

"I don't know," Mimi answered in a thin voice. There were, or were going to be, tears in her pale blue eyes. "I don't know, I didn't taste it."

Futeau put down his glass a little roughly, and a drop of wine spilled on the white tablecloth. How many times had he taught her . . . "Mimi, when I talk to you in the presence of others, I don't want any more of your indecisive answers, your little answers limper than a cat dragged out of the drink. I don't ask you to think, even the prettiest woman can't give what she hasn't got, but if I say, 'That dish we had the other day was good, wasn't it, Mimi?' don't answer, 'I don't know,' answer, 'Yes, Steve, it was good'; and if I say, 'That whatchamacallit picture was terrible, wasn't it, Mimi?' instead of coming up with your eternal 'I don't know,' say, 'Yes, Steve, that whatchamacallit picture was terrible.'" He sat her down in front of him and explained the same thing ten or twenty times—"Don't look as if you're contradicting every word I say, for God's sake!"—and she listened in silence or maybe she didn't listen at all, with her eyelids lowered and her blond hair on her neck, and if by chance she showed her eyes, they were, or were about to be, swimming in water. If only she would react . . . But no, she took her bawling out as placidly as if he were a bawling-out machine and she a wall. He had never thought that in two years of life in common he had broken all the will in her, except perhaps the will to kill him—him, Steve Futeau.

"Don't you like wine?" asked Moses Bergmann. The inflection of his voice was humble and unctuous, and he resembled a country pastor calling on the local squire. "By us, in Latvia, nobody drinks it," he added, sighing. "Today, being in France thirty years already, I can't get along without it."

"Yes, I like wine," said Mimi, smiling like a convalescent. Nelly brought the coffee—six hundred francs a kilo, a find!—and they talked coffee. Mimi's bulging forehead was reflected in the black beverage whose aroma filled the room. Yes, yes, she liked wine. She had liked it, a long time ago, twenty-four months of marriage ago. Half a glass made her laugh, a glass made her sing, and a thimbleful more made her madly in love with men and beasts and plants and things. The day she met Lieutenant Steve Futeau, she was far from dreaming that he would make her lose her taste for wine, for laughter, for men, for beasts, for things. She looked briefly at Nelly—it was Nelly who had introduced them, in April 1940, when Steve was on leave in Paris. Three months later they had met again at Angoulême, she borne by the tide of refugees, he back in civilian life; and after three months more they were married in the south of France, at the home of her parents, who were the proprietors of a small vineyard near Béziers. The Ripperts had cast a favorable eye on the marriage of their daughter. Futeau didn't have a sou, he said he was an author, or maybe a poet, some trade fit for a Parisian out of work, but he was built like a country boy and there was always lots for a pair of strong arms to do on the vine-clad hillsides—when two of the younger Ripperts had gone into Germany with the prisoners. Besides, Mimiche, married, pregnant,

would soon get rid of her young girl's ideas—to take her law at the Sorbonne, as she put it. The three Rippert sons had likewise given their new brother-in-law a warm welcome, the youngest one in person, with many a brotherly slap on the back, the two older ones from their Stalag, having judged him by his photo. "Me, Monsieur Bergmann," Steve was saying, "me, I'm not worried about the future."

In Mimi's cup the precious beverage, cooling, turning to coffee dregs. She put forth a finger tipped with a white nail, touched the cup: it was not coffee dregs, you couldn't read the future in it. She would have given half her life to know when she would find courage to abandon Steve. Or to kill him: "Me," said Steve Futeau in his self-assured voice, "me, I say the Germans have a hell of a lot of what it takes. I don't say they'll win the war, but if they lose it they'll do it on purpose. With their Todt Line from one end of the coast to the other, how do you think the English can get a foothold?" Mimi looked into her cup as if she saw the Todt Line there, and in the Todt Line the little hole where the English would get a foothold. Madame Raya Bergmann said it was maybe better that way, because otherwise they would destroy France, and anyway it wouldn't bring the dead back to life. As far as she personally was concerned, she would be glad if Monsieur Futeau was right: they had to have confidence in the future. The Germans, brutes though they were, let people live their own lives without getting in their way too much. These atrocities in Poland and Russia, how did you know they were not exaggerated? Maybe over there the people were saying the same things, that if blood was flowing it must be in France. With all this lying propaganda, think of it. If there was something you shouldn't trust, it was propaganda. She remembered the Stuttgart radio broadcasts, before the invasion, didn't they say there was panic in Paris, and famine, and Bolshevism? Bolshevism like in her back yard. So how are you going to know? Personally, what did she have to complain about? Nothing. The other way around, rather. She could congratulate herself. And she certainly wasn't the only one to be better off than she was before the war. Moses, the poor goop, had never been any good at anything, no good in caps, no good in leather jackets, no good in the notion business. But since Nellychenka's marriage . . . It was sad to think about, but except for the defeat Nellychenka would never have met Cyril. "If they are the strongest," she said like an owl waking up on its branch, "we ought to have the peace signed and let them put some order in Europe."

"Europe would be missing us, when they had put some order in it," said Hirsch. Another one of these Jewish women, and an old blabbermouth in the bargain, more of a Nazi than Himmler. How could they sit there so quietly on their behinds, when his heart was lower than his stomach? That woman the other day, with death dancing the cucaracha in her eyes. His lips burned at the thought of the kiss he had planted on Sonia Krantz's willing lips. His look roamed in search of a glass with

a bit of liquid in the bottom, and the glasses were as dry as the inside of his bones.

"You, Madame Bergmann, you ought to use better judgment when you're talking," he said, aggressive all at once. "Whether the Germans win or lose, they'll crush us like bedbugs, like . . ."

He choked, his bones were so empty. Madame Bergmann looked at her spouse, displaying her porcelain, as if to say, Bergmann, my friend, do you hear how he dares to speak to your wife? But there was nothing warlike about Monsieur Bergmann, and, furthermore, all Raya had to do was not talk like a fool.

"You and your crapehanger's ideas," Cyril Daubigny intervened. "What a yellow-belly! What are you always moaning for? You've eaten well and drunk well, and an hour from now you'll sleep well, so what's all the crying about? Time enough to eat your heart out when they cut off your head, if ever they cut it off." Steve laughed, but not even Madame Raya Bergmann echoed him. That laugh, that Mimi detested more than anything in the world. She could not see in the cold cup whether Hirsch would have his head cut off, she could see Steve's laugh. "Papa Rippert," Steve was saying in the dark interior of the cup, "me, I've got a bellyful of the city. The city is the bunk, it stinks on ice, as sure as my name is Futeau. What have you got in the city? Pansies and floozies. Me, when all is said and done, I've always been for life in the open air." And he laughed the way you shake a tree. He went to the window, drew in a lungful of the open air, stretched, and said, "Me, I say there's nothing like the soil. . . ." Watching him over his mustache, Papa Rippert remained silent. His son-in-law served himself a slice of bacon as thick as the sole of a shoe, readied himself to massacre a loaf of bread. "Me, by God . . ." he said. "Me, I . . ." said he. He put himself in full charge of the cutting, the grafting, the pruning, the vintaging: Futeau on the job—and never a sickly plant, not a phylloxera for ten miles around, never a bunch of grapes lost in the fold of a furrow. "Me, order is my dish . . ." he said. Now he was a taster—the *blanquette* was just a trifle harsh in the mouth, the *Lunel* had fermented a shade too long, the *Frontignan* the merest shadow not long enough. Three months after they had killed the pig and danced the round, Rippert, Sr., aided by his son, chased his daughter's husband with a pitchfork. From the top of a pile of wood in front of the house, Madame Rippert saw her son-in-law run pell-mell down the powdery road. The winter rains had been late that year, and the citizen, in his hurry, raised the dust.

Nelly, after making sure that Georgette had not wet her crib, agreed to sing. She had a nice soprano voice and a repertory of songs which were Cyril's delight. She sang "*Le pauvre nègre tellement maigre*," standing and working her hands as she had seen the Môme Piaff do it; then she sang "*Voilà le bon vent voilà le joli vent*," sitting on Cyril's knees. Cyril took up the refrain in his most vibrant basso and rubbed his Gothic nose into his wife's neck. "And you're a good guy . . ." he breathed behind

Nelly's ear while she sang *Petit navire qui ne voulait pas naviguer*. Steve Futeau also took up the refrain, and Madame Raya Bergmann beat time by waving the sugar tongs. A good son-in-law she had, after all. Rather ugly for a girl like Nellychenka, but good.—Nelly's neck, Nelly's bubbies, Nelly's mmmm, thought Cyril, singing the refrain. A patootie like her between the sheets every night—life was fine. Hirsch the cashier thought of the filth and funk of life, and Monsieur Bergmann thought of nothing at all. In the cup of cold coffee, three months after he had beat it out of the Rippert home, Steve Futeau broke Mimi's thumb with a twist of his wrist. She had said, "Steve, if you don't learn not to strut so much, you'll have wattles growing on you." "Whaddyamean wattles?" he asked, quick to distrust a word he did not understand. She explained—wattles . . . the things that grow on the nose of a turkey . . . So he broke her thumb, not altogether on purpose. After three months more, she almost died of a miscarriage. In their life, like a cyclic phenomenon, something special happened every three months. All at once she said, "Steve, I was married two years ago today."

There were tears in her eyes—real tears in her eyes of chilly sky blue. Nelly left Cyril's knees and put her arms around Mimi. She drew her away into the nook of a bay window. "Be brave, my poor dear, don't get upset . . ." she murmured, squeezing Mimi's arms. Mimi stifled her sobs, pressing her mouth wide open into Nelly's shoulder. "*She was married . . .*" came Steve's voice from the table. "You'd almost think . . . *We were married, my pet . . .*" Cyril kicked him under the table, making him understand that he ought to keep quiet. Monsieur Bergmann discreetly left the room, and beckoned to his wife from the door. Hirsch was collecting bread crumbs and piling them on the white cloth in front of him.

"I want to go home," said Mimi.

She was taller than Nelly, and more slender. Elbows out forward, she pressed her hands to her temples and breathed through her mouth. Her pale blue eyes were wide and staring behind a film of water. "Come and lie down on the sofa, Mimi, you're as white as a sheet," said Nelly.

"I want to go home," Mimi repeated, looking straight ahead.

"There's time enough, it's only ten o'clock," said Steve. Was she going to take it into her head to give orders, the crazy thing? "And me, I have some business to talk over with Cyril."

Mimi closed her mouth. Hirsch had a nice pile of crumbs in front of him, on the white cloth. That Krantz woman with her warm tongue between her teeth and her eyes full of death. "It would be better to take Mimi home, Steve, she's tired," said Nelly. "You can talk business some other day."

Cyril in turn said that business could wait twelve hours, and Steve got up from the table. Of course he should have remembered that it was the second anniversary of their marriage and bought a gewgaw for Mimi—but that crybaby, making scenes in public the way she did . . . God, what

rotten luck he had. That Mimi wasn't a woman, she was a lachrymal gland. "All right, come on then, what are you waiting for, since you're in such a hurry to get home."

Hirsch the cashier announced that he would leave with them, and the Daubignys accompanied them as far as the garden gate. They waited twenty minutes for the streetcar, in silence, under the wide sky peopled with crickets. The car came and passed them by, crowded to the doors, ballooning like a pumpkin. "Crap on that," Steve commented. They went along on foot, Mimi between the two men, through the gloomy outskirts of the town. Futeau thought perhaps he should have taken Mimi's arm, but after the show she had put on, never. So damned smart of her to make him look ridiculous before his friends. Hirsch tried to walk at a different gait from his companions, so that the noise of their footfalls might be less challenging. He did not like a detached, a solitary sound, in the hostile dark. Even in the motion pictures the whistle of an isolated bullet seemed more sinister to him than a round of machine-gun fire. Voices, the sounds of man or of the things which reveal man's presence—provided they were not isolated, not foundering in absence, provided they were profuse, many-tongued—were for Hirsch like a buoy in the sea, like a friendly door, he could go toward them; but a single voice, a sound gone astray, was like drowning, like a knife at his throat. Solitude, in men and in sounds, gave off an odor of carrion. The unique—destiny or death—horrified him. "Nothing unique is true," he might have noted if he were a writer of maxims. But he wrote nothing, nothing but his discordant step in the blindness of night. This unique, this slime-filled and swill-fouled existence, perhaps it wasn't true after all. He was still in the suburbs of Paris, amid the happy voices of a hundred children, under the rough-laid walls of the public school. Sudeten—everyone knew this—was the name of an edible oyster, no one had died for Danzig, and Hirsch had never dreamed of going on a journey to Tasmania. Lord no, it had taken all that drivel to make him think of such a thing. He would have liked to ask Mimi what she thought of all this, of the snivel that dripped from the nostrils of the world. She ought to have some ideas, when it came to snot and ruined lives. A dream, nothing but a vicious figment of the imagination, no truer than a flat earth, than a sad France. Ask Mimi—her hair of white gold, her eyes of golden blue. A dream with no truth in it, a vicious dream, such as you have when you're bored, such as he had a second ago, when it seemed to him that he saw Marc Laverne emerge from the dark and plunge into the dark. His fingers brushed Mimi's fingers, and he took her hand. "Wasn't that Laverne, over there in the shadows?" he said.

"Take me away, Hirsch," said Mimi. "To your place, any place." Her hand rested in Hirsch's hand and her voice was simple and toneless. Hirsch stopped as if someone had hit him in the back of the head. Within him, in his bloodless chest, his heart had changed sides. "Don't you even know what you want?" said Steve Futeau. "Me, I thought you were in a hurry to get home." They had come to a halt before the half-open door

of a café, through which the waiters were bringing in the terrace furniture. A shaft of light cut into Mimi's profile, and her hand weighed like ice in Hirsch's hand. "I'm not going home," she said.

"You're . . . what?" asked Steve Futeau. Suddenly he understood. An intonation of curiosity, almost of solicitude, lingered in his voice. He was not looking at Hirsch. With that whippersnapper, the little fool. That eunuch. "Let go of my wife's hand," he said. Hirsch did not answer, he held onto Mimi's hand. His heart was looking for a place in his empty chest. "Don't leave me with him, Hirsch," said Mimi.

He was not going to leave her. Not with Steve, not with anybody. He couldn't, she was too alone. The waiters had dropped their work, they watched the two men and the woman. In the shaft of light Mimi's face assumed the reliefs of an ancient icon, and there was no water in her unmoving eyes. The other one too, with her mouth open on the moist white teeth and the warm tongue. They were all too alone, even Steve. Steve felt the skin tighten behind his ears. "You lousy skunk," he said, driving his fist into Hirsch's stomach. "Ooh!" went Hirsch. He doubled over, swaying on his feet, then went down headfirst. He landed on a table, his face against the marble. He had not let go of Mimi's hand.

Several persons had collected behind them, silent and patient. Using his free hand, Hirsch drew himself half erect. He stared at the table top like a blind man recovering his sight. Steve Futeau brought the edge of his hand down like a hatchet on Mimi's and Hirsch's clasped hands. The waiters, with their arms folded and their bellies forward, stood enjoying the spectacle, and someone among the onlookers cleared his throat with an accent of conviction. "Let go of my wife's hand," said Steve. Steve's wife stood pressing against Hirsch, and she too looked at the table top. "Hirsch," she said, "don't leave me with him."

Steve Futeau's fist put the thick taste of blood in Hirsch's month. "Pfuuh . . ." went Hirsch, in an effort to open his lips. "Look at this . . . Look at this . . ." he croaked, pointing to a rectangle of paper which was stuck to the table top. In his pounding chest his heart had dug a niche for itself under his ribs. The imagination was vicious but clairvoyant, life was a smudge of dirt but a true one, and that Laverne—a miscreant with fins for the night. Mimi touched her handkerchief to Hirsch's lips and he did not resist, keeping his finger pointed to the table. "Let go of my wife's hand," said Steve Futeau.

He could not hit Hirsch, because Mimi's arm shielded his face. Hirsch emitted a sort of gurgling whinny, and Mimi took away her handkerchief. "Hey, what's the matter out there? Why's it taking you so long to get those tables in?" cried an angry voice from inside the café. The waiters leaped into action, urged on as though by a whip. "Come on, that's enough of that, you kids . . ." said one of them. Hirsch looked at them, then he looked at Steve, and Steve's wife, and the gaping group behind. His finger had not left the rectangle of paper on the top of the table, and around the edges of his lips the blood was drying in crystals of black salt. He

opened his mouth, and suddenly, as if he never again would be able to close it, he began to blurt out, in the voice of an inspired comedian:

"Here . . . Read it . . . Here . . . The . . . Of the . . . The killers of the Gestapo . . . Oh, Mimi . . ."

He let go of Mimi's hand, turned, and plunged in among the bystanders. The little group split open, closed again, then in a wave rushed upon the table. Futeau grabbed his wife by the arm, nailing her to his side. "No more hysteria out of you, my girl," he said, squashing her elbow. He leaned over the shoulders of those in front of him, and read:

TONIGHT LAVAL IS DELIVERING THE JEWS TO THE KILLERS OF  
THE GESTAPO! MARSEILLAIS, UNITE AGAINST THIS PERSE-  
CUTION! TAKE THE VICTIMS UNDER YOUR PROTECTION!

They went home in silence, the man clinging tightly to his wife's elbow, the woman going forward like a somnambulist. Futeau thought he should have let Cyril know, but he didn't want to leave Mimi right now, and you couldn't say those things over the phone. Anyway, Daubigny's parents-in-law were in no great danger, having been naturalized French citizens a quarter of a century before, and as for Nelly—Nelly was a Parisian by birth. And then they lived at the ends of the earth, and the streetcars, stuffed with suburbanites, were buckling on their wheels. He recalled the question Hirsch had asked, just when this fool of a woman had started to make a play for him.—Laverne, eh? Pasting up stickers, eh? This time he really had something on the "founding member" of the Sucror. This time . . . A short whistle escaped him, and he squeezed his wife's elbow a little more tightly. And the cashier! Boy, did he bleed, the stinker! One more guy whose blood was too close to his skin. Tomorrow, at the Suc, he would pinch him under the chin, delicately, and make a speech to him. "Look, cashier, me, I don't hold it in for you, you're all right in your way; but if ever you cock an eye at Mimi, as sure as my name is Futeau you'd better make a date with the dentist." He did not release his hold on Mimi's elbow until they had crossed the threshold of their hotel room.

Mimi slumped on the edge of a chair. She saw the room through a film of clear, moving water. Behind a flowery cloth screen, Futeau was washing his hands in a sink. "Talk about an anniversary party," he said, appearing in shirt sleeves and untying his tie. "God almighty, Mimi, can't you be like other women? You've got to be starting something all the time. Some women play bridge, and you play the victim. Result, you get us in bad with everybody, and that imbecile gets a pasting because you can't behave yourself."

"I'm the imbecile," said Mimi, not turning her head.

Futeau looked at his wife with an expression of discomfiture. He was not used to having her take part in their "dialogues"; she ordinarily left the whole burden of talk to him. At first this passive resistance had exasperated him to the point of madness. He would grab Mimi by the shoul-

ders, shake her hard enough to dislocate her bones, and shout, "Talk, talk, say something, you . . . you . . ." But, as he did not like being contradicted, in the long run he learned to put up with her wordlessness. Thus Mimi's short retort disconcerted him. He hesitated, not knowing what to say to this woman sitting on the edge of a chair, like a—like nothing, like a stranger. He had the sudden and unexpected impression that Mimi was a person.

He took a step toward her, lifted her chin with his thumb. "Mimiche, don't tell me you really wanted to run away?" She did not speak. He took away his thumb, and she left her head as it was, thrown backward. The electric light swirled in her watery eyes as it does in a fish tank. Steve went back behind the screen. "Aw, for once you were going to say something . . ." he said in an uncertain voice. Mimi rose from the edge of the chair, opened the closet, took the cover from a shoe box. She proceeded without haste, without noise, while the toothbrush grated in Steve's open mouth. A clasp knife with a spring lock. She had really wanted to run away. With Hirsch, since he happened to be there. With anyone who would take her. She pressed the spring of the knife. The snapping of the blade tore the weapon from her hand, but she snatched it up again. If one of the café waiters had said, "Come," she would have gone. "There's another button gone to hell," said Steve from behind the screen. She turned back the bedcovers, placed the knife under the bolster. Hirsch, the coward. She took off her blouse and skirt. Hirsch's savage lust for life. Hers, too. With the first passer-by in the street, the first man who would know how to say a man's word in a woman's ear. She picked out a nightgown from the drawer, the newest one, the color of her eyes, to go with her lust for life. Steve came from behind the screen, naked as on the day of judgment. That gladiator's body which she hated. She slipped between the sheets, closed her eyes. "Aren't you going to wash?" he asked, stretching, thumping his chest; then he turned out the light and got into bed. Something special every three months. It seemed to Mimi that the edge of the blade was against the back of her neck. Hirsch, who for her sake displayed more bravery than any gladiator ever had. Steve grasped her breast as he would have picked up an overturned cup. She lay on her back, eyes closed, heart beating slowly. Steve's hand, which will not land in Hirsch's gums again. Steve's hand slid along Mimi's belly, then along her thigh, and with a pull he brought her against his bare skin. He tried to fit his other hand under his wife's neck.—A festive gown for the great lust for life, thought his wife.

"*Sacré nom de Dieu!*" said Steve, sitting up in bed with a bound. "Damn it to the bottom of hell!"

He pulled the cord of the night lamp, looked at his fingers. A little blood was running from his forefinger. "What the hell's in this bed? Pins?" he said, with his finger in his mouth. He felt around him, threw aside the bolster, came upon the knife. Mimi lay on her back, eyes closed, heart standing still.

"What's this knife doing here! It's that bitch of a maid again, with her monkey tricks! If I don't kick her ass tomorrow, my name is not Futeau!"

He picked up the weapon by the point of the blade and threw it at the door. It buried itself in the wood, quivering like an arrow. He put out the light, sucked the drop of blood from his finger. Then he set upon Mimi like someone trying to tear down a wall.

## » 9 «

MÉLODIE THE S.O.L. MAN HAD TALKED TOO BIG. HE HAD let himself be carried away by the imaginings of a neophyte overwrought with devotion. The thing was done without any spectacular stage setting, without raucous commands; and in the rare cases where violence had to be used, it seemed to hurt the party on the giving end as much as the party on the receiving end. The orders were—no noise, no disturbance, discretion and speed. A matter of style, of independence of mind, the officials judging that, if the job was German, the manner should be French. When the tactical plan of campaign was worked out, they had even considered requesting the gentlemen of the police to check their automatics at the cloakroom, this instrument not being absolutely indispensable for pulling harmless sleepers out of their sleep; but a plain-clothes man deprived of his gun being like an ordinary man deprived of his suspenders, the suggestion was rejected. This concern for the niceties was carried to the point of deciding not to use the traditional Black Marias, the mere sight of which might have thrown those arrested "for verification of identity" into a panic, and the military authorities were obliged to lend two and a half dozen trucks to furnish the needed transportation. Other considerations, no less aesthetic in nature, led the inner office to substitute volunteers from the S.O.L. for the uniformed police, the latter lacking the vigorous attitude of mind required for this sort of work. The job—since criminal hands had sown the town and environs with incendiary appeals—began about two in the morning, an hour ahead of the schedule originally established.

The thing rolled along simply enough, in truth, almost always according to the same formula, although with more or less noise. The truck stops at the curb, two plain-clothes men in gabardine and soft hats jump to the ground, one of them checks the number of the building with a flashlight, the other puts his finger on the bell and keeps it there until someone inside, growling and sputtering, comes clapping to the door. One or both of the plain-clothes men say "Open up police!" and the door is opened. The plain-clothes men—generally one young and the other in the flower of his age—push the concierge, male or female, back inside, shoving the

flashlight under his or her nose, and they repeat "Police!" as if afraid they will be taken for visiting nurses. The concierge, male or female, bats a startled eye and puts his or her clothes in order, sputtering as before. While taking care to keep his or her toes out from under the policeman's shoes, the concierge sometimes exhibits a certain bad humor—"don't have to open up at this hour because if it was burglars and it ain't the law you cops what do you care about the law it's going too far with the stuff you get to eat nowadays if you can't even get your sleep *merde alors*." Chasing their good man or good woman backward by poking the flashlight in their rheumy eyes, the plain-clothes men land in the concierge's office. The younger one—symbol of bold courage—sticks his flash in his pocket, the older one—symbol of experience—pulls out a list. "You have a roomer named Milka Laja Brzznsky thirty-six years old Cheskoslovask," he says, wounding his tongue. A child calls from an invisible alcove, and if it is a female concierge she says, "It's all right go to sleep darling," but if it is a male concierge he says nothing. At other times it is the grunting voice of an adult waking up in the eternal invisible alcove—"what's up a fire or what or the English," and the concierge answers—"it's nothing it's the dicks." The plain-clothes men are used to it, they're on their twentieth call and everywhere the same refrain greets them dick dock and they make no protest, their susceptibilities being dulled to a degree at that hour of the night. "Now then this Boruche Smcha Schzwtrkfp couple fifty-two years old Judoslav," the older of the plain-clothes men insists with some urgency. They don't get an immediate answer, not the way they ought to, and the plain-clothes man starts his reading again, more painstakingly this time, now and then using spectacles which he fishes out of a case lined with purple plush, while the younger plain-clothes man looks around him as though hoping to lay his hand on a bottle of Calvados. When by chance concierge and legionnaire cohabit in one and the same skin, the work is greatly facilitated thereby. The plain-clothes man has hardly had time to spell out the first letters of the customer's name when the information bounces out—"fourth floor fifth door to the right at the end of the hall room 23 knock loud they aren't quick on the uptake here wait a minute I'll go with you with the passkey in case." But when the concierge is on good terms with the roomer or is not in sympathy with plain-clothes men in gabardine and soft hats, the latter are put to the trouble of repeating their question several times and then it is rather a grumbled "Go ahead up it's under the roof number 18 and what did she do to you the poor woman with her husband who can't stand on his pins and don't stamp your feet it wakes people up at this ungodly hour." The two plain-clothes men climb the stairs, you need a good wind for this job, find their number, knock on the door. In the office the concierge prevails on his or her consort to leave the warmth of the bed, and together they hearken in silence to the echoes of the drama. Ears glued to the door, the plain-clothes men listen to the slumbering of the people they do not know, do not imagine, and with a light hand they tap and tap with little rapid blows,

the orders being discretion and no breakage, and also because their inner orders sometimes make them uncomfortable in the region of the plexus and forbid them to tackle the matter highhandedly. On the ground floor the female concierge's foot touches that of her husband and she says, "Don't move I'll go wake up number 2." She goes to number 2, scratches on the door—"let me in Mam'zelle Colinette till I tell you what, it's me M'ame Ernestine the police are here they're taking away the gentleman on the sixth floor you know the one with the gout that he can't hardly get around and his wife the one who likes cats." On the sixth floor the woman who likes cats thinks that maybe it's still another cat, poor little things, no one wants to bother with them except the nasty people who cook them in a stew, but she's afraid that if she opens the door it will wake up her husband and there are four cats in the room already and it's not easy with the restrictions. Downstairs Mam'zelle Colinette has trotted barefoot to the door—"the people on the sixth floor good grief M'ame Ernestine wait till I throw something around my shoulders"—and the gentleman on the sixth floor, awake some minutes now, whispers, "what is it Perla there's someone at the door." The woman tucks the covers around her husband's back—"no Israel it's a cat." The plain-clothes men perceive that their efforts have finally borne fruit, something's moving around inside, and they knock, saying in a confidential voice, "Open up police!" The man and the woman sit up straight as if moved by a spring, their hands grope for each other and meet but not their eyes and it is certainly better so, better not to see each in the other's face what both know is there. With her coat over her nightdress and her head bristling with curlers, the lady in number 2 has joined the concierges—"what a world M'ame Ernestine a woman who loves animals just the other day I gave her a bit of lights that was left over." All three lift their noses and twist their necks, when the door opens upstairs a ray of light will fall down the stair well, and the female concierge comments—"animals in a furnished-room house they only make dirt but you're right about what a world it's nothing but a pain in the neck don't move and I'll go knock on the Bertins' door they're in number 7." At number 18 the plain-clothes men knock knock, they mustn't give the ones they're after time to think, to breathe, the tap tap enervates obsesses hypnotizes maddens, no respite otherwise they won't open. Those orders, no noise—what lack of foresight after all, because if the individuals decided to play hard of hearing the plain-clothes men would be right back where they started from. But the individuals lack such inventiveness, the word "police" annihilates them, and moreover they don't know what the orders are. The woman gets her feet to the floor, she totters toward the door and switches on the light—"just a minute please." The plain-clothes men continue their tap tap, that's the technique, it's as if they were tapping on the people's skulls, it doesn't hurt, not right away, it just keeps them from thinking, seeing, distinguishing right from left. The Bertins have come outside their door, where Mam'zelle Colinette and the concierge have joined them. Madame Bertin sneezes,— "isn't it awful it makes my

plain-clothes men are there too, and they rush up, saying—"which ones are going," voices suspicious, hands ready, one would think, to receive a load of gold. Those who are going come forward by themselves, it does not occur to them that it might occur to anyone to try to take their place for the journey, they come forward and present themselves and they are seized and hoisted in and the truck gets under way, snapping a whip at the slumbering house fronts. The people on the sidewalk do not speak, it has been as swift as an execution, and perhaps it comes suddenly to some among them that words are no longer of any use, that with this carrying off a part of themselves has gone away in the night which covers so many hostile lands and common graves and ravages without a name, and so many hopes, too, so tenacious that, vast as is the night, it is not vast enough to cover them. In the driver's cab of the truck the older of the plain-clothes men consults the luminous dial of his watch—they've kept to the average of a quarter of an hour per operation—and under the tarpaulin in back the two other plain-clothes men count their booty as if they were working by the piece, figuring that with two or three more loadings the truck will be full to overflowing and they'll have to go and drop the whole cargo and begin again empty. The truck rolls and bounces and insults the distant sky, and because the sky is distant and so indifferent to insults the silence is heavy among the travelers under the tarpaulin. Then a swerve, a sudden stop, the two plain-clothes men beside the driver jump to the ground—and the routine starts again from the beginning.

That was the way things went—or just about. Thirty trucks, each with its four plain-clothes men, and its driver, also a plain-clothes man, criss-crossed the great city in search of their load of Jewish meat. Here and there they had to knock down the client after knocking at his door, or grapple with a hysterical woman to get her downstairs, or carry out a youngster hollering his head off, or swap words with the people of the neighborhood; sometimes the people of the neighborhood were not hostile, after all nobody was going to pickle these foreigners in brine, they would just be deported from Marseilles because they overcrowded the city, ate the bread which was needed for the inhabitants, traded on the black market, and read the Swiss papers; sometimes—and for the plain-clothes men this was the most convenient situation—sometimes the clients had taken the precaution to decamp. All in all—the teams had been carefully selected, never two young ones in the same team, never an S.O.L. man to put his foot in the apartments—all in all the elegance and deftness of the French methods had not belied their well-earned reputation. Nevertheless, despite the precautions taken, some hitches had to be expected, and the death of a Polish woman named Sonia Krantz was to be deplored.

The Krantz family had taken up residence in the Haenschels' room the evening before the departure of the old couple, the latter having decided to spend the night in the waiting room of the station so as not to risk missing their train. The cautionary idea of establishing themselves in the

station twelve hours before the train's departure had, in fact, been the brilliant invention of Pawel Krantz, a practical man and a great connoisseur of railroads and travel. For the first time in their nine years of purposeful vagabondage the Haenschels had felt agitated to a degree, and Krantz had filled their minds with his vision of trains leaving from the wrong platform, of compartments taken by assault, of clocks out of order, of baggage wrongly registered. For months he and his family had been living in a hovel between Aubagne and Marseilles, a shack without light or water, an hour's walk from the nearest shopping center—a tumble-down hut in truth, the last vestige of a once flourishing and now abandoned quarry. In a short time Sonia Krantz had developed a persecution mania, the boys had changed into little bohemians, and the spongy ground of the place had given Pawel Krantz an unforgettable case of articular rheumatism. Hence to set up housekeeping in the Haenschels' room was, in their existence, so remarkable an event that in order to advance it even by twelve hours Pawel Krantz had not hesitated to invent, for the Haenschels' benefit, the most horrific stories of the traitorous conduct of trains in general, and of trains out of Marseilles in particular.

The Hirsch incident had plunged Sonia Krantz into a sort of speechless prostration, and she was unable to help her husband. He had to take care singlehanded of the packing and moving of their goods; to make a number of trips—halfway by streetcar, halfway on foot—between the abandoned quarry and the room the Haenschels were leaving; to help the old folks get their luggage to the station; to run to the police station in order to have his change of address registered; to wipe and swipe Salek and Mietek; to unpack and stow away; to stand in line for bread; to cook the leek soup; to put up the boys' bed where the chest of drawers had stood, and to move the latter down to the concierge's rooms; to put the little ones to bed; to put his wife to bed; to get to bed himself. Out beyond the high, grim wall which cut off the window of the room, out beyond the black barricade of the wall, the farthest galaxies were beginning to go blue in the sky when Pawel Krantz had his first dream of the night: a German cannon was firing heavy shells at the door of their fine room, and at each explosion the gun crew gnawed their fingers in rage, groaning, "American visal American visal!"

Pawel Krantz smiled at his dream and turned over on his stomach. The American visa—what a shield, it will be the death of the German artillerymen. His hand reached out, looking for his wife's body. "Sonia," he said, with his mouth in the pillow. He wanted to tell her his prophetic dream, for fear of not remembering it. His hand felt around in the warmth of the sheets as if Sonia had no more volume than a one-franc piece. "Sonia," he repeated, sitting up. A light the color of dirty slate was smeared on the curtains of the window and the German shells were crashing against the door. Kneeling at the foot of the bed as if she were praying Christian prayers, Sonia was breathing with a mechanical sound. "Open up police! Open up police!" said the German artillerymen between two salvos.

Krantz crept on his knees toward his wife, touched her with a finger to make sure she was real. Cold and immobile as Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt, Sonia gave no sign of response. "Open up police or we break down the door," said an amiable German voice. Krantz squeezed his wife's shoulder, ran his fingers over her back, her breast, her hair, what a dream, Sonia changed into salt and German artillerymen speaking French. But already he knew he was not dreaming, that, using the neck of his dream as a footing, the Franco-German police had got hold of his life. A hic-cough escaped him, almost a sob, this room, so nice, so dreamed about, and not even one night, not even. "Sonia, be calm, I'll go open the door," he whispered.

"No," said Sonia in a hoarse voice, a masculine voice that he did not recognize as hers. The knock was at the door—leece-po-leece-po-nup-ope-nup-po—no stop no bang no haste no stop. Krantz pulled a corner of the blanket over his wife's shoulders, where was the air in the room gone, Sonia was breathing in all the air, she didn't think of the children, she thought only of drinking in the air, or was it the police with a vacuum pump. He jumped to the window, opened it with a push so violent that it swung shut by itself, opened it again. The humid crawling of the dawn was feeling its way down the wall, and at the base of his skull Pawel Krantz felt an inexorable forefinger tap-tapping with uninterrupted blows—ope-leece-po-nup—as under an ether mask one sees the slow gravitation of soporific ciphers crumbling away one's consciousness. "Mamama . . ." Mietek mumbled in his sleep, poking his knee into Salek's stomach. Outside the door the amiable police tap-tapped and singsonged their duet, and kneeling at the foot of the bed Sonia Krantz drank in the air. Then Pawel Krantz knelt too, wrapping the blanket around his wife's shoulders, kissing her cold cheek, as helpless both of them as their little boys sleeping on the spot where yesterday there was a chest with drawers. "Calm yourself, Sonia, for the love of God, Sonia, look at me, the doctor told you not to . . ." Sonia looked straight ahead of her, her eyes wider than the door on which the tireless tap-tap danced like a talking hail—police be reasonable police open up don't be afraid police verification of identity open up police nuppo leecepo break police lock quick nuppo it's only police verification status opo nupleece. Krantz put his fingers in his ears, this two-voice chorus was more of an obsession than the fixed idea of an American visa, of inter-American visas, of rooms with walls higher than the light, of the SS man hanging his Jew by the testicles. As before toward the window, he bounded toward the door and opened it with a jerk.

The policemen came over the threshold as if someone had given them a shove in the shoulder blades. Sonia Krantz jumped straight in the air, she was standing on the bed and looking at the two men. Some of the dirt had gone out of the slate-colored light, and the two plain-clothes men saw the young woman with the light behind her, outlined in the transparency of her nightgown against the rectangle of the window. Coming awake with a start, the boys stared at the intruders with a terror

which made them squint. One of the plain-clothes men unfolded a list, the other flashed his light on it. Using his index finger to decipher the name of his catch, he articulated:

"Monsieur Gitla Bromberg, Polish, twenty-three years old and family, please come with us."

Pawel Krantz felt dazzled and dizzy. An enormous lamp flashed on in his eyes and went out. "You have made a mistake, my name is not Gitla Bromberg," he said, blinking with emotion. Standing on the bed, Sonia had opened her mouth as if her eyes were not big enough to feast on the spectacle of the two men. The plain-clothes men cleared their throats, looking at the window through the young woman's gown. "It's not your name, then?" said the man with the list.

Krantz gave his name, then the name of his wife, then the names of his children. He had nothing to do with Gitla Bromberg, and that was a woman's name anyway. The plain-clothes man unfolded his list once more, beckoning his colleague to give him some light. "Don't worry, everything is all right," grunted the man with the flashlight when Krantz made as if to rush to the electric switch. As good as a movie, that woman in her nightshirt standing on the bed, it would be too bad to turn on the light, you wouldn't see so good. "Sure enough, you're right, Monsieur Krantz, I had the wrong line," the plain-clothes man with the list admitted. He beckoned Krantz to him so that he could witness his good faith. "You can see for yourself, Gitla Bromberg, that you say she's a woman, and on the very next line there you are. That fixes it, right?" Pawel Krantz saw for himself, he was fixed, letter for letter, between the aforementioned Bromberg, Polish, and one Horovitz, nationality unknown. The plain-clothes man put the list back in his pocket, pleased that things were in order. "Well then Monsieur Krantz and family," he went on with a sort of solemnity in which there might have been some trace of irony, "let's get dressed and quick we've lost too much time talking."

He nudged his companion in the ribs with his elbow and they turned and faced the door. Lifted by a single force, Salek and Mietek landed with one plunge in their parents' bed, and each of them seized one of their mother's legs. One by one the great wall, the great eater of air and sunlight, spread out its brown wounds. The plain-clothes men stole a look behind them, tough luck to have to make her get down out of there, the Polish dame standing stiffly on the bed with the brats pulling at her nightdress and the window brighter every minute. "Come on, lady," said the more sensible of the two, "you have to get dressed and come with us."

"No," said the woman outlined in the window frame like a figure in a shadow play. "Go away," she said in a man's hoarse voice. She put her hands on her sons' heads, and they pressed more strongly against her legs. "Come on, come on, no nonsense," the same plain-clothes man began again limply. Pawel Krantz looked at Sonia with terror, she had no nose, no mouth, no face, but enormous black-lantern eyes, but the monstrous



eye of a dead lagoon. "Go ahead, you, Krantz, tell your wife to be nice about it."

Pawel Krantz did nothing of the kind. He knew they had to obey, that resistance would get them nowhere, but he did not tell his wife to be nice about it. She was beyond niceness or meanness. In Warsaw, when they used to walk in the Krasinski Garden, he had often asked Sonia to be nice, to give him her hand, then both hands, then her mouth. And yesterday, when he had asked her to go to bed early so as to wake up rested and happy in their new room. She had been sitting where now Salek was trying to hide, her wild eyes bounding from one object to another, and she had let him undress her as in the days of their love's young blooming. The doctor had said, "Get your wife a change of air or else the worst is to be feared," and it was done since yesterday afternoon, they could hope for the best henceforth, the American visa, the ocean voyage, and for this evening he had a surprise, half a rabbit, fifty grams of green coffee, a packet of genuine Lucky Strikes for Sonia, and two bars of chocolate for the children. For this evening. "My wife is in no condition to come with you," he said.

"But sure she's in condition," said the plain-clothes man with the flashlight, looking at the window through the young woman's body.

Suddenly Pawel Krantz noticed the spectacle Sonia presented. A wave of hatred and shame lashed his heart, and made the blood spurt from his nose. He picked up the blanket and tried to fit it around his wife's waist, but she did nothing to help him, her hands resting on the heads of her sons who clung convulsively to her legs, immobile and cold and turned to salt, and in place of a face, a mouth, a soul, only a lake of black light. He stood between her and the policemen, between them and her innocent immodesty, with his lips and chin and chest spattered with blood.

"You can see perfectly well that my wife is in no condition to come with you. But I'll come right away, with all the identity papers necessary."

"Listen, you, that's enough of that stuff," said the man with the flashlight. "I tell you you're coming, the whole lot of you together. Nobody can say we're for separating families. Get going, stick your head under the faucet, so they won't say it's us that fixed you up like that. And you, too, lady. C'mere, little fellow, till I put your pants on."

He went to take hold of the older of the children. Salek emitted a scream of terror and took refuge like a monkey between his mother's legs, and Mietek imitated his brother's cry. The plain-clothes man went forward another step, but Sonia's hand caught him across the lips and knocked his hat off. The nightdress was torn over one of her shoulders, and her skin was turning the gray color of the dead in the cold.

"You damned Jew!" said the man with the flashlight.

Arm raised, he threw himself on the woman standing erect against the clarity of the day which looked in over the wall with the brown wounds. His comrade grabbed him by the belt of his coat, and Pawel Krantz, bleeding from the nose, blocked his way. "Take me away, but do not touch

my wife," he shouted. The belt came off in the hands of the plain-clothes man with the list. "Wait, Madrus, you got to take that woman easy," he said. But the man who had received the blow on the lips was not of this opinion. "I'll show her how to take it easy, the whore. But first this pimp here . . ." He aimed a kick into Krantz's organs, followed by a punch in the jaw. Only the punch in the jaw found its mark. Krantz fell over backward on the bed, but stood up instantly and again took his place before his wife. It seemed to him that he saw very clearly, very far, that the room had never been so beautiful. Stiff and erect, her hands on the children's heads, Sonia had not budged, and her whole face was transformed into a look. Hugging with arms and legs to their mother's body, Salek and Mietek wept and bawled. A fear-stricken face showed itself in the doorway, then another. "Do not touch my wife," said Pawel Krantz, bleeding from the nose and mouth.

"Then tell her to take the kids and come with us," said the more sensible of the plain-clothes men. "Tell her we won't hurt you, that it's just to find out where you were born and if you have money to live on. Go ahead, tell her."

All at once Pawel Krantz felt calm and without fear and without courage. It had to begin someday, it had to finish, and this was perhaps the day. There it was, it was simple; as simple as blood. There's a lot of blood in each man, every place a man goes he carries his blood along with him, in the mountains and the valleys, in the city and in bed, he is so afraid of losing a drop of it, then one day he loses it in floods and it doesn't even hurt and does it really make any difference, only he wished that Sonia would not stay that way standing with her nakedness before the eyes of these strangers, her pure nakedness before their dreadful eyes. He turned his back to the policemen, put his hands on Sonia's hips, lifting his blotched face to her, and it seemed to him that he had never loved her as he ought.

"Sonia, my child, don't mind I'm going to dress you. Don't mind I'm going to put your red dress with the white collar on you."

"Speak French, so we can understand!" said the man with the flashlight.

He tried, but he could not. Not even Sonia's name, although it was the same in Yiddish and in French. Suddenly he did not know how to say in a foreign tongue, "Sonia, don't mind I'm going to dress you in your prettiest red dress." He could not, it would have been like a sacrilege, as if with his own hands he had opened the brown wounds of the wall opposite, with his own hands brought in the light of heaven for Sonia to lean on, for these men to see her by. "Leave me alone, leave me alone if you want me to be able to persuade her," he said without turning around.

Sonia did not look at him, she had no eyes except for the two plain-clothes men. She was breathing with an effort and with each gulp of air the top of her breast showed above her nightdress where the lace was. With the corner of a sheet Krantz wiped the drip from his sons' noses, dealing

each of them a slap to make them hold still. They doubled their cries and tears and their noses ran twice as much. "Make them shut up, the bastards," said the man with the flashlight.

"They are my sons," said Sonia Krantz, standing on the glory of her transparent body. Her voice was hoarse and wheezing, and her eyes larger than her face. "I will not give you my sons. Go away, go away."

The two plain-clothes men exchanged a glance. A dirty mess. They'd have to knock this Krantz out and haul his wife down by the ears. The kids—experience had shown this—the kids would come galloping after without their having to lay a finger on them. But a dirty mess, with noise and plenty of breakage. Krantz once more was holding his wife by the hips, he was talking to her softly, persuasively, "Sonia, for the love of God, they won't take the children away from us, I promise you they won't take them away, come, the four of us will go together and we'll be back in an hour; Sonia, Sonia, don't mind I'll get your dress for you, you are so pretty in your red dress with the white collar, they'll go out Sonia and you'll get dressed in peace." He could have lifted her and sat her down on the bed, but she would have struggled, and these men upon her with their questing eyes, their tactile eyes. All at once he wanted to cry, to hide his head in Sonia's luxurious belly and cry like Salek and Mietek.

"Listen," he said, facing the policemen. The blood had starched the top of his pajamas, and on his lips hatred rang like a bell. "Listen, you are not going to take my wife away by force. You are not going to fight, two men against an undressed woman. I won't let you." There was a laugh in his blood-crusted face, a spasm which felt to him like a waxen mask. "You hear me, I won't let you. I am not afraid of you." His blond hair stood straight up on his head and his short mustache bristled. "If you want me, I'll come with you. But you will not touch my wife, you will not put your hands on her."

As if the thought of putting their hands on her had suddenly made up their minds for them, the two men lunged upon the Krantz family. After all, they were under orders: they had been told to bring in the people, and they had to obey, and their people had to obey. They didn't like to push folks around, not for nothing anyway, and when the job could be done with tact and distinction it was better for everybody; but if the customers didn't choose to understand when they were treated politely, then it was just too bad for the customers. This pimp, he thought, he was a tough guy. Under their onset Pawel Krantz fell back on the bed, pulling Sonia down in his fall. The policemen followed them down with the whole weight of their bodies, laid hold of the boys, and pitched them toward the door by the arms and legs like quarters of veal. The charitable persons who were standing there caught them as well as they could, but shrieking bucking biting Salek and Mietek made them let go, and a second later were back in the melee on the bed. Near the door a woman had begun sobbing into her painted fingernails, and a man's voice said, "They'll kill them, they'll kill them."

The man's voice had not specified who would kill whom. Four adults and two children were tearing at each other in silence in a cloud of feathers and vegetable fiber, in silence in a tempest of visceral rumblings. Muffled silence of blows, of the soft swelling of battered flesh, and the grunts, the grunts of the men, the woman, the children, the bed. "My bed my bedding the police we've got to call the police," said the proprietor of the rooming house, holding his paunch. "Stick your bed," grumbled someone without budging an inch, while the woman with the lacquered nails bit her lips till they bled. Skewered into the orgy, twisted into the thick of the debauch, like blooded puppies snapping at their shadows the children bit with all their might into the ears of the plain-clothes men, squirmed into their vests, tore their trousers, boring deeper than jiggers. Shaken off like fleas, back they came to the attack, mouths wide open and flames at their snouts, not shouting, not crying, harmless and unpunished—unpunished because, by a prodigy of kindness at the very heart of a prodigy of hate, there was punishment only for grown persons. Under the heavings and joltings the bed had detached itself from the wall and taken to the open. Like a kneading trough insecurely bolted to the floor and subjected to a furious churning, it tried to flee its crew of epileptic rowers, and no one would have imagined that in the narrow space of the room a bed as awkward as this could play the gondola so well. Now one, now the other of the plain-clothes men, now the little boys, now Pawel or Sonia Krantz tumbled overboard, then instantly climbed back over the gunwales as if the floor had indeed changed into the waters of the deluge, and the bed—the skeleton of what had been a bed—into Noah's ark. Her nightdress in shreds, blue with delirium and immense bruises, Sonia Krantz gasped between her teeth, which were sunk into anything that offered itself. She no longer saw clearly, a thousand irons tore her limbs apart, but she had hold of the monster and would not loose her hold, not before the monster was dead and the children safe. She felt alone and strong, alone and strong against a humanity which ate children. In the open window the wall displayed its brown wounds, it matched them with the blue wounds of the naked woman, a wall high and free and a drinker of sunlight, and in the open door charitable persons beat their hands one against the other and said—"ah the brutes ah the brutes." Pawel Krantz did not know any more than his wife did where the blows came from or where they went, again he was in the midst of a prophetic vision, the German artillerymen have bashed their heads against the American visa and then Hitler comes and from his yawning sea lion's mouth he vomits whirlwinds of magic powder in the eyes of the Jewish children, but he, Krantz, stops the yawning mouth, with his arm up to the elbow stops the sorcerer's windpipe and between them from now on accounts will be settled personally and body to body. He felt without fear and without courage, at last the day was come, yet he would have wished to have Sonia there, his memory for dreams was so bad—look Sonia how I handle the sea lion gefülltefish I make out of him, but in a red dress with

a white collar Sonia was out for a walk with the children, all the children of the earth out for a walk with Sonia in a red dress. The bed was a boat, a scenic railway, a kneading trough, a kaleidoscope—snowstorm of feathers, springs, mattress in shreds, masks of melted wax, dark shadow of the pubis brushing mouths shadowed with froth, and the grunt, the grunt of pounded flesh frizzing and fermenting. Holding his paunch with both hands as if he feared for his guts, the proprietor of the rooming house groaned—"my bed my furniture my wallpaper," and the carcass of the bed, broken in two, suddenly collapsed. Punch-drunk with blows given and received, the plain-clothes men also had let their common sense slip away from them. They would have liked to get free of the naked woman, the smiling man, the hornets which buzzed around their ears, to get out of this cursed bed, to allow themselves the required space and distance, and to knock the clients cold with a round of cracks on the occiput, but they were not able, were no longer able, these madmen these bastards would not agree. But they had to get it over, work free some way or other, and worse luck damn the luck go for help, unless they wanted to shoot, let them have it smack in the puss with the contents of their automatics. Either thought was so sickening to the plain-clothes man with the list that he discarded both instantly: call for help or gunplay to subdue a parcel of Polacks—what a comedown it would be! Even as he drove his fist into someone or something, he managed a quick look at his sidekick, a pretty sight he was, his own mother wouldn't recognize him. His own reflections made him forget himself long enough to be rammed in the eye by a head, and kicked in the liver by a heel. A Bickford fuse started sputtering in his meninges and he rolled overboard, squashing one of the young ones under his slack body. At the very instant his head was about to explode an idea was born in it—*Cap de diou!* If snot-noses come galloping after their parents, why wouldn't the latter come galloping after their snot-noses? Holding onto the brat by an ankle he got to his feet, hairy and lumpy and with bells ringing in his skull, there'd be nothing left of poor Madrus but a pulp, a gruel. . . . "Madrus!" he shouted. "Madrus! Grab the other bastard and let's go!" He did not wait for his comrade, folded the child in two, and dove for the door. Wringing their hands the charitable public opened a path for him, then closed it again, and bearing his prize the plain-clothes man legged it down the stairs. "Mietek!" shrieked Sonia Krantz, heaving the three-quarters-demolished plain-clothes man into the air with her joined legs. "Mietek!" she shrieked as if her lungs would burst. Salek was the one the plain-clothes man with the list had snatched, but she no longer saw clearly, no longer heard clearly, calling her youngest, who was caught in her legs of livid marble and was shouting in answer—"yes Mamama yes Mamama!" Tottering, falling, rising again, she threw herself at the door and the charitable public did not open a path for her, the woman was naked, naked and striped and swollen and bloody, it would be a sin to let her go out. Someone made bold to take her by the hand, someone tried to cover her with a coat—"in that condition sweet

Jesus ah the brutes the brutes the mother of a family who's going to go for a doctor," while Sonia shrieked "Mietek! Mietek!" thrashing around in the dark of her puffed eyelids, in the dark of the benevolent voices which were trying to persuade her to be reasonable. Having got rid of the plain-clothes man with the flashlight, blind as his wife and drunk with wounds and contusions, Pawel Krantz in his turn tried to break through the jam at the door, where, tearful and immovable, the neighbors stood shuffling their feet like guilty souls kicking their heels at the ticket window of purgatory on the day the lots are drawn. Belly in hand and suffering a million windy colics, the proprietor of the house had slipped into the room, was inspecting the wreckage and mourning the ruin, meanwhile stepping over the plain-clothes man with the flashlight, who, obstinate and tenacious, was trying to get to his feet, and Sonia was shrieking the name of Mietek, and Mietek was shrieking "Mamama," and Pawel was exhausting his last bit of strength against the dogged altruism of the neighbors. He could not see, could not hear, only Sonia's voice filtered through to him, Sonia must find a way through, must run after their son, their son was calling from far away, farther away than the shores of America, from the farthest depths of the great gaping maw of the sea lion, Sonia could, Sonia would—O Sonia how beautiful you are in your red dress. With a full swing the plain-clothes man with the flashlight brought his handcuffs down on Pawel Krantz's head—O Sonia we shall go to America. He took a step sideways and a step backward, smiling as he would have smiled at ship time—I promised you Sonia O Sonia here is America. A second blow of the handcuffs buckled his knees and he fell full length, face to the floor, on his wedding-day smile. The proprietor of the rooming house jumped to one side, a fingernail more and the fellow would have knocked him down in his fall, and all at once the charitable neighbors invaded the room and began to cut to pieces the plain-clothes man armed with handcuffs. Blind and swollen and clothed in black-and-blue marks, Sonia shrieked the name of her son at the door at last left free, at the door through which the senior plain-clothes man was at last coming in with help, and in a flash she flung herself at the crowd, over the altruistic crowd which was massacring a plain-clothes man guilty of not knowing how to do his duty, plunged over the crowd and glided across the window sill to meet the wall. Gorged with light and all wounds showing, the wall wanted none of her—and as one falls she fell.

"No, Nelly dear, not a word," said Marion into the telephone. "Stay where?" The tears were stopping up Nelly's nose and it was hard for Marion to hear her. "Yes, Nelly, of course, Nelly, but calm yourself, think of your child," she said in a voice of divine clemency. "Everybody's gone already, but Pierre isn't leaving the office. Who? Me? Please, Nelly, try to speak louder. What? Yes, Pierre, until I get back. I'm just going out to get a bite, and Steve will be back too, he's only going to see Mee-mee, it seems she's sick. Yes, sure, we'll call you every ten minutes. You'll see,

whole Suc's in for it. That's what I was telling Cyril when he said he had an idea, and then he went out and didn't come back."

They took a table at the Chink's, at the back of an old house buried in the winding alleys of the Old Port. They were known there, and were greeted with a smile at the entrance to a shabby-looking bedroom. "Hungry?" asked a Chinese who might have been only an Annamite, showing a row of gold teeth in a face of ivory. They passed through a nook clogged with old furniture and trappings, then through another bedroom, and from there into a windowless chamber that smelled like an operating room, in which several persons, seated around little dissecting tables, juggled their black chopsticks in a series of bowls full of anatomic hash. The waiter brought them rice, four different kinds of chopped meat, thirteen vegetables minced into crumbs, soya sauce, hot tea, and a lot of profound bows. Squeezing Steve's knees between her own, Marion said that strictly between him and her it wouldn't surprise her, not by a long shot, if Laverne turned out to be a stool pigeon. "Look at it yourself, Steve," she said in a voice with which she would have pleaded for the life of a sinner. "Last night you catch him in the middle of this obscure business. I say obscure, because it endangers the life of the Suc and the security of a hundred people, and in parentheses it's not the first time he's done his best to sink the place. Next, this morning he doesn't come to work. You, Steve, you're talking to Cyril, Cyril goes out, and right after that in walks Laverne and wants to see Cyril. . . . You see how it fits together? It's suspicious already, because since the day Cyril told the Control Commission and the Permanent Commissioners to go to the devil, he and Laverne haven't said a word to each other. Note that the coincidence is curious, to say the least: Cyril goes out and disappears, and Laverne walks in and asks for Cyril. A classic, when it's a question of building an alibi."

"I'm damned," said Steve, with his mouth full of meat choppings, "I'm damned. Go on, Marion, it's damn well thought out."

"We're present, you and I," Marion continued, adjusting her calves around Futeau's, "when, with Cyril absent, he sees Pierre. You didn't notice it, but in spite of his pretense of not being disturbed he seemed nervous, a little like someone that the soles of his feet are burning him. I never took my eyes off him, so I know what I'm talking about. So then he tells Pierre what you heard, that we'd have to be ready for a visit from the police to the Suc, recommends firing Françoise as soon as the alarm is past, gives advice like someone who knows how police investigations go, refuses to say where his information comes from, then beats it like he's afraid he'll give himself away. You don't have to be a Sherlock Holmes to put that one together. First of all it's simple, isn't it, Steve? Someone who knows so much about the plans of the police, it's because he's got a finger in them. I've thought about it all day, but it was only when you told me . . ."

"Why didn't you ever say anything to me, my pretty?" Futeau cut in. He looked at her with an expression of puzzled astonishment. Was she

. . . was she playing footy with him? Her face looked redder than usual, but maybe that was from chewing. Pushing with his knees, he spread Marion's knees apart—by gad, yes, she was letting him go ahead, she had a lech for him, this fat-bottomed Marion. "How did you expect me to know, my pigeon?" he said.

"Ah, but I had to be sure, Steve my pet," she said in the voice of one swooning. "I had to be . . ." All at once she saw that he wasn't asking her about Laverne, but about herself and him, Steve Futeau. A film of damp heat covered her whole body. ". . . sure," she continued, changing horses without letting on, "that I wouldn't be calling in the wilderness. I've got my pride too, Steve . . ."

"Me the wilderness?" said Futeau, pointing to himself with his chopstick. He patted her knee under the table, left his hand there. "See how badly I'm misunderstood? Even you, Marion . . ." She was fat to the touch, and willing, giving in nicely, under the squared tablecloth. Marion protested with resignation in her voice—not her, she understood him, and Futeau's Adam's apple went up and came down again. "Come on, let's go back to the Suc and pack Pierre off to his dinner," he said, exploring what was under the tablecloth. They were about to call for the bill when Marc Laverne pulled up a chair and settled himself at their table.

"Don't look so surprised, stay put," he said, pulling on a cigarette that had gone out. Marion and Steve stayed put, the latter's hand under the former's skirt. Laverne put his elbows on the table, so as not to get in anybody's way. "Don't interrupt me, I'll only be a minute. I dropped in here by chance, looking for someone. But since I find you here, I can give you some news. There's reason to think that the investigation at the Suc will be put off three or four days, time for police headquarters to catch their breath. The force is too busy with its Jew hunt. They went at it like novices, and a lot of things went wrong. That's that. I was up to the office a half hour ago and saw Musaraigne. He's waiting for you. I told him that in my opinion it wasn't necessary to spend the night there sleeping on tables. Daubigny, if he turns up, would go home to his wife first. What's more, I don't think he'll turn up, not tonight in any case. No, let me finish, I'm in a hurry. This afternoon I hopped out to see Nelly. She looked worried to death to me. It might not be a bad idea for you to go out and keep her company, Marion. In short, I learned, a word at a time, that this morning, before leaving the house, Daubigny changed his suit and shirt. This little detail no doubt explains how he came to forget his identity papers."

"But I didn't know anything about all this," said Steve Futeau. "I should have been told, for God's sake!"

"Nelly didn't know it herself," said Laverne. "She's in such a trance that I hesitated to tell her. I discovered Daubigny's papers in the inside pocket of the coat he was wearing the day before. It's as plain as the nose on your face that he was caught in a roundup. With that not very Aryan mug of his, and nothing to prove his old French nobility, he's certainly been

thrown in with the rest of the rubbish. Where? I have no idea. The first thing tomorrow one of you go have a look around the Milles camp. The Jews who were picked up were sent to Milles. Maybe he'll be there. So long."

He pulled on his cigarette, which was still out, and was gone. Marion and Steve exchanged a hesitant glance. With his usual smile on his gold teeth, the Annamite, who might really be a Chinese, brought the bill. It came to three hundred and eighty francs in round figures.

"Pay it, Marion," said Steve Futeau, taking his hands from under the tablecloth. "Pay it and let's go and relieve Pierre. And then this Laverne, no matter what he says, we'll spend the night waiting for Cyril, won't we, my pretty?"

"Yes, my Steve," said Marion in the voice of an early Christian martyr. "The whole night, my Steve. You can't trust a word he says, the lowlife."

"Act natural. Walk straight ahead."

Marc Laverne "acted natural," but bore to his left at the first crossing he came to. Straight ahead: as it happened, that was how he was going—straight to Emilio Lopez's attic. So the forward-march order gave him a strong preference for detours. As he walked he tried to judge the age, the corpulence, the eventual agility of the policeman. As long as the other man paid no attention to the route and let him go where he wished, Laverne would try to work his way through the narrow streets, into the heart of the clammy maze of high, crooked walls, where a plunge into the dark would have some chance of success. "No funny business, Laverne. Not with me," said the man, drawing out his words. His voice was as thick as his body, the powerful outline of which rubbed against Laverne's shoulder. "You know, I'm disappointed in you," the man said, tapping him on the elbow with his finger.

"It might even be the honorable Inspector Espinasse in person," said Laverne, not looking at the man. He was trying to make out whether there were any more policemen at their heels. "How nice to meet you! How are you, Inspector?"

A rumbling sound came from the inspector's chest. "Not so good, thanks, and you?" he said, as though talking into a kettledrum. He gave him another tap on the elbow with his finger. "Where were you on your way to, Laverne?"

"To go swimming on my back and count the stars," said Laverne.

"Huh . . ." said the inspector, and they walked on peaceably. So it was Espinasse, Espinasse of the Sûreté Générale rechristened National Security inspector in Paris before the debacle, political division.—Assigned to the Marseilles Prefecture, or on special mission? Laverne wondered. It came to him that Espinasse must have run into him by accident, not being a man to chase after his quarry himself. His taste was not for running down the quarry, but for dressing it after it was taken. The first time Espinasse had had a bone to pick with Laverne was the day after an office of the

*Action Française* had been sacked, an expedition in the course of which one of the royalist bully boys had left an eye behind him; and the most recent was at the time of the Munich agreement, as the result of an article described as "inciting the military to disobedience." Espinasse's specter had a bad reputation among the initiate, and falling into his hands promised nothing to look forward to with pleasure. Although he seldom resorted to violence, those who had passed through his back room at Sûreté headquarters regarded him as a sadist of the first water. Thirty years on the job had thickened his skin but refined his instincts; and under a boorish exterior he cultivated a delicate love of questioning a suspect, digging into him, taking him apart piece by piece—a love for "mosaic work," according to his own terminology. He combined the talents of a confessor and a vicious psychoanalyst. But he was particularly redoubtable for the exceptional keenness of his scent, for the infallibility of his memory. He would identify the author of a text by the turn of a phrase or by the punctuation, and he never forgot a face, a walk, a thing said. Laverne remembered the man's highly personal way of doing things. He seemed to cherish his quarry once he had it in hand—to take charge of it, to make its future his own business. Just as a family physician keeps in touch with his patients' state of health, Espinasse never lost sight of the tracks of his wild beasts; but, like all superior practitioners, he was really interested only in special cases—in the young catch, often still unripe, but with good bloodlines. When his net brought in a specimen whose breed he recognized, he would put it back in circulation after taking its measurements, and not the anthropometric measurements alone. He was known for having broken, then corrupted, a number of young members of the movement, and for having reared the most remarkable generation of provocateurs to infest the ranks of French revolutionaries since Vidocq's day. His knowledge of the European working-class movement, from the earliest French equivalents of Brook Farm to the latest theses of the Fourth International, combined with a secondhand understanding of Marxism, had taught him that socialism was no "pretty Utopian idea," but a reality which could not be put down by filling the prisons to the doors. Moreover, socialism as such did not worry him particularly; he did not allow himself enough time to see its first gleams lighting up the sky of France. Life had made him a specialist in the struggle against the revolutionaries, and he did not hate his victims any more than the torero hates the bulls; on the contrary, he liked them when their condition was good, their weight standard, and they charged straight. His appetite was not titillated by small fry, nor by the harmless whales which any bungler could harpoon without getting out of his bunk; and reform-school sentences were not in his line. A skilled hunter, he did not slaughter his game—not before the proper time. The political beast was of a different complexion than the common run: he liked it plump, ample in volume, rich with its full quota of stearin; he wanted the bleeding to be a treat to see. He was patient, he worked on a long-term basis. It sometimes

soft face was covered with soft blotches. "A boy who goes by the name of Michel," he said. "He was last seen in Bordeaux, when the court job was pulled." His voice came out of the insides of a tom-tom, it seemed to go on and on. "I would like you to tell me if you know him."

"I don't read the papers," said Laverne.

"I'm not asking you to tell me where he's hanging out. Probably you don't know. But you might know if . . ."

He did not finish, as if the strings of his bass fiddle had broken all at once.—This is really bad, thought Laverne. He could not remember Espinasse tripping over his tongue ever before. The words held back vibrated and vibrated in the inspector's chest. What did he want to know, and what was it he knew so little about? Good luck and a long life to him, if he was running after Michel. Revolvers drawn, Michel and two others had invaded a German military court, when three of their men were about to be condemned to death. An Oberst, a Hauptmann, a sentinel, a French gendarme were killed. High-tension work. The following night on the docks at La Rochelle a German patrol had riddled a cyclist with bullets. The corpse was identified as being that of a certain Alfred Jacquinet, laborer, twenty-eight years old, birthplace Béthune. It was Michel. Laverne heard of it two weeks later from a messenger who came to Marseilles. He had not known the man. He fished in the bottom of his pockets for a cigarette. "But you're a liar," said the inspector, taking away his finger.

"It runs in the family," said Laverne.

He crumbled some tobacco dust and ashes into a cigarette paper. "Huh . . ." went the inspector, and blew his nose. His handkerchief rose and disappeared like a breath on a frosty night. "You think I'm a louse," he said.

"No," said Marc Laverne. "I never think of you at all." It seemed to him that the inspector's heavy step had become heavier. Far below them the sea was talking to itself, far above them the sky was gone. Laverne wet the edge of the paper and rolled a thin cigarette. "I'd give you a decent cigarette if you asked me," said the inspector, talking down a rain barrel. Laverne did not ask, and the inspector did not offer him a cigarette. They had retraced their steps, and once more the old city greeted them with its swampy scum.

"Look here, Laverne, you're pretty young to be taking me where I had no intention of going." A sound like the rolling of a drum came from far down in the mass of his body. "Those stickers—'People of Marseilles, unite against, et cetera'—your fingerprints were all over that job. I don't know who printed them yet, but a couple of days will settle that. In July you were in Lyons at a secret gathering of the 'Revolutionary Left.' You made three reports, one on the situation and outlook of the Resistance, one on the strike movement in England since 1940, one on the Russian internal picture. The leading articles of at least two underground papers are yours. I'm fairly sure you had something to do with the attempted robbery at the Toulon arsenal. I'm practically certain that you've been to

Switzerland, and that you brought back tommy guns and grenades. I've got enough on you to send you to the guillotine five times over. But I'm not going to pull you in."

He stopped talking, and they went on several paces in silence. Two stink bombs ran down the pavements like will-o'-the-wisps. Or were they the eyes of a cat? Laverne was wondering who the stool pigeon was. "You want to know who the stool pigeon is," said the inspector. "He works for me. For me exclusively. I will tell you who he is. You can put him out of the way, and I won't raise a finger." He was talking from the bottom of a well, far down from the bottom of his chest. "On one condition. You will tell me if they caught Michel. You must know if they caught him. You can answer in one word: yes, no. Michel is my son."

Laverne stopped to light his cigarette. The inspector did not stop, and at once the high, crooked walls closed over him. His step became less heavy, then cottony, then remote. In Laverne's hands the match flame died beneath the weight of the night.

THE A.R.S. DELEGATE SPOKE FIVE LANGUAGES RATHER well, and a sixth rather badly, but no language in his repertory was understandable to Katty Braun. She simply did not listen. With a half smile on her drawn features—she had always smiled with one eye and one corner of her lips—and her cough held back so as not to interrupt, she watched him talk and did not listen. “Katty,” said the A.R.S. delegate, “we’re working on your case, you know, and your consul is taking care of it, and the Red Cross too, soon you’ll be released.” He took her by the hand to make his lies more convincing. “And the Swiss consulate is studying your files, Katty, but you’ve got to drink this milk.” He knew that she was not going to be released, neither she nor any one of the two hundred women who peopled this shady hotel converted into a camp—not soon, not ever. He knew that in a day or two days or perhaps in an hour they were going to be taken away—most of them, at any rate—toward the great release which was due them, and he said to one, “How do you spell the first name of your uncle the farmer in Wisconsin,” and to another he delivered a telegram from her daughter in Chile, “You see everything comes in time, this says your visa has been granted,” and he told Katty Braun to wet her cough in the can of American milk he had brought her. Katty freed the hand he had taken, freed the cough too long held back. “Four billion bacilli in twenty-four hours,” she said, wiping her mouth. Her half smile wandered over the group of women who surrounded her and the man from the A.R.S. “How I wish you would help me figure it out,” she said, coughing into her handkerchief. “Won’t you help me? How much is four billion? It isn’t enough, is it?” She coughed and coughed, bent over by the effort, trying to spit out an additional yield of bacilli. “If only I knew how many that is,” she said, making a ball of the handkerchief tinted with garnet foam. With a sweep of her hand she threw back her string-colored hair, uncovering the eye which did not smile. “Today I coughed a great deal, maybe I’ll have more than the four billion. Won’t you help me count them?” None of the women would help. The man from the A.R.S. wondered if they would have agreed to count four billion had they known that their time was coming, that soon they

would be taken as never women were taken before. Maybe they would have. Maybe they would be glad because anyway it will be a long journey over vast stretches of green earth lying under great tumbled masses of bright sky, and as long as you’re traveling you haven’t arrived anywhere, whereas this hotel, cut off from the air, the sun, the seasons, peopled with nocturnal terrors, with depraved guards, with Paolo the idiot, in this hotel the women went back over their steps, over their years, slowly up the rugged slope of madness. “Yes, Katty,” said the man from the A.R.S., “if you drink this milk you will have more than four billion.”

She had arrived less than three weeks before, empty-handed and without even a fresh handkerchief, and with this cough, as if inside her, in her chest, someone was splitting logs. She was surrounded, interrogated, felt by inquisitive fingers—who are you, why are you, and if they still give exit ships, and if the steam visas continue to come in, and if it’s true that it’s false, and what cossacks the Russians are aren’t they—a newcomer being like a traveler fallen from a probable world into a conjectural world, from a possible planet to a hypothetical planet. Here, within these walls encrusted with bedbugs, smirched with urine, time had no backbone, the light penetrated only by hearsay, and the things of life, left in suspense, were deposited and stratified into the mold of memory. The women believed that on the outside a tomato was always reddened by the sun, that the merry-go-round always enchanted grown people, that men smiled in answer to a smile. They believed. The thoughts and images and dreams which through the years had stamped themselves in traceries of stone on the memory now gave up their fossils. The women had forgotten nothing. The probable world from which the newcomers were landing could not but continue the world in which they had left their footprints. They did not believe that you needed the permission of two governments and several police agencies to gather daisies in a meadow, that the towns of their birth were less safe than the African jungle, that a German, even one with hernia, with goiter, was worth two dozen Frenchmen, even blond ones. They did not believe. Their reminiscences restored a gracious planet, polite manners, easy visas, kisses in the dark, and no sin that an alms taketh not away. They had forgotten everything. “Wait awhile, you complain of the food, you’ll see what it’s like,” they said. For the maintenance of each one of them the penitentiary administration of the department paid seventeen francs to Madame Odile, but Madame Odile had her fortune to make—“everyone for himself and God for all and isn’t it a lot already for the Marshal to bother with all these greedy-guts.” No threat of death by slow strangulation would have kept the greedy-guts from fleeing their “hotel.” They listened to the newcomers—five francs for a cigarette, the eyes out of your head for a pound of potatoes, visas torpedoed, steamships annulled, carryings off by night, hostages by oven batches, and they shook their heads—“a paradise, the bosom of God, wait wait, you’ll see in a couple of days.” Many were old backsliders, some had known more camps than they could count on their fingers,

and yet for each one of them the last patch of earth stitched around with barbed wire had acquired, by comparison with Madame Odile's establishment, a sort of goodness in retrospect. Yes of course the mud and the dysentery and the vitamin deficiency and the frozen hands and feet, yes sure the scrofulous children and the collective hysteria and the libidinous sergeants, yes of course but goodness nonetheless—the cloud dipping down to the barracks, the peasant on his cart, the tenacious grass between two stones, and the horizon, the secret line of the horizon over which someone was going to come, something was going to happen, as it is promised for the day of redemption. "Wait wait, you didn't want to leave where you were," they had said to Katty Braun, nodding their heads comprehendingly. "From here you'll want to leave through the walls." But Katty Braun would have wished to leave through herself, to go out body and soul. She had come with the half of a smile on her filigree features, and a breathing like the rattle of glass in her chest. "I had a friend, she used to come and sleep in my room on the quiet," she related. Shut up in her room whose window looked out on the street, on the faces of men, on living dogs, confined there with her cough which set her cheeks afire just at the time Marianne Davy came in with a bite to eat which she did not eat, she read Proust and dreamed of young girls in flowers and young men in gaiters. Then, one day somebody knocked at the door of her room. "Katty Braun, Luxemburger, please come with us and no scenes." She went with them, a little girl between two young men without gaiters, and there was no carriage, no horses frisking at the door. They walked along the streets, passed from one quarter into another quarter, and she saw very clearly that everything was changed since she and Swann had held hands under the Tuileries linden tree. She came in a little skirt, empty-handed, with her breath that went like a sawmill and her cough that went like wood splitting and a half smile, and she had nothing with which to quench the thirst of her companions, whose eyes, filled with petrified memories, were also in search of things past. But the women were patient, they knew how to extract her story from her a scrap at a time, a flat gray story like the polders in the Flemish country where she had gone to stay with her Belgian uncles, whence she had returned, yes on foot, yes through the green Ardennes, yes through fair shamefaced France. A grenade had blown her parents to pieces, two brothers had vanished between two roundups, a third had disappeared on the road to England, and she was here with her smile divided in half and a crew of woodchoppers in her chest. "No, home I didn't cough," she said, untangling her pale hair, enameled with sweat by the evening fever. "Home I went and sat down with Proust in the field behind the house. I read and I looked at France." Some wanted to know who this Proust was with whom she went and looked at France in the field behind the house, and others wanted to know if her father was rich, if her mother made cakes, if in Luxemburg they didn't like Jews. She was pretty sure her father was rich, she had never seen a Jew, and her mother made good

cakes. "No, not to America," she said, crouching on the floor and coughing into her knees. "I'm not going to America." The child seemed to live backward, she was not going to America. "Our consul pays for my room, they're going to send me to Switzerland, and Marianne used to bring me food." She even had a consul. "Well then if you have a consul, what are you doing at Mother Odile's?" Katty Braun did not understand. "Odile, the boss of this . . . of this . . ." They could find no word to describe the funerary mound in which they made their habitat. But maybe the little one was not telling the truth, what Marianne would have given her food since from the moment she came here no one had seen her put a bite in her mouth, it was as if she had lost the habit. "Go ahead and eat, you silly thing, it's sewer water but eat it anyway," they had said at the beginning, but Katty smiled with one eye and with the other she did not smile, saying, "In a minute, but now I'm going to look for a window." A window—she'd been struck with the idea the third day of her stay in the camp. She wandered over the two floors of the building, through the fourteen rooms gorged with women bleached by the electric light, from window to window, every one cut off by thick boards carefully fitted together, in which by dint of patience and rage and broken fingernails the "boarders" had pried out a knot or broached a hole. They tried to dissuade her—"stay quiet, little coughbox, you can see windows are condemned, that's to make us fairer and fatter for the day of the feast"—but the little coughbox did not listen, no longer listened. She had been to see the guards, saying, "I have to go home and get the window, I forgot to bring my window," and the guards answered, "Sure, sure, cutie, get two while you're at it, but wait till it's day." At roll call, at the time supposedly of the morning when beyond the dead windows the light was beginning to hail the awakening of the earth and when the women were counted and recounted by men who touched them on the breasts, Katty stepped out of the line and asked if it was day because she had to go and get the window. The man on duty put his hand on her hip—"with all due respect, mademoiselle, right away mademoiselle, a window like a flower, and on a silver platter so it will be pretty, but wait till it's day," and it was the strict truth because the electric bulb was still weeping from the ceiling. She stepped back into line, her grave eye became very grave indeed, it looked at the women with an expression which made them ill, for they had been quick to see that to Katty Braun "window" was another word for Proust, for France behind the house, for the coughless years in the limitless fields. Bracing herself on the walls saturated with viscous ooze, she faltered down the corridors, entered each room, made her way to the eyeless window, and with her hands flat on the panks she coughed until no sound came any longer. "Try them, try them, you're the one who didn't want to go out," said this one, and that one said, "Why don't you sit still, you drive me crazy with all this coming and going." There were about fifteen women in each room, curled up on the floor, overlapping one another, dozing, picking their vermin, almost naked, almost asphyxiated,



young and old, ugly and less ugly, and all resembling a subterranean vegetation. The electric bulb shed a light the color of a fistula, a sick gutter light, day and night and forever, and every place where a woman had taken off her dress or was massaging her calf or scratching her ribs, Paolo the idiot, the idiot son of Mother Odile, was there, prowling around her. Before anyone could fend him off he was in the midst of them, spread out flat on his protuberant belly, and with the eyes of a stillborn calf he looked between their legs. They picked up a spoon, a shoe, they cracked him on his gray skull, his squash-soft skull, and Paolo, openmouthed and rare of tooth, said nothing and looked between their legs. A guard would come and plant himself at the door, that Paolo, vicious as a monkey ha-ha, and he held his sides to see the new ones, the ones who were not accustomed to the usages of the house, waste their blood trying to drive out the head woman's offspring—two hundred and forty pounds and fourteen years old. "Bat him all you like my dears ha-ha," said the man on the doorsill holding his sides, and Paolo did nothing, said nothing, did not even try to evade the blows, he stayed flat on his belly—a mass of acephalous gelatin with calf's eyes looking into the insides of the women. But he too little by little became a habit, like the vermin and the policemen's paws and the absence of life and the presence of life, like hope, like the monomania of Katty Braun. Katty flattened her face against the planks over the windows, her smiling eye glued to a crack, her grave eye hold closed by a finger, until a fit of coughing tore her away and sat her on the floor. It was broad daylight, she would go out and get the window, didn't any of them want to help her to convince the man that the day was really waiting for her outside, outside there behind the planks? None of them wanted to. They had stopped reasoning with her or answering her questions, the little coughbox refused to eat, to sleep, to understand that no one here knew anything about windows that little girls from Luxemburg have left behind them under the oak tree, alongside their seesaw—refused to understand that they knew perhaps too much about such things. Each one of them had lost something someplace and first of all windows that were all the more beautiful because they were lost, the woman from the Saar whose husband had voted for France, the Estonian whose brother had got himself killed for France, the Czech who for a cigarette slept with the guards, the Russian who combed her hair and combed it and combed it, murmuring in a singsong voice, "I am white as a dove and I am whiter than the doves," the Spaniard who knelt and blasphemed, beating her forehead on the sticky wall—"tuve dos hijos y me los mataron y tuve dos maridos y me los mataron oh Virgen santisima es que aguantas cuatro hombres de una vez oh gran puta santisima," and the hundred and ninety others, each with her marvelous colic, her iliac passion unlike all other passions—listen on Pentecost the girls of the village went down to the Danube to wash away their sins and in our house they took out the linen cloth and the silver goblet—listen listen at fifteen I had hair so beautiful that the lords came from all over Moravia—listen

listen listen on summer evenings when the breeze from Majorca came over the water and blew up the ramblas Joselito and I—"Listen, don't you want to tell the man to let me go . . ." They did not want to tell the man. They had had mantillas of Córdoba lace, mats of Bohemian glass, mirrors of Danube water, each had her window of rock crystal just as the little coughbox had hers, and they did not believe that the man with the glutinous fingers could ever give it back to them because he could never take it away. So on the twelfth day the little coughbox had begun to spit blood, and on the fourteenth day she said:

"Four billion bacilli, how much is four billion?"

As if a fog composed of billions of crystals had settled on her memory and gripped her in a white frost, overnight she forgot the cracks and the fissures through which she had communicated with herself. "Look, it's red," she had said to one of her companions at her first attack of blood spitting. "Why is it red, madame?"

"Because you don't eat," said Madame.

"It's because I haven't got my window, don't you want to . . ."

"Nobody will want to as long as you don't eat. If you would eat you'd kill the bacilli, the bacilli are what makes the red, and you have a lot of them."

"I'm eighteen," said Katty Braun.

"A lot," said Madame. "Four billions every twenty-four hours."

She had seen this figure or maybe had heard someone mention it, and it came to the tip of her tongue just right for Katty Braun, a Luxemburger with pale hair and the half of a smile and a breathing like the rattle of garnet glass in her chest. "How much is four billion?" she said, smiling with one eye and not smiling with the other. "I could spit them all out, couldn't I spit them all out, but if only you wanted to help me." "Look, Katty, here are some handkerchiefs and a can of condensed milk," said the man from the A.R.S. He turned to the women who stood in a circle around them but they shook their heads comprehendingly—the little coughbox won't drink, won't rest, she wanted to know how much time it would take her to clean out her chest four billion bacilli at a time, and no one was willing to hold the spittoon for her, not even the consul, she had a consul, not even the Red Cross, not even Paolo the idiot.

The women were moved out in the afternoon, under the eyes of a crowd of gloomy bystanders. The nocturnal roundup had occasioned so many disagreeable incidents, it had developed into such a hurly-burly despite the elegance of the French method, that the authorities, to get it over with, took the bull by the horns, and, putting the German method into practice, continued by day a job which was created to be done by night. The Germans were crude, refinement of manners was not their dish, but at least they were efficient and not tortuous: a punch in the jaw—since there were always punches to distribute and jaws to get in their way—ought to be administered clean and quick and ungrudgingly. After

all, an untimely gallantry and urbanity were survivals of the old regime; hence the authorities put things to rights in a jiffy, thus giving proof of ready wit and revolutionary initiative.

Although the new measures were indeed an innovation, the use of the Black Marias was due to the exigencies of the situation itself. Keeping the Germans supplied with Jews and the city population with vegetables had, in fact, made the problem of rolling stock a grave one. At the insistent demand of the Secretary of State for Food Supply, the general who presided over the destinies of national defense had resigned himself to seeing the rare trucks, and the little fuel left him under the armistice, degraded to the obscure role of a delivery service, and the army itself reduced to the ignoble role of storekeeper. But he had come close to waxing really angry when it was proposed that he should transport the Jews. He swore that damn it the Jews could walk, had the Pharaohs put camels at their disposal when they were chased out of Egypt, and while they were at it why not offer the Jews a cruiser to carry them to Palestine? While they were at it and at the rate the general saw things going, from the trucking of vegetables through the shipping of Jews, the next thing they would ask him to do would be to unleash his six 75's—the army's inalienable goods—and make war on the drought by shooting at the clouds to produce rainfall. Nevertheless he consented to resign himself on the basis of a categorical promise: this latest infringement on his honor was in no case to exceed one short night. But it was clear that he was angry; and when, at the expiration of one short night, he was asked for a short day in addition, he talked of resigning, and if he did not lay his saber on the table it was because the armistice had deprived him of it. The President of the Council, wearing a white tie and with dandruff showing on the lapels of his coat, had to display much of his proverbial adroitness in order to bend the patriotism of his Secretary of State; and in the end, thanks to a compensation—in this case a pass for a three-day trip to Paris—the general agreed to compromise, and a situation was avoided in which the Jews would once more have brought about a cabinet crisis. The Southeast Military Command was notified that it was to place fifteen vehicles at the service of the Prefecture of the Bouches-du-Rhône Department, and the Marseilles police, with all patrol wagons going full blast, were able to bring a task badly begun to a felicitous conclusion.

The person most deeply grieved, the one whom the stroke of force against the foreigners well-nigh pulverized with despair, was Madame Odile. No doubt her idiot son, Paolo the idiot, also had reason to look upon existence with a jaundiced eye, the women's departure deprived him of his one sustained and consistent activity, but at least he did not have the use of speech with which to exhale his regrets, and besides, it is a notorious fact that youth is speedily consoled. On the contrary, Madame Odile possessed every resource of speech to give outward expression to her pain, and she was no longer in the age of youth which is a consolation in

itself. Every day for a year and a half she had expended herself without stint in order to keep her little world alive and have it wait for better times, accepting every sacrifice to the end that the gentlemen of the Prefecture, the penitentiary division, and even the guard service, might be gratified, for although her thirties were behind her she was not bereft of palpable charms—eighteen months of her life devoted to these poor creatures who had neither roof nor hearth, to provide them with roof and hearth and soup and quiet—and now look. That morning, as soon as she saw the face of the fellow from one of these busybody American outfits, a fellow with his head on backward as if someone had been using it for a top, she had a nasty premonition. She knew them, the grumblers, the name-callers, in their view her place should be a residence for noble young ladies—on a measly pittance of seventeen francs per blockhead—and if it chanced that they did not go sticking their noses into the soup kettle, weighing the bread rations, examining the bedbug bites with a magnifying glass, it was as sure as clockwork that something was wrong with their digestive system, just like Paolo whenever he lost interest in the undersides of women. The premonition a mother would have. At ten o'clock a stranger appeared bearing an official note which advised Madame Odile *veuve* Sapinière that the persons interned in her hotel were to be moved out that very day, starting early in the afternoon, in five groups of forty individuals each, for which reason the said lady was ordered to take all steps necessary to facilitate the transfer of the said internees, in other words to have them ready with arms and baggage and ration cards—since no delay was to hamper the operation. Moreover, the note announced the arrival of two men who would assist the lady and the staff of guards.

It was one of those blows of ill fortune which can undo the proudest natures. Madame Odile ran to the Prefecture, knocked on door after door, got herself rudely snubbed, wound up in the office of Monsieur de Pontillac, got herself turned out before she had time to open her mouth. Yet she had thought out her speech, a speech that came from her heart, from the depths of her motherly kindness.—Where are they going to pack them off to now these poor women and why messieurs because if it's some competitor with a lower price Madame Odile will sacrifice herself for sixteen francs for instance or fifteen-fifty a ruinous rate messieurs but it's a matter of affection of attachment some of the guests are with Madame Odile an awful long time seeing them leave what a heartbreak messieurs and why the expenses of the journey and of putting them in a new place and all and on the contrary there is room at Madame Odile's lots of room fifty more persons could be taken care of and for fifteen francs and filet of beef costing what it does and then the gentlemen know the house cross her heart Madame Odile has always made them welcome there heh heh and Sapinière her late husband had left two or three of those old liqueurs that make the night pass quicker that is Madame Odile is thinking of the time and these poor women messieurs some of them cough and others

have trouble with their legs and others they need attention so to speak and who is the competitor a slave trader an exploiter because why if the competitor takes less than fourteen francs she's a thief a procuress a Jewess and you the gentleman with the sanctimonious pan and you the other hypocrite how much is she paying you the crook wait till Madame Odile gets talking does the competitor the double-crosser does she look better lying down then Madame Odile when she is lying down or what or maybe you're not the pussyfooter who comes rubbing around up at the hotel gandering the women through the keyhole that even to Paolo it stinks and look at the other sly-puss over there with his double-talk and not two weeks ago he mits his three hundred francs at Madame Odile's plus an hour of goings on on the sofa and now they're for the competitor the Freemasons the Degaulists the snakes in the grass the and what's she got that Madame Odile hasn't got better suspension or what or wait till Madame Odile says her say bunch of pious frauds you'll see what will come out of it gentlemen thirteen-fifty those poor things they're not built for traveling some of them will turn their toes up if you move them and for thirteen francs yes Madame Odile will immolate herself at thirteen or else hell and damnation messieurs Madame Odile will teach you a thing or two. But Madame Odile did not succeed in delivering this discourse, and it was she who was put out, between two bailiffs, and roughly. She returned to her hotel filled with indignation over such duplicity, all these white slavers pulling the wool over the Marshal's eyes, just to think of it made her so miserable that she cried. She cried twice as hard when she had to give up every single food-ration card because the two flatfeet they sent so-called to help her would give her no help at all, down to the last cheese ticket the brutes, were they going to line their own pockets the rats, a fortune, her fortune, eighteen months of work and self-forgetfulness. What would she ever do now, this rabbit hutch fit to lodge a couple of dozen down-and-outs, Paolo fit for a padded cell, herself beginning to lose her zip. She shut herself in her room and made herself a ham sandwich and a cup of chocolate: she couldn't bear to preside at the departure of her boarders, who were tripping off with grins on their faces, the ingrates, the greedy-guts.

The greedy-guts go tripping off, they smile as they go. They don't know where they're being taken and they walk into the light of day as under an arch of triumph. And even if they knew. Under the soles of their feet the flagstones of the sidewalk have the softness of moss, and never was there sky so wide. They smile at the bystanders who watch them smile, they would like to touch them with their fingers, ask them their first names and if they are from around here. Around here is certainly a rich country, the fragrance of lavender is everywhere, a vast country, you can't see the end of the street. They leave, and the sun comes along with them, a sun with each woman—and what does the destination matter? Another camp no doubt, other Paolos in or out of uniform, all roads lead to death, but the fourteen boarders who left feet first from Madame Odile's were

wrong to forget that the plant grows ever green, that the clouds always catch fire in the morning, that great is the patience of the earth. They haul themselves into the Black Maria and look at the people, the pavement, the street corners, and they look at each other, what truth there is in a man's step, in a child's gesture, and it was as if they were saying to each other, We have not been cheated out of anything since the things of the earth knew we would come back and here they are all of them with their goodness of yesterday and tomorrow, and it was as if they were saying to each other, See woman you come into the world naked and no wiser than your mother before you and her mother before her and back and back to when they cut flints with their teeth, naked and hardly the strength in your mouth to drink from a nipple, but with the first drop of milk and the first drop of light, which are the same since who knows how long, things begin to awaken, to open their branches and take you into their devotion. It was as if they were saying things like these to each other, since the Russian no longer sings of being whiter than the doves, the Spaniard is not blaspheming, Katty Braun is rediscovering France behind the house, and since things really did wait for them, at each step waited faithful and so indestructible and so faithful. Things are the witness that does not speak false—see woman they come to you from the Russian *izba*, from the southern slope of the Pyrenees, come to meet you on the broad road to Aix-en-Provence and hold each other by the hand, form a chain all along the road of your journey and wherever you go they salute you, this maple tree like the maple tree in Bratislava and this willow weeping in the stream as it is right for it to weep and this black mulberry so black and even the olive tree which grows here and only here. The Black Maria rolls on, unfolding new expanses of warm earth, unfolding slices of horizon as the folds of a fan fall open. The women look at each other, finding again their common kindness, and if they do not speak it is because any word, any laugh, would profane this hour in which the things of the earth kneel down and adore them. They know, how could they help knowing, soon another camp will come, they know, soon it will be the waking up in the vermin-ridden night, but this is the hour of pardon, for everything, even pardon, is still possible.

In the immense courtyard hemmed in between immense flat buildings of weather-wasted brick, three thousand human beings, each with his bundle and his anthropometric card issued by the office stood shuffling their feet near the great portal, which was guarded by a squad of gendarmes. Last name—first name—nationality—Jew—non-Jew—visa—no visa. Under the lowering heat, under the dome of dust which rose from the crawling swarm, languages and dialects wove interminable, senseless questions. Since the early hours of the dawn new consignments had poured in ceaselessly, men and women and children of every appearance and extraction, and immediately each one began to pivot in the closed circuit of his past, with his brain drained white by dint of fantastic calcula-

tions. Verification of identity . . . They all belabored these three words, right side up and upside down and inside out, as if in the end some spark should jump from them. For years they had been subjected to unrelenting verifications, they had been measured by micrometer and tested with aniline dyes, as if they were staphylococci that spoke Hebrew or perhaps streptococci or tadpoles perhaps. For years. If only the verifiers would agree finally and once and for all—these visa hunters, they're branchiosaurs, they're Cro-Magnons just down from the top of Mount Carmel. . . . But an awful sentence lay upon the verifiers, and each morning they began again, like Sisyphus the son of Aeolus, to heave on the stone, since they too worked in the rock, though under the surface, in the Cambrian, in the infra-Jurassic, eager to find there the imprint of our grandfather the air-breathing scorpionid, of our grandmother the spiraled belemnite. They had the bump of excavation, the vice of searching under other people's cupboards. "Chief, a Polack, kind of blond but with a name to throw in the garbage can," said a legionnaire scribe, trying to decipher the indecipherable. Installed in the place of the colonel who commanded the Milles camp, Block Captain Ignace Matthieu was presiding at the head table over the doubtful cases which the consciences of his subordinates submitted to his jurisdiction. "Son of who and who," said Matthieu, his mustache bristling with suspicion. The legionnaire spelled out letter by letter—"of Jadwiga P-i-e-p-r-z and of W-o-j-c-i-e-c-h, how's that for a jaw-breaker, Chief?" The chief ran his thumb down a list of Christian names common among the Polacks—"yep, it's here, he ain't one." This was the method, the great experiment, the system of rationalized excavation. The man "who ain't one" said thank you, there he was, cleaner than the paschal lamb, but exactly as if he were a vulgar Jew of the late paleolithic stratum he went to swell the crowd in the immense courtyard flanked by buildings the color of gangrene. And the anthropologists, pen in hand and protractor to the eye, craving for a smoke and careful of their calligraphy, the anthropologists blackened cards upon cards with hundreds of prehistoric names—enough to make them die of meningitis.

Although Monsieur Adrien had conferred discretionary powers on him, Matthieu was determined to apply them in all equity. Precisely and unequivocally, the instructions specified that every contentious case would automatically be classified a Jewish case, but Matthieu was not a contentious sort, his name was not Josephine. This is where she should see him, established firmly in the chair of an army colonel, giving an army colonel's orders. That would have shut her trap, the unbeliever, that would have made her turn green with humility, the bile-spitter. She would have seen a man holding the hand of authority over the destiny of a great many, proceeding with rectitude and exactitude. . . . Ah, the ungodly trouble-maker, that Josephine! All his pride at being chosen for a select post was disappearing under the malefic shadow evoked by the mere thought of his wife. *Nom d'un nom*, if she wasn't lucky enough to be the mother of Françoise, he'd have her hauled in, and there, hands in pockets and feet

on the table, he'd watch her play the high and mighty in the middle of the populace, with her tongue hanging down to her belly button. He smiled at the thought, so broadly that the tips of his mustache tickled his cheeks. But now that he was in the saddle Josephine would learn to be respectful, otherwise, by St. Philip, he'd make her dance at the end of a rope. "That bum joke of a Legion is making a clown out of you, Ignace," she had said this very night, when a special courier had come with an urgent summons to appear before Monsieur Adrien, Comte de Pontillac. A clown, hey, him—now occupying the chair of a colonel of motorized cavalry! Him, Ignace Matthieu, chosen from among all the block captains for this strategic command! Ah, the poison mushroom! While he was getting into his clothes, she, with her nose sticking out from under the covers and a voice to bore holes in the ceiling, had launched into one of her major tirades, as if being awakened at the crack of dawn had given her a sudden inspiration. "Wait till your Legion blows up, and quick as a wink the neighbors will hang you from the lamppost across the street," she said, exhaling fumes of ammonia. "You'll make a pretty sight, my poor Ignace, with your bare behind smeared with pitch and the kids on the block shooting their bow 'n' arrows at it." He had got out of there with his shoes unlaced and his tie in his hand, to escape her tongue-wagging, the . . . the pessimist. Even as he hastened to the Prefecture and completed his toilet, he had questioned himself as to the motives of this disquieting summons. The Sucror affair, a parachute invasion, a gas alarm, unexpected arrival of the Marshal in Marseilles—all these things and more had passed through his mind. But none of his numerous surmises had seemed to square with reality, because there would have been other block captains in the big chief's antechamber, and the guards would have known something about it, and so would the doorman. While waiting to be brought before the regional chief he had paced the anteroom, and at each step a little more of Josephine's pessimism bent his heavy shoulders. As the minutes passed his concern had grown and turned into real anxiety: his conscience had suggested to him that if Josephine prattled like a magpie, he, for his part . . . Hadn't he talked a little out of turn the other day in Garrigue's place, boasted of his relations with Monsieur Adrien, and here was the result, some of Mélodie's doing, no question about it, a traitor's denunciation, the regional chief was simply going to break him, rip off his epaulettes—that is, tear up his block captain's card, number 102.

Pontillac had kept a long silence before saying a word to Matthieu. He took a singular pleasure in staring the block captain out of countenance, and in noting how, under the influence of his gaze, Matthieu's ears slowly turned purple while his mustache drooped lower and lower. A pleasure not wholly lacking in interest. He knew that if he prolonged the silence, if he gave a certain expression to his stare, that the man's ears would go from purple to midnight blue, and his face from scarlet to purple. However, to be fully satisfied, Pontillac's pleasure and interest would have

called for more conclusive experiments; a mere disturbance of the pigmentation was in itself nothing exciting. He wondered whether by prolonging his silence to the extent desired, and accentuating the feigned curiosity of his look, he would be able to make Matthieu get bluer and bluer, then go royal purple, then turn the color of a Bordeaux sauce, and finally die of a stroke. But this was not the time for experiments, and besides he needed the man.

Under the pretext of a ten-day furlough, the colonel in charge of the Milles camp had been temporarily relieved of his post. It did not suit Vichy to keep a soldier inherited from the Republic, and therefore steeped in prejudice, in this post for the few days needed to conclude a certain operation. The military record of the soldier in question, his political and religious convictions, his adherence to the Marshal's doctrine, gave no reason to doubt his loyalty. Still, there was the presumption that he would have "had ideas," that he would have "sought to understand," as the saying is. In short, he would have tried to "get to the bottom of things"; and in getting to the bottom, he might well drown. Milles, for the next few days, called for a man who, not knowing how to swim, would be careful not to go out into deep water, who, once hitched to the cart, would pull straight ahead, without being troubled by so-called humanitarian considerations. Running through the roster of his legionnaires, Pontillac came upon Matthieu: Comrade 102 was hustler enough to give the job everything he had, simpleton enough to regard his assignment as a reward for his supposed merits, unimaginative enough not to see beyond his instructions. "Matthieu," he had said when the man's ears began to turn violet, "Matthieu, you must know that the Marshal's enemies, who are as perfidious as they are dangerous, and who would not stop at any treason, are attempting to undermine the foundations of our revolution. . . ."

Matthieu's mustache had fallen lower than his lower mouth, and Pontillac foresaw the moment when his block captain would collapse of a stroke even without any particular effort on his part to stare him down. "I . . . I know, monsieur . . ." he had breathed. And, feeling in the inside pocket of his coat for his Legion card, which the regional chief was certainly going to take from him, he had added:

"I . . . Monsieur . . . Agitators who . . ."

"That's exactly it, Matthieu: agitators and saboteurs. Would you be ready to fight them, to exterminate them if necessary?"

"With my own hands!" Matthieu had cried with conviction and vehemence, imagining himself attacking *Mélodie* with a crowbar.

"That's what I like, Matthieu. Take that chair and sit down here. I have a confidential mission for you."

The instructions were extremely simple, there was no danger that Matthieu would drown in them. Several hundred, or perhaps several thousand, persons were going to be concentrated at Milles, in addition to the crowd of "permanent" internees already there. As they came in, their food-ration cards were to be confiscated, and in exchange each would receive a card

bearing his name, nationality, and, when called for, the stamp "Jew." Possession of a visa would be indicated by the note: visa for the United States, for Costa Rica, for Patagonia, or whatever. A stock of these cards had been prepared for the purpose, and henceforth, to the exclusion of all other documents, they would serve as titles of identity. Since the identity papers of most Jews already carried the pure Gaulish equivalent of the note *Jude*, their non-Aryanism was already established; as for the others, it would be up to them to prove their non-Semitism. To this purpose the following would be taken into consideration: baptismal certificates, religious marriage certificates dated earlier than March 1933, and, to a certain extent, when the individual was Nordic in type, his parents' first names—an index list having been drawn up for each nationality. Other instructions, much more detailed, much more important although no more complicated, would be transmitted in the course of the day. And—supreme rule to be observed—no discussions, no controversies, and get on with the job smartly.

Matthieu did not go back home. He arrived at the camp at six in the morning aboard one of the trucks which were shuttling between Marseilles and Milles. There he found a whole headquarters staff of gendarmes, secretaries and lesser fry of the Legion. A captain of gendarmes, forewarned by a call from the Prefecture, was waiting for him. "At last, monsieur," he had said, touching a lazy finger to the visor of his cap. "I was giving up hope of your arrival."

"What's that?" Matthieu retorted, counting the captain's stripes. "What's that? A soldier giving up hope?"

The gendarme, caught short, threw out his chest. From the voice that came out of the newcomer's mustache, he took him to be the sort of hare-brain who could raise a rumpus in no time. "You see, monsieur, we have no orders, and the shipments have been coming in steadily," he said in his own justification, chest out and heels together.

Matthieu's mustache had bristled with satisfaction. The orders? He would give them, would pull them out of his sleeve, would shake them like jingle bells—they'd know where the cat was. . . . "I trust at least you didn't mix my shipments with the others?" he had said, with an imperious note in his question.

The gendarme had done his best to improve his military stance. With what others? he had wanted to ask. But he had to be wary of this walrus with his tone of command; quite at random, therefore, he declared that he hadn't mixed anybody with anybody. Torn from their slumber by the noise of the trucks and voices and the pounding of feet, the "permanent" internees had come out in groups into the courtyard, where the blue light of dawn had daubed tinges of raw meat along the pus-colored bricks. Accompanied by the captain of gendarmes, followed by non-coms in charge of the various services, Matthieu had made a rapid tour of the camp—dormitories, kitchen, infirmary, urinals—short questions, eager answers, and at each step a little more gratitude for the work of the Marshal dilated

his heart. Of that work he too was the creature, the creation, like the Milles camp, like the national revolution. This very gendarme, now hopping with zeal, now gesticulating with respect—this captain of gendarmes, would he not, in other times, have given him, Matthieu, the brush-off, treated him as a civilian who could damn well keep his nose out of things? When he had given his instructions, issued his orders, tested the chair of the cavalry colonel his predecessor, Josephine's fate was decided: the next time she opened her big mouth and showed her evil tongue, he would beat her like a rug, like a bowl of mayonnaise, until her venom turned to honey.

It did not take him long to discover that certain singular satisfactions, reserved to men in positions of command, were attached to his post. He had not been installed an hour before Jean Baptiste Mélodie arrived with a respectably laden truck. Like a prancing, rearing horse, he invaded the office, loud of voice, proud of thigh, whacking the scribes on the back by way of greeting. Desperately they signaled him to desist—lay off, you big-mouthed baboon, there's the boss up the line—but he thought they were merely tickled with his cracks and his whacks, and his gaiety grew. Mustache rocketing, Matthieu, not saying a word, observed him with the expression of a man rolling up his sleeves to slit a calf's throat. Without his being aware of it, some of Pontillac's look had stolen into his eyes, and he measured Mélodie as he might have peered at an oyster just before swallowing it. The S.O.L. man was still strutting and showing off when, in a voice like a hammer on an anvil, Matthieu called:

"Legionnaire Jean Baptiste Mélodie, come here!"

Mélodie wheeled around, and, recognizing Matthieu, gave himself a thwack on the stomach. "Holy mackerel, it's Ignace!" he exclaimed, advancing toward the block captain. "What goes on, Ignace old boy?"

The scribes stopped scribbling prehistoric names, and the bearers of the same, standing in line before the scribes, shifted from one foot to the other. Matthieu's stare became a little more like Pontillac's.—Hahaha, went something very like a trumpet inside of him. Hahaha. In a single instant he saw Josephine serving him breakfast in bed while Madame Garrigue besought him to have a glass of sauterne while Monsieur Adrien gave him the ceremonial kiss on both cheeks after having decorated him with the *francisque* while the Marshal . . . "Attention!" he commanded, mustache forward.

Mélodie put out his hand, then a finger, as though to point out block captain Matthieu to the admiration of his contemporaries. "Hee . . ." he said in a voice suddenly so thin that it sounded like the squeak of a mouse. "Hee, Ignace . . ."

"Attention!" Matthieu repeated, rising from his chair of command.

With his finger pointing to the block captain, Mélodie turned a questioning eye around the room, but the scribes, silent and rigid, were looking at the poster of the Marshal, and the roundup victims were looking at each other. "Are you deaf?" shouted Matthieu.

Mélodie was not deaf, he had heard clearly, Ignace was addressing him as if they had never met before. "Hey, for Pete's sake, Ignace, don't tell me . . ."

Matthieu told him to shut up, and Mélodie shut up and corrected his stance. Unbelievable but true—this winebibber, this deadbeat, this cuckoo . . . he was in charge! He had to yield to the evidence, if it were only the way he ordered, "Get on with your work, gentlemen, please!" and the way the scribes obeyed. Even as he adjusted his thumb along the seam of his trousers, he wondered whether he ought not to adjust his foot in Matthieu's belly.—You'll pay for this, you lousy goat, he consoled himself. Suddenly he remembered that Matthieu had a daughter, a cute dish, a pert piece—wait till I fix her up for you, you blue-faced ape, just wait. . . .

"Wipe that sneer off your face!" said Matthieu, eying him from head to foot. "Dismissed!"

The S.O.L. man saluted, about-faced. Matthieu let him get as far as the door. The faker, with his tough-guy airs. The blowhard, with his big-time swagger. The men he commanded, the—the dimwit. He let him get to the door, then recalled him with a command as short as if he had clapped his hands. "Mélodie!"

Mélodie halted. He seemed to be weighing the point before he obeyed—but he obeyed. He marched back, halted at three paces as required by the regulations, fixing his eyes on Matthieu's mustache.—Just wait till I get square on your Françoise, you ass-hole. Matthieu, trained in a good school, maintained a silence à la Pontillac, a silence which he did his best to shade à la Pontillac, but Mélodie's ears did not turn red. "Who is in charge of your truck?" he asked.

Mélodie answered that he was in command of the unit assigned to the truck. "Fine fine," said Matthieu twice over, content with life, content with his mustache, which he lifted to the proper level with a poke of his thumb. "On your way back to Marseilles you will make a detour through Belle-de-Mai. You will inform Madame Matthieu that Monsieur Matthieu, being invested with the high command of the Milles camp, will not be home for lunch."

Mélodie winced so visibly that Matthieu lost his nose in his mustache. So that hurt his pride, the poor little S.O.L. man. It hurt him to be an errand boy, the windbag. "Is that clear?" he asked, resuming his seat in the chair of a colonel of motorized cavalry. "And don't waste time, eh? You will report to me on your next call here, legionnaire. Dismissed!"

The S.O.L. man took his leave according to the rules of the military liturgy, and went out thinking of the daughters whose destiny it is to pay for the sins of their fathers. He had his revenge that very day, not, it is true, with the daughter, but, rather unexpectedly, with the mother, which, while not quite the same thing, provided him the occasion for a copious triumph. Some three hours later, having unloaded his catch at the gates of the camp, he presented himself to the chief, and, standing irreproachably at attention, delivered his report in a loud, clear voice. In accordance

with the orders received he had stopped at Belle-de-Mai, had been able to contact Madame Matthieu, whom he found in animated conversation in front of the house, in the center of a group of neighbors, all voicing their opinions on the events of the day. "I said to her like this, I said, 'Your husband, Matthieu, sends word to you that he won't be home to lunch seeing as how he is in command at the Milles camp.' 'Listen, hot shot, what's that line you're handing me?' your wife, she answers." Once more the scribes desisted from their calligraphy, looking anew at the poster from which the Marshal favored them with his unctuous smile, and the roundup victims shifted from one foot to the other, waiting to pass from one life to another. Matthieu struck his thumb behind the flannel belly-band which girded his middle, he had pulled it too tight in his haste of the morning, otherwise why did he feel so hot all of a sudden, or cold maybe? "Get to the point, legionnaire, get to the point," he said, popping a button from his vest. "To the point, chief," said Mélodie in the voice of a stentor, "I told your wife I wasn't handing her a line, that it was orders. So your wife asked me what was all this stuff about the Milles camp, seeing as how camps were for soldiers and her Ignace, as your wife said, he wasn't built for that kind of thing. I must add, chief, that Madame Matthieu called on the neighbors to confirm this, and that the neighbors were pretty much of her opinion, and even more so. I defended you, chief, I said yes, you're in command, but it didn't go over at all, and the worst of it was when I explained that Milles was where we were taking the ones we rounded up." He spoke with jubilation, pronouncing the words as if he were chewing each one of them, while Matthieu's ears went from red to deep purple. He had opened his mouth to shout "Dismissed!" or "Mélodie, get the hell out of here or I'll tear you to bits!" But Mélodie, imperturbable, invincible, his voice echoing to the rafters, delivered the loveliest tirade the scribes and their clients had ever been privileged to hear. "So then, chief, your wife said, 'If I don't see Ignace back here before supper, he'd better stay where he is, because I'm not going to have any turnkeys around my house, anyone who goes around locking up poor people that is, while his Monsieur Ponti-Ponta draws his pay from the Boches.' Don't get mad, chief, that's how your wife said, Ponti-Ponta. Then she said that, commander or no commander, you are a—wait till I think—you are a membrane, no, that's not it, a lamebrain."

Matthieu rose from his chair with a violence that promised nothing pleasant. He had forgotten to button his vest, and on his belly the broad red flannel cincture flaunted itself like the baldric of a diplomat. This time it was simple, he was going to tear Mélodie to pieces, then to shreds, then have him put in chains, then have him handed over to a court-martial. But Mélodie, supple and light on his feet, saluted smartly, clicked his heels, and was away on the double, while the scribes, obeying the Marshal who had winked at them from up on his poster, with a single movement returned to their paleontological labors. One moment Matthieu thought of summoning the captain of gendarmes to order the S.O.L. man's arrest,

then the next moment of stripping the latter of the command of his unit and assigning him to latrine patrol; but before he could make up his mind which way to turn, Mélodie's truck, clearing the entrance with a bound that rattled the windows of the office, hurled itself down the dusty road and disappeared at a hard gallop.

Matthieu's discomposure was not of long duration. The wings of demoralization were too short, it could not reach him on the heights of his post as commander. As for Mélodie, his case was judged: he'd work the fellow's ears off on the job, and wait for the first chance to pulverize him. Sentence was likewise passed on Josephine: as soon as he got home he would begin by beating her for a good, full hour; then he'd grab her tongue with the sugar tongs and cut a cross in it with his razor; and if after that she looked as if she might spew any more of her venom, he would poison her as surely as if she were a plague-bearing rat. That was that, he was unlucky in his wedded life, a bad wife was worse than a hump on your back, but she wouldn't get away with it any longer, by St. Philip, now that he had his foot in the stirrup and his seat in the saddle.

As things were going, moreover, the job, while not always running smoothly, had style to it—grandeur, in a word—and was rich in essential satisfactions, such for instance as the case of the captive who described himself as the proprietor of the Sucror and the rightful user of the noble "de" before his name. He was unloaded about eleven in the morning, and began at once to voice his complaints so loudly that someone was obliged to shut his mouth with a box on the ear. He did not have a single identification paper, not a food card, not a sou in his pocket: he had the jaw of the Homo Sinensis, a nose like a kitbag, a face more Jewish than a Palestine rabbi: and he said he was fourteenth-century and illustrious Norman family and nothing less than the Viscount d'Aubigny and then his armorial bearings his escutcheon his shield quartered in saltier on a field of purple enamel gold-bordered with a serpent on the flank dexter and a cinquefoil in the flank sinister and a . . . "Listen, Monsieur le Vicomte," they said to him charitably, "you can shut your trap and shove your shield up you understand." Dirty, unshaven, bearing the marks of a twenty-four-hour sojourn in the cellar of a neighborhood police station, he had talked himself hoarse protesting his innocence, failing, in his frenzy, to understand that if he had been guilty of a crime, of murder or theft or rape, he would not have been in Milles but in a nice proper state prison with a right to consult counsel, to receive visitors, to use the numerous delays common to the legal procedure. Being pushed none too gently in front of Matthieu's desk, he recited his glorious history once more—twenty generations of French blood, ancient nobility, lieutenant in the Anti-aircraft, Dunkerque, monsieur, proprietor of the Sucror—an industry useful to the nation if ever there was one, father of a charming baby girl, the whole thing's a misdeal, monsieur, if only someone would be kind enough to phone his home his wife would come running with his papers, thank God there was a telephone right on Monsieur's desk, it wouldn't take a minute to dial the

number, R 19-24, with your permission, monsieur. But Matthieu did not give his permission. Lolling back in his chair of command, smoking a cigar he had found in one of the desk drawers, he studied Cyril Daubigny with the expression of the regional chief himself, not encouraging the man's confession, not interrupting it either—talk on, my lad, we're happy to listen. As it had a few hours before, a hahaha echoed far down in his person, behind the flannel girdle which was wrapped four times around his waist. What a pleasant thing it was to have the proprietor, the head of the so-called date-crust factory, under his thumb! To have him right here, a bird caught without firing a shot and ready dressed to be served on Monsieur Adrien's table! Matthieu would not even think of letting him use the phone to warn his fellow plotters. No doubt about it, his good luck had begun with the Sucror affair, it was getting better every day, this was not the time to muff it. This guy, this enemy of France, was a smart one, he was so anxious to get at the phone he must have a code. A couple of words, nothing suspicious about them—hello, honey, how do you feel today—and his accomplices would be alerted, they'd get rid of the evidence of their crimes in no time, forge themselves alibis, and the day the police closed in there'd be nothing there but crusts—and that was the word. No, no, the alleged count was fine where he was, and until the Prefecture came to a decision on his fate and that of the Sucror, Matthieu intended to keep him within arm's reach. And since the seditious personage refused, in spite of all that had been said to him, to abandon his pretensions to nobility, Matthieu, in his role of commander, was obliged to exercise a commander's initiative: the law demanded that every suspect be provided with an identity card and a register number, so he christened his man Zuckor by association of ideas with Sucror, then added Isaac as a given name, and, the christening in any case being provisory and revocable, made his birthplace Russia, in Moscow itself, the heart, as it were, of a Communist fief.

In vain Daubigny protested, in vain put forth his arguments. To put an end to the wrangle, two gendarmes grabbed him by the collar, and, at a sign from Matthieu, booted him out on his face into the crowd massed in the courtyard. Stretched out full length with his hands and his cheek flat in the dust, he felt almost relieved at this repose, after a day and a night of useless charges and countercharges, and he lacked the will to get back on his feet. At the level of his eye he saw shoes moving around, then stopping, then moving around again, and he imagined that he was dead, for when you are dead all you see of the living is the soles of their shoes. Suddenly this sensation struck him as so peaceful, the feel of the ground as so kindly, that he was disappointed when unknown hands seized him under the arms and set him erect. "Come on, come on," said someone, dusting him off, "you can't lie here this way, it scares the children."

Daubigny pushed back his hair, took off his glasses, and began to clean them on the lining of his coat. His myopic eyes wandered over the faces around him. Someone gnawed a crust, someone scratched the inside of his

ear, someone smiled. Daubigny put on his glasses, rubbed the corners of his mouth with the back of his hand. "I shouldn't be here, I am not a Jew," he said in a scratchy voice. "I am a Frenchman."

The faces around him immediately went mute and closed and stony. He looked at them one after the other, young men, old men, a woman. "I didn't mean that Jews ought to be here," he said. Around him the faces showed eyes that were empty like the eyeholes of a mask. Daubigny suddenly did not know what to do with his hands, and he plunged them into his trousers pockets. "I haven't eaten since yesterday morning," he said, without rhyme or reason.

He cut his way through the little crowd, took several rapid steps, halted. In his pockets his fingers stuck together as if they were coated with glue, and along the ground innumerable shoes moved around in the dust.—Come come, he thought, squeezing his eyes shut. Come come, I've got to pull myself . . . He stood still, his hands stained with sticky sweat, thinking, I've got to pull myself . . . His head felt as if he were holding it in his hands, detached from his trunk in the filth of his hands, and he waited for an idea to take form in it. High in the heavens the sun drew its bow, and down in the courtyard tongues of fire came and hit him in the back of the neck. If only he could succeed in seizing an idea, any idea; or in finding something to do, anything at all; for instance, putting his head back on his shoulders. He turned all the way around, first in one direction, then in the other. Tie his ideas together like bits of string.—A courtyard, he thought, with more terror than one learning to think. He wanted to think—a large courtyard, a very large courtyard; but the ideas were quicksilver, they did not let themselves be seized or tied together. His eyes followed the coming and going of the internees, some of them argued and gesticulated, others squatted on their bundles, still others showed their little papers to each other. He closed and opened his hands, covered his face with them, then sat down on the ground, thinking, I've got to, I've got to.

For more than an hour he sat there, his head in his knees and his eyes closed, stammering, I've got to, I've got to, I've got to pull myself . . . But he did not really think even these words, he felt them in him as a foreign body, as a vertical obstruction. He knew, this is the way hallucinations are, or nightmares, above all you must not heed the call of the dark, must not scratch where the itch is; he knew, and yet with all his strength he dragged himself in pursuit of an idea, of an embryo of thought—I must not. Then suddenly an enormous phrase brought him bounding to his feet—that I am Cyril, am Cyril d'Aubigny, d-Aubigny Cyril! He raised his wrist to his ear, his watch was going, two o'clock in a couple of minutes, and what was he doing here while Nelly, crazy with anxiety, was certainly looking for him all over the town, all over the earth? He dashed toward the gate, which was guarded by a squad of gendarmes, the imbeciles couldn't keep him here indefinitely, not him, not a drop of Jewish blood in his twenty generations of spotless nobility, not him, not him. But then,



as if the precipitate of the words "blood" and "Jewish" had changed into a mixture of explosive acids, he stopped short: Nelly his wife, Georgette his daughter, were gorged with that blood! Nelly, Georgette, they might be in this very courtyard, mixed in with this constantly growing crowd, Nelly his good guy, Nelly and her barley-sugar bobbies. He clutched someone by the sleeve, then by the shoulder.

"Hey, have you seen a young woman, brown hair, gray eyes, this tall, with an eight-month-old baby, Daubigny, Nelly Daubigny?"

The someone delicately removed Daubigny's hand from his shoulder. He was wearing several weeks' growth of beard, and black smudges formed a mosaic on his forehead. "No, haven't seen them," he said in a cottony voice. "I'm an old hand, I know everybody in Milles, but not the women." He examined Daubigny from head to foot. "They didn't start bringing women in till this morning. What are you—Rumanian?"

"I'm French," said Daubigny. "I was caught in a roundup yesterday morning. I forgot and left my papers home. I'm not a Jew and . . ."

"That's what they all say," interrupted the man with the forehead encrusted with grime. He squirted a slow jet of spittle between his yellow lips, then ground it into the dust with his foot. "I'm the Grand Vizier of Turkey, myself. Anyhow, if you want to sell something, I'll buy. And if you're buying, I'll sell. I have cigarettes ten francs apiece, sausage two francs a slice, chocolate, biscuits, margarine, and socks. You want any, just ask for Ali Baba, all the old-timers know me."

He spurted another jet of spittle, long and stringy, ground it down conscientiously with the toe of his shoe, then yawned, showing his ashy-colored throat. The thought of biscuits, of sausage, fell into Daubigny's empty stomach like a ball of lead. "Is there any place you can telephone here?" he asked.

"Telephone?" said Ali Baba, chewing cotton. He scratched his cheeks, looked up at Daubigny with an eye whose lid was doubled back and had no lashes. "So you were never in a camp before, Frenchman who aren't a Jew?"

"The hell with camps, I've got to telephone!" Daubigny retorted. Again he had the impression that his ideas were about to sink beneath a layer of forgetfulness. "I've got to get out of here, they have no right to . . ."

"If you're in that much of a hurry . . ." said Ali Baba. He belched, raised his hand, pointed his finger to the sky. "You have your visa, I hope."

Daubigny left him at a run. He guessed, he began to understand, that his behavior resembled that of an ordinary Rumanian, an ordinary Slovak or Walach, that a kind of panic, still crouching, still latent, was coming forward to meet him. But, guessing this, he reacted, he took himself in hand. "Excuse me, monsieur, I have something very important to talk to you about," he said, addressing himself to one of the gendarmes on guard before the gate.

Knees bent and thumbs behind his belt, the gendarme measured him

with an appraising eye. "Hm-m-m . . ." he grunted, without moving his jaw. "What's it about?"

Daubigny came a step closer. He felt in full possession of his faculties. This copper, with all his airs, would ask nothing better than to make a fat tip for himself by doing an errand, you could see it with the naked eye. The whole pack of them must be hand in glove with each other, otherwise the Ali Babas would not have their socks stuffed with sausage at so much a slice. "May I speak to you privately?" he asked in a half whisper.

"Go right ahead," said the gendarme expectantly. He had not taken his thumbs from behind his belt, and he put out his stomach like a shield. On the other side of the gate, cutting across a flat, spaded terrain, a long string of cattle cars came from the south and disappeared slowly toward the rear of the buildings which flanked the immense courtyard, where several thousand persons were cooking in the sun. An unbroken murmur came from there, the rising and falling of a distant swell, and despite the absence of a breath of wind, despite the open space and the open sky, every object, every face, was covered with a grayish deposit of dust. Daubigny tried to pull apart his sweat-glued fingers, cleared his throat.

"Look, it's as simple as rolling off a log. I was arrested in a roundup, yesterday morning. I'm a Frenchman like yourself, born in France, not a Jew. There's a hundred francs in it for you if you'll get a phone call through to my wife—R 19-24, Madame Nelly Daubigny. All you've got to tell her is to come at once with my papers that I left in my navy-blue suit. All right?"

"You don't look much like a Frenchman," said the gendarme.

"I can't help what I look like," Daubigny retorted impatiently. "In any case my forefathers were French, and their fathers before them. I went through the war as a lieutenant in the 403d Anti-aircraft. You can check that when my wife comes with my papers. Come on, you won't refuse a favor to a compatriot."

"I'm not your compatriot," said the gendarme, pushing out his stomach. "Where's the hundred francs?"

"You'll have to tell my wife to bring my billfold. I left my money in the other suit."

"Hm-m-m? . . ." said the gendarme, as if making a note of it. "We don't give credit here. In Milles it's cash or no go. And besides you can't stand here. On your way."

"But my wife will give you the money," said Daubigny, putting his hands together. "Two hundred francs if you want. Or three hundred. Look, it doesn't matter, name your own price."

"Go f— yourself," said the gendarme, looking at his dusty boots.

Daubigny rubbed his hips, his torso, perhaps to put his useless hands to use, or to offer himself as security perhaps, or to let the other look through him. His intentions were honest, did he look like someone who proposed to trick his gendarme, couldn't Frenchmen do each other a favor any more? Knees bent under the weight of an ineffable superiority, thumbs

wedged behind his belt, fingers playing a tattoo on the buckle, the gendarme squared his shoulders and looked into the distance—Telephone . . . Couldn't they dream them up, the no-goods. A little smuggling, fine, that made sense at least, a job for a customs man who wasn't too particular; but if the gendarmes had let themselves get mixed up in all the schemes hatched under the internees' bonnets, they'd either go nuts or turn into nursemaids. Anyway, things didn't look too good. With the new boss on hand, outside jobs wouldn't be so easy to get away with. He looked as if he didn't have a head for business, the new boss. And since yesterday the camp was so well guarded that a flea would have had a hard time getting through the lines. "Listen, you," he said without looking at Daubigny, who continued to plead his cause, "go away quietly and wait till they make up their minds on your case. That's good advice I'm giving you."

"But I'm a Frenchman, I can't stay here, I've got . . ."

"If you're a Frenchman they won't hurt you. And beat it, or you'll get my size elevens in the balls."

Daubigny did not beat it. Two trucks dumped a cargo of wonder-stricken women at the gate, and at once set out again empty. In the courtyard the rising and falling of the distant swell seemed to grow in volume. Daubigny took off his glasses, held them up to his shortsighted eyes, then put them back on his nose. Each word he pronounced awakened an echo in his empty stomach, the hollow sound of a waterskin when you flick your finger against it. "I'll give you my watch, plus five hundred francs when my wife comes to get me."

The gendarme stopped drumming on the buckle of his belt. Five hundred francs was nothing to sniff at, but anyone would be a fool to count on it, because if by any chance the fellow's wife came it would be that she had second sight or something, not to mention the blockade on the roads all around Milles. As for the watch, that was something else again, something palpable. "What's your watch made out of?" he asked, looking into the distance. "Gold?"

Daubigny hastened to take off his watch.—Don't you want it set with jewels, you crumb? he thought. As carelessly as if he were accepting a handshake the gendarme took the watch, examined it judiciously, front and back. Another gendarme came over, took a look, went away without voicing an opinion. "Not gold," said the man with the air of a connoisseur. Nevertheless he put the watch to his ear, and, when he heard it tick, dropped it in his pocket. "Okay, we'll tell your wife to come with the papers and the billfold. Now go away, get over there and take it easy. We'll take care of it."

Daubigny repeated R 19-24, recommended R 19-24, recalled his wife's name three times, then drew back a dozen yards or so and sat on the ground. Take it easy. It would take two hours for Nelly to come. He tried to imagine the length of one minute, then one hundred and twenty times one minute. He closed his eyes, but immediately things began to float, to

rock like a compass in its bowl of mercury in heavy weather, and he opened his eyes again. If he had a little water, the time would pass more quickly. To drink, and to wash his fingers. This filth, you'd think . . . He couldn't remember having touched anything sticky. The void which hunger had hollowed in his body made him light and a little bit tipsy. The telephone was ringing in the house and Nelly was running to answer it, flapping in her bedroom slippers. They must be wondering at the Suc too. If it had happened to Pierre. Or to Steve. Steve had just told him about Laverne's work. A good point for Steve. Made to measure to get rid of Laverne. Once and for all. Nelly was at the streetcar stop. With her bubbies.—If only the car isn't late. Laverne, the pest. He put his head in his knees, his eyes following a procession of shoes, a wheeling of shoes in a bed of dust. Animals, great cockroaches, very busy. Laces like antennae. See humanity from below, from the vantage point of the foot. Nelly was on the car, she would be here. How would she look, seen from the slippers? Lie between her feet, and look. Lie down and look at Nelly's mmmm. And Marc Laverne. Bad luck, that man. Not malicious, but a troublemaker. Since yesterday morning, ten o'clock. Bad luck, yes, and how. He hadn't wanted to use the phone at the Suc, not the thing to do, they'd locate a call in five seconds with their listening boards. If he had come down five minutes later. Or sooner. Or called from a café which was not touched by the roundup. He had dialed the Prefecture number, asked for the office of the superintendent of police. "Who's calling?" Nelly was taking the Aix-en-Provence bus, on the Canebière, she would be here. He had pinched his nostrils to change his voice. "Some information on the stickers that were put up last night," and just at that moment the bistro had been surrounded. Nothing, not even twenty sous to pay for the call. He had forgotten everything, except the streetcar tickets. You can't do better than that for rotten luck. And the Suc across the street. If only someone had come out at that moment. Or stuck his nose out the window. He closed his eyes, opened them, closed them again. The ground and the sky floated gently, but he kept his eyes closed.—I won't fall, I've got my sea legs, he thought, lying down on his side. He was boasting, but Nelly was looking at him and he didn't want her to see him with his nausea. Everybody had said over and over again, Eat some fresh fish, you must have something to vomit when the rolling begins. Georgette was eating fresh fish, with her head tipped over on her shoulder. She sucked the bones, then stuck them in her blond little wig. They were right, let's go eat, Nelly. Clouds of dust rolled over the sea and the sea made a noise like a surging crowd. Seen from below, the ship resembled an endless shoe. This tastes fine, Nelly, what is it, give me a lot of it. It's fried onions. It's sea anchovies Rumanian style. I am not a Rumanian. I have made forty million date crusts, one for each Frenchman, but don't push me. "Come on, on your feet, show your card," said someone, pushing him with his foot. Daubigny sat up with a start. "Nelly," he called, putting out his hand. His fingers were stuck together as if wrapped in a bandage, and he had mislaid his glasses. A

couple of fists grasped him by the collar and hoisted him to his feet, and a light was flashed into his myopic eyes. "Quick, your card," someone commanded, thrusting a bad-tempered thumb into his ribs. Daubigny closed his eyes, opened them, turned away his head. Swift and expert, strange hands went through his pockets. Over the surging courtyard the night had spread a great cape studded with stars.

"I am a Frenchman and a veteran," uttered Cyril Daubigny in his most harmonious bass.

Squatting side by side on a thin layer of straw, neither Arthur Papsky nor Otto van Lodevijck spoke. All around them, cowering as they cowered in the darkness of the long building with the doors closed and flanked by gendarmes, some five hundred Aryan internees panted and sniffed. Had it not been for the vicious debauch of voices and calls and wildly running feet, had it not been for the squalls which swept the vast courtyard and drenched the bricks of the building like gusts of spindrift, they might have heard the churning of half a thousand convulsed hearts, the beating of two thousand jugular veins. Hands crossed under his chin, under the beard which had grown red and thick, Otto van Lodevijck listened with all his might, eyes wide open on a darkness so solid that he felt its clammy touch. He knew that Papsky had stopped his ears, that nine out of ten of the five hundred men and women whose breathing he could follow as one listens to one's own suffering, that nine out of ten of them were holding their faces in their hands, their eye sockets and eardrums in their fingers, backs rounded, backbones arched, limbs stiffened, like miners in a gallery which is caving in. But he did not want to. He did not want to miss the hailstorm of cries, of blows, of savage falls, whose echo whipped and lashed and bit into the rotting brick. This was his punishment. He had known all this once, once in Poland, in the village of Falenica-under-Warsaw, a land of white sand, of white snow, of pines so black that they blurred the sky. He listened with his whole body and the bones of his body listened and the marrow of his bones, and his blood ran more swiftly to catch the cries and the blows and the savage falls in the night outside, boundless boundless desire to go on living, boundless boundless desire to go on killing, and it was his punishment to take part in it always, in Falenica-under-Warsaw in his captain's boots, in Milles-en-Provence in his internee's rags, here and there and everywhere. But it was not quite the same thing here and there and everywhere, here they did not kill, not right away, lacking the tools or lacking the benevolence, here they resigned themselves to secondary tasks—readying the beast, marking it with the hot iron, for the batches would be numerous, several long strings of cattle cars so that none might be deprived. First they had surrounded the buildings, they had searched into the remotest corners, and when the captives of the eleventh hour and the fifteen hundred "permanent" internees were brought together and lined up in the immense courtyard where fifty gendarmes and a swarm of legionnaires

armed with pocket lamps maintained the law, they had begun the sorting out: Jews on one side, Aryans on the other—and no gate-crashing. A half a thousand of them, who were favored with anthropometric cards innocent of any defamatory inscription, enjoyed the signal privilege reserved to racial elites: cut out from the common herd, packed into a separate enclosure under strong guard, they were preserved from impure contacts. The remainder were in turn divided into two groups, the possessors of visas and the others, the absolute untouchables; and the latter were forthwith thrown head over heels into the cattle cars, the long line of which stood out in sharp silhouette against the summer night.

Papsky's hand groped in the dark, touched Otto van Lodevijck's shoulder. He feared for his former pupil's reason. Since the day they had met in the Milles camp, Arthur Papsky saw that Gregor Wolfgang—he could not get used to calling him Otto van Lodevijck, this borrowed name seemed to him, oddly, to belong to a corpse—that Gregor Wolfgang was deliberately letting himself sink into a quicksand. His pupils had taken on the feverish shade of things that are consuming themselves, the brilliance and patina of things which are ready, which consent to go under. The voice of a Jewish woman rang out so high, so long, that in the courtyard everything seemed to have fallen silent, transfixed through and through. Behind and before, on the sides and perhaps below and above, anguish crawled among the five hundred Aryans, coming out of their bellies, crawled moist and slimy, a heavy gas which sat on the lungs and corroded them. Papsky had been too delighted, too happy to find Gregor Wolfgang again, to think of recalling the Vienna incident, even if only by allusion. He had thought Wolfgang was an officer in the Wehrmacht or a dignitary in the Great German Reich or an astronomer in the sky of Valhalla, lost to science, to men, to himself—and then had come the surprising, the unhopd-for meeting in this place of election, of wonders, in this chosen place which, in spite of the high esteem in which he held Gregor, he had not believed him capable of attaining.

A car door scraped along its rusty guide rail and slammed shut in the distance. The thud of fists, of heels, of heads striking the walls of the car, resounded dully, and cries were heard, cries borne on their own wings. The night had become light and transparent, a sonorous night which had lighted a great number of lamps in its sky so that no one might dare to accuse it of complicity. Gregor Wolfgang heard the footfalls, the insults, the outcries, they were directed at him exclusively, they entered into him with the penetrating force of a shot from a longbow. The other time, at Falenica in the white snow streaked with black pines, it was also at night. Christmas night, he remembered, it was his punishment to remember. The moon was climbing, pushing before it a holiday halo, swimming upward in the center of a holiday aureole, and as it climbed it ate the sky, it covered the sky with a great round shroud. He had come out on the doorstep of the house where he had his quarters, looking at the chalky moon as never he had looked at it before; and he felt surprised, astro-

physicist as he was, that this dead, blind, powerless moon should have established itself so deeply in the emotional life of mankind. He had received a letter from Ellen, it had been delivered at the mess just when a toast was being offered to Adolf Hitler, to the victory of the Swastika, and a few minutes later he had left the table. Ellen—the little girl he had always known, a very German little girl with her large handwriting as open as candor itself. The voice of Captain Stoltz, somewhat raucous, already a shade off key, and the voices of his men of the Regiment Der Fuehrer, rose far into the calm night, celebrating the feast of Christmas; and from much farther away Ellen's laughing voice was saying, "Gregor, on the twenty-fifth of December I shall sit at my window and I shall look at the moon, and if you look at it too we shall see each other, we shall surely see each other." Ellen with her light blue eyes so full of laughter and her arms sprinkled with grains of copper-colored wheat and her superstitions. So he had come out on the doorstep and he was trying to see Ellen through the moon's uncovered face, and it was then that he saw SS Captain Stoltz and several SS non-commissioned officers, submachine guns in their fists and a laugh in their throats, chasing a group of people along by kicking them in the behind. He was holding Ellen's letter in his hand, her writing was as loose-jointed as love and as it happened she was speaking of love—"I'm twenty years old, Gregor, and I should be ashamed to be this way but I'm not ashamed, I dreamed that we were on horseback and the war was over and then we climbed to the highest hut on the Jungfrau and I became your wife." Stoltz and his men and the group of people had come to a halt in the center of the little square bordered with thatched huts and cabins and old houses huddling under the tooth of winter. The SS men were laughing, a laugh so tremendous that when a submachine gun vomited a rapid chaplet of bullets Gregor thought that it was the laughter continuing, only a little more nervous, a little more drunk, although on the contrary it might be a very sober laughter at thirty degrees below a zero so absolute that the moon itself stopped moving, an eruption a whipping up of very sober delirium tremens which caused the moon to break down and infected the magazine rifles and gave them the shakes and the colic and the feeling that they had to spit out pointed bilestones.

Gregor Wolfgang uncrossed his hands under his six months' growth of beard, crossed them again. Holding fast to their faces, to their lacerated hearing, the five hundred Aryans inhaled and exhaled a breath of anguish, long filaments of black anguish. The mutilation continued its merry dance in the vast courtyard, cries and blows and savage falls, gathered up by the sky of France, the nyctalopic sky which looked down from on high and washed its hands of what went on below. On Wolfgang's shoulder Papsky's touch tried to tear him away from his memories. He had come closer, the snow under his cleated step was more sharp-edged than scalpels, and the men's laughter lashed at the silence and leaped to perch atop the pine trees and wait for the crows. All around the square the old houses lay stark and still under the bluish halo of the moon and the snow and

the freeze, stark and yet ominous with a secret life, for from within them invisible eyes peeped out on the drunken progress of the torture—eyes that would not forget; old houses kneeling in fear, in hate, and as simply real as scenery on a deserted stage where phantoms loom in the glow of a night lamp. He had come closer, with Ellen's letter in his gloved hand—"all is so pure on the Jungfrau, so noble, you were at my side and I dreamed that if every man were brought up there even once, he would come down a better man, and wars would not be so horrible, don't you think so, Gregor?" Short and inordinately stocky under his long military cape, gold-rimmed glasses on his boiled-bean nose, Stoltz held the beard of a long, thin man in his left hand, and with his right dealt him a series of crashing punches on the mustache. He was standing on the man's feet, and to make himself taller still he raised himself on the tips of his toes, and he dealt the blows with the healthy joy that comes from work well done. "*Schlepp Du dreckiges Schwein!*" he said between each two punches, and he counted, "*zweiundzwanzig, dreiundzwanzig . . .*" standing on the man's feet and holding onto his beard so as not to fall backward, and obediently the man pulled in the opposite direction, pulled on his broad beard so that Herr Hauptmann Karl Stoltz, SS Regiment Der Fuehrer, might win his bet. Submachine guns at the ready, the SS men laughed and counted with their Hauptmann, they mustn't let him cheat, counted and laughed as if inside their chest cavities an archangel's finger were tickling their ribs. Two bodies lay on the hard snow, two heaps of flesh clothed in black smocks on the snow which had fallen from the immobile moon, and with their hands in the air twenty or so more men with fur bonnets on their heads stood waiting for their round of smashing blows and crashing bullets. He did not see the salute of the non-commissioned officers; he held Ellen's letter—"I don't want them to kill you, Gregor, oh, Gregor I am not one bit ashamed, you told me you would like to have two sons but I don't want to, not before there are no more wars, I don't want them to learn not to be afraid of death." Blowing his frosty breath into the man's battered face, Captain Stoltz counted the punches under the exacting eyes of his SS men who were not afraid of anything, and who echoed—"schlepp achtunddreissig" whom in the mustache, "*schlepp neununddreissig*" whom in the mouth. Long and thin and his arms beating the air, the man took the blows on his mangled face, pulling backward on his beard so as to give Captain Stoltz a firmer stance. Stoltz had lost his cap, it had rolled along the ground and come to rest against the quiet hand of one of the dead men, and under the circular shroud of the Nativity his bald spot resembled a slightly soft hard-boiled egg. "Hey, Hauptmann Wolfgang . . ." he panted, out of breath and with the count at forty-six, "hey, the bet's a hundred marks *du dreckiges Loch.*" "*Du dreckiger Arsch,*" the SS men intoned, counting forty-seven forty-eight under the moon which was remembering the birth of Christ. "A hundred marks . . ." said Gregor Wolfgang in a surprised voice, as if he had never heard of such astronomical quantities. "*Ja ja aber sicher hundert Mark Herr Hauptmann,*"

chanted the SS men, stamping their boots on the snow. He looked at the tall, bearded man who was taking the punches on his open mouth, out of which one by one the teeth had jumped with their sheaths of bleeding gum. Like stumps of wings his long arms shaken by spasms beat in the void, mute call for help, for he did not groan, did not defend himself, and yet he could have taken Stoltz by the neck, between the blouse and the fat of the chin, caught him at the exact spot where the throat is made to the measure of unhesitating hands. At that instant Wolfgang felt a sort of peaceful certitude, which later he knew had been real, the quiet certitude that if the man had undertaken to strangle Stoltz, he, Wolfgang, would have let him go ahead, would have ordered the SS men to keep their hands off and let the man go ahead. Sweating, exhausted, his gold-rimmed glasses covered with a film of frozen silver, Captain Stoltz stopped at the sixty-fourth blow. An SS man brought him his cap, another delicately massaged the hand with which he had punched, and the pulp-faced man, still on his feet with his arms held out from his body, looked like a decapitated tree. "Your honor Herr Hauptmann," said the SS men, hopping from one foot to the other in their straw-stuffed boots, "it's up to you Herr Hauptmann," they said, addressing Gregor Wolfgang, with their faces split by a laugh which issued in leaps and spasms from their gullets and stifled them as it escaped. And thereupon it was very simple, simple and swift without hope as in a dream one falls from great heights, commits great crimes, and because all at once he no longer had Ellen's letter in his hand—"oh Gregor when you come back I don't want you ever to talk about the war"—and because innumerable eyes peered out in fear and hate from behind the dead façades of a Poland four times slain and four times living, and because a sudden nausea, a sudden wish to shout no almost made him vomit, he went into the group of peasants with their hands in the air and began to massacre the strongest built, the most robust among them, in order that bravely he might bear the injustice of the German man. But he had chosen badly, had made a bad choice or else punched too hard, this art calls for science, calls for love, and at the sixth punch the man wept like a girl, at the nineteenth lost an eye, and at the thirty-third went down headfirst on the kindly snow. On that Christmas night, at the hour when Ellen had been waiting for him at the crossroads of the moon, on that night of the Nativity Gregor Wolfgang did not win the prize of a hundred marks.

Sliding in their rusty grooves, the doors of the cattle cars slammed noisily shut, sealing nameless destinies behind them. In the courtyard walled in with gangrenous brick the gallopings and neighings and wild cries diminished in intensity. Gregor Wolfgang caught the sounds, he knew where they came from and where they went, it was his punishment to know. He was in the building piled with Aryans whose skin blossomed with heroic furunculosis, he was in the cars piled with crazed Jews, he was in the infirmary where bunches of men and women, pursued by gendarmes and legionnaires green with divine panic, snuggled up to the

typhoid patients, kissed the diphtheria patients with the kiss of love, to get a portion of toxins, a dollop of bacilli and cocci which are the very work of God as the visa is the very work of the Americans, a lick of bacteria which would save them from the journey. Gregor Wolfgang journeyed over conquered Europe, traveled in his tank through Holland, through Belgium, through France, which he knew because he had visited it in 1936 in the company of Arthur Papsky, his teacher, whom later he struck in the face. And it was in France, two years after the night at Falenica, the night he had gambled a hundred marks and lost his faith, it was a little more than two years afterward that he met SS Hauptmann Karl Stoltz again, in a private house in the city of Orléans where Jeanne d'Arc on every stone had left the imprint of her fervor, and killed him. Coming from Lille, where his unit had gone into winter quarters, Wolfgang reached Orléans at the beginning of September 1941, having been detailed to the headquarters of the general commanding the region. The hotels which the Wehrmacht had requisitioned in the city were overcrowded, and he was provided with a lodging order which led him down a quiet little street tucked away behind the cathedral, to a door set crooked in a forbidding wall crowned with broken glass. He rattled the bronze knocker, waited for long minutes before he heard a lazy, interminably slow scraping of wooden shoes, and when the door opened just wide enough to let in a dog—a rather small dog—he made out the oldest woman in the world wearing the prettiest bonnet on earth. He slipped the lodging order through the crack, then quickly drew back his hand, for without a word the old woman slammed the door with a bang. He walked up and down along the wall crowned with fragments of glass, a calm little street where no one passed by, low houses with shutters closed over the warm penumbra of interiors forever barred against the "occupants," interiors perhaps not beautiful, perhaps not gay, Empire knickknacks, grenadier's saber, old, respectable, tenderly irremovable dust, interiors of grief and furtive steps and furtive smiles which the "occupants" would never understand. At the end of a quarter of an hour, when he was beginning to get impatient, the door opened again, this time wide enough to let in a good-sized dog. He was received by a woman who must have been beautiful in her youth, taller almost than he was, with blue eyes circled with black and utterly impenetrable. She stood at the entrance to a room, in the frame of the door, her left arm hanging stiffly down a black silk dress, her right hand resting on the silver head of a cane; and behind her loomed the outline of a tall, thin man whose immobile mask suddenly produced in Wolfgang the impression of a familiar ghost. He introduced himself, excused himself, standing face to face with the lady, whose age he put at seventy, and she neither made a sign to come in nor said a single word to him. The servant—the long, thin, completely toothless man—preceded him up a wide staircase of greenish stone, opened a door. Wolfgang lived in a large room which contained only a bed, a peasant cupboard, a washstand disguised as a chest of drawers, and a single chair, to the exclusion of any object—curtain,

carpet, picture—which might enliven the view. The fireplace, cut square in the whitewashed wall, was bare and cold and seemed to have forgotten the very memory of a fire. On the other hand, the single window opened on a large and well-laid-out garden, the existence of which you would not suspect when you knocked on the crooked door in the wall topped with shards; but while the neatly cut lawns and the spruceness of the walks gave proof of assiduous care, he never saw a living soul in the garden. Sometimes, when he was not on duty, the desire came to him to follow the arborescent alley, then to seat himself under an oak tree and read a page of Herschel or Kepler. But he did not dare—any more than he dared to ask for lodging for his batman. Throughout the eighteen weeks he lived in the house he never met anyone nor heard any sound, either when he left about eight o'clock in the morning or when he returned after night-fall, and up to the evening of the murder he was not sure that the lady with the silver-headed cane had not been an apparition, and the old woman in the bonnet and the wooden shoes a figment of his imagination. He had a key to the house door, sheets and towels were changed every Sunday, the water pitcher was filled every day, and when he left a little money in full view for the person who took care of his room, and who he naturally supposed was a being of flesh and blood, no one touched the money. And another time he pinned a fifty-franc bill to a sheet of paper on which he had written "Kindly buy some wood for the fireplace"; but he found the bill intact and "The fireplace is out of order" written on the same sheet of paper.

Somewhere straight before Gregor Wolfgang's eyes the brick imbued with black anguish began to dissolve. It was not yet the oozing of the dawn, not yet the breath of day, but the promise was there already. From farther away than the other slope of imagination, the day announced its necessary coming. In the vast enclosure, where, hunted to the end, the last latecomers howled their *vivas* of farewell, the camp buildings, preparing to emerge out of the night, were feeding on their canker scales. Muffled thuds and thumps and cries came to the ears of the Aryans drained of substance like mediums drained of ectoplasm, and Gregor Wolfgang looked back on other nights, Christmas night in Poland, twenty men who had lost their teeth and their noses and their faces—at five marks per face. It was his punishment to look back, to figure the price of a face in marks. Papsky's hand rested on his shoulder, a hand which tried to steady him on the uncertain boundaries of reason, but Gregor Wolfgang looked back on that other night in the house in the city of Orléans, where for eighteen weeks he had lived in contact with inaccessible souls, with phantoms so lofty that they had not once taken the trouble to show themselves. He was in his great bare freezing room, a light snow had whitened the specter of the garden—how these people whom he had never seen, of whose existence he could not be sure—how they ignored him! Why were they not hostile, why did they not show the primitive reactions of the animal at bay, since after all he did exist, he did cross the threshold of their house

and breathe its air? He had thought fondly of doing something violent, of going down at coffee time after dinner, with his uniform in perfect order and his Iron Cross, and sitting by the fire, there must be a fire down there, and saying, It's the east wind that brought this snow. Quietude and grandeur of talking weather with beings human enough to be interested in it. Quietude and grandeur. But he was under no illusion, he would simply have made a fool of himself, for they would not have looked at him, he knew that they would not have raised their eyes from the coffee cups, even if he had ten Iron Crosses around his neck. He walked up and down the undressed room, a letter from Ellen lay on the bed, one of Ellen's many letters which he did not read, which he did not answer—Ellen whom he had lost with the hundred marks and his faith in the German man on that Christmas night in Falenica, when twenty villagers were asked to take off their coats trousers shirts drawers and *tanz* the polka Du Saupole at thirty degrees the polka below an absolute *tanz* zero. He opened his foot locker, took out a bundle of letters the envelopes of which only the censor had violated. And if only the hearthstone of this fireplace hid a way out, he thought, a tunnel through which to escape and lose himself in his turn. He watched the flame unseal Ellen's letters, the flame which so quickly read Ellen's letters, which turned the pages and so quickly devoured the despair of them, and suddenly—it was January 14, 1942, at twenty-five minutes to nine in the evening—suddenly there was a light knock at the door of the big undressed room, followed by another knock, and a third. Despite himself, and because it was the only defense his instinct suggested against the horrible panic which seized him, he drew up to attention and kept silent. So the phantoms, the disembodied spirits of this house, had known his loneliness. Two more knocks sounded at the door, discreet but not timid, and moving like an automaton Wolfgang crossed the room and opened the door. Dressed in black and as toothless as a nursing babe, the long, thin personage, whose immobile mask Gregor had certainly seen sometime, somewhere, the long, thin personage stood on the threshold, as stiff and impersonal as it is possible to be. "Madame and Monsieur wish to inform Monsieur that they would be honored if Monsieur would be kind enough to accept a cup of coffee in the salon," he recited in the voice of a ventriloquist. Wolfgang nodded, simply nodded, being unable to say a word. So Madame and Monsieur. He changed his linen, brushed his uniform carefully, brushed his hair and his teeth. So a cup of coffee in the salon. It seemed to him that he had never been so young, so worthy of living; that something was coming, was about to happen, for which he had been wishing for a long time, since the day when in the amphitheater of the University of Vienna he had raised his hand against his teacher. The letter-reading fire turned the pages, made charred curlicues out of them, and Ellen's large handwriting crackled feebly and fearfully—"oh Gregor have I been such a complete fool, have I been so completely unbearable, why won't you answer me, why won't you write me these simple words: I am alive." He unloaded his revolver, threw the magazine into the foot

locker which stood open at the bed, closed the locker, adjusted his belt; but then, changing his mind, he took off the holster and laid it on the chair, and at the last moment put his Iron Cross beside it. His heart was beating so rapidly that he had to pause before the door where, at his first visit, he had been received standing and with less courtesy than is customarily shown to a chimneysweep. There were three persons in the salon when he entered, after having elicited a "come in," not too curt, not too hurried. He came to a rather abrupt halt, stunned by the thought that these people, who showed no resemblance whatever to immaterial shades, had for one hundred and thirty days on end succeeded in remaining silent and invisible. He was invited to take a seat. A young woman of about thirty, very pale, it seemed to him, with her light brown hair pulled back flat over her ears, handed him a cup of coffee. He half rose to take it from her hands, and noticed a wedding ring on her finger. A meager fire on the hearth threw out an occasional spark, and an old gentleman dressed in a lounging jacket with hemstitched lapels stood warming his back before it. The old lady whom he had seen in September was sitting erect, with a book open on her knees, in a chair with a high, carved back: around her neck was a fur piece nobly cut but passably moth-eaten, and she wore a long plum-colored taffeta dress which at her slightest movement rustled softly like silver foil. "If you are a coffee lover, you will like this, monsieur. It is a good blend." Her voice was clear and natural. "But perhaps you are not used to drinking coffee without sugar?" "I prefer it that way, madame," Wolfgang lied. He strove to speak as correctly as possible, with as little accent as possible. He was sitting too far away to see whether there were still black circles around the old lady's pupils. A silence followed, slow and measured, as if the essential had been said. The old gentleman warmed his back at the meager fire, and the young woman, keeping her eyes down, held a piece of sewing in her hands. It seemed to Wolfgang that it would have been his hosts' place to set the tone, to say the word which would break the ice, but he was too conscious of being the perfect intruder, so perfect indeed that they had resigned themselves to accepting him as the lesser of two evils, and in his haste to put a good face on the situation he took the lead, and, for want of anything better, offered cigarettes. The old gentleman alone accepted one—a smoker's curiosity about a foreign cigarette, but perhaps all the same there was some strain of politeness to mitigate the curiosity. He examined the cigarette studiously, spelled out the inscription, raised it to his prominent, well-formed nose, and at last expressed a vague opinion on tobaccos as such. Silence was going to fall again when the street door was opened and closed with a sharp bang, which struck Wolfgang as all the more unusual because he himself had always taken care to close the door quietly, and because it was, in actual fact, the first sound he had ever heard echo within the walls of this dwelling. He could not suppress the questioning expression which came over his face, and, when he raised his eyes to his hosts, he saw that the sewing had slipped from the hands of the young woman. He heard

a heavy step grating on the stone staircase, and again the slamming of a door. "It is your compatriot, monsieur," said the old lady, closing the book in her lap. "My compatriot?" Wolfgang asked. "An officer of the army of occupation," said the old gentleman, leaving his place before the fire. There was nothing particular in his voice, but, all at once, Wolfgang rose and remained standing. "Please, monsieur, do not leave us yet," said the young woman, without raising her eyes. This therefore was the reason. . . . His hosts had called him in as a "witness," had appealed to his "protection," having, most likely, no ground for complaint about him, and being won over, it might be, by his discretion. "I am not German, I am an Austrian," he said with the suddenness of a fit of coughing.

A tinge of gray, the greenish tinge of pus, was mingling with the darkness which had lumped together five hundred Aryans under a single layer of collective terror, but soon soon the daylight would free them, would send them back each into his own skin, and there would be five hundred individual terrors. In the vast courtyard above which the night with its clean hands was extinguishing its lamps, falls and blows and immortal *vivas* had taken refuge in the cattle cars, and Gregor Wolfgang heard the harsh grunt of the locomotive as it got up steam, while fists and heads beat loudly on the lead-lined walls of the train. The scream of the sliding doors reached him as they were closed on the last tourists, all provided with visas for their last journey, and from then on, from the moment the door above opened violently and an imperious voice called, "Hey, no one here!"—from then on the events followed each other according to a rhythm which nothing could have altered. At the first "Hey!" and the "No one here!" he had recognized Stoltz's voice. "The gentleman moved in only this morning," said the old lady, opening the book in her lap. The long, thin, toothless personage came into the salon, his eyes questioning his masters. "Were you . . . were you ever in Poland?" Wolfgang asked, feeling the goose flesh rise on his skin. So that was where he had known this face, this deaf-mute ventriloquism, for this was the man on whom Stoltz had laid a hundred marks against sixty-four crashing blows, at Falenica-under-Warsaw. He had lost beard and mustache, lost his teeth one by one in their sheaths of bleeding gum—but was he really the man? He looked at his hosts one after the other, then again at the servant, they appeared not to have understood the question, or not to have wished to understand it, and the old gentleman ordered the man to disregard the calls, which were more imperious at each repetition. The young woman covered her face with her hands, and the old lady closed the book in her lap. "If you allow me, I shall go now," said Wolfgang, but Stoltz, leaping down the stone stairs four at a time, burst into the room and, raising his arm under the domestic's nose, shouted, "Heil Hitler why does no one answer when I call hey!" He thrust his hands into the pockets of his long almond-colored cape, and he pushed out his belly. "I want you to give me fire and hot water," he said, planting himself in the middle of the room and slowly turning around. Standing beside the pale, motionless

young woman, the old gentleman drew himself up a little straighter, and the old lady opened the book on her knees. "Hey, Hauptmann Wolfgang, what are you doing in this *Judenschule*?" Stoltz exclaimed, extending a friendly hand. Wolfgang shook his hand without quite knowing what he was doing. The SS man had not changed much, except maybe that his belt was rounder, which made him as spacious in the hips as in the shoulders: his boiled-bean nose held up his glasses with their rims of yellow gold, and his eyes, likewise yellow, looked on the creation and its annexes as a basket of dirty linen. "Captain Stoltz, the presence of the ladies and gentleman demands that we converse in French." He listened to himself with astonishment, with the sensation of never having heard a phrase which sounded so false, and he stared at Stoltz's glasses as he would at a rare object. In her armchair with the high carved back the old lady was opening and closing the book on her knees, and her plum taffeta dress rustled like silver foil. Stoltz's yellow eye closed halfway. "*Was zum Teufel soll ich französisch quatschen!*" he said in his grating voice. "*Wir werden diesem hier—und dem andern—schon das richtige Deutsch einbläuen.*" He looked at the people of the house, then at the furniture, then again at Wolfgang. "Bravo, *gut gemacht*, Wolfgang. I can see we're in with the family, and the family looks like they'd have a good cellar." His hands in his pockets, squatty as the base of a column, he studied his brother officer attentively, and in the shelter of the gold-circled glasses his eyes took on a cast of arrogance. "You got a pain in the stomach or what the devil?" he asked, puffing out his cheeks. Gregor had indeed turned pale and his hands trembled. "Captain Stoltz, I shall thank you to come to my room, I wish to talk to you," he said in the same sententious tone as before. He saluted his hosts silently and went toward the door. Opening and closing the book in her lap, the old lady followed him with her eyes, the old gentleman expanded his chest a little more in its coat with the hemstitched lapels, and the young woman rested her face in her locked hands. Wolfgang remembered that as he passed the tall thin personage standing as straight as a grenadier on parade, he had experienced a sudden panic, the same panic he had felt an hour earlier when the knock had come at his door. But this time he knew its reason immediately: if Stoltz had not followed him, he would have turned back and pushed him out, shoved him out, scandal notwithstanding. But Stoltz followed. His nostrils dilated like a bean put to soak, he raised and dropped his arm, hurled a Heill—and followed. They climbed the staircase step by step, side by side. Stoltz's yellowish-brown eye swept around Wolfgang's room and lighted on the chair, where, hanging against the gleaming holster, the Iron Cross looked like a humble can opener. He picked up the medal, felt it with the fleshy part of his thumb. "Say, Wolfgang, have you lost your senses?" he asked, squaring his shoulders under his long cape. Wolfgang took the cross from him and scaled it onto the bed. "I've lived in this house for four and a half months, Stoltz. I don't like the way you treat . . . the way you strut like a conqueror." He was so pale that Stoltz lost his smile as one drops some-

thing when disturbed. "You're really washed up, Hauptmann Wolfgang," he said, a sudden excitement in his eyes. "The domestic . . . the man in black . . . do you know who he is?" Wolfgang interrupted. "No. So what?" said Stoltz, picking up the Iron Cross off the bed. A yellow light flared and went out in his gold-circled eyes. "Is he an English spy?" "He's the man you beat to bits with your fist, in Poland." Stoltz gave a high, short laugh, then looked at his fists as if to refresh his memory. "You're crazy," he said, not remembering. His voice was gritty and peaceable, and he played with the Iron Cross. "The ones we SS men have sent to the devil will stay a hell of a long time. No chance they'd be coming back to bother us here." He stopped, and the yellow of his eyes became a little less yellow. "In Poland . . . I stayed in that crap heap of a country till a month ago," he went on, opening his lips on gums the color of an eraser. Once again he examined his fists, then the cross, then Wolfgang: he might have been seeking a place to spit out his disgust. "More than one son of a bitch got what was coming to him, my dear Wolfgang." "More than one son of a bitch," echoed Wolfgang. He wanted to laugh, but the laugh did not come out; and he felt a heightened interest in Stoltz, something akin to desire. "You have a voice like a kid's rattle," he said bluntly. "So? . . ." Stoltz said, puffing his cheeks. "Does it hurt your ears?" Wolfgang shook his head stupidly. Stoltz's yellow eyes seemed to be drawing him irresistibly from a great distance, he was going to set out and try to reach them. "I wonder what you did in civilian life," he said, taking a step toward Stoltz's eyes. "What do you mean, civilian life? Do you think I'm an old man? I'm thirty-two, and these bastards . . ." His voice rasped and broke, and the yellow of his eyes became lighter, then darker. "When I was eight I was an apprentice in an artificial flower factory, but these bastards didn't give our Germany time to get back to civilian life. Today they're paying for that." He juggled the Iron Cross and his bean-porridge nose dilated. "Hey, listen, those people downstairs better be polite. And if they have a cellar, they better open it up. But maybe you're in love with the girl with the flat hair-do?" Wolfgang stared at Stoltz's yellow pupils, wondering if he would ever be able to reach them. "Go on about the artificial flowers," he said, taking another step. He still wanted to laugh, but the laugh would not come out. "The hell with the flowers!" said Stoltz in his gravelly voice. "Afterward I lived in Cologne. These damned Frenchmen, all we saw was their troops, their little officers with their swagger sticks, all over the place, worse than lice in a Jew's beard. They taught their Senegalese to soil our women. Today it's our turn to lay theirs. You guys in the tanks can't see anything in your sardine cans, but we SS men get around. Everybody knows the Poles are a race of pigs, but the French are sons of bitches. The girl downstairs, how is she with her clothes off?" "Leave that cross alone," said Wolfgang. At last the laugh had got out of his mouth. He put out his hand to take the cross, but, acting on its own account, the hand doubled up, made a fist, landed a slanting blow on Stoltz's nose. As if someone were after them with no good intention, the gold-rimmed



glasses went into a horizontal dive, dragging first Stoltz, then Stoltz's cap behind them. He sat down on the chair, collapsed on it in fact, and the chair went to pieces under him. This was the second and last noise that Gregor Wolfgang ever heard in his hosts' house, in the city of Orléans.

The night put its trappings in order, took down its veils and arranged them in the corners of the building, uncovering half a thousand Aryans shorn of their innocence. Faithful to the rule, to the age-old order, specters and visions had bounded in pursuit of the last comets, bounded clackety-clack toward the shady side of the world, and, falling from the livid wakening of the sky, the freshness of dawn wiped away the tepid print of cries and falls and savage neighings. Papsky's presence became less weighty, less insistent on Gregor Wolfgang's shoulder, less harsh the grunt of the locomotive; and although now and then a butting head raised an echo from the inside walls of the cars, exhaustion and silence reigned. Silently, without trying to get up, without haste, Stoltz had drawn Wolfgang's revolver from its holster. Stripped of their glasses, his yellow eyes were blurred and mobile. "Silence, silence," Wolfgang whispered, putting his finger to his lips. "Silence . . ." he repeated, taking a step on tiptoe. Leaning on his elbow, Stoltz pulled back the safety lock of the Walther PP with his thumb. "*Du verfluchter Scheisskerl!*" he said without opening his mouth. The electric bulb painted a flash of light on the top of his bare skull, and the yellow of his pupils invaded, then overspread, the whites of his eyes. "*Du österreichischer Bastard!*" The laugh had come out on Wolfgang's lips, it wandered over them like a caress. He picked up a leg of the chair. "Ssilence . . ." he said, leaning over Stoltz. Stoltz pressed the barrel against Wolfgang's chest and without haste pulled the trigger. So soft was the click, so soft Stoltz's skull, so stuffed with softness, that the club made no echo. A net of blood welled from the peak of his skull and bonneted his baldness, the heavy mass of his body projected itself upward, but at the second blow he lost the revolver, at the third he lost the Iron Cross, and at the sixty-fourth blow of the chair leg he had lost nose and mouth and teeth and face—lost his face, made in the image and likeness of God. When Wolfgang, spattered, haggard, out of breath, fell to his knees, he saw the long, thin, black-garbed personage standing in the doorway, motionless and empty-eyed. He was carrying an armful of civilian clothing.

TWO DAYS AFTER THE DISAPPEARANCE OF CYRIL DAUBIGNY, at one o'clock in the afternoon, the police invaded the Sucror. The evening shift had just taken over, and the day shift had not yet left the factory, so that just about the entire personnel was caught in one sweep of the net. Six gentlemen in civilian clothes, two of whom were commissioners, took possession of the premises, and in the twinkling of an eye everyone was herded into the machine room, where the grinding machines, left to their own devices, continued to function empty. At the demand of one of the commissioners, Pierre Musaraigne submitted the list of employees to them, and two of the inspectors proceeded to call the roll and to check the identity of each worker. Another inspector, assigned to go through the account books and archives, applied himself zealously to his duty: the fourth mounted guard at the main entrance, and the two commissioners seized the directors' office and closed themselves in with Musaraigne, Futeau, and Marion.

The authorities themselves did not know exactly what they wanted to find out. Their orders were to search, to question, to put this one or that one under arrest if the occasion demanded, and to crown the whole with a report in due and proper form. First of all, therefore, the commissioners had a box of Sucror products brought to them, and sniffed at the sweets for some time before venturing to put one in their mouths. One at Daubigny's desk and the other at Musaraigne's, they consumed a large number of the candies while asking a large number of admiring questions—it's flavored with what, is it nourishing no kidding, does it bring a profit and how much: but they did not really warm to their task until they had taken on a solid ballast of pure sugar and pure gold, as if, having satisfied themselves as to the filling qualities of the merchandise, they were still doubtful of its digestibility. Moreover, once the inspectors assigned to the identification proceedings had made known the preliminary results of their investigation, the commissioners felt that they could now begin to follow the first traces of a trail which—they would take care of this—would not be lost in the sand.

Although the directors of the Sucror had pretended to attach no impor-

tance to Laverne's warnings, the visit of the police did not catch Musaraigne, Futeau, and Marion entirely off their guard. The half-dozen foreigners who worked for the house although lacking a labor permit were not included on the list which was submitted to the police. Their salary was accounted for under "miscellaneous expenses," so that their names were not on the pay roll, nowhere in the Sucror books was mention made of their existence, and for more security they were ordered not to set foot in the factory until further notice. Anyway, though no one could hope to be immune against the erratic disease of spyitis which was abroad in the country, everyone had his false papers and his real innocence, and all in all, if the Sucror was going to be convicted of lese-decree, of lese-revolution, the "clandestine workers" would have to be caught red-handed, so to speak. But while not putting their finger on anything incriminating, the commissioners nevertheless got wind of a plot. The breath of inspiration passed over them when, despite calls and counter-calls, three citizens persisted in not answering present: Cyril Daubigny—commercial director, Marc Laverne—confectioner, Gustave Henri Hirsch—cashier. "Hmmm!" said one of the commissioners, waving the personnel list; and the other commissioner said, "You're darn right!" Citizens who become invisible just when the police want to say hello to them clearly are not on good terms with the regulations. But what gave them the proud certainty of having flushed a hare was when the girl who never took her eyes off the guy with the Hollywood shoulders, the girl with the outsized behind, said, "Our commercial director has disappeared, no one has seen the sight of him since day before yesterday morning."

A look of understanding passed between the two commissioners. They had asked, "This whachamacallum Daubigny and the other two that's missing, what about them?" and the answer was . . . Hot stuff, huh! As if the odor of frying bacon had tickled their mucous membranes, they spread their nostrils and puffed out their lips. "Disappeared, heh?" said the one who had settled behind Musaraigne's desk. He placed four fingers of each hand on the beveled glass, then, fanning them out, appeared to be comparing them studiously. The other commissioner was poking through Daubigny's desk, carelessly and without interest. "May I?" he said to nobody in particular, breaking the seal of a packet of cigarettes which he had just discovered in one of the drawers. "Black market?" he asked in a casual tone, sniffing the tobacco. He helped himself, served his colleague, and, while Futeau made haste to offer them a light, pocketed the package. "Well, all we know is Monsieur Daubigny went out the day before yesterday around ten in the morning," said Marion, looking at Futeau with devotion. "As he left he said . . ."

"That's fine. Tell us what he said," the commissioner at Musaraigne's desk encouraged her. One after the other he lifted his wart-crowned fingers, compared them carefully, and carefully set them down again on the beveled glass, and the other inspector, still carrying out his inspection of the drawers of Daubigny's desk, nodded approval. This so-called com-

mercial director taking a powder just when they wanted to have a good look into the inside of his mouth, that was the sort of thing that made their mission worth while. They had come with no other mandate than to get the feel of this outfit, with no other ground for indictment than the fundamental dogma: every citizen is a delinquent whether he knows it or not—and right off the bat they stumble across something big! Nobody disappears without a good reason, not these days, not on the eve of a search, this they knew by experience. "So then, mademoiselle? So then? . . ." Futeau tried to intervene, to explain how Daubigny had declared enigmatically, "I've got an idea," but the commissioners cut him short, as the floor for the moment belonged to the girl with the outsized behind. They didn't trust this overhelpful Tarzan: he was in too much of a hurry to say his say, too obviously at ease when you came right down to it, he must have a couple of things on his conscience. They didn't trust the other fellow either, the so-called technical director, who stood over against the whitewashed wall and kept his lip buttoned up. They didn't like customers who had too much to say or had nothing at all: it wasn't natural, and it complicated the job. They weren't enthusiastic about the girl either, the so-called secretary general. They caught the words as they dropped from her red lips, she had a funny way of talking, you might think she was as good as a lamb's heart turned on a spit, and if she had said, "Aah, go shoot yourself," or something of the sort, she would still have said it with the air of blessing her neighbor. They listened to her charitable voice and they followed her look, which always returned to the so-called general foreman with an insistence likewise full of goodness, full of long-suffering indulgence, as if she were saying to him, "It's all right, it's all right, God and I forgive you everything." He had played her a dirty trick, the guy had, but she was pure, not a drop of hard feeling in this girl, or were they in cahoots, because with all her rolling eyes of mercy she seemed to be consulting him at the same time, looking for a prompt. They asked her if she had a theory as to the disappearance of her commercial director, and she answered no, she hadn't the shadow of a theory, although on the other hand yes, she had an idea, not exactly an idea-idea but a suspicion, that was it, rather a suspicion: seeing that Cyril Daubigny had left home without his identity papers, he might have been caught in a roundup. A new look of understanding passed between the commissioners. "Is he a Jew?" one of them asked; and the other added point-blank, "We know he's a communist, don't deny it." Marion did not deny it, she merely smiled indulgently and said that Daubigny, whose name was D'Aubigny by the way, belonged to the old French nobility, and as to communism, well . . . She did not formulate an opinion about communism, but for an instant she took her eyes off the guy with the Hollywood shoulders and turned them to the poster of the Marshal—eyes so filled with tenderness that a third look of understanding passed between the commissioners. They had to admit that the whole thing was neatly contrived: a man forgets his identity papers, and poof! disappears like a gust of wind,

what could look more natural! Roundups—the commissioners hadn't thought of it—roundups could be an excuse for anything. They would, of course, make a phone call or two, but the odds were good that if the so-called Daubigny had really been caught in a roundup, he would have had no trouble identifying himself within an hour; and, supposing he had been given a bit of a going over, and had then been held for a while on account of a black eye, it would not be hard to locate the Daubigny in question. Knowing the business and the methods, it occurred to the commissioners for a second that the alleged Daubigny, having collected one of those bad knocks which befall a client who has to be handled a little roughly, was now a handsome corpse in some neighborhood police station; but they did not even pause at the thought, it was too unlikely: in such circumstances you don't send investigators to the home of the individual concerned, on the contrary you make haste to bury the defunct, and the case with him. This smart guy had lit out all right, but he won't get far, hell no, not far, and as for the cutie with the Mary Magdalene eyes, she knew more about it than she was letting on. "Good, we'll go into that later," said the commissioner with the wart-crowned fingers; and the other commissioner, signaling to Futeau for a light, said, "You're darn right we'll go into it. Now this what's-his-name, this Marc Laverne—has he disappeared too?"

"Me, I wouldn't be surprised if he did disappear," said Steve Futeau, striking a match for the commissioner's benefit. "Me, I'd be more surprised if he didn't disappear."

The two commissioners nodded, as if they were wholly in agreement with him. Why indeed should he be surprised, this handsome dog who seemed to know exactly what he was getting at? A funny place, the Sucror, you never knew what would turn up next. They were about to invite him to state his ideas a little more clearly, when Musaraigne, without moving from his place, took a hand in the discussion.

"Cut out the hooley, Futeau! Marc Laverne hasn't the slightest intention of disappearing. He asked for three days off, and he'll be back to work tomorrow."

The two commissioners looked up together. So the so-called technician was not deaf, nor dumb either, in fact a little too talkative for their taste. "Nobody asked you to put in your two cents' worth," said the man whose fingers were reflected in the beveled glass. "You can talk when your turn comes." They returned to Futeau, who had flushed from ear to ear. "There's no hooley about it, Pierre. Me, I say Laverne has good reasons for taking a powder, and you know very well that . . ."

"I don't know anything!" Musaraigne cut in. He detached himself from the wall and took a step toward Futeau. He too reddened, and anger made his voice break. "Everything you say and do from one end of the year to the other is hooley." He glared at the commissioners and addressed them face to face. "Marc Laverne is one of our oldest employees. There's a quarrel between him and Futeau, and several times they've almost come

to blows." He indicated Futeau by a movement of his head, not looking at him. "He can't let a grudge die. He wouldn't hesitate to drown Laverne if he could." He turned to Futeau with a short, nervous laugh. "There's a woman between you and Laverne, and everybody knows it. You'll never forgive him for taking her away from you. You . . ." He looked at Marion, with another forced laugh. "Isn't it a fact, Marion, that everyone knows he's woman-crazy?"

Marion sat down heavily at her typewriter. God and I forgive you everything, too, my poor Pierre, said her clement expression. She too would drown Laverne if she could—the lowlife, the pest. She smiled at her Steve and patted her hair. "Me, I'm mixed up with Laverne over a woman?" said Futeau, pointing to himself. He seemed stunned by the idea. The commissioners looked over the three characters, one after the other: they were putting on a mighty good act, the fakers, they were out to make a farce of justice, it was as plain as daylight.

"So this Laverne," said the man who had pre-empted Daubigny's cigarettes, "you say he has good reasons for taking a powder? He's a De-gaullist, heh? We know his whole story, don't deny it."

"Me, what I know," said Futeau, "is that I saw him three days ago doing something that . . ."

"Lay off the claptrap, Futeau!" said Musaraigne. He had gone back against the white wall, and he was as pale as the wall itself. "Lay off the claptrap. To listen to you, anybody would think you'd seen him . . . you'd seen him stuffing Daubigny's corpse into a trunk for shipment overseas. Come on, why don't you admit that Laverne slept with your wife, and that's why you're so sore at him?"

The shock made Steve Futeau clap his hands together: then, like Musaraigne a moment before, he forced a hollow laugh. "If there's any hooley being dished out around here, you're doing the dishing. The guy who'd sleep with Mimi while I'm alive hasn't been born yet. Go and ask Hirsch, if you're interested. Me, I . . ."

"Hirsch . . .?" said the commissioner installed at Daubigny's desk. "Isn't he the third one who missed the roll call?" He stood up and stretched. "Did he disappear too?"

"He's certainly back by now," Marion intervened, puffing out the daisies on her muslin blouse. "I'll go and make sure."

"Don't go to any trouble, mademoiselle," said the commissioner, still stretching. "We'll take care of it ourselves." He put his arm out toward Futeau, took two quick steps, and touched him on the shoulder. "So what was it you saw this Laverne doing? What was he up to? Printing a newspaper, eh? Come on, we know all about it from A to Z, don't deny it."

It was the other commissioner's turn to stand up. He put his fingers together and pressed them on the beveled glass, making them crack all at once. "The fact is," Futeau began, "that I saw him about eleven in the evening, on the Canebière, while he was . . ."

"Shut your mouth!" said Musaraigne, holding up the wall with his back. "Shut your mouth!" he said, holding himself up against the wall. "Shut your mouth, shut your mouth for God's sake!"

"But, Pierre, what's got into you all of a sudden?" Futeau asked, with an amazement mixed with irritation. He looked at the commissioners, then at Marion, then again at Musaraigne. "We always agreed that Laverne was a damned louser-up, didn't we? Just think of . . ."

"And what a louser-up," said Marion in the voice of a nun reciting the rosary. "If Steve cares to explain how Cyril disappeared just when Laverne . . ."

"Shut up! Shut up!" said Musaraigne. "You cackle like a pair of old hens, like . . ." He detached himself from the wall, took off his glasses, folded down the earpieces. The two commissioners followed his movements as if they were afraid he would leap up to the ceiling and vanish through the transom. His teeth were chattering. "Futeau, I'll tell you what you saw on the Canebière at eleven o'clock in the evening! You saw Laverne taking your wife home with him. You told me so yourself. And now you're trying to get back at him." His voice rose higher with each word, becoming louder and more piercing at once. "You can tell just by looking at Mimi. You raised hell with her, but you're not satisfied with that, you're out for Laverne's hide. You won't get away with it, Futeau, do you understand? . . . Do you understand? So shut up, shut up for God's sake! . . ."

"You're the one that better shut up!" said the commissioner with the crackling knuckles. "You're darn right he better shut up," his colleague agreed. He raised his arm and hit Musaraigne across the face with the back of his hand. He would have punched him squarely in the jaw, but Futeau, being quicker, caught his arm in mid-swing. The man shook himself free, and the other commissioner, with a bound, got behind Futeau. "Steve, Steve, look out!" cried Marion, pressing her hands to her breasts. The two commissioners looked at Futeau, one behind and the other in front, wondering if he would try anything foolish. A pretty kettle of fish, this Sucror, a tricky setup, with people disappearing by the dozen, trunks being sent overseas, and in the end everybody going to bed with everybody else. They were happy, this was a change from anonymous letters and keyhole ambushes; and if the lad with the Hollywood shoulders wanted to add spice to the dish by trying something foolish, all the better. But Futeau had no thought of adding spice to any dish whatever, he was in a hurry to go straight to the heart of the thing, straight to the abscess. These commissioners didn't scare him, not them nor two more like them, and if Pierre thought that he, Steve Futeau, had stopped the cops because he didn't want him hurt, he was off the track completely. "If they want to knock your head off, they'll have to take what I leave for them," he said. "Because before they get their hands on you I want to settle with you myself. What are you hinting at about Mimi and Laverne? Come out with it! And to think I took you for a pal, a real pal." He examined the

commissioner who stood between him and Musaraigne, puffed into his face. "Are you going to talk, yes or no?"

"You know very well what I mean. And so does Marion. Anyone would understand . . ."

His teeth were chattering so hard that he could not finish. Marion studied herself in the fragment of mirror over her typewriter, as if her reflection could tell her whether or not she knew what Musaraigne meant. If Mimi was sleeping with Laverne, so much the better, and even if she wasn't, it was interesting to talk about. And Steve—what a man! Look how he kept the two cops in their place, all he had to do was blow in their faces and they stayed put, and then he was strong and aboveboard and all. "Anyone would understand, but not me," Futeau was saying. "Me, I'll have no beating around the bush. I'm no good at riddles, I'm not." He wondered if he shouldn't push the commissioner aside and take Musaraigne by the ear. There must really be something between Mimi and Laverne, otherwise Pierre wouldn't have been so insistent; and since she had tried to do it with Hirsch, why couldn't she have done it for real with Laverne? But Pierre was lying, it wasn't possible, the story wouldn't stand up, Mimi never went out alone, he kept her busy all the time, and anyhow he would have caught on right away. "You're lying, Pierre . . ." "You're all lying, but you'll learn to tell the truth," cut in the commissioner who had established himself behind Futeau. "You're darn right they'll learn," the other commissioner chimed in. He strode to the door, opened it with a shove. "Hey, men!" he called. Two inspectors came up at a trot, hats on the back of their heads and Sucror candies in their mouths. "How are things going out there?" asked the commissioner who had called them. They answered that things were going all right. Through the partly opened door the Sucror staff could be seen crowding slowly into the wrapping and shipping room. The man behind Futeau left his place, he had folded his hands over his stomach and he wiggled his thumbs. "We taking any of those out there along?" he asked, indicating the door with a glance. The inspectors answered yes and no, that it was up to them, seeing that the whole lot seemed to have their papers in order. "We're taking these three customers," the commissioner announced, wiggling his thumbs over his stomach. "You can explain yourselves at headquarters, if you don't mind, *messieudames*?" He was like the father of a family promising his progeny a surprise. "You're darn right they don't mind," said the other commissioner, looking at Musaraigne and Futeau with relish. "Some of the customers love it, don't they, boys?"

The boys nodded and chewed. "Explain what, for hell's sake!" said Futeau. Then suddenly he broke into a gay, unaffected laugh: this comedy that Pierre was putting on was to save Laverne! Mimi—Mimi had nothing to do with it, absolutely nothing. "Me, I'll explain the whole thing to you in five seconds, gentlemen!" He was surprised that it had taken him so long to see through Pierre's game. The dumb lug, what was his idea, with all the mystery! And why the crazy yarn? What a ham, that Pierre! What

a bungler! The world's champion when it came to putting his foot in it. He sure had put a flea in the cops' ear, all right: the damage was done, and even if they wanted to they couldn't repair it now. But Futeau didn't want to repair anything, he didn't give a damn about the damage, and first of all he wasn't going to get mixed up with the police to accommodate Monsieur Laverne. Let Monsieur Laverne get out of his own mess. "Call my wife, Mimi Futeau!" he commanded the inspectors who stood munching date crusts. He tried to get out to the wrapping and shipping room, but the inspectors, their jaws working rhythmically, blocked the doorway. "She saw the whole thing," said Futeau, addressing the commissioners. "We were walking along the Canebière, me and my wife, when . . . Wait, there she is. Mimi, come here a minute! Come here, this will give you a laugh." Motionless in the middle of the silent group which was watching the scene in the directors' office, Mimi did not answer. "Come on over here, Mimi!" he repeated, beckoning to her. "The same as I see you, she saw Laverne pasting up stickers . . ."

"Won't you ever shut your trap!" said Musaraigne. "Won't you . . ." He charged at Futeau, but the commissioner with the wart-crowned fingers tripped him as he passed, and he sprawled on the floor. There was a hush, during which they all watched Musaraigne get slowly to his feet. Marion held her breasts, and Futeau's eyes slewed away from Musaraigne's glare. "Mimi, would you mind coming and telling your husband that he lies like a thief?" he said into Futeau's face. His teeth were not chattering, and he wiped his hands along his thighs. The commissioners said nothing, they were sizing up the parties to the action and waiting to see what would happen next, and the inspectors, stepping aside to let Mimi pass, stopped chewing.

"Did you want to speak to me, Pierre?" Mimi asked in her thin voice. Her blond hair hung low on her neck, and her air-and-water eyes were hidden behind dark glasses. Marion puffed out her green muslin blouse embroidered with yellow daisies, she looked benevolently at Mimi, and Musaraigne looked at Futeau balefully.

"Mimi," he said, never taking his eyes off Futeau, "Mimi, he claims he saw Laverne pasting up stickers and doing God knows what else, and that you saw it too. He claims it was at eleven in the evening, that you and he were walking on the Canebière, and that both of you caught Laverne red-handed. Tell the truth, Mimi. Isn't it true that Futeau has it in for him because you threw him over for Laverne?"

"Everybody in the Suc knows he can't stand Laverne," said Mimi. She looked like a blind woman to whom lying was unknown. She turned toward the room, toward her fellow workers. "Everybody knows it," she repeated. "He did everything he could to get Laverne fired. He tried to frame him in every possible way. There isn't one of us who doesn't know what was going on, is there?"

"That's right!" came in chorus from the group, the answer of a crowd seized with anger. In spite of the inspectors who sought to prevent them,

they rushed toward the door of the directors' office. His face red and his arms dangling, Futeau had lost the power of speech; he stared at Mimi with an effort that made his eyes pop out of his head. "Yes or no, were you with your husband when he saw your pal sticking stickers?" asked the commissioner who had tripped Musaraigne.

"What pal?" Mimi asked. Steve Futeau did not know she was looking at him from behind her dark glasses as if at last she was seeing him die. "Do you mean Marc Laverne, messieurs?" A faint smile passed over her lips, and all at once she seemed so beautiful to Futeau, so desirable with that smile he had never seen before, that he almost groaned. "Look at that man, messieurs. Can't you see he's raving mad with jealousy? You yourself, monsieur . . ." She paused, as if to give the smile time to cover her whole face. "You yourself, Monsieur le Commissaire, if he caught you giving me your arm, he'd denounce you as an English paratrooper or a Russian liaison officer."

The commissioner put his hand to the knot of his tie, and the inspectors, halting the movement of their jaws, peered slantwise at their boss. "You'll pay for this, Mimi," said Futeau, folding his arms as if they were worked by a spring. He did not recognize her with those dark glasses; her smile, and the shape of her face, and the curve of her mouth, and even the dress which fitted her hips so smoothly, were unrecognizable. The idea came to him that this woman was not Mimi, the real Mimi would not have dared. He wondered what they were after, what they were accusing him of, why they were so determined to poison his existence; and the moment after he was torn between the impulse to pound his fists into the crafty faces which taunted him, and the contrary impulse to make off as one flees toward self-destruction. "You'll account for this, Mimi," he added, without thinking, without believing it. He felt betrayed and abandoned, Musaraigne had turned out to be a lamentable weak sister, and the Suc, left headless by Daubigny's disappearance, would not be long in going under. "Come along, you can explain yourselves at the Prefecture. They'll help you to get your stories straight, *messieudames*," said the commissioner who was twiddling his thumbs on his stomach. "You're darn right they'll help them," said the other commissioner. "Come on, get your hats and let's get going. You too, Madame Mimi. The four of you. And the rest of you clear the door. And don't one of you leave Marseilles without permission, or it'll be tough on you." Futeau lit a cigarette, sat with one haunch on the corner of the beveled glass. He was resigned, Prefecture or headquarters or court of assizes—Godamighty what do I care this will teach me to put any confidence in family or friends not one in the whole pack would give me a glass of water if I was dying of thirst and the Suc the hell with the Suc it's no skin off my ass me I'll join up in the new army me they pay good in the new army look at that Mimi you'd think me and her'd never slept together and with my rank I'll be a captain with my fingers to my nose and before the war is over I'll be a colonel and nothing to worry about they need guys like me in the new army young and

muscles and all. That was the ticket, he'd join up, not in the volunteers for the Russian front of course, no German uniform for him, he'd join up in the French army, the regular, the armistice army, and no one would catch him trusting anybody again—man or woman or anybody. Misanthropy. Way down deep this was his true character, he admitted it now: misanthropy right down the line. The devil with the others! Live alone and like it. He should never have married, what a dope he'd been to take a wife. He tried to read Mimi's eyes behind their mask of dark glass, met and read Marion's instead. Yes, after all, Marion was left to him, Marion alone amid the universal treason. He felt a warmth at his throat, like the other day at the Chink's, and his Adam's apple went up and came down again. Marion, by the Lord! She understood him, she knew the man he was. Him and Marion. She didn't mind his awkwardness, his rough edges. A girl with a heart, that Marion. Him and her, they could have made out. The Suc, after all, it was too bad. Him and her, they could have run the Suc as it had never been run before.—Yes, my Steve, as it never had, said Marion's eyes. Musaraigne for sure was not the man to command, and the way he had just put his foot in it the cops would hold on to him as sure as God's little onions. A girl with a heart, that Marion, and nice to the hand. Nice, no mistake about it. And Daubigny, who maybe wouldn't show up till the end of the world. Him, Steve, and her, Marion—and for God's sake the Suc is on its way again like on ball bearings!—Like on ball bearings, yes, my Steve, said Marion's eyes. "Messieurs," he said, pointing a finger at the commissioners, "bring Hirsch, our cashier, along too. He saw the whole thing. He will certify to the accuracy of my deposition."

"You won't get Hirsch to testify falsely," said Musaraigne. He looked at Futeau and hate clouded his eyes. Pressing closely around the door of the directors' office, several dozen young men were measuring the general foreman with their eyes as if they were feeling him and testing him until the moment came to tear him to shreds, and behind her dark glasses Mimi was beautiful and untouched.—If she said . . . thought Futeau, suddenly dazzled. If Mimi said a word, the word, if she said, "Steve, take me away," he would have done something . . . something really big. "You won't be able to intimidate Hirsch," said Mimi. "Hirsch has too much courage. . . ."

"You make me sick!" thundered Futeau. "You're . . ." He choked with pent-up rage, looking at Mimi as if he would crush her under his heel. "I promise you, my girl, you haven't heard the last of this! Call Hirsch, messieurs! Where the hell is Hirsch?"

Docilely, the commissioners signaled to their inspectors to call Hirsch—and they called him. Futeau came to the door, facing the looks of those outside as if preparing to plunge head down through a fire. "Hirsch! Come out of there, you dumb cluck! Hirsch, damn it all!" The sneak, the coward, with his designs on Mimi . . . This bunch of yellow-bellies, they polluted the earth. . . . He turned his back deliberately on them, addressing the inspectors. "Did you check Hirsch off on your lists?" He acted as

if he had taken command, and intended to make use of it. "Look him up, messieurs! Look him up!"

"He must be one of the missing ones," said one of the inspectors. "When I called his name back a bit they said he went downstairs just before we came up, and they said we caught them all here, the morning shift and the evening shift, because the morning ones were waiting for this Hirsch to come back with their pay, because they get paid by the day, after work, and so this guy, the cashier, didn't come up again, so it looks like he got wind of what was going on, that's why . . ."

"That's why there's one more disappeared," said the commissioner with the wart-decorated fingers, cutting off his subordinate's wordy explanation. "But that's the rule, it's never two but three," he added sententiously.

"You're darn right it's never," the other commissioner approved.

Bowed beneath the weight of the march, the woman's silhouette blocked a fugitive outline against the towering night-shrouded mountain. "Walk in step with me," she had said when they left Canfranc five hours earlier, five hours of diabolical ascent, as if in order to reach Spain they had to clamber over heaven—the highest of the seven known heavens. Hirsch had walked in time, twenty thousand obedient paces step for step, and behind him the couple who belonged to the caravan likewise obeyed, left-right-left, more cautiously than if they were walking on broken glass. During the first hours of the climb the discipline of the cadenced step, of the chorused footfall, cost him an almost unbearable distress. The single echo of their collective exertions, the synchronous rhythm of their stride, of their breathing, as if the hostile hugeness of the night contained only enough solid space for one foot, only enough air for one pair of lungs, seemed to him likely to arouse all the guards on either slope of the Pyrenees. They had to feed on silence, they should have been crawling on their bellies, soaring like bats; but this single flat echo, this smooth and naked echo, was the worst peal of bells that Hirsch could imagine. They were four, the couple behind him in Indian file and the other woman, the guide; in front, a sort of monstrous pendulum by reason of their swaying in unison, as if the four of them were parts of a complete whole—the four legs of a horse, the four columns of a cenotaph. When he or one of the others dislodged a stone or stubbed his foot against a root, when the cry of an animal resounded against the leaden vault of the night, Hirsch felt a brief but real relief, which he tried to prolong by some deliberate breach of discipline. Taking advantage of the break in rhythm resulting from the fall of the stone, from the recovery of the person who had stumbled, from the slow dying out of the cry, he hurriedly changed step, or coughed, or cleared his throat. But as soon as he had shattered the fantastic structure, woven a human note into the inhuman harmony, the woman behind him laid a vigilant finger on his shoulder, calling him to order with a touch as impersonal as the echo of their presence in the interminable night. From the first mile of their long trek he had hated this woman whose face he

did not know, having barely glimpsed her and her companion in a shuttered room, to which a contact man had led him when he got off the train from Pau. Sometimes, feeling the correction coming as a musician anticipates the wrath of the maestro, he tried to escape it; and then, not finding the shoulder where it had become accustomed to chastise it, the lady's finger hit him in the neck, the shoulder blades, the ear. Hirsch did not know whether she was young or old, thin or fat, and while he was not in the least curious about what she was or was not, for a long time she had obsessed him like a load lashed to the back of his neck. Up to the imperceptible moment of transition when his thoughts, solicited by new sensations, had finally lost her, he had sought, with a persistence all the greater because he knew he could not do it, to convince himself that at the next touch of the finger he would turn back and push the lady over a precipice, so she could understand once and for all that a single but constant sound, launched in the night, is an instigation to crime, a prelude to death in ambush. He had tried to foresee the probable consequences—a landslide in the distance, or perhaps a clap of thunder, a marvelous thunderclap whose voice would have pulverized the threat of death in ambush, or perhaps Spain would at last have emerged from anonymity, Spain at last above the night. But she, sure of the rights she had bought with the twenty-five or fifty or maybe a hundred thousand francs her mountain promenade had cost her, plodded ahead at the prescribed step, the only step allowed on the clandestine run of the frontiers.

Nevertheless his stride had fitted itself to that of the group, and without his being aware of it, the lady's vigilant finger had lost interest in his shoulder. Following the silhouette of the woman who preceded him at arm's length, his eyes riveted on her back, on the black outline of her back stuffed with night and the mountain, he dragged himself along in the wake of someone who knew, of someone who was sure and indefatigable and who knew. The woman in front—he was as ignorant of her face as of those of the couple behind—he felt that she was strong and sure and light in the murder-ridden darkness. He made out the woman's back against the back of the night, the curve of her loins against the loins of the night, she clung to the darkness like a walnut to its shell, with the sort of certainty that comes from possessing the essential truths. She might know no more than the mountain paths, than the abutments and flying buttresses of the mountain which screen the fugitive from the aim of the gendarme, from the fire of the *guardia civil*, but it was a great and good knowledge nonetheless. Why was he, Hirsch, unable to enjoy this thing, this strange object—certainty? A thing in common usage, not dear, not rare, an object external to the soul, since millions of people walk around with their certainties in their vest pockets, in the frames of their eyeglasses: they use certainty for legs, for metaphysical fins, it clothes them with a kind of sacerdotal dignity, and makes them contented and sure of what they are doing. But on his skin the vaccine of certainty refused to take. Yet he was no "Voltairean," no "materialist," he thought that in the absence of

a god bearded and vindictive, or an effeminate and tearful god, an "intelligence" co-ordinated the risings and settings of the universe. And that was the rub—he "thought," when what he wanted was to know, instinctively, as Laverne seemed to know, a thing or two, no matter what. Granted, he knew as well as anyone else that this was the mountain, the night, that he was fleeing, that on the fear-laden sky no frontier separated the worlds, that one day every man must die like a pig, like a saint; but the cataloguing of facts, the "certificates of faithful copy," implied no certainties for Hirsch. He did not doubt that a vegetable was green, coitus good, prayer appeasing: these so-called objective truths were painless as eggs under a brooding hen. That had nothing to do with certainty. He thought that certainty is at the opposite pole from knowledge and experience, that it is coal changed to diamond, lead transformed into gold. He did not know what he thought about it. In the exceedingly rare moments when he had felt "visited" by what he hoped was a certainty, it had always taken a negative, a perishable form; like the silhouette of the woman in front, which would dissolve with the first blinking of the dawn. He remembered a day in Paris, with the light sliding down the slowly tilting sky. Elbows on the table and ears in her hands, the girl bumbles discontentedly through a page of Montaigne's *Essays*—*That a man ought soberly to meddle with judging the divine lawes*. He watches her pouting little mouth puff out with disdain, and when she enounces: "Whence it followeth, that nothing is so firmly beleaved as that which a man knoweth least; nor are there people more assured in their reports than such as telleth fables," all at once he is seized by a commotion so brutal that he leaves his pupil in the middle of a sentence and makes for the door. Suddenly, in the strangest way, he had been struck by the stupefying certainty that he knew nothing of Montaigne, whose *Essays* had been his bedside book since he was fourteen years old: he had finally felt the recoil of a text read and reread a thousand times, as though after four centuries of vain investigation he had, in the batting of an eye, penetrated its inner sense, discovered the subtle message which Montaigne had put there expressly for him, Gustave Henri Hirsch: "Hirsch, nothing is less known than what a man believes firmly." He recalled another time, when he was on holiday at Senlis. One morning, when he had gone upstairs to kiss his grandmother, who was bedridden under the burden of her great age, he had the extreme, the dreadful revelation that the old house in which he was born had become a stranger to him, the ancestor propped up on a pile of cushions likewise a stranger, and he no less a stranger in his clothes, in his skin. He dashed to a mirror, did not recognize his own face; and, as always when he was assailed by these certainties which destroyed what he had thought to be certain, he began to run blindly away, chased by an anguish without name or description. Thus, the other day, by an illumination as surprising and brutal as the preceding ones, he knew that Sonia Krantz had been hoping he would come, hoping for the seal of his complicity on her open mouth, on her warm tongue, in order

that death might take her; and this time, as in Paris and at Senlis and on other occasions when he had almost succumbed under the impact of similar certainties, he set off at a mad gallop, which now Spain alone would be able to stop. "Is it still far to Spain?" he whispered to the dark back which climbed and climbed the steps of the night. "Still far?"

"Still far," the dark back answered laconically. The measured stride of the caravan paced off the immeasurable distance. Hirsch had been warned, eighteen hours of rhythmic march, and when the church towers of Jaca show their gray points in the red dust of the sunset, it will be Spain—Spain there on the other side of flight, she could not fail this rendezvous, she could not fail it, he had only to be patient, Spain with her tombs gaping wide, her prisons and her camps where Christ is adored, with her franco-francofranco in stencil on the street corners smeared with cephalorachidian fluid. He had only to be patient, it was regulated chronometered like the express trains on the main international lines—six hours of march, one hour of rest, three hours of march, one hour of rest; at the end of the tenth hour a Spanish guide would relieve the French guide, then six hours, rest, three hours, Jaca. Jaca on the horizon. Jaca which the sensible traveler would carefully avoid if he wished to keep his teeth, to keep his little easily killable life. But confidence was the thing, confidence and thousand-franc notes, since for a reasonable increase in the tariff a third guide would set the traveler down in Huesca, where he could board a wagon loaded with straw or a bicycle and get to Lérida, whence he would depart in a taxi and land in Barcelona. Or not land there. But confidence was the thing, don't ruminate over derailments and take a supplementary pinch of dollars out of the lining of your coat since there are special tariffs for Madrid, extra tariffs for Gibraltar, de luxe tariffs for Lisbon. Hirsch had "booked passage" only as far as Jaca, he had paid only fifteen thousand francs, and afterward he figured . . .

Afterward! He almost halted, almost clutched the back of the woman who was scaling the steps of the towering, night-shrouded mountain. Afterward . . . And afterward? During these last few days, when he was running around in circles looking for a way out, until he had carried off the Sucror cashbox and vanished in the fog, during these days he had not given a thought to this "afterward," which now, all of a sudden, bit into his mind. The silence, charged with nocturnal tumult, wavered under the maddening interrogation—and afterward? . . . and afterward? . . . The Pyrenees between him and France, between him and the slack body of Sonia Krantz at the foot of the high wall which garlanded her with its spreading wounds, and then Spain, and then the unknown isles with their promise of peace and of life and of amiable coconut trees—this is what he had thought of; this, and his red blood, out of which they proposed to make black pudding, or synthetic honeys and petrols. But perhaps he had not even thought of that, all he remembered was that he had run in one direction and his brain in another. There was nothing he could do about it, for a long time now the interior of his body had been

afame, burning wildly, fermenting wildly. For a long time. He was born at the hour when peace and the isles and a well-loved text no longer fitted into rational categories—at the hour of the pagan feast which heralded the fecund Saturnalia of our age. He could not and would not be part of it, he was not made for currishness, he was made for rice pudding and weak tea, for a muffler around his throat and Montaigne in his heart: ". . . whatsoever injurious alteration or fall the heavens may prepare against us . . . I holde it only fit for Kings to be angry with Kings; and mocke at those rash spirits, who from the braverie of their hearts offer themselves to so unproportionate quarrels." But he could not even laugh at them, sarcasm and humor were not included in the inventory of his gifts, and whatever direction his impulses took, he sank ever deeper into the vertical night. "I can't walk any farther," he said all at once to the dark back of the woman. "I don't want to . . . I don't want to."

The woman's dark back did not answer and Hirsch went on walking. The night was without bottom, without summit the mountain, without faces the women in front and behind. Vibrant and tenacious, the echo of his words passed back through his ears and caught him by the throat.—What don't I want? he asked himself, as if he were contemplating his own corpse. The silence belched with the rumbling flatulences of a swamp, and a few scattered stars, chased far aloft by the voracious invasion of the night-shrouded mountain, swung at the end of a chilly ray of platinum. But on the contrary, with all his might he wanted this or that, for instance to identify one of those stars before their platinum thread melted, that should be possible since they had a name, followed an orbit, lived in constellations. To recognize them at this moment would have confirmed the reason of his being, the extravagant reason which drove him to pursue, like a dog on a leash, a scent lost in advance. To know which one belonged to the Gemini, which to the Swan, this would really have been a point of reference—but no, no, he was adrift on a spherical sea, on a sea so closed that constantly he came back to himself, to Gustave Henri Hirsch.—Afterward? But afterward came one of those certainties for which he had a genius, one of those crawling truths simpler than the fear of living, than the panic of dying: after the isles and the stars whose surnames and genealogies one knew, after the nebulae, as they were called, and still afterward and further and further and yet further afterward, the darkness is not less nor the hatred less nor less the drunkenness under the traveler's teetering step. There was no haven, no star nor isle nor nebula without its Jew on the cross, no hole in the moon where he might find pardon for having invented a Jesusgod of mercy. Suddenly, so close to Hirsch that he almost bumped into it, a spike of mountain punched through the sky, and through the puncture in the skullcap of the sky the bradawl of dawn stippled the curved hump of the night. "Here we are," said the guide's dark back. "Careful, there's a steep drop for a hundred feet."

They scrambled down a slope, sliding like logs down a chute. Carried



away by her desire to do what was right, the woman behind rolled to the head of the column. "Gewaaalt! . . ." she called in the voice of a night bird. "Gewaaa . . . !" "Don't shout," said the guide, hooking her as she passed. The man behind grasped Hirsch's coattails, letting go of a small chest which bounded downhill with the noise of an avalanche. He uttered a series of unintelligible sounds, clung to Hirsch's coattails with renewed decision. "There, we made it," the guide said. "Sit down." She slipped off her knapsack, knelt, sat down. The man uttered a short, furious string of barks, and his wife translated—chest, hard-boiled eggs, oranges, all we had to eat, what will we eat. "In a minute it will be daylight, and you'll find your chest," said the guide. "We have an hour to rest. Sit down, but don't stretch out right away. It's bad, you're perspiring." Hirsch disobeyed, fell back on the damp moss. The woman with a finger like an orchestra leader's baton called him to order with a touch on the shoulder. "Go to the devil," said Hirsch, with his eyes closed; and as she did not seem disposed to comply, he gave her a rap on the finger. "Oh!" she said, then ground out a long phrase addressed to her companion. The guide uncorked a flask and they heard her drinking. Hirsch was thirsty, blisters were rising on the soles of his feet, his muscles were stiff with cramps, and in his chest the air shrilled like an old hinge. "You can't smoke, wait till it's daylight," said the guide, putting the cork back in the flask. She was having visions, he wasn't smoking, or maybe it was the other man.—How sure she is that it will be daylight, he thought. He liked her calm, melodious voice, and her Midi accent. His sweat was drinking up the moisture of the soft moss through his clothing. At his left the couple said nothing, and on his right the guide again uncorked the flask. All at once he recalled her name, he had heard it in Marseilles—Valerie, a girl that nobody knows where she comes from, but trust her, she's regular and she knows the mountains. "Valerie, I'm thirsty," he said, lying, eyes closed, on the damp moss. She put the flask to his lips and he drank without opening his eyes, letting the wine dribble down his chin. "Get up, you'll catch cold."—She talks as if she knew everything, he thought. As if she had read Montaigne. "He'll catch something now, just when we're going to get into Spain," said the woman whom he had dispatched to the devil. . . . Catch anything whatever, but a certainty which would not be the contrary of a certainty. To believe that there is something other than the always impossible flight, than the ever more relentless perplexity. Not to think that at every breath toxins are invading the bloodstream, that at each instant conjunctive cells are stifling the noble cells. Not to think of entropia. To believe, like Valerie, that daylight will come. The dawn had climbed high enough on the rungs of the sky, for the man struck a match, a courageous dawn which was not afraid of the light of a match. "When we get to Portugal we can lie on the beach and not be disturbed," said the lady traveler. She had high hopes and she was going to Portugal. "We are going to Palestine: and you? Are you going to America?" She had high hopes and firm certainties, she was sure of meeting Palestine

at the tip of her disciplined finger. "We have all our visas, the Spanish and the rest, but not the French: and you? Have you got your ship already?" "I am walking around the world," said Hirsch. He was lying flat with the damp moss in his shoulder blades, eyes closed and jaws parted. "You're losing something," said the lady, touching him on the shoulder. He felt around, came on the Montaigne which had slipped out of his pocket. "It's my diplomatic passport," he said. The man blew out cigarette smoke, growled a series of incomprehensible words. "My husband says where is the chest, he says . . ." "It's right there under your nose," said the guide, leaning on her elbow. "Ya, under my nose . . ." the lady traveler agreed, enchanted to see it there.—I've always gone forward crabwise, thought Hirsch behind his closed eyelids. Begin all over again. Start out again, by the main staircase this time, and with a fanfare of trumpets. He sniffed, closed his jaw.—I was born a servant, he thought. I was born a slave who dares not put on his master's coat when the master is out. If the doors of the Hôtel du Parc had been thrown open and Pétain himself had come to greet me, hat in hand, I would not have risked it; I would have turned a last look, breathed a last sigh, toward the service entrance. "We'll be at home in Palestine," said the lady who had her visas. She was sucking an orange and spitting out the pips. Hirsch opened his eyes, closed them. The dawn was freeing itself rapidly, becoming arrogant and malignant.—I'll go to Palestine, too, he thought. I'll go there, intoning an alleluia. I'll be at home too; at home at the Weeping Wall, yowling to my heart's content. A bad symbol, that wall. A big cancer. An ozena in the nose of the Jews. Go to Jerusalem and raze the symbol. Or take it on his back and transport it to Berchtesgaden. A sort of chuckle escaped him, like the cackle of a quail taking wing. "He makes his own jokes," said the lady who was spitting out orange pips.—To Berchtesgaden, and let the Nazis beat their brains out against it during the thousand and one years of their reign. The moss had grown warm under his back, and in his chest the air chirred like a barber's scissors behind one's ear. "Valerie," he said.

"Yes?" the guide answered. She was stretched out on the moss with her chin on her fists, she looked at Hirsch through her eyelashes. There was something unexpected, a note of banter almost, in the way this man addressed her. She studied his face in detail: it was hollow in the cheeks, hollow at the temples, the mouth bluish, the lids closed over the deep cavities of the eye sockets—the face of a shipwrecked man thrown up on the beach, whom the cold flashing of the dawn will not bring back to life. "Yes?" she repeated.

"Are we in Spain?"

"Not yet. We'll be there at the second halt, three hours from now."

She had raised herself on her elbow and was looking at the man's hollow visage. Through his slightly open, slate-colored lips she could see a thin piping of white enamel. He rested so quietly that she wondered if he had forgotten to breathe. "Why?" she asked. "Are you in a hurry to get there?"

"Why not?" said the woman with the attentive finger. "Why not? Did he have such a good life in France? Phooey on France."

"Go to the devil," said Hirsch. His hand groped around and met the guide's hand. He took her fingers and she let him take them. "You'll be back in six hours, seven hours?"

"Be back? Back where?"

"Back here." Drops of sweat oozed out between his eyelids, gathered in the hollow of his cheeks. "Right here. I'm not going any farther."

"He's not going any farther!" exclaimed the lady who was going farther. Horror rasped in her voice, as if someone had flipped up her skirt in the public square. She delivered a long and impossible stream of words to her companion, but he rebuffed her with a bark. Behind Hirsch's eyelids brown rings were dancing on a yellow background. "I'll wait for you right here. Do you mind? You can pick me up on the way and we'll go back together."

"He's going to wait for her right here!" said the lady who couldn't keep quiet. She seemed sincerely shocked. "Right here, for heaven's sake! He thinks she'll give him back his money, that's what he thinks. She . . ."

"If you like . . ." said the guide in a slow voice. She let him hold her fingers, looking at the man who once more was forgetting to breathe. "I never come back by the same route, but if you don't want to go on I'll return here for you."

"You shouldn't ever come back the way you went, it brings bad luck," said the lady who had principles.

"Anything can happen, but since I've been doing this work I haven't had an accident. I tell you that to put your mind at ease, in case you were . . ." She hesitated, watching Hirsch's immobile mask intently. "I won't return your money."

"What did I tell you!" triumphed the lady who had her visas and the rest. "She wouldn't give his money back, not a sou she wouldn't give." She touched Hirsch's shoulder, and her voice trembled with anxiety. "How much did you pay? Sixty thousand francs, like us?"

"I don't want you to give back the money," said Hirsch. "I hadn't even thought of it. I'll stay here and wait for you. . . . Valerie . . ."

The fingers lying in his hand assured him that she was listening. In the shelter of his closed eyelids brown rings were spinning lazily on a yellow background. "Do you think I'm afraid?"

"I . . . I don't know."

"She doesn't know!" said the lady who had her visas and the rest except the French. "If he was afraid, would he want to stay here alone?"

Hirsch released the guide's hand. His back was warm and wet, and stuck flat to the carpet of moss. He seemed to have grown thinner in the last hour. His nostrils were white, and the lower part of his face was drawn. Leaning on her elbow, the guide watched the words forming on his ashen lips. "The other day a woman asked me to take her away. I had taken her hand and her husband was hammering me in the face. She said, 'Take

me away, don't leave me with him.' I knew I shouldn't leave her with him. She needed me, needed someone, as—as I need you now. And then something happened, and I left her with him, and I ran away."

"And what happened, I ask you?" said the lady who had her visas and the rest except the French and who was going to Palestine. "Her husband chased you, he did right, that's what happened."

"The same day, several hours earlier, I had kissed a woman. I went to see an old couple, and met her there. Her eyes were two crazy millstones. She came toward me with her lips open. I put my mouth into hers, deeply into hers."

"Oh . . ." said the lady who was offended in her modesty. "Oh . . ." she said, biting into a fresh orange.

"Then I ran away. Ran. Ran. I had never seen her before. Nor after. Yes, after. The next day. I saw her naked and swollen, doubled up on the pavement in a pool of blood."

"And why?" cried the lady, spitting out a pip. "What did you do to her?"

"That was three days ago. Or four. Since then I've been running. No, not since then. Since I had legs. And yet I'm not a deserter. Deserters flee from a cause, a danger. I never faced a real danger. I don't know exactly what a danger means. I fought the war in Paris, at a recruiting station. I . . ."

"He talks and talks and I don't understand a thing," said the lady who didn't understand. "I this, I that. And since he paid, why doesn't he want to come?"

Hirsch stopped talking and lay quiet. The guide slipped on the straps of her knapsack. "It's time to go," she said, standing up. "He's not so stupid, he'll come, you'll see he'll come," said the lady that nobody asked. She groaned as if she had dropped ballast, pulled herself laboriously to her feet. The man did the same, in silence and without groaning. Hirsch was lying on his back, brown circles rose and sank inside his yellow lids. He had grown older in the last hour and the lower part of his face was white and pinched under the sweat. To stay here, eyes closed, without moving and without breathing. He felt renewed in serenity, as after a confession. Stay here and win. "Valerie?"

"Yes?" she said, straight and calm above him.

"I think you will come back. But even if you did not come back . . ." Again he fell silent. Even if she did not come back. But she must go now, right away. To continue the monologue would be cheating. "Now go," he said. If he opened his eyes and saw her, he would begin again to run in her wake. To stay here alone and with no discipline but his will was to flee more madly than ever, but this time against the current. When she comes back to pick him up, he will have found an escape. One escape or another. "Now go," he repeated.

"I shall be back toward the end of the afternoon," said the guide. "There's bread and cheese beside your book. . . . Let's go."

The man barked a series of sounds, his wife answered with a flood of words, and Hirsch was left alone. The creaking of steps could be heard on the complaining gravel. There was still time to jump up, to rejoin the caravan. On the yellow screen of his eyelids the brown circles spun faster and faster. Three hours—two hours—one hour—Spain. Señor Don Gustavo Enrique Hirsch el Cobarde. There was still time, the caravan's steps could be heard as they died out in the cold of the morning. *Jaca. Muy cobarde nuestro.* With a violent effort he sat erect. Hispanity on his hand. The earth turned and he with it. Spanish influenza and he with it. He propped himself on the moss, slipped, caught himself. The cramp had poured a column of concrete into his neck and down his back, and in his ears the silence burst with a loud report. At first he saw nothing, then he saw a cave open to the sky, concealed by dead brushwood. Wide and quiet tumult of the silence. The earth was turning more slowly, and he more slowly with it. He wiped his mouth and his forehead, looked at the sweat stains on his handkerchief. Maybe there was still time. He walked into the brushwood, it wasn't dead at all, it mingled with a broom in flower and brambles studded with berries. Time to bring Sonia Krantz to life, time to take Mimi Futeau away. Wide and quiet tumult of the dawn. He put out his hand, picked a raspberry, then a blackberry. The blackberry exploded on his lips, squirting black milk into his nostrils. He laughed soundlessly, limped back to the carpet of moss. A cuckoo called in the distance, perhaps from Spain, a cricket made echo close by, perhaps from France. He gathered up the orange peels and threw them behind the brambles. Then he sat down and ate. Bread had never tasted so good.

## » 12 «

THE LITTLE TOWN WORE A LOOK BEFITTING A SUNDAY in time of war and national mourning. Hundreds of Marseillais who had come by train and bicycle, each carrying a basket of provisions, were lunching on the pine-dotted heights, or lolled on the café terraces before a glass of mineral water, or lay on the sunny beach. Moored loosely to the quai, boats painted in gaudy colors and christened *Rose de Mon Coeur* and *Agapine II* rocked on the somnolent water of the mole-enclosed bay. No fishermen went out now, for want of nets and bait—for want of courage, too, since the Mediterranean, strewn with bombs and torpedoes and underwater mines, had become a place of ill repute and the fish were gone. The painters—mostly foreigners—who were to Cassis what Cassis was to its fishermen, had likewise vanished for want of canvas and paints and visitors' permits. From time to time, indeed, some young person appeared, a fleeting vision on the gray pavement of the port, wearing brick-red or pastel blue slacks, with salient anatomy and swinging gait, drawing appreciative eyes after her; but the overprecise crease in her trousers, the too artful disorder of her tresses tossing in the mistral, raised doubts as to her reality: it was truly a vision, a reminiscence of an age rich in mussels, in broad jokes rubbed with garlic, in demoiselles who allowed themselves to be loved. Yet everything seemed to be as it had been in the past—the old houses in the shimmering light, the chilly transparency of the water under the keels of the boats, the proud sun on the hillsides, and the crowd itself, not too sad, not too faded. Through the window of the little restaurant where she was finishing her luncheon with Pontillac, Karen's eyes followed the townspeople as they picked their way between the ugly iron tables which the bistro-keepers had set out along the quai. "I used to come here once or twice a year and spend a few days," she was saying. "I was very fond of this corner of the coast. In spite of its vacationers dressed up as painters and its spinsterish Englishwomen, Cassis was still a fishing port, it was genuine, if you see what I mean, in contrast with other towns along the coast. But oh my, I don't recognize my Cassis now. Not that it has changed, on the contrary it would seem that the absence of Cook's tourists would restore the hallmark of modesty which the town

must have had, I suppose, before the invention of the railroad: but still there's something wrong. I'm almost sorry I suggested that you bring me here, Adrien."

"Suggested? . . ." said Pontillac, tapping a cigarette on his thumbnail. "I should rather say persuaded by main force. . . . I certainly felt a tugging at my ear when I yielded to your whim."

"You showed it plainly enough, monsieur." She gave vent to her slow, low-pitched laugh—a Hungarian laugh, he thought, desperately conscious of the idiocy of the idea. "I can readily imagine, my dear, that you have very little enthusiasm for the pleasures of Sunday picnicking in the suburbs. But to come back to Cassis, mightn't it be the gendarmes at the corners, and also these gentlemen with the peculiar expression—what do you call it, yes, the hangdog look—like the one on the sidewalk opposite, that change my little village? And the posters? Have you noticed the considerable variety of posters splashed on the walls? How annoying they are, these placards that no one reads. Do you read them, Adrien?"

"Not at this moment," he said somberly. He was dissatisfied at having let himself be dragooned into this silly excursion. At Karen's apartment, or in his own, for she might finally have consented to come to his place, they would have had some wine, and he would have taken her into his arms. Sunday was the only day of the week when he could take a few hours from his work, and it was as if Karen had done him out of a promise. But, knowing how sensitive she was to the slightest change of voice, to the faintest trembling of the lips—already her black pupils were dilating, already non-presence was clouding their light—he repressed his crossness. He brushed the tips of her fingers lightly, then the back of her hand. "I remember something I read one day, a study on the effectiveness of poster propaganda. The author, I recall, concluded that there was no better way to disseminate ideas. Everybody who uses the streets is subject—involuntarily, mechanically if you wish—to the appeal of an illustrated poster; and if he doesn't stop to read it, his eyes go back to it repeatedly. He comes across its reproduction so frequently that he absorbs its contents whether he likes it or not. . . . But what a boring topic, Karen! Would you mind telling me what we do next on this radiant day?"

"It is radiant, isn't it?" she said gaily. "Oh, Adrien, don't be so stiff-necked about it! Have you forgotten that I made you bring your bathing suit? To the beach, monsieur! As for the posters, it may be that your author is not altogether wrong. On my first trip to England I improved my English by reading the signs in the streets: High Life Tailor, Keep to the Left, Established 1850. It's curious to note that the more inane the text was, the more it attracted my attention and the greater progress I made. After your explanation I think I understand that the . . . let's say the educational technique . . . is the same for these . . . these posters. But you must admit, my dear, that for sheer ugliness they're unbeatable."

As he crossed the square, lightly holding Karen's elbow, Pontillac could not help turning his attention to the posters. Whatever his author's

theories, the fact was that he had never caught himself submitting "involuntarily and mechanically" to the appeal of advertising display bills, national or other. Karen was right, in her rather pitiless way: these posters were ugly, so ugly that one might easily suppose they were intended to run down the product they advertised. One of them, celebrating the decree on the retirement of aged workmen, thrust itself upon his notice and solicited his approval: against a background of factory chimneys the Marshal was shaking the hand of a workman in overalls. "I keep promises, even those of others," said the legend. Alongside the "proletarian," who had been given a robust, ruddy complexion, the Marshal looked rickety: he risked an apologetic little smile, as if the workman's grip was crushing his fingers, and the oak leaves on his kepi resembled wilted leeks. All at once he remembered a newsreel he had seen, on his last visit to Vichy, of all places, in the projection room of the propaganda service. The Marshal was shown at his estate in Grasse, he was watching his gardener sprinkle the lawn, and suddenly—Pontillac imagined the director raising his finger: "Okay, Monsieur le Maréchal!"—suddenly the leader of all the French tripped down a gently sloping walk, three steps at the most, and so sorrily that he just missed falling flat, cane first. "The Marshal, still vigorous as always and in full possession of his intellectual faculties . . ." intoned the voice on the sound track. Why had this ridiculous scene not been cut? The fact that he himself, at first sight, had not divined any disparaging intention, clearly demonstrated the insidious subtlety of the weapon of sabotage. His face was so careworn that once more Karen suggested that they abandon the idea of bathing and return to Marseilles.

"No, really not, Karen. It would be a pleasure to go for a swim," he said, asking for his bathing suit. He hoped that a dip would calm him, and in addition he wanted to talk to Karen. They met again on the sand, in the midst of a crowd, a large part of which was simply cooking in the sun, in town attire, the women with their skirts pulled halfway up their thighs, the men exposing their garters. A horde of children pranced and shouted, and people stepped over each other and trod on each other good-humoredly, and played ball, and played cards, and indulged in catch-as-catch-can wrestling. The beach was small and narrow, and offered no refuge where Karen and Pontillac could sit down without having people fall all over them, and even on the black rocks which rose toward the southeast the crowd swarmed with the oblique movement of crabs with the waves washing over them. They stood undecided for some time, Karen amused by Pontillac's visible displeasure, Pontillac unable to conceal his antipathy for such familiar promiscuity. "If you can get one of those self-propelled skiffs," she said, "I shall allow you to take me out to sea."

The idea struck Pontillac as excellent. A dozen or more of the pedal-propelled skiffs were crisscrossing the bay. There was none free, however, and a number of people, who had been on the list for hours, were impatiently awaiting their turn. Karen saw Pontillac haggling with the woman who sat enthroned in front of an alarm clock, saw him slip a

hundred-franc note into her greasy hand—and the first skiff that came in was theirs. There were some protests, a few harsh words, but the renting woman put on a show of anger—"four hours ago already the gentleman with the little lady they paid me for the boat so what are you kicking about I'm telling you eh?"—and away they went. It looked as though Pontillac had taken Karen's "going to sea" literally, he pedaled as if to get out of sight of land, and soon the beach was no more than a slender ribbon of pale sand overhung by verdant terraces. They moved along a tall cliff whose bare, forbidding mass, rising straight from the sea, was reflected deep down in the tranquil blue of the water. "Look at that! You'd take it for a pirate fortress, wouldn't you?" said Karen. She was rubbing a suntan cream over her face and shoulders. "Would you rub this on my back, Adrien?"

He stopped pedaling and the skiff floated at rest, drifting slowly before the breeze. Scarcely wrinkled, scarcely moving, the water gathered the bright sunshine and reflected it like a distorting mirror. The physical exertion, the tête-à-tête with Karen in this long-sought seclusion, her nearness to him, had relaxed Pontillac. She sat in the bottom of the skiff between his knees, bracing herself on them with both hands, and he rubbed her back. He thought—her nearness, the nearness of her body, of her voice; and the thought was symmetrical with the sensation of absence he felt as soon as he was away from her. With one hand he pushed aside the wisps of hair on her neck, with the other he spread the cream on her shoulder blades, and she shivered and arched her back under his touch. He had never yet seen her so close to nudity, so flawless in her perfection, nor had he ever held her so tightly enfolded. What animal was she, to what queer species did she belong, that she troubled him as she did? If he were able to situate her, to classify her in his collection of fauna, he could have thrown off her hold on him as one gets over a neurosis after a dream has been analyzed. He placed Karen's head on his knee, bent over her, fixed his cold stare in the black fire of her eyes, and over his look came the dull, diffused gleam of opaque glass. Karen knew this look, she was armed against the combustion which she sensed beneath the apparent calm of his eye—a cold light which saw through everything and revealed nothing of itself. She had an intuition that at this moment, as always when he was about to kiss her, he was struggling to overcome a sort of undefinable fear. There was nothing in Pontillac which moved her so much as this bashfulness, this reserve, as if he were apprehensive of being rebuffed. At such times he wore an expression of sadness, a hard, sad expression which was entirely beyond his control, and which delivered him into her hands in a state of candor, almost of purity, that he was far from suspecting. She waited with delight for the instant when he would put away his self-censure, his forty years of seigniorial discipline. He dared not mingle his mouth with hers until she gave him encouragement, freed him of the bond of which he was perhaps not conscious—a permission she gave him by thought, by a wish, and which he perceived as if

she had expressed it aloud. But this time he was not going to kiss her, not right away, she felt it in his touch, in his breathing. This time he was going to say something of—of moment. "Don't say anything you might regret, monsieur," she said, her cheek against his thigh and her eyes half closed. "I would be liable to take you literally."

Even had he wished, he could not have fooled her. She confounded him by her insight. "How do you know I intend to say something which might entail, not regrets, but bitterness at least?"

"But I don't know, Adrien. It can be read in your eyes, I suppose."

Like the ridiculous idea about the "Hungarian" laugh, a no less ridiculous conjecture passed through his mind: the women of the Magyars were soothsayers, witches of Endor. He was sure she had read nothing so revealing in his eyes. He was silent for a few minutes, while he maneuvered the skiff so that Karen's face was in the shade.

"My eyes must certainly be getting weak," he said, "if you see something in them which I haven't put there."

She was sitting sideways between his legs, with her cheek against his thigh. He did not touch her. He wished she would go back to the other end of the skiff; it seemed to him that he would be more at ease to say with simplicity the far from simple thing he wanted to say. He hesitated, looking for the right words, fearing the pat and the conventional, and all at once, in an overhasty voice, he declared himself. "Karen," he said, "I want you to be mine."

Karen's eyes opened wide. She had expected to hear him say these words, it had to come one day or the other, a day like this for instance, she had even imagined the turn of phrase—almost exactly—a short, deliberately hurried phrase; but her reaction was not less sincere. As if she had guessed Pontillac's wish, she left her squatting position and went to the forward end of the boat. "To be yours?" she said, trying to gain time.

He misunderstood her, or perhaps his mind was made to misunderstand her. "Yes, Karen. What I mean is that we should be married."

She smiled with her eyes, and he saw his slip. He hesitated, undecided between the awkwardness of an apology and the pedantry of an explanation, but apparently she intended to spare him the trouble. "I may presume, I suppose," she said, "that I owe you an answer?"

That was indeed the truth: an answer was called for.—She has a way, he thought, of extracting from any situation its incongruousness, its stupidity, in passing and without touching it, or so it seemed. Marriage, "becoming man and wife," was accomplished by questions and answers. But one had to think about it. Karen had thought about it. And no doubt she thought that if she said yes he would seal their espousals with a kiss; and if she said no . . . She could not say no. "Karen, I'm not going to play the fainting suitor, nor you the little girl who must consult her mother. I love you, and you know it. You knew it before I myself knew anything about it. You are . . ."

"You told me one day, Adrien, that I had a good deal of *savoir-vivre*. But perhaps, on this occasion, you should have forgotten, or pretended to forget, my worldly breeding—if that is what you mean by *savoir-vivre*. Perhaps you should have spoken to me of love, if only to prepare me to face this unlooked-for declaration—"I want you to be mine!" Don't you think so?"

"Have I ever spoken of *savoir-vivre* in a way that seemed unfavorably critical? I don't remember, Karen, but it's possible. It may have been at the beginning of our friendship, when . . ."

"Don't make excuses, Adrien."

"I wasn't thinking of making excuses. I was going to say that you are not a woman to play with words, nor am I." He laughed suddenly, more openly than she had ever seen him laugh, and she laughed with him, looking at him mischievously. She was grateful to him for his slip of the tongue, as if he had committed it intentionally. Laughter humanized him, put a trace of innocence in his somewhat too virile features. "I meant," he began again, still laughing, "that I am not a man to commit myself lightly. I ask you to be my wife, Karen. I ask it because you love me too. I would not want you if you did not love me."

"That's a two-edged sword," she said, without looking at him. "I could easily turn it against you, merely by saying that I do not love you." She was playing with the water, letting it run through her fingers. "But I suppose you have already blunted the edge that threatens you. You would not fail to parry by saying . . ."

". . . that I don't believe a word of it," he interrupted. "Very true, I would not believe you." He abandoned the tiller, took Karen's hands and drew her to him. She yielded, resisting just enough to let him feel her coming to him. The boat drifted slowly toward the open sea, and on the lazy swells the sun lighted a profusion of precious stones. He lifted her chin, trying to break through the non-presence which made deep pools of her abnormally dilated pupils. "You can't lie to me, Karen. It would do you no good to open your eyes as wide as lakes. I would not lose myself in them."

"Yes, Adrien, I can lie to you. I can lie to myself." Her look was veiled, it annihilated itself in its own light, and her lips were slightly parted. She loved the lively stirring of his breath on her neck, the broad contact of his hand on her body. "Don't say anything, monsieur," she whispered. "Don't say a word. But I permit—I permit you to kiss me."

He took her to him and kissed her frenziedly. Never yet had she said these words, never had she returned his kiss. This time her eyes remained closed under his caress, she did not look at him with that lucidity which made him feel that he was ravishing her against her will. This time she was not thinking of "something else." She offered herself as he had imagined she must know how to offer herself. He lifted her, bearing her whole and entire to his lips, feeling the appetites, the ancestral desires of can-

nibalism rising within him. "Let's jump . . . let's jump in the water," she begged.

He jumped, holding her against him. Under the thrust the skiff splashed and drifted away. The water opened and then closed over them, and they came up far ahead of the skiff. He had not released her, covering her streaming face with kisses. Before them the sea spread out, wide and peaceful, with the wind over it that makes it breathe. Straightening her back, Karen escaped from Pontillac, and they swam side by side toward the open sea.

They came back to town at nightfall, gorged with sun and weariness. They had little to say to each other during the return trip; there were too many people around them, too much confusion in the suburban train. She would not allow him to see her up to her suite. Before leaving her, he thanked her for the little service which she had been good enough to undertake, saying that the next day he would have an envelope left at the hotel desk, containing four hundred and fifty thousand francs, the equivalent, at the official rate, of the ten thousand dollars she had transferred to the account of Madame Clarisse Orfanville in New York; and when she protested, declaring that the letter of credit might be some weeks in arriving, and that, in any case, she had no need of the money, he made a great show of persuading her that she lacked experience in financial matters. The cablegram she had turned over to him that morning, he explained, constituted provisory evidence of the transaction, with which Madame Orfanville would be satisfied until the original document arrived. But Karen refused to talk about it, saying that she was too tired. "Whatever you wish, Adrien," she said. "I just can't talk business now. You will call me in the morning, won't you? I think I've had too much sun. No, no, please, I must be alone." She went up to her apartment and stood for a long time at the open window, thinking back over the events of the day. Then she curled up in the white leather armchair and surrendered to the slow invasion of the night.

The jay feathers trembled furiously on Bessy Hargrove Bowman's hat. Wasn't it a shame, these houses with nobody knew how many floors, and stairs as steep as ladders? "In the States we have elevators in every building . . ." she moaned, pausing to catch her breath. "Oh, Pietro darling, do you remember? . . ." "I remember," grumbled the Colonel into his goatee, pushing Mrs. Bowman ahead of him. "Just a bit farther and we'll be there," he said encouragingly. Not daring to rely on the worm-eaten railing, she hoisted herself by pressing down on her own thighs. "Isn't it a shame? . . ." she repeated in a voice weak for lack of breath. "Six flights up and no elevator, isn't it crazy? . . ." "It's a very great shame indeed," grumbled the Colonel, "but would you mind not speaking English, Mrs. Bowman?" How did he want her to speak, when you're in agony you can only speak your own language, and why did he have to be so overly polite, had he forgotten her name was Bessy, just plain Bessy, the same as

fifteen years ago? "It's the food," she said, going up one step at a time. "And the water . . ."

They came to the landing under the roof, and the Colonel knocked at the door. "Do you know this man, the . . ." She pointed at the door, while with the other hand she arranged the hair around her hat. "The . . . the thief?" she whispered. "Isn't it kind of . . . kind of dangerous?" It was impossible to tell whether she was hiccupping because she could not get her breath, or whether she was really afraid of falling into a bandit hide-out. The Colonel signaled to her to keep quiet, and again knocked on the door. They waited for a minute or two, the American looking at the old Italian with questioning eyes. "Pietro darling, you never can tell, maybe the police are in there. . . . Maybe he's been arrested. . . ." She bent her head, straining her ears to catch the sounds which were stirring behind the closed door, and the feathers on her hat shivered with emotion. "Oh dear, maybe he's just . . ."

"*Quién?*" came a high-pitched male voice, short and ill-tempered.

"*Aquí estoy, con la chula,*" the old man answered through the door. "*Como están las cosas?*"

"Except for my stomach, Señor Seneca, things are going fine," the young, ill-tempered voice said in Spanish.

Mrs. Bowman tugged twice at the Colonel's sleeve. "What's . . . what's happening, Pietro darling?" she hiccupped.

"He says we can't come in," grumbled the Colonel. Turning again to the door, he addressed it in Spanish. "Make your voice as frightful as you can. And don't pronounce any proper names, she might understand."

"Frightful . . ." came an enraged voice. "Wait till you see me. I'm awful. I scare myself. She'll never want to see a Spaniard again, your *damita*."

Mrs. Bowman had not let go of the Colonel's sleeve, she listened with all her ears and she hiccupped. "What's the matter with him? Why doesn't he . . ."

The Colonel made a gesture of despair. "We got here too late: there's a buyer inside already. We might as well go, Mrs. Bowman. I know him, he won't let us in."

He turned his back on the door and took a step down the stairs, but the American hung onto his arm with both hands, stopping him short. "Why, I won't give up just because . . ." She gave two resounding knocks on the door. "Tell him, Pietro. Tell him I'll pay cash." She grew more and more excited: her voice was shrill, and she clung to the old man as if he were about to escape from her by force. "Tell him I'll . . ."

"I'm going to open up," came the raging voice from the other side of the door. "If the *damita* passes out cold, I have aromatic spirits on hand."

The Colonel raised his hand in another gesture of despair mingled with inability to do anything. "He says we can go to the devil, Mrs. Bowman. We'd better leave."

"Don't call me Mrs. Bowman!" she said in brusque irritation. She pulled

at his arm until he came back up the step. A surge of energy and determination colored her quivering cheeks. "You're the same old Pietro you always were," she said. "The same old Pietro, who couldn't buy a pair of socks the right size." She laughed—a short, joyous sob. "You're a butter-milk drinker, darling, not a businessman. We won't let them take our Dürer away from us without putting up a fight. You've got to fight in this world, Pietro." She gave several loud, rapid knocks, still holding onto the Colonel's sleeve. "Tell him to open the door, Pietro. Tell him I'm an American and I pay cash. Tell him . . ."

The door opened, Emilio Lopez appeared on the threshold, and Mrs. Bowman took refuge under the Colonel's goatee. The old man put his arm around her to ward off any possible blow, pushed aside the jay feathers which were tickling his nostrils, and smiled with amusement at his accomplice. Lopez had arrayed himself in a pair of bell-bottom trousers, vaudeville Apache style, a plaid shirt wide open on his tanned, hairless chest, a scarf which he thought was just the thing to give him the air of an escaped convict: around his broad, flat face his hair stood out thick and matted, he showed his canines in a grin which did its best to be ferocious, and he carried his arms curved and forward like a wrestler ready to lunge. He examined his visitors one after the other, as if deciding which of them to eat first, and suddenly he poured out a torrent of words with the *r*'s rolling at the rate of ten a second. Cowering under the Colonel's chin, Mrs. Bowman watched the madman with unconcealed and wholehearted terror. "What . . . what's he saying . . . what's he talking about . . ." she hiccupped, surrounding the old Italian with both arms and blinding him with her feathers. He patted her on the back to calm her, blew into the feathers, and waited for Lopez to stop rolling his *r*'s. "*Caro mio*, your act is in the best tradition of Goldoni," he said in Spanish, smiling over the Bowman bonnet. He gave a rather firmer pat to the lady's back, freeing his goatee at the same time. "He says we may come in, Mrs. Bowman."

He pushed her in ahead of him, still soothing her with his hand, and Lopez closed the door with a final gesture of rage. The attic had been transformed, nothing now suggested the studio of a painter, the place looked more like a mechanic's shop. "Horrible . . . Horrible man . . ." said Mrs. Bowman with a little more assurance in her voice. "He's an anarchist, isn't he?" It was a bright day, the sun poured down lively and golden through the skylight, and Mrs. Bowman felt her calm returning. "You see, Pietro darling, in this world you mustn't ever get discouraged." She turned completely around the room, looking for the Dürer. "Well, tell him . . ."

"*Ya puede usted salir de su rincón, señorita,*" said the man with the leonine face, fixing on Mrs. Bowman an eye like a starving feline's.

"What is it? *Quoi? Qu'est-ce qu'il dit?* Did he call me señorita?" Her impatience made her mix up the two languages, and her eyes darted here and there in search of the Dürer. Coming out as if by magic in answer to

the Spaniard's invitation, Karen now made her appearance. She threw a glance at the two visitors, spoke a couple of words in Italian, and turned her back. "That's the buyer, Mrs. Bowman. I know her by sight," the Colonel whispered in English. "It's up to you to show what you can do." He passed his knuckles under his nose, sniffing them delightedly. "She's Italian," he added into Mrs. Bowman's ear, taking stock of Karen's attire in detail. It was indeed a gorgeous display: a fiery rose blouse with a black lace edging at the cuffs, a sky-blue skirt adorned with the same lace, a note of extravagance in the coiffure, a hint of the bizarre in the profusion of bracelets and necklaces: it was evident that she too took pleasure in staging the act. "It's too bad," Mrs. Bowman whispered in return. "The Italians and the Germans are the hardest bidders in the world. They get away with everything, you'd think their money cost them nothing." "This woman especially," said the old man, indicating Karen with a glance. "I've heard she has unlimited capital at her disposal. She buys for Mussolini." He stuck his monocle in his eye and raised his voice. "But we may speak freely, Mrs. Bowman. They don't understand English."

The monocle was the signal, the show was about to start. "Aren't you ashamed, old graybeard?" said Karen in Italian, looking at Lopez with the eyes of one who would work for Mussolini. "She even calls you her darling!" Lopez, who did not know Italian, shouted that his Dürer was a damned wonderful thing and he would not let it go for less than a beefsteak with a side order of French fries, and the Colonel, grumbling in his beard, patted Mrs. Bowman's arm. "She says the price is awfully high," he translated. "Of course it's her game to say it's high. As for the anarchist, he says she can take it or leave it." "How much, how much?" said Mrs. Bowman, hopping with impatience. "But why doesn't he show the painting, tell him to show the painting, Pietro darling . . ."

The Colonel signaled to Lopez over the jay feathers that it was time to bring out the painting. "Are you jealous, my dear?" he said innocently to Karen, looking at the man with the face of the disconsolate lion, while the latter declared in his lion cub's voice that no one had ever manufactured Dürers as genuinely faked as his. "I didn't suspect you of having such pronounced tastes," Karen answered as if she were accusing Lopez of murder with aggravating circumstances. They played their roles straight, with application, with unbridled gusto, Karen speaking Italian, Lopez Spanish, Mrs. Bowman English, and the Colonel "translating" for the latter's benefit the tirades of his two young accomplices. Plunging behind what looked like a mechanic's workbench, Lopez brought out the picture, propped it up where the light was best, and at once began roaring again like a lion chained by one foot. While he and Karen "bargained" in abrupt tones—he declaiming verses of García Lorca into which he slipped the words "Prado," "Madrid," "Dürer," she teasing her grandfather on his conquests—Mrs. Bowman examined the painting—an early self-portrait of Dürer, there before her in all its magnificence. The Colonel, who knew the original as well as he did the counterfeit, could never help admiring

his young friend's astounding craftsmanship: only a highly trained specialist, equipped with all the modern apparatus used for scientific analysis, could have challenged the age of the wood and the paints, for the execution as such would have fooled the Nuremberg master himself. Nevertheless, despite the perfection of the copy, despite their own vocal outbursts which added naturalness to the atmosphere, the Colonel, Karen, and Lopez watched Mrs. Bowman's procedure with some misgivings. It was clear that she knew her business. She had taken a sheet of notes out of her bag, compared her data with the painting, stood back, came forward again, worked with a magnifying glass, measured with a precision ruler, checked the authenticity of the label with the various registry numbers from the Prado, uncorked a phial, put a drop of some preparation in the extreme corner of the canvas, waited to see the reaction—but the merchandise was made to withstand all tests, including ordeal by torture. Mrs. Bowman scratched her head through her straw bonnet. A little, joyous sob escaped her.

"I don't know what to think," she said, not taking her eyes from the painting. "It looks genuine to me, but you never know. What's your opinion, Pietro darling? Would you trust this . . . this anarchist?"

"You mustn't let my opinion influence yours, Mrs. Bowman." He lowered his voice, giving it a confidential note. "I should be very much surprised if the Italian let herself be taken in. . . . In any case, my dear friend, you are the expert: I'm only an amateur. On one point, however, I can give you assurance: this Dürer, the one you have before your eyes, did disappear from the Prado during the civil war; and the man who is selling it was responsible for its disappearance. This I can state positively."

"The Spanish war ended three and a half years ago, didn't it, Pietro darling? Why did he keep the picture so long?"

"He was in a concentration camp," the Colonel explained patiently. "He escaped only two weeks ago. The Dürer was hidden away safely all that time."

Mrs. Bowman stole a look at the man with the face of the inconsolable lion, who continued to gesticulate with his big paws and to bare his big canines: he was close enough to her imaginary picture of an anarchist engaged in sacking museums. Like everyone else, she had heard that a number of masterpieces had been stolen in Spain during the civil war—works by El Greco, Velásquez, Goya, and others, no doubt including this Dürer—and it was said that the international art market had been enriched with a number of priceless works which were in circulation as a result of the looting. Every honest merchant dreamed of putting his hands on one of these jewels. Thanks be to the Almighty, these were the rare rewards which wars and revolutions reserved for those who did not fight, for the simple pacifists who were content to save the symbols of culture. All of a sudden the anarchist-robber became an attractive figure in her eyes: in his own way he contributed to the salvaging of the fruits of human progress, which, all things considered, were better off in the private collections



of America than under the rubble of the ruined cities of Europe. If these Europeans had their wits about them, they might even obtain wheat and corned beef in exchange for a few trifles out of the museums of London and Munich. "Oh, Pietro darling, may I have a chair?" she moaned, her eyes devouring the painting.

The Colonel placed a taboret at Mrs. Bowman's convenience, and she sat down with a loud sigh. Her enthusiasm at the thought of carrying off the "stroke of the century," her anticipatory jubilation as she pictured Mr. Bowman annihilated by surprise and ecstasy, had made her forget the mercantile side of the transaction. She remembered it the instant Karen, making sure she was seen, took from her handbag a sheaf of five-thousand-franc bills—remembered it with a start, with a flush of panic in her face, which brought her rocketing from her taboret. "Pietro, Pietro darling, she's taking my Dürer from me!" she cried, rolling the mass of her body between Karen and Lopez as if to prevent them from falling into each other's arms. Patently quite as impressed as the American woman, the Colonel looked at the money in Karen's hand, then at Karen, while the latter, vastly enjoying his mystification, said in Italian, "Have the smelling salts ready, signori. I believe Grandfather and his Dulcinea are on the point of fainting." Had Pontillac . . . A broad smile fanned out the Colonel's whiskers and disturbed the impeccable points of his mustache. Spellbound by the sight of the bills, acting in a sort of trance, Lopez tried to take the money which Karen was trying to pass to him and which Mrs. Bowman was trying to intercept. "Wait! Wait a minute!" she responded furiously to Lopez's frenzied onomatopoeias, bonnet askew and feathers a-tremble. He didn't scare her now, nothing in the world could have scared her at this moment, not even the tigerish fangs and dust-mop mane of this anarchist. "Tell him . . . tell him, Pietro darling! . . ." she hic-coughed, pushing the baffled and bellowing lion before her into the farthest corner of the attic. "Don't be a fool! Don't be silly! . . ." she said, cutting off his attempts to escape. "Pietro, tell him I'll give him a hundred dollars more than her, two hundred dollars more, tell him, Pietro darling!" "Then give, let's see them, *mujer de mi alma* . . ." said Lopez in Spanish, wriggling as one who would free himself and cannot, and Karen said in Italian, "The hour of my departure is at hand, but I'll drop in to see you at seven, you ugly old graybeard Don Juan." She was dying to kiss him, to raise herself on the tips of her toes and plant a passing kiss in his goatee, but he signaled her to do nothing of the kind. "No sentimental effusions until seven o'clock at my place," he said: then went on, in Spanish, "I shall now announce the price. Try to slip out of her hands, just enough so that she can catch you. As for you, my dear girl, as soon as she turns around, you pretend to carry away the Dürer."

"Shall I bite her to make it look more authentic?" asked Lopez, struggling with Mrs. Bowman. "One bite no bigger than a beefsteak, eh?" Mrs. Bowman, with her hat over her eyes, was calling "Pietro darling" while she dressed down her anarchist in English mixed with slang, and

her anarchist, rolling his *r*'s as if he were beating a drum, had begun to chant "*dolares . . . francos . . . duros . . .*" in the voice of a Corybant.

"My dear Mrs. Bowman," said the Colonel wearily, "suppose you give up your wrestling match and offer him a hundred thousand francs more than this lady. As I understand it, her bid is four hundred thousand. Go up to a half million, and maybe you'll get the Dürer."

Lopez slipped away from the American as planned; and, also as planned, she had hold of him again before he got far. "Pietro, she's taking my Dürer!" she shrieked when she saw her rival seize the painting. But she had already done some mental arithmetic: thirty-two hundred dollars, plus three hundred and twenty for Pietro's commission—she had been afraid it would be five thousand! "Yes, yes, tell him, Pietro darling, tell him! . . ." She lost interest in her anarchist, ran after Karen with an agility surprising in a person of her build, and tore the picture out of her hands. "It's mine! Let me have it! You . . . you . . ." she bayed, holding the painting in both hands and walking backward. "Your beloved almost overturned me," said Karen, glaring at Mrs. Bowman with a spark of wholly unfeigned anger in her wide black eyes. "Go on, finish your act, Grandfather, and let me get out of here. It's getting tiresome." She still had the bundle of bank notes in her hand, and once again she held it out to Lopez. "Pretend to make a dash for the money," said the Colonel.

Lopez obeyed, Mrs. Bowman shouted a warning to "Pietro darling," and the Colonel stepped in to block the two young people. A dialogue passed between him and Lopez in Spanish, rapid as a spate of machine-gun fire, then a bilingual dialogue, still more rapid and almost violent, between Lopez and Karen, the former speaking Spanish and the latter Italian, then a command in English—"Quick, quick, give him something on account while the lady is hesitating!" Without putting her picture down, Mrs. Bowman caught her handbag between her knees, opened it with one hand, took out a billfold, held it in her teeth, shook her head like a horse when the bit keeps him from cropping grass. When Lopez had snapped away the packet of dollars which the American had finally drawn from the billfold and counted with her one free hand, Karen, in a voice like the crack of doom, announced that she was on her way, wished them good luck, and went out, slamming the door behind her.

Shortly afterward the Colonel and Mrs. Bowman also left. It was easy to convince her that the Italian woman, furious at having lost the match, might well report the facts to her consul, and that things might take an ugly turn if she returned to the Spaniard's place with an official from the Armistice Commission. At the same time, to put her mind at ease, the Colonel explained that Lopez had rented the attic for the sale of the picture only, and that in an hour he would have disappeared like a volatile gas. They wrapped the painting in newspaper, tied it with string, shook hands with the abandoned lion. Obedient to the preconcerted plan, Mrs. Bowman walked along holding the Colonel's arm, and keeping her mouth closed despite her intense desire to talk. They took leave of each other at

the corner of the Canebière and the Quai des Belges, again according to plan. But as he handed her the picture she gave a little joyous sob, and, yielding to temptation, whispered:

"There now, Pietro darling, that's the way to do business."

"That, in truth, is the way to do it," he said, striking a ringing blow on the pavement with the iron tip of his cane.

"It was left at my hotel this morning, a little before noon," Karen was saying. "Yesterday we spent the day at Cassis, and in the evening, as he was leaving me at the door of the hotel, he mentioned that he was sending me four hundred and fifty thousand francs. Here they are."

"Had you brought up the matter of this—this reimbursement?"

"Not at all. I even pretended that I had no need of the money for the present. He was the one who insisted. . . . Can you imagine?"

"I'm trying hard," said the Colonel. In slippers and his wide Basque beret, very tall, very thin, he came and went between the door and the window of the little room piled with books. A facetious smile crinkled the crow's-feet which etched an intricate filigree around his pale eyes. "I am imagining a real transfer of funds, a banking operation as Pontillac conceived it and as he now thinks it is accomplished: at a stroke, with a lot less trouble than it gave Lopez to manufacture the cables, he pockets the trifling sum of a million two hundred thousand francs, since the Orfanville person must have paid him at the black-market rate, while he reimburses you at the legal rate. In short, my poor child, so far as he knows he has swindled you very smartly." He stopped beside his granddaughter, who was turning the pages of a book on top of the piano, and put his arm around her shoulders. "He is conscious of this. . . . Of course, if our minds were as upright as his, we would understand that he, being a convinced defender of the new order, could not countenance unlawful speculation by handing over all of Orfanville's black-market francs to you: so that, after all, his conscience continues to function in a system of—we might say in a legal system. . . . Why the downcast expression, my Gervaise?"

"The legal system," she said. She ran a listless finger over the piano keys, her cheek on her grandfather's shoulder. "I dragged him off to Cassis willy-nilly, as it were. It amused me to see him going there in violation of the new-order legality of which he is, as you say, the convinced defender. I let him take me to the station, and when he had been on line for twenty minutes—ah, why weren't you there to see him standing on line like an ordinary traveler, caught between two little old women who cackled and cackled!—when he was a step away from the ticket window I pretended to remember all at once that as a foreigner I couldn't leave Marseilles by the main exit, nor come in again either, since at the Saint-Charles station the gendarmes check the identity of all passengers. He seemed delighted, he didn't like the Cassis idea, but then I recalled, with an adequate show of joy, that one can take the streetcar to Aubagne, and go the rest of the

way on a train where there is less surveillance than on the one leaving Marseilles." She gave her low-pitched, lingering laugh, rubbed her cheek on the old man's shoulder. "I thought he was going to run away, simply leave me there and flee. But he's so much the gentleman . . . We came back to town the same way, and on the return trip it was he who remembered that we would have to skip the customary amenities with the gendarmes. I'll finish by converting him into an outlaw."

"If I were Cicero," said the old humanist, breathing in the odor of Karen's hair, "if I were Cicero I would say it was natural that the law should be silent when arms speak."

"Ah yes, Pietro darling," said Karen, aping Mrs. Bowman. "You've guessed right. The guns are massed, and I'm in the line of fire. So if you were I, Gervaise Drouault, granddaughter of an old roisterer who seduces opulent Americans, what would you say?"

"I . . . I would try not to say anything I had not carefully considered beforehand."

"You think it's easy to think it out, you crazy man? How long do you think one can defend oneself against oneself, against everything that's in us and can't be thought out?" She snuggled under the old man's arm, her head in the hollow of his shoulder, her distracted finger barely touching the keyboard of the piano, always repeating the same figure on the same keys. "And it's so frightfully, so romantically stupid. Do you want me to tell you a story? The story of a girl spy who is sent on a mission, preferably in the Balkans, or in Turkey, that's it, to Istanbul, on account of the narghileh and the belly dances and the knife throwers? Shall I?" Her voice became lingering and low like her laugh: she might have been talking in the dark to a child which would not go to sleep. "This happens in 1912, or maybe in 1916, certainly before I was born, because since then all stories of girl spies have become pretty silly, it seems. The melodrama abounds in significant accessories: express trains, huge driving wheels in the foreground, hissing jets of steam, Pullmans, spies never travel except in Pullmans you know, warm nights, crescents, minarets. The plot unfolds as planned, all that's left is the last act, the one that takes place with the champagne on the table, spies drink nothing but champagne you know, the heroine has already snapped open the secret compartment of her signet ring and poured the poison into the traitor's glass, he's an attractive, well-bred traitor, but wait, wait, at the very last minute there's an earthquake in Anatolia, unless it's a revolver fired into the mirror over the mantelpiece, the champagne spills on the luxurious rug, and the girl spy, who never never is afraid, falls fainting into the arms of the traitor, who sees for the first time that he has always always always loved the heroine. And when she comes out of her faint and opens her large, tender eyes, he, being an educated man—not as educated as you, Grandfather, but a little bit anyway—he will say, quoting George Sand, that the love of a beautiful and virtuous woman is a talisman which protects her beloved. At this the revolvers stop firing, the earth stops quaking in Anatolia, and the curtain falls slowly

and knowingly. Does the scenario strike you as convincing, Pietro darling? Is it banal enough, flat enough, trite enough? Yet it seems that these things happen 'in real life.' And still I'm omitting lots of detail, for the story is palpitating with so-called realistic detail, 'drawn from life,' as they say. You'd know without being told, for instance, that lurking in the shadows there is an abominable old man with the face of a vulture and the soul of a rattlesnake, who has pushed the poor orphan—of course she's an orphan, surely you knew that—pushed her down perdition's bitter path; and that the orphan, although passing for a person of good birth, is nonetheless a woman of the people who is using the papers of a noble foreigner who was killed by a bomb on the roads of France on the occasion of a terrible exodus; and that the traitor, traitor though he is, count though he is, will be touched with grace and will ask . . ."

"Heigh-ho," said the Colonel, with his nose in Karen's hair.

"Heigh-ho," Karen repeated. "On a bright Sunday morning, in a skiff rented in consideration of a large tip, our hand was sought in marriage according to all the rules of the art—genuflection excepted." She struck one key, a single key, holding her finger on it, listening to the note whirl and die in the case of the piano. "Aren't you going to . . . to congratulate me?"

He took her face, looking at her out of his pale eyes, in which sadness gleamed and spread. He could not say a word, for Karen, burying her forehead under her grandfather's goatee, began to weep silently.

## » 13 «

STEPANOFF'S FIRST IMPULSE WAS TO PULL AWAY, TO protest, This is illegal, I demand that you show me the warrant, I . . . But he did nothing of the sort. He knew the mechanism, the implacable perfection of the mechanism: argument would have been as useless as calling for help or appealing to the crowd which thronged the deck of the departing cargo steamer. He knew that these two men, each of whom had slipped a finger under his arm, were only obedient automata, cogs shod in leather and bonneted in felt, entirely impregnable to discursive reasoning. While Yvonne was busy arranging their belongings around the cot assigned to her below decks, and Youra was sketching the long-shoremen at work, Stepanoff had forced a passage to the rail, pushing through the milling crowd of emigrants, who seemed to be anxious to carry away a last picture of the deserted quais and yawning sheds, as if the soul of the old Europe was to survive in them through the visual memory of these breakwaters and jetties and beacons in the blinding light. Below him, under the rusty flank of the ship, which a hole of greenish water, traversed by a shaky gangplank, separated from the broad ledge of the quai, there were two pairs of gendarmes, a covey of plain-clothes men armed with lists and blotters, a number of idle customs men, and a few scattered persons holding passes, among whom were Aldous John Smith and his little, frail, hunchbacked secretary. Likewise frail and hunchbacked and lopsided was this steamer, which had been decommissioned long before the war, declared good for active service after the defeat, and kept afloat by dint of the most desperate patching and tinkering. But every cutter, every lighter was a ship to the departing travelers, so long as it went to sea with them aboard, in the shelter of a miscellany of ribs and plates. The main thing, then, was that this old coal burner was their coal burner, theirs at last, more real than a dozen ships with watertight bulkheads, and whether it leaked or it listed, it could not succumb to the perils of the sea. So Stepanoff had hewn a path to the side, and stood with his elbows resting on the rail, exchanging a word now and then with Smith or another of the three or four Americans representing their respective organizations—Hicem, Joint Committee, Quakers—who never missed

the sailing of a shipload of emigrants. in the hope, almost invariably vain, that their collective presence would prevent some arbitrary action at the last minute. Their sparse words alluded to the delay, for the ship should have weighed anchor a couple of hours ago, or to the weather, for a knot of clouds was moving rapidly toward the west and whipping up the sea: words which were nothing in themselves because detached from their suffix, from their context, but nevertheless implied a secret connivance, like the symbols of an esoteric language. But Stepanoff's mind, sliding over the syllables, bouncing away from them like the brief tumult of the water against the hull, incessantly returned to the port itself. He had known it when it was intensely, gluttonously active, and now, it resembled an immense fossil, the petrified bone structure of a mastodonsaurus. He was fascinated by the skeleton of the cranes stiff-necked with rust, by the moles and wharves where no ship tied up, by the basins and channels bare as salt marshes, by the vast roadstead covered with the shroud of an unending holiday. The thought came to him that in mixing cement with stone and steel with cement, the men of the electro-chemical age, the "moderns" as the historians called them, had lost the secret of making their constructions live in the absence of man. "Modern" man, he told himself, had unlearned how to build to last; the Parthenons and the cathedrals, the pyramids and the obelisks and even the monoliths, were anchored to the soil to last as stone, to live out a geological existence independent of the presence of man; the eternity—by the scale of history—of the ancient monuments might well be due to their spiritual, non-utilitarian conception. But immediately thereafter he told himself that paralleling this sacred architecture, a profane architecture—circuses and roads and aqueducts and castles—had joined in flouting the merry-go-round of the centuries, as if there too the master mason had sealed in a divine principle of indestructibility. The resemblance to the mastodonsaurus, which was so oversized of backbone and hindquarters that it became extinct through its inability to feed its enormous mass, suddenly seemed to him more real than imaginary: the port, intact in appearance, held erect in appearance by its backbone of reinforced concrete, open to the greatest vessels designed to satisfy the greatest megalomania, the monster of steel and concrete, was, in fact, incapable of living by its own resources. Stepanoff wondered where this feeling of ruin came from, a feeling of frightful destruction which he experienced at the sight of abandonment, when buildings, silos, towns were still standing, still whole, but already marked for an evil end. In the same way the workings of death in a face—its approach, its undiscerned but already discernible presence—troubled him deeply, whereas its brutal affirmation—the cadaver, the remains—left him unmoved: in that as in all else, the true grandeur, for him, was in the process of accomplishment, not in the thing accomplished.

Yvonne came and joined him at the rail, after seeking him all over the ship. She smiled to Francine Lepage, who was waving to her from the pier, and looked at Stepanoff, whose convex glasses gathered in the land-

scape and bent it back upon itself, as if it reached its point of reflection in them. "It saddens you to leave, Ivan," she said, turning her eyes away from him. He did not answer immediately, thinking, Departure is a little death, with a complacency which vexed him even while he surrendered to it. "Do you think that a city like Paris or London, a great modern city, can live—or better, can keep a living soul of its own, if man abandons it?" he asked, almost talking to himself. "Could it live on the glory of its iron-nerved pillars, if man left it to itself, to be eaten away by time, whose acid no one would bother to pour off?" She said nothing, knowing that these sentences in the interrogative mood did not imply a response; and he went on in the same slightly disillusioned tone, as if he were adding up the sum of his experience—and not only of his own. "But what does time mean in the absence of man? Look at this port, so broad, so unlimited, made for work, effort, hatred, alive yesterday and today extinct—because man no longer leaves his trace here. For this waterfront, between yesterday and today centuries have passed, a time which has lost all value, even a relative, a dimensional value. And yet is it always thus? Is this a general rule? In China I saw . . ." He stopped, apparently seeking a point of reference in his memory; but either because he found none that was satisfactory, or because the pressure of the crowd all around them discouraged reminiscences, he did not say what he had seen in China. Yvonne was not overly impressed by Stepanoff's abstract speculations, they did not strike her as very persuasive or as corresponding to a genuine need in him. She could not understand what inclination he was obeying, when, in terms unusual to his vocabulary, he spun metaphysical disquisitions whose looseness was obvious to her. It was as if he had discovered a talent hitherto unknown, and was trying it out with a persistence which increased at each new occasion, like a good painter who insists on writing bad poetry, or a real poet who takes to painting and falls in love with his daubs, artists who will listen to criticism of their art, but fly into tantrums if their hobby is questioned. Stepanoff was a man of action, a writer of some ability, but—Yvonne was at length convinced—a poor theorizer, whose mind was naturally averse to the digressions which she described to herself as "primitively cosmogonic." "Have you noticed," he said after smiling imperceptibly, "that in cities which have been bombarded, a church, a cathedral, usually the oldest and most timeworn, always survive the disaster? Wouldn't one be inclined to see something strange in that, some would say . . ."

It was at this juncture that he heard at his ear, at the exact level of his ear, that peculiar question, unique of its kind, which contains only the name and the surname with the title "Monsieur" in front—a question of which he well knew the bitter, unforgettable taste: "Monsieur Ivan Stepanoff?" He raised his eyes, studied the two men, of whom the one on the right had pushed Yvonne out of the way—and immediately he knew he was not sailing. He straightened up, stepped away instinctively from the rail as if it had been about to collapse, making a mental note,

silly and futile as it was, that he was stronger and taller than the two men, who, without waiting for an answer to their purely formal question, had slipped a distrustful finger under his arms.—Be calm, he exhorted himself, feeling his face go pale, feeling himself on the point of exhibiting his passports, his visas. For an instant he thought of attracting Smith's attention, of calling on America for help, but pride and a natural shyness forbade him to cry out. With a brusque movement of the elbows, which coincided with his effort to get free of the crowd, he broke the policemen's hold on him.—Be calm, he thought again, observing himself with the deliberate intolerance with which he examined himself in the mirror while shaving. All around them the faces began to draw back, expressions and voices to congeal, with a stiffening in the body, in the nape of the neck, as when one takes off one's hat to a passing hearse. Later on, when he happened to think again of the scene, he was surprised that he did not find Yvonne in it: she had disappeared from his memory. His whole attention was held by the sight of the fear which exuded on the faces of the people around, as if they had read on his own the stigmata of the plague: this memory stayed with him particularly because he really did see fear oozing from their skin and raising the clammy blotches of terror on it, and because by reaction, through fear of resembling them, he drew from the spectacle the calm which he had tried to impose on himself by sheer strength of will.

His first concrete thought took the form of a triple question, automatic, irresistible, concise, rapid, as if composed of a single word—Vichy? Gestapo? OGPU? The look which he fixed on the two men made them wince, it was so keen, calculating, deliberately critical. He knew how to recognize the agents of the OGPU, thanks to a series of characteristics which were proper to them alone among all hunters of men. There was first their "liberal profession" appearance, their "intellectual" air, so to speak, or perhaps "idealistic"—he classed them among the idealists of abduction and assassination—and there was their Central European accent, which his ear never failed to catch, however perfectly it was camouflaged. "What do you want of me?" he said, simply to hear them speak.

"Have the kindness to follow us ashore," said one of the men, pointing with his chin to the gangplank. "We have orders to bring you to the Prefecture."

They were not from the OGPU. Stepanoff's brain was working fast but calmly, in a halo of quiet which was close to resignation. Had these men been Stalinist agents disguised as operatives from Vichy or the Gestapo, he would have had the resource of unmasking them, of "turning them in"—although he would have hated to do anything of the kind: in any case he would have offered them the most decisive possible resistance. For the first time in his life of opposition to the totalitarian Russian regime, he experienced a tragicomic regret at not being face to face with the emissaries of Moscow, who, for some fifteen years, had been dogging his heels almost constantly.

"But I can't come with you," he said in a voice whose naturalness surprised him. "The ship is about to weigh anchor, and I am a passenger on board."

"That's not our business," said the same policeman who had spoken before. "It's no use making any difficulties, Monsieur Stepanoff. Be reasonable and follow us ashore, if you please."

It was not until that moment that Stepanoff's eyes met those of Yvonne. Pallor had invaded the olive tint of her skin and was bleaching its tan, and she was wide-eyed and staring. "I'm coming with you, Ivan," she said. "I don't know where Youra's gone. I'm coming with you."

"That can't be done, madame," said the other policeman. And as if he did not want to be thought impolite, he added that no one could leave the ship. "The police down there would not let you get off, madame. Come along, monsieur, our time is limited."

Their time was limited. Around them, over half the width of the covered deck, a circle of emigrants had formed, a *cordon sanitaire* of happy tourists sweating anxiety; and it seemed that by the conduction of the air the slime of their fear had spread to Yvonne. She held her bag with her two hands as if supporting herself on it, and a drop of sweat, appearing of itself and from nowhere, began a rapid journey down her face. A sound had frozen on her half-open lips, perhaps Ivan's name, perhaps, simply, a word, and it hung there, unable to come out. She looked at Stepanoff's massive frame, his high, bony forehead, the gray light of his pupils, in which lived the subtlest smile that ever inhabited an eye, and she felt guilty for having thought badly of his metaphysics, of his theories—guilty and punished. They were going to take him away, she knew they were going to take him away and kill him, and she threw herself into his arms, onto his broad chest where so often she had rested her head. "Oh, Ivan . . ." she sobbed. "Oh, Ivan, I don't want . . ."

"All right, Yvonne. . . . Yes. . . . Now, now . . ." he said, stiffening. One of the policemen picked up the bag which she had dropped, the other gathered together the things which had fallen out of it. Stepanoff could not find anything to say. "Now . . . now . . ." he repeated, erect, his head thrown back, feeling the tightening of his neck muscles. In his breast, at the spot where Yvonne was pressing her tear-stained face, a semblance of hope hovered: in an hour, in two hours, he would be released with the customary apologies, would come back on board, meet his wife, his son, and someday soon, beyond the moving arc of the horizon, he would find the possibility of a reprieve, a period of grace. But he had to take his leave, to go ashore with these men.—Adieu, Yvonne, he thought, as stiff as a tree trunk.—Adieu, Youra. Fifty-three years was a good average, a respectable age for a revolutionary who had been put to the question by Nicholas II, by Clemenceau, by Petloura, by Wrangel, by Chiang Chung-cheng, by Dzugashvili. Now Pétain? Hitler? Both? A long life indeed. He had hoped for a few years more, three or four, preferably four: to put his *History of the Russian Opposition* in shape, to write his memoirs, and—

he had hardly dared to dream of it—not to be entirely dead on the day of resurgence, when, springing up from the embers which glow and grow beneath the hecatomb, the stern combat for socialism would at last bring peace to Europe. Well, the road seemed destined to be shorter than he had hoped, swifter the fall of the night. In his breast, against the face of his wife who was sobbing uncontrollably, the hovering of the hope fell silent, opening a void. Into it Yvonne's tears fell like drops of metal.

Aldous John Smith, of the A.R.S., followed the attendant who was showing them the way. He had sent an urgent telegram asking an audience of the regional prefect, who had replied, likewise by telegram, that he could not receive them himself, but that he might make the object of his request known to Monsieur Adrien de Pontillac. He seated himself in a leather armchair facing Monsieur de Pontillac's desk, under a bright electric light which threw its full glare upon him. Pontillac was silent for some moments, time enough to see how his visitor's nerves would react; but, seeing nothing which he could turn to his advantage, he straightened himself in his chair and asked the gentleman how he could be of service to him.

Smith had never had any direct dealing with Pontillac, but he did not doubt that the latter knew him. The A.R.S. had been in contact with his office several times, and letters bearing his signature had come in occasionally. Smith nevertheless gave a brief account of the A.R.S., adding that certain large groups of university people, scholars, and artists, in the United States as well as in Latin America, took a lively interest in the persons whom his organization was trying to assist. "Our task," he said, "consists essentially in facilitating, within the limits of our means and in the framework of the French laws, the emigration of certain intellectuals whom the war has forced to leave their countries, and who have received offers of hospitality from across the Atlantic. It goes without saying that we have thoroughly investigated every person inscribed on our rolls, from the moral as well as from the professional point of view, and we do not take a case in hand until our head office in New York has approved it. But from that moment on we consider ourselves responsible for our protégés. Some of them are sent for by scientific institutions, some by the major schools, still others by their families. Periodically—once a month to be exact—we send a detailed report to our New York office. In my last dispatch, which went out only yesterday, I announced the departure of several of our protégés aboard the *Dahomey*, which left this morning for Casablanca. But one of those included in my message, Monsieur Ivan Stepanoff, was taken off at the very last moment by two plain-clothes men, and since then we have not been able to find a trace of him."

"What was the name?" asked Pontillac.

Smith spelled it out, and Pontillac made a note. He consulted a memorandum, first at the letter S, then at the letter I.—A last-minute denuncia-

tion, he thought, not finding any Stepanoff Ivan on the list of persons for whom warrants had been issued. "A Russian?" he asked.

"Yes, although he has been deprived of his nationality," said Smith. "I may presume to call your attention to the fact that Monsieur Stepanoff is an international figure. His disappearance—or should I say his abduction?—could not fail to arouse anxiety in the United States, and the result would be a press campaign unfavorable to the prestige of France. In previous monthly reports I had indicated that the French authorities had expressed no objection to his departure. His exit visa was regularly granted by the Ministry of the Interior, so that there seems to be nothing to justify an arrest as spectacular as that which occurred this morning. You will understand, monsieur, that I am bound to make this known to New York. I should like, however, to couch my cablegram in terms no more alarming than is absolutely called for. If, as I hope, this arrest is due to an error, Monsieur Stepanoff should be authorized to go by plane to Casablanca . . ."

"Error or no error," Pontillac interrupted, "all foreigners are forbidden to travel by airplane."

"Quite so," Smith agreed, determined not to contradict the official needlessly. "Hence, in the circumstances, I was presuming to request an exceptional procedure. The ship's sailing had been delayed for several hours. It is difficult to escape the feeling that the cause of this delay is connected with the arrest. In fact, the *Dahomey* left immediately afterward. It would appear, therefore, that orders were given, and that they could only have come from an authority competent to hold up the departure of a ship. Before requesting this hearing I proceeded to make a series of inquiries, but despite my efforts I was unable to learn where or by whom Monsieur Stepanoff was taken."

Pontillac listened with growing interest. It must be an "affair," he suspected, a special case, a very special case, assuredly, since his office had been kept out of it. Stepanoff mattered little to him, the man was one of the numerous persons picked up in the police nets more or less by chance; and the threat of a movement of public opinion in America left him as unperturbed as a seismic shock on the moon. He had no illusions, one Stepanoff more or less would not change the course of the rivers in the so-called democratic countries, nor unfreeze French holdings in the United States. Compared with the commando landing at Dieppe—dress rehearsal?—and the Free French raid on Madagascar—prelude to the invasion of Dakar?—and the day-by-day increase of Resistance activity, of sabotage, of underground papers, what difference did it make if this American, with the face and manner of an Anglican minister, suddenly got so upset? He lifted the telephone, asked for the Stepanoff file. "Would you mind telling me exactly what happened?" he said, turning again to his visitor.

While Smith was recounting in detail what he had seen of Stepanoff's arrest, the file was brought in. As Pontillac listened, he went through the documents. This Stepanoff, without the slightest doubt, was a "figure,"

to use the American's expression—a man whose existence was marked with the sign of conspiracy; who had barely escaped some rather fantastic tortures; who, since leaving Russia, had been the object of three attempted assassinations, of seven attempted abductions; who had been burgled twice, expelled from most of the countries of Europe; a man, indeed, who presented every guarantee of "moral and professional solvency." France, clearly, would be happy to facilitate the emigration of such a personage, although, strictly speaking, it would have been more expeditious to send him to crack stones on the Trans-Sahara Railroad. He perked an ear, hearing that Stepanoff was led to an automobile which waited, motor running, with two men inside exclusive of the chauffeur. The car had been parked behind a shed, no one saw or heard it arrive, it was a large limousine, probably of a foreign make. Stepanoff was pushed in and the car started off at once, leaving the two officers who had made the arrest standing on the sidewalk. Smith had been able to catch the license number, but while he was jotting it on the back of an envelope the two policemen had disappeared. "Stepanoff," Smith said, "cannot have melted away by magic. It is urgently necessary, monsieur, to learn where he has been confined, and whether his life may not be in danger. If it turns out that the French authorities had nothing to do with his arrest, there is reason to fear the worst. You are not unaware that the Russian secret police have tried several times to kidnap Stepanoff."

"May I have the number you noted?" said Pontillac. The idea that the OGPU was involved looked interesting and plausible to him. The whole proceeding, as described by the American, was unlike the French methods. Unfortunately the Marseilles police had no limousines at their disposal in which to take their captives out riding; nor would they have sent two agents to pick up their Stepanoff, only to abandon him to three men waiting in a car with the motor running. He looked at his visitor with an expression of skepticism, then of doubt, as if he were wondering how much of his story was drawn from the gangster films of which his country had a monopoly—a doubtful expression, meant to make the American understand that he attached not the slightest credence to his suggestion. The fact, however, was that there were copious reports of the presence and activities of Russian agents on both sides of the line between the occupied and unoccupied zones—genuine emissaries of Moscow, whose very existence was unknown to the little imbeciles who got themselves caught and occasionally guillotined under the label of "communist." This time, if they really had a hand in Stepanoff's arrest . . . Pontillac lighted a cigarette, concealing a smile of satisfaction: this time the gentlemen would have some trouble getting out of the situation. The license number of the car—although probably false—the two men aboard the *Dahomey*, their three accomplices aboard the limousine, the gendarmes who must have examined the passes of all these people, the shipping company which could not have delayed its vessel's departure unless a written order had been shown—so many signs and trails to follow! Times had changed since

the Russians were able to work hand in hand, so to speak, with the incompetence and sometimes the complicity of the defunct Republic. He again assumed his air of doubt and skepticism, called the office of the mineralogical service, and ordered the immediate identification of the license number.

He had hardly hung up when the information came through: the number belonged to a special, confidential series assigned to the occupation authorities in the "free" zone. A shadow of disappointment passed over Pontillac's face. So that was it. . . . It would have been perfectly useless to ask the specific allocation of the number in question, as the German authorities did not push the spirit of collaboration so far as to confide the insides of their little combines to the French. They had demanded a series of plates which would be theirs exclusively, they used these on some of their cars whose movements they wanted to attract as little notice as possible. It was conceivable that Russian agents had had the idea of using the same numbers in order to throw off the suspicions of the Gestapo, but Pontillac doubted it. Even if the enemy had known of the special series, he reasoned, he would have hesitated to touch it: he would have continued to operate under the cover of regular German plates, as had heretofore been his custom when his enterprises involved the use of a vehicle. Because Vichy had no power to examine cars displaying the swastika, bandits of every stripe were careful to don Wehrmacht uniforms and monocles, armbands and boots. This, it had to be admitted, was one of the several negative aspects of a unilateral authoritarian system imposed on the conquered by the conqueror. But if the Gestapo, as Pontillac had about concluded, had carried off the Russian, it was important to make this dominie believe that the OGPU had done the job. "I regret to inform you, monsieur," he said in a voice which put an end to the interview, "that my agency has no record of the number borne by the car in which your protégé was driven away. The plate was a counterfeit."

"Am I to understand that Monsieur Stepanoff was not arrested by the French police?" asked Smith.

"This Stepanoff, it seems to me, has a considerable number of powerful enemies," said Pontillac in a deliberately listless, almost regretful voice. How all this game, great and small, even while conspiring against the national revolution, preferred to wind up in Vichy's snares! "The French police are not given to wearing false whiskers," he added, the old curtness in his tone.

"Quite so," said Smith calmly. He stood up. This official was not precisely what one would call a very friendly man. "Quite so," he repeated. "If my understanding is accurate, Monsieur Stepanoff is the victim of an abduction carried out by individuals who assumed the guise of French police agents. In that case . . ."

"I said nothing of the kind!" Pontillac interrupted. "Your deductions seem premature, to say the least."

"No doubt," said Smith, with a calm that drained his face of color. "Nevertheless we may hope, monsieur, that it will be your first concern to set in motion a speedy investig——"

"A speedy and thorough investigation," Pontillac cut in. He looked at the man standing in the glare of the electric light. He did not like the artificial correctness of this American, the overcorrect turn of his speech; he did not like this representative of an arrogant and surfeited nation. He resented his self-assurance—his self-sufficiency, he amended—his *nouveauriche* prosperity, which placed him in a position to dispense his vitamins. Obscurely, against his own will, he envied him an undefinable, impalpable something, as if he had his feet on firmer ground than he. "And I shall not fail to keep you informed," he added in an icy tone.

"I thank you," said Smith. He hesitated, wondering whether he ought to attack, decided that he should. "Tomorrow, at the earliest possible moment, I shall register a complaint for abduction and illegal sequestration. I shall name, as probable kidnapers, the OGPU and . . . and the Gestapo. But I find myself obliged, monsieur, to put into your own hands, from this moment on, the safety and the life of Ivan Stepanoff, and to hold the public authorities morally responsible for him."

Sniffing the points of his knuckles, the Colonel watched Smith's coming and going. The Lepage girl was right: the American had lost weight these last weeks. "Monsieur le Colonel," the Lepage girl had said, "maybe you could persuade Monsieur Smith to take a few days' holiday. . . ." She had drawn the old Italian into a corner of the room as soon as she saw him enter the A.R.S. office, and she communicated her confidences in a hushed voice, as if fearful that prying ears might hear her, despite the uproar of typewriters and conversations. "I've tried to talk to him about it, but I . . . you know . . . I don't dare. He wouldn't listen to me. He . . ." She had blushed, calling on the Colonel to witness her insignificance. "He works too much. Sometimes he doesn't go home to sleep. He stays whole nights at his desk, or else he walks all over the town, or else he . . . He doesn't understand that if he falls sick, I . . . we . . . He's like a child. If I . . . if somebody doesn't think to make him a sandwich and a cup of tea, he doesn't eat. Will you speak to him about it, Monsieur le Colonel? But . . . but please, don't tell him it was I who . . ." He promised her not to say it was she who. Of course Francine Lepage had told him nothing that he did not know already. Smith, whom he had known as a calm man, master of his passions, almost phlegmatic, now seemed to be living on his nerves and feeding on his fever. But overwork was not the whole explanation of his visible decline in health. Like all those who had followed his development during the past two years, the Colonel knew that Smith was consuming himself in the effort to fight his way out of a closed circle—immigration policy, so pigheaded in piling up obstacles; consular bureaucracy so obtuse; cantankerous attitude of the Vichy clique; lack of money; lack of support; indifference more inert, more impossible to shake, than an

article of faith; and the number—the ever increasing number of victims, in spite of the exterminations, also ever increasing. . . . Tenaciously, untiringly, he returned to the attack, returned to crash against the bulwark, as if he would not and could not admit that these defenses were indestructible. Closed circle, vicious circle: if he would take a week's vacation, if he could get his mind off this seemingly hopeless task, no doubt he could control the exhaustion which was feeding his anxiety; but the obsession of not being able to do better, to do more, augmented his trouble of mind and forbade him the excessive luxury of a spell of relaxation. He was walking up and down the room, telling the Colonel the story of the kidnaping of Stepanoff and his own interview with Pontillac. "I've been bowled over by this affair, as if it were the most ignominious of all I've known."

"That's because Stepanoff's arrest caps a series of events which have sorely tried your powers of resistance," said the Colonel. "Between ourselves, Smith, you look like the devil. Don't be afraid, I won't talk about taking a rest. You couldn't do it. You're like the miser who would rather die than bear the expense of a cure." He paused, felt in the pockets of his waistcoat, adjusted his monocle. "Speaking of expenses, what about your own? Big holes in the bank account, perhaps?"

"Irreparable ones," said Smith. "What with the mass deportations, we've had to scrape the bottom of the barrel. I've managed to get about thirty people across the border, I'm feeding more than two hundred who have gone to earth in every corner of the department, and still they come in, every day, every hour. And for a final stroke of bad luck, a fairly large sum which I expected from London has been intercepted and the messenger arrested." He halted, directed a questioning look at the Colonel, and a smile wrinkled his weary eyes. "I know that question, Colonel. I'll be damned if you haven't brought me a little money!"

"A little," said the Colonel, caressing his goatee. "I've got close to a million francs, but I can't let you have it all. Some of the money I must get through to the other zone. Five, six hundred thousand, that's all I can offer you, Smith. Besides, I think I'm going to blackmail you. . . . Listen, do you know Stephen Audry?"

"Why certainly. He's on the honorary committee of the A.R.S."

"Ah? I was unaware of that detail. You know him personally, then?"

"I met him only once, when I called to lay the plans of the A.R.S. before him, and to solicit his patronage, as the saying goes. I confess that he gave me the impression—yes—the impression of an old, rather extraordinary maniac. But you're not joking, Colonel? You have half a million for me?"

"Six hundred, six hundred thousand," said the Colonel, sniffing his knuckles with satisfaction. "A rather extraordinary maniac . . . Wonderful! I ought to tell you that Audry and I are old, old friends. He was my guest when he came to Italy, I was his on my visits to France. He is Gervaise's godfather. You know that he devoted a book to Denis Drouault, whom he considers the most perfect of poets. . . . *Jours lumineux*



*dans la nuit des hommes, Amours timides dans les fosses de mon coeur,"* he declaimed, looking at his long fingers with the brittle joints. "I plan to go to see him at his place near Toulouse, let's say day after tomorrow, and to spend a couple of days there. I'd need a safe-conduct, or a Frenchman's identity card. Will you have one or the other made up for me? Here's a photo." He smiled to himself over the circumlocutions which he thought likely to get Smith interested in a trip. "Do you yourself need an authorization from the Prefecture every time you want to leave Marseilles?"

"No. I have the remarkable advantage of carrying a permanent traveling permit, valid throughout the unoccupied zone." He was walking up and down the room again. Five or six hundred thousand francs . . . It was enough to keep him going for another ten days, while he waited for other funds to turn up. He was not interested in where the Colonel had got the money. It was none of his business. This was the fourth time in two years that the old man had come in, sat down on that chair, propped his cane between his pointed knees, put his monocle in his eye, sniffed his fingers, and, after a few deliberately insignificant sentences, had declared, with a shade of solemnity in his voice, "Yes, I have a little money." (When he came to see Smith without the "I have a little money" in reserve, he fitted no monocle to his eye, showed no solemnity whatever, and generally his conversation bore on important matters.) He did not ask for a receipt, nor inquire into the use made of his money: he never spoke of it again. And, although the total of his contributions had been considerable, every Saturday evening he called at the A.R.S. offices to collect two hundred and fifty francs in weekly assistance.

"I don't know who it is, in heaven or in hell, who is protecting me," said Smith, picking up the telephone to call his secretary. "Any more than I know what good genie sends you here, Colonel. I wonder how, without your help, I could have carried on till the end of the week."

"The genie of imbeciles," said the Colonel. He took a thick envelope from the inside pocket of his coat, placed it on the corner of the desk. "Is it not true that the security of the wise man is due to the large number of the ignorant, as my friend Cicero says? But to come back to Audry, have I ever told you how much I hate to travel alone? Even in my youth I never journeyed except in good company. This excellent habit has grown with time, and at my age, you know, one does not like to venture on the roads alone." He cleared his throat, looking at Smith out of the corner of his eye. "One risks falling asleep, riding past his station, being trampled in the crowd . . ."

"Blackmail?" said Smith, opening his mouth and wrinkling his forehead. "So this is the blackmail? . . ."

Again the Colonel cleared his throat. Francine Lepage came in, after putting her head, then her shoulder, then her arm, proffering a stenographer's notebook, through the timidly opened door. Smith gave her the Colonel's photograph, asking her to get a French identity card, in any name she liked, ready for the next day, plus a food-ration card to go with

it. In her small apartment in the Rue de Rome she had a printing setup, stamps, seals, various stub pens and pastes, all neatly cached under the red tile floor of her kitchen. Gliding along in her felt slippers, as silent and transparent as an apparition in her own shadow, she opened her eyes until her face was all eyes, pressed her lips tight so that nothing might escape them which would make her blush, took the orders, seizing the word half spoken, the wish half formed. To see her thus, with her hump in place of a torso, with her fragile neck and her oil-paper mask, more immaterial than a spirit despite the beauty of her diction, one was not sure that she was not actually a spirit, a gnome in flesh and blood disguised as a secretary.

"She speaks English exquisitely," said the Colonel after she left the room. "She has the most perfect Oxford accent you will ever find in a French mouth. Has she been with you long?"

"Since the first day," said Smith, sitting down wearily. "Yes, she does have a remarkably pure accent, which is all the more curious because she has never been in England or in any English-speaking country. I don't know what I would have done without her. She takes half the burden off my shoulders. She never forgets anything, knows every file, every detail, and if I called her in the middle of the night I would find her dressed and ready. . . . Yet there are days when I get exasperated with that penitential air of hers, and with her efficiency." He left his chair, stood undecided for some moments as if forgetting why he had stood up, then began pacing the floor again. "At times I would have liked to see her make a mistake, become absent-minded, give me an excuse to shake her up, anyway. But no, she is simply . . . Well, she simply can't get out of order." He turned around sharply. "Isn't that a strange desire, Colonel—to want to push your neighbor around, to trip him up?" Hands on the knob of his cane, short beard spread out over the backs of his hands, the Colonel followed Smith with his eyes. "A while ago, in Pontillac's office, I felt the pleasure it gave him to grease the ground under my feet, to stretch strings across my path, for the one single purpose of seeing me go sprawling. To me it seemed entirely uncalled for, because after all he ought to have known I wouldn't slip. The fact is that he played—I should have said gambled—so prodigally on my thick-wittedness that he got his own finger caught. I don't know why, but I had not thought of the Gestapo at first. It was Pontillac, with his odd eagerness to see me fall flat on my face, that gave me the idea. . . . Do you know him, Colonel?"

"By reputation," grumbled the old Italian.

"He impressed me as being a very intelligent man. A particular kind of intelligence, all cleverness and suppleness, but deigning to exert itself only on great occasions, being satisfied, in lesser circumstances, to affect a nonchalance in which there is a touch of contempt. I observed him attentively, he's worth knowing, if only to learn to parry when he attacks. He's very strong, very dangerous. The way he played me, he almost succeeded in making me lose my patience."

"He wouldn't be so strong if you were calmer, Smith. He has the advantage over you of being absolutely cool. What you call his eagerness to see you fall flat on your face is part of a coolly calculated game. It may happen that he will make a false step on the sliding pond he has prepared for someone else, but it will never be because he loses his patience; whereas your own desires—for instance to see your secretary forget her spelling so that you would have an excuse to jostle her a bit—are not part of your game at all. . . . Either I'm completely wrong, or your nerves need to be put to bed, Smith."

"That's what you think!" the American exclaimed, laughing. "You don't have to see her every day, every hour of the day, with never a smile cracking that mousy little face of hers, never a look that doesn't beg pardon for some unforgivable sin or other."

"Bad reasons," said the Colonel. He raised his goatee, sniffed twice as if to sound his *A*, put the goatee back on his folded hands. "If it would make you happy to give your people a roughing, why not do it once and for all, with or without pretext? All you have to do is open that door and empty out your wrath by emptying your lungs, yelling your head off at them. They'd understand, don't worry. They'd even say, 'Go to it, boss, yell to your heart's delight, it'll do you good.' Or they'd think it. But, in fact, you're no more angry than I am, angry, I mean, with your fellow workers. You're quite simply in need of an old liqueur, a fat cigar, and a little two-day trip to Toulouse and environs."

Smith returned to his desk, drank two glasses of ice water. Remote and persistent, the click-click of the typewriters suggested the rapid pecking of birds' beaks on the bark of trees, and the silence of the city, attenuated and muted under the heavy gag of the curtains, recalled his hours of sleeplessness. Smith drank another glass of water. "I'm thirsty—thirsty as if I were on a diet of salt," he said. His eyes wandered over a pile of typed sheets annotated in red pencil. "Any special reason for wanting me to go on the Toulouse junket?"

The Colonel blew his nose loudly, then began to fold his handkerchief with great care. "I think Stephen Audry would like to see you. I believe he has something—a favor of some kind—to ask of you."

The amused expression with which Smith looked at the old Italian made them both laugh. "A variation on your blackmail, Colonel?" he asked. "You're an old fox. You want to lure me into going on a spree." The Colonel did not bother to protest, he folded his handkerchief and breathed noisily through his nose. Stephen Audry really did have a favor to ask of the American, but it would have been a waste of time to try to convince him of it. Smith spun around in his chair, became serious. "Do you actually think a party in the country would help me get rid of this thirst? Would change the course of my thoughts?" He put his hand on the papers spread out in front of him. "Can anyone 'detach' his thoughts from these heaps of reports, from this literature compared to which the stories of the Marquis de Sade are charming tales? I have plenty here to quench my

thirst: in one concentration camp a single pump for each five thousand internees—a pump which delivers a thousand billion fecal germs with every quart of water; in another camp I have twenty deaths a day average, for a population of four thousand internees—tertian malaria, pneumonia, typhoid, tuberculosis, malnutrition, beatings; I have a hundred and eighty war invalids, Spaniards, Czechs, Poles, and others, all of whom fought for France, legless, armless, gangrenous and purulent, who are pleading to have Senegalese for guards, because the blacks, unlike the militiamen, beat them only on order; I have twelve hundred Israelites who are asking to go back to Dachau, to Buchenwald, camps from which they came here at the end of 1940, for while they were put to death there by the hundreds, at least they were not forced to satisfy their needs in a barrel placed in the middle of the barracks in which they live; I have the echo of a thousand murders an hour, by gas, by fire, by the wandering bullets of the Vernichtungs-Kolonnen; and to top it all, as if it weren't enough already, as if the Nazis were running short of material and Vichy had to make up the deficit, now we have deportations inaugurated in this land of France which they call 'free,' the—sinister stinkers." He hunched his shoulders and held them hunched, as if to keep himself from shivering. "I think of the Pontillacs, the men of the French upper class who serve Germany though they hate her—for they hate her or my own eyes deceive me—but who help bleed their country in order to save a shadow of their class privileges. . . . Come, Colonel, don't let's fool ourselves: nerves, fatigue, thirst—overwork has little to do with that. It's . . . it's all this. It's the unendingness of all this. It's the getting hardened to murder, the being drawn to murder on the fringes of war. It's the flourishes, the ornamental luxury, added to horror to brighten its grayness. You're a military man: you . . ."

"I am not a military man," said the old Italian. He changed position, smoothed the underside of his goatee, then sniffed at his knuckles. "I was a physician in the last war, and I never rose above the rank of captain."

"Really? . . ." said Smith. He touched his temples, then his eyes. "I thought you were a professional soldier in retirement."

"Do I look like one?" Under the thick tuft of his brows, the Colonel's eyes lighted with gaiety. "I'm going to tell you a secret, Smith: I owe my proud shoulder bars to a phonetic confusion: Colonna has become Colonel. The amusing thing is that no one notices it; even I am coming to consider myself a saber-waver, although I never in my life pulled a trigger."

Smith began to walk again, and there was a silence. A sterile rattle of dancing keys pecked muted seconds on an invisible clock face, and Smith's long, equal steps measured and remeasured the length of the room. "Indeed, I should have suspected it," he said, "although you really do have the bearing of an officer."

"And a mind to match," said the Colonel. He rubbed his fingers together energetically. "Sometimes, when deep in my heart I agree that to slay the largest possible number of 'enemies' is a golden rule in the art

of war, the capture of a keg of salted sardines more profitable than that of a living man, I acknowledge my right to marks of rank which would not be entirely fictitious. War, after all, is a serious affair, one conducted, I mean, with logic in its ideas, and its 'humanization' is a little farce combined with a vast sentimental swindle."

"Is that how I look to you—sentimental?" Smith interrupted. He halted, hung a second in suspense, then started out again. "Do I strike you as . . . as gargling with the mouthwash of altruism?"

"Certainly not," said the Colonel.

"Certainly not," Smith went on. "I certainly do not have the vocation of tears, Colonel. All the lachrymal glands are good for is to relieve a head cold. I think—ah, I think that the distinguishing characteristic of man is to straighten his back and start to climb again: it is to undo disaster incessantly. If New York collapsed tomorrow no doubt there would be tears, but there would be a lot of work, and another New York would rise on the ruins of the old. One individual, some individuals, may fail: man goes on." A smile of embarrassment relaxed his fatigue-drawn features. "I express these things badly, Colonel. They are difficult to think, much more difficult to say. It's hard to imagine how good a school war is. You learn—how well you learn!—to watch death go on. Do you see, it seems to me that by putting whole nations under a law potentially equal for all, bending millions of human beings under a common load, war lightens the burden of each one. Because it is collective, because it can reach everyone by the chance explosion of a bomb, the punishment becomes less inhuman. To suffer in numbers may really be to suffer with a sort—with a sort of lightheartedness. But . . ."

"But an essentially abstract element creeps into it," said the Colonel. "Something like an inexpressible sense of justice: it is good, it is just, since war there is, that it be translated into death and ruin, and that the greater number suffer from it. It is 'loyal' to be a part of it. The average man instinctively knows this so well, desires it almost, that . . ."

". . . that he feels frustrated when wounds and bruises are too slow in coming!" Smith exclaimed. "Ah, I'm glad to hear you speak of solidarity in death and ruin. But if your average man is excluded from them? If he finds himself cut off from this egalitarian destiny—what then? If, instead of the good and just law of total war, of the common grave under the common cross, he has no right except to this . . . to this . . ." He laid his hand flat on the pile of documents which littered his desk, sought and met the eyes of the Colonel. "To this . . ." he repeated. With a sharp movement he swept away the typewritten sheets; and, as if the sight of their twisting and turning had reminded him of his thirst, he poured himself a glass of water. "I'm . . . I'm awfully sorry," he said, again stalking up and down the room. He felt the Colonel's presence, the Colonel's pale eyes following his march. "You know that I came to France as correspondent for a news agency. Because it was my professional duty and because I was interested, I studied the French publications from the

beginning of all this. But if I've given it a good deal of thought, I don't claim . . ." The smile of embarrassment returned to his face. "I don't claim to explain anything, I'm not a very good psychologist, but you don't need to be very smart to see that war, by the very fact that it catches up the nation as a whole, creates the factors—oh, I don't know—the factors of a collective 'unanimist' psychosis which awakens the gregarious instincts of the herd."

"In other words," said the Colonel, "war, for those who do not participate in it actively, is equivalent to a sort of stage tragedy: the greater the art, the more the spectator identifies himself with the protagonists. He purges and purifies his emotions in it. It's a catharsis, as my friend Aristotle would say."

"Wouldn't they be the same factors," Smith continued, "which, under a symbol of equivalency or of parallelism, as you like, work toward the maintenance of discipline in an army in the field? Unity in dress, in the ends to attain, in blind obedience—a symbol which in turn implies a oneness of destiny, each soldier being placed under a sign identical with that of his neighbor, and by that very fact being reduced in his own personality and exalted in the common personality? Well, the egalitarian element which modern total war brings as an endowment to the civilian population, however far they may be from the front lines, makes them all identical, emotionally at least, in the embrace of a sort of—of sacred union, in which each one discovers the reason of his being through the unreason of all. Here we have, if I am not mistaken, the exaltation of the instinctive psychosis of the *Gemeinschaft*, which the Nazis oppose to the social consciousness of the *Gesellschaft*. The fact is, when you come down to it, that the 'equal law for all,' if it consisted only in dying of scarlet fever, far from being a democratic myth, goes back to the very roots of social relations, and for the very reason that they think they are sharing in a law equal for all, armies as well as civilian populations continue to bear an unbearable destiny. They would rise against inequality in their lot, and it's when there is a sharp cleavage between the 'rear' and the 'front' that insurrections occur. So I come back to the inexpressible sense of justice which seems to you so essentially abstract, and to me essentially so common. You see, I think the acceptance of one's lot, whether by the civilian who perishes under the ruins of his house or by the combatant who expires in a foxhole, this acceptance, passive in itself, is conceivable and possible because nourished by an obscure but intense sense of justice, quite outside of the criminal code and the fear of the police. Our strength—and maybe our weakness, who knows?—comes from the fact that by every fiber we belong to the clan, to the city. However diminished may be the role of the individual in the social hierarchy, he feels that he is first of all a member of the city, in solidarity with the other members of his group, responsible for the laws which rule the world. No one really desires to escape the common law, no one in any case has the power to escape it, and as iniquitous as destiny may be, it is always in human scale as long as man

finds in it a share which is common to all. We owe our prodigious faculty of taking up the fight again in the first place to our feeling of identification with the species, to our inalienable right as members of the city. Outside of the city, life is neither possible nor thinkable. Let this feeling become atrophied, let the idea creep in that the city is cutting you off or throwing you out, and the very sources of existence dry up. So you have put your finger on it: the city is at war, and to fall, bleeding from the mouth, is the law of the city at war; it is destiny *intra muros*, my destiny today, yours tomorrow. This destiny becomes the normal rule. But, as things are today, millions and millions of beings are expelled, cut off from this destiny; millions have lost their prerogatives as members of the tribe. Banned from the city, thrown *extra muros*, they are deprived of the people's right to pass out fraternally under the ruins of the common house. To me, that's what—it's the hellish injustice of this refusal of burial in holy ground that . . ."

He sat down at his desk, touched his temples and his eyes, and the Colonel stood up. The distant rattle of hailstones came no longer from the typewriters, and beyond the thick gag of the curtains the silence had ripened over the town. It was very late, the late hour of insomnia, when images begin to skim across the hoarfrost of sleepless nights. Rosemary in her blue nightgown, did the fuzz still shine at the back of her neck, was the shadow still warm in the hollow of her belly—"What, but what are you doing there in Marseilles—won't you come back—come back—come back," still and always Rosemary Smith. . . . Well, if you want me to tell you . . . He had come to Marseilles to send cables and he sent them every day, one and the same cable day in and day out for two years, SSSave OOOur SSSouls, in a world which had forgotten the Morse code, which had sewed up its soul in night-blue nightgowns.

"I think I'll go to Toulouse with you," he said, uncorking the thermos.

## » 14 «

AFTER DINNER THE THREE MEN WENT TO TAKE THE fresh air on the terrace. They had to feel their way toward the lounge chairs and locate them by touch, for the dense, odoriferous shadows of the garden rose high in the flaky darkness of the night, and hindered its soft diffusion. Alive with mute activity, with a scarcely audible hum, with cold lights shed by gold-ringed insects in the whimsy of their flight, the garden pushed its forceful breath up to the foot of the terrace. Quietly, for fear of startling his air-drunk and sun-sated plants, Stephen Audry asked his guests whether they were comfortable, whether they were disturbed by the gynaeceum fragrance which rose from his garden. He lingered over the word "gynaeceum," pronouncing it in the deliberately stilted voice he affected when he had rediscovered a word which, no longer in common usage, acquired a new and deliciously pedantic flourish. He liked, at times, to allow himself the use of a word or a turn of phrase which smacked of preciousity, a manner of speaking which sounded pontifical, emphasizing it just enough to flatter his palate, like someone who, savoring an oyster, pretends to have found a pearl in it; he liked the harmonious sonority of certain archaic expressions, the charm of certain outmoded twists of speech, which he banished from his writing, but which from time to time, and as if against his will, illumined his conversation. He prized their particular quality all the more because, unusual as they might be, such flowery or antiquated expressions always imposed themselves spontaneously, without premeditation on his part, and because precisely on account of their odd flavor they illustrated marvelously an idea which a different or merely approximate phrasing would have betrayed. His garden—he had noticed this all of a sudden—exhaled an almost carnal, a somehow intimate odor, and the image it suggested seemed to him at once so new and so evanescent that the word "gynaeceum," more exact, less trivial than the paraphrase "women's apartment," came to him of itself, as if newly invented. In the same way, when he was running through ancient manuscripts or flipping the pages of old dictionaries, he loved to cull the paradoxical notations which enriched them; and when peradventure he found a bicycle described as ". . . a sort of wooden horse, mounted

on two wheels, on which the rider balances himself, placing his feet on pedals shaped like a crank, which turn the large wheel," or when he learned that a chauffeur is ". . . a brigand who burns his victim's feet to make him divulge the whereabouts of his money," he was delighted. Thus again the waggish but spontaneous throwing together of two words made to be kept apart—to describe a mistakenly praised book as "defamed," or a groping mind as "formicant," or an overpolished style as "coddled," gave him an aesthetic satisfaction whose very facility amused him. But while his friends knew that this was a game, a sort of revenge on himself and on the stark purity of his writing, he was not displeased when those who did not know him took him for a poser. "When man invented the door-mat," he once said in answer to one of those questions which he detested ("What do you think, Maître, of the future of progress?"), "he earned his title of bourgeois: when the use of his mind becomes no less natural to him, I shall see a bright future for progress."

Smith and the Colonel had reached Stephen Audry's house toward the end of the afternoon. They had had a difficult trip, standing in the corridor of a second-class coach, squeezed in with a multitude paralyzed by immobility, and when after seven hours in the nutcracker they had alighted at Toulouse, both felt as if they had undergone the torture of the boot. Forewarned by telegram, Stephen Audry had sent a sort of barouche, hitched to a spavined old nag, to meet them at the station, and they covered the last miles of their journey in low gear, so to speak. Tanned of skin, hair blowing, surrounded by a yapping pack of dogs, the writer met them at the entrance to his estate. He embraced the Colonel and seemed delighted to welcome Aldous John Smith; and while making his excuses for the uncomfortable vehicle he was forced to send after them, he had them shown to their rooms—each preceded by a pitcher of wine. They met again at table after the travelers had rested a bit and changed, and immediately, as if he had been waiting impatiently for this moment, Audry set upon Smith, begging him to talk about America. Smith's information was not brand-new, things were happening fast and the news he received was slow in forcing its way past the censors, but he knew the affairs of his country, and was able to extract, even from facts already several weeks old, the measure of what Stephen Audry had called "the heroic cadence of the United States." The latter seemed extremely curious to learn how the country had passed from peace to war, what had been the popular state of mind the day after Pearl Harbor and after the long series of reverses in the Pacific, and how certain intellectuals whom he named, and Catholic and Protestant circles, had reacted. He wanted to know Smith's opinion on the official—and effective—attitude of the American government toward France under Pétain, asked his views on the character of the strikes in the United States, the segregation of Negroes in the army, the mass internment of citizens of Japanese descent, "America First" and similar "Daughters of the American Revolution." He made no comment, listening with such attention that he forgot his soup. His rare interrup-

tions showed his own understanding of American matters, and Smith saw that beyond bare information Audry was eager for an over-all picture which would give precision to his ideas. The light of the lamp fell in copper-colored reflections on his face, with its dry skin stretched over his high cheekbones. The bold line of the profile of this seventy-year-old might incline one to superimpose on him the somewhat emblematic image of a Redskin in the manner of Fenimore Cooper; but at the same time his wavy, bright silver hair, the violet of his eyes, the lively play of his glance, argued against a superficial confusion.—In fact, Smith thought, he resembles an old Viking ruler dispensing justice in the shade of an oak tree.

On the terrace the three men sat for a long time in silence. It was not possible to accustom oneself immediately to the immobility of the air, the heavy surge of the odors, the perfect reign of the insects whose feast it was: the adjustment had to be gradual, avaricious in a sense, as if a careless word, a brusque gesture, would have disturbed the secret ordinance of the night. But Smith knew from what the Colonel had told him that this long spell of silence was the forerunner of a long monologue—that Audry, as the old Italian had rather theatrically expressed it, was "putting himself in the state of grace." He recalled the Colonel's suggestions, and quietly watched the gleaming and disappearing of the glowworms, frank signals, frank after-trails of love: he remembered the old man's words, punctuated by the vicious bouncing of the barouche. "I've known Audry for thirty years," he had said. "I know as much about him as it's possible to know about so complex a personality. I'm certain, however, of one thing: although at times he may seem to strive for effect, Audry is anything but a mystifier. When he has gathered us under an arbor or on the terrace, or led us to some dark angle of the garden where we shall hardly be able to see each other, we must be careful not to break in on his silence: he will be getting ready to speak, and speaking, for him, is a difficult task, which demands what is rightly called a 'climate.' He does not like to talk: there's the simple truth, he does not like it. So much so that I sometimes wonder if he has not been taken in by the legend which he himself created, namely that he is clumsy in the use of the spoken word. But this evening he will talk. He implied as much in his letter to me. It—it will be an event. And it goes without saying that we shall assist at the preliminary ceremonial, the setting of the stage, so to speak. It's always the same: he will invite us to take the air, will choose a shadowy corner, will spend some time savoring the quality of the silence; and when he has—how shall I say?—when he has paid allegiance to some pagan deity known only to himself, with a short sentence which sets the whole tone immediately he will launch into what he has to say."

"I had not seen them for a long time," said Stephen Audry. His voice took its place in the silence without disturbing its tranquillity. "We do not tread the same roads, we are hardly a-thirst for the same draughts. Their names do not matter. One, the leader of the expedition on which they both embarked to conquer me, is a moralist who always has a bit of

his birthright left to barter against a mess of pottage: I shall call him Esau. The other shall be Probus: he has written twenty-six volumes of irrefutable 'History,' destined to prove that if Lucifer invented the Goths for the one purpose of invading Gaul periodically, God saw to it that forever and ever Gaul would cut the Goths to pieces. In the days when I was easily stirred to indignation, I had said of Esau that he was born a hack journalist, and of Probus that he was a cheap-Jack whose specialty was sharpening old sabers; and they of me, respectively and by rebound, the corruptible that I was a corrupter of youth, the pundit that I was the Antichrist turned multigrapher. Later, although it became my habit to ignore them—or perhaps because of this habit—one or the other, once or twice a year, would devote to me a few lines of stylized gall, served on the silken leaves of some uniformly virtuous publication. Thus my surprise was not inconsiderable when, in the first fortnight of April, Esau called me on the telephone. 'Dear friend,' he said in substance, 'Probus and I are passing through Toulouse. If we were assured that it would not be importuning you, we should like to chat for a few minutes between trains. It's been a number of years since we met, and France, dear friend, France alas . . . If he forbade himself to add that France had suffered for our failure to meet, it was because, doing homage to my perspicacity, he supposed that I was sufficiently alert to understand it. As I listened to him I pictured Probus, plump and woebegone as was his wont: I pictured him trying to read on Esau's face the result of the *démarche*, rather in the manner of a little person pulling at a big person's sleeve to find out what is going on. I, too, was desirous of knowing what exactly was going on. Letting Esau babble, I strove to catch some squeak of the oar which sounded loose in the oarlock; for my travelers, needless to say, were not 'passing through' Toulouse, it was I who was passing through, so to speak, and they knew it opportunely enough to come and hunt me out. But what most surprised me was that they should have joined efforts, since, if our relations lacked warmth, theirs did not sin by excess of cordiality. In the past they had written a few love novels together, the construction of the plot being assigned to Esau, the styling to Probus—and it was the hack journalist who was welcomed to the bosom of the Forty Immortals, while the cheap-Jack had to be content with a membership in the Legion of Honor. This had its effect on the companionship, which presently dissolved, and they no longer spoke to each other except with the decorum usual to colleagues who frequent the same salons and sharpen their teeth on the same Audry. Nevertheless I did my best not to show more surprise than was seemly, and invited them to come and visit me. They came—Esau with his smile set and his arms outspread, Probus solemn and with a touch of uneasiness in his moody eyes. By their manner of taking seats, and the way Esau tried to set the affair in motion and Probus to push from behind, I saw with astonishment that they resembled a pair of actors who are apprehensive of bungling a scene. This manifestation of stage fright, which, by the way, they mastered very quickly, made their visit all the more suspicious, since

I know that both of them, and Esau particularly, are incapable of undertaking anything which has not been prepared in advance and in detail. But, being good-natured and not wanting to shove them further into their embarrassment, I had wine served, and they, with equal good nature, praised its bouquet although it was harsh and unaged. Here we are, then, sitting in a circle, outdoing each other in politeness: we express mutual concern about our state of health, allude in passing to the difficulty of getting provisions, then Esau discourses in the manner of a columnist who has just made the round of the literary *cafés*, Probus takes over like a knife grinder who knows the condition of all the cutlery in the neighborhood, and I, curious and courteous, wait for the preamble to be over and the demonstration to begin. For, to tell the truth, my colleagues intrigued me. Being by no means stupid, they must have known that if they had come to give me a lesson in catechism I would certainly let them perish of inanition. Yet that was the object of their visit—a catechism lesson. Of their visit and of their mission. They had come on command, otherwise they would have abstained both from coming and from building altars in my honor. Invested as they were with a disagreeable and rather humiliating commission, they put me in mind of two apothecaries armed with a box of balms and unguents, and deputed to salve me and anoint me until, softened to the right degree and liquefied with beatitude, I should consent to be poured into a mold of their devising. But I am modest and I hate to be handled, *chrism* gives me an intense desire to blaspheme; yet this time the bath of holy oils smelled so strongly of the cloven hoof that I agreed to dip my toe in it. They went about their work deftly, anyway, there was nothing coarse or distasteful about their little game except the odor of brimstone, which doesn't escape me, seeing that I've had the devil at my heels for a long time and that I have an old nose, a good nose, which never fails in its duty."

He paused—and the Colonel sniffed modestly. The garden smelled of powder of mimosa and powder of gold. Half lying in his chaise longue, his eyes open on the opaque darkness of the night, Smith saw an Audry subjecting himself to a bath of emollient oil. Who were the rubbers? Who Esau, who Probus? "When they had corked their bottles and folded their towels," Audry continued, "Probus, to whom this phase of the work had evidently been allotted, started off on a history lesson. The hack journalist had said, without preamble and completely out of context, that he had just heard, from 'a reliable Swiss source,' of the incredible power of destruction unleashed day and night over England by the *Luftwaffe*; and the cheap-Jack, as though at a signal, brought forward his knife-grinding apparatus. Delicately, testing me with his melancholy eyes to see if I had become soft enough, he set out his assortment of whetstones, first the small ones, the medium-sized ones shortly after, the mastodons at the end. 'Ah, yes, England . . .' he declaimed, pouring himself some wine. 'Have you ever, dear friend, thought of the nefarious role which England has always played at France's expense?' 'And Germany?' I said lightly, as if their

massage had really softened my brain. 'I seem to remember that you have written books on Germany's thirst for French blood—or could it be that I err?' He perked up his head, marking a point for himself: I should not have ventured out on that ledge, he had reinforced it in anticipation of my setting foot on it. The Germans? . . . Alas, had he then wasted forty years of his existence, written twenty-six volumes of Franco-German history, only to be so badly misunderstood? Yes, of course, the Germans had made war on us. But what nation has not warred against her neighbor? Is not every frontier a source of grievances? Yet without the English pulling the strings, what could the Germans have done? Haven't they been throughout the centuries the pawns on the British chessboard, the more or less unwitting mercenaries of Britain's insatiable imperialism? Yet he, Probus, thought he had demonstrated that the Rhine was an artificial frontier; thought he had made it clear—oh, perhaps somewhat too much by implication, too timidly perhaps, he would admit—that for a thousand years the English had been stirring up discord between the two banks of the Rubicon. I listened in silence, he recited his lesson without much enthusiasm, renewing his strength now and then with a swig of my wine, almost mechanically. Esau, for his part, had chocked his elbows on the arms of his chair, put his fingers together for support, and leaned his head in them. 'I have always wondered,' Probus was saying, jiggling his doleful cheeks, 'how men can resist the lessons of history as they do. In all fairness, without partisan prejudice, as is natural between people of breeding, is it not as evident as can be that if ever two nations were made to get along with each other, those two nations are the French and the Germans? But nothing in history seems evident at first glance, alas! How foolishly we have lived! he complained—we who are as complementary as colors which, when blended, produce white, the purest of all: they the coal, we the wine; they the body, we the spirit. On our mad disputes, on our noble blood, England has fed and still feeds. England . . . Probus's mournful eyes looked at me with sympathy and regret. Where would England be today, he asked me, if we, hand in hand with Germany, had taught her rectitude, supposing that rectitude and Albion are not mutually exclusive? The English would have been on a footing with the Rhodians and the Cypriots and the natives of Martinique. Had it occurred to me that from the Hundred Years' War to the Entente Cordiale Britain had never ceased to pillage us and to incite others to do the same? Well, he reminded me of it, 'in all fairness and without partisan prejudice.' For the benefit of my education, he embarked on a complete and detailed review of the incomparable perfidy of Britain—'six centuries of uninterrupted treason, my dear!' Did they not proclaim themselves kings of France from 1339 on? Did they not put our Jean le Bon in irons, dethrone our Charles V, make war on our Charles VII, burn our Jeanne d'Arc? He besought me to reply; he begged me to say whether the English, royally defeated in 1453, did not keep a footing on our soil at Calais; whether, in 1491, when Brittany and France had hardly been reunited, the English did not immediately pick a

quarrel with us. I wagged my head, touched with compassion by calamities so numerous. The first cosmopolitan alliance against us—I might have suspected it!—was organized by them in 1511. Ah, the alliances and coalitions: the Grands, the Triples, the Quintuples, they never weary of fomenting them to our destruction. In the self-sure voice of a reciter of vespers, in the voice of a computist calculating the seasons of the ecclesiastical year, he overwhelmed me with wars so frequent, with dates so precise, that my head swam. These English attacked our vessels on the high seas; they robbed us of India, of Ohio, of Canada, of Minorca, of Malta, of Senegal for a time; they destroyed our empire; they swindled us out of Suez. . . . Ah, he knew his almanac and its list of believe-it-or-nots! For over an hour he rustled its pages, leading me on a descent to the kingdom of the dusts incrusting in the solid mud of the ages, baring old sores, forgetting not one of them—John Law, Trafalgar, Wellington—always with sadness in his eyes and melancholy in the trembling of his cheeks, as if excavating such depths of turpitude had made him neurasthenic. Without being in the least concerned about whether I could keep up with him, he brought me from the war of 1914 to the present conflict, stopping off in Ethiopia, in Spain, at Munich, at Dunkerque, at Mers-el-Kebir, in Syria, in Madagascar: everywhere and always, north and south, summer and winter, Albion had done us in over and over again. 'And who is us?' I wanted to ask him, marveling that after so many blows on the soles of our feet, 'we' were still of this earth. With perseverance, with resignation, I strove to discover a note of originality in this showcaseful of chronology. . . . I thought to myself that at least he would draw a conclusion; that he would pull taut the leading thread of his learning and knowledge, and do a jig on it to prove its straightness to me, or string the dates of his calendar on it like so many precious stones, twist it into a diadem, and try to crown me with it. But what need had he to draw a conclusion! He rang with a drier, cruder, and in a certain sense more dishonest sound than the cymbals of propaganda, which does not go back to the time of the battle of Actium to find inspiration. He was playing off key and he knew it, for he has a good ear, even for his own pavaues. Hence he did not conclude. Moreover—and I should have guessed this sooner—it was not his role. In the allotment of parts, the 'history' episode alone fell to him, the 'moral' being of the domain of Esau, the ringmaster. So it was done. His duty accomplished, Probus backed off, not without stumbling into the vice of the man of letters who is fond of a good curtain line and knows how to dose it. 'There, dear friend,' he said, his cheeks a-flutter, 'there you have, succinctly described, the doughty deeds of that race of weavers and cotton merchants. Created to be helots, they were able to pose as baronets by sucking the blood of France.' He raised his hand, and his expression changed from doleful to languid. 'They were able . . .' he repeated in a tone which clearly defined a time gone by. Whereupon, without waiting another instant, Esau came front and center."

Someone was softly closing the blinds inside the house. Smith saw—he

divined the Colonel's shadow darkening the shadow of the night, and slow and strong and dull his heart began to beat by its own motion. From very far away, from so far that he thought he heard it inside his veins, the buzz of an insect caught his ear. He tried to smile, thinking—I shall smile at it, it's an airplane, but he could not smile because it was indeed an airplane and the Colonel knew it and Audry knew it and every man and woman knew it from one end to the other of the village Europe. He kept listening, grateful that Audry had paused for a while, and when the rattle died out it seemed to him that the quiet had grown like the swelling of the tide, setting the widened edges of the silence in vibration.

"Unlike Probus," went on Stephen Audry quietly, "Esau has a certain grace about him. He displays an absence of constraint. I should be tempted to say an elegance, which permits him, no matter what filth he may touch, to come away from it pink of cheek and immaculate of cuff. To give him his due, his 'front' is always faultless: he wears his certificate of good character on his sleeve at all times. But above all, this hack journalist has fashioned himself a halo of austerity: his writings distill an edifying morality—love is chaste, wickedness punished, goodness rewarded. Yet those who, like myself, have seen him close up in his noble-father act, are familiar with the ABC's of his ethics, whose main tenet proclaims that the behavior of men—that of our actor included—never follows a straight path: history, military and private fortunes, sanctity itself, all go in zig-zags. Virtue supposes evil: dung is needed to grow the wheat of which the Host is made. But—and this is the idealistic flower of his moral science—however depraved the world may be, it honors good principles. For what excites the world is not what the world is, but what it would like to think it is. Doesn't Shakespeare say that all the world's a stage, and all of us the actors? And who was it, Pietro, who said that the actor is the only honest hypocrite, since he makes his life a deliberate dream?"

"Hazlitt the Elder," said the Colonel.

"Hazlitt the Elder," Stephen Audry repeated. "So that if Esau lives on cynicism but dabbles in apologetics, it's because the world does evil but adores good; it's a perversely sentimental world and the Sacred Heart is its dream for Sunday. Man, as Esau sees him, is a 'fallen' creature trying to climb back up the slope, but rather in the manner of a crab; a creature with spiritual aspirations—for instance, the Scriptures; for instance, his thirst for knowledge of God—an optimistic crab, which has not lost the hope that one morning wings will come out in place of his claws; which, when the tide is full, hopes to reach the stars by riding up on the foam. Well then, the mission of the writer is to make him hope for all this at low tide as well as at high: it is to put his Sunday dream on the working-day menu, it is to heighten man's appetite for celestial purity; for . . . 'blessed are the cannons, if the Gospel flourishes in the breaches which they open,' as a certain Monsignor Diaz de Gomara, Bishop of Cartagena and member of the Falange, preached, in 1936, into the respectfully attentive ear of Maître Esau. But for us—Esau said 'us' with the intention of including me

willy-nilly in his roster of right-thinking men—for us, until peace returns to earth and the Sacred Heart reigns in every breast, France is the only viable Gospel. 'She is our faith, our particular doctrine, our spiritual and temporal matrix,' he assured me with grief in his voice, somewhat, I imagine, as one would upbraid a pagan who after kissing the crucifix returns to his fetishes.—She is to us, no doubt, what Brittany is to the Bretons or Kaffiry to the Kaffirs, I thought, listening to him. I cast a questioning glance in Probus's direction, suddenly recalling his existence: he had not disappeared, on the contrary he was settling down, fingers thrust under his waistcoat, cheeks in repose, an expression of well-being not far from somnolence. I returned to Esau, he was observing me with his penetrating eyes, the eyes of a courtier prompt to seize the humor of his client; and as if I had said aloud, 'Not at all, dear Maître, we're off on the wrong track,' he changed his tack with the nimbleness of an old courtesan who knows all the tricks. He laughed, feigning a shadow of embarrassment, then spread out his hands in a gesture of candid helplessness. 'One can't change the line of one's thinking at the age of sixty-five,' he said, cutting his age by a few years in passing. He was, of course, a patriot rooted in the soil of France, and even—if labels must be accepted at face value—something of a nationalist; but at least—and at this he hoped I would do reverence to him—he had rarely sinned by sectarianism, and had never allowed passion to stifle the truth. I wondered why he continued to put off his perilous little somersault. I had forgotten that this was the 'line of thinking' he had mentioned, and that it's quite true that one doesn't change his trapeze at the end of a long life of aerial artistry. 'I have always practiced,' he said, 'an intellectual hygiene which has enabled me to look at myself from the outside, to "desubjectivize" myself as it were. Oh, you mustn't misunderstand me,' he warned, careful to avoid ambiguity. 'I am not repudiating my work. I look upon it with indulgence—yes, that's the word, indulgence—and with entire detachment from my personal interests. Thus, whatever may be my ideas as to the insurmountable emotional attraction which the Fatherland exerts on every individual, though the individual might pay homage to the most extreme internationalism, I shall abstain from putting them forward in this conversation. This is easy for me: I take no credit for it, so convinced am I that all of us are exceeded and overborne by the avalanche.' He came to me with hands open and heart bared, he said, came putting aside his own convictions, for fear that I, insufficiently warned, might mistake them for biased arguments. But above all I must not think that he would intone the psalm of national reconciliation, although he firmly believed that certain historical situations tend to put—and actually do put—the sourdine on the conflicts which divide the members of a community. No, no canticle to union. It was because he had 'desubjectivized' himself that he had been able to come to see me, his own flag lowered and his own feelings behind him—'for, as you must have known, Audry, there is nothing accidental about my presence in Toulouse.' All he asked of me was to do the same, to



'objectivize' myself as he had done; to become that other self which each of us carries around in his entrails to serve as a change for emergencies—he taking it for granted that I had a personality as various as his own. 'We have differed over ideas,' he declared. 'Our concepts and sensibilities are divergent, and no doubt will continue to be, but here we are, both in the same boat, and the boat is sinking.' Ah, how badly tuned his lute was! And how dexterously he covered up its dissonances! I watched him with admiration, he put so much grace into his plucking, so much emotion into the playing of his potpourri, that I felt moved to applaud. He said he knew that I could not help being concerned about our boat—which was France, needless to say—he knew it, even if I should say otherwise. I could not help being concerned, if not for the France which he loved, the France to which he belonged and from which I had the coquetry to disassociate myself, then at least for her culture, for her age-old patrimony—to the enrichment of which you have contributed,' he said, as naturally as could be. For France in that sense, at least, he knew that I suffered; that I shared her agony; that I took my part of blame for it. Just as he did, he said; just as everyone in this nation did who by word or deed had taken a position. But, like Probus a while before, he wished to banish passion 'from our debate,' and for that reason he would abstain from trying to distribute the blame. 'The fact is,' he declared with humility, 'that we are not accountable only for the past: the future is our responsibility, and we ought to assume it. Whatever may be the outcome of the war, whether victory goes to the Axis, to the Allies, or to Asiatic communism, you ought to admit with me that a return to the degenerate forms of left-center-right parliamentarianism in France is totally unlikely. Like feudalism in the past, and divine-right royalty after it, the Republic, faulty or not, has lived its life. One may be glad or sorry, according to one's temperament or ideas, but who could confuse a form of government with France as such?' Surely not he, surely not I, he was confidently convinced of it. To identify France with the administration of its rulers would be like judging God on the style of the encyclicals: it would be the basest of blasphemies. I could not take my eyes from him, I was dazzled by his abundance of words, I wondered what conjurer's trick he would perform when he had finished his spiel of reasonable commonplaces neatly hemmed with oratorical platitudes. He came to it all of a sudden, following the approved practice of pitchmen who treat the passers-by to a long harangue before astounding them with the contents of their suitcases. While refusing to appeal to analogies, he begged me to take note, primo, of the disappearance of the Republic in the oubliettes of history, and secundo, of the simultaneous birth of a new empire—the German Empire. He had followed with great interest, he informed me, the excellent analysis of our friend Probus, whose erudition was equaled only by his probity, and he could only bow before the flawless historical criticism of his exposé. I risked a glance toward Probus, being curious to see how he registered this thrust. Thanks to my raw wine, whose soporific properties I had underestimated, he registered

it calmly, slumbering peacefully, his cheek a jelly and his fly in disarray. 'Nevertheless,' said Esau, following the direction of my glance, 'I would hesitate to accept all his conclusions. It may be that England is really the hereditary enemy of France; but Probus, it seems to me, has allowed his Frenchman's heart to encroach upon his historian's vision.' Ah, the slippery knave! Seeing his confederate nodding, he was filching his share of the loot. . . . However, while pretending to deplore the fact that the best of Probuses had been so inconstant as to change his coat, Esau claimed for himself the right to talk about the German Empire all the more freely because, remaining true to his ideals, he recognized that Germany had not been on the side of the angels in France's misfortunes. 'Well then, today, at the tips of our fingers,' he said, looking at his own, 'the British Empire is coming apart, the German Empire is extending its mighty branches.' He did not like the idea, heavens no. He could not mourn for the disappearance of England as a great power, from the French point of view that was rather matter for congratulation, but neither did he like the idea of Germany as mistress of the world. 'Such, however, is the reality,' he said. 'And we cannot change it by making faces. The Germans are monsters, I grant you. But it is precisely because they are monsters that we should—that France owes it to herself to tame them, unless she wants to perish under their claw.' The mission of France, conquered by the monster, he explained, was to tame the monster; to contaminate him, so to speak, by inoculating him with the Latin genius. And, remarkable as it was, France of all nations was the only one capable of doing it. To enable me to grasp this last point, namely that France alone is equipped to latinize the German Empire, he launched into a dissertation shot through with Freudian analysis which in turn was shot through with Adlerian heresy, aimed at proving that the aggressive instincts of the German people went back to their libido: dissatisfaction and frustration complex, with a clearly characterized fixation on Marianne. By collaborating, by consenting to a morganatic marriage with Germany, France saves herself and once more saves the world. Oh, he knew, he said: he knew this would shock me, he sensed my aversions. He could see how much, mistaking the spirit of the doctrine, I attached myself to the letter, and imagined France engaging in adventures similar to those risked by girls who, at the peril of their virtue, pretend to let the foreign bravo seduce them, and stab him in the back at the psychological moment. But no, that was—if I would permit him the comparison—that was a rather romantic, and, yes, certainly literary way of putting it. To pretend to be possessed in order to possess in the end is not, of course, very elegant; but it is a trick of war—and are we not at war? 'The morality of nations does not adapt itself to the individual scale, and France—France, think of France, Audry! France must live . . .' he enunciated finally, by way of conclusion, after two hours of pleading. I did not interrupt him once, I let him take his time and unravel his pitiful rag of calico. Yet he knows my incorrigible Puritan prejudices, and knows that I hate exhibitions of virtuosity. . . . How much better I would have

liked it if he had said: 'Look, Audry, this game of ours is pretty low, we're losing face, but come over to our side anyway, the Marshal needs you along with all the old nags who aren't too compromised. . . .' Well, all of us fail in courtesy at one time or another, but the exquisite gentility of my hack journalist made me deliberately nasty that day. I stood up, making enough noise to awaken Probus, and left the library without a word. I did not put the carriage at their disposal. I suppose they set off on foot. It was raining hard. It's ten miles to Toulouse. I think I was sorry it was not twice as far."

"Have you heard from them since?" asked Smith in a needlessly hurried voice. He pulled himself erect with a suddenness which made the chaise longue shriek. "I mean . . . did anything happen afterward?"

There was no answer. A distant bark tore through the silence, the nearby chirring of insects patched it at once. Smith leaned back with the same brusque movement, making the chair groan as before. The Colonel had warned him not to interrupt, not to ask questions, but the sky weighed on Smith as if he were holding up its vault with the back of his neck. He tried to make out the Colonel, wondering if he was asleep. Fireflies tore the night with the tracer fire of their flight, and sewed it up with stitches of fire. The Colonel was not asleep, he heard him sniffing his knuckles. A sky of planets and satellites and worlds congealed amid the savage milling of airplanes. Arthur Papsky and the grams of the moon. A sky that crushed rules and recommendations and warnings. Rosemary and her night-blue nightgowns. A sky so low and so lax, using Smith's neck for a column. He was not sure he liked Audry's way of telling a story—his way of doing a monologue for the gallery—and the gallery forbidden to intervene. He had had to make known, one way or another, that his headache was devouring the bulbs of his brain, that he had eaten half a bottle of aspirin and thirst was rusting the rivets of his soul. If he had abstained from questioning, from pushing back the bastard sky, he would have wailed like a child. He was annoyed at not being allowed to ask questions, to ask for a drink—that wine, for instance, with the soporific virtues. Was Audry playing for a hand? And that man Esau, so distinguished. So distinguished. And the other, whose name he had forgotten, Probus, or Primus, what a jellyfish. What a jellyfish.—My God, what a menagerie, he thought.

"Some weeks later, at the end of the month of May, I had a visit which was as unexpected as it was impossible to foresee. I had been in Nice for only a few days when a telegram came, urging me to return to Toulouse at once: Martin, my old gardener, was dying. He had been forty years in my service. I had assisted at his marriage, danced at the weddings of his numerous and homely daughters, held his grandchildren at the font, walked at the head of his wife's funeral procession. He was part of my landscape, and I of his family almanac. I therefore did my best not to let him down in this last solemnity, and took the train for Toulouse. The

burial took place the day after I got here. When I came back from the cemetery the house felt cold and hostile; it was as if with the old gardener's death my own had come to crouch on the doorstep, cutting off the light. I couldn't settle down, and after trying fruitlessly to read and to listen to music, I went off to prow around the countryside. There was a taxi standing at the door when, late in the afternoon, I came home from my walk. I don't see many people, don't like to see anyone without warning, and that day I was in no humor to see anyone at all. As I slipped in through the passage which leads upstairs I could see two motionless silhouettes, unrecognizable in the failing light, outlined on the glass doors of the library. I got to my room and rang. The lady and gentleman, I was told, had arrived soon after I went out. When they heard I was not at home they said they'd wait. My servant tried to impress upon them that there was no telling when I would come in, but they protested that they would be patient, and thus were admitted to the house. When the chauffeur was invited to have a glass of wine in the kitchen, he said he knew nothing about his passengers, except that they were foreigners, 'he could tell from the way they talked.' While I changed—I was covered with mud to the elbows—I cursed this pair of intruders who had invaded my privacy, excusing themselves for not giving their names by saying that Mr. Audry would be 'all the more surprised.' Surprised I certainly was. The two stood up when I entered, the man hurried forward to meet me, took my hand, then both hands, with an enthusiasm which made his words indistinct. 'Audry . . . Stephen Audry . . . What a joy to see you again . . .' he said in a halting voice, holding out my arms as a lover welcomes his fiancée after a long separation. 'What a joy indeed . . .' I responded, imitating him in spite of myself and dragging him toward the electric light switch. Now can you guess who my importunate visitor was? Can you guess? It was Opitz, Klaus Opitz . . ."

"What? . . . Who? . . ." The Colonel's voice was uncertain, it was clearing a path through a thick growth of memories. "But . . . Klaus Opitz is dead. . . . Didn't you publish his *Posthumous Pages*, in 1934 or 1935? Hold on, I remember a certain memorial gathering at which his exemplary life and death were exalted . . ."

"Yes, exalted is the word. . . . Well, the exalted and exemplary departed was standing before me, and there was nothing spectral about him. It took me some time to convince myself of this, and if he had not called me by name I certainly would not have recognized him. He held my hands, devouring me with a hungry look. Nothing was left of his gorgeous head of hair, in which no comb had ever put a tooth, nor of his royally slim figure. Aged he was, dulled, a bit fat, a bit flabby, with a kind of softness in his face, due to the puffiness of the features, or to their bluish tint. It was no good for him to pretend to be alive. . . . Between the man who was embracing me and the one who had been my dear friend, eight years of death had done their work of mortification. Yet had it not been for the discreet intervention of a feminine voice, God knows how long he would

have gone on holding me so, with my arms sticking out, and looking at me so, with his soul in his honest eyes. 'Klaus, whenever you think it is time to call Monsieur Audry's attention to my presence . . .' The voice, an exceptionally melodious one, so flattering to the ear that at once it seemed to me lacking in candor, gave us both a start: Klaus Opitz's heavy frame was so stirred, so decomposed, and my stupefaction at seeing him risen from the dead was so entire, that we had completely forgotten the existence of a third person in the room. 'Oh, Inge, I'm terribly sorry . . .' he said. He introduced us—'Stephen Audry . . . Inge Opitz . . . my wife . . .' She tendered me a gloved hand, firm and pleasant to the touch. 'I am so happy to know you,' she said in her perfect voice, looking at me straightforwardly. I expected her to pay me some run-of-the-mill compliment, but she was above such petty blunders. Taking advantage of the interlude, I ordered wine. We made ourselves comfortable, I filled the glasses, we toasted each other, then I helped Inge Opitz off with her coat. She was not beautiful. She had neither the features nor the lines for it. But if we may accept Fénelon's dictum that simplicity is what lends beauty its richest charm, then she had enough simplicity to seem beautiful. In her and on her everything looked right and harmonious, simple and in the grand style. In her appearance an exquisite taste was joined with a studied simplicity, and whether she spoke or was silent, made a gesture or was still, ease was as natural to her as my handwriting to me. And indeed her charm was so finely wrought, so full-fashioned, I might say, that I would have surrendered to it blissfully had it not been for my nose, whose knowledge and experience I shall never cease to praise. Working on its own account as its nobility obliges it to do, it hinted to me that the lady's ease had a bit of the corset about it, that there was something chemical about her charm and artful about her simplicity. I grant you that a nose, be its breed as noble as it may, is not an instrument of work; but as a guide to uncover what lies beneath the surface, it is certainly better than a diviner's rod. Don't you agree with me, Pietro?"

"With both nostrils," said the Colonel. "I've heard of optical illusions, of auditory hallucinations, of certain other aberrations of the senses: rarely of olfactory hysteria. It's well not to trust this guide too much, however. It can lead you too fast, carry you too far, you risk falling on it, you can break it."

"Break it . . ." Stephen Audry repeated. "That is why, after it had passed its idea along to me, I put it under wraps and unleashed my other instruments. Madame Opitz's voice, the perfection of which I have just emphasized, was adorned with an aureole of transparency, with limpid intonations, with golden inflections, which guaranteed its metal—a legal metal, canonical, certified up to standard, let's say like the color of her eyes or the length of her arms.—Well, said my instruments, while the lady's vocal cords could stand on their own merits, her other charms might well owe their quality to nothing more than an exceptionally successful co-ordination of will and intelligence. This proposition—or opposition—

may seem rather thin, I admit; but it impressed itself on my mind, because all of a sudden I had a feeling that a larynx like Inge Opitz's was admirably fitted to serve as an alibi: with that to wear as a scapular, you could fake the three theological virtues and never be caught. However, like most alibis, even irreproachable ones, hers had a flaw. She had too much confidence in it: it was perfect, she never thought of keeping an eye on it. She bowed her E-string with complete security of mind, never dreaming that the other strings of her fiddle might be out of tune with this one. But ah, what a calculating woman! And what an enchantress. . . . If I had met her any place else, if she had not been Klaus's wife, had it not been for the strangeness of the visit, and of the conversation that prolonged itself far into the night, she would have cast a spell on me as surely as the python hypnotizes its bunny. And if I talk about her immoderately, it's because she did, in fact, cast something of a spell on me. . . ."

He paused for a brief instant. A glowworm shone on the ground, and immediately—reprisals or panic—the violet eye of a searchlight poked feverishly through the night. Falling from the black dunes of the sky, flakes of silence lay softly at the foot of the terrace. The Colonel was heard sniffing his knuckles, but the crowbar digging into Aldous John Smith's head made no sound.

"We dined," said Stephen Audry, seizing the one propitious second to go on with his monologue. "He had learned only recently, when he was granted full freedom, that he had been given up for dead, and buried under the flowers of rhetoric. Arrested in 1933, condemned to death by a 'People's Court' in 1934 for 'anti-national intrigues,' he spent years awaiting his execution. He did not know that the newspapers of two hemispheres had announced, described, and commented on his beheading, that they had credited him with apothegms pronounced at the foot of the scaffold—in the purest tradition of the martyrology. Maltreated, tortured several times, he saw his lot change suddenly for the better in the second year after his condemnation. He was no longer shipped from jail to jail. He was hidden away in secret, first in Berlin, then, for good, in Leipzig. There he spent six years. Not a single echo from the outside world filtered through to him during this long seclusion. Sometimes, very infrequently, a prisoner was thrown into his cell, stayed there twenty-four or forty-eight hours, then left to be seen no more. These were always men who were already reduced to the condition of mangled worms, already beyond sympathy, or hate, or tears. They were thrown at him as examples, for his edification, or his amendment. Or perhaps to drive him mad. 'Young movements are hard movements,' he said, telling me about this: and Inge Opitz added, simply, 'They lose too much blood out of their own veins to worry about sparing the blood of their adversaries.' Klaus nodded approval with the pondered gravity which is habitual with him. 'Payment in blood is the only valid payment,' he said, looking into his plate. 'Alas, why is it that blood alone can cement the blundering work

of man?' I did not interrupt. About the middle of 1935 he knew that he would not lose his reason. A mystical certainty: he will not lose his reason. The worst was past. Death, the stinking intimations of death, came to be like the lack of air, like the absence of light: he no longer noticed them. Death was not in a day to come, but in a time already gone by, already lived. He made a curious remark: that despair and having-no-hope are different things. 'The first,' he said, 'kills or maddens: the second frees.' However that may be, he reinvented for his own use the disciplines of imprisonment: walking, exercise, mental hygiene, minute statistics. He enumerated some of his records: forty-two million steps between the walls of his cell—a little more than the circuit of the earth,' he noted, with a smile tinged with melancholy; six hundred fifty thousand knee bends, an equal number of arm bends; four hundred thousand jaw movements to masticate six years' allowance of food, ten thousand hours to digest it. Some of his other statistics were set forth in figures less overwhelming, but still more bizarre, if that were possible. He imagined a hundred individuals and followed their existence step by step: he figured that the number of people an average man meets in fifty-five years of life is hardly more than two thousand; he gets close to perhaps a dozen of them, knows only three intimately, including himself; the difference between the everyday vocabulary of a cultivated person and that of an uneducated one is in the neighborhood of a hundred words. He seemed to take pleasure in recalling these conclusions, the validity of which, dubious at best, was of little importance to him: there was a note of regret in his rehearsal of them. Knowing a great deal about epic literature, he reconstructed the sagas of Homer from memory; he worked out a comparative theory of Western folklore; he composed two dramas and a tragedy, the latter in verse. And he did not go mad. He invented new languages, new continents, new civilizations; he made over the history of the world, left out Christianity, discovered the compass in Caesar's time, America in the time of Horace, had Rome destroyed by Carthage, Vienna by the Turks, the British fleet by the Invincible Armada. He told himself that the earth had changed its sun; that thanks to the twenty square yards of his cell, which was able to resist cosmic disturbances, he alone of all living things had survived; that he was free to quit his shelter when he wished, but should wait for the planet to go back to its old place in the old hoop. He had time, he used it to round out the seven millionth tour of his cage. Then, suddenly, one day entirely similar to the others, he was sent for. The earth, it appeared, had not perished. On the contrary, it too was making over its history, and in a rhythm productive of vertigo: compared with the events of the day, Opitz's speculations on the conquest of Italy by the Samoyeds sinned by lack of audacity. But I'm getting ahead of the story. . . . Taken from his cell, bathed, deloused, shaven, shorn, loaded into a car and brought to Tübingen, he was installed handsomely—although under the surveillance of two men—in a smiling little house at the edge of the town; and there, without summons or warning—

rather like someone involved in a case of mistaken identity and suddenly acclaimed prince regnant—he found himself in the open. He was free. . . . Almost free, it's true, for he could not yet communicate with anyone, not even with the two Cerberuses who maintained a hermetic silence when, at dawn and after dark, they escorted him on his daily cross-country promenades; nor was he allowed to read or write, or to send or receive mail. But he was free. . . . With a contrite smile, with the embarrassment of the timid man avowing rash thoughts, he told me that, knowing nothing of the war, nothing of the cosmic dislocations which were tearing Europe asunder, he abandoned himself to such debauches, such silent orgies of air and light and space, that they drove world affairs from his mind. What a minute reapprenticeship of the foot in the grass of the field! Of the eye in the midst of color! How like the wonderment of the neophyte! But the world did not let him forget it for long. One morning about two weeks later the two men announced the coming of a woman whom he later married—Fräulein Inge Rheydt, who, as Klaus was telling his story, seemed to be enjoying a currant jelly. She arrived the next day—it was in the second half of July last year, not quite one month after Germany's attack on Russia—and that same evening the two men left, after making him sign a contract: he pledged himself on his honor not to leave the place where he was, not to communicate with the outside by correspondence or any other means. He signed. He said that if the document had embodied threats, under-pain-of's and the like, he would not have signed; but the document spoke only of an engagement of honor. I looked at Klaus, I looked at the Inge Rheydt that was, who at that moment was helping herself to more jelly, and said to myself, 'Who is the imbecile who claims that the Nazis lack psychology?' When Klaus came to talk about Inge, from time to time he gazed at his wife with a look in which I could read kindness and affection, and also, at certain moments, something bordering on astonishment. She was a Party member. As she had studied infantile medicine, she had been detailed to the re-education of war invalids. The two fields did not coincide exactly, any more than Klaus was a war invalid in need of re-education, but the Party employed available talents the best it could. Hence Fräulein Rheydt was assigned to present herself at such and such a house in Tübingen, and to place herself at the disposal of a person who was living there only a short time, and whose health would require her attention. When she came to take care of the 'Tübingen man,' she knew practically nothing about Klaus. Her ignorance was not complete, however. They had advised her that the 'Tübingen man'—they both chuckled at the term, because that was what she had called him from then on whenever he was grouchy—had always been an adversary of National Socialism and no doubt still was; that he had just been released after a long detention; that he was a typical wrongheaded intellectual; that an academic culture combined with the degenerate ideology of a cosmopolitan pseudo humanism had made him impermeable to the ideals of the German race and commu-

nity; that the Party recognized his merits nonetheless; that the Party hoped the 'Tübingen man' would see the curve which history was following, once he was faced with the colossal achievements of the new Germany and the greatness of her destiny, to which Europe and the world were bowing. She told him all this the day she arrived, in words simple enough to explain to a child the mysteries of the magic lantern; and so there she was, carrying nothing more than a small valise, and ready—not of course to 're-educate' him, but to surround him with attentions as it was her duty to do. It is easy to imagine the effect of her 'simplicity,' of the direct warmth which she brought at once into his life, so long unaccustomed to human contact. She ran errands, came back laden with fresh news, gave it to him as she had heard it, quickly became the only avenue he could follow to climb up from the past to the present, the only life line to which he could hold. He questioned her on what had been going on; she was his book of chronicles, the index by which he understood events; he knew nothing, she knew everything. She helped him to reconstruct the days, the months, the years he had been dead. Through her he relived the dimension and perspective of the world, in a light which blinded him but cushioned the shock of his groping efforts. Then, one day in the third month of this new era, a truck pulled up before the house and unloaded several packing cases: it was his books, his manuscripts. Nothing was missing, not even his pacifist pamphlets, not even his *Nationalism and the Ethic of Nothingness*, although this work had been the basis of accusation in his trial; and the next day other books arrived, together with newspapers and periodicals. He threw himself body and soul into study. Inge Rheydt had been an exquisite governess, she now became an indispensable secretary. She classified his notes, copied texts, took dictation, did research, looked up references. By degrees Klaus's mind formed a picture of the time; of a time which shook the deep foundations of society. No doubt the earth had not changed its sun, it continued its old round in the vicious circle of economic conflicts, but clearly its center of gravity was launched on a new trajectory. He used the word 'trajectory,' I suppose, to stress the point that in his conception the novelty applied to the line of motion and not to the landscape—to the method, not to the problem. The problem was neither new nor old, it was continuous. Hitlerism, the Hitlerite revolution, because they are geared with events in the new trajectory, are transforming the world as decisively as the discovery of the wheel or of steam: they are preparing, working out, the future of man. We had gone back to the library, Klaus still talking. He came and went from one end of the room to the other with a regularity which suggested an automaton, with a sort of economy, too, the last step in one direction becoming one with the first in the opposite direction. He was not looking at me. He looked at his feet, but at times he seemed to make a painful effort to lift his heavy eyelids, and then his eyes turned toward his wife. Sitting under a lamp, she was leafing through an art book, a Memling in fact, turning the pages soundlessly. I did not have the impression that

Klaus was arguing his points—I mean that he was trying to expound his ideas. He was making a confession. Not a *mea culpa*, but a confession. 'Perhaps I really was an intellectual raised on academicism,' he said. 'Firm, sure, standing stiff in an untroubled climate. A stalagmite. And no less petrified.' He had always believed in the truth of the ideas which he had made his own, in their transcendent, if not their absolute, validity. He had even thought that his work had brought new truths to light. But the young—that is, the generations whose privilege it is to change the world—know, or feel, that the truths are old because the problems are old, and that only the way of looking at them, and therefore of solving them, is new. He, then, had never been young. He quoted Alain: 'No one has ever had, no one will ever have a true idea; but there is a true way of having any idea whatsoever, and that is to see through things.' As for him, he had always seen crosswise. The problem of violence, a fixed idea which he had made the central theme of all his books, and the 'peace' for the 'defense' of which he had been awarded the Nobel prize—he now understood that he had dealt with them like a drawing-room liberal coupled with an altruist who fainted at the word 'blood.' He had been unable to see that climbing on a barrel in the middle of a beggars' hangout where a thousand thieves are tearing at each other with their teeth, and ringing the changes on the word 'peace,' is the worst kind of quixotism. He remembered with horror the conferences, the parleys 'for universal peace and disarmament,' in which he had wasted the best of his life and health. 'The peace-loving nations . . .' he aped himself with a shiver. A market for boobs, a black market where the buyer paid a very high price for an adulterated product. 'Peace and war,' he said, 'are not two mutually exclusive phases. As long as armed conflict remains the only means of balancing the great book between nations, peace simply does not exist.' Whereas he should have faced a reality—war—he had played the mime before a phantom—peace. But the fight against war implies a fight against a social contract of which war is the condition and the product, namely the fragmentation of Europe and the world. He fell back on an analogy: it was because Germany had not been able to put an end to her division into light-opera principalities that she was so long in becoming a modern nation; and it is because Europe and the world remain divided into economic principalities that they are so long in becoming a humanity. 'I perceived that unification was the only way to extirpate war. And first of all the unification of the old Continent. This being granted, it makes no difference which people, which clan, starts the movement. The essential thing is that it be historically apt, intellectually and physically mature. Twenty-five years of Russian Communism were unable to get the work under way: nine years of National Socialism have burst the squares of the stupid European checkerboard.' The fact was that the joints did not hold together, any more than those of the Europe of the beginning of the last century, which fell apart at the mere name of the Napoleonic legions. The nations bent the knee, conquered much less by force of arms

than by the ideals of the French Revolution, which stood for the shattering of institutions anchored in the feudal past, no longer compatible with the development of techniques. 'The same is true,' he said, 'of the German legions today. Their victories could not have been so overwhelming except for the messianic breath which whips their flags. . . .' 'Good heavens, Klaus, what an unpleasant simile,' said Inge Opitz, her nose in the Memling. Klaus stopped, almost on one foot, eyes on the floor, then started moving again without replying. He went back and forth several times in silence, unspeakably weary, it appeared. Against what had she invoked heaven? Was it against the simile, which was banal enough indeed, or against messianism? 'Why was I set free?' asked Klaus point-blank, his voice harsh. 'What do they expect of me? You know me, Audry. I believe what I have just said as sincerely as it is given to man to believe. But I can't serve any more. I no longer know how to escape from my having-no-hope.' Although he addressed himself to me, I was not sure that he was really speaking to me. I stole a glance at Inge Opitz. Was she going to answer? Decidedly, she had made a mistake in sitting under that lamp—and in provoking me. She was fond of the tightrope, that was her business, but I too like the circus, if not to perform at least to watch the performance. 'Have you also become converted to the dogma of violence?' I asked the man, hoping to make the woman slip. Klaus Opitz stopped to look at me, did not look at me, began to walk again. 'I haven't . . . I think, just as you do, that all this is accompanied and must be accompanied by a monstrous injustice,' he said. The woman did not slip, not completely. 'Klaus, what injustice are you talking about? Can you cite one single speech of the Fuehrer which is not an indefatigable cry for justice?' Ah-ha, there was a flaw in her balance pole, a twist in her cord, maybe after all she would break a leg before the number was finished. Klaus's arms hung limp down his decomposed body, and in his bluish face his lips suddenly were moist. 'Intolerance, political cannibalism, are inevitable in any regime which grows over the debris of former regimes,' he said in a tone all at once gone professorial. '*Ipso jure et in saecula saeculorum*,' he added, losing his head. Under the lamp Inge Opitz turned a page of her album. 'It is idle to approve or disapprove of what is part of the nature of events,' Klaus began again with a visible effort. 'It is idle to take arms against the weight of the air or the periodicity of the seasons or the . . . Social tempests are always terrible as they reach and pass through the critical phase of their growth. But the terror subsides and exhausts itself. It is the means, not the end. And if the end corresponds to a historical necessity, as I believe it does, then by the same token it corresponds to a higher level of culture.' He believed it, indeed; so much so that in spite of himself, as in the days of his naïve enthusiasms, he seemed surprised that what was so evident to him should be so obscure to others. But to what ideal spoliations ideality itself is prone! And since our idealism needs bread, our stumbles excuses, and our crimes reasons, Klaus stitched up the wounds of the world with the primordial catgut of

culture. Culture . . . Yes, we could have chatted about culture: we could have analyzed, for instance, a text of Kulturfuehrer Wilhelm Stapel: 'If in all Poland there were only two Germans, they would mean more than millions of Poles.' Culture, in truth . . . A synonym for race, for community of blood, for flame throwers, for torchlight parades: a magician's silk hat in which everything is tossed, from which everything spills out, beyond man, despite man. Despite Klaus Opitz, in any case. Ah, how it moved me to see him, honest and deformed and ideally hoisted onto the Aryan high wire, under the parasol of his cultivated wife, who poked him back into equilibrium every time he missed his footing. He spoke of Apocalypse, of we're-all-washed-up, if the invasion took place and provoked a derailment in the new trajectory. And what is culture, he wondered, unless it is Germany and France, unless it is the age-old Europe whose disrupted members are held together, alas, only by the iron armature of the German legions? But states of siege do not last; fractures and dislocations knit; a day comes, the inevitable day when the warrior lifts his helmet from his head, takes off his shirt of mail, and then for the fine funerals. History knows no instance in which the civil legislator did not return in the end, his return coinciding with the entombment of the military dictator. But while we wait for the obsequies, our broken bones will not knit without the harness of dictatorship. . . . And then, suddenly, as if he had seen me pick up a hammer to smash his orthopedics and dislodge him by force, he took refuge beside Inge Opitz, who was improving her culture by scanning a Memling under the lamp; and there he began to stutter, 'The landings will mean devastation . . . Hell on earth . . . Whereas a truce . . . even a compromise truce . . . would hasten unification. . . . Audry . . . don't you see that . . . that Europe is begging . . . begging for mercy. . . .' He broke down completely. I pushed him into a chair, brought a cordial, forced him to swallow it. He breathed with difficulty, turned livid, turned blue, with his soft, humid lip jerking spasmodically. We stayed there a quarter of an hour, perhaps a half hour, in silence. There was nothing to say. For the twentieth time the woman studied the *Retable of the Passion*, unless it was the *Last Judgment*, the man agonized in the solitude of his conflicts, and I, consumed by one of those demoralizations which assail me once in a quarter of a century, would have given anything for a sleeping draught. I don't know when it was—sometime far on toward dawn—that the chauffeur sent to ask if the lady and gentleman intended to stay the night, in which case he wanted to be paid off, he 'being a man with a family.' They left in the taxi, Klaus Opitz as done in as an exhumed body, Inge Opitz as fresh as a water sprite. Try as I would, I could find nothing to say to them by way of adieu—to him especially, though I almost wanted to keep him with me. I came back to the library, began to walk up and down in a state of mind which called for the unification of all known evils to put an end to Europe. Under the lamp the big album lay open at a reproduction of the *Martyrdom of the Eleven Thousand Virgins*. I wondered what it was in

this mediocre Reliquary of St. Ursula that had retained Frau Opitz's interest—if she had found that she resembled one of the martyrs, or if the incongruous number of the virgins had offended her modesty. Finally, since there was nothing else to do, I went to bed. I slept very badly in spite of the narcotic. A sort of half dream pulled me out of a doze as soon as I lapsed into one, and kept coming back. A chain of panels, mounted on a revolving drum, passed before my eyes. Each panel represented a woman, and it was always the same woman. In one hand she held her own picture, in the other a heart. I did not recognize her. But she had more ease of manner than Memling had genius."

Aldous John Smith felt that someone had touched him, tapped him with a finger to wake him up. He pulled himself upright, making the chaise longue groan, listened.—So I went to . . . he thought, not hearing Stephen Audry's voice. He divined the presence of the two men, their immobility, their unbearable muteness.—So I went . . . he thought again, looking at the night seated on his eyelids. Yet it seemed to him that he had heard an airplane. A very small one, very high up, going around continually. So he had fallen asleep, since at last the whirling of the plane had ceased. He recognized the aspirin bottle in his hand, the taste of mildew in his mouth, and in his head an ache creeping like a fog.—Audry had said that the woman . . . he thought, trying to climb back up the slope of his memory. He would have liked to know how many hours he had slept; what incalculable time; and if the airplane came before or after the sleep. He recalled all at once—Audry had said that the woman was like Memling. Or perhaps that she was like one of the Virgins painted by Memling. That was absurd, he couldn't have said that. Inge Rheydt, so natural it made her transparent. Except for that man Opitz. The ideal Opitz. Whom she took in marriage the way you take a flat. He tried to sound the sky, to see if the dawn was mutilating the night, and the night was not submitting to mutilation. I will not submit, it said, in the mute voice proper to nights. He knew then that he had not slept; and that no one had awakened him, except Audry by his silence.—The race of those who submit to mutilation, he thought, lying back in the chaise longue. He wondered if Audry would ever finish his story; and if he would be inspired to offer something to drink. The thought of whisky, of ice cubes crowned by bubbles of air, made him hiccough.—The race of those who lay their genitals on the block and submit to mutilation. They think it frees them, but my eye it does. He closed one eye, then the other, then touched his temples with his finger tips. The hiccough came back, puffing out his cheeks, but he strangled it on the way.—*The Emasculated*, he thought, deflating his cheeks. A title for Stephen Audry's next book. With a dedication to Klaus Op—

"Was Klaus Opitz deceiving himself as much as he seemed to be?" Stephen Audry asked in a voice not sufficiently doubtful to elicit an objection. "Didn't he understand his wife's role at all? Or his own? Didn't

he think that his release called for a reward? Did he believe he was free enough to have come by his own choice? It's possible. The restoration of his books and manuscripts, the fact that he had not been solicited for any declaration or sought out for any task, his marriage—everything combines to make him forget that, being a Nobel Peace prize winner, his very silence in the midst of the clash of arms commits him irremediably. But that he should allege the crimes of yesterday, which are called history, to justify the cannibalism of today, which is called Realpolitik—that in itself shows what man-eating masters are upon us. Cooked and re-cooked for eight years, how would he have kept his head? How would he see that he has been styled to adorn the table of the Minotaur? Others than he, more rugged of temperament, with convictions less affected by sentimental softness, have disintegrated in that alembic. I don't think I'm mistaken in suggesting that Opitz, even if he is conscious of having been subjected to desiccation, may not feel that he is unfaithful to the ideals he held before his cooking: for that matter, I would freely surmise that he thinks he is defending his credo with a strength of which, in the bottom of his heart, he did not believe himself capable. On the contrary, he feels that he has stood firm and is standing firm. He sees nothing in himself that would liken him to an apostate; and if he stammers, if he seems to be in his agony, isn't it for fear anyone may doubt him? In this he is poles apart from the Moscow defendants, who, being charged with the most inconceivable crimes in the name of some wild abstraction of justice, have perhaps succeeded in persuading themselves that they are guilty, although they have not succeeded in persuading anyone else. But the two attitudes proceed from the same culinary art, which is refined to the dreadful point where it bakes the mind rather than the flesh, the marrow rather than the bone. After the Opitzes' visit this picture haunted me for days, superimposing itself on that of Esau and Probus. All at once I was afraid clear to the pit of my stomach. Afraid of what? I'm not sure I care to admit it even to myself, because it must be that I'm afraid of being dipped in the sauce and eaten in my turn. Oh, perhaps not in my lifetime, for I'm getting old and won't be long folding my tents, but at least after my death, our man-eaters being also—in addition, I might say—necrophiles. To put the thing badly but briefly: my fear is that I shall begin to run off at the mouth. My work is behind me, I am wholly lodged in it, in it I have lived, in its winding sheet I shall be buried. Buried and sealed. But these scamps can make even the dead talk. The thought that it might be exhumed makes my shade shudder in advance. It fears that the tomb may be profaned; that by tearing up its lifework by the roots and growing some hybrid grafts on it, they may doom it to eternal unrest. For I must confess that following the example of the ancients, I have dreamed modestly of burial, of the cake and honey at the door of the tomb. And while there are many ways of being disinterred, of having one's remains seasoned, I know of no sure way to cement one's tombstone so that it will be inviolable. I have thought of this long and painfully, not being

able to reproach men like Klaus Opitz for mouthing among the grave-stones unless I can keep quiet, not being able to blame their silence amid the roar of the Stukas unless I can counter. I have decided to counter. All my efforts having failed to turn up a more judicious solution, a less spectacular exit, I have decided to commit myself in my own individualistic fashion, and to do it in a way that will make me definitely unusable, dead or alive. An exploit worthy of Herostratus, which I have here in my pocket: it's a text twenty pages long, the last pages I shall write. I have sent a copy of it to every newspaper and revue published in France: I've sent it to Germany and Italy.—You want my collaboration: here it is. This text—need I say?—will not be published anywhere on the Continent. I should add that before sitting down to the composition of my exercise, I felt bound, we might say due to an intellectual scruple, to meet with an honorary citizen of the Soviet. Our conversation took place a month ago, in a village near Grenoble. My man belongs to the Soviet only by color, being Burgundian by birth and Parisian by manner. I've known him a long time—since, as a young Dada, he was carving rhymes out of a vocabulary picked up from the subway posters. He had gifts. More than gifts. He started out to become the literary revelation of the century, and wound up wearing the bonnet of the official bard of the Communist Party. Although I did not know his address, for he is under the ban of the law, I had no difficulty getting in touch with him: it was enough to ask a young lady of my acquaintance, also a Party member, to be kind enough to communicate my desire to meet the poet. About ten days later, as I was coming out of a post office, a stranger, who first assured himself of my identity by calling my name, informed me that on such a day, at such an hour, in such a place, I would meet 'the person you know of.' In the meantime, mum's the word. Without further initiation, there I was plunged into the middle of a real-life mystery story. . . . We were punctual at the rendezvous. The interview was short and completely inconsequential. Correct, haughty, as full of information as a timetable, the poet had a most victorious air about him. He knew all about the visit of Esau and Probus as well as that of the Opitzes: he knew better than I did myself why I had wanted to meet him. As I expressed surprise at his omniscience, which was real, he said, 'To each one his little information service, my dear.' He called me his dear. I must say he did not take me at all seriously. Moreover, he was remarkably clever in drawing me onto the waste ground of generalities, in dazzling me without showing himself; and while I had the impression of learning more than I had hoped, in fact he left me more ignorant than before. He avoided any show of proselytism, asked me no embarrassing questions, answered none which would have pinned him down: he deigned, at the very most, to inquire into my views as to the 'general situation.' He was—I find no other word and must repeat myself—he was superbly victorious. He knew, the skillful dialectician—he thought he knew—that the logic of events would compel me to take the first step toward his Party. His rivals had held

out perches and dragnets, they had gone away, nets empty and arms sore; as for him, he was not going to commit the error of scaring me away by an overhasty welcome. Fishing is a science: you catch a trout by tickling him behind the gills. The best way to stimulate my gills is to leave them alone. Since I had come snooping in his waters, he was confident of seeing me return. But I'm too old a fish for that. Too old, indeed. The official poet will await me in vain. I'm back in my hiding place of slippery stones, old stones that bear the imprint of my body. And here I reach the end of my narrative, Monsieur Smith. . . . I owed it to myself to tell you all this, so that you might know the background before consenting or refusing to do me the favor which I propose to ask of you. I also needed—and I beg pardon for having presented both of you with an accomplished fact, and not leaving you the possibility of a protest—I needed to go over the facts aloud, in order to convince myself one last time that my text deserves to be made public. My friend Pietro Colonna was kind enough to make our meeting possible, Monsieur Smith, so that I might ask you if you would transmit these pages to England and the United States. Would you have the goodness to read them and tell me your decision?"

There was a silence. The night was solid and heavy and peopled with the invisible. A train whistled in the distance, long and without strength. The Colonel sniffed his knuckles, with no more noise than if he were not sniffing them. On the chaise longue, his hands between his knees, holding the empty aspirin bottle, Smith was sound asleep.



SITTING ON A BUNDLE OF STRAW, ANNE MARIE JOUVENET and Marc Laverne watched Marianne Davy's posterior hoist itself effortfully to the top of the pile of hay. Making her way toward the little window under the rafters of the barn, she sank over her ankles in the dry grass, fell flat, got to her feet again, while the pointed tip of her nose explored the surroundings as distrustfully as a weasel's snout.

"You won't see anything worth while, my poor Marianne," said Anne Marie, pushing off her left shoe with the toes of her right foot. "Marc knows the road, he's been over it more than once. You'd do better to rest yourself. . . ."

"Marc Marc Marc . . ." grumbled Marianne, hauling on her posterior. Marc Laverne winked at Anne Marie, and likewise took off his shoes. Marianne had reached the window and was rubbing the dirty panes with a handful of hay. Anne Marie couldn't talk about anything but Marc—Marc this, Marc that—and this rotten grass got in everywhere. "Sure I can see one leap occupied France a bit of the road and we're there . . ." she said, her words playing leapfrog. She could see a section of asphalt road, a ravine, two telegraph poles, a cow rubbing its flank against the bark of a tree. So that was the occupied zone, that was the France of the Kommandanturen. . . . She turned toward the meadows opposite the barn, toward the shrubs which formed a hedge along what must have been a dirt road. Her round blue eye came and went over the plain studded with knolls, over the sky tufted with sugar-candy clouds: the same plain and the same sky as along the route all the way from Mâcon, and it made her mad to think that an arbitrary line out there divided even a farm, a pasture, in two. She twisted her neck in an effort to spot a tower which Marc had said they would see about a half mile into enemy territory—"a sort of derrick with a platform," he had said, what's a derrick for heaven's sake—from which the Germans watched the line of demarcation with a spyglass by day and a searchlight by night. She couldn't see any tower, that Marc imagined things, but all at once she saw a patrol emerge on the road. She blinked her eyes, and the mobile tip of her nose wiggled desperately. "The Fritzes two there are two . . ." she said, drawing back

from the window. She lost her balance, slipped from her roosting place, and landed in Marc's arms, skirts flying. "Damn that Georges that husband journeys he makes me take that damn . . ." she sputtered while she put herself in order. Laughing in his beard, Marc consulted the watch on Marianne's wrist.

"It will begin to get dark in two hours," he said. "The last time I came through here the patrols passed at thirty-minute intervals, but they might have changed. I'm going to get up there and keep an eye on the traffic."

Anne Marie declared that she would go with him, and Marianne followed in their tracks. She and Marc settled down on either side of the little window, and Anne Marie, having hollowed a place to lie, stretched out full length in the hay. Nostrils dilated, lips partly open, she drank in the odor of the grass with short, intoxicating breaths. Climbing up the ladder, the smell of dung and cow sweat and sour calf's milk came through the opening in the floor of the loft, mingled with the exhalations of the forage, and made the head swim. She looked at Marc, whose curly-haired profile stood out against the window draped with tattered spiderwebs, and under her blouse her breasts swelled and hurt her. If it hadn't been for Marianne she would have squatted beside Marc, with her head on his knees or in the hollow of his shoulder, and maybe Marc would have put his hand on her throat. Maybe he would have. Or else he would have patted her temple at the line of the hair, then her cheek, then his fingers would have lingered over her mouth and she would have nibbled them with her chapped lips. He turned at the call of her eyes, turned away slowly.—Marc's eyes, narrowed by thought, narrowed by his smile. "His wrinkles carve his deeds upon his forehead. . . ." The memory of the Conservatoire came to her suddenly, and of the examination for which she was preparing when the invasion interrupted—the *Cid*, that was what she had been studying.—Marc is my *Cid* Campeador, she mused. "'Rodrigo, hast thou heart?'" she recited in a muffled voice. Marianne's nose took the temperature, tried to find a clue, failed. "Rodrigo . . . ?" she said, puzzled. Kneeling against the window, Marc opened his hand and left it open, palm outward.—I am Rodrigo, gentle Marianne, said the hand, simply because it was open, and because it was as knowing as an animal. Anne Marie doubted that there could be another hand so intelligent as this hand of Marc's, so pure in outline that it was the first thing one noticed about him. She stared at Marianne: the girl was so witless she did not perceive that Marc's hand knew how to answer questions by merely placing itself a certain way. She wondered what position would mean—come, Anne Marie, I'm going to love you. The breath of the stable, of the forage, of her own sap swelling her breasts, gathered in a soundless sob. She pictured Pierre Musaraigne, with the hungry eyes that enveloped her like a wet cloth, and Youra, so handsome, with the veins in his neck rising when he looked at her mouth, and Hirsch, who had a crematory furnace in his chest. And Marc.—Marc. She wanted to shout with joy. Wanted him to fall on her, to weigh the weight of mountains.

"Get up," said Marc, his mouth dry.

"Anne Marie yes otherwise get up the barn will catch fire," Marianne approved, with her nose on the window.

Anne Marie buttoned her blouse. So Marianne was not so witless as it seemed; her big blue eye could see how things were. She had a moment of dizziness, as she stood on the soft carpet of hay and shook her heavy hair. Corneille's verses awakened an echo in her memory, she heard them ringing sonorously under the domes of silent theaters.—"The easy conquest wins an empty triumph. . . ." She twisted her hair in a knot and pinned it on top of her head. No, Marc was not her Cid Campeador; he was Polyucte, who preferred the palm of martyrdom to the love of Pauline. She laughed inwardly, with a force that burst her eardrums.—Like all well-bred young ladies who "have problems," I must have my dip in classical tragedy. I . . .

"Marc, I feel I'm getting out of hand," she said, falling to her knees. "Let's talk, let's talk about something, or I'll fall back into infancy."

"You wouldn't fall far. . . . Get away, Marianne, they're going by again. Thirty-five minutes. Thirty-three, to be exact. Good thing discipline and routine rhyme in German."

"German do you speak that's good because the Fritzes you get along with I hear three words *nicht nacht ya mein herr* and a few francs to wrap the speech in and pigs you become like *Kameraden* that is . . ." Marianne spouted in one breath.

"No, I don't speak German, but they rhyme anyway. Anne Marie, did you put back the document you read last night?"

Anne Marie pointed to her midriff. "Yes, right in its proper place. What do you expect to do with it?"

"I'm to deliver it to someone, in Paris."

"What's he like, Marc? You didn't tell me you knew Audry. Does he really have the mask of an old monarch, the way he looks in pictures?"

"Don't ask nonsensical questions, Anne Marie. You imagine everybody as you'd expect them to look on the stage. And don't use proper names. Tell me now what you thought of his profession of faith."

"That's what it is, isn't it? A sort of last will and testament . . ." She had come up on her knees and squatted midway between Marc and Marianne. She knew this brusque way he had of speaking to her when he was trying to evade her appeal; this ascetic severity, which when she first knew him she had attributed to an idealism so exclusive that it became tiresome. But he never tried to draw her toward a bed—not even in thought, for she would have known, would have seen it—he alone, of all the trouser-bearers who had been trailing after her since the day of her puberty.

"Stephen Audry the old the writer yet he's not dead but I heard . . ." said Marianne, stumbling on the last word and questioning with her nose.

"It's an admirable piece of prose, isn't it, Marc?" Anne Marie said. "I'd put these pages among the finest he ever wrote."

Marc's eyes narrowed in disagreement, and his cheekbones stood out more prominently. "The literary quality of this text is not the question, and to tell the truth it interests me very little. It neither adds nor subtracts anything so far as the content is concerned." It annoyed him to see Anne Marie's mind under the spell of her "drama"—and to see himself drawn into it as well. He no longer knew, since some time ago, if he could continue to resist, or if he wanted to. He knew her story. She had been hardened against sex as one stiffens in pain, and now she burned with the strength of a virgin flame. But she was too young, too passionate. He was not sure she could bear the trial. He wished to "form" her first, to teach her to walk alone, to fight alone—even if he should die. Especially if he should die. "What strikes me in this paper," he said, "is its admission of powerlessness. The phrase, the motif, which repeat themselves and give the text its character, are those which express culpability and defeat. It's useless for him to assert his hope in the future, his whole being leans toward the past."

"I don't know why you hold that against him. . . ." She was looking at Marc's hands. "These lines are not a revolutionary thesis. They certainly don't pretend to be. In their genre, and considering the personage who wrote them, they seem to me to be rather courageous, especially if I compare them with the opportunism of a man like Stepanoff."

"Learn not to use proper names." He shook his head pensively. "No, I don't hold anything against him. Our minds are too far apart for me to want to put blame or shame on him. It has always been hard for me to get excited about something that fundamentally was indifferent to me. To come back to this text, I'm only trying to place it in its true light; and what you call its courage is not the question, any more than its style. Courage, cowardice, style, lack of style—these are all virtues or vices which at best can determine the particular form of an idea, they are not ideas in themselves. The man you just mentioned, however opportunist his present trend, may be mistaken, may interpret the data imperfectly, may take the content for the container, whereas our author works as an artist, as an introvert, on a plane which he thinks is metaphysical but which is chiefly emotional. Although he has a reputation as a thinker, there is very little 'brain' in his knowledge of reality. Before he thinks, he 'feels'; and if he does not feel, there is nothing for him to think about. In the end, nothing reveals itself to him unless he has felt it first. To me all his work is a proof of this. We ourselves are mainly concerned with learning the structure of society, and we see the source of man's moral debasement in the class struggle; but he is concerned with 'good' and 'evil' as absolute entities, from which proceed, in his view, the 'limitations of the human person.' Limitations, progress, ultimate ends, fidelity to one's destiny . . . You will note that the lamer the reasoning, the more esoteric the language; the more rickety the thinking, the taller the crutches. It seems only natural to me that he should revive, and restate in much the same old terms, certain antiquated abstractions whose emptiness no prose, however polished

in style, can conceal. Moreover, the methods of measurement which he claims to use do not correspond to ours, and, in addition, I doubt we are measuring the same anatomy. As to his conclusions, they are essentially negative. What they imply is pretty much as follows: you have lost your sense of the elementary truths, you no longer know how to distinguish just from unjust, black from white; I disassociate myself from your thieves' den and retire to Mount Athos to reread the *Summa Theologica*."

"But, Marc, where do you find all that?" She drew near on her knees, looking at his living hands. "It's true that he disassociates himself from his time, but that isn't the same as deserting—as you are trying to make it out to be. On the contrary, he takes his position against the war, rejects the theory of the unilateral responsibility of the German people. . . . His intuition—since you deny him a political conscience—leads so far that, while condemning totalitarianism, he refuses the Allies any moral credit whatever. I admire the clarity with which he sees things, even if—to please you—he isn't a man of 'brain.' Can you name any others who, like him, have not given way to the hysteria of 'anti-fascism'? Who make no distinction of principle between the 'Christian blocs' and the 'pagan axes'? That at least ought to make us look kindly on him because . . ."

"In his Karl Marx he learns Anne Marie that with a slide rule who has an answer to everything and feels nothing like four over two you talk worse than me Marx in riddles I would like first if I may to know what of Audry's you're talking book about . . ." Marianne interrupted. Through the window her inquisitive nose sniffed a hostile France becoming a little less hostile, a little more like the old France, and in the barn it sniffed the secret blood of Anne Marie and Marc calling each other. The image of Georges took shape before her—Georges naked on the nocturnal sand of the beach and the red gleam like a groan on the sea. "In his pocket Bible he picks out . . ." she added with a sudden note of petulance in her voice.

Marc shook his curly hair and smiled at Marianne. He knew her well enough to see that, in her present bad humor, anything he said would have her after him. "We're not talking about a book, sweet Marianne," he said, cracking his knuckles. "Only a couple of unpublished pages. Understand me, Anne Marie: I didn't mean . . ."

"Could I too or you need a permission . . ." Marianne cut in, scratching under her skirt.

"I'm afraid that even if you had permission . . ." He did not want to let her give in too easily to her combativeness: they had to put up with each other for the whole night, and he detested pettish and peevish humors. "Understand me: I do not mean to cast doubt on the sincerity and good intentions of our author. But precisely because I refuse to look through the glasses of 'good' and 'evil,' I mean to leave the personality and service record of the writer out of consideration. I don't praise him and I don't condemn him: I strip him. What interests me in his case, and what I am discussing at this moment, is the substance of this text, its reason for

existence if you like, and what animates it in spite of its style and its virtues. I don't deny that it is good literature; and touching; and certainly honest. But none of these qualities saves it from incoherence. For instance, he declares himself in favor of the United States of Europe, and at the same time he hopes, as he says, for 'man's return to his deepest roots.' These two propositions, one following directly upon the other, are as gratuitous as they are contradictory. In the first place, he is careful not to specify how he thinks the United States of Europe could be brought into being . . ."

"But that's not his affair," Anne Marie interrupted.

"Perhaps not, but it's mine. The United States of Europe idea is a red herring unless you insert the word 'socialist.' This simple adjective implies the road, namely revolution; and the revolution in turn demands a social and political maturity, a divorce from petty-bourgeois egocentrism, a marriage with the universe of man, which are diametrically opposite to the threadbare mysticism of these aspirations to 'the return of the individual from his aberrations'—supposing that history can be explained by 'aberrations' and that such 'returns' are possible. In the second place, since 'roots' are always 'deep,' at least when it's a question of man, the image really means nothing except a vague regret for a golden age that never existed. A sort of shamefulness due to the disorder of their ideas, nostalgia for the past, anxiety for the future, despair—that's about all that's left in the best of the great artists of the decadent bourgeoisie."

He fell silent, and the two women said nothing. The darkness was coming up from the horizon, swallowing the sugar-candy clouds one by one. Marianne felt tired and nervous.—You'd think I was afraid but I'm not it's this barn are they going . . . she thought, watching the trees close up for the night. She had no desire to debate with Marc, he was too hard to follow and he never let himself be thrown, not even if you belabored him with impertinences. She pictured him rolling in the hay with Anne Marie, and a film of moisture came to the corners of her eyes. Anne Marie open like a burst fruit with Marc in her burst flesh. The patrol came out on the section of road, two men with rifles and gas masks bouncing on their behinds. Françoise's behind, her walk, like an announcing angel's, her satin-wood breast. Drink out of a cup of wood like that. But Anne Marie. To be made as she was made, of pale bronze, and that froth of blood that rose from her like a column of smoke. She moved away from the window, feeling Marc's eyes on her face.—He guesses everything that Marc that . . . she thought, seeking the shelter of the dark. She could hear the bubbles of froth bursting in Anne Marie's blood. Or was it in her own? Or was it the sea at Saint-Malo, that night with Georges?—This barn this hay I . . . "You know everything like a snake charmer you're smart . . ." she said, too fast to be understood.

Marc locked his hands and pressed them between his knees. Anne Marie was stretched out again in the hay, on her belly this time. Without looking at her, he could see the curve of her blouse bulging with the swell of her

breasts. This discussion was a pretext—and the pretext was wanting in solidity: the girls were not taken in by it, or not enough to make them forget themselves. Taking advantage of Marc's expedition into the occupied zone, Smith had requested him to deliver an envelope to a liaison agent of the A.R.S. in Paris. Marc had asked to see the contents before agreeing; then, having done so, had entrusted it to Anne Marie with other papers, which she carried in a special belt inside her clothing. The evening before, in Mâcon, where they had spent the night after their departure from Marseilles, he had happened to think of the text, and, knowing that Anne Marie was an admirer of Audry, had told her, with a laugh, that she was warming some of his unpublished pages on her stomach. She hastened to read them, but they might not have spoken of them again had it not been for Marianne, whose presence forbade them to talk of subjects which had to be kept from her knowledge. She had attached herself to them at the last minute, having learned through a careless remark that they were leaving for the occupied zone, and they could not and would not refuse to take her with them. Then, under the rafters of this stable, on a farm which stood at the border of the zone, when their long wait for night-fall had become charged with tension, he had sought to launch a discussion neutral enough to bring Marianne into it, exciting enough to calm Anne Marie. Audry's writing, it had to be admitted, was not particularly apt for the purpose. Yet he must not allow the silence to continue, Anne Marie to look at his hands, himself to look at her vestal body, Marianne to look at them both. "Anne Marie, get up," he said, his mouth dry.

She obeyed. She sat down, crossed her legs under her, keeping her eyes on Marc's hands. Her tight skirt climbed halfway up her thighs.—Go away, go away, Marianne, cried her flesh, ready to burst. The cattle was coming in from the pasture, for they could hear movements in the stable below, the names of flowers shouted in a strident voice—Woodbine! Daisy! Tulip!—and the trot of the animal coming at the call.—Go away, go away, said Anne Marie's eyes, fixed on Marc's hands which knew how to answer questions.—Go away, Marianne, Marianne, Marianne . . .

"I'm going milked down to see them milked . . ." said Marianne.

She pushed forward, feeling with her foot, ferreting with her nose, then bravely let herself slide down to the ladder by which the smell of dung and cow and calf climbed up from the stable. Anne Marie turned over and rolled on her back, calling Marc. The dust raised by Marianne's slide fell softly over the rattle of chains being put around the necks of the beasts below. Marc settled beside Anne Marie, made her sit up, let her rest against his torso. She was burning like a loaf taken out of the oven, and no less perfumed. "You shouldn't carry on this way," he said, caressing her forehead with his hand. "You chased poor Marianne away."

"No, no, not now, Marc . . . Don't scold me, I don't want to be scolded." She snuggled in his arms, squeezing him with an eagerness that made them both tremble. "Marc, I don't care, I don't care . . . I want to . . . I want a child from you. . . ." Her voice broke with passion, and

her words bruised like blows. "I don't want to lose you. . . . If you . . . if they capture you, I want you to live in me. . . . In me, Marc. Oh, Marc, Marc, am I . . . Don't you love me? . . ."

He loved her and she knew it. And she knew he wanted to wait. She was so young, she wasn't yet twenty, and as passionate as a flame on the ancient altars. That was just the reason—if he were to perish and she were not ready to survive, if she were in the combat only by the sacrament of marriage . . . He cared little for mingling their blood if their ideals were not mingled with it. He petted her hair, her cheek, and the warm accent of the faubourgs sang in his voice. "We've talked about it so often, Anne Marie. I thought you understood. Even if I get through the days to come, I'd never be able to give you a few minutes without feeling guilty about it. My life—our life—is like that. . . ."

"Like what, like what! . . ." She held Marc's living hand and pressed it to her heart. "There's no kind of life, of death, which would keep me from becoming your wife!"

"Yes. But what have I got to do with a 'wife,' or you with a 'husband'? It's as if we were thinking of opening a store. There's no place in our existence where we can plant a garden, start a family, and drop anchor. I'll see to it that there's no place. Not for any principle of ethics or morals, but simply because we oughtn't to. We can't take the responsibility. It's too burdensome—in time, energy, health. We can't be what I want us to be, and pitch a tent out of the wind, at the same time. Pregnancy, nursing, diapers, whooping cough, material worries—all these would take you away from the movement, and from me. Years of living outside the law lie ahead of us, Anne Marie; years when every day will bring its own threat of death. I chose to become a revolutionary, I have decided to devote every instant of my life to being a revolutionary, and that's the way I shall continue. And that's what you must become, if you are with me. This skirt, this blouse, are all you have, just as all I have is what I wear on my back. We'll never have more. We are unable, we have made ourselves unable, to have more. Any 'property,' even in the order of the affections, is a hindrance in the existence we have chosen. I'm young, they tell me I'll think better of this. They might as well tell me I'll commit suicide. I don't want to 'think better of it'; I don't want to be the next to get lost down the blind alley they call the family, where so many revolutionaries have lost their souls in exchange for a titty. If we did not have to fight, if we lived in a world where men like Audry didn't have to mourn over the ashes of the past, nor we ourselves over those of the present—ah, how many children I would have given you! But until that happy day arrives, I don't want to 'earn a living' for my kids by throwing away my own life. If I'm to lose it, let me be standing up, ax in hand, and be crushed by the tree I shall have done my best to weaken—yes, weaken down to its 'deepest roots.' Until you have understood that, and accepted all the risks, all the 'inhumanity' of it, our two lives, poured into one for a few moments, would very quickly break out of their mold. Should I lose you to forni-

cate in the hay, Anne Marie? No, not even if all my bones crack just to touch you."

Her face in Marc's hands, Anne Marie wept. They had spoken of it so often, so often, but he had never yet said these things with that brutality. For the first time she understood that he loved her too much merely to make her his wife; she understood why, when she was ready to give herself, when she was calling him from within the secret modesty of her body, a remnant of anxiety dulled her ardor: he would take her sometime, perhaps he would, but it would be because she was fighting at his side. Now she knew. How calm and sonorous everything became, how calm and grand. She took Marc's hands away from her face, began to roll up her heavy hair. Now she knew, and it was good and peaceful to know. He loved her too much to make her his mistress and nothing more; he loved her too much to take her for the sole purpose of keeping her in the fight. To him she was like the fight itself, like every thought of his heart. She felt for Marc's mouth with her fingers, put her mouth to it.—I am to you what it is good for me to be, she thought. What it is right for me to be.

"Marc, you know . . ." she whispered, her mouth touching his. "You know, I understand now. . . . We've had the same fears, each one of us a different side of the same fears. You were afraid I was in the movement only because you were in it; that I read and thought and worked only because I imagined this was the price I had to pay to have a place in your shadow. And I, until just a moment ago, thought that, unlike the men who pretend to talk to me about the weather while they undress me with their eyes, you were thinking only of socialism, even if you spoke to me of love. But now I understand. I've grown up so much in the last few minutes, Marc. I've grown up and I can wait. You're in me now, even before coming into me, and even if you die . . ."

Again she put her mouth on Marc's mouth. Now they could wait for their first hour of love. The hour would come tomorrow, the day after tomorrow. It couldn't not come. He took her under the arms and helped her to her feet. The night came in through the window, bringing with it in great waves the song of the crickets.

"We were married here," said Anne Marie. "I shall remember."

She will remember. They went down the ladder, carrying their things and Marianne's. The cows shook their chains as they chewed. Marc struck a match and held it above his head. "Marianne!" he called in a low voice. She came out of the darkness straight before them. On her broad face a broad smile was spread, a little crookedly. She looked as if she had been drinking.

"It's time to go," said Marc, striking another match.

"Yes . . ." she said simply. Behind her, in the dancing mass of shadows, a tall devil of a man was scratching his scalp.

Racing the day which was hoisting its silken mainsail in the sky, the train sped into the suburbs of Paris. Pitted with gaping orbits, pocked

with soot, the black face of the suburbs threw itself backward from both sides of the track, then slowly pulled itself erect on the rampart of the growing day. Everything rushed to meet the traveler, answering din with din, whistle with whistle, then swinging around in a tight pirouette, and at that moment it seemed that at last one understood that the earth turned and why it turned. Marc Laverne never came into Paris without a faint pang in his heart. He loved the aged rust of the factories under the fragile light of dawn; he loved the blue garland of windowpanes, the green garland of kitchen gardens, the huddle of houses and huts, of chimneys and bridges, which the rapid passage of the train untangled and at once jumbled together again in a whirligig spin. He accepted the unlovely architecture made of iron and sweat, of cement and sweat. When the train plunged into a tunnel or grazed the high stone bulwark of an embankment, he could see the two girls, reflected in the window, cuddled together on the seat of the compartment whose door yawned at his back. For a moment he thought again of their crossing the line of demarcation; of the long hike through the fields to the little station, lost in the open countryside, where they had arrived in time for the Chagny train; of the wait in the buffet of the Dijon station, amid a crowd of soldiers half awake and of civilians half asleep. Forgetting for the twentieth time, he rummaged in his coat for a non-existent pinch of tobacco dust. Quite unexpectedly, two places within their reach had been vacated as the train left Joigny, and for three hours now, holding hands like children who have cried too much, Anne Marie and Marianne had dozed to the rhythm of the rocking carriage. A peaceful, innocent trip: no alarms, no excitement, except just once, when they were crossing a road, and a car speeding along with headlights out had forced them to drop flat in the brambles.

With the approach of the city the buildings heaped themselves higher above the tracks, and on their faces with the blind orbits the hammering of the train dealt great whistling slaps. He saw the girls asleep in the reflection of the window, and in superimposition, as if they were dreaming, a man rolling a cigarette. In a little while, in his house on the Rue des Dames, his mother will be all flustered to see him appear; and all confused when he says, "This is Anne Marie, Maman." She will busy herself over a plate of bread and butter and a cup of coffee, hiding her confusion as she bustles about. He smiled, thinking what a flutter she'd be in. Anne Marie in turn will try to make herself useful, she will open the wrong drawers, take out the wrong plates, just miss breaking one. A broken plate—one of those which counted in his mother's pride, gold-edged and inscribed with proverbs in blue Gothic lettering—would have put them at their ease right away, one lamenting her clumsiness, the other hastening to manifest her solicitude. He saw them in the window, they kneel down simultaneously to pick up the pieces, Anne Marie protests, Madame Laverne retorts, and, sitting on the floor, they kiss each other for the first time. This will be the moment for him to leave the room, but he will turn back from the door to see his mother take Anne Marie's face

in her hands, hold it a long time in her hands, then say, "So you're Anne Marie." Anne Marie will nod yes several times, the vestal fire will light in her eyes, and she will stammer, "Marc . . . Marc must have told you about me then." Madame Laverne will say, "Who else would you want him to tell, silly girl, except his mother"; and then she will say, "How beautiful you are, Anne Marie," and tears will come to her eyes. He was just about to think: Ah, women! but he did not think anything. The passengers were lining up one behind the other with the decorum of the well-schooled herd, on the platform the porters were galloping in their blue blouses, and in the window Anne Marie and Marianne were waking up like children who have not had enough sleep.

As she had planned before leaving Marseilles, Marianne was going right on through Paris to Breuil-sur-Seine, some fifteen miles outside the capital, where she hoped to find Georges, who lived there with his parents. "I have seven o'clock it's hardly lots of time but in bed I'll find him this way . . ." she said. It had been agreed that if for one reason or another she needed to get in touch with Marc she would leave a note addressed to M. Roger with a bookseller whose address he had given her. "I'll be very busy, don't ask to see me unless it's absolutely necessary; and sign . . . Berthe, remember now—Berthe." She promised to remember. There was a regular protocol to be observed in reaching him: she was not to make a definite appointment in the note, just say something banal, for instance that after thinking it over she would not let her dictionary go for less than two hundred francs, the day after she would walk along the Rue Richelieu on the sidewalk opposite the Bibliothèque Nationale, go in the direction of the Palais Royal without stopping or turning around, she would see Marc in front of her, would fall into step with him, well back, until he went into a café, she would enter in turn and come to his table, and there, at last, he would deign to welcome her with a husbandly kiss, calling her his *chérie*: a whole secret code in the manner of the dime novel—but she promised to remember. As they left the station, under the impassive eye of a sentinel with a grenade stuck in his boot, they wished each other good luck and went off in opposite directions.

Squeezed between Marc and the side of a seat, Anne Marie found that there was something strange about the Métro, something undefinable around her which did not fit in with her memory of the subway. She ticked off the details—the stations still displayed their white tiling, the tunnels distilled an odor of catacombs sprinkled with creosote, the cars wore their bottle green on the outside and their aquarium green on the inside, and yet something was missing, she could not tell what, nor where. Optical effect due to the occupation, she supposed; due to the visible identity of the German uniforms, the invisible identity of the international stool pigeons; to the hysterical shriek of the brakes in the cottoned silence of the gestures. But she could not place the "something," the impalpable presence of which she felt so strongly. She knew what it was, the definition was on the tip of her tongue, something simple and immediate and

as recognizable as Marc's eyes.—Marc's eyes, narrowed by thoughtfulness. She longed to look for his knowing hand, to carry it to her mouth. "Marc, you carry your head in the sky," she whispered, parodying Racine. He pretended not to have heard her. She opened her lips and left them open—so sudden was the anxiety that gripped her heart: how hazardous a man's precautions were when his physique was against him. . . . Marc's forehead, his eyes, his hands were against him, they would single him out among a thousand; against him his even speech, his Parisian accent, his poet's writing.—Marc's writing . . . She knew his letters by heart, she recited them to herself like classical texts, facing the mirror, head high. "Peaceful little street in the shade of the plane trees. Old and peaceful. It slopes downward gently, with a gutter in the middle. The pavingstones are rounded, a beard of purple moss has grown on them. There is a trough of ochre stone, and a pump with a handle that uncurls like a lion's tail. Just now a Swiss woman comes to draw water. She is barefoot. She carries two wooden pails with copper hoops. They would please you, they look like drums circled with gold. From afar, from the back, with her loose black hair, she resembles you. I would like to call her, so as to have the illusion of calling you." This was how she knew he loved her. In the evening, in the quiet of her room, and at night, in the quiet of her dreams, and by day, walking in the streets, she never wearied of reading his letters again and again. Her eyes made the round of the passengers packed upright like asparagus: the point whose tenuousness had prevented her from seizing what it was that denatured the relation of volumes and proportions—she had it at last. . . . Formerly, when she took the Métro at this same time to go to the Conservatoire, two out of three passengers unfolded their papers, spread them out on their neighbor's beret, and regaled themselves with news sauced with printer's ink.—Formerly, before Marc and me . . . she thought. Before Marc there was nothing. There was a kind of inferior, almost vegetable existence, when all she could see of things was their veneer, when she did not know that under the shell of appearances a heavy mash was stirring and fermenting.—I am twenty months old, she told herself. Twenty months ago she and Marc. One month for each year of her life.—I am beginning to learn, she told herself. The Métro called for its newspaper as the football game for its peanuts, the theater for its opera glass. It was a way of being at home, of recognizing each other in a world without discontinuity. And, by the same token, the fact that they were not reading in public the papers which were not worth reading even in private gave them the air of sulky schoolboys, the rebellious air of a super who has been told to shave off his mustache because it doesn't fit in the scene; and the car, as a consequence, looked like a coat turned inside out. "Marc, I had a dream last night," she said, walking up the Rue de Rome beside him.

"I have a feeling you'd like to tell me about it, Anne Marie."

"As Marianne would say—everything you like a fakir guess. . . . Tell me, Marc: what's the matter with Marianne exactly? She has such a

strange way of stringing her words together, she jumbles them so much, that sometimes she seems to do it for fun. You'd almost think that she did it on purpose, that she was putting it on."

"Of course she's not. She told me, one day when she was unbosoming herself, that she sometimes inverts the order of words even when she is thinking. On the other hand, it never happens when she's writing. All she needs is to have the sentence before her eyes, and it goes the way it ought to. She lost her speech as the result of a fall from a horse, and couldn't speak at all for three years. She was seven when it happened, and her speech came back when she was ten."

"I never knew a thing about that. If I had, I would have . . ."

"What would you have? At the most not been impatient now and then? Or pretended to understand quicker than it's possible? But she has enough of a sense of humor to know that people don't always understand her, and that it's natural to get impatient once in a while. She can't remember ever having talked normally, although it appears that before her fall she had no difficulty expressing herself."

"But can't she be cured?"

"She's had herself psychoanalyzed, without results. Some doctors have talked about nervous shocks, traumas which might counterbalance the effects of her accident."

"Poor Marianne," said Anne Marie, looking after an L.V.F. officer as gorgeous as a bird of paradise. "She ought to become a terrorist, that would give her enough excitement."

"That's what she says herself." He followed Anne Marie's eyes without seeming to. "But she admits frankly that—I'm not you see brave enough, as if she were deploring the fact that it's so hard to have shocks made to measure. As for horses, she says that since her accident they refuse to play tricks on her."

"Speaking of horses, there was one in my dream. Aren't you going to ask me to tell you my dream, Marc?"

"No, you might refuse."

"Marc, some of your jokes this morning suit you like a wooden leg. I believe you're just as nervous about facing your mother as I am myself."

"Nervous is a big adjective. Let's say preoccupied, Anne Marie. But for reasons that have nothing to do with the ones that have you on edge. No, please, no questions. In a little while, if you feel able to wait. . . . Didn't I hear you say something about a dream?"

She took his hand to walk up the stairs. "I dreamt you were pursued by wild horses. I was awfully scared. You were not at all like a conspirator." He wanted to ask her what a conspirator was like, what the traditional figure was according to the Théâtre Français, but they had come to the door and he pressed the bell button; Anne Marie felt its ring all through her body. There was no answer, no echo behind the door closed on the closed and smothered silence.—Maybe I'd have the time . . . she thought without thinking. They looked at each other, and Marc rang again.

Maybe she had the time to straighten her skirt, to smooth her hair, to put rouge on her lips—the first rouge of her twenty years—but she was holding Marc's hand and the bell shrilled all through her body. "I'll go and see the concierge," said Marc. "Don't move."

She waited on the landing. The seconds dripped away in her, bringing no peace. A hundred times she had longed for this moment, had imagined the setting a hundred different ways: she had not imagined this waiting, this absence. Marc's mother belonged to her inner world, rather like a heroine of Racine or Corneille, mythical but present, all the more present because Anne Marie invented her, modeled her, with nothing to go on but her desire. "Marc, how did she treat you when you were ten? Does she like the theater? Does she look like you?" Marc waved evasively and did not reply. He rarely mentioned his mother; and if, pressed by questions, he said a few words about her, he did so with a sort of shyness which amused Anne Marie. "You remind me of the teen-agers," she teased, "who mustn't use the word 'mamma' after they've shaved the first time." He let her talk, smiled at the teasing, and had no more to say than before. "You'll see," he said when, by dint of ruse and ingenuity, she had pried a couple of reluctant sentences out of him. "You'll see how she hums in the morning while she combs her hair." She did not know that he was equally shy about speaking of her, when he was with his mother and had to parry a stream of questions: "Come now . . . this girl . . . Anne Marie . . . can't you tell me what she's like? Where she comes from? . . ." He could not. They were too close to him, he himself had too large a place in their lives, for him to speak of them with detachment. "A man doesn't talk about his loves," he felt like responding to their curiosity. He was surprised that they did not understand his embarrassment. In the long run, by cross-checking, by juxtaposition, like a paleontologist reconstructing a fabulous animal, Anne Marie re-created a character—Madame Laverne—but whereas she thought she had guessed appearances, manners, humor by day and by night, she had built a series of pictures whose details were as unfounded as they were conventional. She realized this now, standing motionless in a stage setting of staircase and closed door, facing the bell whose last tinklings still murmured in her ears: in spite of the imaginary conversations, in spite of the evenings lived in spirit talking about Marc and work in the future, Madame Laverne was again an entity distinct and independent of all representation, suddenly more abstract in Anne Marie's eyes than the image of her own mother, whom she did not remember.

Marc appeared on the landing below, and beckoned to her to come down. They followed the Rue des Dames, then the Rue Lévis in the direction of the Batignolles. According to the concierge, Madame Laverne had left at dawn to "visit" a certain farm outside the city—"after potatoes, Monsieur Marc, and even with luck she'll bring back some eggs. . . ." They bought a half pound of bread, a bunch of radishes from a vegetable peddler, sat down on a café terrace, ordered a beverage made from acorns. In the Rue Lévis, where formerly feathered fowl and red meats and opu-

lent cheeses spilled out in a cascade over the sidewalk and mingled with the fruits stacked in pyramids on the carts of the market gardeners, a man offered broccoli, a woman rutabagas, and a blind couple their tin cup.

They ate the bread and the radishes. Although they had had nothing hot since the morning of the day before, the acorn concoction refused to be downed. Anne Marie watched Marc's hands, so intelligent that they seemed to live their own destiny. They held each other, peacefully united on the edge of the table, but to one who understood their language it was clear that an intense concern was concealed under their quiet appearance. "You're worried, Marc," she said, not taking her eyes from his hands. "May I know? . . ."

"I was coming to it. . . ." He smiled, and his eyes slanted and his cheekbones became prominent. "That's one way of putting it, for I'm going to leave you. Listen to me, don't argue before you know what I have to say to you. According to what the concierge says, my mother will be back about noon. I want to use the time to go on an important errand. If you don't see me before noon, go have a look at the house. You and my mother don't need me to get acquainted, and it's better for you not to stay in front of this café too long. If my mother still isn't back, just change bistros. Or go for a walk. No, hold on, you'll see why you mustn't come with me." He parted his hands slightly, closed them again. "Yet you ought to know what's on my mind, Anne Marie."

She knew. She had just found out, because he had opened and closed his knowing hands. "The stool pigeon," she said.

It was the stool pigeon. Since his meeting with Inspector Espinasse in the Old Port of Marseilles, he had not stopped thinking about it for a minute. His first impulse was to put his friends on their guard, but he rejected it almost at once: to do so would automatically warn the stool pigeon, who, to be so well informed, must certainly be among those whom he would have alerted. He went no further than to give an idea of the situation to Anne Marie, simply so that she could hand on the word in case he should be arrested before taking care of it himself. So far as he could do it from memory, he reviewed the character and temperament, the actions and attitudes, the outward and inward personality of all those with whom his political activity placed him in contact: nothing in their past or their present gave the slightest ground for suspicion. Until the second when Espinasse had played his trump and shown how reliable his information was, Marc would have wagered his own head on the integrity of his comrades. Tenaciously, unceasingly, unrelentingly, with a perseverance which gradually turned into an obsession, he had gone over what the inspector had said, word by word, inflection by inflection, trying to force them out of their immobility, their fixity, as if they were heavy flagstones which concealed secret passages. The better to review the detective's monologue, he noted it in colored pencil on a paper which he put up on the wall near his bed, and for long hours at night he analyzed each phrase, their connection, their particular resonance, as if recomposing

a song. For days he was under the unbearable impression that some part of a sentence, some expression detached from its context, might suddenly become a source of light if approached from a certain angle. "You understand," he said in a low voice, his hands resting quietly on the table, "you understand, there I was, I who have no ear for music, with a melody in my head, an air heard in the past, whose tune comes back and lingers till you're sure you can catch it, and then vanishes when you try to reproduce it."

"I might have helped you, maybe, if you had spoken to me," said Anne Marie with a shade of reproach in her voice.

Marc shook his head. She could not have. There was no object, no daylight, no shadow which she might have recognized by touch, nothing more than a vague modulation, the first note of which it was beyond him to repeat. A sensation so persistent that it seemed to him that if he knew musical notation he would have made an extraordinary discovery. He had to make an effort of will to take his mind off it and concentrate again on his political friends. He forced himself to imagine the mental processes of a provocateur smuggled into the ranks of a small organization of the extreme left, the functioning of his brain, the working of his glands, in the hope of building an imaginary character whose portrait could serve as a reference, even a vague one, to situate a being of flesh and blood; but for want of sympathy, and therefore of comprehension, he had to give up the attempt. Another idea, less irrational, turned out to be more fruitful.—What makes the strength of a stool pigeon, he reasoned, what gives him his value, as it were, is that he places himself definitely above all suspicion, so that the very hint of a doubt never presents itself in his regard. "The ideal way to achieve this," he said, leaning backward to see the time by the café clock, "is to go all out for the cause, and to brave the forces of repression unreservedly, especially in illegal activities. There is no more direct road to winning general esteem and getting hold of the principal levers of an organization. The annals of the revolutionary movement contain the records of more than one responsible fighter, sometimes in key posts, who were on the police pay roll for years, and at the same time were pulled in occasionally, given a going over, condemned to prison, and came out better stool pigeons than ever because the halo of martyrdom had given them new glory."

"Everybody knows that, Marc. Don't talk as if you were discovering Columbus's egg. Besides, it's possible for a fighter to become a stool pigeon when he is already in a post of command. In the third place, I don't see what you're driving at."

He liked her this way, stiffening in a discussion. "Naturally, Anne Marie. The thing is possible, but rare in the extreme. A revolutionary organization does not breed provocateurs: it receives them from the outside, all groomed to climb the rungs which lead to positions of confidence. The contrary case almost always involves an obscure member of the ranks who couldn't face a questioning backed up with arguments that draw blood.