You're quite right, this is all well known. What is not so well known is what rule of procedure should be drawn from these facts. As to what I am driving at, here it is: these reflections, simple as they seem, led me to think that I ought to work backward, as you demonstrate the rightness of a theorem by showing the absurdity of the opposite. I therefore took up those of our comrades who offered the most brilliant guarantees, and put them under the microscope again. The method is not superior to any arbitrary method; but, for lack of a better, it has the incomparable advantage of widening the field of investigation. Whereas I could see no one whose smallest action could justify the slightest uneasiness, I immediately saw several who were absolutely above question, and by that very fact—in terms of my reduction to the absurd—eligible to be subjected to a fine-combing."

"You found out? . . ." said Anne Marie, almost rising from her chair. "You know who it is? . . ."

He motioned to her not to get excited. "You never know for sure. Unless he is caught in the act, there is always a doubt by which the suspect benefits. And by which the innocent man suffers. A doubt that nothing can destroy. Which burrows under the skin, into the heart. For then it's not enough to prove innocence, nor to be cleared of all suspicion. There's no bleach that will wash away that stain, even if it has the color of calumny. Therefore, until I know a little more surely where I stand, don't bedevil me with questions. I won't answer them. Let's say that the one I have in mind is called Z. Two indications lead me to him. The first is purely hypothetical, and means nothing without the second: in itself it should not be taken into consideration. It proves nothing, offers no sure ground, has no real intrinsic value. This first indication is a service record which is too brilliant—if the word 'too' has any sense when applied to the full measure of devotion which the revolution demands of each of us. But, to say it again, this service record, in view of the mettle of the person I call Z, has never awakened the faintest afterthought. I had no reason to pause at it especially except to satisfy my conscience, since I had decided to strip down the activities of those of us . . ."

"Including my own, Marc?"

Including hers. So he was just about to pass over the "Z case" when, out of the blue, the air which had been running through his head—the "something familiar," the something seen somewhere before—came back to his memory. Chance coincidence, possibly; but a disturbing coincidence, for in the recollection of what he had come to regard as an aberration of his own thinking, Z stood out in the foreground. "And so I come to my second indication, which, though likewise hypothetical, bears on a material fact. The scaffold of my reasoning rests entirely on this point: I presented four reports at our Lyons meeting, while in his enumeration of my crimes the Marseilles man mentioned only three. It was that hole in his information which obsessed me so much that I couldn't get it out of my head—fortunately! That was the nightmare tune I couldn't remember the first

note of! Do you see? Are you beginning to see where that discovery leads? No, wait till I tell you: I hold that if my man mentioned only three reports it's because he knew nothing about the fourth. That's where the key lies, maybe the solution: he knew nothing about it!"

"You told me Espinasse was very upset. He may have forgotten it."

"True. His emotions may have made him jump a line in the recital of his grievances, I admit. But in that case I would have noticed something like a hesitation at the moment he was unloading his charges against me, for instance when he began to check off one by one the subjects of my reports. But he didn't recall them upside down or topsy-turvy: he cited them in the very order in which I had read them. I have learned to understand precisely enough how ideas run in his thick head to maintain, without serious risk of being mistaken, that it is completely improbable that, having lined up five indictments which, in his far from negligible opinion, were enough to have me guillotined five times over, he would have omitted any aggravating detail. He would not be what he is—whatever emotions he may experience—if he was subject to distractions of that nature. Furthermore, under his coldly professional exterior, he cultivates his little vanities, his little bravado: he wouldn't have deprived himself of the pleasure of pulling my fourth report out of his sleeve . . ."

"Suppose that's true," said Anne Marie. She looked at Marc's hands, admiring how knowing they were. "Suppose it is. What you mean, to come down to it, is that he was badly informed."

"You're getting warm, Anne Marie. What he didn't know, it's logical to suppose his informant didn't know either. But follow me closely. You'll see how everything hooks up and becomes simple—almost too simple. The puzzle seems to consist in a small problem in arithmetic. There were eleven delegates summoned to our gathering in Lyons. The opening day only nine answered the roll call. The tenth, we found out when the meeting opened, had been arrested the day before at the line of demarcation. The eleventh, having been excused to complete a mission, would arrive the second day following, about four in the afternoon. I remember his arrival, I was presiding. The agenda which had been distributed to the delegates listed the reading of a certain number of reports, with the pseudonym of the reporter opposite the title of each. The paper listed first for the opening day dealt with the activity of the organization during the past months. It was to be presented by the tenth delegate, who was absent by reason of his arrest. We talked it over. I was chosen to improvise a report in place of his. This was my 'fourth' report, the one which did not appear on the agenda under my sobriquet. When the eleventh delegate arrived, two days had gone by. He learns of the absence of the tenth delegate and the reasons therefor, but it doesn't occur to him to find out who presented the report of activity. He doesn't know, and the one to whom he gives his information will not know either."

"This was the one you call Z?"

Marc nodded affirmatively and did not go on. His features were drawn

taut with thoughtfulness until his face looked mongoloid. "What else is there?" Anne Marie asked. She was pale and she shivered, transmitting the trembling of her body to the table. "What else is there?" she repeated.

"Nothing. Nothing at the moment."

"You were going to say something else, Marc."

"Yes, but I changed my mind." He had just seen in Anne Marie's eyes that if he said the "something else" he would make Z's identity known to her. "You mustn't insist, Anne Marie. You'll find out soon enough. Now I'm off."

"You're going to see him?" Against her will, anxiety rose to her mouth and twisted her lips. "Be careful, Marc. . . . Be . . . I want to come with you."

His look silenced her. "I don't know whether I'll see him now or not. I don't know if he's in Paris. I don't know anything. And I don't like to see you being unreasonable, Anne Marie."

He stood up—and she stood up with him. She saw that he was no longer in doubt. She saw by his walk that he bore a heavy burden. She ran after him, caught him at the entrance to the Métro. "Marc . . ." she whispered.

He looked at her without answering. Too much passion burned in her body. She had to go through the apprenticeship of calm, of impassibility. She had to earn the right to suffer in silence.

"Marc, it's Youra. . . . It's Youra . . ." she said in a breath. Passers-by turned round at the sight of her weeping. "You won't . . . you won't kill him? . . . He's so young, so handsome. . . . It's Youra. . . . Youra . . ."

Marc freed himself from Anne Marie's grasp and plunged down the stairs without a word. It was nine o'clock in the morning.

» 16 «

"NICE TRIP?" ASKED MAURICE JALE. HE PEERED AT MARC Laverne over the metal rims of his glasses, while he inked the plate of a small printing press. "André, hand him the tobacco. He looks as if he hadn't had a smoke since the Popular Front."

Marc took the tobacco and the book of cigarette papers. "No trouble," he said, sitting down on a taboret. André Maille went back to his paper cutter and began to trim reams of sheets. Although it was a sunny day, the light came sparsely through the shopwindow, which was plastered with samples of printing. There was a silence, disturbed only by the sucking sound of the roller on the ink table, the crisp crunch of the cutting blade, and the light taps of the planer with which a third companion, Camille Sauveterre, was leveling a form. Deliberately, parsimoniously, economizing his movements as if it would help to economize the tobacco, Marc Laverne rolled a cigarette. His view comprised the sunless little yard strangled by high façades, the narrow funnel of the passage opening on the Rue du Faubourg Montmartre, and the intermittent activity on the sidewalk beyond the passage, as at the bright end of a camera obscura. When he came to the printing shop he always sat in the same spot in the back, close to the door leading to Maurice Jale's lodgings, and facing the one which opened on the yard and the segment of sidewalk. It was, so to speak, his traditional place: everything could be seen from the inside and nothing from the outside, and in case of an alarm one had time to decamp through the rear door. He put the tobacco on a table littered with proofs, cuts, and type forms, leaned his back against the wall, lighted his cigarette. "How's the business going?" he asked.

"Nothing special," said Maurice Jale. "We hardly work for anyone except the Wehrmacht any more. If it wasn't for them we couldn't even stay open. There'd be nothing to justify using the electricity. And as for justifying the employment of two helpers . . . Can you figure out what's at the bottom of their policy! Instead of getting their printing done by a dozen big plants, they dish out work to most of the little printers who ask for it. André's idea is that they do it to avoid centralization. But centralization of what? There are no secrets in these forms and letterheads and

bookkeeping trash. There's not a military secret in a carload. And it would be a lot easier for them to keep an eye on ten big printers than a hundred small ones. The proof is that it allows us to keep our credit with them and still keep our own pot boiling. And we're not the only ones: everybody knows it except the Gestapo."

"I can't believe they're that dumb," said Maille. "Their efficiency is only so-so, but they've certainly got reasons for doing things one way rather than another. When they give you an order for this or that, you get your paper with barely two per cent of margin for trial pulls and waste. And they hand out ink with an eye-dropper. They know the capacity of your setup, and give you an amount of work that doesn't leave time for side jobs. In any case you handle only small quantities at a time, so the leakage can never be much. We make out all right, of course, but, as my milk woman used to say back in the days when there were milk women, it's only our French ingenuity. On the contrary, if they concentrated their orders and had them filled by only a few printers, the leakage would go up right away in proportion to the huge consumption of paper. As a bureaucracy they don't have to take lessons from anybody, the occupants don't!"

"Easy to tell you're only an apprentice printer," grumbled Jale. "Say they eat up paper like rats, fine; and that maybe there aren't enough printers to satisfy their appetite, fine; but to go from there and talk about leakage in the big joints . . . Rotary presses, perfecting machines, web presses—those things count the sheets down to the last fingernail. It'd be as hard to get away with anything there as it is to convince you you're talking through your hat."

"I've got some copy for the rag," said Marc. "We want to get the issue out on time. Two thousand copies, if possible."

"Right. We have what we need. If you're here for the proofreading, it'll speed things up. We could finish in one night."

"I'll be here. Have you got your article on the Italian situation ready, Camille?"

"It's being set up," said Camille. The sound of the wooden planer was flat and dry on the lead type. "I've had some supplementary reports since you were here last. It looks more and more evident that if the Anglo-Americans try to invade the peninsula the proletariat in the big northern centers, especially Turin and Milan, will pull a general strike and go over to the offensive. As we had agreed, my article deals essentially with the danger of a premature insurrection in the absence of a revolutionary party, and the extreme urgency of regrouping the different leftist fractions around a class program. I emphasize that the lesson of the coming struggle in Italy will be of enormous importance for later developments in France and the other occupied countries, where the departure of the Nazis will coincide with a radicalization of the masses on one hand, and calls to 'order' from the socialists and Stalinists on the other, under pretext of getting on with the war. I conclude by saying that today more than

ever we must face the problem of the destruction of the capitalist state, and replace the reactionary keynote of national liberation with that of a Federation of the Socialist Republics of Europe, from which Germany could not be excluded."

"Fine. I just happen to have here a resolution of the Marseilles group on the rabid chauvinism of our communistoids. Run it at the end of your article. These integral patriots rival the *Action Française* people; they'll wind up wearing the picture of Joan of Arc as a scapular." He paused, and crumbled the tobacco out of the stub of his cigarette. "Still no news of Louise?" he asked, looking out through the dark funnel of the passage.

Camille Sauveterre stopped working and did not answer. The shop smelled of ink and lead and the oiled leather of the rollers and the sour dampness of a place where the sun never ventured. Four weeks previously Louise Sauveterre had been arrested carrying false identity papers and fifty copies of the paper, and had disappeared without trace. "If we only could find out where they took her," said Jale.

"She was caught in a roundup, wasn't she?" Marc asked. "Tell me how it happened."

"Yes, in a roundup in the Place Clichy," said André Maille. "She and Camille . . ."

"Suppose you let Camille talk," Jale interrupted. "He was there, you know."

"So there was a roundup . . ." Camille Sauveterre's voice was heavy and calm. He took the tobacco from the table beside Marc, began to roll a cigarette. He was of medium height, strongly built, and his short, rapid gestures contrasted with the serenity of his face, which showed his fifty years. "You know how those things go. It's no smarter than turning your ankle on a banana peel. Louise had just dropped off fifty copies at the relay in the Rue Rochechouart. I was walking behind her, about fifteen paces back, as we always do when we're working in pairs. We were headed for the Clignancourt relay, where Louise would have dropped her last batch. After that it would be my turn. She would have been in back and I in front. We'd been on the job over two hours. Everything was going fine. She was carrying a shopping bag to make her look like a housewife. We made detours and so on—the usual style. Just as she got into the Place Clichy, a swarm of trucks loaded with cops streamed in from all sides. The cops jumped off with the trucks still going full speed, and the trucks whipped around on two wheels and blocked the streets coming into the square. In a second the place was closed tighter than a drum. I had time to back into the doorway of a shop. It was in the Rue Amsterdam. Louise turned around, but the barrier was up already between her and me. I lost sight of her right away. She started to run, but she can't have got very far. The cops were hardly on the ground before they had the arm on the pedestrians. They began to chuck men and women pell-mell into the trucks. They chased after the ones who tried to escape into the buildings, and brought them back with a couple of whacks of

their clubs, but they didn't go beyond the cordon thrown across the heads of the streets. I stayed there, hunched into my corner, with the papers under my shirt drinking up my sweat. I couldn't move. It was crazy, it seemed to me that if I moved I'd give Louise away. There were shouts, women especially, and galloping all over the square. In five minutes it was all over. They have it down to a system. They've learned their job. I came back here, we straightened up the place, and warned the boys to keep their eyes peeled." He put a match to his cigarette, watched the flame burning in his fingers. "After three days we went back to work. We knew then that Louise hadn't talked. We were sure she wouldn't talk anyway, but with their methods . . . They must have let her try some of them. She would have been thirty-five next month. She had courage."

"She still has, old man," said Maille awkwardly.

"Oh, you and your chins-up stuff," Sauveterre retorted gruffly. He struck another match, watching the flame dance at his finger tips. "I lose my wife, we all lose a fine partner and a good fighter. That's no reason for mutual consolation. They'll drag her soul out of her body to make her talk, if they haven't done it already." The match went out, and he stood with the charred stick in his fingers. "She had courage," he repeated.

Marc asked for several supplementary details. Through various channels they had found out pretty certainly that Louise Sauveterre was not in Drancy, nor in Fresnes, nor in the solitary cells of the Prefecture of Police. They supposed that she was confined in one of the numerous secret prisons which the Gestapo had in Paris. The paper had been printed during the night before the arrest. Outside of the three printers and Louise, no one knew anything about it, not even the comrades who were to receive the issue and distribute it. All precautions had been taken, following a routine which had become an everyday matter. . . . All at once Maurice Jale took off his glasses and tried to catch Marc's glance with his slightly squinty eyes. His expression was so eloquent that before he could say a word his companions knew what he was thinking. "What's up? What's the matter?" André Maille asked, extending his arms as if to seize something. "Why the long interrogatory, Marc? What have you got up your sleeve?"

"I wanted to know the details of the arrest. I can see better now how the thing happened." He blew on the book of cigarette papers to loosen one of them. "The thought of a denunciation didn't occur to you?"

"N-no . . ." said Sauveterre in a hesitant voice.

"It occurred to me. . . . I was wrong, I realize now. It's certain that they wouldn't have put on a show with roundup and trucks to catch you and Louise. Not even, I think, to cover the spotter by making us believe it was a coincidence. And above all they wouldn't have missed you, Camille." He rolled the tobacco in the hollow of his hand, looking at the brilliant light on the sidewalk through the dark tunnel of the passage. "I haven't caught a case of spyitis. I thought of this because there's a spotter in our midst."

No one said a word. Sauveterre swallowed with such an effort that knots stood out in the veins on his bald temples. Jale put on his glasses and took them off again, then laid them on the frame of the press. Maille's face, becoming heavy, wavered on his neck with the movement of a pendulum. "If I'm not mistaken," said Marc, "he'll come here today, or tomorrow, or the day after. Unless he got himself caught at the line."

"Who is it?" said Sauveterre, in a voice reminiscent of the sound of the planer on the metal. "What are your proofs?"

Marc did not answer immediately. He had no proofs. He hoped that his suspicions were unfounded. There was a certain resemblance between Youra and Anne Marie, due to their youth, to the juvenile exaltation which they had in common, to their undeniable readiness to get themselves killed in the service of their ideas; and this resemblance made intolerable the thought that the son of Ivan Stepanoff was a police spotter. Stepanoff's son . . . It was monstrous. He shook his head in an effort to erase the sentences forming in it, not liking their sentimental turn. For lack of time he had not gone into the motives which might have driven the young Russian to ruin himself: for lack of time, and also because he had felt incapable of imagining them. Violence and torture were excluded, since Youra had not been in prison. The bait of money seemed a supposition too absurd to merit a thought: it would be difficult to find a boy more detached from material concerns, and at the same time more generous. Mental derangement? Megalomania? Vice? Blackmail? Blackmail! . . . The idea was so dazzling that he almost shouted it aloud. He did not see on what grounds, with what threats, Espinasse might have blackmailed and corrupted the young man, but that was a tool which the inspector wielded masterfully. He pictured Espinasse's powerful figure, his walk like that of a weary lumberjack, his calm composed of contempt and—in the widest sense of the word—of a kind of haughty detachment which enabled him to regard human beings as pure elements in a puzzle. Once again he recalled his words—"you want to know who the stool pigeon is—I will tell you who he is—you can put him out of the way—I won't raise a finger." No, he won't raise a finger. No one in the world, from now on, will have a finger in the destiny of Youra Stepanoff. A destiny already accomplished, already sealed, irrevocably. The thought was so painful to him that his hands gripped each other, and his knuckles cracked as if to smash themselves to bits.

He told the story of his meeting with Espinasse, the detailed story of his deductions. The three men listened in silence. Silence hung over the galleys and forms in which, abandoned to themselves, compositions in Gothic letters were waiting to be locked in and run off, so that the Wehrmacht might have sheets whereon to tot up its victories and balance its defeats—debit side so many boot nails plus so many mess tins plus so much dysentery per soldier, credit side so many killed in geometrical progression and so many killed in nightmare progression down to the bottom of the last column of the last invoice of the last stalwart squashed to a pulp

with glory. Then he recounted Stepanoff's arrest. "I had the facts from Smith, the American who is head of a relief office in Marseilles," he said. "He was on the dock when Stepanoff was brought ashore. This Smith doesn't spare himself and is doing a pretty commendable job, although his activity is somewhat that of a 'benefactor of humanity,' he meanwhile being less legalistically minded than most of the Puritans who consult their lawyer before signing a voucher for a jar of jam. In short, he went to the Prefecture and registered a protest against Stepanoff's arrest—and as a matter of fact, Stepanoff was leaving with all his visas in order. Naturally his protest didn't help much. His first thought was the OGPU, but after his inquiries he changed his mind. In his opinion it was the Gestapo."

"Wait a minute, I don't get it," said Maille. "Was he arrested alone, or with his wife and son?"

"No, alone. His wife . . ."

"But what then?" Maille interrupted again. "You say the young Stepanoff will come in here. I thought they had both gone aboard, father and son, as well as Yvonne. Yvonne, that's Stepanoff's wife's name, isn't it? Oh, I see, that's it: when the old man was taken off, the family refused to leave and the young one will turn up again. That's it, right?"

"Yes. But listen. The ship sailed within an hour after the arrest. No one was authorized to leave the boat, and poor Yvonne Tervielle had to stay aboard. The next morning Smith left for a two-day trip. When he got back he found young Stepanoff waiting for him at his office, in a devil of a state of nerves. He wanted Smith to advance him the money for a trip to Paris. He said he thought his father had been taken there, and he intended to go there too. Smith tried his best to get some information out of him, but couldn't; he wouldn't even say how he had managed to get off the ship. He didn't answer Smith's questions. Smith's impression was that Youra knew certain things which he was afraid—was terrified—to say. Visibly he was in deep distress. Smith described him to me as someone so perturbed that he had lost his judgment. When I asked, 'Perturbed about what?' he answered without hesitation that Youra feared intensely for his father's life. In the end, seeing that he wasn't going to get anywhere . . ."

He said no more. His effort of thought contracted the skin around his cheekbones and his eyes, and his face took on an Asiatic cast.—If Youra really did succumb to blackmail, it was because Espinasse had threatened him with regard to his father. . . . He was surprised at not having thought of it sooner. "One minute, André, please," he said, seeing Maille's impatience.—With the old man under arrest, he thought, the blackmail will double and triple in price. Frightened and bewildered as he must be, he'll be caught three times as surely. He's liable to let himself go as far as hysteria, as far as . . . "Maurice, we've got to clean house. Right now. Camille, if your article is in type, break it up. I just had a nasty feeling . . ."

"Nom de Dieu!" Maille spat. "Just yesterday the stock for the paper

came in!" His voice cracked with rage, and he was close to tears. Jale felt around on the frame of the press for his glasses. "Just yesterday, our lovely *Hollande,* our deckled *Chine* . . ." Maille wailed. Jale pushed open the door of his lodgings, came back with a large, heavy package, and cut the string. "Well, you wanted the paper to come out on time, and now we've got to make confetti out of it," he said. Maille was already at his cutter, and set the rules for letter size. "Serve up my *Hollande,"* he said to Jale, whose eyes were completely crossed with disappointment. "Six thousand francs' worth of my fine hand-laid . . ." he moaned, adjusting a ream of gray, pulpy paper on the cutting table. *"Nom de Dieu de nom de nom . . ."* he moaned. Yet this was the technique, the danger-proofing, as it were. . . . In order to conceal a supply of paper when it would be difficult to explain its source and justify its use, they cut it down to commercial-size sheets, which, in case of a search, would not automatically constitute a *corpus delicti.* "I'm going to make two or three telephone calls," said Jale. "Should I warn the others about young Stepanoff?"

"No. Not yet. Just tell them to clean up, and to get out for a couple of days if they can."

Jale took off his working smock, put on his coat, and set out. While Maille worked his cutter and Sauveterre broke up his article and put the type back in the boxes, Marc told them what his eleventh-hour "nasty feeling" had been. "But he himself will tell us more about the whole thing. He left Marseilles four days ago, he must be floating around Paris since the day before yesterday. Smith let him have a thousand francs. He can't go far on that."

"If he's been in Paris for two days, he would have come here already," said Maille. "If it was only to have someplace to spend the night."

Maurice Jale's printing shop was the rallying point, the center where the members of the group gathered when they were in Paris. On any other occasion Youra would not have failed to come there; but Marc thought it most likely that the young Russian was making every effort to discover a trace of his father. Between his flight from the ship and his departure for Paris, he had stayed at least three whole days in Marseilles. "What surprises me much more than the fact that he hasn't been here," he said, "is that he didn't try to get in touch with me there. He had an affection for me—and I returned it wholeheartedly—which should have made him look me up. It makes me feel all the more strongly how mixed up he must have been. . . . We saw each other every day. Sometimes, when the discussions continued late, he stayed and slept in my room. You only knew him superficially, but it was almost impossible not to feel that in every respect he had qualities well above the average. He could be counted on in every circumstance. There was no task, no danger, that he would hesitate to face. Politically, despite his anarchist tendencies, he inspired the greatest confidence in me. He had much to learn, but he worked, read, and did a lot of thinking. I regretted it when he was leaving. He was a loss, there are so few of us." He rolled his third cigarette, being careful not to scatter

the tobacco. "There are moments when I hope I'm wrong. I don't think I've ever felt before how strongly one can hope one's reasoning is false."

"What bothers me," said Sauveterre, "is that he let himself be taken in like a tenderfoot. I've talked with him several times, and I agree with your description of him. He was certainly intelligent. Hanging around prisons and isolation camps with his father since childhood had given him a maturity which was surprising in a fellow his age. He had seen in the raw how the best fighters of the Russian opposition had been boxed in, on the pretext of 'saving' the thing which in their eyes was the equivalent of the 'father'—the Party. He could see how this had led them through every sort of humiliation, to contempt and to the stake. What's more, he could judge from his father's example that it is always possible to resist debasement, and how you come out of it a bigger man—when you come out of it. All this makes it seem hard to understand why he fell in with a police scheme, supposing your logic is correct."

"But I don't believe, you see, that experience keeps a man from debasement, any more than intelligence or courage do," said Laverne. "I think it's a question of moral health, or, to put it simply, of character." He reflected a moment, as if hesitant to go on. "No one is definitely immunized against this evil. It comes into us from the air which feeds our blood. We are born with it, it surrounds us from the day of our first step, like lying, like hatred. In a society which lives on debasement, debasement is a form of the instinct of self-preservation. It takes a lot of character to conquer this instinct. Many a Bolshevik of the old guard has shown, in the long run, that he was as lacking in character as he was in scruples."

"You took the words out of my mouth," Maille interjected. "As the copy editor of *Figaro* would say, it's the 'Slavic soul.' All right, don't light into me the one time I try to speak seriously. I'm no doctor of psychology, but when you know a little about the Russian revolutionary movement you can't help thinking that a lot of the outstanding characters are out of Dostoievsky, as surely as I'm out of the back streets of Paris. The case of the dear old soul who lives at the Ritz and has a broken heart if somebody steps on her kittycat's tail, but goes out, dressed like for a garden party, to poke out the Communards' eyes with her umbrella—it's not so rare as people think. The worst rascals always have their little virtues, and the great models of virtue always have their little Sunday failings. I don't know this Youra very well, he has a nice mug and the advantage of being his father's son; but if it's him, what are we going to do with him? We can talk our heads off, very interesting talk, too, but I want to put a practical question: what will we do with him? If we let him run loose, we'll all bite the dust before long. I propose . . ."

"Quiet," said Marc. He stood up, opened the door of Jale's rooms partway, hesitated for a second. His hands gripped each other, then separated. "He looks exhausted," he said. "I'll take a turn around the block to see if he's been followed, and then I'll be with you."

Coming out of the passage to the street, Youra Stepanoff came into the

yard with the walk of an automaton whose springs have run down. Burning with weariness and insomnia, his eyes at first made out only a confused mass of planes and volumes, as if the transition from raw light to broken light had deprived him of his sight. He halted, looking at André Maille without seeing him. All was silence and pain and thirst. He remembered a faucet with a drop hanging from its lip. He strove to catch the sound of the drip in the iron sink, the sharp memory of it was in his ear like the pain when he had an earache.—If I knew if I could that faucet, he thought with his mouth, with his cracked lips. He looked at André Maille, motionless and mute behind his machine of black salt. Everything was motionless and mute and made of black salt. If only he knew if he could remember. He started to raise his hand in the semblance of an attempt to push back the lock of hair which barred his forehead and weighed on his memory and kept him from seeing, but the stiffened muscles of his neck made the movement too painful. To remember the taste of water, the name of water, on the palate, in the nostrils, in the lungs. Water, enough to die of it. To go down with the stream of water bloated with water under a sky of water on a bed of water like the drowned man of the ballad. He turned slowly around, carrying his eyes which met those of Camille Sauveterre, those of Marc Laverne and Maurice Jale, both standing in the entrance and motionless and made of salt and stone. He started forward again with the step of an automaton driven by the last convulsions of its run-down springs—yellow faucet of yellow copper with the green drop without end with the green fall without end of the seconds of water on the drunken drowned man in the stream of water in the ballad of Pushkin. He reached the faucet, grasped it with his two hands, but could not turn it on. Then he fell to his knees. Then he fell all the way.

Had it not been for the bad humor of a seaman, he would have missed his father's arrest. He was busy wiping his set of drawing pens when he had the impression that someone was shouting at him. He looked around him, then over the edge of the deckhouse on which he had been installed for nearly an hour: someone on the deck was ordering him, in an imperious voice, to come down. "Hey you, the artiss, get down off there!" said the man, hands on hips and head cocked to one side. "Come on . . . quick, I tell you!"

"Who? . . . Me?" he asked, sticking the penholders in a pocket on his chest.

"Sure you! Nobody's allowed up there. Come on, scram, I said!"

Grimacing in the sun, belligerent of pose, playing to the gallery with his nasal sputter, the seaman resembled a concierge starting a neighborhood riot over a missing garbage can. "Hey, shake it up, don't you understand French?" he snorted, haughty of lip. "Or do I have to come . . ."

Squatting on his heels and screwing the cap of his ink bottle tight, he eyed the sailor and said nothing. Even before coming aboard he had

spied the weaving of the loading cranes from his place in line at the foot of the gangway, and had promised himself to interpret their flexibility, their surprising suppleness, the frenzy which seized the gear as soon as the steam spurted from it. Impatient to be at his sketchbook once the formalities of admission were over, he had changed from his velvet suit into working blues and come on deck. The press of the crowd, the joyous coming and going, the feverish bustling of the travelers, the lack of space and perspective, made him decide to climb up on the deckhouse which thrust out over the stern. Indifferent to the tumult and the ardor of the sun, he had tried to transcribe the disquieting finger-language of the booms, whose pantomime evoked in his mind the picture of arms waving signals, antennae scenting and feeling, jointed tree trunks invaded by a vegetation of cables and ropes. He was enchanted by the prehensile power of the pincers and tackles and jaws which plunged overboard, stabbed at the load with their sensitive, forked tongues, and spat out their catch into the yawning hatchway. He had gone to work with enthusiasm, with a sensation of happiness which ordinarily presaged a fruitful effort; and he was disappointed when the capstan driver brought the cranes to their rest position and blocked the levers home, while the laborers, having climbed up the ladder one after the other, laid hold of the heavy covers to close the hatches. He had lingered to run through his sketches, adding a touch here and there, and then had begun to set his equipment in order, when the seaman below, stricken with an excess of zeal, began to play the high and mighty. He was bobbing up and down on his feet, he might have been about to bound into the air, land on the deckhouse, punch the traveler in the nose and drive him away, already the crowd was widening in a circle to miss the blows when the tar began distributing them, but the tar did nothing of the kind, all he did was to raise his arm and put it back on his hip. "Or do I have to come up after you?" he threatened, his nose in the sun.

"No, no, you'd get all tired out," he answered, straightening up.

"Yeah, who'd get tired? What're you talking about!" the seaman exploded, stung to the quick. "Do I come up, yes or no?"

"Don't get excited, pal, I'm coming right down," he said, watching the longshoremen secure the tarpaulins over the hatchcovers.

This was apparently too much for the seaman. He went back a few paces, took a short run, gave a little leap, and caught the edge of the roof with his outstretched hands. Someone laughed in the circle of spectators, then someone else, making an echo. It was fun to see him waving his legs and wiggling his posterior in his hurry to raise and then to balance the disobedient mass of his body—to see him so determined to look more vicious than he could possibly be. "Courage, *batiouchka,* there's a fine view from here," said he, lending him a hand, and it was at that moment that his eyes, plunging over the cordon of onlookers, over the rail with the emigrants pressing against it, met those of his father at the instant when, with a man on either side of him, he was disappearing around the corner

of a shed. He was so disconcerted, so stupefied at the sight, that even while he continued to haul on the seaman's shirt collar he began to brandish the sketchbook at the end of his free arm in a mute but vehement outcry. The seaman finally got his feet on the roof, but did not dare to free himself from the fist clasping his collar, for fear that in wrestling himself loose he would go rolling onto the deck. "Hey, what's up, you looking for a fight? . . ." he stammered. Youra let go of the seaman's shirt, looking at Yvonne, who turned and turned at the head of the gangplank as if seized with whirling folly. "What's she . . . what's the matter? . . . " he said, half suffocating.

"So what, it looks like she's the daughter of the old guy the cops took off," chaffed the tar, happy that events were taking a peaceful turn. He tucked his shirttails into his trousers, ready to take his distance and rush this crackpot who was brandishing a notebook and bugging out his eyes. "That makes one less damned nuisance to feed," he added, regaining his assurance. Youra grabbed the seaman and pulled at him so violently that again his shirttails flapped outside his trousers. "Was it my father they . . . they . . . they took away?" he gasped, not entirely understanding the sense of his own words. The seaman's voice came down a tone, turned mealy and small and insinuating. "Ah, it was, eh? . . . That's tough. But it's no reason to murder people's shirts, fellow. And if I was my father's son, I'd run after him, I would. You only have one father in your life. I'd run after him, I wouldn't let them handle him that way. Go to it, shove yourself in with the longshoremen, the flatfeet won't catch on, you look like a dockhand in those overalls."

"Eh? . . ." he answered. He looked at himself, then at the longshoremen pushing their way through the crowd at the head of the starboard gangway, then at Yvonne, stricken now with volubility, and at the gendarmes in their polished leather harness, and at the deserted wharves where the weight of the sun was melting. "Or do I have to . . ." bayed the seaman, his bravery returning. But he no longer heard, falling into the crowd which opened with a swell like stagnant water. Working his elbows and fists, he caught up with the men who were approaching the gangplank, mingled with them, let himself be borne along, thinking the primary thought of running, the primordial reflex of running—getting off the ship and running. And running. Nobody and nothing not barriers nor police could keep him from running, you couldn't argue about that, it was as evident and mechanical and necessary as barriers and police and vermin. But no one thought of stopping him. Annihilated by her anguish, blinded by tears, Yvonne did not recognize him, and the gendarmes, taken up wholly with their task of watching her sob, paid not the slightest attention to the dockers. He was panic-stricken for a moment as he passed under the eyes of Smith and his little secretary, but like the gendarmes at the gangplank, the people on the dock showed no interest in the group of workingmen as they walked away. He expended an enormous amount of energy to keep his feet on the ground, they lifted themselves by a will

of their own, ready to carry him off in a headlong race. "That was you drawing me up there at the winch, wasn't it?" said the capstan man. He nodded by way of affirmation, striving to suit his gait to that of his companions, while his eyes wandered in search of his father's broad back, in search of the triple shadow of his father and the two men in the white sunlight. "Then you're not a passenger on the ship?" the same man asked. He shook his head, forcing himself not to leap like a grasshopper or prance like a horse. Every now and then a customs man or a plain-clothes man, idle and morose, gave them a sidelong look charged with boredom. They cleared the boundary of the docks without difficulty, under the eyes of two *gardes mobiles* sprawled on a bench in front of a sentry box, and the first dwelling houses emerged from the city, overhanging the empty storage depots. "You're not from Marseilles, I guess . . ." the capstan man hazarded, with the good will of one who makes it his duty to keep a conversation alive. "There's my car," said Youra in answer. "So long and thanks." "So long . . ." said the other man simply. Youra dashed after the car, whose yellow paint made a stain on the gleaming pavement. He was about to jump for the platform when he realized that he did not have a sou.

Eleven o'clock had struck when he reached the Evêché, the headquarters of the police. He asked to speak to Inspector Espinasse—Etienne Espinasse, political division. In a bare room which smelled of cats, behind a black table which smelled of catafalques, a clerk who was sluggish with the heat asked him a string of vague questions—did he have an appointment with the inspector, why did he want to speak to him, what was his name, his nationality: he answered that the inspector was impatiently awaiting him, that his business was strictly personal and very urgent, gave a French-sounding name chosen at random. But the clerk's curiosity was not lively enough to survive. "Wait outside if you want to catch him coming in," he said, scratching his torso with both hands. He waited. Scattered in little groups in the stone-paved courtyard flanked by forbidding buildings, agents in uniform and inspectors in civilian clothes blew through their noses and mopped the backs of their necks. The sun poured down on their cloth caps, on their felt hats, and dashed their good humor —a liquefied sun in an incandescent chalk-colored sky. Reflected on the pavement, on the façades pierced with narrow windows like gun ports, dense and stagnant, the light stirred itself up and crackled underfoot with the sound of burning straw. Everything was calm and flat and already charred in expectation of the sirocco. Their mean, weary masks dissolving in the intense reflection, one or the other of the policemen went out through the huge portal, setting forth on some mortal errand. A year earlier, on the mathematical day of the summer solstice, when with the collusion of the sun the Panzers of the Wehrmacht had spilled out over the land of the Soviets, a raid by all the police forces of Europe had fallen on everyone of Russian birth. He was among those rounded up, several hundreds of them herded into this same courtyard, each with his hands

full of papers, each paper a colic since before the crimeless age when they were foetuses. Profiles and accents of Moscow and Kharkov, of Kiev and Leningrad—how violently they had reawakened his homesickness! He saw himself gamboling on the sharp snow of the Solovetsky islands, unearthing the moss with the blade of a knife, sucking the sedge like a reindeer's fawn. Terror of the days without brightness, of the nights without shadow, the first grouse he had taken with a slingshot. Winters of death, summers of death in the Kola Peninsula. Earth of quartz, leprous swamps, willows where woodcocks, more elusive than phantoms, built their nests. Tasteless mulberries, five-year hunger, amber-colored raspberries, the peaks of Oumptek and Louyavrot stuck in the sky, May flies in myriads feeding on human flesh, lice and lice. At Kem on the White Sea he forgot his Russian, learned the dialect of the Laplanders—a mixture of Mordvinian and Finnish. At Krasnoyarsk he had typhus, at Tobolsk he was carried away on the Irtish at the time of the spring floods, at Yeniseisk he read the *Origins of the State*. He was thirteen when he began to take part in political discussions, fourteen when he went on a hunger strike in sympathy with sixty-seven inmates of the Orel prison. No, the Russians rounded up on June 22, 1941, were not like those among whom he had done his apprenticeship in the deportation areas. Observing that crowd, listening to its talk, he was surprised to feel it so foreign, so completely incomprehensible. Were these, then, the representatives of that humanity which, he had heard, had fled the October Revolution, with gold pieces sewed in their anuses, precious stones cemented under their teeth, and their skin—a tenacious skin which weathered every fever of acclimation? And if they had come out without gold or diamonds, if cowardice did not eat away the whites of their eyes . . . Their dreams, their nightmares, seemed to him interchangeable, without sex, without soul. He did not understand how one could live as one practices a profession, or die as one goes to the privy—"because you must." Out of each trace incrusted in the screen of his infancy a certainty had come to him, so elementary and so overwhelming that it called for no demonstration: life—he meant the difficult days, the difficult bread and struggle and ideas —creates and accumulates a debt which binds. He had only contempt for a morality of deserters, of fraudulent bankrupts in search of a settlement. But his father . . . He was not sure that he loved his father; that he still loved him—thinking reverently, almost with devotion, of filial love as it was in Russia. For some time past the professorial mannerisms, the imperturbable superiority, the very voice of his father had been rubbing him the wrong way. He found it hard to pardon his father for exposing himself to facile criticism—so facile that, to give itself substance, it seemed forced to resort to malevolence. But whether one loved him or not, the fact remained that his broad shoulders carried a past of uninterrupted combat, of unbreakable rectitude, which made him a giant. He had made no easy arrangements with heaven, he had not acquitted his debt the way others resign themselves to physiological necessities. Right here, in this

very courtyard, among a thousand Russians bent double under fear, he had held himself calm and invulnerable—almost too invulnerable. "Your father . . . he's not satisfied with becoming an empiricist, not satisfied to slur the facts and twist their necks until they fit into the formula which he calls 'objective experience,' and which I would be tempted to call 'subjective conjunctivitis.' Even in the domain of ideas he practices a curious transposition from the discursive plane to the plane of the immediate." It had taken the Russian war, the Russian roundup, his father's stocky silhouette standing out in clear relief against the background of a thousand bug-bitten Russians, to make him accept this view of Marc Laverne's, the meaning of which had at first escaped him. It was true: his father had come to label as contrary to common sense any point of doctrine, any theoretical analysis, once their conclusions did not fit in with a norm of immediate action: and at the same time he labeled every action and premise of action as pure and simple recklessness, and banished it as anathema. Henceforth the sole measure by which he judged a thing or an idea "possible" or "objective" was his own capacity—or incapacity—to absorb the shock of it without bending the knee. To him, although he might be unaware of it, not bending had become an ethic, a concept in itself. Espinasse was aware of it; in his voice from beyond the grave he had said, "You don't want the old man to trip up, eh? You don't, do you, go on, say so! Because if he got hit hard just once, now, dried out the way he is, he'd snap like a twig."

Noon went by, and the air became greasy and sweet. At two o'clock the sky was yellowed, and looked like a smear of tepid honey. It was close to three when a column of torrid air swept into the courtyard. It came from above, without warning, spiraling like a twist bit. In a quarter of a second it made a round of the yard, then went off as it had come, sucking up cloth caps and felt hats. Agents and inspectors were so astounded that they stood with their mouths open, watching their hats fall back on their noses. A calm ensued, a state of absence and nothingness, with a red stone-dust hanging in the opaque light. For a minute he felt that his entrails were being drawn out of him, were hurling themselves upward in disorder and pushing against the inner surface of his eardrums. He slapped his ears once, then again, then thrust his thumbs into them. The policemen, fearing to vomit their guts in broad daylight, disappeared without a trace. It took the dust an endless time to settle, and the pavement was smooth and bulging. The light had the weight and the opacity and the perfume of honey, it crushed the eyes and the lungs. Some months earlier, in March of this year, when he had been brought before Espinasse by two flies—they always go in pairs, whether in France or in Cornwall or in Bukeev—he happened to have a small pot of honey in his hand. He wanted to throw it at their feet and make them jump. A grenade stuffed with honey and red stone-dust. He could see their faces yet—faces of traveling salesmen who like to truss the hotel maids, and to boast about it. It happened in the Place de l'Opéra, at dusk. "Come along with us, pretty boy, some-

one wants to talk to you," boomed one of the flies; and as he made as if to halt, with a hint of violence in the stiffening of his arms, the two policemen rounded their lips in protest—a whistle of appreciation on their pasty lips. "Listen, dollface," said the same one, "what have you got against that pretty puss of yours that you want to get it pushed in? You don't look as dumb as that, now. . . ." His colleague gave vent to an onomatopoeia, in a couple of flies there's always one that booms and one that bumbles, so the other cop essayed an onomatopoeia, at the same time giving him a light rap on the back of the neck with his index finger. They went on foot from the Boulevard des Italiens to the Rue des Saussaies. At the end of a maze of corridors, in a room on the fourth floor, behind a desk adorned with a plaster statuette of a hunting dog with his tail in the air and a quail in his mouth, ponderously seated in a reddish wood chair, Espinasse looked like a bored Buddha. "What are you doing in Paris when you're supposed to be in Marseilles?" he said, gruff and indifferent. He took a cigarette out of a packet which stood upright on the table, lighted it from the butt which was smoking in his fingers, his eyes heavy under their tired lids. "What's that you've got there?" he asked, the cigarette in the middle of his lip, his eye fixed on the package which contained the honey. "A delayed-action bomb," Youra said, following the smoke which was raveling out in thin tendrils under the inspector's nose. Espinasse said, "Huh," put his hand to his shaven neck, and stretched, making his flesh creak. "Did Laverne teach you to crack back like that?" "Laverne? What Laverne?" he said, surprised at making himself look dull-witted as a back-country boy. Espinasse reached his hand across the table to take the package. "Yes indeed, what Laverne?" he concurred in a deep voice. He tested the resistance of the jar with his fingers, unhurriedly, with a sort of method in the working of his knuckles that made them resemble cams. "So you've grown to be a big boy since the last time, in '37," he said, untying the package. "Maybe I've grown, but it hasn't made you any younger," he retorted, watching the inspector's thumb press on the cover of the jar. "On the contrary, it's . . ." He had started to say "it's shriveled you up," but stopped himself. A fit of hatred seized him against this man who was opening drawers, rummaging through the papers, taking out a tin spoon. "I paid a hundred and twenty francs for that," he said, seeing the tin spoon dip into the granular surface of the honey. "Expensive," said Espinasse, scraping the bottom of the spoon on the rim of the jar. "Then leave it alone," he said, hating him, longing to hurl insults at him—leave it alone, you old bag, you old hag, you old son of a bitch. "Keep your mouth shut, you'll say something you shouldn't," Espinasse grumbled, burying the spoon in his mouth. Working his jaws as if he were crushing nuts, he glanced over the piece of newspaper in which the pot had been wrapped. His broad face, tinged with the ugly pallor of the dyspeptic, expressed nothing but boredom and sleepiness. "Here, read this, it'll give you something to think about," he said, taking some more honey. He pushed across the table a typewritten sheet on which the letterhead was

printed in Gothic letters and which bore stamps with the swastika: the letter, addressed to the Ministry of the Interior, Bureau of Suppression of Anti-national Activities, written in a laconic French abounding in infinitives, called for a documented report on one Ivan Gavrilovitch Stepanoff, born in 1889, native of Smolensk, Russia, Bolshevik. "It's a forgery," he said offhand, out of his hatred for this man who enjoyed other people's honey. Espinasse shook his head in a calm, completely convincing no. He wiped his mouth, wiped the spoon, replaced the cover on the jar, and for the first time his eyes looked like eyes that could see. "The old man better be on the watch," he said, lighting a cigarette. "The Germans are after him."

It was about four in the afternoon when he went back to the bare room which smelled of moths. The clerk behind the desk which smelled of the morgue scratched his torso, then shouted that he wasn't the inspector's nurse *nom de Dieu*. His beard had grown, a beard for dog days and bad temper, and he shouted, *"Nom de Dieu,* wait in the yard if you want to catch him!" In the courtyard the sirocco was stirring a sirupy, sticky air which clung to the skin and made it slimy. He sought the shade of the great portal which led out of the yard, but his teeth began to chatter and he had to return to the yellow sun, to the stringy air which stuck to the mucous membranes. His chattering teeth, and the rumble at the base of his skull—maybe it was hunger. Or the thought of his father. If they were going to torture him . . . Espinasse had said that he would not stand up under it. That he would snap like a twig. Saying this, he had broken a pencil. With one hand. By pressing his thumb on it. With a flash of yellow paint rocketing across the table, and the sound of a spark jumping. "Listen, sonny . . . Your father doesn't interest me. One of these days he'll sail for America, and there he'll write his memoirs. That's the tradition. They begin by trying to change the world, they end up by writing their memoirs. Provided the Germans let him go. Maybe they'll let him, maybe they won't. The one that interests me is Laverne. Keep quiet when you're being spoken to. I don't want the Germans to get him. Your father I don't care about: Laverne, I do. But he's acting like a fool. You all act like fools. You too, for instance. You think you're smart, and you're nothing but a ninny. Try to get what I'm saying, anyway. Laverne will fall on his face one of these days. He's surer on his feet than you are, but he'll fall on his face. It always happens when you're playing that game." "No kidding?" he interrupted, suddenly ill at ease. Espinasse put his thumbs together and went "huh" through his nose. "You see what a ninny you are. It would get me sore if the Gestapo picked up Laverne and made mincemeat out of him. As long as I can keep track of what he's up to, there's a chance I can get him out the day the Germans set a trap for him. So look, we'll make a bargain. You will keep me posted. Don't start sputtering. I know more about him than you do, and you spend all your time drinking in his words. But some details might escape me. Nothing I learn from you will be used against any of you. All I'll do with it, in case

of necessity, is to keep your pal out of trouble. In exchange, you will be warned if ever the Germans decide to arrest your father. I think I'll know about it in time. Time enough for him to get out of town if necessary. Now you can beat it." "And you hope I'll get mixed up in your dirty racket? You hope to turn me into a dick like yourself! . . ." He leaned over the distance which lay between him and the inspector, feeling his skin bristle, and a desire to strike and be struck. Espinasse went "huh," and without separating his thumbs, apparently without moving at all, drove the whole weight of the desk into Youra's middle. He doubled up, with a pain in his testicles which spread through his entrails and came out of his eyes. The inspector lighted a cigarette. "I'll see you again in a week," he said. "You'll make your first report. It'll be for Laverne's good, that's a promise. For the old man's too. You're a ninny, but maybe you'll understand. And if you don't, your father will take the rap. I'm not joking. Now you can beat it."

At six o'clock the sky turned the color of white lead. The air was the consistency of scum, it plugged the pores and made the skin ferment. Pursued by his itch, the clerk who resembled an ill-bathed corpse crossed the courtyard with flagging steps and disappeared through the portal. At eight o'clock a swarm of uniformed police invaded the court of the Evêché, belts loose and tunics unbuttoned. Their faces were crusted with the red dust, it turned their eyeballs inside out, and they plucked at the cloth of their trousers, which clung to the meat of their thighs and buffed off the hair. At nine o'clock he went out on the street, walked along the parapet in the direction of the Pont Transbordeur, then bore to his right and went down toward the breakwater. He felt empty and entirely without mass, and a thin stream of watery blood trickled through his drained and hollow body. Lying flat on his back between two blocks of concrete, he heard the low scrabbling of the crabs, the low effervescence of the foam, and he was at peace and without regret. All was peaceful and painful in his weightless body, weightless his memory with the salt taste of the night on his eyelids. He had left the honey on the inspector's desk and gone out, holding his testicles through the pockets of his trousers. It took him three days to get back to Marseilles, and all that time he kept one hand or the other in his trousers pocket, but when he reached home Yvonne told him that their exit visas had just been granted and that she expected to go to Vichy for Ivan's visa—and he said nothing. Yes, he did: he insulted his father. He had come to him, saying, "I'm just back from the other zone, and I have something to tell you," and his father broke in, "I might have known, you disappear just when your visa comes, lucky they didn't summon you to the Prefecture," and all he could say was an impertinence—"Go hide somewhere, you make me sick." His father's eyes became very narrow behind their convex glasses, very thin his compressed lips, and when he finally spoke the timbre of his voice was unbearably shrill. "It's quite possible that you have good reason to be dissatisfied with yourself, but you certainly have no reason for getting hysterical." "What

do you know about it?" he retorted. "What do you know about any reasons that disagree with your own?" He felt Yvonne's hand on his shoulder. "You're worn out, Youra dear," she said. Her fingers brushed lightly over his neck, and her voice was simple and convincing. "Take a rest, won't you? We're just going out, and you'll have lots of time for a good nap." He allowed himself to be led to the bed, and it seemed to him that Yvonne had knelt to unlace his shoes. It was well into the night when he awoke. It took him a long time to grasp the fact that Yvonne was dozing in the one armchair, and that his father, with a raincoat over him, was sleeping on the floor at the foot of a cupboard. He slid off the bed, felt around for his shoes, turned the doorknob gently. They did not wake up. He squatted on the stairs to wait for dawn, feeling inwardly that sleep had not dulled his appetite for violence. The dawn was long in climbing the steps of the black staircase. The light had carried off the last shadows of the night when he set out for the suburbs. He made the journey on foot. He knocked patiently, first at the door, then on the pane of the window, with gentle repeated taps, until his finger struck the face of Anne Marie, pressed against the glass. She took him by the hand, sat him down beside her on the unmade bed. A lingering vestige of dream attenuated the beginnings of fear in her wide eyes. "Marc? . . ." she asked, holding his hand in hers. "Has something happened to Marc?" It was still half dark in the room, and Anne Marie's heavy hair smelled of the damp warmth of sleep. He shook his head, trying not to look at her breasts, seeing only her breasts through the fabric of her pajamas. She relaxed, and then all at once she hugged him tightly and kissed him, laughter on her breasts with the points so hard that he felt their touch. He did not return her kiss. "I dreamed that they were torturing Marc," said Anne Marie. "Just when you knocked." Just when he knocked. "When I saw you at the window you scared me. Marc is not in Marseilles. He left two days ago. I thought maybe he had gone to meet you, and that you were back alone because they had caught him. You had such a face. Now it's gone a little bit." She said it was gone a little bit. "What do you mean, 'it'?" he asked, trying not to look at her breasts. "Your face," she said. "It looked like a blotter. But that's from the glass. It's such cheap stuff, that glass, it distorts everything. It's funny how dreams coincide with a fall or a noise." She held his hand as she talked. Her body had the odor of sheep's milk. "I'm thirsty," he said. "Make us some coffee. Or water." She had to be the one to let go of his hand, and to go away with her hair with her throat polished with wild milk. "I could hear him screaming. I never thought Marc could scream." Her voice came in from the kitchen, borne on a noise of dishes and water. "I couldn't see him, I only knew they were torturing him behind a wall. He screamed at intervals, a long scream and a short silence, then a scream again, like this." She paused, as if to fill herself with screams and silence. "Like this," she repeated. He waited to hear how, but there was no demonstration. "One can scream for joy," he said. It was not what he had meant to say. "No, not

those screams," she said. She came to the door between the kitchen and the bedroom, nude under the cotton pajamas, more passionate than violence. "Not like in my dream." "Scream with ecstasy," he said. "If you're ashamed to scream, you're ashamed to live. It's the same thing." Maybe that was what he had meant to say. "Even if it's behind a wall?" she asked. "Behind a concrete wall? Looking at concrete faces?" "Even if it's in a coffin," he said, looking at her breasts in the window that distorted everything. "In Russia we were in a coffin. When a man screams, he's still struggling. And struggling is . . . is never silence." It was not exactly what he meant to say. "You know, maybe you're right," she said. "When one has no hope, one doesn't scream. That's why." She returned to the kitchen, her voice reached him through the noise of water in the sink. "I know they'll catch him. That's why I never thought that he could scream. Because there'll be no hope then. Come and have your coffee. You know, when he's not here, I love to come and stay here. I sit in a corner and I think. I drink out of his cups, I read his books. I decipher his annotations in the margins, then I try to reconstruct the working of his mind. I put on his pajamas, I sleep in his bed. It's my way of watching over him." He could not drink his coffee. He kept one hand in his trousers pocket, and the coffee refused to go down. "Didn't you know he was away?" she asked. He looked at her, not understanding at first, shaking his head, then he closed his eyes. She reached for his hand, covered it with her own. "I believe you," she said. "I beg your pardon." She took away her hand. "I'm going to get dressed. Drink your coffee." He waited until she had gone into the bedroom, then put his head under the faucet. The water spurted into his eyes and ears, and mingled with the voice of Anne Marie. She said it was late. She asked if he intended to go to the Suc to work. They took the car and went to the Suc to work. On the platform of the car the men had eyes only for the breasts of the vestal, and the veins stood out on their foreheads.

It was about eight in the morning when he went back to the Evêché. Clumps of policemen were standing here and there in the courtyard. Some were flexing their legs, rather like acrobats at the entrance to the arena. Some straddled their bikes and rode off in pairs. With their restless eyes under their felt hats, the inspectors in plain clothes looked like drug peddlers on the qui vive. In the room which smelled of mange, the clerk with the epidermis sprinkled with islets of pimples was relieving his itch by rubbing his knuckles against the stiff hair of his beard. "So you didn't find the inspector?" he said, gnawing his fingers. "No, he didn't come yesterday. Will he come today?" There was a rumpled newspaper on the catafalque, with a chunk of bread and an end of sausage on it. "Today, today, what is today?" said the clerk. He reached out his hand toward his lunch, but changed his mind and thrust it quickly between his shirt and his torso. "*Nom de Dieu,* I don't nurse the inspector!" he shouted, scratching himself. "Wait outside if you want to catch him!" He waited.

The sky had not recovered the colors of a sky, it was low-ceilinged, with great slabs of motionless slate. He wondered if he was hungry. He leaned his back against the wall, stiffening his knees to keep them from bending. He examined the space at his feet, it would have been good to sit down, but there were policemen present, fanning themselves with their caps and squinting at the sky, and he knew instinctively that policemen don't like people squatting before their eyes. He sought to make himself more comfortable against the wall, wondering how long he had known that he did not love his father. Perhaps it dated from the other time in June, when the Panzers had fanned out on the Russian steppes. On account of his calm, his decisive superiority, his razor-edge smile among the Russians who were so down in the mouth that it made them limp. On account of nothing. Because he thought he had perceived that his father was almost full of himself. Because he had the feeling that his father was very close to emitting the fumes of pride. Perhaps, too, it went back further than the Russian roundup, to the time he caught his father stealing a look at Anne Marie's petticoats, when she had crossed her legs a little high. Perhaps, again, it dated only from his return from Paris, when he had carried his pain through the pockets of his trousers and insulted his father for threatening him with a possible summons to the Prefecture. But he would have been unable to specify the day, to isolate the fact, it was like a vague and persistent malaise which can't be localized, like the trembling of his knees now although he wasn't hungry. He changed his place, went and leaned against the same wall a little farther on. The policemen were beginning to undo their buttons and puff through their lips, and in the sky the slabs of slate had come a little lower toward the roofs. He recalled the day at the Suc. When they got off the car Anne Marie dragged him into the bistro on the corner, insisting that he drink a cup of coffee. They did not work in the same team, and they did not meet coming out. In the evening Yvonne came to see him. She talked of one thing and another, of the arrogance of the employees at the American consulate, of the trip she was planning to Vichy, but he avoided any mention of the scene with his father, and she had to go away empty-handed. To tell of his "affair" with Espinasse no longer made any sense: he would not have been able to explain why he had not spoken of it sooner, and even if he had found the necessary words, they would not have understood. He would have to wait for Marc. He met Anne Marie at the Suc, but did not go out to see her. If she took his hand again . . . If she asked his pardon again because she trusted him . . . She did not know where Marc was. He had not questioned her; she had told him herself, fearful because Marc's absence was longer than she had expected. Some days later, however, he saw a transfigured Anne Marie: she had had a letter. She came to tell him about it, and her excitement set her cheeks afire. He did not ask what Marc had written, and although she told him nothing, he knew that Marc had made her happy. After work they went to his place and made tea. Anne Marie could not sit still; she did not succeed in quelling her high spirits,

and left him at the end of a half hour, her tea still untouched. He saw her through the window, her hair blowing in the wind. That same evening, when he was already in bed, Inspector Espinasse paid him a visit. It was exactly a week after their "interview" in Paris.

Noon had already struck when the thunder tried to break through the sky of slate above the roofs of the Evêché. It made an enormous smashing sound, failed to dislodge the smallest flake in the vault of shale, then disappeared by degrees in the depths of a maze of echoing tiers and galleries. Some policemen had gone out, others had replaced them. A small van full of prisoners arrived, then the thunder came again, then, for a second, there was an odor of seaweed. He changed his place, went and leaned a little farther away. His knees no longer trembled, and he was not hungry. He watched the condensation lacquer the stone, the prisoners rush forward as their names were called, he pictured Inspector Espinasse. He thought at first of not opening the door, then merely made him wait outside. The inspector picked out a chair, propped himself in a corner of the room, lighted a cigarette. The soft music of a radio came in from somewhere, like the meowing of a cat. "It's fun making big people cool their heels," said Espinasse, his voice issuing from a tunnel. He turned a weary eye over the room, with the cigarette in the middle of his lip and his hat on his head. He looked at the night table and the cups and the teapot. "Don't you wash your dishes before you go to bed?" he asked. He reached out and picked up one of the cups, sniffed at it, dropped in the ashes of his cigarette. He seemed endowed with the ability to reach things without moving. "So she was so happy she didn't drink her tea!" There was a silence filled by the radio, by the passing of the seconds, suddenly very rapid on the face of the alarm clock. He kept his eyes on the inspector, trying to measure the effort it would take to kill him. "No, no," said the inspector, "we made a bargain, and you'll live up to it." He spoke in his usual voice, drawling and neutral. "Look, you can't tell me a thing about Laverne. Not yet, this time. The next time, yes. When he gets back. I told you: I've got to know what he's up to. You're a ninny, but maybe you'll understand. He's acting like a fool. He wrote the kid a letter. She told you that, didn't she?" He lighted a cigarette from the stub of the first one. "You're a hero, that's understood. Now listen to me, young Stepanoff. I'm interested in your Laverne. I don't wish him any harm. I don't ask you to believe me. I tell you to listen to me. And to obey. He wrote her, the smart guy. Under a false name, to a false address. I intercepted the letter. He's lucky it was me. A romantic letter. A letter you write when you're satisfied. When you've pulled off a good deal. You didn't know he had gone to do a job? Well, I'm telling you. A job in Switzerland, or at the Swiss frontier. I may be wrong, but I'd be surprised. A letter posted in Annecy, in which he talks about women going to the pump. Do you see, I give you my sources. We made a bargain, so I play square. You'll play square too. We've got to. Keep quiet and try to understand. If I had known ahead of time where he was going, I might have stopped him. Or

I might not have. I would have kept my eye on him." He stood up, with a sound of squashing flesh. "The Germans have their eye on the old man," he said. He looked taller, more powerful, under the low ceiling of the room. "Drop him a hint to stay under cover. But he stays under cover anyway. If I learn that they're thinking of taking him out of circulation, you'll get warning. It's in our agreement. I'll see you next week." All the boredom of the world weighed on his indestructible shoulders. He went through the door and closed it behind him slowly. There was a thumping in the dark stairway, then steps along the silence.

The thunder lasted all afternoon, continuing its frenzied efforts to pierce the sky. Between four and five o'clock there were a few scattered drops of rain. They came down one following the other, swollen by the humidity of the air, then flattened themselves on the ground with a brief splash. The prisoners were loaded back into the van. It skidded in starting, and wheeled through the gate in the grand manner. Some policemen plucked at their trousers, others swabbed their necks. He thought of changing his place but could not decide. The day after the inspector's visit he did not go to the Suc. He slept late, a heavy sleep that gave him no rest. At eleven o'clock he settled himself on the terrace of a café facing the hotel where Yvonne and his father had their room. He saw them come out at lunchtime. They strolled tranquilly along toward the Old Port. He followed them on the opposite sidewalk. He left them at the entrance to the Bon Aloi, Madame Babayû proprietor: from the moment they left the hotel a man in double-breasted coat and trousers that were too short had tracked them step for step. He returned to the café, ordered a lemon soda. So Espinasse had told the truth. If his father was really being tracked by the Gestapo, what Espinasse had said was true. He could not get this thought out of his head. It kept coming back, tenacious, monotonous. But was he playing square? He had said that he didn't care whether the Gestapo took in the old man, but was he playing square? He ordered another lemon soda. And if Espinasse was playing for Marc. Why, what had Marc done to him, what did he want to do to Marc? Espinasse and Marc. But if he didn't want anything. If he was preparing himself a set of alibis, for afterward, for when he'd have to answer for fornicating with the Gestapo. But no, in that case he would have bet on some society guy who was caught in the Resistance. And if he was playing a double game, his big belly stuffed with Degaullist secrets, his oceanic head crammed with Nazi mysteries, and if he ransomed one, beheaded the next, assisted the third—according to the haggard rhythm of madness. He drank soda after soda, thinking with a haste that made him stumble, feeling very clearly that he was going over to Espinasse's side. Then he remembered Orel—the night, he is crouching in the mud of the road a few steps from the prison, the men in the prison are in the twenty-second day of their fast, the creamy voice of the OGPU officer—nou nou what would you say to a glass of vodka with caviar *sinichka* with caviar, his OGPU voice deeply moved—nou get up that's enough of that three days of that is

enough *pareniok* eh you can go on strike when you get big, his OGPU voice stirred to the depths—nou nou a swig of vodotchka do it for me *rebionok* for me for Holy Mother Russia, his OGPU voice obscene on a level with the mud with the night with a hundred thousand children dead and due to die—nou nou some caviar. So then Espinasse and Marc, why not Espinasse and Marc like himself at fourteen in the mud of Orel across from the prison with his father in the prison and the OGPU man drunk —to every pack its softhearted bloodhound, to every corrida its sentimental picador, and Marc Marc to feed the cop's hiccoughs the day the cop feels low, the night the cop is with the wenches.

Toward seven o'clock the vault of shale came down so low that the dark came with it. The thunder had not abandoned hope of punching a hole in the sky. There were flashes in sheets and rumblings in cascades and shocks in return. The humidity could be gathered in the hollow of the hand. The courtyard of the Evêché was deserted. There was a short circuit which lasted a long time. The gleam of the lightning discovered bunches of policemen huddled inside the buildings. They pressed to the windows and looked at the sky with eyes of innocence. It was about eight o'clock when he went out through the great portal. He took the same road as the evening before, going forward with the same light step. He was not hungry and he was without strength. He found his place amid the blocks of concrete, at the extreme end of the breakwater. There was a brief panic among the crabs when he lay down. The rain began shortly after and it lasted through the night.

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ALTHOUGH THE IDEAS CALLED ABSTRACT WERE NOT the favorite pastime of Lieutenant Colonel Rudolf Francke, commanding officer of the Kommandantur of Breuil-sur-Seine, it was not unusual for him to ponder the complex relations of the fraction to the unit, of the part and the whole, the admirable concordance of which he had discovered: each and every manifestation of our activities is the linear product, result, and sum of an infinite number of points. At one time he had cherished the idea of bringing together the fruit of his reflections in a finished whole, exactly as points fall into place along a straight line—to range them in a series of chapters, the first of which would be entitled "The Unit-Fraction and the Idea of the Whole," and the ensemble of which would constitute a work of moral science. But that was years ago, and he thought of it now only with a sort of melancholy pleasure, as when one brings to life the memory of one's early ambitions, already remote enough to belong to the reliquary in which our bereavements are enshrined. Yet the abstract ideas of the commanding officer of the Kommandantur, though kept under cover, continued to live on in some recess of his being, whence, the occasion aiding, they could emerge like a flash of lightning. One such occasion presented itself at Breuil-sur-Seine on a night in October, borne on the wings of an act of sabotage by dynamite.

In Breuil-sur-Seine it had been a quiet war for the army of occupation. Quiet and bucolic. Officers and men had lived in rustic peace, far from Russia and glory, amid a flutter of minor activities which called neither for Iron Crosses nor for metaphysical thinking. As a result the soldiers forgot to grease their boots and the officers to button their blouses after meals, and all alike went in for fishing in the stream and napping in the daisies. Then came the dynamiting at the locomotive depot and the damaging of the bridge on the Paris line, and the commanding officer of the Kommandantur was well satisfied. The affair gave promise of worry and headaches, already he had spent the greater part of the night stalking over the scene of the sabotage with investigators from the Gestapo and the gendarmerie, he was afraid he had even caught a cold, but he was well satisfied. Indeed, a charge of dynamite was just the thing to stir up spirit

and revive the sense of duty. It was a trifle, obviously, in relation to eternity, but Rudolf Francke was not forgetting that eternity is made up of small things put end to end in an always necessary order. The more he thought of it, the more convinced he was that, in the cortege of the little things which make the big things, no single one should be treated lightly. The greasing of a pair of boots, the buttoning of a button—why, these had a place in the great indivisible whole! Of course there was a hierarchy among the links—he meant the points—an inequality of value as it were, but only the ignorant could regard as negligible the importance of the lesser points in the linear sum. Despise them, perhaps. Neglect them, never. He thought of the classic example of the Axis: the Axis, a masterpiece, an accomplished Whole, was nevertheless constellated with lesser points: Italians, Japanese, Magyars, other still lesser Slovaks. . . . Furthermore, this principle was well known to the moralists and strategists, for Clausewitz himself had noted it: in a perfect assemblage the least detail deserves special attention. Hence he was well satisfied with the dynamiting. Besides, the consequences had not been slow in making themselves felt. He had just directed his orderly to get the mayor on the phone, and the orderly had executed his entrance-exit in a manner more polished than usual. His bearing, the gleam of his boots, his eye fixed on infinity, his *"Ja wohl, Herr Oberstleutnant!"* were simply impeccable; so impeccable, in fact, that the blond thatch which hung over the soldier's ears had barely trembled.

The orderly made a new entrance, delivered his report, about-faced, and executed an exit as perfect as the last one. No doubt about it, the points were returning to their places in the necessary alignment of things. "Monsieur le Maire wishes respectfully to inform the Herr Oberstleutnant that he is in conference with the commander of the gendarmes," the orderly had said in one breath. "Unless the Herr Oberstleutnant's call is one of extreme urgency, Monsieur le Maire asks permission to call the Herr Oberstleutnant in a quarter of an hour." This orderly spoke well, he put a point of distinction in his manner. The Oberstleutnant stretched his legs under the desk, yawned, his yawn ending in a sigh. A quarter of an hour was all right. The officers of the Gestapo had left only a moment ago, it would take them a good hour to shave and brush their hair. He yawned a bit more, thinking indulgently of Jerome Davy, the mayor of Breuil-sur-Seine. Old Jerome, in conference with the commander of the gendarmes . . . He snapped his head upward skeptically. Skeptically and sympathetically. What a funk he must be in over there, in his office in the *mairie,* with its festooned ceiling. He had a horror of responsibilities, a distaste for decisions, for which Rudolf Francke could find no satisfactory explanation. Was there anything better in the world than a post of command? It was to win supreme command that Germany was waging war. Davy should have understood this, since he understood the doctrine of collaboration—should have seen that, having been invested with authority, he had the honor to share in the realization of a great work. He must

speak to him about it, and show him how, well, let's say inelegant, this recalcitrance was in a former colonial administrator who had not hesitated to turn in his resignation as a protest against the communism of the Popular Front. He could take the liberty of saying these things to him. *Amitié oblige*. He had taken what amounted to a liking for him and his family in the seven months he had been their guest, and he did not doubt that it was mutual. Davy was a sensitive, intelligent man, a bit stubborn perhaps, but full of good, healthy intentions and excellent stories about Equatorial Africa. In the evening, when Madame and Mademoiselle Davy had retired to their rooms, he sometimes smoked a cigar in Jerome's company and listened to him talk of Dahomey or Upper Volta. He drew up his legs and rubbed the inside of his thigh: the night spent climbing embankments had broken his back and twisted his limbs. "Wishes respectfully to inform the Herr Oberstleutnant . . ." The old colonial! When they talked Africa they addressed each other as "my dear fellow" or simply by their first names, but official communications naturally demanded a certain degree of formality. Usually there was a bottle to sustain interest, preferably cognac or kirsch, and when he had difficulty understanding a word, they consulted the dictionary together for its meaning in German. Jerome could hardly be said to have the physique of an "African," that is, of an empire builder, he more closely resembled a country doctor, or one of those provincial French notaries who collect stock certificates as others collect postage stamps, and yet from Bizerte to the Cape of Good Hope the Black Continent held no secrets for him. His house was a small museum of African masks, arms, and ivories, of which a large proportion belonged to the sacred patrimony of the German nation, since Jerome himself admitted that certain pieces came from Togoland, and the Cameroons, and Kionga—pure Germanic lands. He put his legs back under the desk, took his chin in his hand, looked out the window. Funny country, France. He was glad to be there. France excited him, when he thought about her. At first she had been antipathetic to him, he had even thought of having himself changed to Denmark or Norway, Nordic countries with a population which understands you and lets you understand it, and then all of a sudden no, he preferred France. This dated from his arrival in Breuil-sur-Seine, and his inclusion in the Davy household. At that time he shared the belief commonly accepted in the German army, namely that the French were a lot of well-educated dirty bastards: they sold you their rubbish for good money, made room for you with venomous politeness, never looked you in the eye, and as for making friends it was as easy as taking Moscow. He reached for a tin box, chose a cigar with care. Well, it was open to question. Yes, very much open to question. Or else times had changed so much since 1940 that the French were no longer like themselves. To begin with, they sold you nothing. Or almost. For instance, he had to import these cigars from Holland. Next, they did not often make room for you. In the cafés, the restaurants, the movie houses, they kept their seats until you got tired of waiting and

went elsewhere, and elsewhere it was the same thing. Next, they looked you straight in the eye, although with the expression of a blind man, as if you were transparent or null and void. Next, it was not so impossible to make friends. He scratched his shoulder blades against the back of the chair, lighted his cigar. Those who said of the French that they were bastards to the third power were rehashing the catchwords of the barracks; or else they wanted to sleep with French women, and hadn't succeeded. He had succeeded, but that wasn't why he felt a Francophile, so to speak. After all, he was a soldier by trade, and as such he liked to find resistance in an adversary. It was his business as a soldier to conquer, and the enemy's business not to let himself be conquered. The French, obviously, were trying not to give in too easily. The others too, for that matter, but he knew nothing of the others. He had not been in on the Polish campaign, and as for the one in Russia, he could only hope not to get in on it. In short, he did not dislike France. An act of sabotage by dynamite, or even several of them, would not change his feelings. Rather the other way about, seeing that such incidents made things more linear. The amusement would cost the municipality of Breuil-sur-Seine a batch of hostages, a fine of a small million francs, and when the saboteurs were caught they would get their hides punctured. He blew the smoke of his cigar out the window, and he felt at home; quite at home, as if Monsieur le Maire Jerome Davy had inserted his name in the birth register of Breuil-sur-Seine. There was something of that, a sort of comforting sensation of citizenship to which his name, Francke, gave a touch of orthodoxy, and there was also, yes, the fact that France reminded him of a woman to whom you have given a good beating and who lifts up her head and binds her wounds while you look at her. What he would have liked, liked truly and without reservation, would be to become her Protector.

The orderly made a brilliant entrance, announcing Monsieur le Maire on the phone. Jerome Davy heard Lieutenant Colonel Rudolf Francke inquire after his health, returned the courtesy, took note that he was to come to the Kommandantur for an interview with the gentlemen from the capital. Monsieur le Maire of Breuil-sur-Seine hung up and sat quietly, his hands spread flat in front of him, his head bent forward.—In a half hour with the gentlemen from . . . He wondered what disagreeable experience the euphemism "interview" disguised. The prospect of being "interviewed" again by the gentlemen was not inspiring. He found their company tiresome, their methods exhausting. They spoke loud enough to stun a deaf man, understood not a word of French, conducted their investigation on foot—and at a frenzied pace. A public calamity, this bomb in Breuil-sur-Seine. He was surprised that it had to be Breuil-sur-Seine. In his town there were neither mines nor factories, nothing but a locomotive repair shop, and the dam, of course. He shivered at the thought of the dam. Ah, surely the saboteurs wouldn't dare: they would shrink from the enormity of the crime. That would be the end of Breuil-sur-Seine. He saw the waters rolling over the Place du Maréchal Pétain,

inundating the *mairie,* carrying away the soldiers' monument, swallowing up his African collection. . . . Ah no, they were capable of anything with their bolshevistic "scorched earth" tactics. He felt weary, and old before his time. Another night like the last and he would be fit for the hospital. The hospital, in fact, might be a solution. He took his hands off the table and thrust them into his coat pockets. It was shameful to have such thoughts. He had only to remember the Marshal, older than he by twenty years. He looked at the Marshal, felt twenty years younger.—A little energy, a little energy, he thought, taking his hands out of his pockets. What he had to do was to ask for a reinforced guard on the dam. Anyhow, each one had his own calvary in this France of ours. When all was said and done he had no regrets, except that he had been appointed mayor. Things might have been better, for him personally at least, he could have lived on his stocks and his retirement income, far from political and administrative ambitions, while he waited for peace and the new France; or, on the other hand, they could have been worse, in spite of all his worries—his son Philippe a prisoner, his son Georges gone without leaving an address, the disturbing reappearance of his daughter-in-law Marianne, who he had hoped was dead and gone, his daughter Genevieve so pious that she forgot to eat and drink, his wife Constance's floating kidney, and now the bombs. . . . But he was not complaining, he had only to think back a little, to think that if he had stayed in the colonies he would have been forced to enroll in the Degaullist adventure, perhaps even to carry arms in support of the communism of the Allies. What luck, what luck that he had insisted on his right to retire in 1936. There, at least, he had shown insight. . . .

He looked at the time, saw that he still had ten minutes of grace. He was glad, because sitting down gave his feet a rest. He thought of taking off his shoes, but recoiled before the complications. Walking all night had finished him. He was not a noctambulist by habit. It had not happened to him very often since his military service, in 1900; not even on the occasion of the two wars, since at the time of the first he was rejected on account of a heart condition, and at the time of the second he was no longer of an age to bear arms. As for the colonies, you don't walk there, you're carried. And what a night it had been! A night for the Valkyries! Endless coming and going by flashlight, from the depot to the bridge, from the bridge to the depot, making the round of the track, beating across country, searching, nosing, like emissaries of Odin hunting for corpses. And to think it wasn't over yet, that he might have to start climbing the hills again! He would have given a great deal to go home, take his shoes off, soak his feet in a basin of water with a drop of emollient added. There were twenty towns and villages grouped around Breuil-sur-Seine where the bombs could have exploded with as much if not more profit to the communists, but there you were, chaos was everywhere, even among the communists. In any case the bridge was a mess, and the transit of troops through Breuil-sur-Seine station was blocked for four or five days, and

that's all there was to it. In parentheses, it was a good thing he had been away from Breuil the evening of the bomb. You never knew with the gentlemen from the capital, as Rudolf called them, they were suspicious of everybody, some said they distrusted the Marshal in person. Collaboration or no collaboration, savages remain savages no matter what you do. This was well known to old Africans. The day of the bomb—he smiled dolefully, noticing that he referred to the dynamiting as to a historical event, whereas the episode was not yet twenty-four hours old—the day of the bomb he had spent the whole morning and a part of the afternoon at the Paris Kommandantur in behalf of his son Philippe, whom they had promised to liberate over a year ago. Anway, he would have given a lot to pass his job on to a—to a younger man. Why of course, that was the idea: to a younger man. He must speak of it to Rudolf: must explain that at his age, with an old heart lesion and his family troubles, he was slowing up, naturally. Rudolf was a well-bred man, an intellectual, he loved France, he would understand. It was a question of France's welfare, after all. He promised himself that he would bring out how essential it was to have the right people in the right places; that he would insist on youth, resoluteness, dynamism; that he would not forget to throw his heart lesion into the scales at the opportune moment, by way of contrast and to enhance his argument. Not that it gave him trouble, not particularly, but it was there, since it had prevented him from serving in the first war. And then Rudolf was a friend, or almost, and between friends a favor is in order. As to the family troubles, that was a more delicate matter. He put on his hat, shook out his trousers to straighten the creases. One couldn't decently bring strangers into family affairs. That Marianne, what reason could she have for coming back? The daughter of a cloth merchant, or worse yet of a custom tailor, he wasn't sure which; and she spoke a gibberish, a jargon as jumbled as the jabbering of a Tikki Tikki from the Middle Congo. He had been opposed to this marriage, he had even threatened to disinherit his son, but unfortunately Georges persisted in having his own way. He went down the grand staircase of the *mairie,* bracing himself with one hand on the balustrade and the other on his hip. As always, alas, he was right: three months after the wedding, bang! blowup. If Georges had at least taken the first step and put her out . . . But no, he left her the advantage of walking out first, like a grand lady. When he thought of it . . . Poor Georges. Bound for life to that woman. He halted at the edge of the sidewalk, inspected the street in one direction and then in the other, hurried across. To that woman who came from God knew where. How well she knew, the schemer, that Georges was religious, that he wouldn't divorce her. She had figured that he'd come running after her—and he had done exactly that. He was a time about it, of course, since she had left in 1939 and he two years later, but delays did not alter the matter. To be exact, he had really not caught on to the fact that Georges had quit the paternal rooftree to join his wife; it had taken the latter's unexpected appearance in Breuil to make him think of it, for though he did not know

where Georges was living nor what he was doing, he would have thought him anywhere except with her. The day he left the house Georges had said that he intended to tour the two zones, study the condition of the country, and then look for a place in the services which cared for the prisoners of war; more precisely, he had hoped to be sent into Germany so that he could work to raise the morale of the prisoners there. It was a good, honorable idea, which he, as a father and a Frenchman, could but approve. After weeks and months had passed, however, without a word from Georges, he wrote to the Marshal's government—only to learn that there was no one by the name of Georges Arnolphe Davy in the government employ. Followed more months of silence, and still more. In the house, by tacit consent, no one mentioned Georges; and if by chance Constance or Genevieve or he himself mentioned his name, it was with a sort of desperate calm which deceived nobody but tried to be natural—as if Georges were in his room or would soon be back from a run into town. Each of them had worked out dozens of theories, pondered dozens of suppositions, which they no longer shared with one another, keeping them secret so as to nourish their own hopes. He himself, after long meditation on the probabilities and eventualities, decided that Georges had enlisted in the Légion des Volontaires Français and was fighting on the Russian front: it was the only possible way to explain, if not to justify, his absence and his silence. He refrained from imparting his conclusions to his wife and daughter, it would have disturbed them needlessly, since after all his idea was merely a hypothesis; and he tried to convince himself that in the long run his own serenity, though partly a pretense, would have a good effect on them. And now, in a trice, the arrival of his daughter-in-law had jeopardized the precarious peace of his household! She would not have come to Breuil, would not have knocked at his door, if there had not been a renewal of relations between her and Georges. Ah, the deserter! He planted the soles of his burning feet flat on the ground, thinking bitterly of the cold, hard indifference of the younger generation. Ah, the turncoat! A year and a half without a letter, without a sign of life to quiet his old mother's heart. There couldn't be any doubt, he was with her, with that common person, otherwise she would never have showed herself in Breuil-sur-Seine, and just the day after a bombing into the bargain. But suppose she was mixed up in the bombing? A woman is always less suspect. A woman is so innocent, she puts on an air of such artless candor. And if she had nothing to do with the bomb, what did she want exactly? Was Georges dying perhaps, had he sent her to ask help, or pardon? He felt frustrated by his inability to answer all these burdensome questions. If it hadn't been for the gentlemen from the capital and the Kommandantur with its flag flapping in the wind, he would have gone directly home for a session with that wife of Georges's. For he had had no leisure to interrogate this daughter-in-law of his. He had been leaving the house, still done in by his execrable orgy of somnambulism, having barely taken time to shave and swallow a cup of coffee, when she

arrived, and he had been dumb-struck with surprise. Had she not babbled a word or two in her inconceivable jargon, he would scarcely have recognized her. Not that she had changed, no doubt she belonged to that particular species of creatures which do not change, do not improve, but he would have expected to see anyone, no matter who, Henry IV or Charlemagne, rather than her. Thereupon Constance his wife and Genevieve his daughter threw themselves upon her as though to welcome the angel Gabriel announcing the Incarnation, dragged this Marianne upstairs, and left him alone and perplexed and already caught up by his tasks and duties as first municipal official of the village of Breuil-sur-Seine.

"Please, Mother, please, go and take a little rest . . ." said Georges in an empty voice. His hand groped in search of his mother's hand, touched her knee. "Please . . ." he said, with his eyes closed under the sweat.

"Yes, Georges, yes . . ." whispered Madame Davy. She waved a Japanese fan feebly over her son's face. Although she was seated, supporting herself by the beam which jutted out from the wall, she swayed from time to time. A black bandeau was bound around her hair, emphasizing its whiteness, and, by contrast, the dark gleam of her eyes. Across from her, standing beside the couch, Marianne was dabbing at Georges's cheeks with the corner of a towel. His breath came brokenly, and his Adam's apple was so prominent that the cartilage showed through the skin. "Please, Mother . . ." he repeated, turning his dripping visage toward her.

Madame Davy raised her burning eyes to Marianne: it was beyond her strength to leave her son. She had passed the night watching beside him, with no one on whom to call for help; a night without end, with her Georges racked by his suffering, with her Genevieve sunken in prayer. Her Georges had come back after eighteen months away, in the nocturnal hour of the explosions which shattered the windows of Breuil, his tall body topheavy on a lifeless leg, his fever so high that his teeth were chattering. "Quick . . . to the attic . . . quietly . . ." he had whispered to Genevieve, who by good luck had gone out on the terrace to set the chairs straight, and had heard his stifled calls. Mother and sister helped him to climb the stairs, two flights of stairs up to the slanting tiles of the roof, which all day long had drawn the sun in this beginning of October, and had stored its sultry heat in the attic. He remained standing on his sound leg on his dead leg while they pushed trunks together, brought up mattresses, improvised a bed, without a word, without a question, gliding along on tiptoe although there was no one in the house who could hear them. They put him to bed, undressed him—his leg swollen, his thigh a burning log, his body in a cold sweat, the unpardonable ignorance about fractures, the absurd powerlessness to take a part of the pain on oneself, the black hours in the black attic with the fear of the German boot with the suffering which multiplied the time with the murmur of prayer which multiplied despair. Then came daybreak and morning, the father's ill-humored return, his ill-humored departure, and Marianne's arrival, Mari-

anne at last as they should have expected, for Georges's friends could not have abandoned him to his fate after what he had—after what he had done. She looked at Marianne with ashen eyes, waving the Japanese fan painted with ridiculous Japanese women who in turn fanned themselves, not understanding that her own son, that the wife the friends of her own son had no confidence in her. She guessed, her heart long ago had guessed, that Georges her Georges was a soldier in the secret war the secret conspiracy in which simple words took on a somber power, but she did not ask for the secrets the words the powers, she begged for a name a soul an address from which help might be sought. All night long she had pleaded, in a repercussive tone which became mechanical, which gradually fell into the rhythm of fever, of suffering, of the ceaseless murmur of Genevieve's inexhaustible fervor—in an unconscious voice which tortured him, which kept him from sinking into a coma and finding a moment's surcease. He refused a doctor, nobody suspected that he had taken refuge in his parents' house, nobody must suspect, there were no friends, there was no help except in himself, in his will to endure the pain and to conquer it. But she was beyond reasoning, again and again she returned to her single plaint, interminable fixed idea which made her forget the meaning of the words, begging him ever and always to give her the magic formula which would save him. He had no plan, no practical scheme to leave this house and get to Paris: he tried but could not fix his thoughts on it, repeating to himself that in an hour, in a minute, he would get hold of himself, pull himself together and go away from there, as one succeeds in balancing the most improbable bundle on one's back and carrying it off. Thus, when he had fallen from the top of the main arch after attaching the delayed-action bomb, he was sure he would never be able to stand up. He found himself incapable of moving, lying flat on the stony floor of the ravine where as a child he had played cops-and-robbers, and such a lack of sensation throughout his body that he at first thought he was paralyzed. With the precision, with the minute attention of the paralytic, his brain registered the smallest details of the briefest instant—the sound of foliage and insects, the refraction of masses on the mobile darkness, the infinitely calm progress of its own infinitely lucid thoughts: If I'm coming out of a faint, if I've been unconscious for some time, the bridge will come down on me, but if I haven't lost consciousness I have thirty minutes to spare, and if I can move, if my spinal column isn't twisted into a corkscrew, I ought to try not to leave my carcass to the Fritzes. He made an enormous effort to concentrate, moved his lips, moved his tongue, it was good to know there was no blood on his tongue, then wiggled his fingers, then raised himself on his elbows. The earth in the ravine was warm and crawling with life, it exhaled an odor of humus and grubs which he was surprised never to have noticed before, and all of a sudden he knew he would not die. His brain functioned like a watch, he was intensely conscious of the flight of seconds and fractions of seconds, each of them awakened him a little more to the presence of his body and slashed at it

and tore it with wild dogs' teeth. He pulled his legs up under his belly, they worked, they were the seat of too much pain to be entirely dead, and when suddenly all the torment in the world localized itself in his left leg he knew that he would walk. By the strength of his wrists, helped by his good knee, his chin, his trunk, his abdomen, he climbed back up the side of the ravine, crawled across the tracks, slid along over the ballast. He was not fleeing from bridges bedecked for their flight into the stratosphere, he was not struggling against the pain which every movement amplified in his splintered leg; he was engaged in a wild race with time, with the multiplication of time by space, more real than centuries of pulverized legs. With the butt of his revolver he broke off a low pine branch, stripped it, and used it as a cane, hobbling on one leg, hauling the other, falling flat, getting to his feet, carrying his body as if the meaning of his life had revealed itself in this unbearable ordeal. He had carried out other sabotage operations, more difficult, more exalting than this one, and always he had come back with the feeling of emptiness, of a blank in the hollow of his chest, which turned to a fatigue without joy, without peace, and faded away only in the course of new preparations for new undertakings. But this time a kind of ecstasy, of brutal rapture, all at once balanced all the debts of the past. He went forward dragging his leg weighted with molten lead, bristling with hooks and spines which caught on every obstacle and anchored him to the ground—but he went forward. He knew every turning in these woods, every rise and fall of the terrain, and finding himself on familiar ground made him feel that he was advancing by leaps and bounds, more rapidly than if he were mounted on stilts. He went forward tugging his leg which was heavier than the arch of a bridge, trampling on his precautions, on his promises: whatever happened, he would avoid his father's house—but he had not been able to foresee this betrayal, this felony of the instincts which leads the hurt beast to the lair long since abandoned. He sniffed his own habitat, breathed in its aging, serviceable odor, so serviceable indeed that despite the pain, the suffocation, the nausea which overwhelmed him, despite the raging pack which was destroying his body in a sort of foul debauch, he drank it in with a vague intoxication. He had reached the boundary line of the property when two explosions, at the interval of a second, rocked the little town.

He dropped down into a clump of hawthorn, and almost immediately vomited with a violence which raised his body from the ground. He tried to catch any distant cracklings, to situate any fires at the level of the clouds; the timing had been perfect, his teammate had done his work well, the locomotive depot and the roadbed of the bridge had popped high and far in the night over Breuil, but the cracklings and fires inside his bones made him deaf and blind. The front of the house looked unapproachable under its mask of blackout curtains, and although he knew it stone by stone he doubted that he had ever seen it. Its smell no longer came to him, it had lost its odor of sanctuary, it was dead and disinfected and covered with an untarnishable shroud. Little by little, as the minutes

passed and the delirium grew, his false doubt changed to false certainty, he hated the mummified mass of this gabled cube—who lived there, what woodlice who dared not show their mud-gored bellies, their canker-swollen antennae, what were the bulbous monsters spying on him with their bulging eyes and leaving him to die? He picked up clods of earth to throw them at the windows, at the tumid eyes which brushed him with their lashes, but he put no strength behind his throw, and the pellets fell a step away with the soft sound of bursting bubbles. For fear of shouting he stuffed a handkerchief into his mouth, groaning ineffable exorcisms through the gag. The house was empty, it swarmed with flukeworms and leeches, otherwise his mother his sister would have guessed, they would have come out with their arms full of brandy, a swig of alcohol would have put him on his feet, with the brandy his mother his sister his bicycle and he would have set out on one wheel on one leg on one . . . Then suddenly he saw Genevieve outlined against the light of a half-opened door and he called her, very calmly, in a very calm, very exact voice, so as to be heard by her and her alone. She came without faltering, he knew she would not cry out, she had more firmness and resignation than a blessed saint in heaven, and she said, "Don't move, Georges," as if from all eternity she had foreseen this moment. He asked who was at home, without moving, in the same very simple very exact voice. "Mother and I," said Genevieve, already kneeling, already lending him the sturdy support of her shoulders. She guided him toward the steps of the terrace, careful in the extreme, did not call her mother until they had crossed the sill of the vestibule and she had closed the door. Her bad eyes preventing her from recognizing her son, Madame Davy poured out questions as she came down the stairs, but even before she could utter an exclamation he ordered her to be silent in a tone which struck her dumb. With more effort than it would have cost them to climb a mountain peak they reached the attic, and, after covering the dormer windows lest a glimmer of light escape, they put an ironing board under his leg and compresses on his bruises, thanking Heaven that he was alive, and had come home, and that the father had work to do, and that the German officer was on duty. At the first step of the staircase, as if he were in a position to give orders, he forbade them to question him, to inform his father, whose tendency to panic he feared, to seek any aid, under any pretext, even if he himself called for it in a spell of fever. They refreshed him with eau de cologne, swabbed him with poultices soaked in boric acid, opened the dormer windows to give him air, and then, finding a curious inspiration under the cover of the darkness, his mother let herself go in a riot of supplications which did not cease all night. At certain moments he was on the verge of a torpor which was more swoon than sleep, but always the monotonous pleading, riding astride the imperturbable monotony of prayer, had brought him back to consciousness, from far away, from some far-off aerie toward which his whole soul yearned. Just as, amid the hawthorn bushes, he had counted on a mouthful of alcohol to revive his strength, now he

counted on a minute of sleep to restore his faculties. Eyes closed, jaws locked, he stiffened himself in an effort to drive off his pain by following a thought, he knew which thought, it was going by within eyeshot but out of reach of the mind, passing just outside his eyelids now arch of a bridge on pedals now devil's stilts on a bicycle, multiple as the amoeba, multiplied two by two in geometric progression, but he would get up and take hold of it with both hands, get up right away and grab it in his arms and carry it away on bishop's croziers, then suddenly he saw Marianne and he knew that he was delirious.

The departure of trains for Breuil from the Gare de l'Est being suspended for reasons which were not explained to the prospective passengers, but which the prospective passengers were not slow to learn for themselves, Marianne made the short journey by autobus. The R.A.F., the people in the autobus told each other from lip to ear, the R.A.F. had bombed the line over a distance of ten miles. The victims were counted regretfully, well-informed tongues even specified the numbr of dead and wounded, but "war is war, and those Royal Air boys have their eye on the bombsight." It was years since Marianne had set foot in Breuil-sur-Seine, and her memory of the Davy establishment had dimmed. She asked her way—"Davy? You mean Monsieur Davy, the one who's mayor of the town? It's that way, you can't miss it, you might say it's the château around here," the citizen whom she had accosted informed her. So he'd got himself made mayor, old Davy, it didn't surprise her, she might have suspected it, a royalist, royalists the whole family, Georges first of all, the pig, he wouldn't give her a divorce, why wouldn't he, he certainly belonged to the Legion. Situated at the edge of the town on a low hill, the "château" seemed to her more opulent than in the past. There emanated from it an air of lordliness, of haughty isolation, and at the same time of genteel decay, which she wanted to find unprepossessing and spurious, but which charmed her nevertheless. This gave her a vague feeling of frustration, as if she had been cheated of her due. The pointed extremity of her nose poked about in quest of inspiration, and she was happy to spy the calvary carved in solid wood over the main door—a so-called sixteenth-century Breton bas-relief, as she, openmouthed with admiration, had heard Georges describe it. He had a gift for pulling her leg, taking her for a ride, that Georges, that. All at once she thought that it would be just like Georges not to live with his father any more, or to be a prisoner in Germany, or a militiaman in Vichy, or a chamberlain of the Most Christian King; and the possibility that she had made a fruitless journey, and might have to go back empty-handed, made her animosity toward the Davys rise like a rocket. She grasped the bronze knocker with a vigor that hurt her fingers—when the door opened of itself, putting her face to face with her father-in-law in a bowler hat, black coat, white waistcoat, and striped trousers, chin smooth, mustache waxed, and his eye so round, so fixed with astonishment, that it made her smile.

"Hello how you Monsieur Davy are . . ." she said, noting in detail the formality of his attire.

He did not answer and she pulled in her smile. Maybe he was on his way to a funeral. He looked older than she had believed him, and more distinguished. He had his back to a totem which was grimacing over his shoulder, and this added still more to his distinction. "I see came to . . ." she said, meaning to state that she had come to see Georges; but, rapid as her speech was, she could not round out her sentence, for Madame Davy and her daughter Genevieve, appearing at the head of the stairs, literally plunged to meet her, seized her under the arms, and almost carried her up the steps four at a time. So energetic was their grip, so precipitous the action, that she let herself be carried off without resisting, more bewildered than frightened. They pushed her into a room, turned the key in the lock, and continued to flutter even while they peeked out the window at the departure of their husband and father. So far they had not uttered a single intelligible word, nothing but shush-shush, with their fingers to their lips.—Crazy they are bats completely . . . thought Marianne, feeling the goose pimples rise on her skin.

"Manners if I ever saw . . ." she said, placing herself behind a chair for protection.

"We were afraid you would say something to Papa," said Genevieve. "He doesn't know." She made an awkward gesture, then put her hands behind her back. "We have a German officer in the house."

Marianne wiggled her nose. A German officer. She wasn't surprised. She took a firm stance behind the chair, ready to use it as a weapon in case things took a turn for the worse. They were nutty, it was plain to be seen. They were hiding something from their papa, the German officer maybe. Or they imagined that. Cracked, mother and daughter both. She did not feel at all reassured. "Yes of course but to shove that's no reason people around . . ." she said, her voice off key.

"I am so happy that you've come at last," said Madame Davy, bursting into tears. "He didn't want us to call a doctor, and he's in such pain. He was waiting for you, of course. . . . He knew you wouldn't abandon him. He is so brave, he waited all night, but he could have told me, couldn't he? I was desperate. Come, come quickly. We fixed a place for him in the attic."

Marianne grasped the back of the chair a little more strongly. They were out of their heads, though maybe not dangerous. They certainly didn't look right, the mother especially. Galloping madness. They imagined there was someone in the attic, and running up- and downstairs had worn them out. A sick man who wanted his own doctor. What don't people think up when they go off their rocker? They took her for the doctor. Or maybe all this wasn't imagination. There really was someone in the attic. Georges! Georges, that husband, that! He had seen her strolling in the garden, and had taken cover upstairs. She began to tremble so violently that she moved the chair out of place. If she was stupid enough to go with them, he . . .

they . . . That's where they always kill people, in attics. Or in cellars. "It's that Georges up there who's hiding . . ." she cried.

"We would have put him in his room, in his bed, but he wouldn't let us," said Madame Davy. The tears inflamed her eyes and her voice pleaded guilty. "I shouldn't have listened to him, should I? He's so uncomfortable up there, he's stifling. Oh, come quickly, Marianne. When you see his leg . . . He came in like that, with his leg broken, all alone with his poor leg." She smiled timidly, as if to win her daughter-in-law's confidence. "Above all don't think I blame him, Marianne. Since the day he left me I knew it was to . . . to do these things against Germany. But I'm so afraid for him. Don't be angry with me, Marianne. So far he must have come, dear God, I don't know from where, from the bridge, I think, because the locomotive shop is too far, he would have had to cross the town, he never could have with his leg. But now here you are at last. You'll save him, won't you? You'll have your doctors come, and . . . and . . . Come, Marianne, please, please, we mustn't leave Georges all alone."

Marianne walked around the chair and sat down. How could she ever have . . . Shame set her face on fire. Her big blue eyes were immobile, looking at nothing. Her humiliation made her want to sob. Genevieve said something, but she did not hear. Never in her life had she felt so humiliated. Not even when, after three months of marriage, she learned that Georges had a mistress. But then she had been able to defend herself; she could avenge the outrage, and did so by walking out. This time the sore was in her, rooted in her like a stain from which there was no escape. She remembered the barn at the border of the zone, the man who smelled of the sweat of animals, his hot breath, the touch of his calloused hands along her thigh, at the very moment when Georges was gambling his life, and her fear just now—the hysteria of a snake. . . .

"Come . . ." said Madame Davy. She patted Marianne's hair with the tips of her fingers, timidly. "Come, Marianne . . ."

Not yet. She could not come yet. First her shame must subside in her, must flow back into her blood and dissolve in it. Georges was up there. She could give him her legs, could carry him away on her back. Carry him away. He had changed. He was no longer the snob, the king's henchman who takes pleasure in throwing stink bombs at socialist meetings. He was no . . . "It happened tell me is he very bad how . . ." she said, uncovering her face.

"We don't know," said Genevieve. "He hasn't told us a thing. His leg is terribly swollen. I'm going into town to see if I can find some ice. We must do something right away, without waiting any longer." She stopped, fixing a calm and despairing look on her mother. "The worst is to be feared . . . gangrene . . . amputation . . . I don't know. He can't stay the way he is. He couldn't bear it. He came yesterday evening, after the explosions. I found him in the garden. It's fortunate we have no servants in the house any more. Since Georges went away, in March of last year,

the gardener and the housemaid only come every other day. They leave at six o'clock, so there were only Mamma and me at home. Papa was in Paris, and the German officer hadn't come in yet." She came nearer, trying to catch Marianne's eyes. "I don't think Georges lacks confidence in us. If he did, he wouldn't have come here. I don't know what he would have done, but he wouldn't have come here. He doesn't lack faith in his father either, even though he forbade us to tell him. And you yourself, if you had doubts about us, you wouldn't have looked for him here. I understand your precautions. I understand that discretion is your power and your safeguard. That's why we did as he told us, although we were ready to call a doctor a hundred times. I don't need to tell you how trying it was. We were free to suffer, we were not free to lose our heads. I prayed the Blessed Virgin to keep us from losing our heads. But now we must save Georges. You've come to do that, I know."

She took her hands and kissed them. Marianne looked straight before her, seeing nothing. She observed her shame ebbing slowly in her veins. She had come to save Georges. And through Georges to save herself. He's upstairs there with a broken leg. With the tenacious silence of men who don't weaken. She will know how to make him say whom to call. He will trust her. He will see that she came to get rid of him, but that it's no longer possible. That it was never possible. Madame Davy was patting her hair, and Genevieve had gone to look for ice. Because he waited for her. Waited without knowing. And she. It had taken her all these stupid years to come back. She knew that miracles happened. So simply that you didn't think of them as miracles. Like Françoise in the movie theater. Like Georges and herself in Breuil the same day. "Georges let's go see him . . ." she said.

He had recognized her. He was no longer the young man she had left. He was the same age as she, twenty-six, but he looked forty. A deep furrow creased his mouth, and the hair above his temples had whitened. She wiped his forehead, his eyelids, the wings of his nose, and he submitted passively, with his lips partly open on his jerky, difficult breathing. "Mother, Mother, go and take a little rest," he repeated from time to time, eyes closed, teeth clenched. Madame Davy waved her fan, she braced herself on the beam, and her ashen eyes implored Marianne to defend her against her son's will.

"Yes why an hour's wouldn't you take sleep . . ." said Marianne. And as Madame Davy still resisted, still hoped, she added, "I have it won't be long to talk to Georges . . ."

Madame Davy rose and left without a word. She was certainly on the point of complete exhaustion. Marianne continued to wipe Georges's face. He uttered a feeble sound in the back of his throat. He was not delirious. It was indeed Marianne, her rapid speech, her bounding phrases which ignored punctuation. He barely opened his eyes, trying, it seemed, to be surprised. But, for some obscure reason, there was no surprise in him.

For the first time in her life Marianne forced herself to check and

balance the delivery of her words. With the sensation of weaving a tissue more fragile than autumn gossamer, she slipped in, after each word, a space of uncertainty which made her dizzy. She placed the words one by one, disposed them one by one according to the broken line of her speech, as if she had discovered in herself the power of ventriloquism, and that was it, she was learning to breathe while she spoke, to exhale slowly; and if the phrasing of her speech was not suppler as a result, at least it was clearer. She said that she owed him the truth. She had come to Breuil to force him to agree to a divorce. But she no longer dreamed of it. Not for the moment. She said that she had landed in Breuil by chance, fortuitously as it were, without choosing the moment of her arrival. This meeting, which a day more or less might have made impossible, seemed like the will of destiny. He, who believed in Providence, could not disregard this—this warning. She said that whatever might be their mutual grievances, she was still his wife. She said that she was not playing on sentiment. He had to trust her. He must tell her where, when, how to get in touch with his comrades. It was pure folly to go on this way. It did no good, protected nobody from danger. If his condition got so bad that he had to be taken to the hospital, a police investigation would inevitably ensue. She said that one way or the other he would have to be put in a doctor's care. She said that it was much better to have a friendly doctor. His mother and sister believed that he and she were working together; that the only reason for her presence in the house was to bring help to him, to arrange for his transportation to a place of safety. All their hope lay in that belief; their very lives depended on it. She said that she did not have the heart to disabuse them. He must, he had to trust her. She said—she said, as if each word scorched her heart as she pronounced it.

He did not answer. He feared to open his eyes, to see Marianne again. He feared—he did not believe he could bear her eyes, could repulse the great blue eyes which stalked his weakness, his inclination to succumb. Even so, even by setting against her his wordlessness and immobility and indifference, he was surrendering to her. She divined, she provoked the frittering away of his will. He had to conquer himself, and conquer her; neither his own suffering, nor the soothing caress of her hand, must force his defenses. It was simple: he had nothing to say. The name, the address which he might have mentioned, were beyond his power to reveal. It was simple: he had never known them. Never. But something else might happen. Another manifestation of the will of Heaven. Something—he would lose consciousness and then the women would have their own way, and he would commit no sacrilege. Then they would plunge the iron of their compassion into his wound. Then they . . . He remained stiff. . . . O my God, Thou who seest me, if Thou hast pity on me give me strength to resist, strength to resist, to resist . . . His head, now the seat of a total refusal, of an absolute negation, began to roll to and fro on the pillow.

"Yes Georges," said Marianne. She watched suffering crop out in Georges's face, then spill over. "Yes Georges," she repeated, filling her

lungs to interpose a volume of air between the words which she placed one by one like footsteps along a twisted ridge. "I can be believe me discreet I have friends I'm going they will help us as far as it is humanly possible and prudent." She wanted to wipe his face, but his head was rolling from side to side. She did not know whether he had heard her. She hesitated as to whether she ought to repeat what she had said, then thought that perhaps he could no longer hear, then that he no longer had any choice in the matter, then that it was time to act.

On the stairs she passed Genevieve, who was coming up with the ice. Madame Davy followed behind her daughter. It seemed that her breath was only waiting for an unguarded moment to leap out from her ashen eyes.

"Back I'll be wait for me to Paris ten-twenty I have time to go don't call anyone . . ." said Marianne. So precipitate was her speech, so back-end-to, that she did not understand herself.

It was nearly five-thirty when Marc Laverne came back to the Rue des Dames. His first glance told him that his mother and Anne Marie had got to know each other very well. They welcomed him with demonstrations of gaiety mixed with the inevitable remonstrances—his first day in Paris and right away he was taken up with "business," it wasn't right—his mother pretending to demand a preferential treatment for Anne Marie, Anne Marie likewise pretending that his first duty was to his mother. He let them coddle him and jostle him, amused that their manner toward each other was still a bit formal, their half smiles still a bit knowing, and that already they were leagued in a sort of complicity, a feminine freemasonry, to dominate him, to put him under a bushel. He took a quick shower, asked for fresh linen, and, because he pictured them idle and cooling their heels outside the bathroom door, but also because he was as hungry as a bear, he suggested that they get something ready for him to eat. He knew they were impatient—his mother especially, since she saw him only rarely on his hasty visits to Paris, which were always so filled with work that he left her only the tag ends of his time—impatient to have him for themselves exclusively, docile for once, relaxed, abandoned at last to their affection. They would have liked to bathe him, to dress him with their own hands, to revive, for his benefit, some sacred rite of hospitality, so inviolable that he could not back out of it. He was all the more embarrassed because he felt guilty in their regard, since he was going to have to leave them in a couple of hours. They filled his glass, watched over his bread and butter, shuttled to and fro around the table, counted the motions of his jaws, prevailed on him to have some more of the home-fried potatoes since he thought they were so good—"you'll find out what he likes, Anne Marie, nothing but fried foods and hardly any vegetables, really only the worst things." She abstained from saying, "the worst things for his stomach," as she would have been sure to say in other circumstances, and he could not suppress a smile: it was clear, she was watching her language in

honor of Anne Marie. He noted that there was a certain beauty about her, that her graying hair puffed out over a forehead still young and free of wrinkles, that her brown eyes flashed with happiness; and it made him smile more broadly.

"What are you laughing at?" asked Anne Marie. "Because we wait on you like a prince?"

"Like an emperor!" Madame Laverne corrected her. "It's his guilty conscience that makes him giggle, because he knows he doesn't deserve what's done for him."

"Bull's-eye!" said Marc. He had been looking for a pretext to direct the conversation toward the topic which preoccupied him. "It's true I have a guilty conscience, although, on the other hand, your service is a shade jumpy to please personages of royal blood. I'm dislocating my neck trying to follow you back and forth; and you're giving the people downstairs a headache. Come on, sit down, please. I have to tell you something, Maman."

"About your guilty conscience, son?"

"Exactly. I must . . ."

"No, not today. I absolve you in advance of all your misdeeds. Anne Marie and I have proclaimed this fourth of October a holiday, a day of amnesty. I refuse to hear a thing that would make me sad." She looked at Anne Marie, then again at her son. "You're not thinking of going out again this evening, Marc?"

"I hate anything that makes you sad, Maman. I'd love to get into the holiday spirit with you, with the two of you. But I have to leave you at seven-thirty at the latest. I'll be back at eleven o'clock. It isn't so awful, you see." He put his arm around her shoulders. "And if you have some secret cake to solemnize the return of the prodigal son, we'll cut its head off at midnight, as well-bred people ought to do. I'll go, I'll come back, the time will pass quickly, and you'll have Anne Marie to gossip with."

"Aren't you taking me with you?" asked Anne Marie, a brief gleam of distress in her eyes.

"I'm not taking you," he answered, separating the words with malicious intent. Neither one of them realized, Anne Marie particularly, how much he was exasperated by this ridiculous obligation to justify himself which they imposed on him—Anne Marie, who ought to have understood by this time; who should be able to avoid these bursts of panic in her voice, which were absolutely—absolutely unbearable; who, moreover, was so conscious of her foolishness that the words "take me with," implying the idea of a burden, had substituted themselves, significantly, for "go with" or "come with." She certainly knew that if he could have stayed home he wouldn't be going out; that if he wasn't "taking her," it was not because he thought her unworthy to accompany him; and that if he had told her to come, it would not have been for her Hermione's eyes, but because her presence would have been needed. But she didn't try to control herself; she obeyed her first impulse, which was always strong enough to sway her

completely. Between the attitude she knew she should adopt and the one she in fact adopted, there was all the difference between knowing and doing. "I am sorry to have to say this to you, Anne Marie, but you have a curious talent for forcing me into situations where I look as if I were playing the domestic despot."

"There he is, being mean to her," said Madame Laverne. She freed herself from her son's embrace, took Anne Marie's hands in hers. "It's not enough for him to abandon her, he has to mistreat her too. A fine host!"

"That's just our way of exchanging ideas," said Anne Marie, blushing from ear to ear. "It's the way intelligent people answer the questions of silly little girls." She gathered that a pressing matter was calling him out; but, as always, a knot of anxiety formed in the hollow of her bosom, slow and sure and similar to a coming cramp. Why did he refuse to understand that every trace of that anxiety vanished as soon as she was at his side; that she was silly, but only about him? She would have liked to know if he had found Youra; and if he had . . . No, that couldn't be, he would not be eating so calmly, with such appetite. She felt that if he did not talk to her about it himself, she would still be weak enough to ask these sterile questions which irritated him because he could not give satisfactory answers. "Was he always such an old sobersides, or did he get that way when his beard began to grow?" she asked.

"Always," Madame Laverne affirmed, kissing Anne Marie. "At the age of five he was more interested in what the grownups had to say than in La Fontaine's fables; and at fifteen he was explaining the negation of negation to me. He didn't succeed, but I love him just as much anyway. Don't bother to look wise, now, you never convinced me that two noes make a yes. This being said, let me add that I am the only slightly intelligent person here present. Yes, my children. And to prove it to you, I am going to leave you. You'll need all your time, my son, to win Anne Marie's pardon. No, no argument, please. Besides, I have an errand to do which will take me an hour." She stood up, looking at her watch. "Certainly. An hour at least."

"An errand? On a holiday? A day of amnesty?" said Marc, falling in with her game. He rolled a cigarette meticulously. "All right, all right, no argument from you either, it won't help your little lie a bit. However, listen to me. I have something important to tell you. I won't come back alone. There will be someone with me, a wounded man, whom I want you to take in. You'll give him my room, you won't mind? I'll sleep out here on this couch. I'm sorry to have made so free with your apartment, but I know you won't turn me down. I would have spared you this inconvenience if I hadn't been taken unprepared. He'll be here only a day or two, the time it takes to get a safer retreat ready for him."

"A wounded man?" asked Madame Laverne. She plucked at the violet on her hat, and her face turned a shade paler. "He's not in danger of . . . of . . ."

"I don't think so. He has a broken leg." He addressed himself to Anne

Marie, whose eyes widened. "As for you, your program is as follows: at exactly a quarter to eleven you will be downstairs, in front of the door, to wait for a friend. You'll see him almost at once, carrying a bag and smoking a pipe. As you don't know each other, he will say 'Orion' as he passes you, whereupon you will answer 'Sagittarius,' then come into the house right away. He will follow you, and you will bring him upstairs. He's the doctor who'll take care of our wounded man, with whom I shall arrive shortly after." He looked at his mother. "Maman, would you mind lending me a set of your keys?"

She gave him a set of keys. They made no effort to keep her from going out. She left the apartment without their hearing her go. There was a short silence, during which Marc was absorbed in the smoke of his cigarette, and Anne Marie in Marc's hands.

"We shouldn't have allowed her to leave," she said finally.

He looked at her with amused eyes—with eyes that saw the reverse side of things and were amused by it. "Why not?" he said. "You're burning to know what happened today, and you made her feel it. I must give you credit: without the slightest effort, simply by the movement of your passion, you subject others to the intensity of your desire. You are what is rather idiotically called a magnetic being. For, when you come right down to it, you put her out of the house, exactly as you chased Marianne from the hayloft last evening. Of course you didn't say anything, didn't give a sign, it may even be—this time at least—that you didn't consciously wish anything, and yet with the full force of your desire you exhorted her to leave us alone. So here we are. Come now, come over here near me and I'll tell you my adventures. What a frustration, what a pain it would be, wouldn't it, Anne Marie, if I went away without making my report to you?"

She came and huddled up against him. His reasoning was always right, even when his conclusion was wrong. He dissected the facts and laid them bare, but she was not sure that bareness was synonymous with truth. She thought that facts were never bare enough that you could consider them in themselves, without their echo as it were. She was afraid of this intelligence which first sucked the life out of a thing, then stripped it, to get down finally to the core, to the objective stone, as though to the "stone" in polyps, which, when squeezed, paralyzes the animal. She sometimes felt a mighty desire to see him sheathe his scalpel, discover the landscape for its color, the sky for its wide arch, not through distraction or carelessness, but deliberately, voluntarily, as one violates a rule of action. Yet she knew that in his own way—and much more delicately, perhaps, than many a one—he was marvelously susceptible to the great joy of discovery. Even as she listened, she told herself that it was absurd to accuse his mind of never letting itself be determined in its judgments by general considerations. She understood, she persuaded herself that she understood: it was not true that in his method of considering facts he abstracted from their context. What inclined one to think the contrary was his system of putting

the facts in their order, approaching them in their natural succession, and not passing to a subsequent fact before exhausting the preceding. There was no room for the vague and the approximate in the exercise of his thought; he refused to put lyricism and ideas, thinker and thought, in the same package. This was what gave her the impression that he dismantled facts and laid them bare, the impression, yes, she hardly dared admit it to herself, of a dryness of heart with which at times, albeit grudgingly, she reproached him. But how quickly everything about him became human as soon as one accepted what she took to be a natural inclination of his mind! She listened to him: the sobriety of his manner of unfolding an image, of the unexpected detail, of the penetrating observation, illumined his way of seeing things with a fleshly touch, a sort of sensuality which was all the more present because scarcely perceptible.

In a few words he told what had happened at Jale's printing shop, the arrival of Youra Stepanoff, his fainting, his "confession." He judged that the young Russian had entered on the ascending line of his crisis not in the inspector's office in Paris—that had been a relatively banal attempt at provocation—but in Marseilles, at the time of the scene with his father. "When Youra discerns the presence of a spy on the old man's trail," he said, "he's in a blind alley, since his discovery shows him that the inspector did not lie to him, not entirely at least. I think that if I had been in Marseilles the day he came to my place after his return from Paris, or even later, the day after the evening you went to see him in his room a little before Espinasse's intrusion, I think he would have told me his story, and would, by that very fact, have got the better of his crisis. You might put it that if he had seen me in time everything would have been reduced to a ceremony of words, as in the rites of exorcism. At that moment there was still time. Up to then he hadn't told the inspector anything, had yielded no 'confidence.' Despite the fact that his situation had become morally untenable, due to his solitude and his sense of guilt with regard to his father and you and me, there was no debate in him. The thought of allowing himself to be blackmailed by the policeman had not even entered his mind. He felt so far from any danger of making a false step that he never thought of protecting himself by changing his address or leaving Marseilles. He believed that his only problem was to give me all the facts, and therefore to wait for me; that by informing me of a development which concerned all of us, he would transform its character, or rather would restore to it its true content: it would cease to be a personal contest between him and the policeman, and become again what it was in reality—a collective problem for our whole group to face. He did not understand that the time factor constituted the biggest ace in the inspector's game; that the whole play was built on a single fact, namely my absence from Marseilles. Espinasse had learned that I had left the city; he did not know for what purpose, nor for how long, but he decided to take his chances and set up his gambit. He might have failed, in fact he succeeded. If I had come back a few days sooner, or if Youra had spoken to

his father, the inspector's game would have been out the window. There was no hitch. There's a god of policemen as there's a god of drunkards; otherwise the drunkards would bump their noses on every second lamppost, and the cops would be mucking around in their own excrement. I wondered briefly why he had woven his toils around Youra rather than you. For psychological reasons, it goes without saying. In the first place, he knows him better, or I should say more authentically, than he knows any of us. He saw him for the first time in 1937, when Youra was sixteen. With his keen eye, his sense of the weakness in a man, he detected a touchy pride in the boy, a complex and contradictory sensitivity, which gave him something to work on. Knowing how he had grown up in Russia, he calculated how he would grow in exile; moreover, taking the father into account, he reconstituted the son. Whereas you would very certainly have reacted according to a conventional pattern, following a classical norm, so to speak—you would move heaven and earth, you would look for help in every quarter and by every means, Espinasse had foreseen that young Stepanoff would pull back into his shell the minute his effort to communicate his trouble was balked, taking on himself the whole weight of his disturbance. In addition to that, he could blackmail you only in connection with my safety, whereas he had a double hold on Youra—me and the old man. But to come back to Youra's failure in his attempt to communicate with his father, that failure was soon to assume much greater proportions than a mere wound to his pride. In this sense his arrival at my rooms, when he found you there alone, was a kind of shipwreck. Each of your words, each of your attitudes, was a monument of egoism which you raised to your concern for my health, my comfort, my little mishaps. Not for a single instant did you think of him for himself. To you he was simply a public, an audience. You took delight in . . ."

"Why are you so hard on me, Marc?" she said. She held him in her arms, with her cheek against his chest, breathing in the warm odor of his skin. "I wanted to take him against me, Marc. He was so beaten, so crushed, that I wanted to take him against me and hold him very tight. Ah, why do you make me say these things? . . . Don't you see, Marc, he loves me, I think he loves me, and—how could I have known?—I thought . . . I was trying to defend myself by . . . against that . . . that yearning, so frantic, so hungry, and I was ashamed, and afraid, and, Marc, Marc, talking about you was my defense, my refuge . . ."

He buried his face in Anne Marie's hair. She wept without sound. He was angry with himself for having forced her to this "confession," which, in the last analysis, told him nothing that he had not already guessed; for having forced her to it knowingly, as if he never could humiliate her enough; for treating her as if she were a theorem, with a logic that was almost insulting; for depriving her of warmth, so much so that it was becoming cruel.—I'll have to stop this game of hurting her on the absurd pretext of guarding myself from her, he thought; and I'll have to stop hiding from myself the fact that I don't want to guard myself from her,

and never have wanted to. He stretched out on the narrow couch, making her come with him, on him. She shivered under his hand, and her whole body bowed and lent itself to his caress.

"You surely remember," he began again, nearer to Anne Marie's ear, "that at that time he becomes taciturn, aggressive, highly excited, too; and it is in this condition that Espinasse finds him some days later. Now Espinasse never turns up empty-handed; he hates situations which he does not control from on high, and even when he has his victim reduced to powerlessness he never approaches unless his gun is cocked. He spreads several issues of our paper under Youra's eyes, points out which texts are by my pen, proves coldly that he knows enough about me to put me up against a wall; and—this is the high point of his cleverness—he convinces him that he is keeping his men off my trail in order not to compromise me; that if any agent, even one in the lower ranks, were to get after me, I would be lost. But the remarkable thing is not that he wins his game against Youra; it's that he really does 'take care of' me, he really is interested in 'safeguarding' me. I'm not mistaken about this: he is 'reserving' me, 'preserving' me for his own platter, although this is more complicated than a simple question of police cannibalism. His thick bulk harbors a dangerous proliferation of complexes, a tangle of motherly solicitude for the victim to be, of Peeping-Tom curiosity, of sexual appetite. . . . However that may be, he had young Stepanoff in his pocket: Youra talked. He informed him of our assembly in Lyons—after the fact, it's true, when everyone had gone back to his own corner; he told him of my part in the foundation of the Sucror; he kept him up to date, so far as his knowledge permitted, on my movements during the past months. . . . He felt that he was giving away nothing of importance, an impression which Espinasse fostered and kept alive: he abstained from questioning too directly, asked nothing which might provoke a recoil, now and then revealed a detail of his own information to prove the sureness of his references. It's true that Youra did not mention a single name, that he never said a word about our meeting places, or about Lopez's attic or Jale's printing shop; but the little he said did not fall on deaf ears. Did Espinasse have me trailed when I left Marseilles? I couldn't say with certainty. The fact is that I didn't notice a thing; the fact is, moreover, that with the exception of Louise Sauveterre and the comrade arrested on the zone, quite independently of Espinasse, we suffered no losses. Things went along this way since the beginning of April, and would have come to an end with the departure of the Stepanoffs. Then came the old man's arrest and the son's escape from the ship. While we were beating our brains out wondering why he didn't come to see me, since I knew from Smith that he was in Marseilles, and while we were fearing that he in turn had been arrested, he was mounting guard at the Evêché in the hope of meeting Espinasse there. The feeling of guilt which was always lively in him needed only his father's arrest to make it leap up with increased violence: Espinasse had tricked him, made him go down into the murky waters of his sewer, and

it was all useless—as he had always known in the bottom of his conscience, or so he had reproached himself. Note that Espinasse may not have deceived him, at least with regard to the old man, whose arrest may have escaped his vigilance. But Youra is not looking for excuses; on the contrary, it is no longer in his power to accept anything except what crushes and destroys him. So he waits in the courtyard of the Evêché, two days and a third morning in the heat of the sun, in that sirocco atmosphere that fell on the city, you remember, without eating, without drinking, without any other reason than to wait—and it seems that this was his only refuge from madness and suicide. I don't often have temptations to bloodshed, but when I recall Espinasse's words—'the stool pigeon . . . I will tell you who he is. . . . You can put him out of the way. . . .' I have a sweet, immaculate craving to have a cutlass in my hand, and my inspector right here, within reach of my craving."

"Yes," said Anne Marie. "And I'd be with you."

"Yes," he said. "The third day, about noon, he finally learns that Espinasse is not in Marseilles but in Paris. You know the rest. He goes to the A.R.S., gets a thousand francs from Smith, heads north for the zone. When he got to Jale's he hadn't eaten for six days. That's where he is now. He's sleeping."

"But . . . then . . . he isn't the one with the broken leg?" She sat down abruptly, took Marc's hands. A gleam of anxiety lighted in the mobile pupils of her eyes. "Have you . . . What have you decided to do with him?"

He freed his hands, took her in his arms. "Anne Marie, you're not a woman, you're a bonfire. You don't live, you consume yourself. You're a body in a state of permanent combustion. So you thought we had worked him over, and had broken his legs before finally reducing him to a pulp? Really, this time you deserve a medal. Ask me for it when I get back, because I've got to go now. For your information, the broken leg belongs to Georges Davy, husband of Marianne of the same name. Youra arrived at the printing shop about half past ten; by a quarter to twelve we had his whole story. I was on my way home to have lunch with you and Mother when I decided to look in at the bookshop to see if there was any mail for me, and came across Marianne, who was watching for me on the opposite sidewalk. She was back from Breuil, and was determined to wait for me if she had to spend the whole day there. I always knew she was high-strung, but I never knew her to be so vehement as she was then. She was so excited that her speech was all but incoherent. I never saw her serve up so rich a hodgepodge of sentences without verbs and phrases without punctuation. In short, I went to Breuil-sur-Seine with her, to the home of her parents-in-law. Georges, her husband, whom she wanted to divorce, whose very name seemed to make her disgusted with existence, well, Georges had shown himself less contemptible than he was in the legend: the day before, he had dynamited a bridge. She found him in his father's home, hidden in the attic without his father's knowledge, his left leg in

pieces, and determined to pass out there rather than tell how to get in touch with his political friends so that they could come and give him a hand. So it had occurred to darling Marianne to ask me to do them the 'service' of evacuating her man. . . . But I haven't time to go into detail. In a few words: I went out there, I saw the wounded man—a shifty character he looked to me, parenthetically—I talked with the three women, that is with the mother, the sister, and Marianne, I looked over the place, assigned a definite function to each of them in the removal, and was back at Jale's at four. It's an annoying mess, it's got us in a sweat to tell the truth, especially since this Georges Davy is or was of the extreme right. We have other rows to hoe than playing the Good Samaritan—and yet we can't leave him to croak where he is. Result: Sauveterre, Maille, and I are going out presently in a truck. We'll give him a shot of morphine and bring him in here."

"And Marianne?" asked Anne Marie. She was gathering up her hair and piling it on top of her head. "And Marianne?" she repeated, sticking hairpins between her colorless lips.

"I don't know," he said. "I suppose she'll come here the first thing tomorrow." Suddenly he wanted to stay; to stay with Anne Marie, with her firm, smooth body which smelled of wild mint. "Where are you sleeping? In Mother's room?"

"Why?" Hands at her temples, head thrown back a little, she looked at him as if she had caught a change in his voice. "In any case I won't go to bed before you come back. . . . Yes, in Mother's room."

"Fine," he said. "You'll be comfortable there."

It was nine o'clock when the truck went through Breuil and stopped on the departmental road, some three hundred yards above the Davy estate. Genevieve was waiting at the designated spot. She had put on a dark dress, and a beret hid her light hair. "It's there," she whispered, rising at the door of the truck and pointing into the night. The three men stepped out. "Where, there?" Sauveterre asked, he being the chauffeur. She took him by the hand and let him along the edge of the road to an opening in the underbrush. Sauveterre backed the truck into the opening until it disappeared in the shadow of the branches.

"Now we have to cross the road," said Genevieve. "It's on the other side."

"Yes," said Marc. "Tell us how things stand at the house. Quick."

She spoke fast. "We followed your instructions to the letter. Unfortunately, the German officer is in the house. Marianne has taken charge of him. She's locked herself up with him in the library. They're discussing Papa's collections. She's making him drink. She'll keep him busy until everything's finished. Maman has taken Papa out. It was very difficult. Father came in very tired. He was in a hurry to do just one thing—to go to bed. Yes, and to talk to Marianne. He can't understand what she's doing in the house. When he came in . . ."

"Skip it," said Maille. "Tell us what we're interested in."

"I'm sorry, excuse me, I . . . Yes, he was on the verge of being angry, but Maman took him out just the same, on the pretext of talking about Marianne. She acted as if it was a secret . . ."

"How long do you think she'll be able to keep him out?" Marc asked.

"I . . . I don't know. Maman will do the impossible to keep him until ten o'clock. She'll . . . She said she'd pretend to have a weak spell, if she had to. She . . . I dressed Georges. It was terr—— He's ready now. We'll take him out this way. It's a six-minute walk, I timed it. I left the gate open, and the doors, as you suggested."

"Perfect," said Marc. "You go first. You'll go first on the return trip too." He pointed to Maille. "This friend will carry your brother on his back. I'll bring up the rear. Let's go."

Sauveterre stayed with the truck. They plunged through the trees in Indian file. The night was warm and black and full of tumult. It seemed to Genevieve that the forest resounded with their steps, that the shrilling of the crickets was not strident enough, the noise of the dead wood not dead enough, that her own heart awoke an immense echo in the heart of the countryside. She admired how much these two men were masters of their nerves. This boy, who had come with Marianne. He had the head —the head of a Persian prince. Georges was like them—sure and strong and noble. Like this boy. They would save Georges. They always saved their friends. She was grateful for friendship, for Georges's valor, for the valor of these men; she was grateful that they were alive—they and all the others who resembled them in the night of God.

Filtering through the blackout curtains, a vague glimmer shone from the dark mass of the house. Going up the steps, they heard Marianne's voice, rapid and high-pitched, then her laugh, so forced that it sounded metallic. It was stifling in the attic. Georges opened his eyes slightly, then closed them. His face was drowned in sweat.

"I'm going to give you a needle," said Marc. "It will calm you down. Then we'll transport you."

Georges did not reply. Aided by Maille, Marc prepared the morphine injection. Genevieve wiped her brother's forehead and cheeks. She would have liked to ask where they were transporting their comrade. She looked at the two men, one sawing off the tip of the phial, the other adjusting the needle to the syringe: no, they would not want her to know. Nor would Georges. She had no right to. Her mother had no right to. She unbuttoned Georges's trousers, baring his thigh. He belonged to a force stronger than the ties of blood. She was to have no access to it. She was to know nothing of that force, of these men. Never to see this boy again, like a prince of Persepolis. For her they would have no name, no identity, resembling the memory of sensations never felt. That was clear and just and terrible, as verdicts always are. But she would not ask. There was nothing she could desire against their will. She slipped to her knees, pressed her lips to Georges's hand. She will pray to the Blessed Virgin to

preserve their anonymity, to spread over their mystery the mystery of her divine mercy.

They waited for some ten minutes in a silence which unfolded and spread with the rapidity of winged fluids. It seemed that the drug created a progressive void, a purely physical rarefaction in which the sick man's breath came more and more slowly. Genevieve raised her head, rested her eyes on her brother. He was no longer in pain. She knew he was no longer in pain, O God amenable to pity. He was slipping into a reverie where pain was forgotten, where rapture was exalted. She, who had learned the poets and dynasties of ancient Persia from his lips, saw that he was sailing up the splendid course of the Shanamâh, hand in hand with the bard of the epic legends; she saw that he was resting beneath the royal canopy of Darius in the land of Bâkhdi which is Balkh where the oriflammes toss, in the land of Ourva which is Kabul where the green pastures wave. She saw that, light and free . . .

"It's time," said Marc.

She straightened up. The silence had lost some of its emptiness, it had come back to itself, laden with meaning and living matter. "Can I be of help?" she asked.

Marc glanced in her direction. He had not noticed that she had a willful profile, an erect carriage, a pure mouth—a mouth it would be good to touch with the tips of his fingers. André Maille went around the bed, and together they raised the wounded man to a sitting position. There was a hint of stiffening in his loins, as if he had wished to yield—or to refuse. "Take it easy, you'll ride like you were in first class," chaffed the printer. Slipping one hand under Davy's legs, he brought them gently over the edge of the couch and set them on the floor.

"How do you want to carry him?" asked Marc.

"As planned: across my shoulder. If I pick him up piggyback, he might let go."

"Right. Mademoiselle, help me to get your brother to his feet. Yes, that's it."

One hand under his armpits, the other under his elbow, they lifted him up. He offered no resistance. Maille put one knee on the floor, slid his arms around Georges's thighs, fitted his shoulder into the hollow of his stomach, laid one ear flat against his hip. "There, let the bundle down," he said. Marc and Genevieve lowered the wounded man's body to Maille's rounded back, and he straightened up.

"All right?" asked Marc.

"About forty pounds over. But it'll be all right. We shove off?"

Marc took Georges's hands so that they would not dangle against Maille's legs, and they shoved off. He rested quietly, eyes closed, cheek flat against the back of the man who was carrying him. Genevieve in the lead, they descended the steps without stopping, crossed the zone covered by the German's animated voice and Marianne's hasty replies. Once again it seemed to Genevieve that the dead wood made a noise like a watchman's

rattle underfoot, that the night animals had put a mute over their windpipes, that her own heart was ringing a wild alarm: and her advance was so tense, so concentrated her attention on the panting of the night, that she stopped a full second later than her companions' sudden halt.

"What's the matter? . . ." she whispered, extending her hands like one suspended between heaven and earth.

Maille seized her by the shoulder and squeezed so hard that her knees almost buckled. The violent jog tore the first sound of a whimper from Georges, but Marc cut it off by clapping a hand over his mouth. Very clear, very close it seemed, the snapping of branches was heard, and suddenly a light flashed to their right, a long whip of light eager to beat the darkness and tear through its soft surface.

"Wer da!" came a cry in two different keys; and, in echo, with a strong accent of garlic, "Halt! Who goes there!"

Huddled together in the shadow of the trees, the two men and the woman and the wounded man were silent. The light thrust splinters into the thick skin of the forest, stroked and sniffed the night. "Where's the road?" Marc murmured. "Point, don't speak." His mind was working by images, each image a mental operation which fitted, precise and free of movement, into the preceding and following ones, forming a chain. Genevieve indicated the direction. "Right there . . . just below here . . ." she said, despite the prohibition. Maille's fingers sank deeper into her shoulder, but she was fascinated by the mobile play of the light and defenseless against an irresistible urge to talk. "That's the voice . . . of the brigadier . . . of the gendarmerie . . . it's . . ."

"Keep quiet!" breathed Marc. "Able to find truck alone?"

"I'll make out . . ." grumbled André Maille in the same mutter. The light glided and danced, explored the blind space in its blind haste to explode in their faces. *"Wer ist da!"* came the shout again; and again, as by repercussion, with the same Midi accent, "Who's there! Answer!"

"Good," said Marc almost inaudibly. He had just made out the sound of feet toward the source of the luminous cone: they mustn't be given time to get their bearings and start to beat the woods. "Good. I'll lead them off. Clear out as soon as they come after me." He slipped an object into André's pocket. "The key. Don't wait for me. Tell them home that I'll be in later. Tomorrow. Come, you."

He took hold of Genevieve's wrist, set out with a bound. She bounded after him, carried away by his speed. "Halt! Halt! Or I fire! *Nicht weiter!*" several voices barked. Head down, taking care not to run into the trees, Marc pulled Genevieve in the direction opposite to that of the road. But he was not pulling her; she leaped along stride for stride, her hand in his, shoulder to shoulder, and though the gallop at their backs terrified her like a view-halloo, she shivered with exaltation. The light bounded in their tracks, caught them from the side, lost them, found them again—a light bearing shadows and shouts and bullets. They ran in a zigzag, losing ground to the light which now cut less diffused holes in the mass of the

forest, amid the whine of bullets smacking the tree trunks with the sound of a slap, and they jumped first to one side, then to another, to escape their pursuers, of course, but also to keep them in tow.

"They're going to catch us . . ." puffed Genevieve. "Leave me . . ."

"If they take us—you don't know me. Never saw me before. Say we . . ."

"I know . . . I'll say I met you . . . out walking . . . that you . . . you made love to me . . . that I . . . that we ran away to . . . because . . . Now go away . . . go away . . ."

"Let's keep them after us as long as possible," he exhorted her, feeling that she was weakening. He was thankful to her for understanding the game, for entering into it without wincing. When he had taken her with him on his flight, it was on this "alibi" that he had been speculating. At the very instant when she identified the gendarme, he had seen the picture: the brigadier is surprised to recognize the daughter of Monsieur le Maire, a gritty note makes his voice quaver, Mademoiselle Davy veils her face, pleads guilty, begs him to keep her secret, appeals to his nobility as a soldier, invokes her parents' shame, their confusion, their malediction . . . And if he could risk the unlikely chance that the gallantry of the gendarmes would let itself be touched by Mademoiselle Davy's modesty, no appeal to their chivalrous soul would have alleviated the plight of his friends if they were discovered with a badly injured man of doubtful origin aboard a stolen and disguised vehicle. The chase came on with furious but triumphant shouts—"Halt! Halt! *Stehen bleiben!*"—ever nearer, already near enough that the hope of taking the quarry alive had stayed the firing. "Come on, one more effort," he said, squeezing Genevieve's hand.

"I . . . I can't. . . . I'm going to fall . . ." she gasped. "Save yourself. . . . Please . . . I beg of you . . ."

"Home! To your house!" he said, crushing her hand. He risked a look over his shoulder. "Is it far? Quick!"

"Three . . . four minutes. . . . There . . . Here . . . this way. . . ."

He almost cried aloud: three or four minutes, when the race had been going on—seemed to have been going on—for hours. "Stick to it! We have time if you hold on! You must hold on!" The thought of the Davy house, of the German officer, had assailed him with the suddenness of an inspiration. The new tone in his voice, the pressure of his hand—a different touch, no longer impersonal but almost warm—acted on Genevieve like a whiplash. An exultant joy, a joy which called for cheers and fanfares, lent speed to her legs: this boy like Xerxes at Salamis which is Kouloure needed her in his combat, needed her in his retreat; she was with him, on his side, no longer an obstacle but a guide, an accomplice. "I'll hold on, I'll hold on . . ." she said, with a knot in her throat.

She was made of stern stuff. He recalled her pure mouth, her high forehead, and the pressure of his hand on Genevieve's became more intense. "The officer, what's he like? Junker type or army brass?"

"He's . . . very . . . very pleased with life. . . ." The light, bearing

shouts and sounds of galloping, burned her with its cold flame. It seemed to her that the breath of the pursuers was striking the back of her neck, that their fingers were lengthening and reaching her and tightening in her hair. "Pleased . . ." she repeated.

"Yes," said Marc. "Friend-of-France style or Nazi stickler? Quick!"

"No . . . Friend of . . ." They were running uphill, with the pack so close at their heels that they could hear its panting. "Man of the . . . world . . . patronizing . . . There . . . there . . . the house. . . ."

"Fine," said Marc. "Perfect," he said. They were running uphill in the oily light, amid the oily cries. "Take refuge in his arms. Demand his protection. His justice." The galloping echoed justice justice at Genevieve's very back. "He'll be caught short. The soldiers too. And the gendarmes. They'll be in a quandary. Go after them. Attack. Call them all the names you know. Anything. Get hysterical. As if to cover your shame at being caught—I mean caught with a lover. I'm a stranger. Don't forget. Don't forget."

"I . . . I won't forget . . ." said Genevieve.

"Yes. Now call out. Your mother first. Then your father. Then the German. By his name. Loud. Loud!"

They bounded up the rasping sand of the drive, and Genevieve called. The instant they reached the terrace, two gendarmes and two soldiers charged through the garden gate, pushing their hoarse shouts before them with the sharp point of their flashlight. Genevieve stumbled on the steps, caught herself with Marc's help, called out again. When Rudolf Francke appeared at the door of the library, she threw herself around his neck with such impetuosity that he had to steady himself on the doorframe. Marianne loomed behind him, her big blue eyes starting from their sockets, nose wiggling, hands as agitated as if she too were trying to keep from falling. Like a quartet of marionettes whose strings had got tangled, the four men parachuted into the vestibule, off balance, lips drawn back on the exclamation stricken dumb, brakes on full at the sight of the officer. Emitting sounds of arms, of hobnailed boots, of air pumps, they bumped against each other in their haste to correct their stance under the eye of the Oberstleutnant, who, in turn, hair a mite ruffled, a touch high in color, a bit bizarre certainly with his arms outstretched and the girl hanging around his neck, transfixed them with his glare. But he was not thinking of them, he had exterminated them by his mere presence, by the sole power of his epaulettes; he was thinking, he was feeling Mademoiselle Davy, whose nervous body heaved against his. She had never suspected how much he had been drawn by the maddening outline of her hip under the light dress, the humiliating line of her hip, of her thigh, and there he held her, more present than in dream, every hollow of her body molded against his own. He dared not move, dared not break the spell, vaguely incredulous of his lucky star on this marvelous evening—the wife of one of the Davy sons, almost almost, then Genevieve, Genovefa as he called her in his secret heart, so feverish, so faint, that his head was spinning. A picture

took possession of his mind, he saw himself lifting Genovefa in his arms, he laid her on a couch, he undressed her, slowly, suavely, while she sobbed on the pillow like virgins the night of their wedding—when all at once she began to storm.

She stormed for a long time. She faced the quartet, which had finally fallen into line, puffed out its torso and pulled in its buttocks, and she stormed. She trembled with indignation, she communicated her trembling to Rudolf Francke. Withdrawn in a corner, Marc followed the effect of the operation. They hunted her like a beast, said Genevieve. The cowards, the cravens. They tried to strike her down. She offered her back to Rudolf Francke, each point of her body coincided with that of Rudolf Francke, and she stormed. She twisted, she lent herself to his touch, she provoked its contact, furtive and brutal as an obscene hand in the press of the subway, and it was extraordinary to pay her debt thus with her body, thus clandestinely in the public square, her debt to Georges, to Marianne, to this boy who will not be her lover. They chased her like a thief, she said. The rogues, the ruffians. They tried to kill her. She took Rudolf Francke's hand, she must get some hysteria into it, she took Rudolf Francke's hand and clasped it under her heart. Looking over the German's shoulder, Marianne opened her mouth on a strangled flood of words. They tried to assassinate her, said Genevieve. The bandits, the *bravi*. They fired at her point-blank. Swallowing their breath and reddening more and more, the four men pointed a fixed eye on the horizon line as by regulation. Four mad dogs after a woman, said Genevieve. The hoodlums, the hooligans. They deserved prison. The penal colony. Rudolf Francke would have sent forty times four imbeciles to hell for the slightest brush of this leg against his own, of this hip, of these loins on his skin, in his skin. He hoped that Genovefa had a string of names, a long string of nicknames to hurl at these idiots who had had the stroke of genius to take after her, to toss her into the arms of his desire. Behind him, unable to make out whether Georges was captured or safe, Marianne could not close her mouth on the question which was cutting her tongue to shreds. Odds and ends of sounds and words roamed around in her, came to the tip of her tongue, resounding stones which lacerated her with their blunt mass. Ever since the morning she had moved in a state of trance, torn between anxiety and shame, each hour of the day an inner devouring, each minute with the officer an agony. If only she could succeed in reading Georges's fate in the eyes of Marc and Genevieve, but this German who had put his fingers on her, this German body which she had saturated with alcohol so that he would put his fingers on her, blocked her vision, and Genevieve, pressing Rudolf Francke's hand below her heart, said, "Get out of here, you horrify me! You monsters, you . . ."

All at once she had no voice left and the imprecation died on her lips: her mother appeared before her, hat strangely askew on her head, and her father, mustache strangely straight in his face. There was a moment of hesitation, a moment of universal suspense, and then a somersault so com-

plete that Madame Davy wound up in Genevieve's arms and Genevieve in Marc's, and the stiffness which girded the quartet slipped several notches, and Rudolf Francke crossed his hands smartly over the prow of his belly, and Marianne closed her mouth, and Jerome Davy opened his.

"What's all this? What's going on here?" he asked, looking around at soldiers and gendarmes, his friend Rudolf Francke and his daughter-in-law Marianne, his daughter Genevieve and his wife Constance, and the strange young man who was helping his wife to settle in a chair. But the question, remaining unanswered, suddenly reminded him that he was furious, that he had every reason to be furious; and he set his anger in motion.

"What's happening here, Brigadier? What are you doing in my house at this hour? Speak up, please!"

The brigadier of gendarmes stepped forward the length of a shoe, touched the visor of his cap in salute, moistened his lips: at last he could make his report, explain how and why, and retire with honor. Like a real colonial, Monsieur le Maire Jerome Davy had authority, and, by way of consequence, some understanding: he would recognize that the exercise of duty gets you into certain situations which are apt to lead to error, whereas with the German colonel you could sniff the kick in the behind a mile away, even for nothing. Sure, ask a Fritz to know the French proverbs, sure, tell him that all cats look alike in the dark. . . . If Mademoiselle Genevieve hadn't taken a powder everything would have ended in a friendly good evening on both sides, although—a matter of simple, sensible routine—he might have been curious to see the papers of the young fellow, who, whom, well, just so if in nine months . . .

"It's this way, Monsieur le Maire," he said, "it's that Mademoiselle . . ."

"Get out of here!" said Genevieve. She was patting her mother's hands, and Marc had retired to his shadowy corner. "Tell them to get out of here, Father. They've frightened Mother. Tell them to get out of here, to get out of here . . ."

"But just the same, I have a right to know!" said Jerome Davy, risking a worried look at his wife. She had just had a fainting spell, right out in a Breuil thoroughfare, so much so that the loiterers had had quite a show, and here she was in another, and it looked like a serious one. She had taken him out for a "walk" unheard of in every possible respect, under the preposterous pretext of talking to him about Marianne, as if the house and the garden were dangerously unfit for the purpose—taken him out over his own dead body, as it were, with an insistence so pressing, so agitated, that it had made him uneasy. It had come to him that in the morning his mind had paused in passing on the coincidence of the dynamiting and his daughter-in-law's . . . and if there was something to it, and Constance had learned something! Ah, heaven forbid! . . . He had popped out of the tub where he was soaking away his fatigue, and hurried into his clothes. They trotted into town, she continually putting off till "just a minute, in a minute" the revelation of her secret, he collapsing with weariness and consumed with impatience. And she didn't tell him a thing!

Not a thing that was coherent! Not a thing that made sense! Three quarters of an hour of walking, of blisters, of shooting pains, to find out that Marianne was Georges's wife—the wonderful news!—that she was the perfect wife for Georges—the wonderful stupidity!—that they should be proud of Georges—the wonderful discovery! As exhausted as he was, he had to hold her up, for her legs could hardly carry her, and she did not reply to his questions, or replied evasively. What had this Marianne come to Breuil for?—to visit her in-laws, of course; where is Georges?—in Paris, naturally; why doesn't he come to see us?—he's busy; doing what? —he's working on a thesis in Persian literature; what? a Persian thesis? hadn't he taken his doctorate years ago?—yes, of course, another thesis . . . and so on in the same vein; and if he hadn't been sure she was hiding something, that she was lying incredibly, he would have doubted her sanity; and then to find the gendarmes and the Wehrmacht in his house, in his home! There was dynamite and the devil's tail in all this, and there was reason to be furious, furious, furious. He pointed a round forefinger at his daughter-in-law, at the unknown young man, at the immobile quartet:

"What are you doing in my home! And you! And you!"

"It's this way, Monsieur le Maire," said the brigadier. "It's that Mademoiselle Genevieve your daughter and that individual over there were discovered in the forest while we were on duty and carrying out orders, seeing that suspicious tracks had been found in the neighborhood, and instead of obeying when we hailed . . ."

"You lie!" Genevieve cut in. "You fired without hailing. Don't listen to him, Father, he nearly killed me."

"I beg Mademoiselle's pardon," said the brigadier of gendarmes, unwilling to be taken for a liar. "Us, we fire only according to the established rules." At once he was very pleased with his formula, and repeated it with embellishments. "According to the established forms and rules. If Mademoiselle and her fiancé had not run away, we would have . . ."

"Her fiancé? . . ." Jerome Davy asked. So Genevieve was considering marriage, Genevieve who had intended to enter religion? Well, with all these execrable goings on, here was a bit of good news at last! Again he glanced at his wife, who lay collapsed in the chair, wordless and motionless. Could Constance have conceived the "walk" to keep him in the dark about their daughter's romance? What was the meaning of these absurd stage effects? What did it all mean? "Once and for all, Genevieve, I beg you to let the brigadier have his say."

"You're a horrible person," said Genevieve to the brigadier. "You are odiously impudent. Father, if you won't tell him to get out of here immediately, I shall be the one to get out." She looked directly at the Oberstleutnant, who was standing in the doorway and enjoying the spectacle. "Monsieur, can't you order these men to get out of my sight?"

For some minutes past, Rudolf Francke had been studying the man whom the gendarme had designated by the generic names of individual-

over-there and fiancé. So then, Genovefa-the-pure haunted the woods in the company of the stronger sex? At night, in the bushes, in the company of the stronger sex, Genovefa-the-virtuous? So she liked that, did she, cuddling in the grass. And she had come rubbing against him, Rudolf, only to cover her "fiancé"? So that he, Rudolf, would dismiss his men, whereupon the said "fiancé" would have made himself scarce before this dear Jerome came in? Ah the little orange blossom! The pretty robe of innocence! Ah, these Frenchwomen, after all! But yes, he'll help her to save her face. Yes, he'll assist her. There's nothing like being obliging to a girl, like helping her to straighten her skirts when a happy accident has mussed them, nothing like it to give you a claim to the role of Protector. He offered his homage to Genevieve, first with a movement of the head, then with a slight bending at the waist, while his eyes, leaving her to come to rest on the soldiers, seemed to have passed from a brilliant color to the negation of all color.

"Aus-rücken!" he said. And as the men, caught unawares, hesitated a second, he raised his voice: *"Hurtigmachen, Tod und Teufel!"*

The two soldiers saluted with the utmost haste and headed for the door. Disconcerted by the lieutenant colonel's order and by the exemplary obedience of their teammates, the gendarmes saluted in turn—and at that moment Jerome Davy decided that he had had absolutely enough of it. "Stay here, Brigadier!" he shouted as no one within the memory of man had heard him shout. He had enough of these machinations in which the whole pack of them seemed to be involved. Enough of this shady conspiracy in which bombs, hostages, fines, firing squads, and fiancés were mixed.—Enough, enough, enough! he repeated to himself, as if for fear that all at once he would have enough of having enough of it. "Genevieve, I want to know what has happened. Who is this young man? Who are you, young man?"

Marc Laverne felt that the moment had come to manifest himself; not exactly to answer the old gentleman's question, but to show himself in solidarity with the girl. The moment to compromise her. "I met Genevieve an hour ago. I had lost my way while out walking, and I asked her the road. One word led to another, and we became acquainted." He stood against the wall, conscious of making himself look like a small-time seducer, conscious of the flavor of boastfulness in what he was saying. "She was gracious enough to accept my company. We walked through the woods, then we sat down under a tree . . ."

". . . at the spot called La Fourche, on the side toward the road," the brigadier interrupted with a knowing air. "As I was saying to Monsieur le Maire, the place is suspect, seeing tracks were found there, the footprints of a man who limped, and seeing also that we don't know any gimp-legged man in Breuil-sur-Seine . . ."

A sharp exclamation escaped Madame Davy, cutting short the verbal abundance of the brigadier. Genevieve threw herself to her knees, clasping her mother's hands vehemently. "Don't you feel well, Maman? . . ."

she said, trying to make her go back over her exclamation. But Madame Davy no longer understood the meaning of what was happening. She made an effort to stand up, to hurry and bring help—her son in the attic, the gendarmes and the soldiers and all the enemies of God are after her son, they are forcing him to run on his broken leg, to hobble on his broken leg until he dies; but Genevieve, nailing her to her chair, made hope live again in her, massive doses of hope like fist blows that knock a drowning man unconscious and save him.

"Yes, exactly, I went for a walk, I sat down at the foot of a tree," she said, turning a hard, white face to her father. "I . . . I was happy. With a boy I had just met. Is that what you wanted to know, Father?" She clasped her mother's hands, and her voice was white and hard in the sonorous silence. "If my brothers were present, they would forbid you to torture their mother this way, and to expose their sister to the eyes of these . . . of this uniformed rabble. They would have protected us." She turned to the Oberstleutnant, to Marianne, who was looking over the Oberstleutnant's shoulder. "When you go back to Georges, tell him how his father . . ."

With the full strength of his arm Jerome Davy slapped his daughter. A dull red stain began to eat into the chalky whiteness of her face. ". . . tell him how his father takes pleasure in humiliating me," she said.

Jerome Davy struck again, but Rudolf Francke and Marc Laverne stayed his arm in mid-air. Their hands met on the old man's wrist. Madame Davy found the strength to stand up against her husband. He trembled, he spat like a cat. He was not tired now, not sleepy, he hurled defiance at all the scoundrels of the earth. A distinguished, an incomparable fury was avenging him on a world of crapular fronts, dethroned kings, malign collaborations, Teutons who get themselves roughed by Russians. A fury which purged him. Which he had never known, which at last he knew. Of which he would not let himself be cheated. "Put that man out!" he shouted, glad to be shouting. "Put him out, I say!" He had never slapped anyone, never made Constance cry. It was terrific, nevertheless. He struggled, shouting, "Throw that man out!" He held onto the wrath of his life, he would not let it go. He demanded his due of administrations and magistrations; his due for not having been to war; for not having been to women; for having been to the Africans. He exacted payment in bulk for what he had lost piecemeal. "Throw him out!" he shouted to hear himself shout, to keep up his rage so as to be able to shout.

Marc Laverne felt that the moment had come to take his departure; not exactly in order to satisfy the old gentleman, but because it was time. He passed in front of the gendarmes, motionless as dolls in a show window. Jerome Davy continued to fulminate. Empty of breath, Madame Davy braced herself on Genevieve's arm. Rudolf Francke imprisoned his host's wrists. What nerve, this Jerome. And what a daughter he had, the old rooster. So she had been laid. By a man she picked up. That's all. Ass in the air, that's all. Here you are, sir. Have some, sir. He liked the promise of it. He liked the promise of it enormously.

"Good-by, Genevieve," said Marc. "I hope we'll meet again."

"I'm going with you," said Genevieve. She slipped her arm through Marc's. "Do you want me to go with you?"

"Yes," said Marc. They passed through the door. Rudolf Francke released Jerome Davy's wrists. Finding himself no longer in constraint, he felt his fury suddenly losing its conviction. He turned halfway around, clutched at his wife. So this was the end. So he had been thrown back into his blind alley. Already the old passive habits called to him with the familiar tinkling of their bells—imaginary aneurisms, glories of Africa, royalist politics which in a thousand years and so on; already he felt coming back in him the retired administrator, the municipal officer in the service of the Kommandantur, the old man who dozed at the fall of day. So strong a regret seized him for his lost revolt, so strong a pity for the last—last debauch of his life, that a rekindled flame brought him upright. To shout once again, once again to ignite that holy wrath. He looked around him, if at that moment he held in his hand one of the lances, one of the assegais from his panoplies, he would have wielded it all around with the war cries of a Hottentot. "Take that man out, arrest that man!" he shouted, standing on tiptoe. "Arrest that man, I say!"

The two gendarmes rocked back on their heels. That man—there was only one man in sight, Monsieur the Lieutenant Colonel in charge of the Kommandantur of Breuil-sur-Seine, whom no one but the Marshal himself had the power to arrest. Subsequently Monsieur le Maire must mean that other man, Mademoiselle Genevieve's fiancé. That, yes, they understood the clear, certified orders, the more so because an arrest, even if the charge was thrown out later, always paid its fare. They executed a little high jump to return their salute—when, coming from very far away, breaking through very distant terrors, words made their way to the lips of Marianne.

"No, no, you can't do that!" she said, pushing the German officer aside. "You can't have him arrested! Think of Genevieve, of Genevieve . . ."

She stopped, looked at herself, then at her hands, then she put her hands to her mouth. Jerome Davy would have liked to go on shouting, to have her put out, to have her arrested too, but his voice was gone.

"I . . . I can talk," said Marianne. "You heard me, I can talk. . . ."

She could talk. A spokeless wheel began to spin in her eyes. She put out her hands in search of support, met the considerate arms of Rudolf Francke. He caught her in time, nimbly. She was a bit heavy, but good to the touch.—Ah these Frenchwomen, after all, he thought, carrying her into the library. On the rasping sand of the drive the gendarmes' boots set off in a gallop.

» 18 «

"WHERE IS MARC? I'VE GOT TO SEE MARC . . ." THE appearance of Youra Stepanoff, his rising out of an oblivion more impenetrable than hatred, aroused in Anne Marie a mass of emotions so compact that her first impulse was to shut the door—to slam the door and hold it shut with the whole weight of her body. She was not afraid of ghosts, but she discovered with dismay that she had almost succeeded in forgetting his face; or, at least, that she had striven to lose the memory of it, as one tries to mislay a thing which brings bad luck. During the last fourteen days, equal to fourteen cycles of an immeasurable age, she had lacked time and space for any reflex which did not have Marc for its pivot. Her thought, describing an orbit always the same, a single revolution, unique and interminable, exhausted itself in its own echo: Marc, Marc's silence, Marc's fate. Anything that sought to distract her from it belonged to the realm of the absurd; and if there continued to be movement on this stage where the very matter of the spectacle could be grasped no longer, nothing had any real truth. From Madame Laverne to Marianne, from the neighbors next door to the gas company employee, people were as tenuous as phantasms: they cast no shadow. They were to her drama what the prompter is to the text—reminders, no more. But in her, on her memory which needed no reminder, which drew in the breath and blood of Marc, the outer pantomime henceforth left no impression. She was impermeable to the prophesyings in which Jale and Sauveterre and other decipherers of epitaphs excelled; she was deaf to their gravediggers' logic. The lucid streaming of the sand through the sandglass was powerless to convince her that she was not dreaming; that Marc was gone, and the theater closed. Then, suddenly, on this same stair landing where a fortnight ago she had yearned so ardently for the emergence from legend of a legendary Madame Laverne, the unlooked-for apparition of Youra Stepanoff overthrew, with a flip, the content of the absurd.

She did not slam the door, did not find either the word of welcome or the word of rebuff. So that was it: she had set out to efface him from her memory because the sight of him, the accent of his voice, would remind her that she was cheating. For she was cheating. How right Marc had

been not to trust her fully! How right he had been to blame her for her "primitive" reactions! When he subjected his relations with her to criticism, there was always a certain misgiving in his estimate of her. He considered her too exclusively "tied" to him, not yet capable of fending for herself. His days and hours, he said, were too committed, so that he had no use for her as an ornament; and when she objected, protesting that he was putting her on the level of a mere decorative gewgaw, he retorted that she was playing on words. It mattered little, he insisted, that she was ready to be hacked to bits for him. Nothing, in fact, exasperated him more than this readiness. He detested domestic heroism and solidarities made of conjugal habits. "I reject fidelity in itself," he would say. "I conceive it only in a given relation of values between us and the object of our fidelity. Let such a relation happen to be modified, let one of the parties alter the values which cement the association, and the devil will go off with the most thick-skinned fidelity in his pocket. And first of all I reject loyalty to the dead. There'll be no pious memories, no macabre cult, on our calendar." Hence he wanted her to be capable of going on alone, of not mourning and lamenting, if he should disappear. The only fidelity he asked of her was that she be big enough to outlive him, that she learn to place her steps otherwise than in his tracks, that she know how to give her life a meaning more precious than mere attachment to a man. But in reality she was showing herself to be so far from "big enough" to measure up to his demand that at the first trial she plunged herself into mourning, rifles reversed and flags dragging—so far from "big enough," indeed, that it had taken the resurrection of the younger Stepanoff to make her lift her head out of the ashes and smile.

She took him by the hand and he followed her. He had shot out his question in a burst, as soon as Anne Marie opened the door; quickly and in a single breath, but she had not reacted, had absolutely not reacted. He had not looked at her, not higher than the bottom of her skirt and a bit of her bare knees and calves, waiting for her to do the sensible thing. At one moment he had thought he should repeat his question, good and loud this time, to make it easy for her to insult him, to spit at him, as she, sensibly, was thinking of doing. Since the day of his "confession" he had not pronounced a single word apart from this—"Where is Marc? I've got to see Marc . . ." and, as if this long spell of dumbness had exacerbated a contrary need in him, he felt a passive but consciously perverse desire to be insulted and spat upon. But Anne Marie had found something better and worse, she took him by the hand as she used to do when she was troubled or unhappy or happy maybe, and he followed her into this apartment where he had already come with Marc, when he still had some innocence about him. He let her lead him to the sofa, sat down when she told him to sit down. She smiled a little—so little that he could not bear the sight.

"Where did you come from?" she said.

"From over there," he said. "From the printing shop."

It was true: he was being "held" at the printing shop. She thought with

a sort of relief that what made him unrecognizable was his mechanic's blues, and the clumsy look of his long arms dangling from the tattered sleeves. "My poor Youra," she said.

"I got out of the printing shop through a window." He looked at the window, at the patient geometry of the hemstitching on the curtains, and his voice was level and matter-of-fact. "I promised Marc not to leave there, but this morning I broke a windowpane and left."

She did not say anything. He shouldn't have done it. Probably he had no papers on him, and he attracted attention in his shrunken blues, with the lock of hair in his eye, with his incredibly Russian look. But as he continued to keep silent, she asked him why he had not told Jale that he meant to come to the Rue des Dames.

"Because I left at daybreak, and I was locked in with a double lock, and the hasp of the window didn't work."

"Why don't you give me a straight answer, Youra? Is it because you think I . . . I'm angry with you?"

The building across the street outlined itself on the transparent geometry of the curtain; a building that one day or other some men came and put up there. He thought, Came and put up, reflecting with astonishment on the amount of persistence the act of coming, of doing, implied. He pulled down on the cuffs of his overalls to make them cover his wrists. "I've got to see Marc," he said.

"I don't know where Marc is," Anne Marie said slowly. She saw the skin tighten over Youra's temples; tighten and become transparent. "He was arrested. Didn't you know that?"

"I didn't know." There was a lump of phlegm in his throat, a round gobbet of melted wax. He looked at the building across the street and the patient geometry of the openings in the cement façade for the persistent torture. Was it Anne Marie who had asked, "Scream in the cement?" It seemed to him that she had been the one. "I was hoping he'd come over there," he said. "I waited fifteen days. I didn't set a limit. I was sure he'd come. They brought me food three times a day, and cigarettes, but they didn't speak to me. They locked me in. I figured they were waiting for Marc too. For the decision."

"The decision . . ." Anne Marie repeated. Her eyes were on the sleeves of his blues, and his hands were too big at the ends of his bare wrists. "What decision? Look at me, won't you?"

He did not look at her. Yes, the question about screaming in the cement was Anne Marie's. The other time, in Marseilles, in the cotton pajamas. "The important thing is to scream." That was what he had answered. Or something close to it. All that filthy bilge. All that word-swindle, to take the place of language. "Marc—how did it happen?" he asked.

"What decision?" Anne Marie said again. She had the feeling that he hated her enough to kill her. "Marc didn't say a single reproachful word about you. Won't you look at me, Youra?"

He would not. He cleared his throat, in an effort to reduce the clot of

suet in which his voice was stuck. "How about me? Aren't you going to ask me if I don't feel I have to reproach myself? And crawl on my knees like a character in a Russian novel? Not at all. . . . I was well off over there. I slept. Day and night, without stopping. Without stopping, I tell you. And when I wasn't asleep, I pretended to be. They must have told you: I pretended to be. I could have been listening at the keyhole, there was a lot of talk going on in the shop out front, but what did I care? I woke up long enough to swallow what they gave me to eat, then went back to bed. I lied when I said I was waiting for Marc. You're not waiting for anything when you're asleep. In fact that's what you sleep for: so as not to be waiting." His voice was becoming savage from the pent-up tension behind it. "And I wasn't dreaming. Not even a dream, I tell you. Two weeks with an empty brain. Half a month with no brain at all. Then this morning it came back to me. Just this morning, and everything changed. You want to know what changed? I'll tell you. You won't understand, but I'll tell you all the same. I got that line from the cop: he keeps saying I won't understand but he'll tell me all the same. I won't sleep any more, that's what changed. As long as I live, I won't sleep any more. And I'll live a long time, that's a promise. I've got to, otherwise I'd lose. Isn't that a good decision? I'm proud of it. I'm . . ."

He turned his whole body toward her. She was pale and she smiled a little. He tried to swallow, but the lump of resin climbed up inside his throat. "You think I'm putting on an act," he said.

She shook her head. Her heart was beating heavily, and it hurt her. She tried to take his hands, but he quickly put them behind his back. He blew sharply out of the corner of his mouth to clear away the lock of hair which was blinding him. A look of triumph came into his eyes.

"You're lying," he said, his voice sticking. "You're lying to make me think I'm not lying. You can't get away with that. You know perfectly well that it isn't possible not to sleep. Do you know anybody who can do it? You see, it is impossible. But I can do it. Why are you looking at me like that? You think I'm talking about real sleep? About getting under the covers and dreaming? I told you you wouldn't understand. You want to know? I'm talking about what's behind sleep. About what we spend our lives hiding from ourselves—that we're crawling worms. All our lives we try to give ourselves legs, and when we think we've got them, but we've never got them, it's time to die. I won't hide it any more, that's what I'll do. I won't do like my father did, pretend to be God the Father. Nor like Marc did, and pretend to be a . . . an eagle." The expression on his face changed, making him suddenly old. "You won't tell me what happened to Marc?"

She was glad he had asked the question. Listening to him, she was afraid; of his words, of their sound, of their meaning. She wanted to put her arms around him, to show him how she suffered with him. Without going into detail, leaving out any mention of the Davy affair, she told him how the arrest had come about. She spoke hastily, as if the rapid out-

pouring of her words would keep him from some rash act; and since what she felt free to tell him was said in a few sentences, she went on without pausing about the older Stepanoff's arrest, for the sole purpose of keeping Youra in suspense. She did not know what to do, thinking that she should not leave him to himself, nor abandon him to this clairvoyance which he claimed to have. But already he had ceased to listen, and was again looking at the building across the street through the mesh of the curtain.

"Where are you going?" she asked, seeing him stand up. "Wait a minute, I was just going to make coffee. Won't you have a cup with me?"

He did not answer. She stood up in front of him. He looked awkward and defenseless, and his wrists dangled from the sleeves of his blues. "You mustn't go out in the street, it isn't wise," she said.

He took a stride toward her, forcing her to step back. "Zero," he said. "The only wise ones are God the Father and the eagles."

"You can't go away like this," said Anne Marie. "Not like this. Wait a minute, I'll give you a coat and a pair of trousers of Marc's. They'll arrest you. They'll . . ."

"They won't." He saw anxiety cloud Anne Marie's eyes. "You want to know why they won't? You want to know? You won't understand, but I'll tell you all the same. It's because I'm a cultivated worm: they make a profit on me."

"That's enough, Youra!" She spoke through her clenched teeth. "I know you're unhappy, but you have no right to show your contempt for us by humiliating yourself like an Oriental. You have no right to forget that you are still one of us, and that we love you. Relax. You need to calm down. Maman . . . Madame Laverne won't be long now, and we'll all have lunch together."

"So you're afraid, eh? The whole pack of you are afraid!" He seized her by the arm, pushing her before him. "For me—or of me? Afraid I'll go to the police? You bet I'll go to them—crawling. That's my job, didn't you know it? Crawling to the police!"

Roughly he shoved her aside, made for the door, and sped down the stairs.

Etienne Espinasse restrained himself from raising his head over the sheaf of papers the clerk was handing him; he lifted his eyes, slowly, heavily, until his look met and measured that of Youra Stepanoff, standing in the doorway.—Armed? Unarmed? he thought, as if he was thinking with the back of his neck, with the roots of his molars. He took the tip of his tongue between his teeth, gently at first, then harder, then very hard, being careful meanwhile not to move his jaw. As he looked out from under his bushy eyebrows, it seemed to him that his superciliary arch was pressing down on the muscles of his eyes, and his scalp and the skin of the nape of his neck hurt him. He could have pushed the button under the desk with the toe of his shoe, but the presence of the clerk embarrassed him. He bore the young Russian's gaze, leaned on it as it

were, and at the same time tested its tension.—Trying a fast one, not trying a fast one? he thought, resisting his desire to swallow. He would rather the fellow didn't try a fast one. He brought one hand from under the desk, with a long, gradual movement, as if a less controlled gesture might set off some automatic firing contraption, then signaled his subordinate to get out of the room. The clerk hesitated, uncertain as to the fate of his sheaf of papers, then moved obliquely toward the door.—Stinking police, thought Espinasse, holding his foot over the electric button. Boat gone three weeks, where's this kid been hanging out all that time, he certainly didn't swim back from Morocco. He would rather the kid didn't try a fast one, he had things to say before he pulled anything like that. The clerk slid sidewise behind the younger Stepanoff, who stood stock-still, anchored to the floor.

"Close the door," said Espinasse, no longer gnawing on his tongue.

The clerk complied, lingering in the crack of the door with a face sharpened by curiosity. Espinasse brought his other hand from under the desk, picked up a cigarette, lighted it. He'd been right about this nitwit: one bad break, and he threw a fit. He wasn't worth the trouble. He wasn't made of the same stuff as his father. "You'll lose an eye if you keep on popping it out that way," he said through the smoke of his cigarette.

"Where is my father?" said Youra. "Where is Marc Laverne?"

Espinasse took his foot away from the alarm button. No, the nitwit wasn't armed. Set to yell some, no doubt, but not armed. He was almost sorry. He felt angry with himself because he had chewed his tongue and had a pain in his scalp.—Marc Laverne and Stepanoff, Sr. . . . Decidedly, the conquerors ran their own show without him, against him. It wasn't the first time they'd poached on his preserves, but the snatching was beginning to be chronic. The thought of his son came back to him: he couldn't forgive himself for having lost track of him since the business in the Bordeaux court. His son was not in the legal prisons or the secret prisons; he had not been deported into Germany by the terms of the so-called "Fog and Night" decree to be delivered to the firing squad of the Sicherheitsdienst; he had not been shot down under any alias known to his father.—Unless . . . he thought. He did not like to think about this "unless . . ." with its points of suspension that harbored every threat. He preferred to think that his son was recovering from a wound; or that he had popped over to England. There were no surprises in the setup, after all; a man, whoever he might be, was free or behind bars or dead. But the young Russian's simple question had at one blow demolished the systematic scaffolding of the infallible alternative. His ignorance concerning the fate of Laverne and the older Stepanoff suddenly showed an abyss at the edge of his path, and put his son's fate in doubt again. He sucked on his cigarette so vehemently that for a second his voice failed him.

"Where've you been spending your time since you jumped ship? Come over here."

"What have you done with my father and Marc Laverne?" said Youra, not moving.

Maybe he was armed, after all. . . . He clung to this thought, as if it somehow comforted him. Suddenly the idea came to him that if he stopped a bullet his son would come out of hiding to get news of him. "Huh . . ." he puffed, disgusted. Wearily he looked at the younger Stepanoff.—He's sick, he thought. Sort of seasick, the hero. But he'll have to control himself. And talk.

"Come over here," he repeated. He pushed the packet of cigarettes across the desk. "Have a smoke, if you like. No, no back talk."

Youra came nearer, took a cigarette—and in a trice was on the inspector, brandishing the plaster dog with the quail in its mouth. "Answer me, before I split your skull!" he said, his lip drawn back.

"Huh . . ." went the inspector. He pivoted in his chair, seemed to reflect, then with all his might drove his knee into the young Russian's belly. The statuette described an arc over his head, and Youra staggered backward to the wall. Espinasse set his foot over the bell button. "I told you no back talk," he said.

"I'll kill you . . ." said Youra, putting his hands in his trousers pockets.

"I've heard that before," said the inspector. He looked at the fragments of the statuette with a bored and weary eye. "I don't know where Laverne and your father are. I didn't even know they'd been taken in."

"You lie," said Youra. He came back toward the desk, holding his belly through his trousers pockets. "You lie like . . ."

"Shut your mouth, you fathead. Take a cigarette and try to use your brains. Stop foaming at the mouth, I tell you. I don't need to lie to you, you're not that interesting. Tell me what you know."

"I'd see you croak first," said Youra.

"If you don't stop sputtering, I'll have the boys give you a shellacking. I'll have you beaten till you piss blood." His voice was calm and low-pitched, and completely bored. "That's a promise I'm making you, and you'll see if I'm lying. You're a ninny, but maybe you'll understand. You must be polite. In France, people are polite."

"Oh yes, I'll be polite, don't have me beaten till I piss blood," said Youra. He looked at the inspector as if to pull his heart out with his fingers. "I'll tell you politely and in good French—Inspector Espinasse, you're a dirty dog, you're a load of whore's meat. Since we're in France, may I beg leave to tell you very politely that you're a sewer hole? That I'd like to sprinkle your thick hide with gasoline and put a match to it? How do you like my politeness, Inspector Espinasse? Now you won't have me beaten till I piss blood, will you, Inspector?"

"Look here, Stepanoff, Jr.," said the inspector. The bags under his eyes seemed to have swollen and got bluer, and his voice came from the inside of a tub. "Look here, I'm not going to argue with you. I don't know where Laverne and your father are, any more than I knew fifteen minutes ago that you were hanging around Paris. You're a lamebrain, but maybe

you'll understand. It can happen to anyone not to know certain things. When you've told me the things you know, I'll see what can be done. I don't say for the old man, but for Laverne. And you'll have to tell your story. First, because that's our agreement. Second, because you won't refuse to help your pal Marc. Lastly, because that's what you came here for." He put his foot on the button, gave three short rings. "But first I'm going to have you beaten, so you'll learn to be polite."

Two men came in, their eyes questioning Espinasse. They were bareheaded and their trousers were neatly creased. Youra took one hand out of his pocket and laid a light punch on the lips of the man who had come up at his right. His action was so unlooked-for, so foreign to the ways of the house, that the policeman forgot to pull his head back.

"Come on, my coppers, don't you get it?" said Youra. He pointed a finger at Inspector Espinasse. "Old asshole here wants me beaten till I piss blood."

The inspector went "huh . . ." and the two policemen laid hold of their man. He made no effort to resist. "No, here . . ." said Espinasse. He didn't want them to take his nitwit away and maybe spoil him. The nitwit had some things to say. The policeman who had received the tap on the lips jumped behind Youra, caught hold of his lapels, with a rapid movement pulled his coat down over his back, and with a deft twist pinioned his arms. His companion, head lowered and sure of fist, began to plant sweeping hooks in the patient's liver.

The inspector lighted a cigarette and plunged into the sheaf of papers. "Take it easy," he said, talking through his nose. The nitwit was capable of letting them burst his spleen without saying ouch. He didn't want them to polish him off. Not right away. The work lasted three minutes, maybe two. Youra did not defend himself, did not scream. Anne Marie in the cotton pajamas over her breasts of—over her breasts. "If you're ashamed to scream, you're ashamed to live." All these words you say, and that you've got to pay for. The first half-dozen hooks took his breath away. Mouth open, nose stopped, he threw himself forward after each blow as if his lungs were going out of him following the movement of the fist. "You're right, screaming is natural to us." All these words you say, that come back and demand their due. His liver swelled and spread, and the pile driver was satisfied with its work. He would have sat down on the floor, but the policeman at his back had put an arm under his chin and was bracing him with a knee in the small of his back. He made out the face of the man who was working on him, distorted and moving as though behind flowing water, then he stopped hearing the sound of the pile driver on his flesh: he discerned its arrival and departure, but through several layers of thickness and quite without echo. There was a taste of iron filings in his mouth and pine needles traveled vertically in his eyes, and then he found himself on a chair, facing the inspector, who was looking at him through the smoke of his cigarette.

He caught his breath a wisp at a time, and inside of him the pain

began to clarify its lines, also a wisp at a time. He touched his belly, but it was as if he had touched a wooden belly with a wooden hand. The inspector pushed a glass of water to the edge of the desk, and he took it and drank it. Then he touched his chest. He was wearing an iron corset studded with points which sank into his muscles when he breathed. The two men with the neatly pressed trousers had gone away, and the inspector resembled a Buddha dying of weariness.

"I hope you're satisfied now?" he said. "You're some hero."

Youra put the glass on the table and asked for water. His tongue also was wooden, and too thick to hold between his teeth. He drank again, without throwing back his head. Then he carried the glass to his forehead and pushed aside the lock of hair which was blinding him. In his eyes the pine needles lighted like filaments and went out one by one, and in his belly something whose name he did not know called for water.

"More water," he said.

"Nice people say please," said the inspector.

He did not say please and he did not get water. It was just as well he was playing it bold: one more glass of water and he'd throw up. "Very good," said the inspector. "Better than I expected. Now be polite. No, no more nonsense, I tell you. If you want some more going over, all you need to do is ask me nicely. I'll have you gone over till you feel rewarded. It's a promise, so cut out the yammering."

Youra touched his belly. "Pus bag," he said. Each draft of air lighted a new brand in his entrails. "Skunk fart," he said. He could see that his insults caught Espinasse like a whip; that it disturbed his mask of boredom. "Cow dung," he said. He put his finger in his mouth, touched his tongue. "So it turns your guts inside out to hear that you're a manure wagon, hey? If you'd give me enough time, I'd exterminate you just by telling you what I think of your rotten carcass. You know I'd exterminate you. Go on, call in your muscle men. Call them in, sow's tit. Call them in, call them in, what are you waiting for, you scum!"

"Sure sure, little wise guy, I'll call them for you right away," said the inspector, with his cigarette in the middle of his lip. In answer to the bell, the two muscle men came forward in their neatly creased trousers. They wore the air of two gentlemen visiting friends at home. They took hold of their patient under the arms.

"Greetings, my coppers," said Youra, stiffening his knees.

"Like before, chief?" said the coppers.

"As you like," said the chief.

"Right," said the coppers. "We take him outside?"

"Not at all," said Youra. "Go to it, my coppers, I won't scream."

"Take him outside," said the inspector.

They took him. So fast, so strongly, that his feet barely touched the floor. But they had not reached the door when Espinasse told them to halt. They halted, on one leg, in the attitude of a discus thrower, bending backward and listening over their shoulders.

"Look here, you're a dumbbell, but try to understand all the same. This is your last chance to . . ."

"You big fat heap of manure," said Youra, facing the door.

One of the policemen hit him on the mouth. Then he wiped his fingers in the patient's hair. Youra passed his tongue over his lips. They tasted like pepper. "You old, old whore's brat," he said.

". . . your last chance to give your pal Marc a lift," said the inspector. "If it's not too late. If he's not dead. Shut up. We know, you're a hero. Look, it's the last time I'll talk to you. I don't know what became of Marc. I've lost sight of him since your fake sailing. If he's been arrested, you must know where and how. That's all I'm asking you. After that I'll have you taken away. You'll have your beating, you've earned it. It's a promise. And you'll scream like a nice boy. That's a promise too. Turn around."

The policemen turned him halfway around. His head on his chest, the lock of hair in his eye, he listened to the pain rocking his bones. If Marc wasn't dead. If he could see Marc again, and Marc made the decision. He blew into the lock of hair. "Put the cops out," he said.

The inspector had them put Youra back on the chair in front of the desk, and they went out. He looked at the young Russian as he emptied a glass of water. What was there about this Marc Laverne that attached this one to him? What was so attractive about him? All of a sudden he too was thirsty, but there was no other glass in the room.

"I don't believe you," said Youra. "Even if you opened up your big paunch so everyone could see what's crawling around inside, I wouldn't believe you. There's not a soul in the world who trusts you. If I were in your place I'd be awfully sad. I'd commit suicide, in your place. Nobody. Not even a dog. Not even your own son."

The inspector's arm plunged over the desk and caught him full in the face. He fell backward, carrying the chair with him. The glass he was holding in his hand took off toward the ceiling, then fell back amid the debris of the plaster statue. The two gentlemen who were waiting in the hall to take away the patient showed their faces in the doorway, and the inspector told them to put Youra back on his chair and the chair back in front of the desk.

Youra wiped his mouth and nose. The blood made an ugly brown stain on the blue of his jumper. In his mouth his wooden tongue was pushing out a useless tooth. The inspector lighted a cigarette. He wore his look of somnolence and boredom.

"Not even your own son," said Youra. "But maybe for once in your . . ."

"No more nonsense," said the inspector.

". . . in your bitch of a life, just once, so you can lie to yourself, you'll keep your word. Marc Laverne was arrested the fourth of October, fourteen days ago today, at Breuil-sur-Seine. He gave the name Philippe Chasserat, born in Dieppe, liberated prisoner. The gendarmes handed him over to the Gestapo, and he was probably brought to Paris." In his

mouth the useless tooth had given way. He took it in his fingers and put it on the inspector's desk. "It belongs to you," he said. "A war trophy." Through the breach the air flowed over his tongue like a tricklet of water. "Now call in my coppers." he said.

The inspector called them in.

"October 9 1942

"This morning I begin my fifth day of fasting. This paper and ink were brought in to me a few minutes ago. I am not too weak. My writing is fluent and, I think, no more illegible than usual. My pulse is slow but regular. It must be my training. This is my fourth hunger strike in the last twenty-five years. I don't know why I note that. Perhaps because I am proud of it. Perhaps also because I would like it to be known. The Germans will be the first to read these lines, but I am not writing for them. Nor for myself. One does not write for oneself, certainly not on the threshold of death. One writes—this is a commonplace—to make public confession: an ablution in broad daylight. But I am reconciled to commonplaces. Moreover, I had no intention of setting down any 'posthumous notes.' The few lines I may happen to jot here during the few days to come will be due to the fact that the gesture of writing, or rather of having a pen in hand, is part of my game against Herr Scherbe. When I made him believe that I was composing my memoirs, I put myself in the situation of having to write. Thus, to state the thing more clearly, I am not writing 'for'; I am writing 'to'; to those who will wish to count me among their own. Who are they? I really do not know. A quarter of a century ago I would have said without hesitation: the communists. Today I do not know. Even if I take 'communists' in the purest meaning of the word. We might say that this is an anonymous letter, with the difference that for once the anonymous applies to the addressee. I shall use a cliché: I imagine myself writing a letter to the 'man of good will.' It is true that I am also reconciled to clichés.

"I call it a letter for lack of a better word, because this is neither a message, nor a testament, nor a profession of faith. I no longer have time for such things. And what is more, a letter sometimes is very slow in reaching the one whom it interests. Yet I am sure that these pages will be read. The Nazis will not destroy them. Not even to give my certainty the lie. Bureaucracies destroy nothing that looks like a page covered with writing. They have a mystical fear and respect for paper. Paper is the distinguishing attribute of bureaucratic power. They burn books and falsify their texts, granted; but they preserve the originals in fireproof vaults. The smallest throwaway that bears some trace of the opposition against the Stalinist bureaucracy is religiously preserved in the cellars under the Kremlin. I envy the historian of the future, who will have access to them. When I said to Herr Scherbe: 'Give me four weeks and writing materials,' he argued about the time but provided me with enough

paper for six months. So it will be known that I am on my fourth hunger strike. Our vanity often takes the wrong direction: nothing, in any case, flatters us so much as our physical advantages, real or imaginary. Thus, on the ship, I felt a futile sentiment of superiority when I saw that I was taller, and no doubt stronger, than the two agents who had come to arrest me. 'As strong as Comrade Stepanoff,' the Partisans used to say. I remember, it was during the civil war, in the Urals. I had moved a horse which had fallen dead on top of an automatic rifle. This gave birth to legends. 'You know, Comrade Stepanoff, the one who can lift a horse.' I had not lifted the horse, I had pulled him by the tail, but I let them talk. I convinced myself that to explain, to restore its true proportions to the fact, would be a way of glorifying myself. Today I know that it was vanity which kept me from speaking. Today I know that even then I knew it was vanity.

"Why do I set down this perfectly uninteresting thing? I have not the slightest intention of abasing myself. If I was absolutely determined to give an accounting of my pettinesses, I could produce better evidence than a dead horse. I think the reason is to keep myself from pontificating. I am alone before this page, as alone as one can be, with fifty-three years of days and nights behind me, and only a few hours in front of me, and I would like to be simple. I do not say sincere, but simple, meaning as free of theatrics as possible. Heine knew it already, and Dostoievsky repeated it: no one is sincere when he speaks of himself. But why should I speak of myself? Just so that I can be simple. I will not succeed, not always. Let the story of the horse be my trial horse. A man has made up his mind to die. Following the tradition of those who die, he ought to make an accounting of his actions and deduce certain melancholy precepts for the benefit of the living. I shall not escape this tradition. One does not invent the metaphysical terms of one's death. At most, one seasons them with a greater or smaller amount of eloquence. I should like my terms to be without gravity. It is not a grave thing to die. If pathos begins to flow from my pen, imagine me tugging a dead horse by the tail. That will re-establish the balance. But in itself this caution is already a stage pose.

"I had to interrupt my writing. The German soldier who acts as my jailer and body servant brought in my lunch. To do away with meat, vegetables, bread, and coffee three times a day is a complicated enterprise. The soldier is a man in his thirties. He never speaks to me, and he turns the eye of disapproval on the plates which he brings me. I think he envies me the luxury of my menu. Indeed, I am fed with an excess of luxury. It surprises me how little the methods vary when the aim is to make a prisoner amenable. Torture or comfort. We arrived here at night, in the big car which came to the wharf for me. I know the automobile went up the grand boulevards as far as the Etoile, but I do not know exactly what quarter of Paris this is. My cell is a sort of hotel room, with the window walled up and the door reinforced with an iron bar. There is an electric

bulb in the ceiling, and a lamp at the head of my bed. There is a water closet in the left-hand corner of the cell. That is where I get rid of my meals. I 'eat' with my back to the door. When my guardian takes a notion to slide back the shutter of the peephole, he sees me working my elbows. I rattle the knife and fork on the edge of the plate. Moreover, I cut up my meat, I crumble my bread. Sometimes I empty the plates. Other times I leave remnants of food on them. Now and then I ask for more sugar for my coffee, or less salt in my vegetables. Clandestinity is made of such precautions. I make my requests bureaucratically, in writing.

"My first questioning took place October second, the fourth day after my arrest. The questions asked were strictly biographical. A German, in civilian clothes, in the flower of his age, checked off with a pencil the documents which he drew out of a folder. These documents, the precision of the questions, even their perfect dryness, proved that my capture had been long and carefully prepared. If they waited until I was aboard ship to arrest me, it was because they hoped to lower my resistance thereby. We too made much use of this elementary psychology—build up a subject's feeling of security when you know he is lost. The session lasted over an hour. There was no controversy. My questioner was the 'card-index' type. His task was merely to check the references of fact and chronology. The pattern of my life was spread out under his hand: birth, activities, prisons, writings. Objectively. All he had to do was to verify the totals. There were no errors. Nor were there any comments.

"The following day I made the acquaintance of Herr Scherbe. As I came in he asked if I would mind speaking German. If I did, he would be glad to converse either in French or in Russian. We spoke German. Scherbe is close to fifty. He is bald, not very tall, thin. Like his predecessor, he is in civilian clothes. He is polished in manner and language, direct and cynical in the exposition of his ideas. He said to me in substance: I have some very large advantages over you. Firstly, I have force on my side. I don't bring this up to make you tremble. I mention it only to define our respective positions. Secondly, I know the man you are. I know you intimately. I have been studying you for months. So that you can't maneuver, even if you thought of doing so. Thirdly, this is a personal matter between you and me. Understand me: I have nothing against you personally. But I have always treated the affairs of my country as my own. Fourthly, I have decided that I will not enter into debates on ideology or ethics with you. That is not my method. I know your ideas. You think you know those I represent. We're even. The only advantage you might have over me would be to take refuge behind what in your terminology is called one's conscience, or one's probity, or the unity of one's life. My decision has closed that retreat to you beforehand: I shall not contest you these things. I guarantee you conscience, probity, unity. Hence I shall not try to convert you to National Socialism. You're beyond the age. We need you, not your approval. Just as we have need of specialists and scholars, whom we do not ask to subscribe to the Hitler doctrine. We furnish them

materials, implements, laboratories, and they work, each at his specialty, as they would under any other regime. Political and religious dogmas have never changed the chemistry of the atom. Not practically, at least. I had you brought here to ask you to work. I shall put the radio, the press, the cinema at your disposal. You have specialized, if I may put it that way, in the struggle against Stalinism. I ask you to continue. You will enjoy the most entire freedom of expression. You will be the only one to choose your subjects and your language. I shall lift all censorship, if you promise me: (a) not to touch on the war; (b) not to touch on the German people, army, or politics.

"I said: 'And if I refuse?'

"He smiled, and offered me a cigarette.

"October 10

"I have an almost childish desire to see the light of day. It was five o'clock by my watch when I woke up. I stayed in bed a long time. I had sweats. Throbbing sensation that they came from the lighted bulb in the ceiling. I thought of the light in Marseilles. I thought of Youra. He's in Morocco, I suppose. But if the transshipment has already occurred, he is on his way to America. I hope he did not try to get back into France. His look, which I intercepted at the last minute, from the quai. I also thought of Yvonne. I am glad they have left. It gives me peace. Youra was going farther and farther from me. Yvonne too. He very clearly, with a touch of hostility intended to justify his emancipation. She very gently, with returns of tenderness. It made me suffer, on account of Yvonne particularly. I loved her passionately. I proved myself incapable of cultivating the affection of these two beings. I can admit it to myself now. Youra, because I could not help him to free himself of my tutelage. Yvonne, because every day, a little each day, I was destroying her esteem for me. Both, because I had taught them to see into me too clearly. A man is not loved by those who know him too well.

"I got out of bed at eight o'clock. My hands trembled as I sent my breakfast down the water closet. After that I walked up and down for an hour. This weakens me, which is a good thing. My vision is disturbed. I am smoking too much, probably. I must cut down. I think constantly of Youra's eyes. Or rather, I see them. It gives me a kind of sorrowful anxiety. Now it is noon.

"Yesterday was my first day without a 'conference.' This is part of the agreement with Herr Scherbe. From the third to the eighth of October he kept me in his office for hours each day. Whatever his previous intentions were, we talked ideology and ethics. We couldn't help it. The fifth of October I started to fast. I could take my life in a simpler way, but I intend to die slowly. I want to assist at my death. I want to be present at it. That is why I say 'take my life' instead of 'kill myself.' To kill oneself is to act quickly. It is to obey a fit of despair. I am not desperate. I do

not even claim to be committing suicide by way of protest. In Stalin's jails, protest had some meaning. Although we were incarcerated, reduced to the condition of helots, we hoped the Party would right itself. When we had recourse to the hunger strike, we were using it as a resounding weapon. No one fasted secretly. Moreover, for us who were part and parcel of the Revolution, there was grandeur in dying under the guillotine of reaction. We were not indifferent to historical analogies. But there is neither meaning nor grandeur in dying at the hand of the Nazis. There is only the greater or less degree of torture. There is anonymity. Among so many dead, the act of dying is reduced to an abstraction. It is important to escape from this abstraction. It's a serious thing to leave one's remains to the dogs. I have made a decision. I have made a calmly considered choice, which is all the more final because I have the power to retract it. It is good that I have to hold this power in check. It is good that with each passing hour my instinct of self-preservation makes me increasingly aware of this power. It is good that I desire to live, when I have chosen to die.

"Scherbe's language, the turn of his thought, are those of a cultivated man. His Russian is flawless. I noticed this when he quoted Lermontov in passing. He has certainly lived in Russia. Besides, he may not be German. To tell the truth, he does not interest me. In the course of the 'conferences' which followed, he has proved that he really knows me. That is, he knows the psychology of a Marxist revolutionary of my generation. This knowledge has enabled him to work out a method free of tricks. He works with a hatchet, brutally, with a false absence of subtlety which is subtlety itself. The originality of the method consists in deliberate contempt for all sentimentality. He does not appeal to the cowardly side which is in all of us. He does not draw pictures of the better life, of a humanity happy because Aryan. He abstains from following the classic tangent: the failure of Russian Communism. He promises nothing, neither rewards nor honors. Very simply, he puts you to work. In his Europe every man fights or works. A man is as good as his work. He becomes his work. In fact, he exists only by his rifle, his workbench, his spectroscope. His tool is his measure. He weds its soul. Deprived of his tool, he changes into an inanimate object. He ceases to exist socially. As for me, without a rostrum, without the press, I lose my reason for existence. It is Scherbe's duty to restore to me my social *raison d'être*.

"Just now I was seized by a spell of weakness. I lay down and slept a little. Now I am all right. I drank a mouthful of water. I drink water, three glasses a day. Then I walked up and down, barefoot. I feel lighter barefoot.

"Day before yesterday I propounded my conditions to Herr Scherbe: I asked for four weeks, to write my memoirs. After which I bound myself to give him an answer. He wanted to know what my answer would be. I said: 'That will depend on the state of my mind in which my self-examination will put me.' He seemed satisfied. He seemed to count on the beneficial results of my introspection. He argued, however, over the

four weeks. It was too long, to his way of thinking. I was on my sixth 'conference' with him, my fourth day of fasting. I could not continue these interminable sessions any longer. He would have noticed the weakening of my resistance. We agreed on three weeks. We also agreed that this period would belong to me entirely. No more 'conferences.' Nothing which would take my mind from my 'redaction.' Clandestinity is made of such ruses. His last word was: 'I hope you will understand that one must know how to resign oneself to history.'

"He takes himself for history. Just as we did, in the years of the civil war. With this capital difference, that we were animated by a boundless humanistic idealism. We wanted to carry the time. We did not ask anyone to resign himself, but to come with us. To help us in that terrible effort. We did not look on history as an impersonal machine, in which the individual would be devoured. We really thought to liberate man, from historical determinism as well. We were right. Man is not a myth in the service of a dehumanized history. It is the latter which is the myth. There is no history which is not human.

"October 11

"When my soldier comes into my cell, I try to evade his eye. I've thinned a great deal in the last twenty-four hours: he might notice it. True, my beard, which grows thick, serves as a screen. I have scattered my pages all over the place, even on the cot. As soon as I hear the sound of footsteps, I pick up one of these pages. So that I always look as if I were at my memoirs. Or else I pretend to be reading. A volume of Hölderlin, which Herr Scherbe lent me.

"Although all this writing is no more than a sort of sham, it seemed to me that I had a great many things to say: the war, the Revolution, the destiny of man. It seemed to me that at last I was about to ask myself some simple questions: Why does man exist? Why is the tragic the very core of man? I have just reread these notes: there is self-excuse in every line. I was not far from destroying the whole thing.

"Nevertheless I am trying to live up to my pledge: to be simple. But that ambition, modest as it is, is only a deception. In 'being simple' all complexities exist in potency, and I knew it. I chose the most difficult, so as to fail in my effort. I could have proposed to be without make-up, 'to be true' as it is called. I could have proposed to be without pride. Or even sincere, despite Heine and Dostoievsky. I would have succeeded, if not in all of these together, at least in one or the other. But I proposed to strip myself with a stroke of the pen of fifty-three years of affectation, of centuries of refinement. The result is that I am turning out literature. I give my style a melancholy rhythm which is not in me. One would say I was disillusioned and reconciled. I am not.

"And yet I wish to persevere. After all, even when one assumes an attitude, one is still oneself. When I was ten or eleven, I walked bowlegged

to give myself the terrifying appearance of the sailors. I would recognize myself by that attitude, if I happened to meet myself at the street corner. Or again in some given circumstance, when I was ashamed but pretended to the contrary. When I worked myself up to a fit of anger, knowing that I deserved to be hanged. When I lied, with more innocence in my eyes than they could hold. So this is myself, even if I put on the self that I am. Besides, what judgment can I utter on what I write here? And what difference does my judgment make? Henceforth nothing that comes from me is justified, since I am a few paces from death. Nor is anything condemnable. At this degree of withdrawal, the present no longer exists. My present is wholly in my past, and I am not the judge of my past either.

"I watch myself diminish. My thirst is getting harder to bear, but my daily ration of water is still three glasses. My pulse is regular, though slow. I do not suffer from alimentary hallucinations. I would almost say that I have no desire to eat. I empty my plates into the water closet without regret. The first three days the temptation was painful, as always. Insurmountable desire to hold out a mouthful of meat, a mouthful of bread. With a sort of prayer to oneself, a sort of incessant incantation: this will be the sole, the only mouthful.

"I've developed a tic: I polish my glasses ten times an hour, though I know it's my eyes that are cloudy. I must make up my mind to cut down on tobacco. I move around, I trot up and down the cell. I like the contact of my bare feet on the cement floor. I think of Youra's eyes.

"Evening. I have been thinking of the innocence of becoming, as Nietzsche calls it. The purest promises are contained in the instant to come.

"I have not been able to urinate all day.

"October 12

"This soldier who never says a word . . . I would like to know when he sleeps. He seems to be on his feet all the time. As he is the only one I see, he has become the connecting link between the outside world and me. In fact, he is its representative. By and in himself alone, he is the Hitler Reich, the light of day, the beef which has been boiled in the pot. His rare appearances bring me the odors of life. For that matter, it's probably reciprocal. My daily presence, when he gets up and when he goes to bed, necessarily puts him in touch with something he will not forget. Never again will he forget me completely. A parcel of my being will leave its mark on him, which will be added to his other experiences. Which will be transmitted through his sons. That is how we are immortal. Through holding each other by the hand. It is not negligible.

"I have promised myself that I would set down here a few lines on the dogma: 'The end justifies the means.' I am more concerned with my personal attitude than with general reflections. It is evident that no end,

however ideal it may be, can withstand treatment by maculation: the action of the means on the end is direct and irreversible. 'Any-means-at-all' signifies the unclean means, if not the most unclean means. By unclean I mean all that the fascist and Stalinist totalitarianisms, and, to a lesser degree, the 'democracies,' practice in the pursuit of their ends—lies, base maneuvers, treason, contempt of human dignity. It is likewise evident that questionable ends demand questionable means. Every habitual criminal makes his morality out of this primary-school Machiavellianism.

"I see how fragile my reasoning is. I know that our evidences are relative. The most unattackable are valid only for their time. The same is true of our concepts of justice, of equity. And again, of what we understand by 'respect for the human personality.' Nevertheless, we belong to the time of our evidences. They bear our imprint, and we theirs. We: meaning the best of us. But 'best' is a word, a comparative in the name of which it is easy to do the worst. Let us say: those in whom injustice arouses so intense an anguish, so painful a consciousness, that they pledge their life to fighting it. 'Injustice,' however, is still another word, like 'truth,' or 'evil,' words which do not mean the same thing for everyone. For some they mean nothing. I know a story, a sort of parable, which illustrates what I want to say. I've heard that it's a Chinese story. A wagon is going along a road at nightfall. Rising out of the semidarkness, a woman begs the driver to take her along. He signals her with his whip, she climbs up. After some minutes, the driver says: 'You're very upset. It's because the road is so deserted.' 'Oh,' says the woman, 'It isn't the road. Before you came, another wagon passed by. It was still daylight. I waved my hand, just as I did a few minutes ago. The wagon stopped, and I went close to it. "Climb up," said the man who was driving. "The town is far off." It's true that it's far to the town. I was about to climb up when I saw his face. It was terrible. He had no face. He had no nose, no mouth, no eyes. He had a big egg in place of a face. A smooth, pale egg. I ran away screaming with terror.' The driver listened in silence. Then he turned to the woman. 'Yes,' he said. 'I know. A face like mine.'

"My writing is beginning to waver. I must be careful of it, if I want anyone to be able to read what I write. The scratch of the pen on the paper taxes my endurance, and I find it hard to write horizontally. The lines trail off at the right, and it's as if they pulled me down with them. And my letters are unequal in height: from one word to the next, they do not resemble each other. Studying them, I see how I am failing. How already I go forward only on acquired momentum.

"My head is clear and empty. There is a sort of waiting in me, a peaceful expectation, which keeps me awake. I lie long hours on the cot, watching short kaleidoscopic pictures parade by. Sometimes one or the other tickles my curiosity, but I cannot seize them. Though they are extremely naïve in composition, I do not know what they mean. In any event they do not recall anything I myself have experienced. They are so elementary that I could not have preserved the memory of them. For instance: a woman of

the people covered with a fringed shawl. Drops of ink falling on a rug. A large key in the lock of a cabinet. One of these pictures was more composite in character: in a snowy landscape, on the roof of a hut, Youra was attaching a piece of slate with a length of wire. I never saw him do that, at least so far as I can remember. So it goes for hours, whether my eyes are open or shut. This is not without interest for me, since it is the way I'm running down.

"Evening. I am utterly weak. I have discovered that when he makes up my cell the soldier steals my cigarettes.

"October 13

"I had no desire to write a note all day long. It is almost midnight. I have had a good day, except for some smothering sensations in the morning.

"I notice that these notes look more and more like a bedside bulletin on the condition of the patient. I must not be so interested in taking my pulse. Today the kidneys functioned well.

"October 14

"Tenth day of fasting.

"This choice which I have made, and which excludes all other possible choices. The act of choosing always implies something irreparable: the renunciation of everything which is not this choice. And the more fundamental the object is, the more final the renunciation. I have just felt this with such bitter intensity that my heart underwent a renewal of activity. Because, all at once, I saw Yvonne's hair again. She had beautiful hair. Its sandy lights heightened the olive tint of her skin. Her gestures were long and supple around her head bent forward in front of the mirror.

"I am writing lying down. It is time to watch expenditures. I am at the point where I must conserve my energy for the 'meal service.' The comedy at the table, the breaking up of the food, exhaust me. This morning my sight was so disturbed that I had to grope around to find my glasses. Now I see better. I am like an old motor which knocks when it starts, but warms up as it runs. My beard is sixteen days old. I wonder what I look like.

"Soon I shall not be able to use my pen. I see all I might have noted here and have not noted. If ever these pages fall under the eyes of M.L., he will shrug his shoulders. He will say: 'Stepanoff would have done better to die in Russia, standing up and face to the future. It would have saved him a lovely nosedive. And it would have spared us lines on his girl friend's braids, in the hour of Europe's agony.' Maybe he will be right. Maybe, saying this, he will be proving his strength. I hope he will conquer. I wish it for him. But how irritating, at times, the haughty self-assurance of that boy.

"Six o'clock. The light must be beautiful on the quais. Between the Ile Saint-Louis and the Cité with the lengthening shadow of Notre Dame. I would like I think I would like

"October 15

"My pictures have left me. I doze. Lightly. With the consciousness of With the consciousness of having to wake up at mealtimes. Have I said that the Germans will lose. The Allies too. Russia too. But the Germans first. The The In 1927, millions of workers. I am cold. My brain is working well. Millions of workers came out in the streets, to shout their indignation against the crime done to Sacco and Vanzetti. Ten years later, these same masses were deaf and blind when Stalin assassinated the noblest artisans of the Revolution in Moscow. It is strange I would like I cannot see any more I would like Youra Yvonne

"October 16

"I feel better than yesterday. A while ago I fell. I have not urinated in three days. I have broken the bulb of my bed lamp. The pieces are under my pillow. Tonight I shall open the veins in my wrist. I would like to know where they will bury me. I can hardly see. I hear the ticktock of my watch.

"Night. I am cold again. I should have asked for covers. We are the just. We are

"Night. My writing is certainly ille I see Youra's eyes. I see "

» 19 «

"NO . . ." SAID ANDRÉ MAILLE. "NO, IT CAN'T BE . . ." WITH-out moving, Maurice Jale and Camille Sauveterre followed their friend's pointing finger: a man, clothed in a raincoat with epaulettes, with a beret on his head, had come out of the tunnel which led to the street and was walking across the little courtyard.

"Can you beat that. . . ." said Jale, taking off his glasses. "Can you beat it. . . ."

He lunged forward, opened the door with a haste that rattled the windowpanes. Marc Laverne crossed the threshold and moved toward the back of the shop with his hands in the pockets of his raincoat. He leaned his back against the wall and sat without moving a muscle, looking at the slice of sidewalk which was visible at the other end of the entranceway. Jale's press went on working empty, emitting a sound of gears and suction. André Maille fumbled through his pockets, then put a packet of tobacco and a folder of cigarette papers on the table beside Marc Laverne. Maurice Jale put on his glasses and cut the switch of the press. He seemed to be squinting more than usual.

"You look as if you thought you'd been followed," he said. "I'll go as far as the corner, like to pick up a paper or something."

"Yes," said Marc. "I gave my man the slip by coming through the market, but have a look anyway." Without taking his hands from his pockets, he motioned toward the tobacco with his elbow. "Roll me one, André, will you?"

André Maille shot a glance at his friend, picked up the tobacco and the cigarette papers.—*Nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu,* did they wreck his mitts? . . . he asked within himself. Camille Sauveterre, dimly lighted by a bulb in a lampshade which reflected the light down on the type cases, covered his emotion by pretending to work. He was thankful to Maille, ordinarily so free with words, for having said nothing; he was grateful to him for passing the cigarette back and forth over the tip of his impatient tongue. So, one might come back from the deepest pit of the grave. The Nazis simply could not immolate indiscriminately all those

who fell into their hands. The killers had, according to an endless, sterile rite of augury, to dissect too many bodies, to decipher too many threatening omens in the hollow of each life. They were engaged in a race against quantity, and even killing quickly quickly ever more quickly called for time, and they were losing, for all these entrails to be read with their fingers rose and swelled and suffocated them. And so rapid was their gyromancy, so furious the prophetic whirling, that by the effect of centrifugal force a victim fell from the altar now and then, as for instance Marc Laverne, no doubt, and so, perhaps, in her time, Louise . . .

"Camille, put out the light," said Jale, coming in. "You can see in from the outside." He took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. "Not a gumshoe in sight. I'll have a look every half hour." He put back his glasses, standing in the middle of the shop; and then, point-blank, with an urgency too long repressed:

"How's it, Marc? Are you all right?"

"Not too bad," said Marc. Hands in pockets, he lighted his cigarette at the match which Maille held for him. "What date is it today? The seventh or the eighth of November? I've lost count."

It was the seventh of November, eleven o'clock in the morning. He could have found out passing a newsstand, but he had the policeman on his trail. He asked about the events of the last thirty-four days, and they talked about the paper they had printed in his absence, the battle of Stalingrad, Rommel's reverses in Libya, the general situation. He was sitting with one haunch on the edge of the table, the cigarette hanging from the corner of his mouth and his beret pulled down over his forehead, listening in silence, with that concentration of mind which was characteristic of him and made him appear to gather up the words as so many individual objects.

"And Youra?" he asked, nodding toward the door which opened into the living quarters. "When did he take off?"

"So you know about that?" said Maille, stretching his neck. "Oh, I get it, it was Anne Marie . . ."

"I haven't seen Anne Marie yet. In a little while I'll ask one of you to go to the Rue des Dames and let them know. I mustn't set foot there for some time. Has Anne Marie been coming to the shop?"

"Yes, but only since young Stepanoff left," said Jale.

"I'll say she's been coming," Maille interrupted. "She stays an hour or so, right there where you're sitting, and she watches us pottering around. She doesn't talk much, and we don't either, you understand. At first she was quite restless, she walked up and down, touched everything, you'd have said she was accusing us, the poor kid. Then she calmed down. She found out the place where you used to sit, and she stays there like I told you, following us with her eyes till the tools fall out of my hands. We went to Breuil after news, she and I did. Twice we went. We saw the gimp-legged guy's little sister. She's got something, that babe. A backbone, I'm telling you. Mayor's daughter or not, and even with the German

colonel staying in the Davy house, they put the heat to her for fourteen straight hours."

"I know. Or I imagine, anyway. They confronted us."

"Where? When?" Maille looked at Jale and Sauveterre, as if it was up to them to answer. "We didn't know anything about it here."

"They brought me back to Breuil, for a sort of 'reconstruction.' About the middle of October, the thirteenth, to be exact."

"Ah, that's it, because Anne Marie and I saw the babe—wait: we were up there with the truck on the fourth, so it was the sixth when we saw her, think of it, a month yesterday. And the second time was—wait: the tenth, no the eleventh . . ."

"It was the tenth," said Sauveterre.

"The tenth? You're right, my boy, the tenth, in Paris, but she didn't have anything new to tell us, except that she felt she was being watched. We didn't get to see her on our first trip to Breuil, and for a good reason, she was having her session with the Fritzes. She told us the gendarmes had handed you over to the Gestapo men, who took you to Paris the next day."

"That's right, except that the Gestapo men were at the gendarmerie when I was brought in, and got nosy about me. If it hadn't been for that coincidence, the cops might have let me go a day or two later."

"Merde alors," said Maille. "Anyhow, you can bet it was no fun for anybody. What the Fritzes were trying to get out of the babe was your name. She told us she was glad she didn't know it. They quoted her fifteen or so, all kinds of names, I wrote them down, French, Spanish, Polish, Arabian, you'll see. None of them had anything to do with you except Philippe Chasserat. They can read print, the Gestapo. The only answer she gave—the babe, I mean—was that she met you on the road, and like the thread and the needle you went to take the air under a tree. She went on like that for fourteen hours, without getting tired. After that, when we saw her in Paris, we decided not to meet again for a while, since she felt she was being shadowed. And since she doesn't know where to get in touch with us, she couldn't tell us about the confrontation. She asked us if she could see her brother. We told her she couldn't. We also made it clear to the brother's wife that she could forget there was a place called Breuil anywhere near Paris."

"Marianne Davy? Wasn't she questioned?"

"No. Can you imagine! A lucky break. She left Breuil that same evening. According to what she told us . . ."

"You didn't have her to the shop, did you?"

"Hell no. She showed up at your mother's house a little before one in the morning. We were still there, Camille, the sawbones, and me. We stayed there all night, anyway, on account of the curfew. And your mother and Anne Marie, of course. Boy, was that Marianne on her ear! She never stopped beating her gums. You'd think she had only just learned to use her tongue. Me, alongside her, I'm a deaf mute."

"That would surprise me," said Sauveterre.

"You surprise easy. I'm telling you, Marc, a jabberer. Well, anyway, it was a good idea she had, not to stay in Breuil for the night. She would have had a tough time making the Fritzes swallow her yarn about the divorce. Stories like that just won't stand up, you get it, a day there's been sabotage in the neighborhood. The best of it was that the Fritzes never found out she existed. The colonel didn't talk either, and the gendarmes and soldiers either didn't see her at all or else they forgot about her. A break. Well, come on, tell us, they confronted the two of you . . ."

"They did. Roll me a cigarette, André, will you? The girl's got a lot of courage, all right, but you know . . ." He twisted his neck, first to one side and then to the other, as if his shirt collar had suddenly become uncomfortable. "She would have been put through it, then her parents, then Marianne Davy, naturally, and with Marianne her Georges on one side, Anne Marie on the other, and it isn't far from the Rue des Dames to the shop. An avalanche, it would have been. Of course Genevieve Davy . . ."

"A dame with the stuff," Maille cut in, licking the cigarette. "Didn't need to go over the lesson with her, she got it first crack."

"Yes," said Marc. "She was perfect. All told, I was afraid of only one thing—Marianne. That was a break, as you said. Where is she?"

"Living in a furnished room in the Latin Quarter. We moved her man out of your mother's the night of the fifth. We put him up at the Rue Miromesnil."

"The Rue Miromesnil? At the doctor's place?"

"Yes. In the maid's room, that is. It was the only way. The fellow needed attention, and we couldn't run the risk of renting a room. But neither he nor Marianne knows who the place belongs to. There's a dentist in the building, and the gal's having him fix her teeth. That way she goes upstairs under the concierge's nose. Besides that we told her to forget the Rue des Dames. . . . But say, how about yourself? We'd kind of like to hear, you know. You're holding out on us." He lowered his eyes, looking at Marc's pockets. "They gave you the works? . . ."

"No," said Sauveterre. "They gave him a handful of chocolates."

There was an interval of silence. Jale rubbed his eye with his forefinger, not taking off his glasses. A sprinkle of rain spattered the court. At the end of the tunnel of the entranceway, men's trousers and women's bare legs crossed as if they were on a turntable. Maille, beginning to feel frustrated, stretched his neck to get his voice back, but he was cut off by Sauveterre.

"To tell the truth, we didn't have much hope," he said slowly. "When we found out the kind of questioning they had put Mademoiselle Davy through, we gave you up for lost. We reasoned that if the Germans were so anxious to learn your real name it was because they didn't trust your papers. We wondered if you would continue to identify yourself by the name of Chasserat. It seemed to us this would not be easy for you, but at the same time we saw no way you could come back on it. And since

they never release anyone they catch with false papers, since they comb them right down to the . . ."

"You're not kidding, they comb them!" Maille interrupted, unable to restrain himself any longer. "And when in the bargain it's a fellow they pick up on the scene of a sabotage . . . Hey, you know, I haven't been wishing that Georges Davy a long and happy life!"

"Yes," said Marc. "I gave the name of Chasserat, and I had to try to keep on being Chasserat. It was really the only thing I could do. After all, they only had a doubt to work on. What kept them from being sure was that there actually is a Philippe Chasserat, that in fact he was liberated with others of his compatriots following the commando raid at Dieppe. But I had pulled a boner: I had neglected to learn my namesake's business thoroughly—the location of his Stalag, the route by which he had been returned to France, et cetera. So there were moments when I was caught short. There's nothing shakier than a false identity, even the most solidly established. That's when you realize that a man's life takes shape around a few meager signposts—a catchall of memories and associations. But I had a kind of inspiration, an old dodge used by the swindler who covers up his forgeries under a layer of false names that gets thicker and thicker. The idea was this: if, finally, they don't take me for the one I want to be taken for, let them take me for someone more important than a chance saboteur—for the arm of De Gaulle, for the eye of Moscow, in a word for some big shot who has everything to lose by being identified. If the scheme worked, two decisive consequences might flow from it. First, they would cease to connect me with the Breuil affair, the Davys, and Marianne, and this would throw them off the trails which lead to the shop; secondly, my pretended importance might save me from the worst, at least partially, at least for the time being, so long as they hoped to pry some information out of me. Exactly how I went about inspiring them both with the sense of my notability and with the hope that they would sooner or later identify me would be hard to say. I think I gave myself the air of an extremely circumspect personage, a man of almost immaterial prudence, as if I carried in my head the archives and codes of most of the illegal movements in Europe, and at the same time I tried to give them the impression that I was liable to yield in the long run, but a little at a time, incredibly little at a time; that after each interrogation a morsel of truth came out of me in spite of myself, that I was giving out through some spot in my body without even being aware of it. I moved ahead, they pushed me and I moved ahead, but—it's hard to describe—an inch a day. I think I succeeded in keeping them in suspense; in reminding them, if you like, of a very simple thing that they have a tendency to forget, namely that if at times it's difficult to make the living talk, it's hardly possible to get words out of the dead. But the game began to bear fruit only after the 'reconstruction.' My cell was changed, I was isolated, they entrusted me to a less brutal but more refined team. The fact was that there had been such perfect agreement between Genevieve Davy's story and mine that it must

have seemed unlikely to them that the thing was made up out of whole cloth. Their somewhat oversimple picture of the looseness of the French predisposed them favorably, you might say, to the idea of two strangers saying how-do-you-do-it's-a-nice-day-isn't-it, and proceeding without further ado to fornicate in the shade of the nearest tree. Furthermore, Genevieve Davy really does present all the symptoms of innocence: with all the good will in the world it would be hard to impute the most insignificant political thought to her. Nevertheless, if her adventure with me had really been accidental, what was I doing on that little-traveled road that day? Who were the persons I was going to see? Whom had I just left? I wound up by 'confessing' that I had come from Virolles on foot, Virolles being a few miles to the north. Why? To take the train at Breuil. Again why, since there is a station at Virolles? Silence. Whom had I been to see at Virolles? Silence. Who was it? Then I 'let slip' a name: René, or Jacques, or Sicard. Then I caught myself, I protested that I had never said René, Jacques, Sicard. The same way every two or three days—the time it took me to recuperate, and get into shape for some more questions. Then, all of a sudden, the thirty-first of October, something new turned up."

He stopped, lighting the cigarette which Maille had put between his lips. He was beginning to tire, and his fingers hurt him. Jale went out to make a tour of inspection. Maille asked if they would all go to lunch together, but Marc replied that he would rather have a bite in the shop. "And that on condition that one of you feed me," he added, with a sidewise glance at his friends. "I have bandages on my hands." Maille relieved his feelings with a string of oaths, and Sauveterre said nothing. The sprinkle of rain had become more than a sprinkle, it was pelting the courtyard with perseverance. Jale came back, and they decided to stay in the shop and take potluck.

"So a week ago," Marc continued when they had had lunch, "I'm taken out of my cell about nine or ten in the morning, and shoved into a room I don't know, empty, sinister, with traces of fresh blood on the walls and a big spotlight in the ceiling. I've just been through a night of questioning, and I figure they're running out of soft methods, and getting ready to apply a continuous treatment. I squat in a corner of the room, and my teeth begin to chatter. At that point the judas slides back, I vaguely make out an eye peering in at me, I catch the sound of dialogue, the rattle of keys, the door opens, lets in a fine thickheaded specimen of a French cop, a paterfamilias type, followed by two Germans. The cop pulls up, looks me over, tells me to get on my feet, and when I delay, he's on top of me. He drags me to the center of the room, slaps me over the ear, grabs me under the chin, lifts my head as if I were a calf, and begins to bawl: 'You! You're Justinien Granier! You can't fool me! Justinien Granier, condemned to death *in absentia* for rape and murder by the court of assizes in Oran! Ha-ha, this time your goose is cooked! This time you won't get away from the gggg . . .' and he imitates the fall of the knife on the neck. He hauls my head still higher, right against his own, against his crafty eye, he deals

me some more good resounding slaps, bawling, 'You're the one, Justinien Granier! You're the one who strangled Mam'zelle Dancourt!' The two Germans stand behind him, silent and somber, two of my usual 'handlers,' and in a flash it comes to me that a surprising thing is happening to me, a kind of 'judicial error' which might get me out of the Gestapo's hands and put me on the road to Oran. . . . But I haven't had time to get my bearings in the role of strangler of young ladies which has fallen to me, when I catch a whisper, barely a whisper, covered by the blows and the bawling: 'Say no. . . . Say no, for Godsake, you dumb cluck. . . .'

"My God!" Maille exploded. "I get it. . . . Granier . . . The law student . . . I remember, the papers were full of it, before the war. . . . And it's true they never found him. . . . That's the limit, that is! So then? What happened then?"

So then Marc Laverne said no. His name was not Justinien but Philippe, not Granier but Chasserat, and he had never set foot in Mostaganem. He named the town on purpose, because he had, like Maille a moment ago, just recalled the story, which had boosted newspaper circulation, and had remembered that it is traditional with criminals to give themselves away as idiotically as that. The trick worked immediately. He saw a spot—almost a tear—grow and then disappear in the man's crafty eye. "Ha! Mostaganem!" he shouted. "Sure it was in Mostaganem that you did the job on Mam'zelle Dancourt, wasn't it?" And as he struggled, saying, in a voice which he tried to make as shrill as possible, that he knew nothing about the thing they were accusing him of, the man lifted him half off the floor, shook him, threw him to the ground, and, between two whacks, two bellowings, thrust an object into his hand—a pellet the size of a walnut. Later, in his cell, he read the message. The text, typed without margins or paragraphs, on both sides of four sheets of onionskin paper, detailed the history of Justinien Granier: origin, family circumstances, childhood, studies, crime. Every word, every sentence converged methodically toward the painting of the character's portrait, and certain features, certain salient details, added the desired relief. The crime itself was described with complete, dry precision: victim, locale, clues, comings and goings of the murderer before and after the deed—graphically, as it were, and apparently in the finest detail. The last lines contained some practical recommendations: yield and confess after prolonged resistance; make it clear that he was giving in only because he knew they had the goods on him; burst into tears at the moment of confessing; put on a complete emotional breakdown; beg for pardon; in case of difficult questions or failure of memory, lay his hesitation to the horror he feels at the memory of the crime; if he had to, but only if he had to, let it come out by veiled allusions that Mademoiselle Davy had barely missed suffering the fate of Mademoiselle Dancourt; reason for presence in Breuil-sur-Seine—looking for a chance to pull a job; Chasserat papers—stolen on a train; domicile—none; former domiciles and identities—improvise; destroy the typed sheets immediately upon reading. He read them as a pious man reads his prayer-

book; then he rolled them into tiny pellets and swallowed them. He did not understand, he admitted that he was absolutely unable to understand who could be setting up this play, and for what motives. The afternoon of the same day he underwent questioning again. Paterfamilias directed the production. He had at his disposal a thick folder of documents, some five-year-old photos of Laverne, his anthropometric cards, and he went from reviling to wheedling, from dramatic gestures to brutal blows, while the Gestapo men went into ecstasies, never having seen a suspect worked over so comically. The suspect did not confess. The next day the punishment was more severe, and he fainted twice: to have to "practice patience," while every cell of his body was conscious that a single word could put an end to the torment, had weakened his resistance. By evening he was beginning to give some signs of breaking down. The second of November, just as day was dawning, an hour after being brought in to the interrogation room, he collapsed. He did not succeed in spilling any tears, but he collapsed well enough, and with a good deal of naturalness. From then on, as if the last ounce of brutality had disappeared from the earth, the violence ceased. The Gestapo men licked their chops and became vaguely libidinous, they might have been moved by the sight of this rapist-assassin, Paterfamilias expressed his satisfaction by slapping his colleagues on the back, and two days later, early in the morning, he was delivered to a couple of gendarmes who clapped handcuffs on him and led him away.

Once more Jale went out to inspect the horizon, and Marc profited by the break to have a cigarette rolled for him. A stiffness was spreading through his members, emerging from his bones and attacking his muscles intermittently. He smiled, thinking of how he had accused himself of strangling the lady. Crouching in a corner of the room as if to flee from a vision, with his face in his bleeding fingers, he cried for pardon before Paterfamilias, who watched him with his crafty eye, in which, like a petrified tear, a colorless spot came and went in a kind of bizarre pulsation.—If I told Anne Marie about it, he thought with a flash of embarrassment, she might well conclude that I would make a good ham actor. Jale returned, with his glasses clouded and drops of rain on his forehead. A little of the coolness of the pavement came in with him, and Marc felt disturbed by the stagnant smells of ink and lead and copper. He asked them to leave the door open a bit, and as he was warm he finally decided to get rid of his raincoat and beret. Maille and Jale helped him: his hands were swathed in bandages and his head was shorn unevenly, with tufts of hair of varying length which gave him the appearance of a skinned Tartar. The shearing was the work of Ursule, the "governess" of Etienne Espinasse—Estienne, as she called him—for it was to the inspector's, to the private domicile of the inspector, that he was brought by Paterfamilias, into whose hands the gendarmes had delivered him, in due and proper form, in the very heart of the Prefecture, in an underground room whose lights gave out on the Place Notre Dame. "How about it if I take off the

bracelets?" said Paterfamilias, once the gendarmes were gone. "How about it? You'd kind of like to scratch your ribs? You must itch like the devil, hey?" He whirled a bunch of keys on the end of a chain which hung from the lapel of his coat, and there was something of the philanthropist on his pointed belly, a radiant kindness due to the successful issue of a piece of business. "But no trying to run away," he said. "You've got to be regular. And then you wouldn't run far, rigged up the way you are. And you mustn't talk bad about me either, monsieur? . . . To think I don't even know your name, hey? That wouldn't be nice, to say anything bad about me. I went at it a little rough, but it was for your good. I swear it was for your good. And then we kissed them off, didn't we—the Boches, I mean? . . . Here, get into these duds. We'll drop into the barber's before we go out." He opened a valise which contained a suit of clothes, the raincoat, and the beret. They paid a visit to the barber of the house, who shaved off his month-old beard, then they took the Métro at the Place Saint-Michel, changed at the Châtelet. Paterfamilias had nothing to say during the ride. The petrified tear was no longer in his eye, but the guile, which also resembled a pebble, was there as usual. They got off at Convention, walked up the Rue de Vaugirard. Laverne abstained from asking questions. Besides, whether he liked it or not, his mind went off vagabonding, his thoughts had the bounding lightness of soap bubbles, they burst at the slightest touch, and even his battered body forgot its pains and aches at the sight of the animation of the city. Paterfamilias was telling a family story, his mother who had seen the Prussians in '70, his wife who was expecting a baby for the New Year, how Frenchmen must give each other a hand, and Marc was recording the fact that the streets, the pavement, the mauve light of the crossings, the old face of Paris, had never been so young. They passed from the sunny side to the shady side, then it was the steps of a flight of stairs, landings, a door, Espinasse in the doorway. He found himself in a dining room—table with polished top and a chandelier reflected in it, six chairs ranged symmetrically, sideboard decorated with a vase containing artificial flowers, buffet adorned with two photographs facing each other. A sofa made up as a bed occupied the space between the buffet and one of the two windows of the room. He was not surprised to be in Espinasse's home, suddenly there was something banal about it, something expected, which prevented him from being surprised. "Ursule, come on in here," said Espinasse, looking at Laverne. Paterfamilias smiled benignly, he was holding his hat on the overhang of his stomach, and he too looked at Laverne. "You may go," said Espinasse, not turning around. "Drop in to see me at headquarters, around noon." Paterfamilias went out with his hat in front of him, and Ursule came in, pounding her feet. She was dried out, erect, and her movements betrayed an almost animal rudeness and awkwardness. She looked about seventy, and she stood at least six feet high. "This is Ursule," said Espinasse, as if making an excuse. "Well, Ursule, make the gentleman comfortable." She advanced on the gentleman, laid hold of him as if he were a clothes

dummy. Everything about her was oversize—her extremities, her nose, her ears, her fingers. Marc let her go ahead, doing his best to abet her undertakings. "Look at that, he has ringworm, your gentleman has," she said, pawing through the gentleman's hair. Marc laughed, although the old woman's hand weighed heavily on his aching head. Espinasse came over and had a look. "You take care of him, Ursule. He was hit by a car." "Yes, fine, I haven't got enough work to do as it is, sweet Jesus," she said. She went out, pounding her feet on the gleaming floor. The tinkle of glass in the sideboard echoed her step. Espinasse put some cigarettes on the table and brought an ash tray. "Sit down, I have a few things to say to you," he said. He looked as if he had not slept in a week. Marc took a cigarette in both hands, and the inspector gave him a light. "Did you know it was me who got you out?" he asked. Marc shook his head. The tobacco tasted bitter and overstrong. "Well, well, you disappoint me," the inspector said. "Surely you don't believe in miracles?" "That's just it," said Marc. The inspector shook out his handkerchief and blew his nose. "I'm not asking you to thank me," he said. "I'm not asking you for anything. But you're to do two things. You'll stay here a few days, till you're able to stand on your feet. Then you'll get out of Paris. You'll get out of the occupied zone. I don't want you to fall on your face at the first corner, and I don't want you to get yourself picked up. This time you wouldn't be the only one involved. If you're caught again, the Germans are smart enough to work their way back to me. Even if you didn't talk, they'd pay me a visit all the same. I wouldn't like that. I've had a bed made for you in this room. Ursule will rub some salve on you. Don't interrupt. I know it's all right with you if they hang me. But not with me. So make your choice. Either you promise to obey and I accept your promise, or else you refuse and I'll clap you into solitary and keep you there until the Germans take the train again. That might be a long time." He looked at his watch. "I'm leaving in fifteen minutes. If your answer is no, I'll take you with me. In the meantime, come and have a cup of coffee if you care to." They went into the kitchen. Bread, coffee, jam—it seemed to Marc that he had never tasted anything so good. Ursule came and went through the kitchen, a giantess with the movements of a puppet on strings. Nothing was said during the meal, but when Espinasse got up from the table, Marc announced that he was staying. He went to bed a little later, and slept until the second morning after. Ursule, seated on the edge of the bed, was rubbing some unguent into his back. "There you are, sweet Jesus, so this woke you up at long last," she said, holding him down on the bed. He let her proceed. "You're a friend of Estienne's," she said in a tone of demonstrative certitude. He did not at first understand what Estienne she was talking about. "He has a great many friends," she said, kneading him with her paddle of a hand. "When he was this big, already he had more friends than you could shake a stick at. But since Pauline died he's become a bear. And Jean Paul is dead too. Estienne says he's a prisoner, but I know he's dead. I know, I tell you. And it makes me awfully sad." She talked on and on, and he

fell asleep again under the hard touch of her hand. Evening was falling when he awoke again. He felt broken and relaxed, sore and rested all at the same time. He got up, slipped on the raincoat in place of a dressing gown, and made a tour of the kitchen. Ursule, looking as if she were walking on stilts under her floor-length skirt, greeted him with a plate of soup, some bread, and a glass of wine. He could not use his hands. His fingers had swollen while he slept, they were without prehensile power; so the old woman fed him with a spoon, spilling the soup, tipping over the wine, talking about Pauline and Jean Paul and Estienne, and what a bear he was, and how he had a lot of friends who never came to the house. She put dressings on his fingers and salves on his scalp, and it was not till then that he saw the weird haircut he owed to her efforts. Espinasse came in late. He struck a match to light his way, crossed the dining room without noise, went into the kitchen. Marc heard him fumbling with the gas stove, filling a glass, cutting bread, chewing all alone against the quiet of the night, so close behind the partition that it made him unreal—the whimsical image, almost droll, almost pitiful, of the citizen inspector engaged in preserving his body by feeding it on sops. A short while later he came back through the dining room, feeling his way this time, and disappeared through a door which he closed softly; and once again Marc heard him living with himself in the mad security of solitude. He lay a long time listening to him as he tossed in his bed, sighing loudly; and it annoyed him that he could not shut his mind to the inspector's presence, that his own sleep was broken by the other's insomnia. Making the best of the situation, he tried once more to understand the inspector's motives, to discern some reason in his reasons, but he could think of nothing that he had not thought of before. In the morning, while Espinasse was having his breakfast, he came to the kitchen and announced his intention of leaving that very day. "You sure you feel strong enough?" Espinasse asked. He had the same air as always—boredom, fatigue, power. "Enough to look after myself," Marc answered. Ursule, pounding with her feet, served him a cup of coffee and some bread and jam. "I'd like to ask you a couple of questions, Inspector," he said, putting his bandaged hands around the cup. "Have a go at it, once won't make a custom," said the inspector. "Yes," said Marc. "I am curious to know how you discovered who was hiding under the name of Philippe Chasserat." The inspector looked at him over the flame which he was holding to his cigarette. "Well, well, you disappoint me more and more. You know I have informers, don't you?" "Exactly. Tell me: did it take you long to rig up the Granier affair? To study the papers, take some documents out of the files, substitute my fingerprints for his, and so on?" Something like a smile flickered around Espinasse's eyelid. "It's too bad," he said. "You'd have made a fine career at headquarters." "Yes," said Marc. "Because if you tell me how much time it took you to get the thing set up, I will tell you when you saw Youra Stepanoff. It couldn't be more than a day out." The inspector made a face. "So he shot his mouth off? I shouldn't have trusted that boy. Well,

anyhow, he'll be better off in America." Marc tried to pick up a slice of bread, but did not succeed. "My turn, Inspector, to say that you disappoint me: you know perfectly well that I know that you know that Youra Stepanoff never left." "What's that? He didn't leave either? Oh, that reminds me: old man Stepanoff is dead, if that interests you." Marc shook the inspector's packet of cigarettes in both hands, managed to get one between his lips, lighted it at the flame of the stove. "Do you mind telling me when and how?" "Not a bit," said the inspector. "Three weeks ago. He went on a hunger strike under the noses of the Germans, then opened his veins. I saw the corpse. He had a satisfied look. He died as he lived—satisfied." He looked at his watch. "You're free to leave. When do you figure on clearing out of the occupied zone?" "I don't know: in a couple of days." The inspector stood up, put his cigarettes in his pocket. "I'll give you ten days. If you stay in Paris one hour longer, I'll come after you even if you hide in the catacombs, and I'll put you away, as promised. You ought to know I live up to my promises." "I think I know it," said Marc. When Espinasse had gone, Ursule began to tramp all over the apartment, talking about Pauline, Jean Paul, Estienne. She helped him to dress, was an endless time lacing his shoes, asked if he'd be back for lunch. As he had expected, a policeman fell in behind him. He got rid of him after walking for two hours, in the crowd in the market.

"Poor Stepanoff . . ." said Jale. "Not so long ago I was re-reading his *Critical History of the Commune*. He really had a mind. And his son . . . While we had him back there I had to sleep out. It was a nuisance to have him at the shop, but it wasn't easy to find another solution, either. But the fact remains that we didn't handle the thing well. For fourteen days none of us said a word to him. On October seventeenth he broke a pane and went out through the window. He went to see Anne Marie. She was the one who told him about your arrest."

"October seventeenth?" Marc said. "That's strange. It coincides with his father's death, if Espinasse's three weeks correspond with the facts. Since then, no news, of course?"

"Not a thing. Anne Marie will tell you. To her he seemed to be out of his head."

"We missed the bus with the kid, that's sure," Maille interrupted. "We left him all alone back there to eat his heart out. We didn't even tell him you were jugged. And when he found it out he went and made a stink with Espinasse, you can bet on it. Result, the old gimlet had him shipped out."

"I'm afraid it's worse than that," Marc said. "Espinasse wasn't natural when he talked about him. 'Well, he'll be better off in America'—my heart shook when I heard that heavy-handed crack. He might as well have said, 'Well, he's better off in the other world.' "

"What? You don't mean he had him rubbed out?"

Marc put his bandaged hands together and did not reply. He could not understand how they had been able, knowing that he was on the other

side of the door, not to speak to him for fourteen whole days. It seemed incomprehensible to him. And unjustifiable. But already the one among his friends who detested silence had gone on about something else, and he had to promise himself to take up the question at another time.

"That Espinasse is a queer bird, all the same," Maille was saying. "You think he had them do away with the kid, and at the same time he's fishing you out at the risk of his own neck. Did he ask you about his brat again?"

"No, he may have thought I owed him something there; but he was afraid of getting the silent treatment again, and didn't dare ask. At first I thought he knew. But old Ursule, who does know—or guesses—showed me through her monologues that Espinasse still does not know. It really hits you hard when you think of it—a detective like him, with a nose that never misses, with all the ways he has of digging into other people's lives, and still reduced to depending on a couple of obscure revolutionaries to tell him the fate of his own son. One of the two photographs which stand facing each other on the dining-room buffet is the picture of his dead wife. The other is that of his son, Jean Paul. I looked at it for a long time. I think—and this would explain a thing or two—that there was some resemblance between him and me. By 'watching over' me, Espinasse is watching over his son; maybe, to a certain degree, he's redeeming himself in his son's eyes. Yet I don't believe that such a transfer of affections is enough to solve the difficulty. Probably no one knows, and he less than anyone else, what black magic is working in his soul, and producing these effects against nature—against *his* nature." He looked at his hands, they were working under the bandages, they were fermenting underneath like dough in a warm place. "Camille, could you do a couple of errands for me? Maybe you have orders to work on, and I'm making you lose time . . ."

"No, not at all," said Jale. "Don't worry. Camille can do as he likes with the day."

"Certainly," Sauveterre said. "I'm listening, Marc."

"Good. I'd like to ask you to pop in at the Rue Miromesnil. Tell the doctor that he'll have to put me up for a couple of days. Don't give him any information. The Germans let me go, I need his science to repair the bad effects of theirs, period. Then you might let them know at my house. Don't say I'm here. Nor that I'm banged up. And tell Anne Marie to come to the Rue Miromesnil about eight this evening. She's to bring me some linen, a toothbrush, and my razor. Give her the address, she doesn't know it. Don't give it to my mother. Tell my mother she can't see me for a few days. Don't forget to tell Anne Marie not to come if she feels she's being trailed. Not under any condition. That straight, Camille?"

"Yes, Marc."

"Good. I'm going to lie down in the back. If Anne Marie gets a notion to come with you, you don't know where I am. Maurice, may I have a copy of the paper you ran? And the papers from the last week or so, if possible?"

"You go and lie down, and I'll bring in all the papers I can find," said

Maille. "And if you want me to roll you some cigarettes, all you have to do is say so."

Marc said so.

Standing in the attic room, Georges Davy hefted the two canes which he used for support. He had just raised them from the floor, inch by inch, and he did not totter and he was not dizzy. The voluptuousness of feeling the weight of his body resting on his legs . . . He checked his desire to neigh, to bellow, to make noise for the sheer joy of making it. . . . Man is a vertical creature! he longed to shout. I am vertical! Vertical and in plumb and perpendicular to the plane of the zenith! A prodigious fact, which deserved to be proclaimed loud and far. It was three days since they had removed the plaster corset from his leg, three days since Marianne had finally taken her departure and left him to himself, alone and free for his future; and since then he had not ceased to be reborn in his own eyes. This newly knit leg, this solitude regained by dint of refusal and cruelty toward Marianne and toward himself—it was memory after amnesia, light after darkness. He tried another step, then another; his canes held an inch from the floor, assigning himself the difficult goal of making two turns around the room, then three in one hour, then four in the next hour. "Several weeks . . ." the doctor had said, feeling his patient's tibia. "Several weeks of rehabilitation." Humbug, that doctor! Babies' gruel, that doctor! A few days—he would make a few days suffice. That doctor had wanted to leave the cast on for another month, and he had had to threaten to smash it off with the butt of his revolver, to make him give in. That doctor was a know-nothing, his knowledge shuttled between diet and drugs, he did not know that a terrorist's wounds heal according to a law which gives the lie to the Faculty of Medicine. He dropped into a chair, with a sensation of relief which he pretended not to notice.—In a few days . . . He imagined himself lying motionless in waiting, in the tumultuous silence of fear and anxiety, when the body tightens and vibrates and sings in the hour of the secret assault. That doctor—what did he know of the power of the blood at the hour of murder? The power which kills the enemy, which cures the disease. He touched his chest, unconsciously.—Which kills him in his flesh and in ours, he thought; in his bridges and transformers, which still are ours. And Marianne, what could she know about it? She had wanted to "share his fight," as she said in her socialist jargon; to share this thing which was without possible sharing or communion, which was stronger than sex, than—he had almost thought: stronger than God. You bring no one into your damp night, into your damp fear which envelopes the night and peoples it with pile drivers, into your lust for the lives of an evening, very particular, very extraordinary lives, which are unknown to you and which you cherish above all else, since you seek them out and take them. One could not share one's vocation, he knew that. In the beginning, when he had known agitation instead of exaltation, when the nausea of the novice

with his first pipe contaminated his happiness, when the death of someone assumed the minor meaning of a "successful mission," he had been so proud as to think that whoever did not use his weapons was a coward. But little by little, as one discovers the secret of a masterpiece by returning to it again and again, he learned that "whoever" was not a coward, nor he himself a hero. "That" was in him, rooted in his body, in his glands and ganglions—"that": the night, the ambush in the night, the fearful tension which purifies the blood and makes the blood tingle. He convinced himself that he was doing his duty, that he was defending France, but far down in his ego he discerned other less rational reasons, ends unjustifiable because they were above justification. Sentinels grappled to himself, clasped to himself so that noiselessly they might dance a jig under the knife, trains derailed, burial mounds of twisted iron and twisted cries and flamelets like tongues of women . . . He told himself that they were German sentinels and German trains, but he skimmed over it, as one skims over one's morning prayers. It was possible that a German life had a special flavor, he did not know, he had not tasted other lives; but over and above the symbols for which France and national liberation stood, there was henceforth the call of the night, of action in the night. He loved—he loved the feel of his grenade, the licking of the flame which had come from his fingers, the hurried babble of the dying. He loved the work of his hands.

He opened his eyes. Someone was coming up the stairs, was stopping at the door—a stranger in the house, he could tell from the uncertainty of the steps. He loaded his revolver, set it on his knees, and covered it with a newspaper. The stranger was putting a key in the lock, feeling it in, like someone crocheting. Davy watched the lock, watched the knob turning, looked at the man who came in and pushed the door closed with his back: Basque beret, raincoat with epaulettes, hands in pockets . . . the figure of a Vichy agent, he could pick it out of a thousand. He slipped his right hand under the newspaper, and there was a second of suspense, of flat, naked calm.

"Who are you?" he said. "You've got the wrong room."

"I'm one of those who gave you a hand at Breuil," said Marc Laverne.

"You've got the wrong room. Good-by."

"Yes," said Marc. "You may not recognize me. I gave you a hypodermic."

He did not recognize him. Breuil, hypodermic—the words proved nothing, they gave off the smell of a trap. "Once more, you're mistaken," he said.

"I saw the one who is taking care of you. He told me how, in spite of his opinion, you insisted that the cast be taken off." He stood with his back to the door, studying Davy's inscrutable face.—Zeal of a neophyte, he thought. Fanaticism of a convert. But was he a convert? And from what to what? "Did Marianne tell you I had been arrested?"

Davy eased his grip on the butt of his revolver. So this was the man to whom he owed his life. . . . The man who had got himself captured in

his place. . . . He wondered what he was supposed to do, what were the rules of politeness between saviors and saved. The other two—the one who had carried him on his back and the driver of the truck—he did not remember them either. He wished to owe them nothing. He had no change to give them in return for their gold piece. Not even small change. "She told me," he said.

"Were you ever in prison?" Marc asked.

Georges Davy shook his head, slowly, as if this were another thing he did not remember. What did this savior want of him? Did he mean to demand his due? To remind him of punches received in the stomach? Under cover of the newspaper the muzzle of the revolver rose a half inch. —In the stomach. He would take his hands out of his pockets, would put them to his stomach, then, leaning forward, he would come. Would come —with that surprise on his face, that custom of leaning forward and seeking your arms to die in. "Why?" he said.

"For the experience," said Marc. "I was placed in a cell a little larger than this room. We were forty or fifty in it, the number varied. But by the prolongations and ramifications which attach everyone to the world outside him, and make every prisoner the junction point of an infinity of coincidents, we were a people, and our cell a continent. One of the things I learned was that if the police suddenly acquired the power to read the hearts of half a hundred political prisoners, all illegal movements would become impossible for long years thereafter. But what the police can't do, a prisoner sometimes can." He paused, looking at the man in the chair, at his graying temples, his ascetic pallor, his closed lips that had unlearned the art of laughter. "I know what organization you belong to," he said.

Under cover of the newspaper Georges Davy's index finger pressed the trigger of the revolver more firmly.—The experience of holding a life at the call of his finger. A life, like a girl: come. He would come—his smile barely twisted and words of love on his lips. Like a German. But the Germans came in the night, you could not see their smile. You could touch it. Ecstasy of touching a mouth as it smiles its last smile in your hand. He caught himself closing his eyes. "Go away," he said.

"I have notified the people of your organization," said Marc. "We can't keep you any longer. They'll come for you tomorrow during the day. The one who is taking care of you judges that with help you can get as far as the Métro."

A tinge of red colored Georges Davy's lips. He looked at the man leaning against the door as if the latter did not exist. "Whom do you mean, they?" he asked.

"I don't know. Your friends. Do you want me to let your sister know?"

"No. I'll be ready."

"Yes," said Marc. "That's all I had to say to you. However, if you wouldn't mind, I should like to talk to you for five minutes. Aren't you, or weren't you, what is called a royalist?"

"I don't answer questions," said Georges Davy. Under cover of the newspaper his thumb was deciphering the monogram embossed on the lock of the revolver. "It's a rule."

"There's nothing personal about my question," Marc said. "It comes from an interest which transcends personalities. I had thought you might help me to understand a case from which I would draw a political lesson. You, rather than someone else, because it happens that you are an example of the case which interests me, and you happen to be handy. What is the guide which leads a man from the most extreme nationalism—from the hatred of 'social government,' meaning an order from which the masses will have eliminated all economic and hereditary hierarchies—into the ranks of the Communist Party? Or, to put the question differently: what, in your opinion, is the concrete fact which causes the holder of a monarchist doctrine to discover an identity of aims with a daughter organization of the Comintern?"

"You bore me," said Georges Davy.

"Let me try to put you at your ease," Marc said. "I am a revolutionary. If the term means nothing to you, think of me as a member of the Communist Party to which you belong today, but at a time when the very name of the Party horrified men like you—let's say in the twenties. The liberation of France interests me only in so far as it is an integral part of a wider reality—the revolutionary liberation of Europe. This is the only liberation I can conceive. In the measure of my means and of my strength I work for the destruction of the capitalist state, for the seizure of power by the working class, for the inevitable coming of the dictatorship of the proletariat . . ."

"You're a great worker," Georges Davy cut in.

"You might finish by convincing me of that," said Marc. "You're putting me to a lot of trouble. But I'm patient. I don't despair of seeing you display a little less boredom and a little more interest. You surely are not ignorant of the fact that communist 'patriotism' will have all the consistency of an order given and revocable in Moscow. It's easy to see what you put into this wedding with your enemies of yesterday and of tomorrow. It is also easy to see that you reserve the right to turn the rifle which you now aim at the army of occupation, and point it, when the time comes, at your ally of today. Tricks of war—and mutual, by the way, because your party knows what to think of the loyalty of its recruits, and is preparing itself accordingly. What is less easy to see is the moral benefit you find in all this. By 'you' I mean all those whom everything separates from this anti-national party if there ever was one. I don't know you, I don't know your natural bents, it may be that you have the soul of a warrior. But the opportunities for striking a blow are not lacking. There are five, ten combat organizations, one more daring than the other, sapping and mining the German army. What interests me is the motive of your choice. If I isolate you from those who have been converted and indoctrinated at the eleventh hour, if I am not to include you in the category of the

cowards who are always the first to side with the powerful—for the power of the Communist Party in France will rocket with the defeat of the Nazis—then what is the bait, what are the inducements which Stalinism offers to your moral sense? Do you adhere to it because you are conscious of its fundamentally counterrevolutionary historical function? Because you rely on it to corrupt and then to nip future risings in the bud, just as in the past the leaders of your school called in foreign intervention to guarantee them against the specter of a mass movement?"

"You weary me," said Georges Davy. "You . . ." Again he caught himself closing his eyes. "You are a Trotskyite."

"Suppose I am," said Marc. A smile narrowed his eyes and threw his cheekbones into sharp relief. "Suppose I am. You react in conformity with the program, although I doubt whether you know what Trotskyism means."

"You're an annoying doctrinaire," Georges Davy said. Under cover of the newspaper the revolver lay loosely in his hand. This savior discoursed with too much facility. He had the destructive mind of women.—Women have no stomach, he thought; they have a gizzard. "Your five or ten combat organizations are playrooms for foundlings. They're women's gizzards. This is no time for rumblings in the gut. It's the hour of action. The Communist Party is action. It's order, discipline, men's stomachs. The Communist Party . . . this is it." He threw the newspaper off his knees. "This is it," he repeated. He slipped the lock and the bullet fell out sideways. "For the present, monsieur, leave me alone."

Marc left him alone.

Anne Marie's breathing was peaceful and deep: she will not wake up. She had said she would not allow sleep to shorten her wedding night, but a new sap was surging in her breasts, and she will not wake up. Marc Laverne slid to the carpet and felt around for his raincoat. It was night over the city, but already, behind the heavy folds of the curtains, above the frail lacery of rooftops hardly visible against the massive sky, some impalpable sign foretold the early coming of the day. He settled down with his back to the window and put his swollen hands flat on his thighs. Anne Marie in her tranquil sleep, with the passion in her that knew no sleep. He descried her silhouette, or perhaps only divined it, because she could not be elsewhere than in this room, on this couch, with her passion that turned her into a blazing brand. He listened to the rise and fall of her breathing—why was she his, why she particularly among those whose womanhood promised them to love, to the act of being possessed as she had been possessed this night? He leaned his head backward, resting his neck on the top of the chair. What was the law, the fundamental principle, which had made this act inevitable? He and she—he wondered if it was a choice, a situation deliberately chosen in preference to several other equally possible situations. Or had a certain element of determinism here too imposed a direction on the course of things? Was it not in his power,

at this very instant, to change everything? To reverse the order of events? Anne Marie's existence and his own, the existence of a being yet to be born, seemed to hang from the point of an idea: to open the door, to go away with no intention of returning . . . An invertebrate idea, a lunatic idea, with no more future than—than a German victory. But an idea, even when it had no other object but itself, when it corresponded to nothing necessary or possible, still supposed an alternative—a judgment of values with relation to a situation, and consequently the possibility of a choice. Nevertheless he could not choose to jump out of the window, or to walk naked through the dark city, or to stab a German in the back: he might think about it, he might do it, he could not choose to do it. The fellow upstairs, with his revolver on his knees, with the dream in his eyes and the hatred in his words, had chosen neither hatred nor dream nor revolvers. And Stepanoff the son. And Stepanoff the father. The older Stepanoff had not chosen to be arrested aboard his cargo ship; he had not chosen to die by a hunger strike. He had lived a certain way, following certain norms, whence certain consequences—not, moreover, foreseeable. These norms, this life, this death, did not, in Marc Laverne's eyes, consist of a sum of choices at the mercy of a will.—Nor did I, he thought, make a choice in attracting and holding the interest of Inspector Espinasse. I did not choose to resemble his son. It took the concurrence of a long chain of circumstances, all exactly contrary to my will, and between them the connecting link of the Gestapo and the beatings and this room at the doctor's, to make Anne Marie my wife. If I had been at the Rue des Dames, Anne Marie would not have been "married" tonight. Nor tomorrow night. Nor, perhaps, ever.

Nor, perhaps, ever. Anne Marie uttered a series of disconnected words, as if the echo of this threat had touched her sleep with terror.—The power to turn a person's life upside down by merely saying yes, thought Marc. Or saying no. A fictitious power, he knew. He thought that no one dispensed this yes or this no as he liked, so long as they were capable of modifying the "natural" course of events. He looked at Anne Marie, at the invisible spot where Anne Marie was sleeping. When the daylight begins to whiten the windowpanes, he will see her be born to herself, to what will be herself at her awakening after love. After this sleep Anne Marie will no longer quite be Anne Marie; henceforth another herself will open and break out under her heart and share its rhythm. He smiled, listening to the grave sentimentality of his reflections.—Does one ever escape from the tyranny of this sort of "first sensations"? he thought. From this well-known "nature" which comes back at a gallop? It did not bother him that one should experience the emotions of Mr. Everybody in savoring a wine or flattering a fanny, since the affective life, like language, had its stock of aphorisms, of ready-made phrases, of vulgarity, in a word: it bothered him rather more that it should provoke what, with a touch of contempt, he called "mental salivation." Whether it bothered him or not, however, such "salivation" was his proclivity, his organic weakness.—I did not

choose that either, he thought. His need of knowing the how of the why, the relations of the why and the how, was his instinct, his intimate passion. A smile sharpened his cheekbones at this epithet, which he had invented for the personal benefit of Anne Marie.—My intimate passion. My drunkard's thirst. Things and people, events and situations, in so far as they were part of his landscape and modified its perspectives, deserved to be understood, that is, to be seized by their roots and torn out of their inertia. Sometimes, when he would have chosen to take a holiday from himself—to lie on his back and stare at the ceiling, or lean out the window and lose himself in the passing show—and did not succeed in doing so, the ceiling burgeoning with ideas and the passing show with significance, he doubted whether he was capable of intellectual discipline. More than once he had promised himself to leave Anne Marie alone, not to treat her as a mere factor in a problem which was beyond them both; but his cervical glands salivated on their own initiative and he was forced to obey. He looked at her through his half-closed eyelids, with his head leaning against the back of the chair and his hands flat on his thighs, there was a slow pulsation in his hands, and Anne Marie was emerging from the shadow, and the shadow was growing paler at the level of her sap-swollen body.—I had promised myself . . . Even a while ago, when she had taken his mangled fingers in her mouth, when she had placed them one by one on her belly smoother than glass, he had not been able to refrain from "thinking" her; and his present expectation, his desire to see her awaken with the face of a woman who had known love, was again in view of "understanding," of "seizing things by the roots." He put his hands together with a sudden urge to touch himself, to confirm by touch his own presence, in this chair, in this room which invited the dawn and revealed itself to itself; but his fingers had lost their tactile sense, their great animal wisdom.—At twenty-six, he thought, I am the most tedious old man in creation.

He closed his eyes. He knew fairly precisely the old man that he was. If a certain intellectual exactness, and a repugnance to prettifying the exercise of thought with sentimental trumpery, were synonymous with old age, he was glad not to be "young." Ah, the fine victory of the numskulls who, from the summit of their haughtiness, accused him of dogmatism, of dryness, of scholasticism! When, in the course of interpreting a text, a doctrine, a school of thought, he insisted first of all on situating them in function of their historical and social background, and was told, "That's all very fine but there's more to it than that," what could he do but shrug his shoulders? No one needed to be a soothsayer in the land of instinct to know that there was more to it than "that." Hence, "that" was not supposed to contain absolute values or transcendental qualities. "That" was satisfied to be a method of investigation. Indeed, if the dialectical materialist interpretation of history did not explain "all," it enabled him to understand better, or less badly; it equipped him with a system which empowered him to grasp more clearly the relations of the parts to the

whole. He was quite willing to recognize an irrational element in human activity, and to admit that the repressed unconscious weighed heavily on the steps of man. But, since he acknowledged no man but the social man, he denied that this irrational element should be left to itself and considered self-sufficient. Even in the days of his political apprenticeship he had known that the competition between economic forces in a capitalist society did not automatically empty into the estuary of socialism. The shock of economic forces made socialism possible and necessary, it did not make it obligatory. So he could only shrug it off when certain men of "refinement" accused him of paying tribute to economic fetishism or fatalism. He discerned the telltale mark of the spiritual decadence of the time in the clamorous popularity enjoyed, after a hundred and fifty years of unbridled rationalism, by the unconscious, the divinatory, a tribal art and a tribal logic, a whole cascade of blotting-paper subworlds designed to save man, his soul, and his pyramids.—The "salvation of suffering humanity," he thought, cannot be the result of dream experiences or voodoo trances, any more than it can pre-exist in the crude state in the "laws of nature." Salvation can come only in and through socialism, and socialism is situated at the opposite pole from a timid masturbation between nothing and nothingness.

"Marc . . ." said Anne Marie, rising to her knees in a single movement.

He looked at her between his eyelids. She had not cried out. She had said "Marc" from the bottom of her throat, in a voice so deep that it still resounded in him. He could not see her eyes, they were lost in the shadow of her temples, but he knew that her thighs and arms and belly were vibrating and stretching with the violence of muscles cracking under blows.

"You lie," she said without moving. "You're not asleep."

He was not asleep, but it was she who was lying. Her fear was such that her words had meant—"it isn't true, you're not dead." He saw her better, each instant brought its touch of light to Anne Marie's body—the heavy mass of her hair, her bosom high and firm, the oval of her belly like a pointed arch of stone. "I'm not asleep," he said.

She was kneeling in the center of the bed, and he looked at her in her immobile nudity which enticed the dawn. Against what assaults was this never extinguished anxiety a bulwark? Did this unmoderated fear for his life counterbalance an unmoderated desire to see him dead? And if it did, whom did she wish to kill in him?—This time I'm well into the unconscious, he thought. So well into it that I'm losing my footing.

"Really I'm not asleep," he said. "In fact it's because I couldn't sleep that I'm in this chair."

She slid her legs onto the rug. The dawn sent a steely gleam over her lusterless body. She came forward on the tips of her toes, as if her nakedness had made her too light. "You wanted to see if I'd be afraid when I woke up," she said, sinking down at Marc's feet.

"No," he said. "I just wanted to see you when you woke up, that's all."

She locked Marc's calves in her arms and put her mouth on his knuckles

which had lost their animal wisdom. "I am a magician," she said. "I touch you and you're cured."

"Yes," he said. "Then you make me eat a spice cake and I turn into an elf."

"No, you don't. You'll still be Marc. But I'll make you invisible."

"I wouldn't like that. We're too ready to turn into phantoms."

"Well, I'd like to be a phantom." She put Marc's face between her breasts, and he was intoxicated with wild thyme and new-mown hay. "Then I'll make you invulnerable."

"Now that's more interesting. I only wonder what price you'll demand."

"You," she said. She drew him out of his chair and toward the couch.

"That's always the price magicians ask—a soul."

"The soul of Marc," she said. The dawn encrusted pieces of old silver in her skin. She lay down under him, arching her back to meet his questing mouth. "The soul of Marc," she said. "The soul of Marc, of Marc."

He never thought to think her.

» 20 «

"WELL, WELL, SO YOU'RE BACK AROUND THESE PARTS . . ." said Steve Futeau. He rocked back and forth in the revolving chair, behind Pierre Musaraigne's directoral desk. "Kind of returning to your first love, aren't you, my girl?"

Marianne Davy swung her nose in one direction, then in the opposite direction. This Futeau's chin was spreading, and his cheek shone as if rubbed with garlic.—I must learn not to stick thisses and thats in everywhere, she thought. I must stop imitating that Georges. This Marion . . . damn and double damn, these demonstrative adjectives! She's changed her hair-do, this . . . the Marion, she must have had an accident. Smiling at Marianne, Marion was pulling out a curl over her ear. "I'll take it down in shorthand, Steve?" she asked in a fainting voice, looking at herself with one eye in the sliver of mirror above her typewriter.

"Always," said Steve Futeau. "Now then, Marianne? Did you swallow your tongue?"

"I'm back, as you say," said Marianne. She fixed her blue pupil in Futeau's gray eye. "Couldn't you at least offer me a chair, to show you're glad to see me?"

"Two, three, four chairs!" Futeau exclaimed, jumping to his feet. All at once he looked at her askance, as if he had caught her playing a trick on him. "D'you hear her, Marion?" he asked, not taking his eyes off Marianne. "D'you hear her, little Marion?"

"Certainly, my Steve. She . . ."

"Certainly my foot! What's got into you to talk like everybody else, Marianne Davy?"

"It must be the sight of you. You overwhelm me, Steve Futeau."

. . . ussbethesitovuuoverwelmestevfuto . . . Marion wrote in shorthand. Pencil suspended, she contemplated her friend's physique, carved in straight male lines. Steve Futeau, one hand on the beveled glass which covered the desk, the other pointed at Marianne, was so surprised that he had forgotten the chair. Was she making fun of him? He hesitated as to whether he ought to tell her to clear out, and in a hurry.—I laid her, didn't I, the show-off, he thought. If there's a guy who knows what she looks

like right side up, it's sure me. The memory of his good fortune calmed his apprehensions. She wanted to get her job back at the Suc, he could see that from here, and she had sense enough to know it wasn't the moment to go high and mighty. It came to him that of course she couldn't know about the changes which had taken place in her absence, or that people no longer walked into the Suc as if they were home. "You're looking at the director general of the joint, in person," he said, ceasing to point at her with his finger. "Take a chair now, and tell us what brings you here."

He sank into the revolving chair, tipped it back. Perched on the wall, the old gentleman smiled amiably in the shadow of his mustache. Futeau picked up Musaraigne's paper knife and began to play with it. Well, if she preferred to remain standing, that was her business. It just showed she wasn't consistent. Anyway, she never had been able to think straight, he recognized that. If she had known what side her bread was buttered on, he and she would long since have said "I do" before the mayor. They would have made some little Futeaus, she was built to have them, all they had to do was go to it. Not like Mimi, for God's sake. Mimi, for God's sake, wasn't worth the candle; not even if she was served up, done to a T, on a platter. He rattled the paper cutter on the beveled glass. "Come now, what can I do for you, my girl?"

Marianne was listening to the dull grinding of the machines. So he was director general, this . . . —No, not this, but Futeau short and sweet, she corrected herself. Very here he is director general arrived chief grand janissary, as I would have said a few weeks ago. She pictured him with his head shaved, a Bulbul Emir mustache, a scimitar at his side, riding a barrel of Sucror sweets. "I want to go back to my job," she said.

"Your job . . . It was taken a long time ago, your job was. Did you imagine we were sitting here twiddling our thumbs, waiting for you to make up your mind to come back?"

Marianne wiggled the mobile tip of her nose. She was beginning to be tired of the way he was sizing her up. "Steve, I don't doubt that you're the director, and the general, but it happens that I'm back in Marseilles, that I need work, and that I'd like to have my job again."

"You don't doubt, you'd like . . . Are you going to get mad too?" He pointed his paper knife at her. "It's the limit, all the same! She thinks it's as easy as that. . . . She walks in, drops us a curtsy, here I am, my friends, and that's that, we sit her down in front of the meat and potatoes. Comical, isn't it, Marion?"

Marion gave a little laugh and agreed that it was comical. Futeau lowered his paper knife, tipped back more comfortably in the revolving chair. He was going to take her on again, she was an old sidekick after all, but not this way, no ultimatums. In this House, ultimatums, and vetos too, were a thing of the past. Great guns, with the Suc in his pocket and Marianne for good measure, he'd have reason to dance a jig! And how she had learned to place her words in the proper order! It gave her a sort of charm, it had made a new woman of her, so to speak. . . . He slipped a

glance at Marion, she was puffing out her blouse and staring at him with devotion. If that one ever stuck her nose into what didn't concern her! But no, she'd mind her own business, especially if he kept her just in case, like the cold bird in the princes' icebox. Princes . . . they were the ones who knew how to live. Princes, they . . .

"Listen," said Marianne. She felt worn out and vaguely sad. "I won't argue about your sense of the comic, yours and Marion's. You both have enough to give away free, but please try to catch your breath between two laughs and tell me what team I'm to start with. I just came in after four days on the road, I've got to find a place to stay, I have hardly any money, and I expect to work this afternoon and collect a day's pay."

"Sense of the comic or no sense of the comic, I'm telling you you give me a laugh, you do. Come on, take a chair if you're tired. Marion, give her a chair. So then, it's four days from the Champs Elysées to the Canebière? And your excellent friend Marc Laverne, is he back in Marseilles too?"

"Marc Laverne has been arrested," Marianne answered.

"Here's your chair," said Marion in the voice of a sister of charity. "Well, he had it coming to him, didn't he, Steve?"

"Who? Laverne? I'll say he had it coming to him!" Futeau rejoined. "And he's not the only one, either. Give us the story, my girl: where and how did he get himself pinched?"

Marianne said she didn't know. Futeau shrugged his shoulders and said it was too bad, because although Laverne was a damned nuisance he would have sent him a box of Sucror. Then he told Marianne about Pierre Musaraigne's arrest. "They locked him up in the Chave prison, my girl. Marion sends him a package once a week. That's all they allow. We got to walk like on eggshells, you know, with the Suc to take care of. Me, if you want to know what I think, I don't see him getting out before the year 2000. He got himself into a dirty mess, on account of Laverne, of course . . ." He didn't want to say anything bad about Laverne; he, Futeau, bore him no grudges, but *nom de Dieu de nom de nom,* the fellow deserved a swift kick in the pants. It was probably because of Laverne that Daubigny had disappeared. Nothing, not a sign of Daubigny in all of France. Laverne's fault, again, that Daubigny's parents-in-law, the Bergmanns, had been deported, seeing that Daubigny would have found a hide-out for them. Poor Nelly was the only one left of the whole family, with the little one, fortunately. He paid Cyril's salary to Nelly, so at least she didn't have to worry about where her next meal was coming from. "That's something, that next meal, don't you think, my girl?" he said. "Now, to get back to yours, this is for you." He spread out a large-size double sheet under Marianne's eyes. "Just read that for yourself. Bring it back to me this afternoon, signed with your pretty hand. And don't forget: we don't stand for lateness. Morning eight o'clock on the dot, afternoon two o'clock on the dot." He pointed to himself with the paper knife. "If I hadn't rescued the Suc, I wonder what would have become of the whole lot of you. I'm not talking about myself, because me, you know . . . You'd be working for

Hitler, turning out shells. Ask Marion, she'll tell you if it's true or not."

Marion nodded assent, shorthanding— . . . elsaskmarionshelteluifitstruornot . . . At two o'clock "on the dot" that afternoon, Marianne deposited on the director general's desk the double sheet mimeographed on both sides: complete civil status, family background, religion, military service, membership in organizations and societies, degrees, illnesses if any. The person signing bound himself to follow the rules displayed at the factory doors, to justify his absences by a medical certificate, to claim no indemnity for layoffs or out-and-out dismissal. A paragraph in capital letters forbade political discussions. Another paragraph contained a table of fines for work judged defective. Eighteen subsidiary paragraphs brought up the procession, each beginning: "It is forbidden to . . ." Marianne worked at an isolated table, back to the room and face to the wall, on probation, or maybe in quarantine. She rolled the paste between the palm of her hand and the top of the table, now and then looking over her shoulder at one or the other of the workers, and they smiled back to her, or spoke to her soundlessly, forming the words with their lips, and she answered the same way, with lips and head and eyes. Though talking was not explicitly proscribed, they had put their signatures to so many interdictions, to so copious an index, that it came naturally to talk as little as possible. Furthermore, the daily quota, which had been raised to forty-two hundred pieces uniform in weight, equal in length, perfectly round, wrapped this way and powdered that way, took all their time. Yet not every last minute. They found time to avenge themselves by smearing the walls with prohibitions of their own invention—"the personnel is cordially advised that, under pain of fine, it is obligatory and proper to append to M. Futeau's name the title of Billballs the First, Proconsul"; "it is forbidden, under pain of dismissal, to compare the head of Billballs the First to a pisspot, either directly or by allusion"; "those who go to take a crap are reminded that there is an embargo on all noises, under pain of the sack." They knew that this made the director general sick to the pit of his stomach; that in the evening, knife in hand, he went around scraping the walls; that he would have given his right hand to catch those who, in spite of his vigilance, were insulting him so basely. If at least they had the decency to compose their libels on paper . . . They had started with water color, gone on to China ink, and now were using red lead. "Red lead will be the death of him," they told each other. "It's poison." From time to time, carrying their boxes of sweets to the window which gave into the wrapping and shipping department, one of them paused for a moment at Marianne's back, and gave her the news in a word. She was pleased at this, because turning her head around too frequently gave her a stiff neck. She learned that Steve Futeau had denounced Laverne; that Pierre Musaraigne had shown backbone against the cops; that Gustave Hirsch had run away with the Sucror cashbox; that Mimi had kissed Steve off. She was glad for Mimi. So at last she had found enough energy to send him packing, this Futeau. No, not this, but the Futeau.—More energy than I

ever had, she thought. All those weeks spent trying to hang on, to recover lost ground, when Georges was holding her off, throwing her out as if she were a housemaid. Yet she had declared herself ready to follow him wherever he wished, under bridges and under locomotives, dynamite cartridges around her waist and as many revolvers as fingers. That revolver he had . . . He played with it, he polished it, he slept with it. It made her ashamed to think about it. It was plain he would never again sleep with anything but a revolver. Would he even have a mistress . . . ? No, of course not, only his revolver, his bullets, and that something blackish, or reddening, behind his light eyes. She had sometimes felt that he was studying her as a distant object, as a target, that was it, a target. She had made herself as small as she could, she had almost said, All right, go ahead, take me as a target, but take me. She had been wanting in pride, in the end. And his wordlessness. It had become terrifying in the long run, hours and hours of silence thickening all the time, rising like water in a well. A slimy, crawling silence. Not a word of concern for Laverne. She had told him—"the man who stayed with Genevieve, you remember, he was captured trying to save you"; and not a word, not even a reaction. Nor, for that matter, had he cared about who was looking after him, or who was paying his upkeep. She had had to go to Genevieve about it. Poor girl, she would have sacrificed herself for that Georges, damn, for Georges, she spoke of him as if he were a saint, but there was no question of bringing her to her brother. He had become suspicious, he wouldn't trust his own shadow, and underhanded too, not once had she felt that she caught the real meaning of his rare words. And yet . . . And yet she would have stayed even if he did not notice her; even if all she did was follow him, simply follow him. Serve as his gun-bearer. He would have softened sooner or later, no one can hold out like that, bend backward like that, every day of the year, every year of one's life. The icicle, the pillar of ice which held him up would have melted, perhaps with the end of the war, or else with the last German he would kill. The lousy war. She flattened a dozen of sweets as a sign of her indignation, and her nose pointed up and then pointed down. She felt a fit of anger coming on, one of those good fits of anger that relieve you like a sneeze. He thought he was a desperado, that Georges. Yes, that. A tough hombre. A swashbuckler. A fire-eater. He didn't talk to women. Nay nay. He was busy with the war. He was cutting up Germans. That's what he thought, the birdbrain. He didn't see that the war was busy with him. Busy destroying him. That it was the Germans who were cutting him up. Into little tiny pieces. From the inside, from inside his liver and lights. That they were nibbling away at his soul. That they were his suicide. Yet he believed in God. He knew suicide was forbidden, that, that, that . . .

"Exhale, my girl, exhale," said Steve Futeau in an almost confidential voice. He had put his hand on her shoulder, against the neck. "Nothing like it to get over what ails you. Clears up congestion."

Marianne shook her shoulder and Futeau took away his hand. He sat

down beside her on the bench. "Got something on your mind?" he said, beginning to roll the paste mechanically. "If there's anything I can do for you, just let me know."

"There's nothing the matter," said Marianne, blowing her nose. "I have a cold."

"Teary cold, cold in the heart," Futeau declaimed, raising his finger. "Each one's got his own, you know. I tell you that because me, you see, I'm the worrying kind myself. I look like a bruiser, you think the minute I show up I'm going to push everybody around, but it's just the opposite: I'm the one that takes the pushing around."

"You're a sensitive fellow," said Marianne.

"Make fun of me if you want, but it's true just the same. Me, I'm hurt as easy as anything. They say I have no sense of humor. First of all I'd like to see someone who could tell me what a sense of humor is. But then it's possible I haven't got any. You can't have everything. The fact is I can be won over as easy as the other way around. A kind word, a smile, and I'm eating out of your hand. Don't you think that's because my heart is always just waiting to be welcomed, like the poets say? Nobody knows, you don't know, what a pal this old Steve could be."

"No, nobody knows," said Marianne. "Nobody ever saw a girl named Mimi."

"You don't know what you're talking about, Marianne. Nobody knows what goes on between a couple except the couple themselves. Ask me, and I'll tell you. I'd love to talk to you about it. It's tough when you're all alone, without a soul to talk over your troubles with. After all, appearances are deceiving. I look rugged, but down deep I'm cracking up. Me, I need sympathy. And then I get sore. Maybe I have a lot of faults, but I haven't got them all. I can't have: I'd bust. I'm ready to admit my faults, pay for them if necessary, me, I don't hide from facts, but what the devil! They shouldn't condemn me without a hearing. Look, Marianne, will you?"

"Will I what?" said Marianne, wagging her nose.

"Let me open my heart to you," said Futeau. My God, what a figure she had! "I'm alone, you understand. So alone it's getting me." He knew prettier ones, but a better-built one he had yet to see. "Look, there are fifty of us at the Suc right now, and not one I could say to, 'Come on, let's have a drink and talk things over straight from the heart.' They'd think I had some scheme up my sleeve. But you, you're different. I can talk to you. Listen, I know a little bistro on the quai where we can eat: how does that hit you? It's on for tonight, yes?"

Marianne said that it was not on. She had to get her valise from the station baggage room, she had a couple of letters to write, she had to find a place for the night. Futeau was tenderly insistent, they would have dinner early, he would send someone after the valise, and while they chatted they would hit on a solution for the night. Wait, he had just had an idea—practically, you might say, an inspiration: if it would fix her up she could have his room, that was to say, his bed, until she got things

under control. "Me, I'd sleep in the chair," he said. "With pleasure, you know. Buddies are buddies."

She had known he was coming to that. Even that morning, in his office, when he was pointing at himself and at her with the paper cutter she had felt that he was reviving memories. "No, Steve! Would you do that for me?" she said. "Really? You'd do that?" She moved her leg away, slowly, as she did in the streetcars when someone put his hand where she didn't like it; then she stamped her heel down hard on Futeau's toes. They both stood up, she with the effort, he with the shock; then they both sat down again. He hadn't noticed that he was uttering an exclamation.

"You were saying?" she asked, sniffing at a piece of paste before putting it in her mouth. "What were you saying, my dear friend?"

"You'll pay for this . . ." Futeau groaned, trying to hold his foot under the table. "You'll . . . I'll . . ." But, finding no word expressive enough to illustrate the payment in question, he took it out on himself. Ah, the imbecile he was! The incurable, the congenital imbecile! Always forgetting that wolves are men, the other way around, he meant! He threw his leg over the bench, bewildered, unable to think where the door was. They were laughing up their sleeves, the . . . the . . . Ah, the bastards, the bitches! Ah, the viper's eggs! Ah, the gonococci!

He spied the exit, rushed toward it limping. No one laughed. Gravely, seriously, as is proper at a funeral, they looked at him as he hopped out on one leg. He was cracking up, the proconsul was. It wouldn't be long now. It was the red lead. Red lead never forgives, it will be the death of him. Someone passed behind Marianne, patted her back approvingly. Her nose went up and down while her hands went back to rolling the paste out. What would he do now? Fire her? She thought of the city, of the mistral blowing over the city, then it was tiresome to think of it. Cogitation didn't help at all. So many days lived, so many days to live, whether you thought about it or not. Better not to. Something will turn up—a lodging, another job, other miracles. She had thought so much about getting a divorce and leaving the country, and now look, it was just the opposite. The opposite—always and everywhere. You think this, you do that. Futeau thinks he has a wide-open heart, he's plugged like the neck of a bottle. Georges thinks he's Joan of Arc, he's . . . She mustn't think of Georges. She blew her nose, first one nostril, then the other. He was dead. You don't think about the dead. You eulogize them. That was it, she must learn to eulogize him. The poor young man. His name was Georges, he could read Persian. He died in an epidemic. Many young men perished in it, but he was one of the best. Well, probably one of the best. She was at his bedside when he passed away. An epidemic which did not forgive: it was galloping germanitis. It had frozen his spinal column stiff, and brought on a rash of revolvers, yes, they were even in the whites of his eyes.

She was delighted with her invention. It wasn't too much like a eulogy,

but it consoled her quite as well. As her soliloquy grew in amplitude, changing gradually into a sort of recitative chant, a fever seized her, an increasing hurry. She worked better and faster for it, as if there were a relation between the motion of her palms on the table and the quickening rhythm of her words. She finished her quota ahead of her companions, ran out of the room, ran out on the sidewalk. The wind which had been blowing through the city since morning whipped at her face, and her exaltation collapsed at its touch, leaving her naked with herself. She remembered that she had no place to go, that she had forgotten to collect her wages, that the mistral was after those who had no shelter. She was just about to retrace her steps, to ask her fellow workers one by one if they would smuggle her into their rooms, when Françoise Matthieu, borne on a rolling carpet, came forward to meet her.

"Hello, Marianne, I'm so glad to see you back. . . ." She gave a short, high-pitched laugh, her young teeth gleaming in the shadow of her mouth. "I saw you this morning, with the director, but nobody has a right to move around any more, so I came and waited for you now. I work on the morning shift, that's why. Aren't you coming? Are you going to stay here?"

Marianne came. They walked down the street toward the Canebière, struggling against the mistral. With her arm under Marianne's, Françoise went forward without touching the sidewalk with her feet. "Aren't you going to say anything, Marianne? Aren't you happy to see me?"

Marianne was happy. "You were so nice to come," she said. She smiled, offering her face to the wind. Françoise, of course. She should have remembered. No, it was better this way. If she had thought of it, Françoise wouldn't have come. The law of opposites—always and everywhere. The very foundation of dialectics. "How are things home, Françoise?"

"Oh, fine, fine." She laughed into Marianne's shoulder—a laugh that stilled the wind. "Are you coming home with me, Marianne? You know what? I changed the room all around, you won't recognize it. You're coming with me, Marianne, aren't you? You know what? I've been wondering all the time if you'd come back. Why didn't you write me? You can send letters from one zone to the other, it's allowed. Papa says it's allowed. But you know what, Marianne, we'll have to wait before we go home. It's too early yet. You'll see how nice it will be, now that I've changed the room around. You know what I've got? Guess. You'll never guess. I have an electric sun lamp. It warms you up, you know. Now that it's getting cooler, it's wonderful to have. You know what I like? You'll never guess this either. I like—I like to warm my fanny with it." Some passers-by turned around at the sound of her laugh, others stopped to watch her come toward them. "It's perfect for that—round and all. Would you like to go to the movies, since we have time? Yes? You're so nice. You know where I got the sun lamp? From Papa. He can get lots of things you can't buy any more. Since he got promoted, things are better with Mamma, because he brings home soap, and the other day he even

brought some sugar. He's somebody now, Papa is. He's the head of a barracks, at Milles, you know, it's over in that direction. But Mamma still bawls him out anyway. She says it will take more than the sugar he brings home to sweeten his life when the war is over. That's what she says, but I don't feel that way. Papa's doing his duty, he says he's a soldier of the Marshal, and that pretty soon France will be unitified, and that women and politics don't go good together. But Mamma . . . Look, here's a movie. Shall we go in? I saw this one already, it's cute, I'll tell you about it. There's a woman who has a lover. One day . . . What's the matter, Marianne? What do you see?"

For a moment Marianne had been looking at a young woman who was coming across the street. But . . . but wasn't that the girl she had met at the Colonel's? A "pupil" . . . She certainly didn't look as if she lacked "education." With an anatomy like hers, education was a process of instinct. But old colonels are smart people, they're stuffed with science, they know how to choose their "pupils." In his room, a room no bigger than—than p-f-f-f . . . He . . .

"Is she what you're looking at?" Françoise asked uneasily. She leaned against Marianne like a figurine in a mechanical ballet. "You know her? You've . . . Come on, come on, let's go into the movie." She took Marianne's hand, raised it to her lips to stifle a laugh. "You know what? I'll tell you something. I wouldn't tell anyone else but you. You know what I'm going to do? I'm never going to get married."

Marianne's blue eye met Françoise's golden eye, then her scarlet mouth half open over her young teeth. Somewhere in an already distant, almost unreal past, a person named Georges was vanishing like a meteor.

"Neither will I," she said, her eyes following Karen's figure. "Neither will I, Françoise."

"Surprised?" Karen asked. She smiled with her mouth and her eyes, and she gave both hands to Pontillac. "Do you always receive your guests in the vestibule?"

He ushered her into his living room, relieved her of her coat and scarf. He was surprised and delighted. Although he had several times invited her to come to his place, she had always taken refuge behind some pretext or other. "Please, don't try to lure me with music that no one else could play for me, or with prints and pictures that I haven't see before, or with wines that can't be had on the black market. . . ." But he did indeed possess some extremely rare Catalan *coplas,* some Braques and Bonnards which she certainly did not know, and some rather unique liqueurs. And now, of her own free will, without further ceremony . . . He held her by the shoulders, at arm's length, trying to read her face. Just as some fear an ill omen in an unexpected visit, he wondered if Karen's coming might not be due to some untoward circumstance. He drew her to him, feeling the warmth of her body seeping beween his fingers.

"Good evening, Karen," he said in a muted voice.

"Good evening, monsieur," she said in the same tone, with her arms against her body and her head slightly tilted.

"May I ask to what extraordinary event I owe the privilege of your presence?"

There was nothing but a smile in Karen's eyes, and, at most, a hint of uncertainty in her expression, as if she was doubtful of the meaning of his words. He felt a sudden vexation at not having realized that there might be no other event than himself. He could not understand why, as soon as Karen was involved, his mind set out on unaccustomed paths, where planes and perspectives fitted together according to an absurd geometry, similar to that which things assume when one looks at them head down. A long time had passed since he put his head between his knees to become acquainted with the universe, but in his relations with Karen it always seemed to him that he returned to his adolescent attitudes.—You give me back my youth, Karen, he thought, not knowing himself whether the thought was ironical or merely testy.

"Three capital events!" she said emphatically. "One: I'm cold; two: I'm hungry; three: I . . . But before I announce the third—the most capital, naturally—I shall wait for you to have done scrutinizing me. Whereupon we shall put a match to those logs over there. My teeth are chattering, Adrien. And I adore an open fire. It's an invitation to gaiety. I want to be gay, monsieur."

She asked for matches, squatted on the hearth. Pontillac looked at her in silence. The fire caught the kindlings, licked at the logs, and lighted a vague aureole in Karen's hair. She turned around, smiling at Pontillac as if she had invented flame, and he warmth. "Isn't it gay?" she said. She turned back to the fire and put her arms around her legs.—Like Grandfather, she thought, nestling her chin on her knees. "Just hear how it crackles," she said, speaking of the flame. "When I was a little girl I couldn't see why things kept from burning by themselves. I thought that there was fire in everything, and first of all in ourselves. Today, though I'm not quite a little girl any longer, I still believe that. Don't you think it's true, Adrien, that every human being carries a glowing ember in him?"

She faced the fire as she spoke. The light of the flame fell on her, sharpening the trim lines of her body. It seemed to Pontillac that he was seeing her illumined from within. "You're lyrical, Karen," he said.

"I'm serious," she said. "There's an ember smoldering in every human being. At every instant of his life, each one is capable of becoming the center of a blaze. I don't say of a roaring fire, but a blaze. The reason why many burn away cold is that the ember which is in us doesn't give rise to spontaneous combustion. It must be freed from the ashes. It must be blown upon. Other times a combination of circumstances may be enough. Or again, I don't know, an—an encounter. But no one will be accused of having come on earth without this promise of flame in him. No one is guilty of that."

Pontillac took her by the elbows and helped her to her feet. Her eyes

had their somber, lucid look. "Is this a sermon?" he asked, half smiling. "Or a sudden appetite for parables?"

"Oh no, Adrien. It's a hope."

He placed his curved forefinger under Karen's chin and lifted her head. "There are flames and flames," he said. "Some people's flame shines only in darkness. It is made of the same matter as the will-o'-the-wisps that flare over marshy ground. There are incendiaries, in the literal and in the figurative sense, and the flame they set has nothing—let's say aesthetic—about it. There is hell, Karen, and it burns with a very hot flame. But allegories are likely to be confusing. Why indulge in them, when we can so easily get along without them? Moreover, didn't we speak of being hungry? Unfortunately it's my man's day out, but I shall go and have a look at the larder."

She remained standing on the spot where he had left her. She was surprised that he had caught her allusion so quickly, although she had made it in the hope of his catching it; surprised that he had so promptly thrown the ball back—fire of incendiaries, of stagnant waters, of hell . . . She wanted to ask him, without further equivocation, the minute he came into the room with a slice of cold veal in one hand and a lettuce leaf in the other, "Is ten-thousand-dollars-at-the-official-rate the exhalation of a swamp or the flame of a count?" But perhaps he knew . . . Perhaps he loved her enough to know . . . She turned around, as if the answer might be hidden behind her back. He was so dangerously perspicacious. . . . She picked up an andiron and moved a log. Laughable, ridiculous supposition. He didn't have the faintest idea. At most he supposed her to be moderate in her enthusiasms for the new regime, she having certainly given him more indications of it than were needed. Of course this wasn't specially agreeable to him, many a time she had noticed his too visible displeasure, but she saw clearly enough that he did not take her nonconformism too seriously. These gentlemen's ladies, to the extent that they bothered their heads with ideas, had a right to share those of their lords and masters; and he was confident—Karen had no doubt—that she would conform to convention.

Pontillac returned, carrying neither veal nor lettuce, and Karen did not seek to learn what flames, pure or impure, lighted ten thousand dollars "at the official rate." He had found some ham, eggs, and coffee. Did she know how to make an omelet, toast bread, prepare coffee? He was joking, making inquiries as he would of a newly hired secretary, but Karen perceived that Pontillac's curiosity, born of the game itself, was lying in wait for her answer.

"Secrets revealed only to the man one marries," she said. "It's part of our dowry, you see. Consequently you must either make the omelet yourself, or give me something ready to eat, even if it's only an apple."

"I have no apple for you, and I don't know how to beat eggs," he answered, holding her against him. "Consequently you must either marry me or die of hunger."

"But this is blackmail, monsieur. My wish in coming was to eat a quail, to drink a glass of Bordeaux, to be gay; and you say to me, 'Do the cooking or marry me!' My coat, monsieur. My coat, if you please."

He closed her mouth with a kiss. She was fresh and supple and her lips had the taste of warm wine. "Karen, Karen, you will be my wife." To repeat—Karen Karen, like this, mouth to mouth. "My wife. Karen, Karen, my wife."

"I shall be dead of hunger long before that," said Karen.

"So there's nothing left for me to do but put on an apron?"

She shook her head several times, with conviction. "And don't forget to turn back your cuffs. A slice of ham and two eggs will be enough. Beat them well, so I can hear you."

"How so? Won't you keep me company in the kitchen?"

"Not a bit of it. I shall look around this room while I wait for you. I see some prints there which look worthy of my attention. Add a pinch of grated cheese, it heightens the flavor. Is one allowed to open the drawers? I adore poking about in them. There's never anything but broken pens and old razor blades, but I love it. Didn't you know I was a kleptomaniac? Be off, monsieur. Be off. Don't you think it's a kind of art to steal without profit to oneself? If by any chance you come across a spring onion, cut it up into the omelet. And don't brown the butter too much."

"Wait, Karen. Wait, and don't say a word." He seemed to have a brilliant idea. "I have the finest dish in the world to offer you. A feast for the gods. If after eating it you don't marry me on the spot, it will show that you have no palate."

"Guilty ahead of time, Adrien: I have no palate." She ran the tip of her tongue over her lips. "What is it? A quail? Braised with bacon? Served on toast in a grape leaf?"

They both laughed, holding each other's hands. "Neither quail nor skylark, but a *terrine de chasseur*. I had completely forgotten that several of them arrived just recently from my estate in the Poitou. Two or three times a year my people allow themselves the pleasure of sending me this masterpiece of local cooking. If only my valet hasn't stowed them away someplace . . . Be patient for a second, Karen."

He was back in a minute, carrying two earthen jars on a tray. A paper band was pasted around the cover, and inside a round of white cloth covered a uniform layer of lard. Pontillac was amused by Karen's puzzled expression. "It's the only dish I know how to prepare, in fact. And it's a science in itself, and not one of the least important. Tell me now, do you like it?"

She liked it. It was highly seasoned, gamy, rich. Pontillac opened a bottle of Châteauneuf-du-Pape, praised its year, filled the glasses. They had seated themselves in the light of the fireplace, she on a stool with a sunken seat, he on the floor. She made him laugh by asking whether the mixture was always eaten cold.

"This mixture, as you so well call it, is at least two weeks old. And in

two weeks more it would have been better, if we had left it time to improve. In winter, in my part of the country, we never touch it until seven or eight weeks after it's cooked: like wine, like the people of the Poitou, it gains by aging." And as Karen was sniffing at her fork, he asked her if she knew what she was eating. She thought it was some new kind of rabbit with sausage, or perhaps a potted boar's head. . . . He laughed so hard that he had to put down his glass. She had never seen him so relaxed, in such a holiday mood. Was he forgetting that North Africa had just been invaded? That the first stone had just been torn from the foundations of his national revolution? Was the mere fact that she was with him, in his home, sufficient to bring him this new ease? The thought gave her a pressing, stormy joy. She watched the youthful pleasure with which he gave her the details of his recipe—a fine fat hare, smoked ham, a very thick slice of lard, very thin slices of veal, cloves, bay leaves, thyme, fennel, onions browned in white butter, the animal's blood, red wine, brandy, cook, take off, mash, squeeze, pour from one stewpan into another, recook for twelve hours; and she did not understand, no longer understood, what interdiction it could be that kept her from saying, Yes, Adrien, let's be married, tomorrow, not a day later.

She asked for more wine, then for still more wine, then for liqueurs. They drank an Armagnac brandy which went from the mouth to the veins and lined them with gold. Karen held out her glass, the palms of her hands warmed the crystal, and he poured the liqueur with the rapt attention of an initiate in the execution of a rite. He saw clearly that she was bent on conquering a resistance, on gaining courage. Her voice became deep and slow, it wrapped itself in the warm tunic of her laughter. What was this obstacle which shut her off from him, this pane of glass which isolated her like a plant in a greenhouse? To know what animal she was. Its way of life, its instincts. One knew nothing of a woman until one knew her zoological genus and species. It came to him suddenly that if he loved Karen it was precisely because he knew nothing about her. None of those whom he had possessed, whom he had loved in the hour of love, had ever had any mystery for him. Annulates or cornupeds, carnivores or ruminants, they had the mark of their race stamped on their foreheads; one had only to put them under the lamp, to take them under the hand, and one could see. One could not see in Karen. She belonged perhaps to the animals which live deep in the sand; in a back country which no one can penetrate, from which no one can come out. At times, when non-presence veiled Karen's eyes, he divined the halo of this inaccessible region which was calling him on. At such times he yearned to go there, to plunge headlong into her maddening eyes, and then he had to defend himself against the desire to seize her by the throat until her pupils emerged from their sockets, and with them, following them, this universe from which he was banished.

He lifted her from the stool and sat her beside him. "Karen, we're not going to keep up this game any longer." He sought her eyes, in which the

flames struck yellow glints. "Tomorrow I'm taking you to Vichy, and in a day or two to my home in Jouvency-le-Comte, where I shall have our banns published. We shall receive the nuptial blessing in the ancestral chapel of the Pontillacs, where, since the fourteenth century, all those of my blood have been borne to the baptismal font, married, and received in their coffins."

"Pour me a liqueur," said Karen.

He poured her a finger of Armagnac. "Do you know that I was just about to phone you when you arrived? I wanted to . . ." He drew her with a pressure of his hand, and she yielded, leaning her head on his shoulder. "I wanted to announce our coming marriage to you, Karen."

"And the fiancée comes running by herself, to receive the joyous news. O clairvoyant intuition of the woman beloved! Let's drink!"

"This is a heady liqueur, Karen."

"A glass, monsieur! It isn't every day that the counts of Pontillac ask your hand in marriage!"

"Here you are, sword in hand, Karen. Should I put myself on guard? May I at least be told the reason for your bellicose mood? And aren't you afraid of wounding yourself, brandishing your saber this way? Or is that what you're trying to do? But you love me, Karen. I know it by your eyes, by your voice. By the taste of your lips."

"How conceited you are, monsieur. I give my lips any taste I please."

"Worse luck for you," said Pontillac with a laugh. "You'll have a conceited ass for a husband. As for your lips, try to give them a bitter taste, just to see."

He tried to kiss her, but she moved away. She was on her knees, glass in her outstretched hand, yellow glints in her pupils. "A glass, monsieur!" she said. "A glass! I am joyous this evening. I have two reasons for being joyous: the Germans are biting the dust in North Africa, and I shall not marry the Comte de Pontillac. A glass, monsieur!"

"You've drunk enough," said Pontillac. He had stood up, holding the bottle by the neck, and he was looking down at her at his feet. "You might say foolish things."

"And if it pleases me to say foolish things? Or even to do them, Adrien? It's such a bore always to say and do what the world expects of you. And what do you call foolish? To sin against good sense? Is what you say and do in your office at the Prefecture, morning and evening, yesterday and tomorrow—is that good sense? The same papers, the same ink, the same bad conscience? Isn't it true that it gives you a bad conscience to do what's expected of you, always, without ever stepping out of line?" She held out the glass with both hands. "Pour me some liqueur, Adrien."

He poured her some liqueur. If the Armagnac made her talkative, she could have all the Armagnac in his cellar. Perhaps she would get light-headed enough to show him what animal she was. For a second he doubted whether he really wanted to find out—like this—by surprise—through

the keyhole. "This brandy might make you say things that you would prefer not to say," he suggested.

"Oh no," said Karen into her glass. "I could never say all the things I would like you to know. This room couldn't hold them all." She looked at him as she drank, sitting on the floor with her back to the fire, her eyes so bright that he thought she was weeping. "The brandy gives me a little courage, that's all. It peels away—oh, so very little—the thick, thick carapace which shields me from you. Thus, Adrien, this courage will make me say that I—that I love you for having thought to warn me that you might catch me off guard."

She had this gift—the genius of a miraculous bonesetter who, by the touch of his hand, drives out the pain of the injury. Very deliberately, with complete premeditation, she had just stung him with a series of massive impudences, and an instant later, with a word, she cured the sting. But he would have no more of his self-complacency—or these deep surges that carried him along at Karen's whim. He would no longer yield to this magic which exalted and humiliated him at once.

"Believe me, I am profoundly stirred by your admission," he said. "And since there has been an admission, I presume on it to inform you that I shall come for you tomorrow about noon. You are requested to be ready and in a sociable humor. We shall lunch here, and then take the plane to Vichy."

"Must I remind you that I have no right to travel in this France of yours?" Karen said. "And least of all in an airplane? Am I not a foreigner, monsieur?"

"I shall have a permit for you. Alcohol makes you aggressive, Karen."

"You'll have a permit? But I am stupid, indeed! I was forgetting that you are in the police, Adrien . . ."

"I am not 'in' the police, Karen. Your sallies—do you mind if I don't find them as witty as they might be?"

"And how about North Africa?" Karen said. "Suppose we went to North Africa instead?" So that was why she had knocked on his door. . . . To take him by the hand and make him seize his chance. His chance was beckoning to him from the shores of Africa, it was calling to him in this single instant at which he might still surmount his own past. But his eyes took on the opaque sheen of resin, a hard film was covering them, and she knew that he was no longer capable of seeing. "No," she said. "Certainly not. You'd get lost on the way there."

He lifted her, holding her in front of him, under his lacquered gaze. He was hurting her arms, and it was good to feel the pain. "I'm going to see you home," he said. "It's one o'clock in the morning. Don't forget that I shall come for you at noon."

"It's true that tomorrow is today," Karen said. "Today and yesterday placed end to end. What would grandfather, who knew his authors, say to that? You knew I had a grandfather, didn't you, Adrien? Don't look at me so severely, everybody has a grandfather. He would have raised his

finger to his mustache and said: 'So that we never live, we only hope to live.' It's from Pascal, isn't it? I think it's Pascal. And you, Adrien—what did you hope for when you pocketed a cool million at my expense?"

Without releasing his hold, he slapped her. A stain came out on her cheek and spread rapidly. "You see for yourself that you have a bad conscience," she said.

"I'm sorry—I'm terribly, terribly sorry . . ." He had turned white, and his eyes were the color of dull glass. "That transaction was proper in every way . . ."

"Proper in every way," Karen repeated. "I have in my handbag the document which bears out its propriety. Do remind me to give it to you."

"If you thought I was—I was pocketing your money, why did you agree to the transaction?"

"I'm rich, and it amused me. I wanted to see how you'd arrange our banking affairs and your affairs of the heart on the same platter. I was ready to stake my whole fortune to see how far you would push that art. You'll never know all I was ready to do. You've lost, Adrien. And I, too, have lost."

"You're a strange person," said Pontillac. "You wallow in self-torture as others do in debauchery. I don't understand you. I don't understand your craving to destroy yourself. But I shall oppose it, Karen. You could cry to heaven for help, and I should still oppose it. You forget that I want you for myself."

"I shall not forget it," said Karen. "I shall think of it all night. I shall not stop repeating to myself, 'Don't forget he's coming for you at noon; don't forget you'd be only too glad to have him come for you; don't forget, Gervaise, don't forget . . .' Didn't you know I'm called Gervaise too?" She felt Pontillac's look enter her eyes and rest there. "It's a name that would suit me so much better. . . . Do you remember those verses of Drouault, that begin, 'Name of my land . . .' and speak of the arrow psalming its way to the target? What will you do, Adrien, when the arrow strikes you?"

"I don't like those verses," said Pontillac. "I don't like your allegories. I don't like anything that sets you against me. Karen, I don't know who you are or what you are. It seems to me that I know you a little less every day, and it troubles me. But I convince myself that I don't really want to know you. Not yet, at least. Sometimes there are such insinuations in what you say that . . ."

"That what?" she raised herself on tiptoe, meeting Pontillac's eyes with her clearest look. "That what, Adrien?"

"That I would like to kill you," he said.

She closed her eyes. There was a quiet spinning in the center of her body. "Drink, Adrien. It gives courage to kill." Quiet swinging of a pendulum in the center of her body. "One must kill when one thinks of killing." He would come tomorrow at noon, in a few hours at noon. "Otherwise you will have no peace, Adrien." She wanted him to come

and to take her away forever and without return and without remorse. "I'll be a kindly ghost, I won't haunt you." She wanted to learn not to want. "See, I'm not crying. I'd like to awfully, but I'm not crying. I'm ready, I'm yours." She was his, it would be like a murder, and afterward she would not want any more, and he would not want any more. "You had a unique chance tonight. You let it go by. You're not made for chance, Adrien. So why wait for tomorrow? Your tomorrow will be like your today, like your yesterday, until there are no tomorrows left for you." The swinging of the pendulum was less quiet in the center of her body, it was taking on weight and becoming vertiginous. "Hurry, Adrien. Hurry." She opened her eyes, and her pupils became very large and very somber.—To be ready not to want. Ready before he speaks, before he takes me back as I want and I don't want. "You have a fraction of a second left—a fraction which won't . . ."

He lifted her in his arms. Karen's head rolled in the net of her loosened hair. Under the half circle of her eyelids, following the fringe of her lashes, a trace of moisture marked a shadow. He gazed at her, and drunkenness gripped his veins like a black powder. He carried her to a bed, seeking her mouth, the inside of her mouth. Slowly, with infinite lightness, his fingers set out to discover Karen—the lobe of her ear, the line of her neck, the arch of her throat, the curve of her loins. He was careful to touch her ever so lightly, as he came to a system of bands and buckles fit to hold up an ounce of hose, listening to Karen's flesh swell under his fingers, and his own blood swelling. She lay in a yielding immobility, a bit of pallor at the tip of her nose, a bit of purple in her cheeks; and though she had not moved an inch, it seemed to Pontillac that she was guiding and correcting his movements. His fingers roamed in the hollow of her hip, they raised a snapping of sparks when they ran over silk, then he put his mouth to her belly, then his nostrils, then his whole face, and the belly contracted and shook and became hard as stone. She put her hand on his head, desirous that he leave his imprint in her, that he leave in her the trace of the bite and the lash, and he, with a delicacy that stirred her as much as his caresses, undressed without for a moment defrauding her of his presence.

"I love you, Karen," he said, words of black powder on his tongue. "Karen, Karen, you will be my wife."

She smiled to herself, at that which was not to be. He did not know that he had lost her. Any more than he knew that the light had come back in her eyes, and that the non-presence had left them. But already, under the soft touch of his hand, she opened and welcomed him on her belly, which breathed out the soul of meadows in autumn. And so aflame was the man that she groaned from far down in her entrails.

Brandishing in one hand the spoon which he was about to dip into a tea caddy, raising with the other the beret which was pulled down over his ears, the Colonel swung around in his tracks: two long rings, one

short—G—Gervaise. He looked around for a place to leave the spoon, stuck it into the pocket of his dressing gown, cast an incredulous glance at his watch hanging on a nail.—Hardly eight o'clock . . . His granddaughter never came to see him outside their "lessons": they had agreed not to break the rule—two visits a week at a fixed time—except in an extreme emergency. Even as he hurried along the dark corridor with its forbidding doors on both sides, his slippers flopping, his goatee hidden by a muffler wound several times around his neck, he wondered if they had committed some error in preparing the letter of credit which confirmed a deposit of ten thousand dollars in the name of one Clarisse Orfanville—some technical defect that he would not have noticed, but that Pontillac would spy at first glance. Although he could not examine Karen's face, he had the impression that a certain movement of her head, a certain stiffness in her bearing as she came over the threshold, forecast the worst. They hurried along, she thinking, He has Adrien's way of holding my arm, and he, She has seen Pontillac, seen him for a long time, too long a time.

"Did I wake you up?" she asked when they had climbed the four steps which led to the Colonel's room. She looked at the absurd heaps of books, the yellow keyboard of the piano, the electric plate on the window sill where the raw light of morning was coming in sidewise, and she could not repress a shiver. "Did I wake you up, Grandfather?"

The Colonel did not reply. He sniffed guardedly and threw back the covers on the unmade bed. He felt vaguely ill at ease, and guilty of something, of the fact that Karen did not look well, perhaps.—She's been weeping, he thought. She's . . .

"I wouldn't say no to a cup of your tea," Karen said, pulling the plug of the electric plate. "It's cold in here, you poor old man."

Well then, since she felt the cold, since she called for tea, the world could not have lost its reason for existence! He was so relieved that, without thinking, he put his monocle in his eye. "Is today my birthday?" he asked, watching her from the side.

"Why yes, let's pretend it's your birthday," she said, taking his hands in hers. "Where have you put your goatee?"

It was a matter of tradition to knock on his door early on the morning of his birthday; and it was a fixed rule that Karen should be the first to present her good wishes. Combed and brushed, in black coat and striped trousers, he waited for her impatient as a novice, drew her into his long arms, and she raised herself on tiptoe and put a kiss in his goatee. This kiss was Karen's inviolable privilege. As far back as her memory reached, she saw herself being lifted to the level of a bouquet of beard: it almost seemed as if her grandfather never had the strength to hoist her any higher. Later, when years had made her taller, he had never bent over far enough for her to kiss him elsewhere than on the goatee; and even later, when she had stopped growing, her grandfather's chin was still the highest point she could reach on his face—although she was of more than average height.

"Let's pretend," he agreed, freeing his goatee from the folds of his muffler. "I never refuse a celebration with my Gervaise. Since you say that today's my birthday, I'm perfectly satisfied, although it ages me by several months." He made a sign in the direction of Karen's handbag. "It's proper, I suppose, to expect my yearly surprise? Come, my darling, don't torment me. You know I'm burning with impatience. It's a terrible thing to live in suspense: it's a spider's life."

"Isn't it a terrible thing, you crazy man? To live on a thread you've spun yourself, and which threatens every moment to take you by the neck? But from whom did you borrow the epigram? Have you gone into falsification so far that you don't even cite your authors?" She turned toward the window, and began to move her finger back and forth over the cover of a book. "Grandfather, I came to say good-by. I'm out. I'm taking leave of this hook on which a dreadful bearded character keeps me hanging like a piece of meat to bait . . ."

The Colonel felt an almost physical pain, as if he had swallowed a draught of vinegar. Ever since he had "put her in business," he had feared the day when she would decide to get out—would decide, not to leave the game, but to go off far away. "Gervaise," he said.

"Yes, Grandfather."

"Would it be indiscreet to ask what you expect to do?"

She shook her head. The window opened on the back of the house. Two men were working below, in what seemed to be a storage place for rags and old papers. She shook her head again. Her forefinger went back and forth over the cover of the book as if she were deciphering a Braille inscription.

"Did you give the letter of credit to Pontillac?" the Colonel asked.

"I left it on the table when I came away. This time he trusted me; he spared himself the trouble of examining it behind my back. No doubt because a while before I had asked him to tell me how he reconciled his million-franc swindle with—with that." She swung her hand in a gesture which started with herself and went toward the men below. "He slapped me."

The Colonel took his monocle out of his eye. In the yard below, one of the men, still talking to his companion, began to urinate against a bale bound with wire. Karen turned her back to the window. There was such confusion in the old man's pale eyes, such embarrassment on the long face with the ears tucked under the beret, that she buried her face in his chest. He wrapped his arms around her, and they rocked back and forth, Karen's cheek against her grandfather's shoulder, and his nose in his granddaughter's hair. "Did he hurt you?" he said.

She shook her head. "Did you ever slap a woman, Grandfather?"

"Yes, once. But she had asked for it."

"Did it do anything to you? I mean, did it give you any pleasure?"

Like Karen a moment before, he shook his head negatively. "What else did you say to him?"

He saw that she wanted to free herself, and released her from his embrace. Below, the two men were picking over a mound of rags. A woman had come along, she was watching them and talking to them. "I told him I had a grandfather who quoted his authors," Karen answered. "And that my name is Gervaise, and Drouault, and that I would not marry him."

"He didn't believe you?" said the old man.

"He didn't believe me." Down below, the woman was touching the rags with her foot and talking to the men. "I'm leaving on the ten-thirty train. I must, Grandfather. It's a less final way of leaving than if I stayed." The woman was crouching under the eyes of the two men, they watched her and she touched the rags. "Than if I stayed till noon."

"Will you tell me where you're thinking of going?"

"I don't know. I bought a ticket to Lyons. After that I don't know. I have to leave, I have to go somewhere, it doesn't matter where, so long as they don't find me."

"Yes, Gervaise; so long as they don't find you. What papers are you taking?"

"My own. I don't want to be that Hungarian, the shade of that Hungarian, any longer." In the yard below the two men had moved around so that they could see the crouching woman better, they were letting her pick out all the rags she wanted. "I hate that dead woman who's taken refuge in me, who possesses me like a demon and lives by my breath. I hate that Karen Trinyi who has become me. I've imagined her so well, imitated her so faithfully, that I've become her." She made the same gesture as before, from herself toward the group below, where, bare-kneed and spraddle-legged, the squatting woman was piling up rags in her skirts. "Do you think I'll ever be able to rid myself of her?" She turned away from the window, her face was pale, and in the pallor her eyes were very large and very dark. "Don't believe it, Grandfather, don't believe it. You didn't see me with Pontillac. You didn't see me laughing, acting, turning phrases in another woman's stead, aping the manner, assuming the genre, affecting the style of another woman. And if I chanced to recover myself, if I dared, by word or allusion, to show what was left of my true visage, I wasn't taken seriously. Do you know where I'd like to go? Do you know? To Hungary! I abhor the Trinyis, their name is a horror to me, but they are calling me, I belong to them, and they will not let go of me. The fact is that at times I've been happy not to be myself. Unforgettably happy, Grandfather. So that when I curse Karen, I condemn my own happiness."

"But, Gervaise, I didn't know . . ."

"I didn't either, you foolish old man. I didn't know either that one can't play fast and loose and then escape unpunished." She spoke in a hushed, almost whispering voice, not noticing that the old man had taken her hands and was squeezing them with all his strength. "How can you recognize yourself when you've hidden your life under that of

another? When you've buried yourself so deep that you begin to like it? Tell me, how can you get this other to leave you when you yourself have become the other? Did you ever think of that, Grandfather?"

"I believe I've thought of it," said the Colonel. "Not exactly in your terms, it's true. Not quite in the terms of a personal experience, although . . . After all, Gervaise, a borrowed identity is a safeguard."

"A safeguard which consumes you," said Karen.

"A refuge for huge numbers of people," said the old man. His look slipped over his granddaughter's head, in the yard below the woman was sitting cross-legged on a pile of rags, she was gathering another pile in the hollow of her skirt, and the two men, now likewise squatting, let her do as she liked. "There has never been an epoch so eager to skin man alive, to dig deep into the secret of his shame. Those who were in the greatest danger have been forced to invent disguises. There was a time when we believed in the identity of man with himself; be as you are, but be yourself. A time when the 'be,' the act of being, was taken for granted. Today the act of being is not taken for granted. In a Europe where a handful of rags is the price of virtue, the act of being supposes first the condition of not-being-oneself—at least on the surface."

"But you're a cynic," said Karen, casting a glance over her shoulder. "Let me go, let go of my hands."

He did not let go of her hands. "No, Gervaise, you're wrong. The cynics were men of great virtue, and I am not. I'm an old man who's trying not to die in his bed. That too is a disguise, and there you are: I've taken off my mask for your benefit. Does it change me much?" The wrinkles wove a fine network around his pale eyes, and the shadow of a smile trembled on the points of his superlative mustache. "It's true that sometimes we do begin to look a little like our masks—let's say like a face stricken with paralysis in a moment when it wasn't watching itself. Hence we must watch ourselves, my Gervaise. It depends entirely on you to send the shade of Karen Trinyi back where it belongs, beside Route 23, between Valençay and Poulaine, where her remains are buried. It's up to you to go through the part of hell which is reserved for you in the common hell. And when you come out at the other end of your experience, let me know. I may still be here to answer."

Tears came to Karen's eyes, but she held them back. It was time to leave. She took an envelope out of her handbag. "Here are Karen Trinyi's papers," she said. "Do what you like with them. Put them under glass, as you used to do with your collections, in Modena. With an appropriate label, to make things clear . . ."

"Destroy them yourself," said the old man, looking over his granddaughter's head.

"May I?" she said. She was like a little girl who has been given permission to rummage through a trunk. She opened the envelope and began to tear up passports, identity cards, ration cards, cards of all sorts. The paper resisted her fingers, it crackled like paper, and she tore it and

rumpled it and tore it again. There was something proud and satisfied in her face when she slipped her arms around her grandfather's neck.

"A rivederci," she said.

She kissed him on the goatee. The tears would not be held back any longer, they clouded her eyes, which had become intolerably large. *"A rivederci,"* she repeated.

The old man did not accompany her to the door. He listened to the sound of her footsteps growing fainter and disappearing in the long hall. Then he looked out the window. The woman and one of the men had left, and a ray of sunlight came over the roofs. He remained standing on the same spot, a long moment of immobility, as if he were hoping that Karen would return. Then he sat down at his piano. So hard was his touch, so fortissimo the tune of the *Polonaise,* that soon someone knocked at the door, asking for silence.

» 21 «

"EXCELLENT, THESE TEA CAKES," SAID MADAME ORFANville with an air of conviction, listening to the crunching of the crust between her molars. And, in a knowing voice: "From the Ambassadeurs?"

"Naturally, my dear," Catherine Tournefeuille-Blas replied. "You know nobody but the foreigners has any pastry. If we deprived the gentlemen of the diplomatic corps of their sugar, they'd turn sour!" She nibbled at a cake with the tips of her teeth, eyes half closed, lips but slightly opened.—Like a love nip, thought her friend. They were of an age which is a defect offensive to the conscience, but Madame Orfanville found a measure of justice in the fact that Catherine, who was a year younger than she, looked every bit of her fifty years, whereas she—no, decidedly not.

"Anything but excellent," said Madame Tournefeuille-Blas. "Try the sweetmeats instead, if you feel up to it." She pointed to some small cakes topped with glazed bonbons. "When I think of all our French gold frozen abroad, I feel that the least they could do is make us pastry fit to eat."

"The very least they could do," Madame Orfanville agreed, taking a sweetmeat. She thought the foreign diplomats were already doing very commendably, trading their cakes, their cigarettes, their nylon hose; she even wondered what would have become of everyone had it not been for these gentlemen's valises; but Catherine had a forked tongue and of course you couldn't expect a good word from her. "A great deal of our gold, Catherine?" she asked anxiously.

"All our gold, for heaven's sake!" She wriggled her fingers to knock the crumbs off. "Whence all our difficulties, my dear friend. If we had our gold handy, we would pay off the Germans and they would go home. Why do you think they're occupying us, except to collect what's coming to them? It will take more than our poor devalued franc to make them happy."

"Our poor devalued franc doesn't make anybody happy," said Madame Orfanville.

"They would have taken their tanks and their flags and gone home before this," said Madame Tournefeuille-Blas. "At the very most they

would hold onto the north coast, to fire on the English. Tea, Clarisse?"

She acquiesced to some tea. One could always learn a thing or two from Catherine. She had contacts in high places, sure information, and—to give her her due—a political mind. Before the war she had conducted a salon frequented by generals, academicians, future government heads, their wives and mistresses: there international affairs were debated, cabinet crises prepared, falls and nominations plotted. The late Monsieur Orfanville, who had made his fortune in the phosphate business and had wound up as the senator for his Department, was a regular guest. Madame Orfanville smiled to the senator's shade; he had died at his post like a good Frenchman, of a heart attack. "But tell me, how is it going to go off?" she asked, taking a meringue.

"What? The commemoration of the eleventh of November? But I told you already: we're putting it ahead a day, so as not to arouse the Germans. What else is there to do? These people are touchy, as parvenus always are. But since we're tied up with them, we must spare their feelings. Consequently we shall celebrate the victory on the tenth, to save appearances. All our friends will be there; and don't forget it's this evening, Clarisse."

"How could I forget it, Catherine? Our eleventh of November is the only victory that counts. Anyway, there never was any other victory but that of '18, let the defeatists say what they like. Count on me, darling." She consulted the watch on her wrist. "Adrien is late, don't you think?"

"Delayed at the ministry, I suppose. Another drop of tea?"

She acquiesced to an extra drop of tea. "You were going to say, about our French gold? . . ." Gold was worrying her at the moment—she had a few bars here, a few bars there, and some louis, and some guineas, and masses of paper francs to convert into gold. She had asked Adrien de Pontillac to recommend a bank in the United States—asked him trembling, because it was illegal and Adrien had a standing in the ministries, but he'd been so gallant about it. He had arrived in Vichy the day before, and no doubt was bringing her a letter of credit, since he had asked her to meet him at Catherine's. She had the balance of the amount with her, a million in five-thousand-franc bills, for he had only accepted a third to begin with—"just enough to set the transaction in motion through my banker," he had said. She regretted that she had not asked him to "place" thirty or forty thousand dollars, it would have been exactly the same thing to Adrien, and it would have relieved her of part of these francs which Catherine herself called poor and devalued. "Do you think they'll return it to us, darling?"

"They'll have to return it to us, if they don't want us to come and take it!" said Madame Tournefeuille-Blas, striking an attitude which her brother would have related to that of the Amazon ant, the *Polyergus rufescens*. "We're at war, Clarisse, don't forget that. The last battle is still to come."

"And what about this horrible landing in Africa?" asked Madame

Orfanville. "You see, Catherine, I'm not like you: it's hard for me to pick my way through these political puzzles."

"No need to say so, my poor Clarisse. Otherwise you wouldn't ask such questions. Why, we'll drive them out, we'll throw them back into the sea! Why do you suppose our Admiral has gone to Algeria?"

Madame Orfanville tried to think it out. Why, indeed, would their Admiral have gone to Africa if not to throw the invader into the sea? Catherine had a sharp tongue, no doubt because she saw herself aging before her time, but when it was a question of France she was the most encouraging person in the world. To tell the truth, Madame Orfanville sometimes felt offended by the proprietary tone her friend assumed the minute the word "France" came to her lips: she spoke of France as of a personal possession, almost as if it were a Pekingese which she was jouncing in her lap. She knew the medicines France needed, the diet which suited her, the colors in which she looked well; she dressed her, chose her jewelry, and stared at her through her lorgnette. "Hold still and let me get a good look at you," she seemed to say to France. After all, even a three-layer great name like Pontillac-Tournefeuille-Blas did not authorize these master-and-maid familiarities; but Catherine was getting old, and was more to be pitied than blamed.—She hasn't been taken to bed since God knows when, thought Madame Orfanville sympathetically. Poor dear. Yet one must be fair, and I'd be the last to blame the men for losing interest in Catherine, it would be cruel, and as for Xavier . . . "And how is dear Xavier?" she asked, not seeing her mistake until it was too late.

Madame Tournefeuille-Blas looked at Madame Orfanville as if she were sticking a knitting needle into a ball of wool. What an incongruous question! Xavier was a household accessory, at most a piece of old family furniture, and it was known well enough, no one had to ask about it. "Quite well, I suppose," she said, autopsying her friend with a look. Was there something behind this curiosity? A dig? Would the Widow Orfanville nee Echalote have dared? In any case it was an impertinence which called for a lesson.

"A very pretty dress you have on," she said. "Stand up a minute and let me see you." How did she manage not to have varicose veins? Or rather to make them invisible? She lifted her lorgnette. "Turn around, Clarisse. Turn around."

Madame Orfanville turned around with good grace. She didn't mind being stared at as if she were France, so long as Catherine admired her legs and was jealous of them. "It is a nice thing, isn't it?" she said, spreading the bottom of the dress.

"A little short for my taste," said Madame Tournefeuille-Blas.—At fifty one she bedizens herself like a trull, she thought. "If I were you I'd change dressmakers, my good friend."

"Do you think so?" Madame Orfanville asked, with the air of one seek-

ing advice. She stood with her weight on one leg, put the other forward, laid her hand along her thigh. "Do you really think so?"

"I should never question my sister's opinion," came the voice of Adrien de Pontillac. He was standing at the door, hat and gloves in hand. "So you'll have to change dressmakers, madame."

Madame Orfanville ran to greet Pontillac, gave him her fingers to kiss, complained that he had kept them waiting. He presented his compliments to his sister, sat down on a sofa, accepted a cake. As soon as he came in he noted that there had been an exchange between the two women, that Catherine was in a bad humor, that Madame Orfanville's handbag was all but bursting. He asked after the ladies' health, answered with an evasive word about his own, begged their pardon for having so little time. They chatted for a few minutes about this and that, and as soon as Madame Tournefeuille-Blas retired—her brother had warned her that he wanted to talk with Clarisse—the latter came and sat beside Pontillac, seeking the good news in his eyes.

"This is your letter of credit," he said, handing her the document manufactured by Emilio Lopez. "So glad to be of service, dear friend."

"But I'm the one who's glad, my dear Adrien! And I don't know how to thank you. . . ." She was struggling with her handbag, trying to pull out the roll of bills which she had forced into it. "It's a great load off my mind," she said, handing the million francs to Pontillac. "Doesn't it strike you as stupid to print bank notes the size of handkerchiefs? They take up so much room."

Pontillac tucked the roll into his coat pocket. "I'm so sorry, but I'm called away by an important engagement. No doubt I shall see you at Catherine's this evening, at Clermont?"

"Indeed yes, dear friend. One couldn't fail to put in an appearance an evening like this. But before you leave, Adrien, I'd—well, it's very simple really: you'll say I'm taking advantage of your kindness, but the fact is that I have a huge amount of liquid money on hand. Don't scold me, dear friend. You know how helpless I am about these practical matters. The senator should have been thoughtful enough to spare me these worries. Would your American bank accept another deposit? Say the equivalent of fifteen million francs? Or twenty rather—say twenty?"

Pontillac looked at the woman without seeing her, looked at her waving her fingers covered with brilliants, showing the points of her knees, ready, he knew—right here—at a nod . . . Karen's profile, Karen's mouth, Karen's breast. The memory came to him with such pain that his face changed, and Madame Orfanville was afraid he was going to call her a speculator and a bad patriot. "I wasn't thinking of anything wrong when I said that," she added hastily.

Pontillac rose and picked up his hat and gloves. He saw Karen, he heard her laugh, her speech—pocket a million—unique chance you let go by—until there are no tomorrows left—incomprehensible, barbarous, Magyar language. "You'll understand, I'm sure, madame, that what you

ask of me makes me hesitate. But you're a friend of Catherine's, and I sympathize with your difficulties. Give me time to consult my banker, although, naturally, I can't promise anything."

"Would you? Oh, my dear Count, has anyone ever told you that you're an adorable friend and a gallant man?"

"Never, so far. Well then, I shall see you this evening. No need to remind you that this is strictly between ourselves?"

Madame Orfanville crossed her hands on her bosom in solemn protestation. They joined Catherine, who was waiting impatiently. This trip to Vichy had cut into her day. Her brother had phoned her to say that he had made an engagement at her apartment in Vichy, and she had come in to receive him and Clarisse there. Had Adrien some special reason for not wanting to be seen at Clarisse's place? They were busy on a deal—some profitable affair, no doubt about it. She promised herself to reconnoiter the ground at the earliest opportunity; if her brother had put his finger on a good thing it was only fair that his sister should share in it. But for the moment she was in a hurry to get back to Clermont-Ferrand, summoned thither by her many duties and obligations attendant upon the advanced commemoration of the victory. She offered to drop her brother at the ministry, she was using the limousine and the chauffeur of her husband the Intendant General, but Pontillac declined the invitation, saying that he would prefer to walk a bit.

He crossed the park and returned to his hotel. From his room he asked for the Hôtel des Ambassadeurs, then for Monsieur Hernán Fuentes Sainz. "Is that you, my dear Fuentes? Pontillac speaking. Fine, thanks, and you? Excellent trip, yes. Leaving again tomorrow, unless something unexpected . . . As usual, dear friend: always in a hurry, always between two planes. Vacation? Imagine! How could one think of a vacation, with France the way she is? But couldn't we have an apéritif together, Hernán? Good, come and pick me up at my hotel. In a half hour, fine." He hung up, walked around his room, met himself in the mirror on the closet door. Was it really himself? Of course he looked like Adrien Thierry Francisque Rigobert, Comte de Pontillac; of course no one took him for anybody else, not even Catherine, though she had the antennae of a hymenopteran—but was this really he? He looked at himself, he alone was able to see the difference—not, of course, the image in the mirror, not this man in the dark suit, but what was hiding in the man, in the part of himself which no mirror could reflect, and which he nevertheless saw on the closet door as if all at once he had acquired the power of second sight. He felt a sudden, childish urge to open the closet and examine the other side of the mirror. He knew what it was that made him unrecognizable to his own eyes: Karen had tricked him, she had led him by the nose like a sophomore. "I ought to be whipped," he said aloud. He began to walk around the room again. Since noon the day before, when instead of taking Karen away he had carried away a letter from Karen, he had felt naked, simply naked, stripped of the last vestige of self-respect. That letter . . . He

touched his chest over the inside pocket of his coat, with an almost fearful gesture, as if to assure himself of the unimaginable presence of a tumor. All the while he had been thinking he had Karen's love, she was meditating this letter—the most humiliating slap in the face a man had ever received. "I forbid you to have a search made for me. But if despite everything your hunter's instincts should drive you to follow my trail, be informed that . . ." He unfolded the sheets, read the rest of the sentence: ". . . that you will be charged with having used me to export capital abroad." He had thought he had her love! Anger—a cold anger seized his muscles and closed his jaw and closed his fists. What was he doing in this room, when Karen . . . What good was it to be waiting for this South American who was greasier than a louse, when Karen . . . She was his whether he believed it or not, whether she denounced him or not; Karen was his, his as inseparably as he belonged to himself. "And you had better know this: even if you had me brought before you, you would not find me again thereby."

He sat down. His portrait sat down in the mirror, in all points similar to the picture the world had of him. He had taken Karen home about three o'clock in the morning. He had said, "Till noon, Madame Karen de Pontillac." Karen wore her smile, which contained every promise, and every prohibition. He had gone back home, whistling loud and strong into the night wind. It had been a discovery, he had not known he could whistle. He had dreamed of Karen, she was shooting arrows at a cock. He moved to prove to himself that he was alive, and in the mirror his portrait moved with him. Then they followed a long beach where he sank in a little at a time, until he had sand in his mouth. He stood up, opened the closet door, and turned the mirror to the wall. In the morning he had gone to the Prefecture, and at noon, at the Hôtel Splendide, he had been informed that "the lady left the hotel at daybreak, leaving a letter for Monsieur." He folded the sheets, slipped them into his pocket alongside the million francs. "I'm not sure that million francs will do you any good." He knew the text by heart. "If I were you I would get rid of it as quickly as possible." By heart, words like splinters under the skin. "A suggestion: I'd contribute it to one of the underground papers which are bedeviling Vichy." Like the edge of a razor. "The gift, even though anonymous, might be a good investment." Each syllable a slap in the face. "When the time comes, and you might have to call in your investment, you could summon me as a witness: I promise to answer present, and that would be your chance to have me back." To see Karen once again, as in the silly love songs. "Besides, are you down to a million? I imagine more than one foreigner will awaken in you an interest equal to that which you have been kind enough to manifest toward me. The files will provide you with the elements which nourish your preferences. You will choose them rich, young, unmarried, photogenic, for isn't that the way you singled me out—by my photograph? You'll have them come to your big, austere office, you will be exquisite as you know how to be, very

reserved, very natural, and there's small chance that one or the other won't consent to play Karen, and sacrifice a portion of her dollars in exchange for your protection." He walked around the room. Speaking of naturalness, that letter reeked of affectation. She made a pretense of political ideas, when in fact she was dying of love. This barbed language masked her weeping. It masked it so badly that . . .—So well that I never heard a sob, he thought. He stood stock-still, struck by his discovery. This barbed-wire language was no affectation at all. . . . At last, at last he was beginning to see what sort of animal she was! An animal so rare indeed, half flesh, half fish, that he was no longer surprised at having taken so long to discover it. An anteater! An echidna! He lighted a cigarette, smiling with one corner of his mouth. Karen and Catherine would never have got along. Not at all. An anteater! She would have eaten poor Catherine the minute they met.—Order of the Monotremata, an *Echidna aculeata,* he thought. He felt almost reconciled with himself. Almost. "Come in! Come right in!" he called.

Coming in arms first, Hernán Fuentes Sainz made a showy entrance. "*Hola,* my dear Count! What a pleasure! How well you look!" He threw his arms around Pontillac, slapped him on the back, in the Spanish manner.—More familiar than a monkey, thought Pontillac, returning slap for slap. He felt a physical aversion for this secretary of some South or Central American embassy or other, he couldn't remember which, whose brilliantined head was rubbing against his ear.—If he's kinky, why doesn't he stay kinky instead of smearing his hair with shoe polish? he thought. He did not wish to admit to himself that his antipathy was as much resentment as anything: Señor Fuentes knew too much, he was putting on the airs of a protector. "What's the rate of exchange?" he asked, getting free of his visitor's grasp.

"A hundred and eighty-two to the dollar, my dear Count." He put a pair of hairy fingers under Pontillac's chin. "What a pretty tie!" he said, fingering the silk. "May I see? How chic!" He rolled his eyes behind the heavy frames of his glasses. "I always say: you may beat the French, but not when it comes to chic."

Pontillac pushed Fuentes's hand aside and straightened his tie. The spider monkey, hardly out of the jungle! The buffoon dressed up as a diplomat! "Three days ago, in Marseilles, the rate was a hundred and seventy," he said.

"Three days ago was before Africa," said the embassy secretary. He put his hand flat on Pontillac's lapel. "That pushed the franc down, my dear Count. *Qué,* why don't you tell Hitler to chase the Gringos?" He studied Pontillac, from below, his eye mobile behind the thick frames. He detested this aristocrat with the lacquered fingernails; this *hidalgo* who bristled with pride while he dabbled in exchange like a grocer's boy; him and his likes—grandees with France in their mouths and dollars in their eyes. He obtained dollars for them, and precious metals and precious stones and cigars and coco y todo; he bought from them too; each embassy had its large and small arrangements, since after all it was good business with payment on the line, *al contado contadísimo.* But what an elegant world. . . . He would have gelded them all, the would-be bluebloods, to see them touch gold as if it was guano, sniff at tobacco as if it was alfalfa, finger dollars—they knew more about dollars. And haughty. And quite the superior race. And so unhappy to commit themselves. "What is Hitler waiting for?" he asked with the air of one hoping for confidential information. "My country is at war with him, it's true, but for us Latin Americans . . ."

"My friend, I did not have you come here to talk politics," Pontillac cut him off. "What's the best price? I intend to make a big purchase."

"A hundred and eighty-two, my friend," Hernán Fuentes Sainz replied. He had put on a serious, solemn exterior. Friend for friend. Feudal lord for feudal lord. "An hour from now it will be higher. Tomorrow, still higher. *Qué,* the more Gringos there are in Africa, the less the franc will be worth. That's the market, my friend."

Pontillac turned away. This—this squirrel monkey with glasses . . . "At a hundred and seventy," he tossed over his shoulder, "I'll take six thousand right away, and fifteen or twenty times that in a day or two."

"*Por mi santo,*" said the embassy secretary. "You're in it wholesale, my dear Count. Six thousand at a hundred and eighty right now, if you wish. But in a day or two . . ." He pushed out his lower lip, making a sucking sound. "It's too far off. One can't see so far ahead. It depends on where the Gringos will be."

Pontillac had done his figuring: six thousand dollars at a hundred and eighty francs to the dollar left him short of change. "Call it a deal at six thousand for a round million," he said.

Hernán Fuentes Sainz unscrewed the cap of his fountain pen and calmly did his arithmetic. It came out that the product of a million would be five thousand five hundred and fifty-five dollars, a figure which he recommended to Pontillac for its beautiful symmetry. Although it was repugnant to Pontillac to bargain with this anthropopithecus who knew his rule of three, he bargained nonetheless. But the embassy secretary, his taste whetted by his client's irritation, returned to the French chic, touched on French women, exclaimed over the French culinary art. He enjoyed crushing this gentility which was so anxious to crush him. "I always say: we Latin Americans are primitives. The true culture is at the table and in bed. *Qué,* look at the French." Since he had taken his post in Vichy, not one of these upstart noblemen had invited him to his table; to their beds, yes, one or two of their wives, out of appetite for a half Indio; to their tables, never. So it gave him a fillip when he was able to bray in their faces. He went so far as to mangle his French deliberately, although he spoke it to perfection. "My dear Count, I shall have your little dollars in an hour. Do you mind waiting that long? And will you come to my apartment to get them? It's on the seventh floor, you remember?" He put his hand flat on Pontillac's lapel. "A thousand pardons, really . . .

The lift isn't working. Restrictions, restrictions. France is so poor, my friend. *Pues adiós y hasta luego . . .*"

He went out, wriggling his hairy fingers. Pontillac was left alone, and stood motionless, not even thinking. It seemed to him that he had just had a longing for something—a violent longing. His hands moved along his pockets involuntarily. He put a cigarette in his mouth. Then, with his thumb, he whirled the emery wheel of his lighter. The flame caught on the wick. He watched it burn and diminish and grow fitful. It seemed to him that he had just had a longing to kill himself.

Catherine Tournefeuille-Blas was very well satisfied with her reception; she had every reason to congratulate herself on having assembled her guests in the green salon. The more spacious rose room would have afforded a greater freedom of movement, but it was not a bad thing to feel a little crowded, in these times of selfishness and defection; and without any question the gathering gained in intimacy what it had lost in . . . She looked around, but could find nothing it had lost. Moreover, the rose room would have created a heating problem, and its twelve venetian windows would have required special curtains to mask the light of the chandeliers, whence a needless expenditure of money. She was partial to the lesser expenditure. Not by temperament—one must live in a style befitting one's birth—but from a sense of patriotic duty. Ah, if everyone would do his duty! As it happened, the dean of the guests had spoken of every man's duty in terms so noble, so moving, that all had pressed around to congratulate the distinguished academician. Catherine Tournefeuille-Blas, in her position as hostess, was particularly appreciative of his remarks, for there had been a moment when she feared that her civic sense had led her to simplify her menu beyond the limits of necessity. In place of oversumptuous hors d'oeuvres there were truffles *au vin de Madère* and *pâté de foie;* only two fishes—a fresh-water trout *à la bourgeoise* and a salt-water salmon *à la Chambord*—although a sole *à la Mornay* might seem to have been required; the meats included chicken *à la diable,* roast beef *mayonnaise,* beef tongue and pigeons *en compote,* but no game; vegetables, naturally, among others a certain tomato *au gras* which the chef had promised her would be a marvel. That was all. She moved around the tables set along the wall, for everyone served himself as he pleased, without formality. Yes, and some gnocchi. No cheese. It was heresy, but after considerable thought she had decided to forgo cheese. Desserts likewise, although, lest the absence of dessert appear symbolic, she had had a *crème glacée au caramel* prepared at the last minute. She went from one group to the other, smiling at some, fussing over others, watchful to see that all had a glass in hand, or a plate, or both. The atmosphere was charming, homey, discreet, with a touch of clandestinity which gave its true note to the evening. She lingered in one group, passed on to another, present everywhere, contributing a word to the conversations, noting who was talking politics and who women, who was drinking

too much and who not enough, who received the meaningful glances and who launched them, what persons maneuvered to avoid each other and what couples to isolate themselves. It was obvious beyond question that the rose room, with its deep bays and its three or four adjoining rooms, was better suited to souls in quest of solitude; but even so, even in this crowded salon, the inenarrable Xavier—what bug had bitten him, that he, who never attended receptions, had put in an appearance without even being invited?—the inenarrable Xavier had succeeded in rendering himself invisible, and Clarisse in jockeying herself into an almost outrageous tête-à-tête with Adrien.

"Jockeying herself" was the right word. Madame Orfanville had to proceed gradually, step by step, rather the way one cuts a path through the brush, in order to capture Pontillac. He was more than sufficiently surrounded, solicited, consulted! A stranger to Vichy, withdrawn from the inevitable deformation of office routine, presiding over the destinies of the largest city in France after Paris, he personified the superiority of the executive over the administrative, of experience over cerebral speculation—and, above all, a latent strength the class and future of which it was not hard to surmise. Although officially he did not hold the highest post in Marseilles, it was known that he was the real master there, and it was whispered that he had the ear of the Marshal's closest coworkers. No one who knew what was going on could doubt that he had the makings of a young, dynamic Secretary of State, probably for the Interior; but the ladies, less preoccupied with politics than with Pontillac's presence in their midst, were generally in agreement that his manner, cut, and carriage marked him more aptly for the ministry of sports and leisure activities. This evening, however, the ladies and gentlemen found him neither encouraging nor sportive. As usual, of course, he was courteous and attentive, never letting a word go without an echo, an allusion without a response, and yet they felt that he was burdened with care, almost taciturn, with a shadow of fatigue in his cold eyes. And, in fact, they did tire him. The elliptical, ambiguous talk of the men, so futile because he knew its mechanism too well, and the women's curvilinear turn of phrase, so direct that it was offensive, submerged him in boredom. So, when he saw Madame Orfanville gliding from group to group to reach him; when, unable longer to restrain herself, she asked him point-blank—was he leaving the very next day? would she have the pleasure of seeing him at her place for tea?—he did his best to let himself be carried off, with the air of saying to his entourage, You see how it is, frightfully sorry, the minute I can get rid of her I'm with you again.

He got rid of her after a few minutes, cavalierly enough as it turned out, but he did not return to "them." He joined Xavier Tournefeuille-Blas, who had withdrawn into a window recess, half hidden by heavy curtains. He leaned against the wall beside his brother-in-law, watching the salon which quivered with voices and laughter and the rattle of dishware. Xavier seemed to have aged. A sort of curiosity, perhaps of astonishment,

smoothed his features and gave them the waxy expression of a mannequin. Yet he looked like himself, or like a snapshot of himself, though he was more round-shouldered and paler than at their last meeting—a character out of an old print, with his overlarge cuffs, his over symmetrical bow tie, his overpolished shoes. Pontillac had never understood why his brother-in-law, whose detachment from the world and its pomps he knew, applied such care to his apparel. It came to him suddenly that Karen and Xavier would have understood each other—Karen and this neurotic old cat.

"It's a surprise to find you here, my dear Xavier," he said. "I didn't know you frequented my sister's salon."

"Is it you, Adrien?" said Tournefeuille-Blas. He seemed almost to be feigning distraction or inattention. "Did you come from the ministry?" He looked around the room as he spoke. "You'll tell them, then, won't you?"

"That depends," Pontillac said. His eyes followed his sister, busy as an ant and as malicious.—She'd have dislocated her mandibles on Karen, he thought. Karen. What a bustle in the anthill if he had brought her into this room. "Do you think I ought to tell them?" he asked. He did not know what Tournefeuille-Blas was talking about.

"Why, they should be told, don't you think?" He looked perplexed and out of his element. "I came back from Vichy an hour ago. When I saw there was a reception going on in Catherine's house, I figured that the guests still knew nothing. I thought it my duty to notify . . . Don't you think they would all be better off at home, Adrien? But everybody is so busy, you see, I don't know whether it's proper to—to interrupt."

Pontillac tapped a cigarette on his thumbnail. Xavier had heard something important, otherwise he would not have come and mingled with these people. "You came from a conference, Xavier?"

"With Von Klahm-Posetzky and the Secretaries for Food Supply and Agriculture. They had an item of news for me: Germany is sending us eighty thousand tons of potatoes before the end of the year."

"That's good news," said Pontillac. He pretended not to see Madame Orfanville, who, however, saw him. He had told her two hundred and twenty-five to the dollar. On condition that . . .—It's certainly not the potato news that brought him out of his den, he thought. "I'm sure it made you happy, Monsieur l'Intendant Général?"

Tournefeuille-Blas nodded affirmatively. "It's only four pounds per head of the population, but it would have helped us to get through the winter. Thereupon they asked me for a million bushels of wheat over and above what had been foreseen. They know perfectly well that I haven't got the wheat. I said no."

"Do you say no on principle, dear relative?" He was watching him out of the corner of his eye. This dumbfounded expression of his, this look of having fallen from the clouds. "I didn't know you were a hardened opponent."

The old scientist folded his hands behind his back. "I'm powerless to oppose anything, no matter what it is, didn't you know that? They are kind enough to consult me on what is possible and what is not possible. I do my figuring, and I hand in my answers." He smiled, and brought his hands in front of him as if to show them to Pontillac. "A million bushels of wheat . . . It's as impossible as cutting the leg off an amputee."

"Right, provided your amputee has lost both legs already. But we haven't yet come to that, Xavier." He noted that a certain fuzziness was creeping into the men's voices, a shrillness into the women's laughter, a swaying into the wine stewards' movements. Karen. Karen's voice and Karen's laugh perfumed with Armagnac. "I hope Von Klahm didn't take back his potatoes," he said.

"No, he doesn't take things back. He increases. When he quotes a quantity, the quantity is variable, but never in the sense of subtraction. Just as it isn't in my power to oppose, it may not be in his power to subtract. Dr. Von Klahm-Posetzky is a multiplier. Don't imagine it's simple, Adrien. You'd get lost in it. In the beginning I thought he presented his demands more or less at random. He's no such fool. He has surrounded himself with first-class assistants. No: when he says one hundred today, the next day one hundred plus *x*, one hundred plus *x* plus *y* in addition the day after that, it isn't due to confusion or incoherence. It's an extremely well-thought-out system. Do you know I took it on myself to put the minister on guard against it?"

"The minister was grateful to you, I'm sure," said Pontillac.

"He complimented me on what he calls my vigilance." He said no more for a moment. His eyes wandered over the salon, apparently without seeing. "I shall wish you good night, Adrien. I feel rather done in. Perhaps you'd best not delay warning Catherine and the guests."

"What answer did they give to your refusal?" Pontillac asked. His brother-in-law was not to get away before he had learned more from him. "A long debate, I suppose."

"As always, I pleaded," said Tournefeuille-Blas. "You know how badly I talk, but in the last year I've worked into my role of barrister pretty well. I intercede for our tubers, our livestock, our vegetable fibers, and, recently, even for the workers they're taking away from us." Again a smile came to his lips, for no discernible reason. "The thing that makes my task easier is that I always plead the same cause before the same judge. He has an extraordinary capacity for listening. When I've finished he opens his folder, finds his figures, and it's as if I hadn't said a word. He listens, but he isn't influenced. This evening, it's true, there was a change in the procedure: he should have announced one hundred thousand tons, as he found out after checking the figure. You see: he increases. That's his function. It was then that the telephone rang. Someone picked up the instrument, then handed it to one of the ministers. Well, the conference broke up forthwith. The two Secretaries and their retinue went off like

the wind, leaving Monsieur von Klahm-Posetzky without taking time to excuse themselves. I learned the news when I returned to my office."

"Your superiors gave no reason to Von Klahm for leaving?" Pontillac asked. For the last minute he had been watching a servant who, from the door, was doing his best to attract Catherine's attention. The phone call, the departure in haste and not in accordance with protocol . . . Could the Marshal have fallen ill? Had he had an attack? Catherine had finally intercepted the domestic's pantomime, she was working her way toward the door. "How did your Doktor take this treatment?"

Catherine was listening to the servingman through her lorgnette. An excited, gesticulating servingman. "There weren't many people at the ministry, but everyone already had the news," said the voice of Xavier Tournefeuille-Blas. Catherine was waving the servant away with the back of her hand, she was shooting her neck out to look around the room. "The cabinet had been sitting a couple of hours when I made up my mind to come home." The salon hummed and rustled and plashed.—The Marshal's dead, Pontillac decided. Or the landing. Catherine was in a hurry—no more lorgnette, no more smiles, more of an ant than ever.—Corsica, Pontillac decided. Quick to the telephone. No, quick to Vichy. He preferred the landing. The Marshal dead, it was a gamble from here on. The jungle. "Here's your sister, Adrien."

Catherine Tournefeuille-Blas threw a look at her brother, and, in an uncertain voice, said:

"Why, Adrien . . . The Germans have invaded our zone! What shall we do? They'll . . ."

She broke off, so opaque were her brother's eyes. So that was it? The Germans this side of the zone. He studied his sister's face.—More make-up than skin, he thought. Karen. The Wehrmacht—to justify the initiative of the Wehrmacht. Karen, her epidermis of—of enamel. Justify militarily and politically. He had to get back to Vichy. Quickly. A re-shuffling of the ministry was in the offing. Couldn't fail. "Xavier? Your car . . . where is it? In the garage?"

"Yes, I think so," said Tournefeuille-Blas. He too was looking at Catherine. How long was it—a whole lifetime she had been his wife. She was strange, pistachio green and pink. It seemed to him that scales, that squamae of pink flour were falling from her and leaving her open to view.

"Why did you keep it from me, the two of you?" she said. She started, noticing that she had spoken to her husband. "You're not leaving, Adrien? When I think that you kept me in ignorance, and it was the butler who . . . But see here, Adrien, you can't abandon us at a time like this! The Germans . . ."

"I'm taking your car," said Pontillac.

His sister's eyes followed him. He entered the crowd and passed through. Xavier Tournefeuille-Blas was discovering to his surprise that his wife was made of wire under her covering of rose plaster. Pontillac crossed

the room, reached the door. His sister had recovered the use of her lorgnette, she was accompanying him with her eyes, amid the glasses, the bald pates, the painted smiles.—That's it, run, run! she thought. This is your chance, brother mine! She had just grasped that he had not known of the event, and that it was she who had apprised him of it. This requited her for having learned it herself from the lips of the servants, who in turn had learned it from the radio. She pictured herself clapping her hands—"Ladies and gentlemen, I have the pleasure . . ." No, not the pleasure. Rather the honor. The duty. The painful duty. She swiveled a look toward her husband—had such a zero ever been seen before! ". . . the painful duty to bring to your attention . . ." Painful was superfluous. Adrien was right to run after his opportunity, but he should have whispered the adjectives to her before starting his run. And then was it polite to clap one's hands to attract attention? What she must say was, Ladies and gentlemen, allow me the privilege . . . Privilege! Why not happiness? She cast another glance at her husband—how can anyone look so much like an owl, an oaf, an idiot! Ladies and gentlemen, it is my sad . . .

She stiffened, then set out as if a brake had been released in her. The dean—it was up to the dean to make the announcement. He belonged to the Academy, speeches came naturally to him. She accosted him without preliminaries, interrupting him in the middle of a sentence concerning good citizenship and Stephen Audry. "My dear Maître," she said in a rapid voice, "may I have a word with you in private?"

"At your service, dear madame," said Maître Esau. The listeners who formed a circle around the academician shuffled to open a passage for him. They watched him, he bent his noble profile forward the better to catch Madame Tournefeuille-Blas's whisper—what was the matter with them, why was she so agitated and why did he grow pale? They looked at each other, seeking to convey their impressions. She was insisting, he was refusing, or was he perhaps weighing the pros and cons, and there, wasn't that the word "German" on the writer's lips—that was it, the Germans had discovered the plot! Someone recalled having seen the butler making signals to his mistress, another had seen Adrien de Pontillac leave the salon with suspicious haste, all remembered that the Fuehrer had proclaimed the memory of the eleventh of November as illegal, null, and void as communist propaganda. And when the uneven voice of Madame Tournefeuille-Blass called for silence so that the distinguished academician might impart a very important piece of information, there was no longer any doubt among the little group: the Gestapo was surrounding the château, the Gestapo was inside the château.

Maître Esau wholeheartedly detested the task imposed upon him by Madame Tournefeuille-Blas. He did not like to see himself in the role of the town crier who announces a stunning defeat to people gathered to celebrate a triumph. Had he himself not opened the evening by recalling the glorious feats of arms of another war? "A victory," he had said, "worthy

of the most sublime traditions of France! A victory which our Marshal won at the point of his sword! . . ." The murmur of approval, the handclasps, the excellence of the repast, the alluring décolletés, the sulky air of a Probus consumed with envy, all this had put him in a rare good humor. In fact he had felt that this was one of his best days: liveliness of wit, alert for the right word, easy of metaphor, digestion satisfactory. Although he had not brought it about deliberately, several of the guests had gathered around to hear him talk about his interview with "the Lord of Toulouse," as he nicknamed Stephen Audry. He narrated how he had found him wasted—decrepit to tell the truth—henceforth incapable of following an idea through to its logical conclusions, and, in a word, frozen in the ice of old age. He did not doubt that the principal reason for his decline was his absence, or rather his withdrawal, from national life. "It shows," he had said, "how dearly you pay for cutting yourself off from the profound life of the nation. Because, fortunately, there is an imminent justice: one cannot wean oneself from the breasts of the fatherland without perishing by the fact!" So nimble was the disposition of his mind that while sketching Audry's decadence in broad strokes he had slipped in a word about Probus here and there, making the company laugh as he recounted the effects of the raw red wine on the historian. But the disastrous news that the Germans had crossed the zone, and the embarrassing situation in which Madame Tournefeuille-Blas placed him by insisting that he make the catastrophe public, in a single instant destroyed both his good humor and his health. He would have liked to go home in a hurry; it was even a matter of urgency, he had had the weakness to preserve several things which he should long since have consigned to the fire—books, correspondence, tracts which the enemies of France slip into your letter box—and in addition he felt a heaviness coming on, a Château Lafite cramp, and furthermore, yes, he had just remembered this with alarm, he possessed certain—well, rather special photographs, which, if they fell into the hands of the Germans—the Germans, the Peeping Toms, the impious scandalmongers, everybody knows they seize on anything to compromise honest people. . . . He tried to get out of the job, he was really not the person required, whereas Probus, Probus the historian, think of it, Madame, what a perfect occasion for a historian, and besides, were they sure the news corresponded to true news, he meant genuine and worthy of credence? So many false rumors were abroad, so much indecent tittle-tattle, and though he was a thousand leagues from thinking that Madame Tournefeuille-Blas was suffering from hallucinations, he respectfully suggested a mite of prudence, a mote of reserve. But Madame Tournefeuille-Blas was categorical: no ifs or buts, she had the news from a sure source, a firsthand source so to speak, from the very lips of her brother Adrien, Comte de Pontillac. And before Maître Esau could recover from his consternation, she had announced broadside that he would speak, and thus forced him to improvise the most unpopular address he had ever delivered.

He did not have to discourse abundantly. Against his will, and though

he had begun with an exordium thinned out with periphrases, his harangue immediately took the tone of a funeral oration, and no one was deceived. "Our victory, ladies and gentlemen, the flaming torch of which we have relighted this evening, so discreetly, so humbly—may nothing, may no reverse of fate dim its immortal brilliance." Everyone felt instinctively that this fine period, this nobility of accent, was uncalled for by the circumstances. The guests pressed closely around the orator, glass in one hand, cigarette in the other. "Let us here take a solemn oath that we shall not forget, dark as may seem the calvary up which our country is climbing, that we shall not forget, I say, that the glorious artisan of the Marne is at the helm of our destiny." Everyone looked at everyone else—what was the matter? . . . What was wrong with him? . . . "Let us entrust ourselves to his wisdom." Naturally, that went without saying, but what then? . . . "Let us abandon ourselves to the might of his vigorous arm." Quite so, Sir Oracle, to the vigorous might, quite so, but have done with calling on the Almighty. . . . "He alone knows the designs of Providence, and, ladies and gentlemen . . ."

"Madame! Madame! There go the German motorcyclists down the road!"

The company executed an about-face, as if carried on a turntable: this popeyed domestic's exclamation was clearer than any speech. . . . The German army on the roads of unoccupied France, what could that mean—except the English on the coast, the communists in the town halls, the patriots to the gallows! All began to turn from one side to the other, to exchange views, to let exclamations slip. Someone asked for the telephone, someone answered, "The line is cut!" Someone rushed to a window, someone shouted, "Don't touch it, they shoot at sight!" Madame Orfanville sank into the arms of a young officer, Probus the historian buttoned up the lower buttons of his vest, Madame Tournefeuille-Blas mislaid her lorgnette, Maître Esau took to the door, and, as if at a signal, the stampede was on. The Germans the Germans! The Germans the locusts! Those animals loved cleanliness, they had a mania for cleaning up, and promptly all remembered their own dust, their hoards savings nest eggs, one his false ration cards, another his genuine foreign currency, another his little religiously smoked hams, another his fats and bacons and flours variously interred. In the twinkling of an eye there was no one in the green salon with the great gleaming chandeliers.

Madame Tournefeuille-Blas looked to one side, then to the other. Nobody. She looked down at her feet, seeking her lorgnette. Cigarette butts. "Cowards and company!" she said in a loud, clear voice. She went to a table, poured herself a drink. She could have told them, Be calm, my friends, the Germans care precious little about you! She too had had her moment of uneasiness, but the sight of all those quivering behinds had restored her serenity. She swallowed her cognac, poured another. Bah, the Germans! They had occupied the other zone for thirty months, and what! It had been bad for a handful of communists, no one else. She swallowed

her cognac, poured another. She could have told them, Silence, my frien you're not communists and the Germans aren't cannibals! Showing th heels because a German rode by on a motorcycle, bah! She swallowed h cognac, poured another. So let them come, let them come, the werewolv she'd take care of them—if their numbers were legion. She would say them, Now then, soldiers, be calm and a little politeness! *A la françai* She swallowed her cognac, poured another. Hussars or dragoons, th didn't scare her. They had been at her feet in the past. And brave on don't worry. Saving Dame Echalote's pleasure. That one, *par exemp* She swallowed her cognac, held the glass level with her nose. What! W it the Germans already! "Come out of there, Germans!" she said loud and clearly. She set herself in motion, eye puckered, glass forward, st flaccid. "Come-out-of-there!" she repeated, grasping the curtain with stern hand. Motionless and completely dumfounded, Xavier Tournefeuill Blas looked at his wife: she had lost her covering of stucco, and unde neath she was all wire and straw.

When Xavier Tournefeuille-Blas pushed open the door of the lodge whic he occupied in the park belonging to the domain of his wife, Catherin nee de Pontillac, he was not surprised to see the familiar silhouette of th Oberherr Doktor Ernst von Klahm-Posetzky slipping in behind him. Ha they not conferred, some hours earlier, on wheat and potatoes? Since th already distant day of their first encounter, each time he had met wi the Oberherr the latter had made it his business to reappear. It had take a certain experience of these meetings to make Tournefeuille-Blas unde stand that Von Klahm-Posetzky was a parasite of the monologue—a ski borer who stimulated the monologue and gorged himself on it. A punctu phantom, paunch and chain and fist and skull stuffed with seven politica and punctual brains, he had made it a habit to reappear, to install himsel on Xavier's neck, or on his superciliary arches, or in his eyes, high black shoes with copper hooks with green socks with enormous and probabl hairy thighs—and he listened to the old man's soliloquy. Solid and im movable like his replica in the flesh, he took on the weight of wool an pig iron, wood and coal—and he listened. The thing to do would hav been not to think, not to soliloquize, but his presence precipitated rumina tion, excited the salivation of the pineal gland, and he did not consent t go away until late at night, walking backward and without lifting his feet, chased out by massive doses of sleeping draughts.

The old scientist groped his way into his bedchamber, switched on the light. The glare struck his eyes like the snap of a whip. He stood motion less, under the impression that his sight had been consumed by a lightning flash. He raised his hands to his forehead, then put them to his eyelids, then pressed his fingers into his eye sockets, but the light lashed at him in great waves. Or perhaps, on the contrary, he was emitting the light. He felt the lamps working in his head, he could hear them sizzling—or was it Von Klahm-Posetzky? Yet he never worked, except sometimes with his

high black shoe when he made it creak, but then this buzzing—no, this hum—no, this murmur. A murmur was running around the room, a cottony plop-plop. He filtered a look through his crossed fingers—ah, what was this, wasn't that Adrien over there on the back of the chair? "Is that you, Adrien?" he said, uncovering his eyes. What a position, he was certainly going to fall and hurt himself. And there, that bald little man, who was he? He looked over his shoulder, then behind his back, a whispering arose from all sides, a rustling of cottony voices, on the floor, on the table, under the bedclothes—there is the disagreeable young man called Antoine Moreau, there is the Secretary of State for Food Supply, there is Madame Orfanville, and there—there—there. So they were all in his room? He rushed to the switch, turned off the light, and suddenly he saw them all, his wife, the ministers, the academicians, the experts, the soldiers, their ladies, their girls—and they pattered; all of them, with no more voice than a carp, with cotton in their mouths down to the glottis—and they pattered. "My dear my dear," they pattered, "I didn't know we were engaged in politics my dear my dear my very dear." Tournefeuille-Blas turned on the light, there was no one there—yes, yes, there was, they rose up all around, they came out of the air with a plop and they swarmed everywhere. He turned off turned on turned off the light, they hip-hopped back and forth around Von Klahm-Posetzky stuffed with wheat, they patpitpattered—"my dear very dear I didn't know dear relative dear relative," and Von Klahm-Posetzky said nothing, he clasped his hands over his paunch and listened. Perhaps they thought they were convincing the Oberherr, but he drank them in like a tick, without emotion. Perhaps, too, they liked that. He opened a door, another, another, locked himself into his laboratory: they were there already, on and under and in the cruses cupels crucibles capsules. He began to hunt through racks and drawers, cocaine would chase them, an injection of cocaine in the heart would chase them, but he found only veronal and he took some.

He went back to the bedroom. They came back with him, plitplattering—"ours the eternal glory ours we have ours we will have dear my dear." They ran around, they climbed the walls, they fell on each other and stayed on each other. Tournefeuille-Blas took some veronal. Von Klahm-Posetzky weighed a million bushels of wheat and a hundred thousand tons of potatoes, and he was swelling. They were thankful to him, they licked their chops, they chatchittered into each other's necks—"my very politics dear darling torch of flamygloring." From time to time the Oberherr made his high black shoe creak and they bounded under the furniture and into the coaches on the wallpaper, then they came out again and pitpatpotatered all the more—"to us ours me my brilling take here dearcountmarntry." So fast that Tournefeuille-Blas had not enough eyes or ears, and he took some veronal. They rubbed each other's backs, nipped each other's ears, lipped each other's rears. A breasting woman and a smiling man lay tongue to tongue, others rode horseback, others ran across the ceiling with their little fingers locked, and what one said all repeated in chorus. Lost in the sleeve

of his own coat, the Secretary of State for Food Supply had said—"white of egg very dear is not so patapee," and all in chorus—"not so patapee." Riding astride a general, Adrien de Pontillac was catching women as they flew by and opening them in the middle. Crouching in a carafe, Catherine was searching for soldiers. She was gelatine pink and adobe brown. "There there my soldiers," she pattered, and all plitplattered, "There there my soldiers." Tournefeuille-Blas quickly put the stopper in the carafe, but just as quickly Catherine was on the stopper, then on her husband's hand, and he had to shake her off, and he took some veronal. Standing on an ink-well, Madame Orfanville was beckoning to the academicians, and they went in under her dress tail to tail, and tail to tail came out again through her mouth. Von Klahm-Posetzky was swelling and swelling, he filled the whole room. To disinflate him would have called for weevils and smut and moths. They would have blighted him. They would have rusted him and blistered him. But Tournefeuille-Blas had nothing but veronal and he took some.

He turned off the light and stretched out on the bed. They spouted from all sides, but there was no more room—and suddenly they were silent. Mouths gagged with cotton, they hopped like fleas and buried themselves in Von Klahm-Posetzky's lap.—I must get up and walk, Tournefeuille-Blas thought. He knew that for the time being Catherine's guests were really gone; and she with them, and the ministers, and the academicians. Von Klahm-Posetzky was turning around slowly, he resembled a silo, but he too was about to vanish, walking backward and without lifting his feet. Get off the bed and walk. He opened his eyes with difficulty. Daylight was beginning to discolor the curtains at the window. Window of the green salon, with Catherine drinking ammonium carbonate behind the curtain.—I must walk, I must. An injection of apomorphine. Go to the bell and ring for the injection. He closed his eyes, tried without success to take his pulse. A pinch of potassium permanganate. Sleep for just one hour. Strong coffee. Someone was walking on his chest. Eighty thousand tons of bare feet in the gorged sky. Sleep for just one minute. Someone in the black pool. Great fat Barbary duck. In. Of. Just one second.

» 22 «

"ME, AS TRUE AS THIS IS CAMOMILE, I SAY IT'S NATIONAL union!" said Mélodie the S.O.L. man. He thought of giving himself a clap on the Sam Browne belt, but Jules Garrigue had just handed him a cup of absinthe, and he would have spilled some of it. He was in full uniform, belt and revolver, leather leggings and polished boots, and he was strutting. But was he really strutting? Jules Garrigue had the vague but comforting impression that, underneath the swagger and the polish, his former waiter was sweating in his pants. There was a mobility in his usually fixed eye, and an unusual brightness, as if he had waxed the whites of his eyes. "That gives us a united France," he said, planted on his wide-spread legs, with his forefinger pointed at the mustache of Block Captain Ignace Matthieu. Of course he was ogling Josette, you could see with your eyes closed he was ogling her, but underhandedly, kind of on the rebound—the proprietor of the Fier Chasseur wondered why. Generally he didn't try to hide it, not much he didn't, he felt her up with his eye, he pawed her from a distance, until it broke Jules Garrigue's heart. He had broached the matter to his wife, one day when receipts were down and the blues up. "Bah . . ." she had replied. "Bah . . . Go play a hand of cards, it will give you a change of ideas." And back to filing her nails and putting curls in her wig, the stuffed goose!—Well, anyway he's not going to propose, the flatfoot, he thought, peering at his daughter on the sly. Perched on her high stool and watching the traffic on the quai in front of the terrace, she seemed to be ignoring the S.O.L. man. He was glad the little one was innocent; a bit pale these last two days, a bit stiff, with funny ramrod movements of the arms and legs—but innocent. "Everything all right, Daddy?" he asked, putting his hand on his daughter's slender neck.

"Just fine, Papa," she said, stiffening under his touch.

He left her alone, with a sigh of resignation. She was tight-lipped, the little one was, she didn't share her thoughts. He wondered which side she got it from. Already when she was no bigger than a grasshopper, she coddled her griefs. She shut them in, she did.—Just the opposite from me, he thought. Him, troubles came out and spread over his skin. "Push up, will you?" he said to his wife, who, with her elbows on the bar, was blocking

the narrow passage behind the counter. She pulled in her seat and he squeezed by her, compressing his stomach. She settled back on the bar, placed her bosom in the hollow of her elbows. Jules was upset, that was his nature, but even so, to say "push up" in front of the customers, like to a woman of the . . . The Germans in Marseilles, she admitted it was no joke, but since the French had lost the war . . . And what was more, if Jules had any gumption about him, instead of worrying his head he'd be making a place for himself in politics. This was the time to do it, all he had to do was get a move on.—For instance, Matthieu, who will wind up in the government, and even this sponger Mélodie, he's doing all right for himself. Mélodie was sipping Jules Garrigue's beverage, with his nose in the cup and his eye over it.—Don't be a dope, he was saying to himself, listening with one ear to Ignace Matthieu, who was talking strategy. Don't be a dope, he repeated to himself. He had stopped talking when Garrigue addressed his daughter, watching the two of them without showing it, and at present he was trying to calm down by calling himself names. He hadn't been so calm a quarter of an hour earlier, either, when he came into the café after making sure that Garrigue was not alone at the bar.—If there are customers in the place, he had figured, Jules'll think twice before he raises a rumpus. Not that he was afraid of the proprietor of the Fier Chasseur, but you never could tell. A father is likely to get a sudden notion sometimes, and Jules was a moody guy anyway. But there were people in the bistro, all right: Matthieu was there, soaking his mustache in his wine, and the madame, and the mademoiselle, and then three customers on the terrace and a fourth in a corner of the room.—You're being a dope, he reasoned with himself. Otherwise you'd be in the middle of the rumpus already. He ogled Josette, who was watching the square through which German machine guns were hurrying in the direction of the Fort Saint-Jean, while Matthieu rinsed the inside of his cheeks and his tonsils. —I'd be in it up to my neck two days already if the kid had talked, Mélodie thought. He sent the cup the length of the bar, under Madame Jules's elbow. If the kid had talked, well, sir, he'd have known about it; and Papa-in-law Jules wouldn't be on his hunkers under the counter, pouring him a fresh camomile. "Ain't that the way you feel too, Jules, that here we are with our one unified France?"

"Oh, me, you know . . ." said Jules Garrigue, with a cup in each hand. There were other S.O.L. men who came to his place to bend an elbow; they were just as thirsty, just as loud-mouthed as this one, but none of them exasperated him the way Mélodie did. It wasn't the liquor he fed him that made him so mad; it was the fear, or rather the terror, and not exactly a physical terror either, that he felt at the sight of him. He was painfully certain that his ex-waiter carried bad luck around on the soles of his feet, that at each visit to the Fier Chasseur he brought in a chunk and left it there like a seed that would take root. He was sorry he didn't know anything about poisons.—A pinch of the right stuff in each cup of camomile, he said to himself, and my man's in the morgue at the end of

two weeks. Or else a purge. Something powerful, that would give him the runs. He smiled at his idea, it tickled him so. "Me, you know," he repeated, "I'm wondering more about what we'll do without the wheat that came from Morocco, and the wine from Algeria, and the olive oil from Tunisia."

"Don't ask so many questions, Jules, you'll wear yourself out!" Mélodie exclaimed. He rocked back and forth on his heels, threw out his chest. His heart was still galloping a little, but that's the way hearts are, they gallop all by themselves. The kid, there was no doubt about it, had kept her mouth shut. He threw her a sustained leer—well, Godamighty! she registered it, she was giving him back as good as he gave her! The memory of her breasts crept up his back like a finger. He swallowed his drink at a gulp, with a staggering sensation throughout his body. She had a taste for it already, Josette had! She saw how good it was, and was asking for more! He sent the cup spinning down the bar and gave himself an enormous thwack over the Sam Browne belt. "Hell's fire, Jules, and first of all they don't have Africa yet!" he shouted.

"Don't yell so loud," said Ignace Matthieu. "We're not deaf, and you're not a corporal yet." He had been watching for a good pretext to shut the S.O.L. man up. "And talking about Africa, that's where you ought to be, since you're so tough."

"Are you looking for me?" Mélodie asked, with one eye on Josette. She was answering, she was prettying herself up, putting some lipstick on her cute little kisser! "Me, anyone who's looking for me can find me, Block Captain."

"Don't worry, little soldier, I'll find you," Matthieu retorted in the military language he had picked up since his appointment to the Milles camp. He hadn't been able to have Mélodie chained and court-martialed, hadn't even tried to in fact, for lack of time and palpable proofs. But that was just putting the thing off. He had not pardoned him for making fun of Josephine in front of the troop—not for Josephine's sake, she deserved to have her head shaved and be sold into slavery, the fiend, but because the bully had attempted to undermine his authority as commander. A dangerous character, this bonehead, a morale-sapper. With his ugly mug and his mountebank's strut, he was as phony as a trimmed card. Matthieu had talked to Garrigue about him, and they agreed: Mélodie was a blackguard and a traitor. He was looking forward to writing up a detailed report one of these days, now that he had some practice at reports. If only he could get the fellow assigned to Milles . . .—You'd get it in the ass every time, he thought. Latrines, punishment drill, et cetera, all day long. His mustache went up a notch, and he pointed a square thumb at Mélodie. "You're such a wise guy, maybe you couldn't even tell us where Africa is. And the same for France. So before you open your big trap, why don't you wait till the Marshal has his say?"

He blew into his cup, through the nose, before dipping his mustache again. Boy how he'd like to see the S.O.L. man try to start anything. With Jules handy to help along a quick, neat job, they'd have taken him down

to the cellar—and Mélodie would dance a jig. Jules had the same idea, yo could tell by the way his hand was closing around the neck of a bottl and the customer sitting in the corner would have been glad to take hand too, you could see it by his promising smile. Mélodie's heart bega to speed again. Did they know, after all? . . . He looked out at the ter race, caught a glimpse of Josette's profile on the way, she was getting read to go out and she was smiling, not quite but almost, and at him— course at me, I'm sure not seeing things cross-eyed. . . . These duds legionnaires had chips on their shoulders, all right, the presence of th Germans was getting on their nerves, the softies, but as to knowing th he had got his hands on the girl . . . Once more the memory of he breasts came to him, no bigger than apples, and of her belly with barel a fold of shadow, and again the staggering sensation caught him and spu him for a second.

"Foutre the Marshal!" he thundered. "You're not the only one in h service, number 102. We're all soldiers of the Marshal, even the wome And sure we'll wait till he says his say. But that won't keep me fro saying here and now that what he does is done right. To begin with, th Fritzes. If the Fritzes are in the south, it's because our Marshal wante them here, no? Or are you going to say the opposite, Colonel?"

"I don't like you to shout that way, Monsieur Mélodie," said Madam Jules over her bosom. "It drives away trade. But for once you're righ even the women are soldiers of the Marshal."

Garrigue took time to throw a despairing glare at his wife, bef crouching down beneath the bar. What was she getting into it for, th turkey hen? He had a sidelong view of Mélodie, whom the madame' approval was blowing up with fresh air. If only it was possible to wate the drink . . . But no, a drop of water and the color was changed, it was like a girl when she's touched. Holy Mary, if ever the big hulk touched Josette . . . He sighed, took a swig out of the cup he intended for Mélodie. When he came up to the level of the bar, Josette was putting on her coat over her little sea-blue dress with the white collar.

"I'm going out for a walk," she said.

"Good idea, go out for a walk," Madame Jules answered. She lifted her bosom with both hands, as if to show it to the company. "Don't be out too late."

Josette promised to be back before nightfall. As soon as she was out of sight, Mélodie announced, in the voice of a lookout in the crow's-nest, that it was very fine to chat and drink with friends, but—"the service is the service, and I've got to beat it." He delayed, nevertheless, several long minutes, burning with impatience and exchanging digs with Matthieu: to walk out on Josette's heels would have given Jules ideas. The customer seated in the corner of the room had come up to the bar, where he ordered a lemon soda. He had a smile, Matthieu thought, which was full of good will, and an engaging face which said yes as he looked at you, a little like a vicar giving ear to the grievances of his parishioners. He listened

and watched the block captain's mustache, and the latter was pleased to gain the attention of his public. That's what Josephine ought to learn to do—open her ears and close her mouth. He had hoped his promotion would put some sense in his wife's head, hoped she would be proud of it. . . . "That's something to talk about, being a commander," he had lectured her. "You can see the Marshal knows how to recognize his own. A rank like that, in the other Republic, I'd have waited all my life before getting it." *Fichtre!* You might as well lecture a block of wood. Next he had tried to bribe her: noodles, dried peas, finally soap—everything he could snitch from the camp stores. It was the soap that won her for a while. Not for long. Without rhyme or reason, usually in the morning at coffee time, she started wagging her bell clapper of a tongue all over again, and what a tongue, two rods long and coming to a point—and hell was to pay. Hence he had arranged to sleep at the camp, at least every second night. He dared not think of the picnic she would have had if he hadn't kept his post at Milles. He had been afraid of this at first: his luck was just too good to last. But there you were, there was some justice in the world, and, by St. Philip, the Marshal kept his promises! Fidelity, devotion, and competence too, were not vain words any more. Scribes, gendarmes, people in batches, an embarkation station, an infirmary, kitchens, telephones, salutes —he was the one who commanded all that, and for good. Nothing temporary about it. He had seen Monsieur Adrien again, the count, who had said to him, "Matthieu, I can tell you this now, you were placed in Milles for only ten days, but I'm keeping you there: don't forget what the Marshal expects of you." Forget? He'd sooner die! And what a life! What activity! What consideration! So *merde alors,* he wasn't going to let an ass-face of an S.O.L. man treat him without proper respect! "Mélodie Jean Baptiste," he said, pressing his thumb on the ex-café waiter's Sam Browne belt, "I've got my eye on you." He touched his eye, so there'd be no misunderstanding. "I'll get you yet. Jules, be a witness. And you too, Madame Jules."

Mélodie gave him a slap on the thumb, shouted, "So long, pals!" and headed for the terrace with a swinging stride.

He found her almost at once, after looking for her up and down the square; or, more exactly, it was she who came up to him, as if she had risen from the pavement. She pulled him by the sleeve as she passed him, and there was a funny look on her turned-up nose. If he himself hadn't been the first to give it to her, he'd have thought she was an old hand. He fell in behind her, a short distance back, smiling at her hips which did not waddle. That was the way he liked them—not waddling. His heart beat fast, but it wasn't the same kind of speed as a while before. From the back, with her bare calves and low socks, she was between a boy and a girl, just exactly his type. From the front too, for that matter.—Lucky girl, she is, that she came across me, he thought. He wouldn't spoil her, he'd train her slowly, a little each time.—She'd spoil easy, a bit of a kid like her, he

thought. Very tender at her age, you can't handle them rough. You've got to know how. He was perfectly at ease, he knew how. The proof—the filly wanted more. And to think how she'd kicked and fought, the little harebrain!

She came to a halt in front of a photographer's window, and he joined her there. Winking at her reflection in the window, he touched her elbow.

"So then, you feel better since day before yesterday?"

"Yes, Monsieur Mélodie. I'm all right. But we mustn't be seen." She was speaking to a couple of newlyweds who were standing on imitation steps in an oval frame. "Because if Papa ever . . ."

"Oh, I'm not arguing," Mélodie said. "Your old man ain't up to date." He pointed to the bride's train. "Now do you see how stupid you were? You sure kicked up a row! You'd have thought I wanted to hurt you. Do you know you bit me on the arm?"

"Yes, I was stupid, Monsieur Mélodie," she admitted in a small voice.

Mélodie puffed out his lip, and in the oval frame the bridegroom did the same to him. "Well, it's all right," he said. "Don't worry about it. I'll teach you. It's always like that the first time. You get a lot of ideas, but then in the end it's the limit how you get to like it. So, now, you're not afraid of me any more?"

She shook her head. A line of German tanks was passing in the street, making the bride's veil tremble. "But we mustn't stay here, Monsieur Mélodie, because if anyone saw us . . ."

All at once Mélodie realized that Josette was calling him Monsieur. He got such a kick out of it that his chest stuck out all by itself. "You're right about that," he said, his voice thickening. "We don't have to get our pictures taken." He paused for a couple of seconds, long enough to swallow. "Do we go to my place?"

"Oh no, Monsieur Mélodie. It's too far. You heard what Mamma said, I have to be home by dark. But . . ."

"Nuts to that, by dark. They won't skin you alive, all the same, if you get in an hour late. Come on, we'll hop on a car. In fifteen minutes we're home."

He tried to take her by the elbow, but she moved out of reach. They looked at the couple in the oval frame, and the couple looked back at them. "Come on, don't start in again," said Mélodie.

"I'm not starting in again. It's too far to go home with you, Monsieur Mélodie. But I have a chum. She lives all alone, you know. It's just around the corner."

A whistle of admiration escaped Mélodie. "For a little holier-than-thou like you, you sure know your way around!"

Josette lowered her eyes beneath his praise. "It's because she's a good friend of mine. We went to school together, Monsieur Mélodie."

"Oh well, if you went to school together . . ." This was terrific! He felt as if he was not going to be able to repress a bellow. "Will she be home, this little chum of yours?"

"No, I have the key." She showed him a key. "She goes to work. That's why."

Mélodie executed a sort of dance step on his toes.—Man alive, will I remember the Germans' arrival on the Canebière! he thought. It's not a day to forget, a day like this. Josette's almond eyes offered him their innocence in the photographer's window, and in the oval frame the bride offered him a sprig of orange blossoms. "If you only have an hour, we better hurry," he said.

He followed a short distance behind her, as before. Her, Jules's daughter, you wouldn't think twice about her: a schoolgirl's sport coat, anklets, sixteen summers that looked like fourteen—but oh boy, when you had a look underneath . . . And the stink she'd made, the minx! And then—click! One try was enough! Love, once you bite into it . . . After all, Mélodie knew of nothing in nature so true as love. It existed everywhere, even in the bottom of the sea, he knew. For instance there were countries with all sorts of customs, Eskimos who sleep in ice, men who wear skirts, people who have never tasted a good drink, but love was the same wherever you went. So, Josette, like everybody else: blood is blood, you couldn't get away from it. But all the same, the girl was an odd piece of character. Kind of independent. Day before yesterday, in his room, she fought tooth and nail, you wouldn't have believed it for a bit of a girl no bigger than that, and not a word, not a tear, nothing but rage, but what a rage, enough to tear the bed to pieces. It didn't make him sore, so long as she hadn't hollered. . . . He crossed a dark courtyard behind her, began to climb a flight of stairs. And look at this now, would you: she hadn't turned around once to see if he was after her. Or the little arrangement with the school friend. A cute trick, and right in his line, or else he was losing his grip. He gave her a pat on the behind, to express his contentment, when he caught up with her at the door she was opening with her key.

"Swell, here we are at your chum's," he said, happy of voice and curious of eye.

He walked into a vast room with a sloping ceiling. Josette closed the door, threw the bolt. The light came straight from the sky, through a hinged skylight. Mélodie felt in fine form, he stretched and examined the premises. "What does she do for a living, your friend?" he asked, beginning to loosen his belt.

Josette did not answer. She turned her back to the door and she held the key in her hand. Mélodie gave her an encouraging smile.

"Come on, we'll make out fine, don't worry." A wisp of vapor clouded his eyes. "I won't hurt you, you'll see."

"Turn around, Monsieur Mélodie," Josette said.

"What a silly you are!" he said with a laugh. "We'll both be raw, won't we? . . ."

"No, turn around," Josette repeated.

"All right, if that's the way you like it," he said, still laughing. "But hurry up."

He turned around. There was a man in front of him, or a lion, and a bomb exploded in his face and drove him back. He began to run backward, waving his arms like a windmill, but his legs gave out and he sank down in a heap. He remained motionless, bracing himself with his hands, his eyes fixed on the blood spouting from his nostrils. His unhooked belt, hanging from the shoulder strap, floated around his hips. Standing near the door in her little sport coat, Josette did not take her eyes from him. He shook his head with a rapid movement, to clear it of its tumult. Then he saw the man. First his knees, then his shirt, open on a bronze torso, finally his mane, hanging over the face of a lion. Again he shook his head, this time to empty it of his vision; and with a lurch of the hips he tried to get to his feet.

"No, Señor," said Emilio Lopez. He came forward a step, and with all his strength drove the toe of his shoe into Mélodie's jaw. Another bomb exploded in his head, a green-and-white sun. He hung for an instant, torso in the void and ankles limp, then he fell. The sky descended through the skylight onto his polished leather leggings.

Emilio Lopez crouched beside the S.O.L. man and took away his revolver. He checked the loading and set the safety catch. Standing near the door, Josette wore the grave expression of a stubborn child. "Is he dead?" she asked.

"You've got to go away now," said Lopez.

"Nnn-nnn . . ." went Josette, with her mouth closed.

He looked at her from below, one hand gripping the weapon, the other flat on the S.O.L. man's stomach. "Yes, you've got to go now, Daddy."

"No," she said. She walked around Mélodie, went and sat down on the army cot. "You said you'll kill him."

He had said so. She had been sitting as she was at this moment, bare knees peeping from her schoolgirl's coat, and he had said that he would kill the S.O.L. man. This was two days before, the very day she had been subjected to Mélodie's violence. She came straight to the attic from his room, whither she had been lured on a pretext so stupid that Lopez was aghast at it. She had gone to the Sector, as she did every month, to have her parents' and her own ration cards renewed. She was used to seeing Mélodie there. He lived in the house next door, and he seldom failed to come and wait for her as she left, and walk a bit of the way back with her. He took her arm, or else he tried to squeeze her around the waist, and he told her stories over which he laughed a great deal. She hated him. He was after her like a dog, eyes bloodshot and tongue hanging out. She hated him utterly. And yet his laugh, his leer, the occasional touch of his fingers, fascinated her. "You understand, Emilio," she had said, "it made me sick to go to the Sector, because I knew he was waiting for me there. But if we missed each other, as it happened once or twice, I wasn't happy. Can you tell me why that was? I can tell you: it was like when you keep touching a place that's sore." Two days ago, then, she met him on the sidewalk in front of the Sector. He was in a hurry. "Quick, your pa phoned me to

get hold of you, he has something for you to do. Go talk to him, he's waiting for you." She asked where. "On the phone, for heaven's sake. Maybe something happened to your mother. Run!" She ran. She felt right away that he was lying, he was the last person her father would have phoned to, but she ran up three flights—into his room. There was no telephone. There was dirty water in a basin, a pair of pajama trousers on the floor, an empty glass and bottle on the table. There was him, and there was her. "I fooled you!" he said, whirling around like a top. "You fell for it! You swallowed it hook, line, and sinker!" She was familiar with his habit of whacking himself on the thigh or over the Sam Browne belt: she had never seen him put such enthusiasm into his whacking.

Mélodie uttered a bubbling grunt, but Lopez's fist crashed against his chin, and he calmed down. The Spaniard stayed in his squatting position, leaning with one hand on the S.O.L. man's stomach, and he looked at Daddy. Her knees were pressed tightly together. "You want me to kill him?" he asked.

"You said you would," she answered.

He had said so. He had told her to bring him in. Any time, at any hour of the day or night. For fear of missing them he had determined not to leave his attic—not even to get food. After Daddy had left, when, with the waning of day, the light had jumped out through the skylight to catch up with the last sun, when the shadows had joined hands so that the *guardia civil* and the hanged men and the priests could come out of their canvas at the primitive hour of vengeance, he wept as he had not wept since he was a child—a fit of hysteria which paid his debt for years of naked faith storming the gates of hell. Curled up in a corner of the attic, he saw them come out of the fabric of the canvas, years of broken bones and maggoty piety, years of rut and ravishment, come out come out before behind over the faun gamboling in the ineffable trace of man. What a rout that night, what a revel among the *guardia civil* with their hard leather hats, the cord at their necks, the soutane on their backs! Were they gorged now with all his sap in their lacquered veins! What drunkenness was theirs now from planting toothpicks under his toenails, from beating his face into a Christ-face with the butts of their clubs! Could he but stop slaking their thirst with his sap! Could he but catch them by the tip of their contented pricks and spin them backward until the past sucked them into its black oubliettes. That night, heaped upon himself in a corner of the attic, he relived his years of vermin and pus, years of blood and gangrene in the mouth, knowing that he could not undo them, knowing that swarms of S.O.L. men had swiveled the Infant Jesus under their unwashed meat and he could do nothing about it. At dawn, when the first sun peeped through the hinged skylight, and bayonets and stakes and chasubles vaulted back into their nothingness, he had made a fire and burned his pictures.

Mélodie uttered a strangled moan, but, prompt as a spring, Lopez's fist leapt at his chin and he calmed down. Josette remained sitting on the edge

of the army cot, her knees together and a key in her hand. Lopez grabbed Mélodie by the collar of his jacket and dragged him toward the center of the attic, where a crossbeam reached from wall to wall. Then he brought a rope, threw it over the beam, made a noose in it. "You've really got to go now," he said, hanging from the rope to test its strength.

"Nnn-nnn . . ." went Josette, with her mouth closed.

"You want to see if I kill him?" he asked.

She did not answer. He looked at her with his arms swinging and his head low. "I won't kill him," he said.

"You said you'll kill him," she replied. The sky was tilting in through the skylight, it put a shadow in her almond eyes. "You said so," she repeated.

Mélodie breathed a sigh, but Lopez planted his foot on his stomach and pinned him to the floor. "I changed my mind," he said.

"You have no right to," said Josette.

Mélodie opened his eyes, then his mouth. The air was heavy on his lungs, and under his skull trains were roaring by at high speed. He put his hand to his lips, and all at once he saw the noose. A shriek issued from his chest, and a spurt of froth with it. He seized the leg which was resting on his stomach, and, before Lopez could recover himself, pulled it violently to him. At the shock the Spaniard lost his balance and jumped into the air; but at that very instant his fingers caught the rope and held onto it, and while Mélodie was pulling himself upright, he plunged headfirst and butted the S.O.L. man full in the mouth. There was a sharp crack and both fell flat, Lopez on his belly, Mélodie on his back at Josette's feet. She had not budged, she was looking at the rope dangling in the oblique light.

Lopez scratched his mane, then hauled Mélodie back under the noose, took off his polished leather leggings, removed his shoes, unbuttoned his trousers and spilled him out of them like a sack of potatoes—head down. The fellow wore no drawers.

"Daddy, I'm going to put you out," he said, pulling Mélodie's shirt down.

"No," said Daddy. "Why did you change your mind?"

"Because it's too easy when you're dead." He relieved Mélodie of his jacket. "That's why."

"I don't see it," she said. Her sport coat had pulled up over her knees, and it hurt him to look at her knees. "What's too easy when you're dead?"

"Life," he said. He tied a length of cord around Mélodie's ankles. "Life and everything."

"When you're dead," said Josette, "there isn't any life."

"That's why it's too easy." He turned the S.O.L. man over, began to tie his hands behind his back. "Now, Daddy, you've got to go away. I don't want you to see."

"I don't care," she said. "If you don't kill him, I don't care."

"Then go away, if you don't care."

"No," she said. "What I don't care about is what you'll do to him if you don't kill him."

He was squatting on his heels, with one hand on the S.O.L. man's body and the other on his own chest. "Why do you want me to kill him?"

"It's because I hate him."

He looked at Josette's knees, and it gave him a pain in the back of his head to see them. "He made you cry, Daddy?"

"No," she said. "He made me vomit. Day before yesterday and yesterday, it didn't stop. I was even afraid Papa would catch on."

"I don't hate him. I hate what he is."

"I don't understand," she said. "It's the same thing, Emilio."

"I'm going to give him a face that's like what he is. You see my face, Daddy? It wasn't like this. It was his brothers that made it like this. *Los requetes y los falangistas y los hijos de puta de tu gendarmería francesa.*"

"I don't understand," said Daddy.

"It doesn't matter. He'll understand."

He brought a jug of water and threw it over Mélodie. Then he brought two bottles of China ink, red and blue, and some syringe needles. The S.O.L. man was slowly coming to himself, he was hawking up phlegm and sticking out his tongue. Lopez stood him up. He was unsteady on his feet. His shirt came halfway down his thighs, and his toes breathed the air through the holes in his socks. His jaw was curiously out of joint, and pulled the whole right side of his bespattered face to the left.

"You see this noose?" said Lopez.

A spark of terror flared in Mélodie's eyes, setting his swollen face afire. A trace of congealed blood crackled around his lips. He could not speak.

"You want me to hang you, eh?" said Lopez.

Frantically Mélodie shook his head. He saw Josette all at once, and as if only at that moment the power of speech had come to him he babbled:

"It wasn't me. . . . I didn't do nothing. . . ."

"No, nothing," said Lopez. He took hold of the noose, made it larger. "Keep your trap shut," he said.

Mélodie sniffed loudly, then nodded. "I'm thirsty," he gasped.

He drank straight from the jug. His teeth clattered on the enamel. Josette sat on the edge of the bed, with her knees pressed together and her almond eye fixed on the noose. The sky, in the skylight, was shriveling up for the night.

"Get under here," said Lopez, shaking the rope.

Mélodie's eyes popped out so far that it looked as if they would never go back into their sockets. His mouth fell open from one ear to the other, but the noose slipped around his neck and he left his mouth agape. Lopez, drawing in the rope, motioned him to stand under the beam. He obeyed, hopping in his ragged socks. The cord was tightened, rising straight from the back of his neck, and anchored. He made such an effort to grow taller that his shirt climbed above his umbilicus.

"If you move," said Lopez, "you'll hang yourself singlehanded."

Tears streamed down into his gaping mouth, and he did not move. Lopez plugged an extension lamp into an outlet, clipped the bulb to

Mélodie's hair, uncorked the ink bottles, moistened the points of the needles before dipping them into the ink. *"Ahora sí, no te muevas,"* he said.

He wiped Mélodie's forehead with Mélodie's shirttail, placed his left hand behind the man's neck and grabbed him by the hair. Mélodie submitted with his whole soul. A tremor ran through his muscles, he vibrated from toes to shoulders, but his head, short-stayed to the gibbet, held firm.

Sure and rapid, following an outline which gradually took form, the point of the needle pricked the S.O.L. man's forehead from top to bottom. Each puncture left a dot of indelible ink, mixed, sometimes, with a drop of blood. Mélodie stood rigidly at attention. His face against Lopez's face, the white of his eyes in the leonine visage, he swallowed his breath and curbed the quaking of his bones. With a snap of his jaw he could have bitten off his torturer's nose, or again, by hanging himself he could have swung the whole weight of his body into the Spaniard's middle. . . . But he had his life to win. He felt his life oozing through his splotched skin; and he wanted his life, he loved it madly and forever, even if it never lost this taste of the garrote and the tattoo needle. So not a movement was made nor a word spoken, and suddenly, at the end of a half century which lasted not quite half an hour, it was finished.

With his hempen necktie, his shirt riding high, and the bulb on his head, Mélodie looked like an electric scarecrow. As he studied him, Lopez recalled Daddy's words—"no, he made me vomit," and, as if to vomit in his turn, he seized the end of his belt and tightened it furiously around his stomach. But his stomach had been empty for some fifty hours. He pulled down the S.O.L. man's shirt and drew back several paces. "It's done, Daddy, you can go now," he said.

She came and stood beside him. She seemed so tiny that he was afraid to look at her. "Is that the face that's like what he is?" she asked.

All at once he was ashamed; ashamed of having been weak, and of not having killed him. Two phalluses, standing straight on their respective testicles, faced each other. One wore the cap of the Admiral, the other the Marshal's kepi. The oak leaves were tattooed in red. A swastika joined the two members with its branches. Underneath was written: *Vive la France*. The picture filled the whole span of the forehead.

"That's that," Lopez said, without looking at her.

"I don't understand," said Josette. "I'd rather have seen you kill him. But it's pretty all the same."

"It's worse than if I killed him," he said without conviction.

"Oh, it's all right," said Josette. "Just let him come back to the café. I'll tell Papa everything and Papa will kill him. So long, Emilio. Monsieur Matthieu will kill him too. They'll be acquitted, you'll see. So long. You'll be acquitted too. You'll . . ."

Her voice trailed away in the depths of the staircase, covered by the clopping of her heels. Lopez untied Mélodie from his gibbet. He held him for a moment in his hands, not knowing where to put him, then dragged

him to the windowless room at the end of the attic and threw him in. He did not remove his bonds. There was a billfold containing some money in the S.O.L. man's trousers. He took the money. He also took the revolver. Then he tore the trousers, the blouse, and the polished leather leggings to shreds. He gathered up a hammer and some heavy nails, turned out the light, closed and locked the door. From outside he drove the nails into the frame of the transom, at forty-five degrees, so that they were firmly lodged in the sash; and from the street below he threw the key into the water.

He rang and knocked for a long time. Although he was one of Smith's men, and had executed a number of "pieces" for him, he had always refrained, for reasons of security, from appearing at the A.R.S. He knew, however, that the offices of the "committee" were never left unguarded. There was always someone there, nights, Sundays, holidays, for fear of a visit from the police or a raid by some band of zealots with Legion badges. Hence he was surprised at not getting an answer. He was thinking of giving up, when, at last, Francine Lepage spoke from behind the closed door.

He hardly recognized her voice, so brusque was its tone. "We're closed, go away!" she said without asking the visitor's identity. More than once she had come to his attic, generally at night, bringing a passport to be altered, a demobilization card to be "adjusted," or else calling for some urgent piece, and he knew her extreme politeness, and her patience, which rendered her inaccessible to fits of temper. He gave his name—"It's me, Lopez Ruiz"—and, to his astonishment, heard her reply in the same harsh voice:

"Is that so? Well there's no one here. Go away!"

"Open the door, Francine," he insisted. And getting no response, he gave several rapid knocks. "Open up, it's important."

It appeared that she was hesitating—but she opened. She took away the heavy bar which blocked the door, then the chain, then drew the bolts. If he had not recognized her voice, she in turn seemed not to recognize his physiognomy: his mane was gone, his short hair was sleeked down with pomade, and he wore a tie. He still looked like a lion, but less ferocious, and less sad. "I just came from the barber's," he said. "I'm off for a change of air."

She nodded silently, as if that went without saying. All of them. They were all off for a change of air. She turned her back on him so that he would not see her eyes. Aldous John Smith, too, she was sure of it. Without even saying good-by to her. She rubbed the corner of her eye with her forefinger, rapidly. He had sent word to her that morning to begin immediately to burn any papers she considered compromising, and she was still at this work when Lopez interrupted her.

"The Germans?" he asked. The filing cabinets stood open, the folders lay everywhere, a fire was burning on the hearth. "When did they arrive?"

"What do you mean, when? . . . This morning, of course, at dawn."

He too had lost his head. They were all losing their heads, as if the mere sight of the Germans had the power to kill. All day long there had been a stream of terror-stricken clients, yelling their heads off for "Mr. Smith"; one might have thought, from their insistence, that he was capable of gathering them into his bosom, where they would be safe from attack. But there was no more "Mr. Smith." He too had cleared out, without even leaving his address in America. She bit her lips, to punish herself for being mean. Perhaps, on the contrary, he was busy starting the machinery of an underground A.R.S., long since organized and readied for work. . . . She glided around in her felt slippers, frail under her hump, and so downcast that Lopez did not know what to make of it.

"Is something wrong?" he asked awkwardly. "If I can help . . ."

"You haven't run into Monsieur Smith?" she asked. She turned away again, feeling the hot blush reddening her face. "He hasn't been in the office all day, and I have so many things to . . ."

"No, I haven't run into anybody," he said, unable to understand the little secretary's perturbation. "I haven't been out of my attic since day before yesterday morning. I left home only an hour ago. I went to get my hair cut and get some pictures taken by the machine at the corner." He remembered that he was as hungry as a wolf, and looked around as if hoping to discover something edible. "What exactly has happened, Francine?"

With the back of her hand she rubbed her cheeks, and went on rummaging through the folders. "Nothing has happened yet," she said. "The Germans came in at dawn, or rather they haven't stopped coming in since dawn. Maybe you ought to clean up a bit at home?" She looked at him covertly, shaking her head. "But of course you knew that unoccupied France had been invaded, since you've changed your appearance."

"Pure coincidence," he said. "And I've already cleaned house. They won't find anything up there, if they stick their noses in. Nothing they'll like, anyhow. Could you give me a bit of paste? I want to put my new photos on a lot of papers I made for myself." He began to spread out papers, stamps, and seals on a table. "Look at this lovely passport. I got it the other day during a call at the Peruvian consulate. And this stamp I fixed up, so that I could become a Peruvian by birth."

She handed him a pot of paste. "If I were you I'd go back home to work on those papers. You can't tell, here: they may come in any moment."

He replied that he could not go back home. She asked no questions, and he went on working steadily. At any other time she would have taken a keen interest in what he was doing. It was from him that she had had the few poor seals and inks which she hid at home, under the tiles of the kitchen; from him, likewise, her meager knowledge of how to manufacture a reasonably acceptable safe-conduct. But why bother to learn the art of counterfeiting now! Every page she threw in the fire reduced a little of the A.R.S. to ashes—and a little of herself with it. She had been the first to start with Smith, at a time when everything seemed possible, and she

had stayed to the last—when nothing was possible any more. Yes, of course, the work would go on underground, the same activity, harder and more absorbing every day, but Smith would no longer be in it. . . . And she knew nothing about him, not even whether his real name was Smith, or John, or Aldous. Thirty months she had lived at his side, they had more secrets in common than any married couple on earth, and she did not even know whether he was married or single. She put forth no claims, she was not complaining, but why had he left this way, without so much as a wave of the hand to her? He did not have confidence in her. She was a little hunchback, good for nothing but taking dictation. Maybe he was afraid she would talk, if they subjected her to questioning. So small. So sickly. She hoped she'd be tortured, right in this room, with him present to see if she would talk. But he was gone. Maybe he was already in Portugal, on the way to his America already, like this, without a word . . . without . . . without anything. . . .

Lopez, from a distance, watched her sobbing. He did not dare go near her. It left him limp to see a woman cry; it made him feel almost guilty, as if somehow it were his fault. And this Francine, with her head screwed down into her shoulders—his whole body ached to imagine her small tired face covered with tears. "Come on, Francine, buck up . . ." he said in the voice of a fifteen-year-old. "You know everything will come out all right. . . ."

She blew her nose like a bird, hopping up and down. "Oh, don't pay any attention to me, Monsieur Lopez," she said without turning around. "It's nerves . . ."

He remembered how he himself had cried, after Daddy's visit. The instant before the breakdown, he would have wagered his life against a beefsteak that he was incapable of shedding a tear.—It's nerves with me too, he thought with a sort of attention, as if he were feeling himself. He had never had any nerves; or at least he had not known anything about it. This was a bad moment to have them all of a sudden.

He gathered up his papers, tried to hitch his belt a notch tighter. "I'm going, Mademoiselle Francine," he said. "Shall I leave you my equipment?"

"What equipment?"

"The stamps, the seals, all this stuff. It might be useful again."

"No, don't leave it." She was going through the folders again, now and then tossing a sheet into the fire. "I'd like to have it, but I'm not sure I'll have time to get away before they come."

He stuffed his equipment into his pockets. "I'm going back to Spain," he said.

She stopped sifting the documents and came to him. She reached well below his chin. "They'll kill you," she said.

"That's not sure. Here, if they catch me, they'll kill me the same."

It was true. He was fit to be killed anywhere in this kill-crazy Europe. "Do you need money?"

"If you have any. I just went through a guy's pockets, but he didn't have much."

"Yes, I have some." She took a roll of bills out of a drawer. "Take it all."

He ran his thumb over the roll. "That's too much," he said.

"No, take it. It's that much less for them to steal, when they come to make their search."

He put the money in his pocket. "I'd love to kiss you, Francine," he said. "May I?"

She said that he might. He lifted her, kissed her on both cheeks. Then he squeezed her to his heart. As he turned the corner of the street, two police cars stopped outside the building where the A.R.S. offices were.

» 23 «

HE SHOULDN'T HAVE TALKED BACK TO THIS CONSUL, but there was something more than mere ineptitude, something that seemed odious to Smith, in this harangue which was half Sunday sermon and half eulogy of the national popcorn. Yet he would have refrained from introducing a discordant note, if the consul had not chosen to take him to task by name.

A little before ten o'clock a consular employee had distributed their passports to the members of the American colony in Marseilles. "Please be good enough to wait a moment," he had said when the distribution was completed. "The consul general would like to say a few words to you." They waited a good hour. Among those present were the scanty American personnel which the organizations across the Atlantic had maintained in the region, a journalist accredited to Vichy, and one or two former volunteer ambulance drivers in the French army, as well as a certain Mrs. Bessy Bowman, with a furious plume on the front of her hat. Thanks to the amusement which this lady furnished her compatriots, the latter were able to pass the moment which lasted an hour without suffering too much from the change of schedule.

Mrs. Bowman demanded that she be shipped back to America. It was her right; she knew her rights, she insisted on the entire and immediate enjoyment of them. All they could do, the secretaries said, was to give her her passport—a nice, freshly renewed passport, valid for all countries, north, south, east, and west. The choice of routes was up to her. They could not take her to the train, and still less open the frontiers for her to pass. The Spanish border was closed since yesterday morning, and, inconceivable though it might seem to Mrs. Bowman, there was no B-17 handy to ferry her by air to New York, whither her husband and son were calling her. But she gave the secretaries a bad time. Plume waving wildly, she read them a lesson in citizenship. Were they presuming to treat her like an emigrant? Didn't they know she was an American citizen? She paid her taxes, she knew the Constitution. Repatriated—she insisted on being repatriated immediately. The private citizen had nothing to do with frontiers and international complications. Let the diplomats put such

things in order: that was what they were sent abroad for, anyway. The secretaries thought it relevant to suggest to her that Uncle Sam was at war, and that after all she could have stayed home. They lived to regret it. Did they think she was traveling for pleasure? Was it a pleasure to eat this abominable French cooking? It was a fine waste of time to be fighting the dictators, if the State Department reproached real New England-born Americans for traveling for business purposes. Some of the secretaries tried to calm her, the situation was not too bright but it might be worse, and the government . . . The government! Mrs. Bowman turned so anarchistic that the feather swung all the way around her hat. A government that was sending her into slavery! Didn't they realize what it meant to be deported into Germany? For wasn't that what the secretaries had said? They'd be deported into Germany, to be exchanged subsequently for prisoners of war. Exchanged! They had heard it: exchanged! Well, if they didn't know, she did. And she would tell them. They'd have precious little to eat, in Germany. "Telephone Eisenhower!" she commanded the secretaries. They won't have heat in Germany. "Telephone Roosevelt!" she ordered. "Telephone . . ." Finally one of the secretaries took it upon himself to get fed up. "Listen, Mrs. Bowman, since you know so much about it, beat it to Vichy and tell the ambassador. He's the only one who knows Eisenhower's and Roosevelt's telephone numbers." But he did not really hope she would follow his advice; at best, he figured, his proposal would give her something to think about for a minute—time for the consul to begin a speech which even she would not dare to interrupt. For the consul general had rung to signify that he was about to make his appearance and begin.

He made his appearance and began, and she did not dare interrupt. Perhaps she was expecting revelations; perhaps, too, her anger was so strong that it made her mute. The consul sported a pearl in his necktie, and he spoke like someone selling toothpaste. America, he said, which had aided, supported, and protected the people of France, was about to leave France. America—in other words, these ladies and gentlemen and himself, gathered around their flag in this historic circumstance. They are not numerous, he said, his heart a-flutter. They will hardly fill three compartments on the train which will carry them into enemy country. But what do numbers matter! Their strength, and their merit, will be in their unity. In that unity which is the unanimous emanation which the people delegates to each of its sons whom duty calls to foreign lands. Let each one of them be an ambassador on mission. Let each one of them act in such a way that the true visage of America shall dazzle the enemy. Smith felt surprised that official language should always be hollow and redundant; he wondered to what degree this was obligatory. This consul with the pearl under his chin was only following a beaten path; he confirmed the fact that the function creates the organ. Moreover, compared to what Smith knew of French eloquence, the consul's was on the modest side. It seemed entirely unlikely to him that the

tremolo, the tear, and the pomp proper to the French peroration could be surpassed. He thought of Audry, replying to Maître Esau that France was to the French, no doubt, what Brittany was to the Bretons or Kaffiry to the Kaffirs. And, in fact, he saw how perfectly the consul's tirade might come from the mouth of a Japanese or Bulgarian or Malay colleague of his, word for word, cliché for cliché: it would have sufficed to say Nippon or Bulgaria or Malaysia instead of America, and hara-kiri, or yoghurt, or amok in place of ice cream. At any rate it was a safe bet that the same discourse was resounding at this very moment among the Paraguayans and Haitians and other Guatemaltecs, they too being obliged to leave the France which they had vied with each other to "aid, support, and protect." He smiled, remarking to himself that there was nothing more international than patriotic jargon—and there must have been something about his smile which bothered the consul general. Circumstances, he said, having made him, as it were, their elected representative, and his functions investing him with the symbol of unity—*e pluribus unum*—he had no doubt that as true, loyal Americans they would have at heart to show themselves worthy of America. And as Smith was now no longer the only one smiling, the consul, becoming crimson, raised his forefinger and said in the tone of a professor:

"Hence it is my strict duty to ask each one in particular, and all in general, to do nothing, to undertake nothing, which contravenes the regulations and laws of the German authorities, as, unfortunately, some of you have done with regard to the French authorities."

The citizens looked at each other with interest. Mrs. Bessy Bowman did not look at anybody: she had not been aware that the consul knew her business, although, naturally, she ought to have suspected it, with the F.B.I. and all. But Aldous John Smith, at whom this exhortation was aimed, said in a curt voice:

"May I ask you to give names. If you are speaking with me in mind, be informed that it will not be your province to incriminate my actions, any more than it has been heretofore."

Mrs. Bowman turned a friendly eye on this compatriot. Everything considered, perhaps he too was in the antique business, if that dear old Pietro had been in it. . . . She gave a joyous sob at the memory of the old Italian. In any case this compatriot knew how to talk to diplomats. Instead of meddling in other people's business, they'd do better to be getting an airplane for those who needed one. She shook her head, and the feather nodded importantly. "Mister Consul," she said, "what do you intend to do to put me immediately—I say immediately—aboard the Lisbon plane?"

The consul's face betrayed such bewilderment that Mrs. Bowman imagined she had not made herself clear. But he gave her no chance to expose the grounds of her legitimate demand. "Mr. Smith," he said, "I hope that the Germans, who are experts at their trade, and who know all there is to know about you, will be able to bring you to heel."

Smith picked up his hat and walked out. The embassy and the State

Department considered him a dangerous "radical," and there was no use arguing with the consul. The weather was dry and cold on the square in front of the Prefecture. There were few people in the streets, and the streetcars seemed to be waiting for something. He looked at the time. It was Thursday. He kept away from the Rue Saint-Ferréol and the main arteries. He could have tried to flee, but he had no thought of it. The A.R.S. had organized excellent relays between Marseilles and the Spanish frontier, and on the frontier itself several passers were in its pay, notably a remarkable girl who went by the name of Valerie. For a moment he thought of her, of a warm summer night with her. He could also have tried Switzerland, or else have lit out for Paris. But he had no thought of it. For the first time since his arrival in France in June 1940 the crushing fatigue which had bowed his shoulders had flown, and he felt free and without any desire to run away. It was somewhat, he couldn't explain it, somewhat as if after years on a treadmill he had discovered the fascinating appeal of laziness: time opened up a wide road before him without clocks at the crossings, without direction arrows.

Nothing but the weight of the air on his shoulders, the streets without end, the time without hours . . . It was so sumptuous that it made him dizzy. Yet he knew that this could not last, that the appeal of laziness would die out, covered over by the deep call of the vice which had taken root in him and would not let him go. It was this vice which he did not want to flee. He did not want to escape his taste for the visa, his love for man-smuggling, his hate for a world of consulates and camps and ovens. And even if he did want to, he knew he could not. It was his ambuscade, his private racket at the heart of the great rotating bordello, whence there was no retreat or desertion possible. The arrival of the Germans, the A.R.S.'s dive underground, had created no diversion: here he was, trapped forever in this Old Port of Marseilles, where he had come one day with his wife, and had come back one day to lose her. Rosemary wrote no more letters; no longer did she say—"come back please, come back, come back, what are you doing there in Marseilles . . ." She had wearied of repeating, ever and always, the same astonished sentence, with no other result than the eternal—"I'm busy, I'm simply too busy, be patient, I beg of you. . . ." Once, shortly after Pearl Harbor, as she was consumed with the fever distilled by the collective-emotion-producing machine, he had undertaken to enlighten her, in somewhat cryptic words, on what was keeping him "over there in Marseilles." So then, he was running a travel agency, she answered in good logic; so then, it was worse than she had thought, because, if he had charge of ships and planes, he had no excuse for putting off his return. What, then, were his real reasons? she asked. What were they, indeed? How could he give reasons for a thing which was completely irrational, when Rosemary had only her logic with which to understand? And who, for that matter, could understand, and who could explain, so bizarre an equation of supply and demand—a visa, genuine or counterfeit, for a pyramid of corpses? Furthermore, did she need to comprehend the

incomprehensible in order to deck herself in night-blue nightgowns and to have a fuzz at the back of her neck? That was simple, the blue gown with her body inside, the fuzzy neck with her heart inside—simple, like having a mouth of one's own, a Kodak of one's own. So simple that he could not make Rosemary understand the equation of the visa and the pyramid, and that Rosemary grew weary of repeating—"please, please, what are you doing over there . . ."

He passed in front of a church, and it occurred to him to enter. His eyes pained him. The penumbra in the nave would do them good. Inside were a couple of old women, and the beadle with a broom in his hand. It was calm and damp, and the air smelled of cold wax. He sat down, looking at the altar, the blackened cross, the polychromed Virgin. For some time past the sight of his left eye had been failing; he thought it was since the headaches had taken possession of his head and begun to work on it with crowbars. With his right eye closed he could not distinguish the Christ on the cross, and the Virgin looked like a column of sugar candy; a few steps away, things became blurred and wavering. There was a kneeling-bench which took on an indefinite air, and the whole chancel, with the main altar and the retable, the air of a music box. He joined his hands and slipped them between his knees, keeping his right eye closed. It was a convenient way to change the world, this giving it the "bad eye." Not to improve it, but to change it. Against the white background of the altar cloth the beadle's stocky figure had become a Negro king, and the two old women were adjusting his headdress. But to improve the world by looking at it a certain way, one had to appeal to Rosemary. She had known the formula since she was a child. The trick was to press one or the other eyeball with a finger, and then things doubled, seemed to split into good and bad. When she was a little girl, this was the way she made those she didn't like "fall." She said "fall," because things and people divided in two, and besides, she had a whole theory, notably that the image which detached itself corresponded to the "heavy" part of the original, that is to the wicked, damnable part—by virtue of the heaviness of sin; whereas the part which did not move corresponded to the good, pure part. She had applied this treatment to herself, in the mirror, with a great deal of gravity, conscious of what a serious matter it was to drive out the sinful part of oneself. She had told him about this the day after their marriage, aboard the ship which was carrying them to Europe, and it made him laugh hugely. He wanted to know what sin it was that she had exorcised in this way, but she did not remember. Probably she had stolen some jam, she said. In any case her system had been successful, for since then she had never committed any sin bigger than that of gluttony. She had this special gift. But with him the experiment had been a failure. She tried several times, with and without his consent; no, he was so wicked that nothing would work. . . . How well she knew how to play the kitten. He drew his hands from between his knees, took out the snapshot of Rosemary which he kept in his billfold. What animal grace in the abandon of her

pose. To possess, even if only once, even if only for a second, this power of doubling things. He put a finger on the ball of the eye which had good sight: there, it works, Rosemary is "falling" out of herself, she comes out in her bathing suit. . . . Hello, Rosemary. She doesn't answer, naturally not, it's the "wicked" part of her which has obeyed, the part that sulks. She hasn't changed, there's just as much gold in her hair, just as much purity in her profile. John, in a church . . . she says, as he begins to play with the lobe of her ear. That's so, he hadn't thought of it. And it's absurd, and sacrilegious, to bring a little woman to your lap when you can wield such a power only once. Quick, there's only a second, quick, someone important to double—himself—the beadle—the Christ on the cross. That's it, make the Christ descend from the cross. Make him "fall." Make the "bad" part of him come out, the wounds, the sores, the turned-back eye that presides over the office when the blood flows on the street outside. Make him come down, with the nails, the thorns, the soiled loincloth for which those who slew him gamble. And let the Christ who remains smile. A two-thousand-year smile, which will burst heaven open . . .

He uncovered his face. The two old women were there, and the beadle preceded them. In one hand he held his broom, with the other he was tapping him on the shoulder. "Tired out, aren't you, eh?" he said in a tone meant to be understanding. "But it's not nice to sleep in church. Or talk so loud. Our Lord don't like that." He stepped back as Smith stood up, and the old women blessed themselves. "Is that yours?" He pointed the broom at the photo of the person in a bathing suit, with an expression of perfect horror.

"That was mine," said Smith. He recovered the snapshot and picked up his hat. It was bright outside, and dry, and free. So free that he did not know which way to turn. He walked at random along the quais of the Old Port. The *Golondrina Azul* still lay at her wharf with a string around her neck, with her faultless poop deck aft, with her cables and pulley blocks in the tall rigging, a graceful hull at the mercy of a swift stroke. He looked at the three-master with a touch of regret, as at a pretty woman whom one almost carried off on a certain day, in certain circumstances which will not occur again.—We're always short of daring, he thought, admiring the faultless line of the sailing vessel. This hull, so light on the wave, so ideal for the high seas, really seemed to him a woman who gives herself only to the ravisher; for her one would truly have to stake his all. But, perhaps it was for the best in the end, if—as he tried to console himself—if at that price the A.R.S. ship had been kept afloat, and her crew had survived to luff her out in the clandestine waters of the night.

He started strolling again, thinking of those with whom he had worked; who, like himself, had acquired in a short time a fairly unique experience in foxing the police. It seemed to him at this moment that he had done nothing else in his whole lifetime; that walking the tightrope was the only way to walk, and that everything that drew breath on earth was violating laws which had become contrary to the primitive act of living. He knew:

in the sewer the mine the brush the château, in these narrow streets, behind the walls of these houses rickety with age, in that man who was urinating and in the woman who was waiting for him, in the baby squatting in the gutter and in the Colonel waving his cane, everything which had a seed of soul was caught in a net of laws which no longer corresponded to—to anything.

"Have you had lunch?" the Colonel asked.

He was standing at the entrance to Madame Babayû's establishment, the Bon Aloi. Smith stepped over the half-breed child squatting in the gutter, and settled down at the old Italian's table. He was glad he had met him. He saw that he did not know how to put to use the freedom which was opening before him, the time without haste and without measure. Like Francine Lepage, who never walked straight across an open space, he had to traverse his in a broken line; on the threshold of adventure, he needed a familiar landmark. The Colonel's voice, his pale eyes in the shadow of the beret, his smile balanced on the points of his superlative mustache, restored to the landscape its fraternal proportions. Underneath his goatee there was a plate of sienna-colored soup, which he recommended to him heartily—for its temperature: with a double pinch of pepper, it started a fire in the pit of the stomach and kept it warm. "For I can tell you," he said, "that Madame Babayû is one of the rare people in Europe who have a bit of real pepper left."

Smith let himself be tempted, and Madame Babayû brought the soup. She also brought three peppercorns, the genuineness of which she begged them to verify before she ground them directly into the customer's plate. "It's because it's you," she announced, to make the consumers fully appreciative of their good luck. The Colonel acknowledged the compliment graciously, saying that he could not help being touched by such consideration. Madame Babayû planted herself near their table, watching fondly over the two men. She had a warm spot in her heart for the old one with the beard. He was so punctual, always there at noon, rain or shine. And so polite into the bargain: he never criticized the cooking, and he paid his ration coupons without arguing. Just before the other gentleman came in she had been telling the Colonel her troubles, and she would have liked to go on with the conversation. Or else ask him what was to be thought of all this, the Germans and all, he must know since he was such a friendly man. And certainly a man of prudence, you could even tell right off that he had a good education.

"Madame Babayû is Turkish," said the Colonel, addressing himself to Smith, who was raising a spoonful of soup to his lips. "She just informed me, in fact, that she is from Samsun, on the Black Sea."

Smith hesitated, then put the spoon down in his plate. "How are things in Turkey?" he asked politely.

"All right, thanks," said Madame Babayû. "We grow tobacco, in Samsun. And there's the Kizil and the Yeshil Irmak. They're rivers. But it's twenty-five years since I was back there, and I don't know if things are the

and all at once his face fell, as if he too had just seen a marine monster. "Oh, come, that's crazy! You . . . you don't think she . . ."

"What surprises me is that you never understood it until just now. Anyone who has ever seen Francine Lepage in your presence, or merely heard her pronounce your name, knows for whom her heart beats."

Smith shook his head. He seemed nonplussed. "I never guessed, never felt a thing . . ." he said. He swallowed the contents of his cup, with his eyes closed. "Have I been so blind . . ."

"For a long time now you haven't been living enough to see others living around you," said the Colonel. He placed the knob of his cane under his goatee. "Tell me, Smith: why have you given yourself to this work? And so wholeheartedly? While you were saving an occasional refugee's life, little by little you were ruining your own. The fact is, you've ruined it. You've simply thrown away respectability, fortune, future, all the good things that give substance to life, and make it—let's say worth while. You're not—at least so far as I've come to know you—you're not an adventurer, I mean in the vulgar sense of the word; nor are you a passionate temperament. You're energetic, your moves are frequently original, I imagine you could lead a crowd if you had to, but I see nothing in you which is characteristic of the so-called righter of wrongs. Anyway, you once told me that when you came here you intended to cable news stories to the papers in your country."

"I hate cowardice," said Smith.

The Colonel dropped his monocle into his open palm. "I don't understand you," he said. "Cowardice is not a thing in itself, let's say like light, or wind; it's a more or less distinctive attribute of man, it is carried in man. Therefore you can hate it only in and through man. Furthermore, was it through hate that you converted yourself into a smuggler, a counterfeiter, a swindler? When you arrived in France, your practical knowledge of illegal work was confined, I suppose, to the spelling of the two words. Since then you've done some pretty astonishing things, Smith; things—at the cost of what an irremissible engagement you alone know. Such an engagement is not sufficiently accounted for by the abstract hate which you claim to have. Not even if you match it with a natural talent for fugitive-running."

In Smith's head a small clock was ticking and turning. "I think you're wrong," he said. "I think I am a passionate man. That is, I've become one. I've . . . Look, it's almost too simple: I feel guilty." He touched his temples with the tips of his fingers. "I say guilty, because, like everybody else, I've read a couple of books on psychoanalysis. Not so very long ago, every time I woke up, I uttered a growl of satisfaction. I jumped into my slippers, dove into my shower, ate my ham and eggs while I glanced over the headlines, and when I got down to the street, life came forward to meet me, in uniform and ready to serve. There again I use a very vague term—life—when today I know that it was only an ersatz, a sort of synthetic drug—swimming pools in summer, skiing in winter, women in all

seasons, and that respectability you spoke of . . ." He paused to ask the waiter for a glass of water. "It's hard to put into words, Colonel; it's as if I said that we were too well pleased with one another—the ersatz with feeding me, I with stuffing myself on it. Does that make any sense to you?"

The Colonel did not answer. The waiter brought the glass of water, and Smith uncorked his tube of aspirin. Huge cannons were defiling through the square, mounted on huge wheels. Jules Garrigue had come out on the terrace. He had just finished his lunch, and he felt like exchanging a word with a Christian soul. "They sure are mechanized to the ears," he said, eying his two customers. One was doing chemistry in his glass, the other was patting the underside of his goatee. The proprietor of the Fier Chasseur heaved a sigh, then went back into his café. He didn't blame his clients: it cut your desire to chat, all this rolling material did. Eyes closed, Smith swallowed his concoction. In his head several clocks were ticking and turning. "That's what I feel guilty of," he said. "That's the cowardice I mean."

"Of having lived as if life was yours by right?"

"Of having worn it as if it were a shirt. Of having been so comfortable in it that I didn't even feel it on me." A smile flickered in his tired eyes. "I'm going to reveal my passion to you. I aspire to earn my life: to pay the price for it, I mean."

"You die of that passion," said the old man. "And the price—what is it?"

"You're very demanding, Colonel. If I told you that I have lived so well only because others have lived so badly, would that give you any idea of size?"

"No," said the Colonel. "Not the faintest."

"You're more and more demanding. You're driving me to use big words." He thought for a moment, then added: "The price of life is life itself."

There was silence. The image of Gervaise rose and disappeared before the Colonel's eyes. Was that the price she had paid? He sniffed rapidly, several times. "It's silly and pointless to burn so hot that you melt in the heat of your own flame," he said, striking the ground with the iron tip of his cane. "For that reason we never can pay our debt entirely. A question of balance: we don't possess enough to cover so vast a disbursement, so that we're forced to resign ourselves to being always in arrears to ourselves."

"Whence the sense of guilt, anxiety, et cetera. . . . Bravo, Doctor. But your generalizations are too facile. For me, so far as I personally am concerned, the only possible transaction I can have with myself is to pay what I owe. And if, as you declare, it's a debt which can never be acquitted completely, at least it's in me to reduce the margin of it—the arrears with which you threatened me a moment ago."

"And with which I continue to threaten you. Tell me: the people you whisked out of the crematory ovens—was that for their benefit or for the benefit of your accounts with yourself?"

"You're trying to draw me into an argument, Colonel," Smith said, laughing. "But I'm in some sort of state of liberty since this morning, and it makes me feel disposed to go along with you. Besides, I have the impression that you're cheating. I could take the questionnaire to which you're subjecting me, and turn it back on you word for word. You've presented me with two million francs in less than two years, while you were eating in a cookshop and wearing a ragged overcoat: was that for the benefit of a few victims of persecution, or for the good of your own Weltschmerz? You see, we're both under the same question mark, hoping for an answer which—which doesn't exist. Colonel, I'm really in a very peculiar state of mind, and I'm going to have to use big words again: there are false solutions to everything, there's no true answer to anything. Therefore the important thing is not the answer but the question." Again a smile flickered in his tired eyes. "I have a feeling that that's what I want to say when I speak of paying: to ask questions, loud questions . . ."

"In a word—the conduct of a child!" the Colonel interrupted. He was irritated by a kind of continual rumbling which he felt beneath Smith's calm or indolence, he didn't know which. "Only children in their earliest years ask questions without caring about the answers."

"That's a good example," said Smith. "It's true, children suspend their lives on their questions." He paused, and his look became fixed. "Turn around, there, yes, that man who's waving his arms as he comes along."

The Colonel adjusted his monocle, sniffing his knuckles in passing. The man who held Smith's attention was coming up the sidewalk, taking steps of unequal length. Although he carried himself straight, it might have seemed that he was broken in the middle.

"There's a child for you," said Smith. "He's paying terribly. Pouring good money after bad." He half rose from his chair. "Hirsch . . ." he called in a hushed voice.

Hirsch stopped and blinked his eyes. There was a stiffening, almost a movement of recoil, through his body, when Smith put his hand on his arm. He let himself be led to the table, sat down on the edge of the chair, looked at the old man with the monocle. A tic made the bones of his face stand out in moving relief.

"I'm a friend of Monsieur Smith's," said the Colonel. He put out his hand. "Delighted to meet you."

Hirsch took the Colonel's hand and held it in his own. Then he turned his eyes toward Smith. He seemed unable to speak.

"Where did you come from?" Smith asked. "It's a long time since we've seen you."

Hirsch separated his jaws and began to cough. He had not released the Colonel's hand. Smith knocked on the glass partition, calling the waiter. "A glass of brandy," he growled, slipping a bill into his hand. The cough was cutting off great splinters in Hirsch's lungs, dry and sonorous and so slow in coming that involuntarily the Colonel marked the rhythm. The brandy arrived in a coffee cup. Smith dismissed the waiter with a nod of

the head, and held the drink to Hirsch's lips. He seized the edge of the cup with his teeth, and, after an incredible effort, drank at a gulp. An artery could be seen pulsing in the hollow of his temple.

"It's nothing," he said in a worn voice. "I caught it yesterday. They killed her yesterday." There was a tip of flame in the deep hollows of his eye sockets. He had not released the Colonel's hand.

"Where did you come from?" Smith repeated.

"From up there," he said. "Yesterday . . . they killed her yesterday. She had left the day before with five travelers. She was to be back yesterday morning. She didn't know that . . . that . . ." He strangled, coughing out of his nose and eyes and mouth. ". . . that the Germans had occupied the frontier."

"What frontier?" Smith asked. The Colonel saw him grow pale, by degrees. "Who is she?"

"I started out to meet her," said Hirsch in a rasping voice. His eyes were wandering, as if still looking for her. "I was working on a farm. Sundays we went for walks. We went out with food and a book. She was teaching me the mountains. She . . . I started out at dawn, as soon as the first German was seen in the village. I rushed this way and that, calling her with all my strength. I didn't know what path she had taken to get back. Maybe I shouldn't have called her, they had already occupied the crests and the passes. They fired at me, but she was the one they killed." His hoarse voice was scarcely audible, and the tip of flame spun round and round in the hollow of his orbits. "When I came back down to the village, she . . . she . . . They had carried her down on their backs. She was lying in the square, in front of the school. It was my fault, my . . . I should have found her, I should have called louder, I . . . In the square, like that, with her skirt. With her bare legs. The people were crying behind their shutters. She . . . I began to run. Then I began to run. I ran all day and all night. I took the train. I took the trains, the trains . . ." His eyes fixed themselves on Smith's eyes, with their immobile tip of flame. "Ah, ah, I ran away."

"Valerie?" said Smith in a voice almost as low as Hirsch's.

"P-pa . . ." went Hirsch, biting off his cough. He stood up slowly. He had not released the Colonel's hand. "I'm—I'm going back there. They'll give her to the dogs if I'm not with her. I know, I saw them. I'll carry her up to the Col d'Anéou. No, higher up, she'd like to be higher up. To the Soum de Monné. I know, I'll build her a decent tomb, with big, with beautiful stones." His eyes were full of hatred as he fixed them again on Smith. "I knew it. They'll give her to the dogs if I'm not with her. I saw them, they were scrambling around at the end of the square. They were stretching out their pointed muzzles. But I ran away, I ran away."

He pulled the Colonel's hand to him as if to take it with him, then began to run. Smith leapt after him. He caught him at the edge of the terrace and forced him to a halt. "Where are you going?" he said, bringing

him back. He had just noticed that there was not a black hair on Hirsch's head. "Do you want to get arrested?"

"I've got to go back there," said Hirsch. His nose was pinched, and pallor covered his face. "Let me go."

"Sit down," said the Colonel. "We're attracting attention."

Smith tried to push Hirsch into a chair. He would not sit down. He clutched the American's forearm. His eyes bounded here and there, with their tip of flame in quest of a fire. "I shouldn't have," he gasped. "I shouldn't have left her. I've got to find out where they buried her. I don't want her to be alone. I don't want her to."

The two of them remained standing, holding each other. "Listen, Hirsch. I'll give you a note to a friend. You'll be received like a brother. You'll have some peace, some calm. You can stay as long as you like. Afterward, when you're rested, you can go up there. He will get papers for you. Have you got papers to travel with?"

"We have a visitor," said the Colonel, pointing with his cane.

A man was coming forward slowly between the tables on the terrace, wearing a soft hat. "Hirsch, sit down," said Smith.

The cough cut off a great shower of splinters in Hirsch's chest. "No," he said tonelessly. He had not released Smith's arm. The personage in the soft hat was in front of them, he looked at the two men standing and the man sitting down.

"Something you want?" Smith asked.

"Police," said the personage in the soft hat. He held his hands crossed behind his back, and he turned his back to the street. "Monsieur Aldous John Smith?" he inquired, pronouncing the name Aldoo Joan Smeet.

Smith confirmed his identity and the personage asked to see his papers. He presented his passport. Hirsch had seized his cough between his teeth and held it in their grip. He also held Smith's arm. The Colonel had placed the knob of his cane under his goatee. Jules Garrigue had ventured out on the terrace, just to have a peek at the sky. The policeman had freed his right hand, he was feeling the cover of the passport. He had not opened it.

"There's a warrant out for your arrest," he said. He spoke with his head down and his hat forward. "I'm going to have a look-in at my tobacco shop. It seems to me it's my day for tobacco. Let's say—ten minutes. Ten minutes all right?"

"Yes," said Smith. "Thanks."

"Oh, you know . . ." said the policeman. He handed back the passport and went off with slow steps, between the symmetrical tables. His fingers were feeling each other behind his back. Garrigue's face split open in a wide smile, at nothing in particular. The Colonel sniffed very rapidly and very loud. Smith asked Hirsch to sit down while he wrote the note he wanted to give him.

Hirsch shook his head, then let go of Smith's arm. He was on the point of saying something, but changed his mind. His heart was beating in the

hollow of his temple. He walked toward the exit in his unequal stride which broke the solitude, which broke him too. Again Smith leapt after him, and again they held onto each other. The Colonel also joined them. He had forgotten the monocle in his eye, and he leaned on his cane. "Smith, you must go," he said.

"You must go," Hirsch echoed.

"Hirsch, you come with me," said Smith. "I'll take you to my friend's house."

"You don't understand," said Hirsch. There was a sudden calm in his rasping voice which made it unrecognizable. "I've got to go back up there. I did it once already. I had come back from very far. With her."

"Wait," said Smith. He looked for the noise of the clock in his head, but all was quiet there. "Take this." He showed his passport to Hirsch, then slipped it into his pocket. "In Perpignan, at the Epi Rouge Café, ask for the proprietor. He'll put your photo in place of mine."

They followed him with their eyes as he went away. He crossed the square and disappeared in the direction of the water. "She—who was she?" the Colonel asked. "His wife?"

"His wife?" Smith repeated. Once, on a warm summer night, he had loved her. Perhaps it was on the Soum de Monné, where Hirsch will build her a decent tomb, with big, with beautiful stones. Suddenly he remembered that he had slipped Rosemary's picture between the pages of his passport. He looked at his hands, at the palms, then at the backs. "I don't know," he said. "I think she was more than a wife to him."

"It's time for you to go," said the old man. "And for me to sit down."

He sat down, bracing himself with his cane. There was an interval of silence. A string of trucks invaded the quai, going up toward the forts. Heroes helmeted in stamped sheet-iron opened their awkward mouths on their vacant smiles. "You, Colonel, what do you intend to do?"

"I? Why, enjoy life. I'm young, the spectacle is grand, the future is grandiose. Now then, go away."

"Adieu, Colonel," said Smith.

"Adieu. Don't forget your hat."

He did not forget his hat. At the corner of the Canebière he passed his policeman. They did not recognize each other. He walked with tranquil strides along his tranquil liberty. The Colonel was grandiose, the future was young. He was glad he had not told the Colonel of Marc Laverne's report from Paris that Ivan Stepanoff was dead, that Youra was probably dead too. The spectacle was varied enough without that, there was plenty for the old humanist to enjoy without that. Ashore on a planet where people put sugar on their lettuce, and sleep with a hundred floors on their stomachs, Yvonne Tervielle was writing American letters—"where is Ivan, where is Youra?"—as if no one died over there. He could not remember—did people die over there? "Where are they?" she demanded, already Americanized, already incapable of understanding that one was nowhere, very exactly nowhere, but in a foetal state, in an intra-uterine life between

a dead past and a future in gestation. Delirious joy of seeing oneself being born, of being thirsty at the moment of drowning. He went forward without haste through the great city consumed with delirium, through France through Europe consumed with hope. In a narrow street behind the central post office he saw a streetcar, real and logical with its wheels underneath and its pole above. Everything had its logic in this delirium this hope, even a streetcar.

He woke up two hours later at the cry of "Last stop, all off!" It was fine and dry and yellow in the rolling countryside. He walked with a jaunty step, accompanied by Emilio Lopez who sawed the arms off statues, by Gustave Hirsch who fought dogs for the body of Valerie, by Francine Lepage who had set fire to her hump. All was true and logical in delirium in hope dressed in warrants of arrest—Adrien de Pontillac whose name was beginning to appear in the presidential communiqués, Gervaise Drouault who probably knew something about her grandfather's millions, Pierre Musaraigne who was tortured in the Chave prison, Madame Odile who had found consolation in taking in brothel boarders, Gregor Wolfgang who had been loaded into a train for Poland the very day of his escape, and Audry and Esau and Probus and the Opitzes and the policemen and the rapacious consuls and the Mexican chargé d'affaires who was more imperturbable than an Aztec god and more honest than a gold piece and all the men and women whom he had known loved hated accompanied him through the yellow countryside at the tranquil gait of his tranquil liberty.

There was a gendarme before the gate, who saluted him. "Not many people left, M'sieu Smith . . ." he said. He swallowed the rest of his witticism, for Monsieur Matthieu was showing his menacing mustache. "It's that American, you know the one," he said, to excuse himself. "Oh, if it's that American," said the boss, pushing up his mustache with the back of his hand. He had it in mind to have a bit of a chat with the foreigner, he had heard that America had not been stingy toward his predecessor the colonel of motorized cavalry, a decent white wine in cases of twelve they said, but the foreigner had already gone into the courtyard and it would not be dignified to run after him.

The sun was slanting in over the great buildings with the gangrenous walls. Freight cars stood at the left, between sky and barbed wire. Groups of men dragged their feet in the dust. Smith approached someone, asking where he would find Professor Papsky.

The someone wore several months' growth of beard and the filth of several centuries. He examined Smith from head to foot, calculating his chances. "What are you? Czesky?"

"I'm stateless," said Smith.

"That's a new one," said the other. "We never saw that here before." He spurted a stringy jet of spittle, which he ground conscientiously into the earth. "All right, and then what? Even stateless persons are born someplace, no?"

"I was born in the United States," said Smith.

The other man stepped back a pace, then walked around the new arrival. In his eyes, with their lids innocent of lashes, a gleam of wonderment lighted. "My name is Ali Baba. I'm the Grand Vizier of Turkey," he said. "And I've seen liars. But a liar like you—phooey! I thought I might sell you a little something, a bit of sausage, a pinch of tobacco, but you're no customer for me. What are you selling?"

"I've sold everything already," said Smith. "I'm looking for Professor Papsky."

He found him behind the "Aryan building" in the middle of a circle of men squatting on the ground. He drew near without haste. Then he sat on his heels. No one paid any attention to him.

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