for the country, you walked into a bistro, you put your elbows on the bar, and the half liter of white was practically there to meet you. It was simple justice, then, to admit that before the national revolution the problem of thirst had had its agreeable side: it did not exist. A sorry time, it was true—the peasant left the land of his ancestors, the family had no corporative foundation, honor was sold across the border, but wine, by the Lord Harry, no one wanted for wine. The horn of plenty . . . An overflow . . . So much so that nobody paid any attention to it, any more than you notice that there's enough air in the air for everybody to breathe at his ease. And yet—who would have guessed it?—all the ills of France were due to that . . . that life of plenty. This particular chapter of the Marshal's doctrine abounded in subtleties, and Matthieu was not sure he interpreted its spirit with the exactitude it deserved. If he was not mistaken, the question was one of cause and effect. And when you looked closely, two main motifs came clearly out of the matrix idea. First, if you sit around in bedroom slippers too much, you lose the sense of the fatherland; example, there's nothing like a cinder in your eye to make you realize you have an eye, otherwise you never even think of it. Second, a glutton who has his feet under the table all the time, and never thinks of anything but filling his belly, he's sure to go soft. Naturally, Matthieu's way of interpreting the doctrine was somewhat direct, he clarified his ideas by rather homely images, which he would hardly use if he had to give a speech in his section; but, being neither an academician nor a regional chief, he was quite willing to leave the niceties of dialectic to those more competent than he.

He cleared his throat, as if to measure the depth of his thirst. He made no pretense of holding a doctorate. Speculating on the texts left him cold: he was a bookkeeper by profession, and the two things didn't go together. Moreover, he was never much for study. A doctrine is like the faith: it doesn't call for knowledge, it calls for belief; and if you do believe, it's up to the doctrine to arm you with arguments that will withstand the test of fire itself. But Josephine, who didn't believe in the Marshal, could resist the most cogent arguments. Monsieur de Pontillac himself would have all his trouble for nothing, trying to convince her. Matthieu's thirst in-

creased considerably at the thought of Josephine. Thick as a mule, that woman. A materialist. An unbeliever, impervious in her unbelief. Impossible to reason with her. Impossible to show her in black and white that this was a genuine French system. "You know what you can do with it, your genuine French system . . ." she would answer. To hear her, you'd think she was the only one to be short of staple foods and soap you could get a lather out of. Did she care that he was short of tobacco for his pipe? Not a bit. Or take the Sucror affair.—She'll raise the devil when she hears of it. She'll be burned up, the old girl will. It made even him wince a little—Françoise's seventy-five francs rounded out his pay very nicely, but—damn the luck!—France couldn't worry about these details of domestic economy. And who said the Sucror would close its doors, anyway? A factory which produces things that are useful, and good to eat besides, is taking part in the national effort, and consequently . . . When they've cleaned out the elements which are unsound and against the revolution, everything will go along even better. He pushed up his mustache with the back of his hand and spat with annoyance. If Josephine had any brains, she would give him a hand in his block-captain job instead of nagging at him all the time. Between the two of them they would give a good example to the whole neighborhood, and a promotion would not be long coming, maybe even an official post. But Josephine had no brains. "Block captain . . ." she never stopped repeating, pulling back her lip as if her gums were sore. "Block captain . . . Aren't you ashamed, Ignace, aren't you? . . ." Worse than the seven years' itch, that woman. What luck the Sucror thing had turned up. That would shut her mouth, all right. The old ways, when you never got a whack at the butter tub unless you were pals with the higher-ups, those old dodges were out for good. In the new France nominations were made according to the citizen's genuine merits and his devotion to the Marshal's work. On these two counts Matthieu had no fear of competition. Let Josephine get her back up if she liked, he knew he was on the right road.

He did not dare to think of the rumpus Josephine would raise when she heard about the conference with the big chief. Better not think of it at all, it drained him of his last drop of moisture. And as he happened just then to be passing Jules Garrigue's, he dove inside, the way a man throws himself from a ship afire.

"Here's Ignace!" exclaimed Jean Baptiste Mélodie, who was standing at the bar. "Why the gloomy puss, pal? Don't tell us you got the pip!"

"Yeah, some," Matthieu answered, running his eyes over the shelves behind the bar. "Hello, Madame Jules. Jules out? Hello, Mademoiselle Josette." He leaned his bushy mustache over the cup which Mélodie was holding between the palms of his hands. "Hmmm . . . smells like camomile, Jean Baptiste." His hollow voice seemed to come from afar off, from the far-off bottom of his thirst. He straightened up, pushed his mustache back into place. Madame Jules spread her bosom on the inner edge of the bar.

"Shush . . ." she said, pushing out her lips and puckering her forehead. "Jules'll be right back. He's in a stew, the poor man, on account of business is so bad. So he went to take a walk."

"Oh yeah . . ." said Mélodie the S.O.L. man. "There's walks and walks. . . ." He sniffed at his cup and peered at Josette, who looked as if she were not interested in anything or anybody.

"Oh yeah what and what walks?" asked Madame Jules, aroused. "Always the smart guy, you are. I told you, didn't I? He's gone out to get a change of air, poor Jules." And, noticing that Matthieu had worked his way to the end of the bar and was preparing to have a look underneath, she added sharply, "There's not a thing to serve the customers, not if they paid in gold. So what do you expect? It's gone to Jules's head. He goes around from bistro to bistro to see if the competitors are getting a bigger supply than us. Daddy . . . How much did we take in today?"

Josette mentioned a pitifully low figure and Madame Jules put her hand to her mouth, as though to hold back an exclamation of horror. Her eyes called the two men and the empty room to witness. "At five in the afternoon," she sighed, looking at her gem-studded wrist watch. "You can't even make the rent, the way things are. . . ."

"Listen, Madame Jules . . ." said Matthieu. His ears were flaming red, and his mustache bristled. Seeing what he was after, Madame Jules continued:

"What can you do? Coffee machine out, no apéritifs, no cordials, beer kept for meal service in the restaurants . . ."

". . . and camomile for the right guys!" Mélodie finished, laughing loud enough to rattle the bottles. He swallowed a mouthful of his drink, clicked his tongue. He looked at Matthieu with one eye and at Josette with the other. "The right guys!" he repeated, for the benefit of Josette, who was watching the traffic on the Quai des Belges outside.

"Listen, Madame Jules . . ." Matthieu began again, taking off his beret and mopping his forehead. "Listen, I can do without apéritifs and . . . camomile. But a shot of white, you know . . ."

"My, my!" said Madame Jules in a voice full of sympathy. "Would you like sauterne or chablis? Good grief! How are things home? Just the way you like them, I suppose. I saw Françoise the other day, she came in for a lemonade." She rearranged her bosom on the edge of the counter. "May I offer you a lemonade, Monsieur Matthieu?"

"You mean the eleven per cent lemonade, Madame Jules?" He tried to wet his lips, but his tongue was as raspy as a cat's.

"Is that how you do when you go to the butcher's?" she asked, tucking up a curl of her bleached hair. "Two pounds of sirloin, you tell the butcher, and the butcher asks you if maybe you couldn't use a couple of pounds extra while you're at it, or maybe a slice of the round or a chunk off the breast, heh? And nice and tender, my dear, no bones . . ."

She was fed up with these souses of legionnaires, who thought they had a right to her reserve stocks. They knew very well it was forbidden, and

you'd think they would be the ones to see that the law was kept, the tin soldiers. But because they had seen the inner circle, they thought they belonged to it. From time to time, and rather frequently, they dropped in to collect a payment in kind, and like it or not you had to fork out. This Matthieu was not the worst of them, he didn't come demanding, he almost crawled to get his tot of wine, but she wasn't going to go along as easy as that, let him twist her arm a little, otherwise they would think they were in.

Matthieu was just about to press his case when he saw the jaunty figure of Jules Garrigue coming across the terrace of the Fier Chasseur. He scrambled to meet him, beret in his hand, mustache in his nose, with a haste that shook his flamboyant ears.

"Greetings, Jules," he hailed him, blocking his way. "Listen, I'm out on my feet, no kidding. You sure won't refuse a guy a swig of white, will you?"

Jules Garrigue looked over Matthieu's shoulder into the interior of his café. "Is that Mélodie in there?" he asked. Matthieu grunted affirmatively. Garrigue could have cursed; could have grabbed a siphon of seltzer and let Mélodie have it in the face. "Beat it, scram, get the hell out of here!" he wanted to yell. Since the day of the meeting when Pontillac presided, the S.O.L. man had constituted himself a "friend of the family," with special privileges in the matter of drinks. Several times a week he came in and planted himself at the bar, and, while gargling his schnapps, made double-meaning cracks and ogled Josette. It hit Garrigue in the middle of the stomach to see him there, with his airs of a pasha who had a reputation to maintain. Taking his drinks on the house wasn't enough for him, he had his eye on Josette too. This fellow, they used to wipe their feet on him and he would answer, Yes, sir, certainly, sir, and now look at him, strutting with his tail feathers in the wind like a rooster at the top of a manure pile. Lucky he stopped at trying to make the daughter, and wasn't after the mother too. . . . But, although Garrigue had sworn to himself that he would break Mélodie's neck if he got fresh with Josette, he felt a sort of respect, mixed with fear, for the presumptive seducer of his daughter. He represented a force, force itself, and he knew how to carry it. Even when he wasn't displaying his military accessories, you felt that force in him, or on him, as if he wore a vest of mail under his jacket, which made him invulnerable.

"Come on, Jules, you asleep on your feet? Aren't you thirsty too?"

Garrigue responded with a feeble smile. He couldn't put Matthieu out of the place while the other mug was tanking up in broad daylight. And then Matthieu was a good guy, he at least was grateful for a good turn.

"I sure am," he said.

He went behind the bar and crouched down, groping in the shadows for the bottle he wanted. At the gurgling sound which ensued, Matthieu pushed up his mustache, two strokes to each prong. It was a coffee cup of decent dimensions, and full to the brim. Jules had a lavish hand when

he was treating his pals. He took three swigs, licked his chops, then took two more. He smiled so broadly that his nose disappeared into his mustache.

"Godamighty," he sighed, his face beaming. "Talk about a miracle."

"Yeah, talk about a miracle," said Jules Garrigue. The wine was half water, otherwise he'd never get along. "Finish your camomile, Jean Baptiste, you can smell Pernod all the way up the Canebière."

Mélodie poured the rest of his liqueur down his throat and pushed the empty cup the length of the bar. It slid along, teetered on the edge, and gave a perilous little bound. Garrigue caught it on the fly, just in time. He said nothing, keeping his eyes off the S.O.L. man. Madame Garrigue touched her bosom.

"Hey, the price of dishes don't worry you, does it? This ain't the time to break any, get it?"

Mélodie stretched, emptying his broad chest of air. He looked at Josette, perched on her stool behind the cash register. The mouse had what it takes, she'd fit him just right. Slim like that, with the hips of a youth and tits just beginning to come up, she was his style. When he was a waiter in the place she had no eyes except for the customers, smiling at this one, smirking at that one, and not even a glance for him, Jean Baptiste. But times had changed, by gad! He counted on running into her in town someday soon, and then they would talk things over.

"Talking about breaking," he said, addressing Jules Garrigue, "something will break tomorrow, here in Marseilles and all around. It'll be a house cleaning, I can tell you. If you don't see me, it'll be because I'm in the thick of it." He looked at Josette, to see if she was listening. "I'm commander of a squad of ten."

Matthieu took a swig of wine and swished it around his teeth before swallowing. Let the S.O.L. man talk for the benefit of the others, he wasn't taking him in. Madame Jules made her bosom comfortable on the bar, and Garrigue asked:

"What, another roundup? Are you S.O.L. guys giving a hand to the cops, now?"

"Hell, no!" said Mélodie, giving himself a resounding thwack on the chest. "We're the ones who'll give the orders, and the bulls will take them. I'll have ten of them under me, I'm telling you." All at once his tone became confidential. "This is big stuff, this time, stuff that's worth the trouble. The uniform police ain't up to it, y'understand, so we got to take over. Look, how about another drop of that camomile, Jules?"

Matthieu emptied his cup hurriedly, so Garrigue would not have to go to the trouble twice. Nothing cheap about old Jules. The second cup was as generous as the first. "You know," he said, after lapping the precious droplets off his mustache with his tongue, "you know, Jules, I'm not like some, I don't talk much, but . . . What I'm driving at is, I don't forget a good turn. If you ever need anything, a word dropped in the right place, for instance, just call on Ignace, and Ignace will be right there."

"If you're putting on that act for me, don't knock yourself out," said Mélodie, looking Matthieu up and down.

"It'd take more than you to knock me out, Mélodie. You'd have to grow up first. And plenty. When I say 'some,' I'm thinking of people with connections. And then I know what talking is. So don't get all steamed up, Mélodie, you're not in the same class."

"Yeah, sure, sure, because you're the one that's got the connections," drawled Mélodie in a mocking voice. He rocked back and forth on his heels, looking at Josette. With her elbows and bosom on the bar, Madame Jules was doing her nails, her hen's eyes darting from one speaker to the other. Jules Garrigue kept quiet, he wanted to nudge Matthieu gaily in the ribs to encourage him to go this back-alley bully one better.

"You're not kidding I'm the one, General," said Matthieu, blowing into his mustache.

Mélodie tossed off his cup. He didn't like it, this nobody of a legionnaire with the puffy red face of a country postman making a laughingstock of him, a member of the Service d'Ordre Légionnaire. He imagined himself grabbing the fellow, with one hand at the seat of his pants and the other at the scruff of his neck, and shaking him till the guts popped out of his fat belly. As a show for Josette. Till he gave up the wine that he was sipping like honey. But maybe Matthieu would not let himself be shaken so easy, he had bulk, and heavy fists equipped with thick fingers.

"Sure, chum, everybody knows you get around," he said, sneering. "Sure, everybody knows you just had lunch with the regional prefect. It'll come out in the papers and over the radio tonight. 'Ignace Matthieu, the distinguished block captain, has graciously honored with his presence . . .'" He guffawed hard enough to snap his vocal cords.

Matthieu's mustache bristled and he spat at the feet of a table. A rush of blood set fire to his ears. These S.O.L. lugs, who did they think they were? Real tough guys, maybe. Recruited a couple of days ago, and now taking a high line and pretending to teach the old guard a thing or two. Nuts! He took a swig of wine and pointed a square-cut finger at his antagonist.

"Cut out the crap, Mélodie, you'll be a big boy yet," he said gently. "You couldn't unbutton your own pants when Jules and me had put in four years of war. Yes, General. And now, if it interests you, the regional prefect is not one of my connections, but Monsieur Adrien—as I have the honor to inform you . . ."

". . . Monsieur Adrien de Pontillac?" asked Madame Jules. She looked at Matthieu with her head canted interrogatively. "Sure enough . . ."

"Sure as my name is Jules," the proprietor of the Fier Chasseur interrupted. "I remember, I was there when he invited you to come and see him. 'Comrade Matthieu,' he said, 'come and see me at the Prefecture, and we'll have a chat.' Give me your cup, Ignace, let me pour you a nip. What did you talk about? The Marshal? Did he tell you when the Marshal would be here?" He talked loud, loudly exaggerating, all too glad to fan

the S.O.L. man's jealousy; and if he could have crushed him under the weight of words he would have talked until the fellow tumbled over backward. "Come on, tell us about it, you're among friends. Pontillac just got back from Vichy, he must have talked to you about it. What do they think in Vichy about the military situation?"

Mélodie rocked back and forth on his widespread legs. He no longer looked at Josette, but at Matthieu, who was giving a flip to his mustache. These old duffers of the draft of '14, who think everybody else should bow down before them . . . Boy, did they make a halo out of their four years in the mud, and this one especially, this drip of a legionnaire, and him without even a medal. Four years . . . As if it was his fault, his, Jean Baptiste's, that this last one had gone only nine months, stillborn, you might say. Legionnaires . . . Good for nothing but laying wreaths at war monuments and talking through their hats. The tough ones, the real soldiers, were guys like him, the S.O.L. fellows. They were trained in machine-gun work, grenade throwing, ju-jitsu, street fighting. They were paid more money than these cacklers ever dreamed of. He looked at the two block captains with pity and disdain.—One of these fine days the S.O.L. will move in and clean them up, and all that will be left of them will be the feathers. Ignace Matthieu and his connections . . . Matthieu was rinsing the inside of his cheeks and his tonsils. Extra fine, his old friend Jules's white wine . . . Josephine's face slid into the bottom of his cup, her lip outthrust, her tongue sharp-pointed. She got in every place, the itch. Sure, what of it, he was at Jules's, and they had a couple. He had been to see the big chief, and they had held council. So—so what? It was his right, he was a free citizen, by God! He emptied his third ration of wine, swallowing Josephine like a pickled onion.

"Well, Jules, it was this way . . ." he said. "We talked a little about nearly everything. In a conference that runs more than an hour, you get around to a lot of things, heh? No lack of things to talk about, is there? But I can't say much, you understand: the enemy's ears are always open. One thing I can tell you, though. . . . You know the Sucror, where they make those date-crust things?"

"Date crusts?" asked Josette. She was watching the traffic on the square outside, and the golden water in the ship basin a little farther away. Mélodie stopped rocking back and forth. The little faker . . . So she was listening to what was said?

"Date crusts, that's what I said, Mademoiselle Josette," Matthieu continued. "This will knock you over, Jules, and you too, Madame Jules. The Sucror, it's what you might call a camouflage. There's something going on underneath. A big fish. Monsieur Adrien and I, we've got hold of the threads. Don't ask me any more, that's all I can say for the moment, you understand why. But just between me and you . . . I can say it without false modesty, I'm the one who gave the tip-off, word of honor, and naturally, you can imagine . . ."

He passed the backs of his two hands over his mustache, simultaneously,

stretching at the same time. As if this manifestation of well-being had given her an idea, Madame Jules lifted her bosom, likewise with both hands, and disposed it more comfortably on the bar.

"A political affair, Monsieur Matthieu?" she asked.

"Political," answered Matthieu succinctly.

"That's what you ought to dig up, my boy," she said to her husband. "Something political." She said it would get him favorable attention from higher up, right away, if he put his finger on something of this kind. She added that he was a poke and a bungler, that he didn't have the stuff. He ought to follow Matthieu's example; there was a man who would get someplace.

Jules Garrigue made no reply, taking advantage of his position—he was crouching down below the bar. "You ought to get moving, there are places open for good men," she was saying in her colorless voice. Garrigue kept quiet. That's all he needed, to start sticking his nose in other people's business. A lot he'd gained by the three or four denunciations he had made. But above all, he wasn't too sure. He had let himself be appointed a block captain, like most café proprietors, on account of the run of people who came to gossip and blabber at their bars, but he wasn't too sure. There were too many policemen in the new regime, too many roundups and condemnations. The people were beefing behind closed doors, and it hurt to see so many young men being deported into Germany. "Labor Draft," so called. He didn't believe in it, you could see through it too easily, and besides, it killed business. Look at how long they'd been there talking things over, and not one customer, either in the bar or on the terrace. He couldn't stand seeing his place empty, it was as if he was buried alive. Better to give the stuff away than to be there all alone, with his wife, who was fixing her hair from morning to night. He brought up a fourth cup for Matthieu, and one for Mélodie too; what else could he do? If only he could get that guy sent to the Russian front, and let him show how tough he was there. There ought to be some way or other of landing him behind the eight-ball. He would talk to Matthieu about it: Matthieu had a way of doping things out. Matthieu was beaming as on his wedding day. Madame Jules was one, at least, who knew what life was all about; and she wasn't bad to look at, either, not bad at all. He smiled at her, losing his nose in his mustache. She was the one he ought to be married to, and Jules to Josephine, *pardieu!*

Mélodie gulped his drink, but he did not really enjoy it. He wasn't satisfied with himself. Josette was acting stuck-up, snubbing him openly, and he had let the comrade-who-has-connections outdistance him. He wasn't going to give in to him, all the same, him with his "political affair," which was a crust, all right, and not made of dates either. His own good name was at stake, his and that of the S.O.L. He began to rock again on his widespread legs, looking at Josette, who was drawing a new pair of lips with a stick of rouge.

"Everyone ain't fit for the same kind of work," he said, clearing his

voice. "Between ourselves, Madame Jules, the legionnaires can't really get no place." He laughed and gave himself a slap on the torso. "Out in the cold, that's where they are. Out of luck. They get jobs fit for civilians: propaganda, morale, exxetera. But us, the S.O.L. . . . All right, Matthieu, don't get on your high horse, I ain't saying anything against the Legion, after all I belong to it too, but every man to his job. Your Suc-whatever-it-is, for instance. I won't take it away from you, but if somebody's got to take a hand, it'll be the S.O.L. that'll do the backing up. If you want a real job of work done, you got to leave it to us. Me and my ten men, I got some real work to do at sunup tomorrow. And there's thirty more like me, each S.O.L. man with his team of ten, arms and all. What do you say to that, Comrade Block Captain? And look, one secret for another, listen to this. . . ."

"Listen to this," he said, "we begin tomorrow at dawn," said Josette. She knelt, then sat down on the floor, folding her left leg under her right thigh. "Like this, Emilio?" she asked. Standing before his easel, closing one eye, the man with the head of a moth-eaten lion was measuring her with the handle of his brush, which he held at arm's length. "That's right, Daddy," he said in his high, boyish voice. "Move your hand a little closer, that's it. Don't move now. So he said that it's tomorrow. . . ." He mixed his colors on the palette. The girl pressed one hand to her bare breast and pretended to hold a flower, or perhaps a jewel, in the other. "That's what he said," she replied. "But he's a liar, you know. He worked for us. He said he was going to be in command of ten men, him alone, and by tomorrow night all the Jews in Marseilles will be arrested."

"You think he's lying?" the painter asked. He was working on a burst of light which marked a golden coin on the flat of her hip. "And did he say what—what they're going to do with all these Jews?"

"I think he's lying," said Josette. She uncovered her breast, scratched her back, covered her breast again. "He said they were going to ship them all into the other zone, and after that it's the Germans' business. Papa doesn't think it's true either. When Mélodie left with Matthieu, Papa talked it over with Mamma. I stayed to listen, that's why I kept you waiting. He says an S.O.L. man can't know ahead of time what he's going to have to do. Maybe they ordered him to be at the barracks tomorrow morning, but he's making up all the rest. Papa says the Marshal can't sign a thing like that, and have people taken out of their beds and sent away to be killed maybe. He says it's not possible, it doesn't go with the French character. Do you think it goes with our character, Emilio?"

"And your mother? What did she say?" He was brushing slate blue on the lower belly—fine strokes which brought out its juvenile line. Josette's body combined all the subtle perfections of adolescence, everything about it was formed and yet not ripened, the long thigh, the narrow calf, the upper torso fragile to transparency, the young surge of the breast hardly out of its mold. He saw it in the marvelous instant when the figure

opens and blooms, in the very movement of its growth, and he painted it with a joy that was almost brutal. "Don't scratch yourself, Daddy," he said.

"I'm not scratching myself, it's the flies," she protested, wrinkling her nose. "Oh, Mamma, you know . . . All she tells him is not to get in a stew. But that's not Papa's way: he's got to be worrying about something all the time. You know what's on his mind now? He's crazy mad because this *Mélo* is making eyes at me. Me, I'm just amused. I act as if I didn't notice it, but it always amuses me. What do you think of that, a big dope like him?"

The man with the face of a sorrowful lion thought what he thought. He drew back two steps, then a third, then took a step to the side, stuck a fistful of brushes into his wild thatch, half closed his eyes.—There . . . from here the canvas does not shine. It's a young faun—and there is nothing faunlike about him but the hoofs. He has just fallen to his knees, but already he is sitting down, already he is seated. He has been running after whatever it is that makes fauns run after it, an insect, a petal, who knows? After something extremely precious, which now lies in the open palm of his hand. He has come to rest this very minute, you can tell it by the momentum which projects the right side of his body forward out of the canvas, and by the trembling of the trampled hawthorn which is just straightening up, and by the cascade of pebbles under the sudden braking of the hoof. It is well for him that he halted his run at the spot, one step more and he would plunge with all his passion over the precipice which yawns in the red earth. The young faun has run a long way, his faun's youth driving him to run, so he is stifling the quickened beating of his heart with his hand. In the other hand, the one which reaches out of the canvas, he holds the object of his pursuit, and it is nothing and it is all; but his eyes, spangles of pure sunlight, look down into the valley below, far, far below, where a hamlet hatched with brown shadows ranges its roofs in rusty terraces. And suddenly the theme is clear. It is clear that the faun has entirely forgotten whatever it is that lies in the hollow of his hand; that it is not the effort of the chase which is bursting in his breast, but the astounding presence of a hamlet at the foot of the red cliff, in the yellow valley. In the pure sunlight of his pupils you see the interior of the houses, of the stables, and the Sunday morning plaza in the shadow of the belfry. You see the trace of man on the sculptured contour of things. The young god is discovering the ineffable trace of man, the roof feeding on its moss, the shadows, cool and brown as old blood, the threshold of the door, the terra-cotta jug, the tool on the bench, the rifle over the hearth. You understand that the faun is just about to bound away once more, already the chase is awakening again along his long thigh—and he will go. He wants the hamlet, a hamlet in the hollow of his hand. The young god wants to become a man, he thinks it will be easy.

"God thinks it will be easy"—this was the title which Emilio Lopez had chosen for his painting. Idea, subject, title, all had imposed themselves

as the forms and colors came to life. At the beginning of this year, when Josette first came to the attic which he used as a studio, he had thought of making her his girl friend rather than his model. In fact, up to the very moment when she ventured into his room, she had not interested him in any way whatever. He had been aware that her eyes were devouring him as he gossiped with his friends on the terrace of the *Fier Chasseur*, or blackened the pages of his drawing book. But, although he was not accustomed to having girls make a play for him, he did not feel flattered by her attention: the print of the nipple had not entirely vanished from Mademoiselle Garrigue's lips. Nevertheless, the day she had come out to ask him if he was a painter, adding, with the voice and manner of a little girl who thinks she's somebody, that she would like to see his pictures, he had reasoned that she was much too earnest in her advances for him to take the trouble to disappoint her. He had invited her to come to the attic, thinking she would not dare, but she dared. From the moment she came in she had fluttered around, moving the paintings from place to place, squeezing the pigments out of the tubes, arranging his brushes in the order of their size, poking into valises and drawers, and finally making a long, obstinate attempt to force the door at the end of the room—which, fortunately, refused to budge. Squatting on the floor at the foot of his army cot, he had watched her bustling about, coming and going on her wooden heels, and had wondered what exactly she was up to, and why she never stopped asking questions and answering them herself. For she had talked unceasingly, creating a stir for the sole purpose of creating one, jabbering like a magpie perched on a crib. She was too young, he had figured, and visibly too naïve, to have come to his place simply to stick her pert little nose into his business. However, as the suspicion might turn out to be less absurd than it looked at first sight, he had determined to put her out, and told her to beat it. "Why? Don't you want to draw me?" she had asked in reply, setting herself straight and slender under the skylight; and, as he continued to watch her, she had taken her skirt in both hands and, spreading it out at the thighs, had pivoted slowly several times, as slowly and knowingly as a professional model. He saw then that this little goose, so ready to be plucked, had not had the slightest intention of teasing him, and that she was having as good a time as if she had been turned loose in an amusement park. "Take off your clothes!" he had said point-blank, with a brutality that was only half feigned. The cold was keen in the attic in January, the east wind whistled through the cracks between the badly pointed walls, yet she undressed on the spot, as simply as if he had asked her to say her prayers. If she felt any embarrassment, the only sign of it was her silence. Instantly, as if being naked had taken from her the power of speech, she stopped prattling. Stopped prattling and moving. Hands quiet at her sides and head thrown back slightly, she had stood motionless, rigid and supple at once, and, he had been aware, infinitely proud. Without taking his eyes from her, he had felt around on the army cot for a drawing pad and a charcoal pencil. But he was not

able to work that day. He had never seen so perfectly fashioned an adolescent body—and it made him forget how to draw. "That's fine, Daddy. Come as often as you wish, and I'll draw you as well as I can," he had said. That was how she happened to call herself Daddy, and that was how he had made a great friend of her.

He made dozens of sketches of her—and did not touch her. Erect as a caryatid, she stood for an hour, two hours, with her hands quiet beside her body and her head thrown back slightly—and he did not touch her. Apparently she did not ask to be touched. He considered her a rather unreal, certainly scatterbrained creature, unfit for everyday use, whose plastic perfection would fade away at the slightest stain. In him, in his thickset body, everything was too square, too leonine, the maw and the mane, the torso and the extremities, and it seemed to him that Daddy's bones would go to pieces if he so much as laid his hand on her. The thought of spreading her under him, of splitting her under him, gave him an acute, almost hysterical pain, such as he had felt the day the *requetes* in their red berets had rammed toothpicks under his toenails, when he was a prisoner in a village of Navarre. When, from weariness or boredom, Josette wanted to change her pose, he let her do as she liked, and whether she squatted on her heels or stretched out full length, her limbs always fell into attitudes which charmed him by their naturalness and harmony. She did not understand painting, and took no interest in it. When she happened to cast an eye on Emilio's work, she wrinkled her upturned nose and said nothing. Yet sometimes she pointed her forefinger at some particular part of the canvas and observed, "Look, I have a pineapple here," touching her breast, or "I have a fish in my hand, and here I have a fishing net," touching the light veil of her pubis. But she was not surprised that he painted pineapples where her breasts belonged, or a fishing net where her pubis was. Painting was below the level of her wonderment. She came to the attic when she could, when she would. Sitting atop her stool behind the cash register, she put her wrist watch to her ear—and that was her signal to him that she was coming. He left the terrace of the Fier Chasseur and went back to his lodgings. Daddy came in shortly after and chattered as she undressed. Her chatter-box nature had reasserted itself with her second visit, and she prattled tirelessly. She gave him the events of the day as reflected in the rather special halo of the bar, detailed her father's and mother's conversations and the customers' comments. He let her talk on, encouraging her glib tongue with a word here and there, and learned much that was useful.

"Mélodie is making eyes at you?" he asked as if he had not understood. He covered the canvas with newspaper. The failing light fell softly through the hinged window in the roof, throwing volumes out of proportion. Arms in the air and bare up to the belly button, Daddy was getting into her dress. "And how!" she exclaimed, popping her head out the top. She jumped into her pants and adjusted them under her clothes. "His eyes get bigger than watermelons. If you could eat someone with looks,

I think he'd swallow me whole. You watch the next time, you'll see. You'd think he got something out of just staring at me. I get scared sometimes. Papa is scared too. He doesn't say so, but I know he's scared. And besides he doesn't like that fellow. And maybe you think I do. If I could . . . well, if I could, I'd squash his peepers out. When he was a waiter in our place, I was thirteen. I was still a little girl. One day when I was downstairs in the cellar to get a bottle, he came down. He was filling a demijohn with wine, and he looked at me so much that the wine spilled all over. After that he followed me up the ladder, and he put his hand up my dress and caught me between the legs. I remember it, don't worry. Good-by, Emilio. I'll signal you tomorrow. Gee, was Papa Matthieu proud about that Sucror business! He doesn't like Mélodie either, but they were drunk in the end, that's why they went out together. Mamma's the only one. So long. Mamma doesn't get it, she's not very smart, you know. See you tomorrow, Emilio. She's . . ."

That was the way she left him, with good-bys and so-longs and see-you-tomorrows over and over again, and the echo of her last words cut off short by the slamming of the door. She never gave him her hand, never said a word of affection, and that was the way he was with her too. They were great friends. He wiped his palette, listening to the dance of the wooden heels as it died away in the depths of the stair well. The light withdrew through the window, hurrying to catch up with the day, which was off on a far journey, the darkness came out of the corners, and the things in the room went into the darkness. He watched the things grow and grow, moving silently to meet each other in their desperate effort to unite, to form a chain—and to strangle him. He knew this hour, it was the primitive hour of vengeance. Shaking off their lethargy, his characters burst through the fabric of the canvas and set themselves to the task, the nightly renewed task, of laying hold of him and bringing him to judgment. What fireworks if they caught him! He knew the verdict in advance: he to be impaled, and his heart torn out. They yearned to gorge themselves on his lion's strength. Gorge themselves to bursting. It was a fixed idea with them. With all his strength in their lacquered veins, they could dance the round. They could go down the stairs and sack the town. All of them. The old woman he had painted splitting logs. The two little boys showing their dickies to each other in a chapel where a condemned man is being prepared for death. The fake Dürer—a first-class job. The torero whose muleta is a Jewish prayer shawl with fringes made of severed ring fingers still wearing wedding rings. The gypsy girl on the table with two daggers in her eyes and a tree in her belly. All . . . even the corpses. The corpses which the solitary civil guard in the hard leather hat is taking down from the gallows. Even the bishop of Barbastro, whom the militia-men are shooting because they found six hundred thousand pesetas in the lining of his soutane. Even the young faun who had Daddy's subtle perfection. All. Sack the town. Then the next town. Then the next. Then on and on, as long as they come upon towns to sack. Until everything

returns to the earth. He knew them, this was another of their fixed ideas—the return to the earth. Then they could go back into the fabric of the canvas, and there would be no one to judge them. To judge *them*. That would be the exquisite hour of vengeance.

He turned on the light—and as if a flash of lightning had singed their mustaches the monsters fell back into their lethargy. Light. Light was part of his lion's strength. Into each of his pictures he put a little of this threat, which was a promise. Even his executioners, his brutes, his priests, gathered a hint of gold in their ugly carcasses. He had been told this. "From the depths of horror you resurrect a vestige of innocence." Words. Because. It was as if they had come at him with the exact opposite—from the depths of innocence you resurrect a vestige of horror. It ought to work both ways, like a draft of air. But it didn't matter to him. Especially not at this moment. He scaled the palette onto the army cot, scratched his scalp, sinking his hands to the wrists in his mane. Especially not at this moment, when he had only one hankering—a wild hankering for a beef-steak garnished with *frites* and crowned with watercress. A hundred and fifteen francs. That was what he had paid the week before, in a Chinese place. He massaged his stomach with the flat of his hand, delicately, and suddenly, as though grabbing an eel, he seized his belt and hauled it tight, tight enough to cut himself in two. Thirty months in various camps and a year of the ration-book diet had left him with a chronic hunger and the desires of a pregnant woman. To stuff himself with food until his belly burst wide open was numbered among the several extremely difficult feats which he had sworn to accomplish before he died. He shook out his pockets, emptying their contents on the floor, then fell on his hands and knees to take careful stock of his resources.

The old Italian found the young Spaniard sitting on the floor, absorbed in the spectacle of several large copper coins mixed in with a few small bills. They looked at each other, the one seated, the other standing, the man with the leonine visage massaging his stomach, the man with the pointed goatee poking in the little pile of money with the tip of his cane. He adjusted his monocle, and, in passing, sniffed at his knuckles.

"*Caro mio*, have you ever heard of Pittacus of Mitylene?" he asked, moving to the center of the attic.

"Let's see . . ." the other answered carelessly. He got to his feet, buttoned his shirt, then unbuttoned it. "A cousin of yours, Colonel?"

"A wise man. He knew how to govern himself."

"And died of it? But say, I thought the wise man was Solomon of Alexandria."

"Solon, Solon of Athens," said the old man, using his cane to lift the sheets of newspaper which covered the canvas on the easel. "There were several wise men, my dear boy."

"*No me diga, caballero*. And this Psittacosis of Methylene? Did he give you a commission for me?"

The Colonel nodded affirmatively several times. He looked at the young faun with the perfect body, then at his host, who was taking in his belt another notch. "A commission," he repeated. "He said, 'Emilio Lopez Ruiz, make the best of your opportunity.'"

"Tender my thanks to him, Colonel, won't you?" He kicked at the coppers on the floor, sending them flying in all directions. "He didn't say at what time exactly?"

"At all times, I suppose." He pointed at the canvas. "The grace of this son of Aphrodite is remarkable. As for Solon of Athens, whom you must know quite well, it seems to me, didn't he ever teach you to do nothing to excess?"

"*Como no, señor*. . . . Even as he consumed his fourteenth pork chop with black olives, he never stopped preaching moderation and continence to me." He went over to the old man, slipped his arm under his. "So I would be satisfied with a modest steak, rare, with vegetables in moderate accompaniment. And don't quote me Cicero's crazy ideas about the appetite. You did that the last time, Colonel."

They both laughed, looking at the picture. This was their usual way of greeting each other, the Colonel amusing himself with his quotations from the ancient authors, Emilio Lopez pretending not to know what it was all about. But an ember glowed in the depths of their game, and they kept its spark alive. As the Colonel saw it, this boy with the face of a monstrous Christ was burning the candle at both ends, consuming himself with a sort of depraved hunger; and in the eyes of Emilio Lopez the old Italian was a mild lunatic afflicted with an incurable propensity to moralizing.

The Colonel took away the iron tip of his cane, and the newspapers fell back gently over the picture. He dropped his monocle, sniffed his brittle fingers.

"Can you give me a little time?" he asked. He took a sheet of paper from his pocket and unfolded it. "I would like to have this telegram. This evening, if possible."

Emilio Lopez took the piece of paper. "CAS 15 New York 38 22 42 9 9 15 30 Karen Trinyi Hotel Splendide Marseilles France Transfer executed stop Letter of credit follows Industrial Investments Bank NYC," he read, trying at the same time to tighten his belt another notch. His huge head seemed to wobble under a heavy burden of thought. He rubbed his torso slowly with his open hand.

"Of course. It will only take a couple of minutes," he said.

He went to the door at the end of the room, pushed it open, snapped the electric switch. The cramped and windowless space beyond, an extension of the attic, looked like a junk shop. There were so many things heaped up, scattered about, piled on top of each other, that it was impossible to make head or tail of the place. From the sill in, the floor was a litter of unrecognizable objects, a debauch of pots and pans and bric-a-brac, a jumble of odds and ends in which a flea market could have taken pride. Crammed into the corners, stacked in tipsy layers, hanging from the rafters

of the roof, dislocated and disjointed, hundreds of pieces of old metal, sheet iron, steel, wood, and plastic material assembled and dispersed in a surrealistic architecture of perturbation and upheaval. The trained eye of a connoisseur would have discerned pumps, carriage axles, crankcases, rusty surgical instruments, levers, pulleys, cables, nuts and bolts, hafts, shafts, ratchets, sockets, cranks, wheels, rollers, ladles, globes, a derby hat, and a cast-iron park bench. Just beyond this hotchpotch, however, along the wall opposite the door, a cleared space made room for a fairly orderly printing setup. There were a number of cases arranged in order and filled with characters. Quoins, leads, galleys, matrices, calipers, were ranged in boxes or hung from nails in the wall. Attached to the floor with steel clamps, two blocks which had come from automobile motors formed the cradle for a hand press, obviously built out of a thousand parts taken from everywhere.

The Colonel made himself comfortable on the park bench, with his cane between his knees and his beard on the head of his cane. Emilio Lopez attached a reel of the narrow strip which is used on telegraphic printing machines to the frame of a chase, and unrolled a yard of the paper. From a case containing the capitals and numerals used on the same machines he took the characters needed to compose his telegram, and assembled them in a composing stick. The Colonel said nothing as he watched the work of his young friend, whose dexterity was a source of constantly renewed astonishment to him. Incapable of winding a clock himself, or of understanding how an umbrella opens and shuts, he gawped with admiration at Lopez's manual efficiency. One could ask him for anything—a transmitter, a delayed-action bomb, an apparatus for counting the stars—and he would build it from the ground up, he would find it almost complete in the inextricable confusion of his shop. The treasures of this establishment came from theft pure and simple; and one of its gems—at least in the Colonel's eyes—was the cast-iron bench, which Lopez had pinched from a public garden and hauled to his attic on his back. But the bench was a sporting gesture, a challenge to himself and to the world, like, for instance, the magnificent cape of the German officer he had knocked on the head on the Corniche road, or the sign from outside the Legion headquarters, or the bronze bell of a trumpet, cut off clean at the mouthpiece, from a war monument. Ordinarily he was satisfied with more practical pickings. There was not a motion picture house in the city, not a café nor a public toilet, not a car left unguarded nor a ship moored at the wharf, from which he had not filched or tried to filch folding seats, electric bulbs, ash trays, faucets, flush tanks, cash registers, electric counters, lighting fixtures, headlights, magnetos, windshield wipers. He used everything or might find a use for everything, and first of all it was a kind of punishment which he inflicted on them, the maniacs, the gatherers of things, the symmetry fanatics, the foursquare builders.

"I have a bit of news for you," he said without turning around. He was putting paste on the narrow strip of paper on which he had printed the

text of the counterfeit telegram, so as to stick it on the official blank according to the rules of the art: he had purloined several dozen of these blanks at the central cable office. "News which smells bad, but comes from a reliable source. Tomorrow at dawn, or maybe tonight, the Jews are going to be rounded up."

He fell silent, continuing his work. The Colonel lifted his beard from the head of his cane. The sharp, rapid contraction of his jaw muscles moved the shadow in the hollow of his temples. His pale eyes seemed to see afar, seeking to resolve an unknown quantity.

"Tell me what you know," he said. "Try not to omit a single detail."

"I have no details. All I heard is that a big roundup is in preparation throughout the department. The Service d'Ordre Légionnaire is mixed up in it. That means it will be a big show. All aboard for the occupied zone, probable destination east by east. I'm going to see some friends, we'll do anything we can. Here's your telegram. I suppose I'll have this letter of credit to set, Colonel?"

The Colonel took the blue form and tucked it into his pocket without reading it. He smoothed his goatee distractedly.

"Destroy the rough copy, Emilio. And break up the stick, would you? Have you any idea what you are going to try to do?" He did not ask where Lopez's information had come from. Every time the Spaniard had transmitted such a tip, it had turned out to be correct. Although he had the ways of a madman at large and the temperament of an individualist whose pastime is demolishing memorial columns, he did not treat serious work lightly.

"Ideas?" said Lopez, removing the type from the stick. "You know perfectly well I have no ideas. I carry out the ideas of others, *caballero*. What was it you told me about that one day? Voltaire, you declaimed, Voltaire maintains that ideas are like a man's beard: he hasn't got any until they grow." He rubbed his finger over his smooth cheek, then over a chest virgin of hair. "No hair, no ideas," he added sententiously. "My friends and I will discuss it, and if there is anything to do, we'll do it."

The Colonel looked at the time, carefully shielding his watch in the hollow of his hand. He was in no frame of mind for banter. This boy with the head of a surly feline was sometimes exasperating. He put the watch back in his vest pocket, sniffed at his knuckles, picked up his cane.

"I'll leave you, Emilio. And thanks for the . . ." He touched the pocket into which the telegram had disappeared. "That's right about the letter of credit, but later. You may not know that since this morning Jews are no longer permitted to leave France. The hunt you say is being planned for tonight must therefore be related to . . . Advise your friends of this. I too shall get in touch with one or two people. If you come to a decision—I mean if you decide on a particular course of action—keep me posted. Good-by."

He descended the dark stairway, stumbling on the uneven steps. So that was it. The muffled rumor which for several days had been stirring

up a vague but tenacious uneasiness, this was what it meant. The lion with the craving for beefsteaks moderately garnished with vegetables sometimes saw things accurately: destination east by east . . . In spite of the layer of silence wrapped around each zone, each province of the fraternal European community, one knew about Lublin, and Treblinka, and the gas chambers, and the great crematory furnaces. He walked through the blind streets of the city once luminous with good cheer, through the hypochondriac streets of the town once shaken with laughter and horseplay. How could these things be? Yet there was no doubt. Furnaces built to roast alive their daily thousands of people. People brought to them for that specific purpose. By rail. In trains solidly packed with palpitating flesh. Trains run by engineers who were married and had families, by firemen who also had families, who respected the schedules and collected efficiency bonuses. Thirty, forty cattle cars to the train, a hundred and fifty lives per car, two hundred gallons of blood per car. They made all these people undress, the furnace likes only real meat that spurts, made them undress quick quick under the kindly moon, and the clothes in piles, drawers and undershirts and corsets and money sewn in the hem of the shirts quick in a pile under the kindly moon. The old humanist walked through the pudibund dark of the streets, tapping the virtuous flags of the sidewalk with the iron tip of his cane, thinking of a Europe made one-minded, one-colored, unisexual by the deliberate practice of death. What fear must hound them to kill this way, without pausing for breath, bullet in the back bullet in the face, in Paris and Brussels, in Narvik and Prague, in Warsaw and Kharkov, bullet in the lung bullet in the bladder, not pausing for breath. And what a rabble of parvenus, what a pavane in their muddy half boots, O Rome of Remus and Romulus! He thought of Diogenes lolling dirty and verminous on Plato's richly worked couch. "I sprawl on Plato's pride," he says. "Yes indeed," says Plato, "but how proudly." He thought of the Falangist philosopher who, holding up a glass of *Jerez* against the light, said, "We Spaniards are proud of having rekindled the fires of the holy Inquisition." O Attila, O Torquemada, how do you feel? He thought that it wasn't only the Nazis and the Blue Division, there were the Russians and the million and a half Poles deported to Siberia, and the Letts who were helping to finish off the Jews, and the Ukrainians who were helping to finish off the Letts, and the French who . . . He thought all at once of his seventy years and more—thought all at once, and for the first time, that no doubt the moment was drawing near for him to die.

He found no one at the A.R.S. except Francine Lepage, who was keeping the office open. They had heard the "news" at five o'clock that afternoon. The whole staff, Smith included, was running all over the city and the suburbs, intent on preparing hiding places where, until something better was provided, a certain number of persons who were in particular danger could be sheltered. They were not sure how widespread the roundup would be, but the information received indicated that the worst

was to be feared. Puny and thin, Francine Lepage gave the old man what information she had, wondering the while where he got the strength to stalk the town constantly on his long legs. She did not know where Monsieur Smith could be found, she said. Maybe at the Quakers, or the Joint American Committee, or perhaps at the consul's, she didn't know. There had been a hurried conference as soon as the "news" came in, and a half hour later everyone was gone, with orders to organize the greatest possible number of refuges and places of safekeeping. On account of the children, too. On account of the children, she remembered that Smith might well have gone to the American Red Cross. She had just been making a list of the A.R.S. protégés who were burdened with children, there were about . . . She would tell him how many there were. She started toward her typewriter, gliding along silently in her felt slippers—not straightforward, in a direct line, but hugging the walls as though she were stricken with agoraphobia. "I have nineteen," she said, turning back the roller of the Remington. "Nineteen kiddies, Monsieur le Colonel." She said "I have" as if she had any, and she said "Monsieur le Colonel." "A little one two months old, and three others less than a year old." Once more she looked at the Colonel, small of frame and hunchbacked, almost immaterial at a distance, and the fluty timbre of her voice was hollowed by a tear. "The adults can . . . They have a chance to . . ." She stopped, as if waiting for him to agree, but he gave no sign of agreement. "The adults have lived, they've had their share, a certain share of the goodness of life. . . ." She blushed violently, realizing that in a way she was reproaching the old man for his longevity. "I . . . I beg your pardon, I don't know what I'm saying . . ." she said, sinking slowly into the chair.

Again the Colonel was in the muffled streets of the city, in the moribund streets of what had been a city. He had known Shanghai, known Guernica, known cities in ruins, with the miraculously standing skeletons of their blackened walls and bell towers hung from the sky, yet with a halo of life, a halo of glory; but in this city, still upright as it was, still waiting for its chaplet of bombs, the stench of death to come oozed from the very pores of the stone and rode astride the nocturnal hour. No doubt it was only a feeling, due perhaps to the fact that a great port without ships is like a great ship without bowels, and that everything in Marseilles was done to excess—there was too much sun and too much wind, too much sloth and too much brawling: and so, as the tall stories were too tall, and the smells were doubly smelly, the threat of death, too, was threatening to the quintuple. It seemed to the Colonel that in any other city there would have been a few more places of refuge, a few less children, than there were in Marseilles. He imagined a touch of perfection for passports and identity cards, an entry added to the usual ones of occupation and birth-place, a notation of the destiny of the bearer. Destiny, roundup. A whole portion of humanity whose destiny was to be rounded up, as it was the destiny of ownerless dogs in well-policed cities. Marseilles—a well-policed city, Marseilles, which had been the brothel of the world! Maybe that was

what it was—this grimace of urbanity on the face of the wheedling old whore, this "New Order" order—maybe that was what made Marseilles so sensitive to the madness of the time, and covered her with a cloak of corpse-colored eczema. In this city, where the rounding up of light-opera gangsters had been a daily event, where people were as tender as cooing doves, a roundup of Jews assumed the aspect of a monstrous practical joke. The word "roundup, roundup, *raf-le, raf-le,*" began to pound in the old man's ears, a savage onomatopoeia of his steps on the black flagstones, of the iron tip of his cane on the black flagstones—"raf-le, raf-le," with the persistence of syllables which take hold on the hearing and knock on the eardrums until they no longer make sense. "*Raf-le, raf-le . . .*" He took refuge in analyzing the word, looking for its roots, its learned formation—an old practice which he used indifferently either to exalt or to mortify his imagination. And, in fact, as if he had discovered the ultimate meaning of things, all at once he felt relieved: he remembered that "*rafle*" was the name of a net for catching birds, and that the word came from the German *raffen*, which meant to gather up and carry off in haste. He smiled to himself, an unhappy little smile to the other ego that carried on a mischievous monologue on the fringe of his consciousness, and that said to him—tsk tsk Colonel what's this nonsense you're handing out isn't it a little too simple to wreak your vengeance on the etymology of words. When he raised the bronze knocker on the massive door of the Dominican priory, he had decided that indeed it was too simple, and that for him, very certainly, the hour of death was drawing near.

He waited for a matter of ten minutes, sitting on a stool which was finely inlaid with metal and ivory. In the cold, bare room, paneled halfway up the walls in dark wood, the little stool—he recognized it as having come, probably, from the Certosa of Pavia and as dating from the early Italian Renaissance—the little stool was the only piece of furniture, except the crucifix which hung slanting out from the wall over the door. He had never been in this house, and wondered if he had been brought to this room deliberately, to show him that in the absence of chairs a conversation conducted standing could not last more than a few minutes. The lay brother who had led him here had asked his name and the name of the person whom he wished to see, and then had left him as impersonally as if he were a pure spirit. No sound betrayed even a suspicion of activity. The surrounding quiet seemed to have a particular, an artificial quality, almost as if a machine were producing silence somewhere behind the walls. He had first walked the length and breadth of the room, counting the dark wood panels, next he had pushed aside the curtain with the tip of his cane—the window opened on a bare, deserted corridor—then he had identified and evaluated the stool. Finally he sat down, resting his hands on the pommel of his cane and his short beard on the back of his hands, allowing his mind to sink further and further into the calm of motionless expectation.

The last time he was in a convent goes back to 1918. It's the great feat

of arms, it's Vittorio Veneto. Burning their last cartridges in the massacre of their last troops, the Austrian forces crack and go down. Every bullet coming toward them from the Italian side is molded in the humiliating memory of Caporetto. Since the last week in October, marching step for step with the battalion of light artillery to which he is attached as physician, he moves farther and farther into the conquered land with his miserable surgeon's tools, his bottles of iodine and sodium and saline solution—carried along by the uncheckable advance, for the uncheckable harvest of disemboweled heroes. Conquered land if there ever was one, old land plowed and planted for centuries, where every thrust of the spade, every bite of the harrow, turned up and uncovered a thousand billion tetanus bacteria, fecal bacteria, pyrogenic germs, climbing up through the centuries to him, to his folding torture table, thousands of billions in the open bellies of the young men. Land of dung and offal, soiled land, nurse of men. Flanked by his two assistants with their fingers sealed in cold blood, with the breath of men who have lost the memory of sleep, surrounded by them and by the innumerable barking of shells, he stitches and plasters great packets of groaning flesh that quivers and dies under his knowing hand, or will die on the way to the first-aid stations in the rear, where they have no more serums nor heart stimulants nor hemostats than he has, nor the least idea of how to blind all the veins that are spurting out their reserve of life. It's the great feat of arms, it's Vittorio Veneto. It's also November 4, 1918, it's the armistice with Austria-Hungary, it's the Habsburg dynasty vomiting its soul, and in the ruins of a convent open to the rain and snow the continuous delivery of batches of mashed flesh, of flesh hacked down in the instant which preceded and in the instant which followed the glorious armistice. The two assistants with their rotten dysenteric breath lug and haul in the chain of broken crushed autopsied bodies which missed the erotic call of the armistice, the fools, and he garrotes them alive as Galen would have done, or Celsus, in the comfortable age of stone throwers and pre-anesthesia. The small familiar nightmare, the nightmare tinely tamed during nine days of no sleep and proud decease, and what's one more that is to say one more man, plus one more, plus twenty more, greatcoats full of guts, mouths full of lung, testicles full of the sky where Our Lord is, and what does it matter now that there's the armistice and now that Beata is dead and Gervaise is born and Denis is dead—Denis Drouault, the most inspired poet of France and of his time. The postman, a great laugh on his toothless gums—a letter from France, a letter from France. When they bring him the letter from France, he has a lad under the knife, a lad with no face.—Read it, you read French: read it, while I clean out this one's eyeholes. The orderly who knows French reads the letter from France, and he listens while he pumps out the whites of the faceless lad's eyes the way you empty out the white of an egg. Denis Drouault, his daughter Beata's husband. Read on. Killed by mustard gas. Read on. Beata Drouault, killed by a premature delivery when she heard about the mustard gas. Read on. A baby, sex female,

baptized Gervaise. So what, so what. Come on, the next one, the white-of-eye of the no-faced lad is all lapped up—*alla vostra salute*.

When he heard the voice—the jovial voice of Father Cruque at the door—it took him the flicker of a second to come out of his reverie. Disregarding the friar's protests, he rose quickly and hurried to meet him. The Dominican wore his white habit tightly belted around his imposing embonpoint. The flaming scarlet of his face, topped by his round, bald skull, expressed confusion mixed with astonishment.

"What a surprise, monsieur!" he exclaimed. "And what a pleasure to see you in this house! Don't get up, please. I hear you've been waiting for God knows how long. I've been in the carpenter shop; just came back this minute." He gave a low laugh. "I'm the carpenter of the house, and we just received . . ." He came to an abrupt pause, and then, as if an idea had occurred to him, went on, "Won't you have supper with us? It will soon be time for refectory, the bell will ring any minute."

"Thank you, Father," said the Colonel, "but unfortunately I can't accept. I already have an engagement. I came with the intention of asking your help in obtaining an interview with the Father Prior."

Father Cruque's gray eye and the pale eye of his Greek teacher held each other for an instant. The Dominican joined his hands on his stomach, over his leather belt, and rocked back and forth on his heels. He seemed to be calculating the chances of success of an extravagant undertaking, and, struck as before by a sudden idea, said jovially, "With the greatest of pleasure, monsieur. I shall tell you tomorrow, at our Greek hour, what day the Prior has chosen to receive you." His hands unfolded and closed again around his stomach. "Shall I tell the Prior what you . . ."

"I am sorry if I seem importunate," the Colonel interrupted. "But the matter about which I wish to speak to the Father Prior is of a rather special nature, and, in addition, extremely urgent. I should therefore be grateful if you would be so kind as to introduce me at once. I am not unaware, Father, that my request is quite out of the ordinary, but I make bold to insist. It is important that I be received this very evening."

Father Cruque took his hands from his stomach and spread them in a gesture of surrender, of one handing over a fortress to a besieger. His bald skull showed patches of pink turning to brick red.

"In that case," he said, "be good enough to wait a few minutes."

He nodded slightly and withdrew, closing the door after him. The Colonel renewed his pacing up and down the bare, cold room. If the answer was negative, he intended to redouble his insistence. But the answer was not negative. Father Cruque returned in a short time. In silence they passed through the silent corridors, came out into a garden in the rear of the house, climbed a staircase. The religious knocked at a door, opened it, and disappeared. The Colonel found himself in a low-ceilinged, white-washed room, furnished with a table, a prie-dieu, and a reading stand on which stood a thick folio volume. As he entered, the Prior rose and came to meet him.

"You are welcome, monsieur," he said, extending his hand. "Will you be seated?"

They sat down, the Prior again occupying his chair behind the table, the Colonel facing him. He was somewhat surprised to see a Superior who looked to be barely forty years of age. The crown of the tonsure cut a jet-black band above his forehead. The fingers of his left hand toyed with a small silver crucifix on the table, and his right hand lay flat on an open book. There was a brief silence, during which the two men sought to sound, if not to measure, each other.

"Father," began the Colonel, "there is not much I can tell you by way of introduction. I presume that Father Cruque, with whom I have the pleasure of reviewing our Greek, has told you what little there is to say about your humble servant. In a few words, this is the motive of my visit. Shelter must be found, for a certain length of time, for a number of children whose situation may become tragic from one minute to the next. Since public charity cannot be called upon in this case, I have taken advantage of my relations with Father Cruque to appeal to Christian charity."

He fell silent, seeking a gleam of encouragement in the Dominican's impassible gaze. The most perfect of masks confronted him, the most perfect composition of indifference that he could recall ever having seen. Not a shadow had trembled on the Prior's closely shaven cheeks, and had it not been for the play of light on the silver crucifix in his fingers, the old Italian would not have been sure that his words had had the fortune to awaken the least attention. Nevertheless, far back in his consciousness the feeling took form that the Dominican's hermetic mask was beginning to lose some of its opaqueness. He was just about to resume his discourse when the religious, still maintaining his extreme reserve, dropped the words:

"Jewish children, I suppose."

The Colonel sniffed sharply, twice over. He had always admired the exceptional ability of churchmen of a certain class in the handling of affairs. He took it for granted that a dignitary of the Church was a past master in the difficult art of nuance and chiaroscuro. The ease with which they hid their own hand, their faculty for penetrating deep into the intentions of others before committing themselves, combined with a very special prudence, which after all was simply a remarkable sense of tact, made him look upon every high-placed ecclesiastic as ipso facto endowed with the qualities which make the thoroughbred diplomat. Thus the Prior's rather direct and apparently not quite diplomatic remark caught the old man unprepared. He had thought the Dominican would maintain one of those silences which may be interpreted in half a dozen ways, thus forcing him to explain himself at length. But immediately he realized that the Prior's words did not reveal his thought, any more than his coldly expectant attitude did. Deciding not to try to outdo his host in finesse, and

thinking that a frontal attack might be to his advantage, he sniffed a third time, and said:

"Exactly, Father: Jewish children. It has just been learned that the Vichy government has made its plans for enormous roundups throughout the south of France. Large-scale arrests of Jews will begin in the morning before dawn. I do not need to define this man hunt in terms of the higher ethical standards. It is hard to face what will become of the children who will be forcibly separated from their mothers: because there are precedents, Father—in the occupied zone, in Belgium, in Holland, in Poland, every place where racial neopaganism has been substituted for the old Christian humanism. But here, as everywhere else, the local population will try to hide and save a few. So I thought that, in the small measure . . ."

"So you thought that the religious of the Order of St. Dominic ought to contribute to these individual rescues," the Prior interrupted. His hand had not stopped playing with the silver cross, and his manner of speaking still preserved its almost outrageous calm; but a slight raising of the eyebrow put a ripple in the black band of hair on his smooth forehead. "No doubt we should take your suggestion in good part, since in the end it must proceed from a praiseworthy desire to teach our order its duty. On the other hand, monsieur, you surely must know that to carry out the project which you have broached would be to act contrary to the law of the state, to which, as citizens, we owe obedience."

The Colonel fingered the points of his mustache, stealing a sniff at his knuckles. He found to his taste the cautious figure of speech about teaching the order its duty. But, he felt immediately, the long paraphrase had really been an ellipsis. Precisely by reason of its discourteous turn, it revealed something extremely subtle and impalpable, something which betrayed a faint odor of allusion. He figured that this man with the face double-bolted against attack would not have allowed himself to slip into a digression of reasonably dubious taste unless he had intended a further meaning to be read into it. Of one thing, at any rate, the Colonel was now sure: the Prior was not averse to hearing him—in fact, he wanted him to go on. Well, go on he would; and it was too bad if the rattle of commonplaces in his pleading struck sparks. Without gestures, his hands resting quietly on the pommel of his cane, with a little more complacency in his eyes than he liked, he spoke of the Christian whom the law of the state bound only in so far as it did not oblige him to violate the law of God. Making a continuous effort to read the possible effects of his discourse in the Dominican's impenetrable countenance, he averred that there was no infraction of juridical laws and regulations in the act of giving shelter to minors, as long as their parents consented. And as the Prior's other hand, which had been lying idle and open on the book, began to give evidence of an existence of its own, the Colonel was emboldened to press his case more roundly. "The law," he said, "might be defined as an ensemble of ordinances and prescriptions emanating from the sovereign authority. If we accept this postulate, we should also accept what it implies, namely, the

existence in fact of a sovereign authority. But, if the authority is powerless to impose the application of its laws, if the overwhelming majority of the citizens systematically contravene the statutes promulgated, the law which emanates from such an authority becomes a source of disorder. In other words, a law which no one respects and everyone tramples underfoot is not *the* law. The fact is, Father, that the sovereign authority in France does not belong to those who nominally are responsible for the execution and application of the laws. The people, taken as a whole, are not misled. From mere black-market operations to the most positive social acts, there is not one Frenchman out of a hundred who does not try to circumvent the law. The law as we have it, Father; so that at this time, in this country, to be outside the law, outside their law, is a claim to glory."

"The validity of temporal laws does not depend on their justice," said the Prior. He joined his hands, then clasped them over the silver crucifix. "They are not within our competence, monsieur."

All at once the Colonel had a sharp impression that the Dominican was trying to make a fool of him. The last trace of affability disappeared from his look, and his eyes became so pale as to be transparent. He bent toward his host, leaning on his cane for support.

"Father," he said slowly, "it is not within my competence to embark on a theological argumentation. I may, however, be allowed to repeat what someone has said before: 'Law and equity are two things which God has joined together.' I think that to consent, if only by silence, to the dissociation of the concepts of law and equity is equivalent to an act of lese-God. It is to make the wounds of Christ bleed."

The Prior rose to his feet. He was of medium height. His white scapular fell in a straight line from his broad, square shoulders. The Colonel, too, stood up, tall and bony. He held his cane in both hands, as if fearful of losing it. The Dominican came around the table and halted facing the old man. They looked at each other with an intensity that made even their breath come short.

"I do not know who you are, monsieur," said the religious. "I beg Providence to have mercy on us all, if I am making a mistake." Under the crown of his tonsure his brown eyes became suddenly tranquil. "Be kind enough to follow me," he said.

They descended the same staircase, crossed the same strip of garden, entered a corridor. Perfect silence reigned in the house. Following one after the other, neither man spoke. A friar, who was sitting in a wicker chair at a closed door, rose as they came near. Answering the questioning look of the Prior, he whispered:

"They are all asleep, Father. Shall I open the door?"

The Prior indicated the peephole with a glance. The religious slid back the shutter.

"Look in, monsieur," said the Prior.

The Colonel looked through the opening. It took him a moment to accustom his eyes to the half-darkness beyond the door. A vigil lamp in

front of a statue dripped glimmers of light. A number of bunks stood in a line against the opposite wall. In them were children, asleep.

The old man stood there a long time without moving, almost without seeing what he saw. He thought of nothing, felt nothing. Only a great peace. When once again he was back in the Prior's cell, he could not speak. Seated as before, he watched the bottom of the Dominican's robe, as the latter walked noiselessly up and down. He did not change his position when his host said:

"When I was told you wanted to see me, I was reading a page of Péguy. May I quote you a passage?"

He picked up the open book, the same one on which his hand had been lying idly. His reading was measured and free of passion. "They" (the Jews) 'recognize trial with an admirable instinct, with an instinct fifty centuries old. They recognize the blow and greet it. It is one more blow from God. The city will again be taken, the Temple destroyed, the women carried off. A captivity comes, after so many captivities. Long convoys will drag across the desert. Their corpses will mark the roads of Asia. Very well, they know all about that. They gird their loins for this new setting out. Since they must pass through it, they will pass through it once again. God is hard, but He is God. He punishes, and He supports. He leads.'"

The Colonel rose. A little of his departed youth put a touch of strength in his old patrician face. The hour of death had not yet come. He said nothing. The Prior put the book back on the table.

"Send the children to us," he said. "We will set up more bunks. They will not be alone. Perhaps someday they will be able to say: '*Si Deus pro nobis, quis contra nos?*'"

The hour of death had not yet come. Going through the deadened streets toward the A.R.S. offices, the Colonel walked ahead as if in broad daylight, with his cane under his arm. What need had he of a cane? In this city one could not lose one's way; on this earth one could not be lost. He felt such gaiety in himself, such gaiety in the onomatopoeia of his steps on the familiar flagstones—what were they this motif this drum-roll this bravura air raised by the anonymous clacking of wooden soles in the friendly dark, what was this cavalcade this *cavalleria* this drinking song? Adjusting his pace to the cadence of the phrase, he let himself be caught up by the echo-swollen melody, then joined it in a loud, cracked voice. A man turned around, another stepped aside, a woman planted herself in his path—as if to accost him. He stopped singing, tried to get around her, but she deliberately barred his way, a silhouette of opulent curves topped with a feather-edged headpiece. Thinking—although the paternalistic mores of the "new order" had forbidden the circulation of such creatures in noble Marseilles—that he was dealing with a light lady, he touched the pommel of his cane to his goatee by way of apology:

"Awfully sorry, madame, but I have a date with Voltaire."

"Hey, you, what's your name?" said the woman, resolutely planted in the middle of the narrow sidewalk.

The Colonel's heart skipped a beat. The opulent female had a dreadful American accent, and a falsetto voice which was not unfamiliar to him. For a fraction of a second he tried to place the voice, to identify it, but abandoned the attempt at once. He was in no position to take any chances in a street encounter. He moved to one side, still holding the head of his cane to his beard, and stepped off the curb, reciting:

*"La tranquille Philomèle  
A sa compagne fidèle  
Module ses doux concerts."*

He barely evaded her and was ready to make off at full speed when she caught up and grabbed him, crying in pure New York English:

"Hell! Are you kidding me, Mr. Colonna, or aren't you? I'd never know you in this black hole if it wasn't for that voice of yours! I'm Bessy! Bessy Hargrove, Mr. Colonna!"

The Colonel seized the woman's arm and pulled her along with him. With the epidemic of spytis that was abroad these nights, her far-carrying voice and nasal English would almost certainly get them arrested. "Hello, Bessy . . ." he whispered, forcing her to run beside him. "Speak French, I beg of you. And not too loud, for the love of heaven. What the devil are you doing in Marseilles, Miss Hargrove?"

She trailed along on his arm, rocking her generous flesh in the swaying gait of a puffed pack animal being driven at a trot. The old man's dry claw, buried in the fat of her arm, deprived her of any notion of resistance. She had known him well fifteen years before, when he was a professor of Romance literature at Columbia University, and oh, what a great gentleman he was. That voice, that mania for reciting the poets—she would have recognized them even in the other world. A touch of sadness came over her at the memory of the past, a past so recent still. She was twenty-five then, he more than twice that age—and what a gentleman! And he hadn't changed much; still straight and lean and hard to the touch, unless by daylight . . . She'd been mad about him, an old fellow stuffed with Horace and Ovid and Chrestien de Troyes as others stuff themselves with ice cream. And the cane. Maybe it was still the same one, after all these years. "Oh, Pietro, don't run this way, you're killing me . . ." she said, shaking the feathers on her bonnet. It was terrible to be so fat, her legs wouldn't carry her any more, and he so slender. How old was he, a hundred, no, hardly that old. Ah, these Italians, these Balkans, who knew how to take care of themselves. He always loved buttermilk, had to have some every morning. They thought he was a savage at the boardinghouse, but he knew what he was doing. Running like a jack rabbit, and a hundred years old. A streetcar, crammed to death, cut them off, and she took advantage of the opportunity to anchor herself to the ground.

"Oh, Pietro darling, you don't want me to pass out, do you?" she complained in her twangy voice. "You're so strong! Don't you remember? I could never keep up with you. So many times you . . ."

She gave a laugh which was more like a sob. He grumbled, pulling her along again, but not quite so fast. He wondered why he was rushing her so: it was really enough to kill her. How could he have, long ago, when he was a boarder in Bessy's parents' house in Washington Heights? He tried to remember—blond, a trace of harelip, on the plump side, warm in bed. Nice legs. He felt his teeth aching, as if he had a spoonful of honey in his mouth. "Tell me, Bessy, what are you doing in France in wartime?"

"Well, I'm here on business," she said, forgetting herself and breaking into English. He pinched the fat of her arm to call her to order. "I'm married, Pietro. You never wrote me, so . . . That's the way life is." She laughed as before, a little joyous sob. "My name is Bowman, Mrs. Bessy Bowman. My husband is an antique dealer, you understand. We have a boy, James, thirteen: he's the best infielder on his team. A lovely, charming, active boy." She sighed, and her feathers bobbed. "As for me, I travel. I buy things. All sorts of things. Vases, old jewelry, fine paintings. I've been running around Free France for a year. It's a good place to do business in. People are selling. The hard thing is to ship stuff to the States, but I manage. Everybody is so corrupt here. Last week I came across an Ingres. A hundred and twenty thousand francs, hardly seven hundred and fifty dollars. A good job. I've shipped it already. You can make the best deals in Paris, but I'm afraid to go there. And you, Pietro? What's your line now? Teaching?"

The Colonel gave a little snort of contempt. He had heard the woman's confidences with a growing interest. "Teaching . . ." he repeated after her. "I'm not crazy, my dear." He leaned toward his companion, trying to look her in the eye. "You're not the only one who's in business, Bessy. This country is a gold mine for those who know where to dig." He paused, for an instant only, as if hesitating. "I buy and sell too, Mrs. Bowman."

"Oh, but that's wonderful!" she cried enthusiastically. "Isn't it wonderful? Antiques, Pietro?"

"Works of art," the Colonel corrected her. "They pay the best, my dear friend. If only I had enough capital . . . I just had a wonderful buy offered to me, but unfortunately it was beyond my means."

He slowed his pace, fell silent. The woman took him by the hand.

"Really? But works of art are my department, Pietro. Tell me about it. Maybe . . ."

"It's too risky," the old man replied. "The affair is rather . . . rather irregular."

Bessy Hargrove Bowman sobbed joyously. "How the world changes! You didn't used to know how to buy a handkerchief even! But go on, go on, irregular affairs don't scare me. What is it? A stolen piece?"

"Hmmm . . ." the Colonel muttered. "A Dürer. Stolen from the Prado by one of the militia. But I must leave you, Bessy. Where do you live? I'll stop and see you some morning soon."

"Wait a minute!" She stopped him, hanging onto him with the whole weight of her body. "A Dürer? But I'll buy any Dürer, stolen or not. I

have all the money anybody'd want. We're old friends, Pietro, aren't we?  
I . . ."

"Will there be a commission for me?" he asked, patting his goatee.

"Why, of course!" she exclaimed, hardly containing her excitement.

"Ten per cent of the purchase price."

"Five," she said, looking at him admiringly.

"Ten. Mr. Bowman will make a fortune out of this."

"Eight. What are they asking?"

"It will be ten per cent. I don't know what they're asking. The bargaining is up to you. You won't get it easily, there are several buyers after it. You'll have a fight on your hands. Give me your address. I'll arrange a meeting, and let you know in plenty of time."

"Hôtel de Noailles," she said, not letting him go. "When? Tomorrow?"

"I don't know. Soon. Good-by, Bessy."

He left her standing there, and sped away on his long legs through the welcoming night. In his ears the heroic onomatopoeia was louder than ever.

YVONNE TERVIELLE SIMPLY COULD NOT GET INTERESTED in these discussions. Her mind detached itself by imperceptible degrees from the controversy, and all at once she would become aware that, like a train which disappears over the horizon, the debate had got so far beyond her that she had to run to catch up with it. The comparison with trains was not a matter of chance. For Yvonne, a discussion of ideas was a sort of convoy: once you were in it, you had to stay until it stopped here or there. She was apprehensive of the moment when her mind would begin to disengage itself from the general movement of the convoy, and this fear, too, was connected with trains. When traveling by rail she was not afraid of collisions or derailments or fires in the tunnel, but she could not help imagining another possible accident, rare as it was, namely "detachment." What she called "detachment" was the breaking of the couplings of the car in which she was riding: separated from the rest of the train and sailing along under its own momentum, her car wandered off on a lateral spur, sped down endless steep inclines, and ended in a splintering crash somewhere at the edges of the earth. When it came to affirmations buttressed with arguments and arguments stuffed with syllogisms, Yvonne always got into the wrong car, the one which detached itself somewhere along the line. She wondered why she had this tendency to let go of everything, when the others seemed to be moving forward at full intellectual speed. She could have followed, after all their speed was not the speed of light, but there was that brief, unpredictable lapse when she went off by herself in her rebellious car. She had finally concluded that this inability to keep abreast of the others might, far down in the depths of her being, be something else than a mere inability; that in reality she wanted to desert the long train and the scrawny little hedges which marched past the windows, which were so small themselves; that under her fear smoldered a desire to let the madcap car carry her off toward other landscapes, unforeseen and fantastic to a degree, unforeseen at any rate in the timetables which had not been brought up to date since Marx, Stenka Razin, or Spartacus. And besides . . . besides, she did not agree with Ivan's ideas.

Leaning comfortably on her elbows at the window of her "detached" car, she looked at the landscape—her landscape. The main part of the train was still following a track parallel to her own, but the divergence became more noticeable with every turn of the wheels. She caught the timbre of Ivan's voice—"your intransigence is simply ultra-leftism, putschism, my friend." She was aware of the presence of Youra, who was sketching with a pencil on his knee, of Marc Laverne, extremely attentive, of Anne Marie Jouvenet, beautiful as a savage who had never admired her image in the waters of a lake, and finally of Marianne Davy, whose mobile nose was reconnoitering the place. She perceived them all, but in a diminishing perspective: they were falling behind and becoming blurred, since she was going much faster, her car being free of restraint. She leaned out the window: through what known or unknown countryside would she be borne this time, what rapid slopes would guide her? This time the country below unrolled its hills and dales in a familiar topography. . . . She saw herself in Paris at the end of 1936, in the cellar of a *brasserie* near Saint-Germain-des-Prés, and it was there that she had met Ivan. When she saw him there he was speaking, before a hundred people or so, of the first Moscow trial, of the premeditated extermination of the old guard who had engineered the October Revolution. He was just in from Russia. He had escaped from there by incredible good luck, incredible indeed, for what strength is there in a man, unless it be his luck, against "confessions," against the solitary cells of the OGPU, against the cold bullet? He had not said so: to his mind there were reason and will in the succession of events; but she did not believe that a man is born and remains among the living by an act of logic or volition. Someone had brought her to this cellar, having first told her of this man who had so many prisons to his credit, so much straightness in his strength, and who, with a handful of others, had said no. The courage he must have had. Or perhaps the habit of courage. Or perhaps faith in justice—in his own justice. She could see him now as he was that evening, looking like a head bookkeeper, a professor of rhetoric, his voice calm, with a little quaver in it—his companions had remained faithful to the old socialist ideal, although they had consented to bear, in the very hour of death, the crimes of their judges and their Party. He said that to them death was no stranger, they had lived too long and too closely beside it, and like the early Christians they had felt themselves to be above its vain terrors. She recalled the weird image—men to whom death was no stranger, who time and again had explored the other side of existence, and had come back with memories intact. It had been difficult, this being her first "political" meeting, to follow the speaker's development of the themes of "democratic centralism," of the "Thermidorian degeneration of the bureaucracy," but she had been overwhelmed by the simple and tragic character of the pictures drawn by this man, whose comrades had just been slaughtered. They left together, saw more of each other. From the beginning of their acquaintance he had gained over her the ascendancy of a mentor, with all the confidence and

serenity which this relationship implied. He opened her eyes to horizons whose very existence had till then been unknown to her, revealed to her vistas outside of the routine of every day. He was convincing without being pedantic, his fund of memories and anecdotes was inexhaustible; and very quickly, in the young woman's eyes, he had become an ideal fulfillment of what a man should be. How human his experience was, how much kindness in his strength! She wondered that a man could differ so completely from the quaint creatures with whom she had hitherto associated, people who moved in and out of the satisfied orbit of her family, her friendships, her work at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She had begun to read his books, to learn them by heart, and at each step, in his written works as in his living work, she felt that she found the man as he was in himself, without pose or make-up. Later, some months later, in intimate life, he had revealed himself always equal to what he had promised—poured in one piece, without fault or fissure. She could not help thinking that he was head and shoulders over the ordinary run of mortals, that grandeur was his natural condition. She was in love. Even his pettinesses, the weaknesses of the flesh, increased his stature in Yvonne's eyes, proving to her that he was—that he knew how to be—human in all things, up to the limits allowed. He had turned from the lure of a career, had conquered prison, famine, despair; his life might any day be cut short by the OGPU killers; and he surrounded himself with a meticulous cleanliness, cultivated a phobia of unfiltered water, feared the stings of insects, practiced an infinity of precautions preliminary to eating an apple or a salad—and all this, even including his rather terrifying appetite, confirmed Yvonne in her certainty that nothing human was foreign to him. She was truly in love. She had asked herself, "Is my judgment distorted by vanity, because I am his wife?" and she decided not, that her judgment was right. Of course she was proud that he was "someone"—really, intrinsically, as a gold piece is really money. But she believed that Ivan's writings, Ivan's past, were of small weight in the opinion she had of him. She judged that to write books, to do great deeds in revolutions, was absolutely not enough to make a biped into that very beautiful thing, a man worthy of the name. She reasoned that writing, or acting, denoted a particular ability to express, to exteriorize experiences common to all men, and that this ability never proved, any more than the manual agility of some and the studious inclination of others proved, that those who do not write, or do not act, led a vegetative existence, exempt from pure emotions and profound thoughts. The perfect achievement, Yvonne thought, resided in the identity of the man with his work, written or unwritten, active or contemplative—in the unification, in a single solid body, of principles and practice. And it was in this, in this precisely, that she had seen the grandeur of Stepanoff.

This was in the beginning, in the months and years of beginning. He had not disappointed her, naturally not—it was not in her to be disillusioned about him—but the pettinesses, the weaknesses of the flesh, had

developed an edge, as always happens in the long run. Sometimes, without rhyme or reason, she was irritated when he guzzled his soup, or gargled his throat at the kitchen sink, or when she saw his braces hanging down over his hips; and she was irritated at herself for being irritated. At other times, having boarded the train of a discussion, she detached her car or did nothing to prevent it from detaching itself, suddenly exasperated as she was with Ivan's "dialectical" acrobatics. She did not consider him worthy of any blame, he was purely and simply above ridicule, and perhaps too far above it, after all—too too clean, too too wise: she did not know and did not want to know. As time went on, she rode in so many discursive trains, and her education progressed so far, that she learned to distinguish the various landscapes which unrolled their silhouettes like backdrops for these journeys through the land of politics. Surprised at first that he was almost always in the minority, with ideas opposed to those of most of his traveling companions, she thought confidently that his theories were so far in advance of the others' that they could only hobble along in pursuit of him. But since he surpassed them in everything, including facility of speech and correctness of logic in the exposition of his motives, and still convinced no one, one day she decided to get on the train not as a near relative of the engineer, but as an ordinary traveler who pays full fare. It was a long journey with several changes of train, and while, five years before, she had not known socialism even by name, now she had concluded that Ivan . . . that he expressed himself like a "liberal," like a "democrat," certainly not like a socialist—he, Ivan Stepanoff, whose life neither had nor could have any meaning, unless it were clothed in the ideology of revolution. Because—oh, she thought she saw it clearly enough—because he was for the war, for "victory."

She thought she saw it—though too schematically perhaps, as a school child finally understands the rule of three. Marc Laverne, on the other hand, caught the shades of difference. Ivan Stepanoff was not and could not be for the war, or at least not for war in general. Not for the war, but not against it either. For the extermination of Nazism, in fact. And since certain irreducible antagonisms set the Anglo-American allies against the monster of Hitlerism, he championed the theory of a "single front" with the crew that called itself democratic.—Caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, thought Laverne, he has made his choice between the two; claims to ally himself with one in order to neutralize the other, on the principle of the "lesser of two evils," forgetting that he is the sucker in this quarrel of butchers. So far as his choice goes, he certainly has chosen the less monstrous of the two, like the social-patriots of the last World War, who also had proclaimed that before undertaking the delousing of their own bourgeoisie they should make common cause with it—a "common cause of circumstance," of course—the first task at hand being to break up the expansionist ambitions of the stupid Wilhelm. Yet Laverne knew Stepanoff's history, he knew that in 1914-18 the latter had not let himself be submerged in the hysterical chauvinism of the pseudo

internationalists of every feather, German and French, Belgian and Russian. But since then, since the brave days of his youth, there had been the Revolution of October '17, and fascism, and the Stalinist counterrevolution, and many a Stepanoff had been stricken with political infantilism. "This war is not a mere re-edition of the last," he often said, whipping a dead dog. "It calls for new methods of carrying on our fight." Laverne listened like a man straining his ears to hear a clandestine radio broadcast, thinking that the necessity for these new methods which Stepanoff advocated—though without specifying what was new about them—did not prevent him from bestraddling the old reformist nag. He listened to this man—even the Vichy regime, absolutely speaking, is preferable to the Nazi regime, because under the latter you and I would be dead, while under the former a certain freedom—due, I grant you, only to the fumbling methods of neophytes—is left to us." He listened, letting Stepanoff talk on to satiation and supersaturation, he watched him and saw only the shadow of what he had been, which at times still created the illusion of the flesh. He told himself—with a cruelty which he made no stern effort to resist—that Stepanoff had missed the good fortune of being killed with the others, in open combat—despite the "confessions." He thought of the adage coined by some wag or other, that a well-ordered life should lead to a well-prepared death. The sad fate of generals who die in their beds. Sad fate and lack of good judgment. "I could show you how far from socialist thought you've come," he retorted, "merely by quoting your own writings of ten or fifteen years ago. Did you not write that fascism is a method of class domination, differing from the parliamentary method only by being more oppressive in character, but essentially identical in nature? That wherever the relation of social forces put 'democratic' domination out of date, the bourgeoisie throws its nice old liberal state on the scrap heap, and lays hold of the totalitarian knout? The myth of anti-fascism, you wrote, is a monumental fraud for which millions of men will pay with their lives, for the profit of the various imperialisms at bay. And today you are pleading the cause of those who, while fighting Germany for reasons which are completely alien to us, are already preparing a neofascism whose methods could quickly become more sanguinary than the Nazi methods, being applied on a vaster scale." He did not resent Stepanoff's calling him a Utopian, a Blanquist, a maximalist, even a nihilist; he resented his having fallen from so high, from fairly high in any case. He allowed fewer attenuating circumstances in Stepanoff's case than in that of a declared adversary. The tinsel of glory trailed at his heels; he was more dangerous than an open enemy—more apt to lead the innocent astray. Laverne reflected that a Francis of Assisi who turns his back on a dissolute life is beatified, but a Francis of Assisi who returned to dissolute living would be burned.—The aureole is a heavy burden, he thought. It obliges. When Stepanoff had come to Paris, what a welcome had been given him! There was meeting after meeting, and for weeks on end he had talked of the state of things in Russia-under-Stalin—of the

poverty, of the forced labor, of the mass deportations, of the systematic strangling of free thought and free speech, of the illegal immortal life in prisons and isolation cells, of political theses written in full on a leaf of cigarette paper—of the racked and suffering Russia where the Revolution lived on, more durable than oppression itself. But afterward . . . Laverne remembered how he had first been bewildered, then stupefied. Yet at that time, before the invasion of Poland, Stepanoff had managed to hold himself more or less steady on the downgrade he was walking. He slipped, lost his footing, but kept his head, did not go down altogether. They met again in Marseilles and renewed their controversy. Stepanoff was no longer slipping, he was rolling, bowling head over heels toward the morgue where lie the remains of all originally revolutionary thought. He had invented some extraordinary formulas: the period of Marx and Engels was the period of the machine, the era of Lenin and Trotsky was the era of electricity, our time is that of chemistry and psychoanalysis. "You don't say," Laverne replied, sarcastic in spite of himself. "What are you driving at, with that encyclopedia-type classification? Do you mean the law of supply and demand is out, since we have Mendelyev's periodic law and can interpret the Oedipus complex? Has that knowledge stopped the French reactionaries in their collaboration with the Nazis?" Stepanoff was walking up and down the little room where Laverne lived in an outlying section of Marseilles. His broad back was hunched with impatience. "You denature my thought by oversimplifying it," he answered. "It is stupid and dangerous to approach today's problems in the light of the *Communist Manifesto*. Several small accidents have reduced the applicability of the orthodox Marxist rule of thumb since 1848. Haven't you learned anything from the last quarter of a century? Can't you see that we're at the bottom of the curve? You are rehashing all the old slogans: bourgeoisie, class struggle, proletariat—a reheated stew, that's all it amounts to. And talking of myths, the proletariat—in the heroic sense in which we used the term—is nothing but a myth. An A number 1 myth. Capitalism . . . Don't you realize that there's no longer any capitalism in Germany?"

This was something new. Laverne did not reply immediately: this called for reflection. As if to help him recover from his surprise, Anne Marie brought him a glass of water. Sitting astride a chair, he followed Stepanoff's strapping back with his eyes. Youra, seated on the floor, was making a sketch of Anne Marie's head. Yvonne had detached her car long ago, and Marianne wriggled her nose as she listened. Laverne gave the empty glass back to Anne Marie and lighted the stub of a cigarette.—I guess there's nothing to do but break with him, he thought.

"Some water, Ivan?" Anne Marie asked.

Stepanoff did not bother to answer. He did not like this girl, with all her beauty. Her estimation of him—he was painfully aware of this—her estimation of him was low. The simple fact, he was astonished to perceive, was that she did not take him seriously. Her attitudes, her retorts, her questions like "Some water, Ivan?" though innocent in appearance,

betrayed an aggressive intention. But being thirsty, he thought better of it and accepted the glass of water. He both understood and failed to understand the origin of the latent hostility which he divined in her. He reasoned that he must shock her enthusiasms and the vitality of a capering animal that was in her. With the instinct of a being which needs to spend itself, she recognized in him the being that yearns to curl up in a corner. He thought that she burned up in pure movement the energy which he transformed into meditation. It annoyed her to have to slow her pace to suit his.—The young kids find the old bucks dull, he thought, with more displeasure than he admitted to himself. She imagines that anything that doesn't gambol isn't alive. He did not know that, speaking to Laverne, she had said, "Stepanoff ruminates and regurgitates the 'lessons of history,' but you can tell he hasn't got enough gastric juices. You'll see: he'll die of indigestion." More especially, he did not know that his continual references to his past made him look simply ridiculous in the eyes of his young friends. "When you hear him ringing the bell of his heroic years so shamelessly," said Anne Marie, "you get the idea that he isn't so sure of measuring up to his reputation." Stepanoff's past was of the public domain, somewhat like an old monument; but when he presumed to use it—rather cavalierly at times—as an argument, as an added weight in the scales, he aroused impatience instead of conviction. Laverne paid no attention to these highbrow weaknesses, they neither touched him nor bothered him. Moreover, with Laverne in the audience, Stepanoff was more discreet about strumming that lyre, or the other instruments of his string section, for that matter. He knew you could not dislodge Laverne with small-caliber bullets. He was no target for arrows cut from soft wood.

Stepanoff had to explain himself in detail. Laverne's questions, his method of driving wedges in and widening the breaches in his interlocutors' argumentation, forced the latter to use the greatest possible circumspection. He asked Stepanoff what data justified his conclusion that capitalism had disappeared in Germany, challenged him to retrace the process of this singular disappearance, demanded figures, statistics, sources of information, and set his own information against them. It came to light that Stepanoff's references were not always as fresh as they might have been. Laverne argued that, if the German factory owners and manufacturers did not enjoy the free disposal of their goods, this was due to the wartime economy; that the restrictive measures in no sense impinged upon the sacrosanct principle of private property, nor upon the usufruct of private property. "If there is no more capitalism there," he said, "and if they have not yet gone over to a socialist-type collectivism, what do you call their system? A leveled economy, pointed entirely to the war effort, wholly synchronized to serve a set of savagely imperialistic interests, puts restrictions on the classic play of free competition on the home market, implies monopolistic control of foreign commerce, freezes capital, controls credit, puts the bulk of the nation on a subsistence income—in short, imposes a specific and, if you insist, a non-conformist direction on

Germany's economic and social activity. But whether you take them separately or all together, these alterations in the traditional functioning of production and exchange do not affect the fundamental bases of capitalism in the least. I don't deny that in this instance the transformations go deep, but I repeat that they leave the keystone of the structure intact. Logically, and if you cared about being consistent, you should conclude that capitalism is non-existent, or at least on its way out, in the United States, Great Britain, and Japan, since these powers also have regulated their economy. You are confusing mere structural modifications with a historic revolutionary process, the former attacking the parts but leaving the whole intact, the latter implying the destruction of the whole edifice, so as to substitute a body renewed from the roots up." He spoke calmly, articulating with care, without haste, in a voice which was never raised, and which for that very reason held the attention and stimulated the mind. At rare moments he had to struggle against an impulse to be sarcastic or to engage in stinging repartee; but he mastered such impulses, being opposed to verbal skirmishes and to discussions bristling with quills. "It wouldn't be hard," he said, crumbling a few grains of tobacco into a cigarette paper, "to put your back to the wall with a couple of schoolboy questions. It's true that these are the most embarrassing kind. I could have asked you if, in terms of your doctrine, which, let's face it, is the doctrine of every parlor-pink liberal—the democracy-versus-fascism idea—if the workers in a London armament factory are supposed to hide their class action under a bushel until the last SS man is carried to his grave, on the pretext that every demand of labor, every strike, weakens the war effort and slows up 'victory.' I could have . . ."

"I would not take the trouble to answer that argument, which is worthy of a street-corner agitator!" Stepanoff broke in. "If you keep on along that line, you'll put me in a class with the editorial writers on *Figaro*."

"It would be nobody's fault but your own," said Laverne placidly. "But I won't ask you any more questions, not even the schoolboy type. I would like to add only this: the whole structure of your thought, Stepanoff, is vitiated by your general position with regard to the cataclysm which has set the world on fire. You really think that reforms, even amputations if necessary, would enable capitalism to survive the present crisis. You are thinking of a 'leveled' capitalism, a 'technocratic' interregnum, something of the sort. Of everything except the possibilities inherent in revolution. Our quarrel no longer bears on modes of action, strategy, estimates of detail; we are divided by disagreements of principle. I am sorry to note it, but you and I are following essentially divergent roads. The ultimate failure of October '17, and the massacre of the best of your generation, have misled you. You—you've lost your direction."

Yvonne had taken no part in the discussion, of which she caught only scattered wisps; but for some minutes she had been watching Stepanoff's movement up and down the room. She was struck by the undulatory—yes, that was the word, undulatory—motion of his gait. He did not seem

to follow a straight trajectory, and when he turned around there was a noticeable bending of the knee and ankle. She, of course, was the only one who knew him well enough—the balance of his body, the angle of his foot, the length of his stride—to perceive that, gauging his walk by the boards of the floor, he was moving in a broken line. She felt a sudden bewilderment, as if Stepanoff were a stranger—the stranger in the stories you shouldn't read at night. So there was in Ivan a bearing, a countenance, unknown to her until this moment. . . . For the first time in six years it came to her, with staggering certainty, that in this powerful body, under this unbreakable skull, a number of drawers opened and shut, whose secret springs had completely escaped her intuition. Watching him as she would have followed the pulsation of his arteries on the dial of an oscillator, she tried to communicate with him, desirous of helping him to throw off the pressure which was unbalancing his step; but he was hermetically closed, she felt, he wanted none of her, not at this moment, wanted no witness in this moment. No help could reach him, from her or from anyone else, he had no need of it, nor of communion, since all he had to do was to say one word, a word of honest impotence—"I don't know, how would I know, maybe this is really the time to back up, to get out of this blind alley"—and the pressure would fall, and the road would lie open for a new, a clean and ringing step. But he was afraid of an admission of impotence, afraid the blind alley was in one of the drawers inside him, and too many drawers in the secret of himself. He—he was tired.—They don't bend us, they break us, he thought, recalling the pride of his red-blooded years. This Marc Laverne—he watched him moving in the convex lenses of his glasses—this Marc Laverne was as they all were, and that was how they should be, young and strong and without indulgence for the weariness of their elders. He had a soft spot in his heart for this young man sitting astride the shaky chair, with his curly hair, his straightforward look, his warmth of speech, the solid planting of his neck on his shoulders.—If only he lives, he thought suddenly, a little ashamed, as when he happened to think tenderly of Youra. If only he lives. The tomorrows belonged henceforth to him, to him and to men of his mettle. Events would settle some disputes and create others, but the Lavernes would tear the mist from the night with their hands.—With their hands, he thought. He picked up his hat, examined it pensively. A thin smile sharpened the line of his lips.

"After your last remark, I think we have nothing more to say to each other," he said. "The deficiency of your theoretic baggage, and, if I may say so, the rudimentary quality of your ideas, make me doubt your political maturity. Speaking of directions, I don't think I have lost mine. But I think that as far as yours is concerned, you have still to find it."

Laverne got up and stretched. Stepanoff's words did not call for an answer. Wiggling in disapproval the caudal appendage which she used for a nose, Marianne Davy looked at the assistants one after another. For her part, she wouldn't give a bag of peanuts for these discussions, where

all they did was get themselves more entangled all the time. Instead of working their tongues so persistently, all these wise men would be better off inventing something worth the effort, Marc above all, a young man built like an athlete—a little sabotage, for instance, or gunrunning, or some line like that. Swell stuff, these theories, this hairsplitting, but not while others were blowing up trains and getting themselves cut to pieces by the Germans. She was for direct action, and afterward they would see. It was true that she herself wasn't taking the risk of handling grenades, and had in mind a trip to the other side of the water, but that didn't prove anything against direct action. She was just about to put in a word, when Anne Marie got ahead of her.

"It's a good thing, Stepanoff," she said, "a lucky thing that one still has something to find out, even if it's only one's direction. And don't you think that on the contrary it's pretty awful to imagine that nothing escapes us? That we can put up our finger and tell where the wind comes from, and where it goes?"

"As for you, you're nothing but an impertinent minx," said Stepanoff, putting on his hat.

"If you think you've found out how to square a circle just by wiping little minxes' noses . . ." said Anne Marie. With a quick sweep of her hand she pushed back her heavy, rebellious hair and turned her back to him. Youra rose from his crouching position and rubbed his hands on his corduroy trousers. He gazed at Anne Marie with a serious expression, as if he were preparing to tell her something confidential. "My father lays it on with a trowel," he said in an undertone. She did not answer and he looked away, feeling the veins swell in his neck as rope swells in a rain-storm.

"All right, Yvonne, it's time to go home," said Stepanoff.

Laverne kept quiet, wondering if Stepanoff would be so stuffy as not to shake hands with Anne Marie and himself. He avoided looking at Yvonne, knowing that it would pain her to have anyone see her dark eyes dilated with confusion. She liked Anne Marie for the great heart she supposed was hers, as well as for the striking beauty of her vestal body; but she did not feel strong enough to show disapproval of Ivan, to abandon him even to the extent of turning a smile toward the girl. He needed her, her air of being satisfied with him, her complicity. She had to remain faithful—even beyond fidelity itself. "I'm ready, Ivan," she said.

"Me too I gosh what time is it Françoise and the movies Yvonne wait for me . . ." said Marianne, having suddenly recalled that she had a date with Françoise at the door of a cinema. Stepanoff told her what time it was. A smile, finer than a spider's thread, passed back and forth over the convex lenses of his glasses, but Yvonne alone sensed that it was there. Marianne had just announced that she was ready, when there was a knock at the door.

His mane in wild disorder, his shirt open over the chest smooth as a scrubbing stone, Emilio Lopez pushed those who were leaving back into

the room. "No one goes out," he said, showing his long canines. He demanded something to eat, was handed a tomato, an onion, a glass of water, and, while he ate, repeated the news he had had from Josette Garrigue.

"That Françoise gabbing has been I'll strangle her if ever . . ." Marianne exploded. Stepanoff wanted to know who "that Françoise" was, and Marianne told all she had heard of the Matthieus' conversation two weeks earlier. They decided that the first thing to do was to establish a sort of chain, with each person who was informed going on to inform others. At Laverne's dictation, Anne Marie began to prepare a list, to which Stepanoff added the names of several of his own acquaintances. But that would not be enough, they needed a more expeditious means, something that would spread the news more widely and whip up the whole population.

"Listen, Emilio," said Laverne. "Can you get us any gummed paper, something to make stickers out of, about this size, like the top of a match-box?"

"Grand idea!" said the man with the face of a stricken lion. "Ten thousand stickers on the lampposts of Marseilles. Write out what you want me to print, find me one more onion, and my presses will roll."

"What? What do you intend to do?" asked Stepanoff. "Paste up stickers?"

"Yes, yes, Stepanoff," said Laverne in a needlessly persuasive voice. "Since we have no radio station, we'll use stickers. Hundreds of people will read them before morning, and it will grow as it goes, like a snowball."

"You'll be arrested before you've put up ten of your stickers!" Stepanoff snapped. "It's a Boy Scout stunt compounded with suicide. We must examine the situation calmly and find something a little less romantic and a little more intelligent . . ."

"If you need another paster-up, count me in, Marc," said the younger Stepanoff.

"Right, Youra. Make a copy of this list, take ten or fifteen addresses for yourself, and get going. Be back as soon as possible. Anne Marie, I'll dictate the wording."

Without a word Ivan Stepanoff pulled down the brim of his hat and went out of the room, followed by Yvonne. Marianne announced that she would have to go, on account of Françoise and the movie theater. Two minutes later Emilio Lopez was on his way to print the stickers.

"Nellychka, my love, I'll take a little more custard," said Madame Raya Bergmann to her daughter, shushing her words. She had a new set of false teeth, and it made her voice sound strange. "It's a good custard, Bergmann, isn't it?" She called her husband Bergmann, so as not to call him Moses in front of strangers. Bergmann nodded approval enthusiastically, though without uttering a sound. Madame Bergmann was pleased with her new plate. She had been a little uneasy at the beginning, it just hadn't

seemed right, you would have thought that out of the whole alphabet she knew only the *s*'s, the *z*'s, and the *sh*'s, but now she was beginning to recover the good enunciation of old, and besides, the dentist had promised her formally that the difficulty would not last. Nelly served her mother a triangle of tallow-colored paste. "Thank you, Nellychenka," Madame Raya Bergmann pronounced, listening to herself talk. What a fine invention, the bridge with a metal thing in place of rubber, and convenient for chewing, not custard of course but biscuits and meat, it does more for your appetite than medicine would. "Aren't you eating any custard, Cyril?" she asked, the light shining on her porcelain-slipped gums.

Cyril grunted into the glass of wine which he was raising to his lips. He hated to see his mother-in-law make Nelly wait on her. Ever since he had married Nelly, Madame Raya Bergmann enjoyed her existence more visibly every day. She affected gentility, lapsed toward obesity, put on nobility. In the early days she was modest and busy, as was proper, cooking, washing, mending, quite satisfied, it seemed, with her toothless mouth and her rumpled hair and a plate of boiled potatoes. But prosperity had puffed her full of visions. Little by little she had discovered the existence of dressmakers, hairdressers, dentists, and she colored her nails and squeezed herself into a corset and it was a marvel that she did not make a face when she wiped Georgette's backside. Since they had laid out the little garden in front of the house, her favorite occupation was sprinkling the lettuce. Morning, noon, and night, whether it was sunny or pouring rain.—One of these days she'll order herself a wheelchair and a cane, and it will be life among the dowagers, Cyril thought to himself. "But, Mother," he had once said to her, being more exasperated than usual, "you're all we ever see in the garden. It's enough to water the lettuce in the evening, before the sun goes down. . . ." "And the carrots, my son?" she had inquired. "All the vegetables in a kitchen garden, Mother." This seemed to surprise Madame Raya Bergmann sufficiently to silence her for a long, perplexed moment; then she put her thoughts back in place with the help of several headshakings. "Well, my son, it won't hurt the little lettuces a bit to have three drinks of water a day," she had said finally.

Cyril uncorked another bottle of wine, filled the glasses. "You're not looking good, what's wrong?" he said to Hirsch as he filled his glass.

Hirsch the cashier drank the wine at a gulp. "I'm as thirsty as if I'd eaten a keg of pickled herrings," he said. "That's not normal, what?" His brown eyes moved around animatedly, as if they could not light on the object of their choice.

"With the stuff at eighty francs, you're darn right it's not normal," Steve Futeau declared. He laughed, but Madame Bergmann was the only one to produce an echo. "Me, I did a nice piece of business the other day," he continued. "Twenty-four bottles at sixty-five apiece. A coarse red, but honest, plenty of body to it. Tell you what, Cyril, I'll bring you a bottle tomorrow at the Suc. You'll see, it's not quite as dry as this, but it's got more body. Hasn't it got more body, Mimi?"