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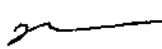
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ETHEL MANNIN

THE DARK FOREST

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"La coeur a ses raisons—que la raison ne connaît point."
PASCAL.



JARROLD'S *Publishers* (LONDON) *Ltd.*

Founded in 1770

47 Princes Gate, S.W.7

LONDON * NEW YORK * MELBOURNE * SYDNEY

To
ALBERT LYNDEN

PRINTED IN
GREAT BRITAIN,
AT THE ANCHOR
PRESS, TIPTREE,
:: ESSEX ::
1946

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I have purposely not specified the years of the action of this story, though that the scene is contemporary is obvious. Similarly I have not specified the nationality of the people, nor identified their countries 'Ling' could be any little town in any neutral country over-run by any nation at war. The invaders could be any country that considered it expedient to occupy such a country. 'Captain Paul Dettin' could be any ardent young patriot supporting the ideology of his country, dedicated to its cause and blind to its defects. I have been interested in the war of emotion and intellect between people of irreconcilable ideas drawn together by a common human need. If the reader, for the sake of convenience, insists on labelling them Fascists and Anti-Fascists, I shall not quarrel with such cataloguing. It will serve well enough. But for the author, at least, it is not the political definition which is important, but the human conflict arising out of fundamentally opposed attitudes. Emotion asks the mind, 'What is truth?' and like Pilate does not stay for an answer. That the heart has its reasons is the reason for writing the book.

E. M.

PROLOGUE

THE Vesteralte farmstead was a few miles out from the little town of Ling; it huddled at the foot of the mountains that stretched like a barrier against the north. In front of it the valley flowed green and tranquil to the edge of the town. Beyond the town, and visible from the head of the valley, was the Sound, smooth and shining, and dotted with islands. What lay beyond Ling Sound, Lingdale, and Ling itself, was hardly of any interest to the inhabitants of the town and the valley. A distant thunder of guns could sometimes be heard across the water. But it was all infinitely remote. The war could never reach to that quiet gentle land of still waters and green pastures. There were a few differences, of course. There were fewer steamers up and down the Sound and calling at the islands; there were no tourists to pick up and put off during the summer months. And the export of dairy produce and eggs was drastically reduced, shipping space being wanted by the warring countries for other things. Nor were the same imports possible, and land that for generations had not known the plough had to be turned up and given over to corn. It was not possible to remain altogether untouched by the inferno raging in the outer world, but the sleepy peacefulness persisted. People still gathered along the wooden jetty on summer evenings to watch the steamer come in, lacking any greater excitement to the day, for though there were no longer the strange faces of the foreign tourists there was always the chance of a stranger from one of the islands or from farther up the Sound. On fine evenings, too, the people of Ling promenaded in the town square, which once a week was also the market-place, and which was flanked by ancient municipal buildings with stepped gables. On fete days they wore national costume, with coloured ribbons streaming from their hats. On Sundays they went to church. The three most important people in the place were Peter Krube, the mayor, Steven Tronder, the minister, and Ivor Bard, the doctor; these three were co-equal in importance, and were virtually the local government, for the mayor looked after the business affairs of the citizens of Ling, and the dale folk, the minister looked after their spiritual affairs, and the doctor looked after their bodies. There were lesser people—there were the bank-manager, and the schoolmaster, and various tradespeople; and apart from them altogether, neither higher nor lower, there were the Vesteraltres, whose family had farmed Lingdale lands for hundreds of years.

When Victor Vesteralte married a girl from the capital he moved

away from the big home farm and took the little place at the foot of the mountains, at the other side of the valley. As the youngest son it was expected of him that he would move away when he married. In due course his brother Joseph would marry and leave home, leaving the eldest brother, Alun, to carry on after the father's death and raise up a family in the old house. All the Vesteralte brothers were tall and broad and blue-eyed and fair, but it was generally considered that Victor was the handsomest and the most likeable, so that it was not surprising that though he was the youngest he was the first to marry.

The girl he married was a school-teacher. There was nothing very remarkable about her. She was small and quiet and fair, with gentle eyes and a sweet smile. Victor could have had a choice of the prettiest girls in Ling—and there were some quite remarkably pretty ones—but he met this girl at a school prize-giving he was attending in the role of uncle, having a married sister living in the capital, and from the moment he smiled down into the serious brown eyes that looked at him over his nephew's head he did not look at anyone else, and within a month he had married her and brought her back to the valley.

It was spring, then, when the blossom of the orchards of the scattered farms lay like puffs of smoke, or drifts of low cloud, in the valley. Victor and his bride came down by train from the capital, where they were married, and drove out from Ling in a decorated hay-waggon. The mane and tail of the grey cart-horse were plaited with red and yellow ribbons; the sides of the waggon were threaded with willow-palm and branches of wild apple-blossom and young larch. Victor drove the waggon himself, with his bride beside him. The body of the waggon was occupied by his family, the minister, and a young man who scraped folk-tunes out of a fiddle all the way out of the town and up the valley. People at the sides of the roads flung flowers and paper rose-petals. When they reached the house Victor lifted his bride down from the waggon, carried her across the yard and over the threshold of the house, and then a great crowd of them sat down to a feast his mother had prepared. The sun shone, faces grew flushed with food and drink, there was a stamping of dancing feet on the floor of the barn, nothing more formidable overhead than the gleaming white wings of gulls, and amid so much merriment no one heard the boom of guns in the distant outer world.

Young Mrs. Vesteralte was not altogether new to farming life, despite the fact of her having been a school-teacher, for she came of farming stock. The snug little house delighted her and she took a pride in keeping it neat and shining. She was an efficient house-wife, and the farm-girl, Sonia, who also helped in the house, quickly taught her dairy work. She and Victor, with Sonia, and the farm-hand,

Greig, managed the farm between them, and the days and nights flowed into each other in an unbroken tranquillity.

On Sunday evenings, after the milking, young Mr. and Mrs. Vesteralte drove into Ling in the trap, which normally took the milk-churns, to church. This was the great social occasion of the week, for at church they met 'everyone'. Very often they brought the minister back to supper with them. He was their great friend. He was thirty, Victor's age, a tall, thin young man with a sympathetic manner and an impassioned devotion to a living Christianity. They were very fond of him. He liked music, and was starved of it in Ling, and it was a great pleasure to him after supper at the farm when Victor's wife lit the candles at each side of the piano and played and sang the folk-songs of their country, and some of the more beautiful of their hymns. He would sprawl sunk in his chair, puffing at a long-stemmed pipe, his lean, ascetic face, rapt. Young Mrs. Vesteralte had a voice as sweet as her gentle face, and happiness and a sense of communion flowed between them, and a deep peace, and content.

Then Steven Tronder would walk back under the stars to the town, thinking with love and gratitude of the essential goodness of people like the Vesteralties, not only the young newly married couple, but the family at the bigger farm, and of all those simple valley people living their quiet lives among the green pastures. Theirs was the good life, he would think, the life of the good earth, and there was this same goodness throughout the length and breadth of the little country—men and women living quietly and simply and contentedly, close to the soil. Even in the towns, it seemed to him, there was very little of the thieving and cheating and the exploitation of fellow humans commonly inseparable from trade. Taken as a whole the people were good. Steven Tronder was himself a very simple person, and he believed implicitly in the fundamental goodness of human beings, in the spark of God in every man. Sometimes his heart was so full of this love he felt for all men that he came near to a mystic ecstasy. He sought in all things, humbly and passionately, to live in the imitation of Christ. People recognised his sincerity, and all liked and respected him, and many loved him, young Mrs. Vesteralte not least of them.

She was so happy, in the love she felt for her husband, and the different kind of love she felt for Steven, in her pride in her home and the little farm, in her pleasure in the peaceful beauty of the valley, that sometimes the whole gentle flow of life seemed unreal. At other times it was the outside world, with all its horrors, that seemed unreal, like a vision of hell, in which there is intellectual belief but no emotional knowledge. On Sunday evenings after church she liked, when it was fine, to walk along the water-front with Victor. She liked the straggle

of gabled wooden houses looking out under the eyebrows of their eaves to the islands growing dark with sunset. She liked the tumble of bells from the town-hall on the square, and the querulous cries of the gulls, and the smell of the sea blowing up the Sound. Merely to walk beside her tall husband, leaning on his arm, sometimes for a moment leaning her head against his shoulder, sharing with him the familiar sights and sounds and smells, was a deep joy to her. She knew, deeply, the contentment of the woman who is with the man to whom she belongs in flesh and spirit. This sense of belonging was with her always, in all things. They understood each other without need of words. They laughed at the same things, reacted in the same way to people and events. That was what being married really meant, she would think, that deep sense of belonging. She did not need that Victor should tell her that he loved her ; he was not a romantic lover ; it didn't matter ; it had never mattered ; he was something much more important to her—her husband, her refuge and strength. Her love for him was all tenderness. She longed for his children. When she knew that she was pregnant the cup of her happiness brimmed over.

By the summer it seemed strange to them both that they had been married only three months ; her twenty-five and his thirty years before they met seemed remote and unreal ; only their life together had reality, and it was not to be measured in days and weeks and months ; it was an eternity of fulfilment. She was thinking this the summer morning she stood beside him whilst he was harnessing the pony to the trap. That particular summer morning which she was to remember all her life. It was market-day and he was going into the town. It was a still blue day with a thin mist promising heat. Presently the valley would be flooded with sunshine and a haze would quiver over the islands that seemed now to float in space, water and mist and sky fusing.

"It's going to be hot, later on," Victor said. "You want to take it easy." Now that her condition was beginning to be apparent he was anxious about her.

"You want to lie down in the afternoon," he insisted. "Sonia can manage the dairy."

She smiled, loving him for his care for her.

"I'm not ill. I've never been better in my life ! And it's good for a woman to keep active, you know——"

"All the same——"

He fastened the whip in the socket beside the driver's seat, then bent and kissed her, gently.

"Take care of yourself, now."

"You too," she said.

He laughed. "The perils of the big city ?"

He climbed up into the trap and picked up the reins.

"Come back soon."

"As soon as I can," he promised her.

He clicked to the pony and she held the yard gate open for him.

Half way down the cart track that ran out to the road he looked back over his shoulder, waving to her with his whip.

She stood leaning on the gate, smiling, watching till the trap was out of sight.

2

Later in the day, when the mists had lifted from the valley and the sky was a clear blue, the air became full of the trundle of aeroplanes. The noise seemed to fill the whole sky, the whole valley, yet no 'planes were visible.

Then it was as though a flock of gulls was released from somewhere out of sight in the blue, a flock of gulls flying inland from the sea, gulls drifting on the wind. . . . But there was no wind, and the drifting whiteness had not the movement of birds' wings. The flecks of whiteness against the blue did not wheel and circle, and as they drifted in it became clear that they were not gulls, nor any kind of bird. . . .

The people of Ling lifted their faces to the blue sky and the drifting whiteness ; they looked up from the market-place and out of windows and from streets, and from cottages and farmsteads in the valley. They saw but could not believe what was happening. They saw with their eyes but could not accept with their minds. They knew with their minds but could not accept with their eyes.

They saw the paratroops drop out of the sky and knew, long before they could realise it, that the unthinkable had happened and their country was invaded. On a summer's morning it had happened, literally out of the blue—the war had come to Ling. . . .

Whilst the parachutes drifted across and down the sky silence had fallen on the market-place and in the streets ; people had become speechless before the shock of not being able to believe their eyes. when the sky was empty again speech was released in a wild babble. No one knew what to do. Policemen blew whistles for no reason except that they had to do something. Windows were slammed down. People began running in all directions. There was a hurried reharnessing of horses to traps and waggons. To get home, to get back to the family, was the thought uppermost in every mind in the market-place and the

streets, and within the houses women went white with terror and cried the names of their absent men.

The terror within the houses, and the panic outside, intensified with the sound of men marching. The market-place was still crowded when the invading troops marched in, and again speech was suddenly silenced, but now the air was alive not with bewilderment and dread but with anger and consternation. Men stood up in their pony-traps and farm-carts watching the foreign soldiers, and suddenly a farmer snatched at the gun slung over his shoulder and shouted, hoarsely, "What are we doing, standing here and letting them march in? Shoot the bastards!"

His face was white with a fanatic rage as he brought the gun up to his shoulder. There was a crack, and a soldier suddenly pitched forward out of the marching ranks and lay motionless on the ground. To the onlookers it all seemed to happen in the same moment, the crack of the farmer's gun, the soldier dropping out of the ranks to lie in a heap on the ground, and the sudden shout of a command in a foreign tongue. The marching column of men stopped dead, like a machine braked suddenly. The officer who had halted the company rapped out another command and the soldiers swung round facing into the market-place. Another command and their rifles were at their shoulders. Another and they had fired into the petrified crowd. Another and they were marching on again.

A number of people lay in the market-place, crumpled up in strange positions. Blood ran between the cobbles. Some of the people were wounded; others dead.

Among the dead was Victor Vesteralte.

3

The troops occupied the town-hall and other municipal buildings. They had machine-guns trained on to the square, and machine-gun posts at all entrances to the town, and covering the water-front. It was all done very quickly and efficiently. When ambulances were rushed up to the square from the town hospital there was no interference. Many of the farmers collected their cattle from the market-place before leaving; what was left behind the invaders droye out to the fields.

Within two hours of their arrival they had cleared a space in the square and had a military band giving a concert. It was a very good concert.

But the square, with its dark pools of blood, remained deserted,

and there was not a soul on the streets. People peered fearfully behind their windows. Many closed their shutters.

During the afternoon, proclamations signed by Colonel Anton, the Commandant, were pasted up all over the town notifying the townspeople that everything must go on as before; transport must run to schedule, shops remain open, all social services be maintained. The town was under martial law, and everyone must be within doors by sundown or risk being shot at sight by the patrols. There would be the minimum of interference with normal civilian life, provided the required co-operation was forthcoming; the penalty for failure to co-operate was death.

Whilst the proclamation bills were being pasted up the colonel stood at a window of the town-hall overlooking the square. He frowned at the sight of the wrecked cattle-pens, the overturned stalls, the ugly patches of blood. He regretted that incident exceedingly. It need never have happened. People were so foolish. There must be no more such incidents. They were quite unnecessary, and they offended his orderly, efficient mind. For their own sakes he hoped the Ling townsfolk would behave sensibly from now on.

4

Everything went on—but not the same. The shops were all open at the usual time and they closed at the usual time. The children went to school. On Sundays the church-bell called the people in from the scattered outlying hamlets. Trains came into the station on time. At mid-day the little painted wooden figures revolved round the town-hall clock and the bells chimed the familiar folk-song. But now nobody stood in the town square to watch and listen. And it was mostly foreign soldiers who came off the trains and landed from the shipping that put into the little harbour. The cinema was open as usual, changing its programme weekly, in the usual way, but it was patronised only by the soldiers. And after sundown there were only the patrols on the streets, and all the windows were dark, because within a few days of the occupation Ling knew the meaning of air-raids.

There could be no complaints about the behaviour of the invaders. Their conduct was exemplary. Nobody was raped or insulted or cheated; there was no looting of shops or private houses. There was no swaggering or bullying or arrogance. The foreign soldiers always made way on the pavements for civilians; they smiled at the children—and took no offence when the children stuck out their tongues at them. They were in all respects civil—even tentatively friendly. It

was part of the rigid discipline. Good manners were the order of the day, so there were good manners. The people of Ling were not under orders, but their conduct was equally uniform. They were silent and sullen. In the presence of the foreigners conversation ceased instantly. A sentence would be broken off in the middle, eyes would stare into space. When the soldiers came into the little cafe bars people would swallow their drinks hurriedly and go. In the restaurants people would get up and leave food on their plates if a soldier came and sat at the table. A civilian looking at a newspaper or a book at a street kiosk would instantly put it down and move away if a uniformed figure came and stood beside him. Women pulled their children close into them when soldiers came down the street—the soldiers never went singly, always in twos and threes—and edged into shop doorways, or turned their backs, gazing blankly into shop-windows. The band played every afternoon in the market-square ; it was always an excellent programme, well rendered, but nobody ever listened. Windows would be ostentatiously slammed down the moment the conductor lifted his baton.

There were people, of course, who were obliged to speak to the invaders. The mayor was one ; the station-master another, and people serving in shops and cafes had sometimes to reply to a question; but from the mayor to the humblest bar-tender the minimum of words was used ; wherever possible Yes or No was made to suffice. And from the mayor to the humblest bar-tender the people were full of hate and fear and bitterness—the bitterness of a deep, smouldering resentment. The mayor asked permission to address the people, either in person from the steps of the town-hall, or by proclamations to be posted in the town, or through the local paper ; he explained to the commandant that he wished to exhort the people to courage in the severe trial that had overtaken them ; the people were bewildered by the calamity, and were terrified by the air-raids ; he felt that a message from him would hearten them. He explained that he felt that he stood in the relation of a father to them. He would not like them to think he had deserted them—that he had gone over to the enemy. . . . He was troubled, explaining all this to the commandant ; he groped for words ; he could express himself well enough among friends, on the town council ; indeed he had made many good vigorous, concisely-expressed speeches in that very room which was now the commandant's private office. But the commandant was a foreigner, and it was he, now, who ran affairs, and the mayor counted for nothing. He lay awake in bed at nights wondering if the people thought he had 'gone over', that he was collaborating. It seemed terribly important to him that he should somehow contrive to let them know. . . . There

was this terrible feeling of insecurity everywhere, and suspicion, and dread.

Peter Krube had a deep sense of civic responsibility. He ran a tailoring business in the town when he was not busy with municipal affairs. It was an old established business and he was proud of it; and he was proud of Ling, and honoured that he had been elected mayor after serving faithfully as councillor for many years. He was a short tubby little man with a down-drooping moustache; he looked what he was, a family man, a small-town businessman, kindly, a little self-important, but this self-importance balanced by a sincere devotion to his conception of duty. In the old days—before the invaders—he had always had a certain dignity, in spite of being short and fat and bald; but since the invasion he seemed to have sagged; he had sagged physically and inside himself; he was full of hate and fear and resentment, like everyone else. He felt old—and helpless. He felt that he could not compete with the colonel—who was the same age as himself, but uninformed, erect, full of the power of authority. He was aware of himself as a small-town tradesman—and a kind of office-boy to the colonel. If he could have been a commandant in a smart uniform, with soldiers at his command—ah then—then—he would have been one of the bravest men in Ling, and the colonel would have had to respect him. Now he had to humble himself, asking permission merely to address the people. He was an old, sagging man, going cap in hand to the foreign officer who had no right under the sun to be there. . . . It was the last indignity; but he had to do it, just to let the people know that he was still there.

The colonel's face looked to him as though it were carved out of rock. He searched it for a recognisable human 'landmark', but the eyes were pale and cold, the lips expressed nothing but firmness; there was a terrible impersonality in that rock-like face, and it added to the mayor's dejection. You could hope for nothing from such a man; there was nothing in him to which you could appeal on the ordinary human levels. He was foreign in every sense, far beyond difference of language and nationality; he was something foreign to human nature—as the mayor of Ling understood it. All the time he was speaking the colonel looked at him with his pale cold eyes; he listened with the attention of a man listening to a language he understands but upon which he must concentrate; he listened with an air of inexhaustible patience, like a man determined to be just at all costs.

When the mayor's words had trailed away into silence he said, picking his way carefully in the foreign tongue, "The people of this town are very well aware that you are still the mayor, and that you are alive and well. I see no need for you to address them. As to what

you call deserting them, going over to the enemy, here I do not understand you. Military necessity has compelled us to occupy your country; we regret this necessity. We are not your enemy. If you have an enemy it is those who drop bombs upon the homes of your defenceless civilians-----"

The mayor lifted his head at that. He was no longer shambling. The commandant wasn't going to get away with that!

"They didn't bomb us till you came here!" His heart beat very fast as he said it, but afterwards it gave him satisfaction to remember that he had said it.

But you cannot argue with a rock disguised as a human being.

"If you have no further requests," the colonel said, and glanced at the soldier who stood by the door.

The mayor said, his heart still plunging, "Only to ask you to go and leave us in peace. We are a neutral country. You've no right to drag us into your wars!"

The colonel motioned the soldier at the door. The man stepped forward and laid his hand on the mayor's arm. The mayor looked up at him, bewildered. It came to him that the soldier had a face like the colonel, though he was thirty years or so younger.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourselves—all of you!" He looked from the young soldier to the colonel. His face was flushed. Afterwards he wondered how he had dared. Then he only knew the blind rage that tore the words out of him, out of his plunging heart.

The soldier propelled him to the door, pushed him out into the corridor. A door slammed, and the mayor of Ling shambled down the corridor towards the soldiers who stood guarding the entrance. He came out into the pale clear sunshine. There was a midday tumble of bells, and a gleam of gulls' wings over the town square; there was a clatter of waggon wheels on cobbles, and women hurried with shopping baskets. Everything was the same and everything was different.

He came down the steps of the town-hall and one or two people greeted him, but no one stopped; people no longer stopped to chat and pass the time of day. No one smiled. He was the mayor; he had always been respected; he had presided at mayoral banquets; he had been the most important person in the town; a kind of king, in a small way—but then it was only a small country, and the king himself had only a small palace, and rode a bicycle in the streets like anyone else—and now he was nothing, nobody, just a small-town tradesman going cap in hand into the august presence of the uniformed foreigner with his ribbons and his medals and his highly polished buttons and his bodyguard with their fixed bayonets. . . .

The mayor of Ling shambled away down the street, an old, de-

jected, deflated man, bolstering up his pride with the reflection that at least he had stood up to the commandant. "You've no right to drag us, a neutral country, into your wars." It was something to have said that. He would tell his wife what he had said to the commandant. It would get around. People would know that he hadn't deserted them, that he hadn't 'gone over'. . . . But he felt shaken and ill, because he had been upset. When you were getting on in years it did you no good to be upset like that. . . .

5

Whilst the mayor was having his interview with the commandant the young captain who had given his company the order to fire upon the crowd in the market-place was interviewing the Vesteralte brothers. He had driven out with a couple of his men to instruct the two young men to report within a week to the commanding officer in the north for work in the ore mines. The men and the women must carry on the farms.

The young captain was quite pleasant, appearing not to notice the silence and stoniness of the young men, or the glowering looks of the old man. There were no protests or arguments.

"You understand? You will report without fail on Friday at the latest."

The young men nodded, and the captain saluted, turned smartly on his heel and strode back to the car waiting in the lane.

The Vesteralte brothers stood in the yard in which the interview had taken place and watched the car until it was out of sight. Then they looked at each other.

Joseph said, "You know what the minister said to us the other night—if we all refuse we can defeat them. They can't shoot all of us!"

Alun nodded. "But we must be organised. We must be a properly organised resistance movement."

They looked at each other and their eyes shone, and the same thought stood in both their minds, "If Victor were here!"

The curfew made meetings difficult; the patrols were everywhere after sundown, even in the lonely valleys. But Steven Tronder went about all day and every day on his bicycle, calling at farms and cottages, taking messages, giving instructions, advice, warnings. The whole resistance movement was centred in him. He had a strong ally in young Mrs. Vesteralte. Because of the curfew he could no longer cycle out to the farm at the foot of the mountains where she still lived,

but he could and did meet her openly in the town during the day-time. The shock of her husband's death that bright summer day had terminated her pregnancy in miscarriage. She had been seriously ill and she had not wished to live, which had hindered her progress. Steven Tronder visited her in hospital and it was he who gave her the will to live. He told her of the attempt being made to conscript the young men for work on speeding-up the getting out of the ore in the north, and of the non-cooperative spirit moving amongst the young men.

"Joseph and Alun will refuse when they are ordered to report," he told her.

"They will be shot," she said.

"They cannot shoot them all ! The resistance isn't going on only in Ling and Lingdale, you see, but throughout the length and breadth of the country ! A few people might be shot, but they cannot shoot a whole nation !"

She lay in the hospital bed turning this thought over in her mind, and she thought of Victor, and how, quite certainly, he would stand firm with Joseph and Alun and Steven, and she knew that she would have stood by Victor, and that now she had no choice but to stand by the things for which he would have stood. Now she was impatient to get well, to be strong and well again, doing what she could in this secret war against the invaders. Now there was some point in living, after all, some outlet for the hate and bitterness. She didn't understand Steven when he insisted that there must be no hate, and his patient attempted explanation of his assertion angered her. Was a woman not to hate the murderers of her husband ? Steven said No ; Jesus in the extremity of physical and spiritual agony on the cross could pray, 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.' We had, somehow, to offer up the same prayer.

But his pleading only made her angry—almost to the point of hating him, and in his terrible pity for the pain in her he did not pursue the argument. But he prayed that in time she might cease to hate, because only then, so he believed, could peace and healing come to her.

When she left hospital she went back to the home she had shared with Victor, despite old Mrs. Vesteralte's attempts to persuade her to come and live with the family. Steven also believed that she might be less unhappy and lonely if she went and lived with Victor's family, but he knew that her heart was set on continuing to live at the farm to which she had come as a bride only a few months ago, not in spite of the associations and memories, but because of them because they were **all she had left** of Victor, and she clung **to them**. When she was **well**

enough to go home Steven and old Mrs. Vesteralte drove out to the hospital in the farm trap and they took her back together. Grief seemed to have frozen in her; where had been her stricken heart was now only a kind of hard core of hate.

When she was strong enough she went to work in the school in Ling. She wanted to live independently of the family; she could not run the farm without Victor. And as a teacher she was in a useful position for sending, through the children, messages to men who were proposing to resist the conscription of labour the invaders were seeking to impose. Periodically the doctor visited the school for medical examination of the children, under the State scheme. He seized the opportunity for a word with Victor Vesteralte's widow.

He said, "Yesterday the minister came to see me to get my support for this non-cooperation movement. I told him it was madness! I hope you will have nothing to do with it. We are a small and helpless nation in the grip of a powerful one. For us, now, the lesser evil is co-operation with the invader."

She stared at him. "You say this to me—Victor Vesteralte's widow?"

"I say it to you *because* you are Victor Vesteralte's widow! I can understand what you, and all the women who lost husbands and sons and sweethearts that day in the market-square, must feel about the invaders, but I say to you, as I go about saying to all the others, that co-operation is the only way to avoid further shootings, further tragedies. This resistance movement can only mean further bloodshed."

She said, stubbornly, "They can't shoot a whole nation."

"They won't have to. They will shoot only a few—the leaders of the movement. The minister, and a few others. That is all that will be necessary."

"Isn't it enough that our government had offered no resistance to the invasion? Aren't we humiliated enough as a nation? Isn't it up to individuals now to show that in spite of our government we are not a nation of cowards?" Her voice trembled with anger.

The doctor shrugged. "It's not a time for heroics. By offering no resistance to the occupation our government avoided thousands of deaths."

"At the price of national honour!"

"It's purely a question of point of view whether national honour is or is not more important than human life. I cannot subscribe to the theory that it is. It all seems false to me. But then my function in society is to save life, not assist in destroying it. Good morning."

Dr. Ivor Bard was very popular in Ling. He was about forty, a

quiet, serious man with an intelligent, sensitive face. That he hated all the things for which the invaders stood was well known. It had not occurred to anyone that he would stand apart from the resistance movement. Steven had counted implicitly on his support. He felt that it would enormously encourage and hearten the people to find the doctor and the minister working side by side. Now that their mayor was only a figure-head—scarcely that, even—to whom else should they look for guidance? It would not be fair, Steven urged, to ask poor old Peter Krube to come in with them; obviously as the mayor he must work in as best he could with the commandant; but the doctor and the minister were not so bound, "And the people look to us," Steven had insisted.

But Dr. Bard had as strongly counter-insisted, "There has been bloodshed enough! No good can come of it. We must do the best for ourselves." He smiled. "Life at all costs—at any price!" He added quickly, "I know what you're going to say—you are going to tell me that it's better to die on your feet than live on your knees. I can only say that I don't agree, and my disagreement is profound—my whole attitude to life is involved in it. Life is the supreme boon—all else seems to me so much heroics!"

Steven demanded, bitterly, "Would you wish a patient in the last agonising stages of incurable cancer to live on—on the principle of life being the supreme boon?"

Bard answered quietly, "I have known such patients wish to live."

"And those who loved them and saw their sufferings—did they wish it?"

"Yes."

The minister's face was wet with sweat. This to him was a spiritual agony. All the dead of the market-square cried out to him, not for revenge but for resistance to further evil.

"There are more terrible things than to die. To die can be glorious, just as to live in some circumstances can be shameful. Jesus being lifted up drew all men unto Him . . ."

The doctor's smile was not cynical but very sad, the expression of an infinite regret.

"Did he? Would the world be plunged in war now, if that were so? Wasn't his death the climax of his magnificent failure?"

The minister lifted his grey agonised face. "No!" he almost shouted, "No! To believe that is to have died already in the spirit!"

The doctor sighed. He said, like one thinking aloud, "'Lord, I believe—help thou my unbelief!'"

It was after that that he made a point of seeing Victor Vesteralte's widow.

He saw her again the day before 'zero hour'—the last date on which the notified young men could report for the north. He went to the school as the children were streaming out and intercepted her in the yard. It was a wild wet autumn day; he had no umbrella and she sheltered him under hers; it gave them the excuse to walk closely so that they could converse in low tones. He would have liked to have taken her to a cafe to discuss everything over a cup of coffee, but it was unwise; people didn't care to discuss private matters in public places any more; there was always the sense of being watched, of eavesdroppers near. To have taken her to his house—had she consented to go—might have looked suspicious. Everyone's motives were suspect since the occupation.

She looked worn and ill, he thought; she had never been beautiful, but she had had a bloom of youth and happiness on her that had seemed to light her up from within; all that was quenched now; she looked strained and old. Only the hate that burned in her kept her going, he thought, generated a kind of nervous energy. Take that from her and she had nothing to live for. And it was a terrible thing when the light by which you lived was the black flame of hate. With Steven it was different; there was no hate in him. He had only this impassioned belief in resisting evil by refusing to co-operate with the forces of evil. He would take the enemy into his house and give him food and drink and shelter, but he would die rather than co-operate with him in the purposes of the war he had forced upon this helpless neutral country. He had a case, Bard thought, but it was a case which would almost certainly mean his own death and that of many others—whilst achieving nothing.

He took young Mrs. Vesteralte's arm as they walked with heads bent against the rain across the school-yard and out into the street.

He said, "I want to urge you to dissuade your brothers-in-law from resisting the conscription. You cannot wish your husband's parents to lose their two remaining sons—and that is what it means if they refuse to go tomorrow."

"The old people are behind the boys. They want Victor avenged—as I do."

"They want more killings? Perhaps they don't realise it means that? Perhaps you don't realise it?"

"They won't stay to be taken. They will hide up in the mountains. There will be bands of young men hiding up in the mountains."

He said, violently, "It's madness! Bands of young men armed with shot-guns—against professional soldiers with tommy-guns!"

"Men with tommy-guns have been known to fall to a sniper's bullet!"

He tried another line. "The first person they'll take will be your friend the minister. He is not likely to go on the run, or to arm himself even with a shot-gun ! Does that mean nothing to you ?"

"They wouldn't dare to shoot the minister ! Any more than they would the mayor."

"They will shoot anyone inconvenient to them. There is no room for sentimental considerations in modern war."

"Steven might be more effective dead than living."

He said, with a bitter hopelessness, "If I could get you all safely locked up for the duration of the occupation by betraying you all to the commandant I would ! I'd have you all certified insane."

He withdrew his arm from hers. "Very soon now, if they don't shoot you too, you will be all alone. You'll know where to find me when you need a friend."

"A collaborationist, you mean !"

He felt the impact of the word as though she had spat at him.

He said, quietly, "It is your word. In a war words lose their meanings. The whole country is collaborating—or the shops and cinemas wouldn't still be open, or the trains still running."

"We've got to live." There was great bitterness in her voice.

"Precisely. We've got to do the best for ourselves in evil circumstances. I'd like you and Steven to consider whether you are doing the best for yourself and those who follow you. I'll leave you now."

He pressed her elbow and turned away. She went on down the wet street, heading for the country and the loneliness of the farm at the foot of the mountains. She was filled with a deep contempt for Ivor Bard. 'Collaborationist'. It was a word which was beginning to be bandied about in Ling. She was glad she had called him that.

Long afterwards she was to remember.

Dr. Bard walked on filled with a deep pity for young Mrs. Vesteralte.

Colonel Anton was averse to unnecessary shootings. He considered that the captain who had ordered the company to fire into the crowd had been too extreme. It would have been sufficient—in the first instance—to fire over the heads of the people, as a warning. If the warning went unheeded, then, ruthlessness by all means. But these young officers, who were not professional soldiers, were apt to be hot-headed. They had the defect of their virtues. The colonel's attitude was not dictated by anything approaching the sentimental.

He believed, simply, in efficiency. It was wasteful to shoot people who might be useful. In every living person there was a potential co-operativeness. Nothing could be less co-operative than the dead. Violence indiscriminately used was merely wasteful—inefficient.

He was very well aware that under the guise of his clerical duties the minister of Ling was going about the town and the countryside inciting young men who had been conscripted for the ore-mines to resist. He had the minister watched for a few days, studied carefully the reports brought to him, and then sent for this misguided young man—for so, in his patient way, he thought of him.

It was not the first time Colonel Anton had seen Steven Tronder. He had gone with two other officers into the church one day, attracted by the notice of an organ recital. They sat unobtrusively in a back pew, the colonel in the middle, a young captain on his right hand, an even younger lieutenant on his left. They sat stiffly and silently, their manner and bearing in ail respects correct, looking straight ahead of them at the deep reds and blues and golds of the 15th-century window above the altar. It crossed the colonel's mind that he must give orders to have the window removed and stored in a deep cellar now that the town was getting air-raids; a pity if anything should happen to it. The church was fairly full. No one turned a head to look at the three officers, and no one joined them in their pew. From where he sat the colonel could see the organist clearly; the thin ascetic face reminded him of someone. . . .

Whilst he was remembering the church filled with the roll and thunder of the *D Minor Toccata and Fugue*. The colonel closed his eyes and gave himself up to it. He gave himself up to it as some men give themselves up to bliss in the arms of a loved woman; as others give themselves up to ecstasy in the beatific vision of the saint. Of the ecstasy of the lover Colonel Anton knew no more than of the ecstasy of the saint; but with the ecstasy of music he was—at rare intervals—familiar. At the fine clean-cut ending of the fugue he passed his fingers over his moustache and, very faintly, sighed. It was a long time since he had known so deep a satisfaction. There was a slight movement of relaxation, of tension released, throughout the audience, and a moment of silence in which a page turned, a programme leaflet rustled, then, soft as the drift of a rose-petal to the grass on a still summer's day, the opening bars of an arrangement of *Jesu bieber meine Freude* were laid upon the air. The colonel knew the familiar lift of the spirit, as though it rose on wings of music to meet the voices that came in with their angelic joy. Angelic joy, angelic bliss. The melody strengthened and climbed to the throne of God on high, enthroned in light, and the voices strengthened to meet it, fusing with it.

till the fields of heaven opened like a flower, and earth and heaven fused in celestial light.

The colonel ran his fingers along his moustache. The firm, gentle, insistence of the melody, the glad confidence of the choir—this was perfection—beauty absolute. . . . The captain shaded his eyes with a hand, his head bowed, as though in prayer. He could quite easily have wept. He was young and emotional and homesick, and had a sense of his soul being dragged up by the roots. The colonel never took his eyes from the face of the organist.

He thought that he looked on the face of a man inspired.

That music and the expression on that face were what Colonel Anton understood by beauty. That beauty for which he had every use but so regrettably little time.

When the cantata finished he got up, motioned to his accompanying officers, and all three quietly left the church before the next piece began. He had not intended staying long, but in any case after that experience—for it had been for him nothing less, an emotional and spiritual experience—he could not have listened to anything else.

He had known that the minister was working against him, but that was the first time he had seen him. Now he was looking at him again, at the other side of the big desk in what had once been the mayor's private office, and he realised that he had a fanatic to deal with. He had seen that fanatic blaze in men's eyes before—usually when they faced firing-squads and died shouting the slogans of their beliefs. He knew very well that in this thin gaunt young minister he beheld a man not afraid to die. He suppressed a sigh. Those who had a natural fear of death were so much more easily dealt with. There was nothing, really, you could do with a man who had no fear of death. There was torture, of course, but the colonel had a fastidious distaste for such tricks. He was first and last a soldier. He preferred to leave the more fanciful forms of coercion to the politicians. The firing-squad was a clean military method—clean and correct and traditional. It had been his original intention to remind the minister that if he persisted in his campaign he would be liable to be shot—should the campaign prove effective. When he saw the fanatic light in the minister's face he adopted a different line.

"I have sent for you," he said, "to warn you that if any of the young men due to report for work in the ore-mines fail to do so by the given date they will be rounded up and shot. In inciting them to refuse co-operation with the military authorities controlling this town it is important that you should leave them in no doubt as to the consequences."

Steven replied, simply, "They are in no doubt."

"It is also important that their families should also be in no doubt as to what will happen."

"Their families also are aware, Commandant."

"You regard it of no consequence that more women are to be widowed, more children left fatherless, more mothers robbed of their sons?"

"Since we have been an occupied country, Commandant, people die nearly every night in air-raids. It is no time to sentimentalise about orphans and widows and mothers robbed of their sons. You should know that better than I, Commandant."

It was the first time anyone had accused Colonel Anton of sentimentality. He was so astonished that for a moment he gazed in silence at the pale young man so indifferent to military power.

Then he said, "You call yourself a Christian, I presume?"

Very faintly Steven smiled. "Like St. Francis, Commandant, I would not so presume!"

Something stirred in Colonel Anton, as when he had first seen Steven Tronder in the church. Something from the far-away and long-ago; something lying on the ground at the bottom of the mind. As on a screen flash-back he had a sudden picture of himself as a boy in a little university town. There was a rushing river and cobbled streets, and on the wooded hillside rising above the river on one side an ancient castle carefully preserved and used as a military training college; on the opposite side of the river, directly facing the castle, there was a monastery, half hidden amongst the trees. As a boy the monastery fascinated him. He liked to climb up through the woods in the evenings and, lying under the trees, let the great surge of music from the monastery chapel sweep over and through him in golden waves—or so it had seemed to him. He thought, then, that he understood the meaning of the word 'sublime'. The noble, austere music spoke to the innate asceticism of his nature; the chant of the monks' plain-song gave him a deep sense of religion. One day he saw the organist, a pale young monk with a lean ascetic face, leave the chapel. Young Anton gazed at him with a rapt reverence. He had believed, then, that he would become a monk when he left school.

But he came of an old military family, and his father had quite other ideas for him. Antons did not become monks or priests, they became soldiers. At the university, too, it was the fashion to read and discuss, not Rousseau, St. Francis, St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, but Nietzsche and Machiavelli. Young Anton began to realise that life demanded the choice between the monastery and the castle, between Rousseau and Nietzsche, between Christ and anti-Christ. Tradition and heritage tipped the scales of decision. He

began to identify himself not with the austerities of the monastic life but the austerities of a soldier's life. He ranged himself on the side of the gods and heroes. Wagner began to mean more to him than Bach. The boy who had lain in the woods on summer evenings and felt his soul stirred by the sweep and surge of religious music, and the noble solemnity of monastic chant, faded like a dream of childhood. Once he had believed in Santa Claus; once he had worshipped, and in secret wept over, a piteous, defeated, crucified saint called Jesus. In later years it all seemed incredibly sentimental; maudlin, even. He had lived the ascetic life his nature demanded, not as a recluse but as a soldier. He had dedicated his life to service with complete monastic self-abnegation. He was a brave soldier, and an efficient one. For the gods he substituted the Superman, the super-hero of Nietzschean philosophy; only the superman could justify man—wretched, contemptible all-too-human man. He was impatient of personal happiness; he had a contempt for those who pursued it. Life, if it was not to be trivial, must be hard, a fight, and peace, if it was not to be contemptible, must be triumphant, a victory.

Yet, buried under all this accumulation of the years, was the boy who had lain in the pine woods listening at sunset to the plain-song of monks; the boy who had wept in secret for the sufferings of the humble Nazarene, and when the young minister spoke of St. Francis the rubble of the years shifted a little and what lay beneath was momentarily revealed. He had a sudden desire to be alone with this young man, this ascetic who had stayed on the other side of the river, and go over it all again—Rousseau *versus* Nietzsche, the fallacies of the Christian ethic *versus* the wisdom of Zarathustra—not because of any doubt in his own mind; no shadow of doubt had ever crossed his mind since his conversion to Nietzsche, but for the pleasure of discussion, and because to talk with this young man who so reminded him of the organist of the monastery chapel in that other world, far-away and long-ago, would be an unique experience—argument with one's dead self. He was fascinated by the realisation of how well he understood this young man. To debate Judeo-Christian morality, knowing all the answers in advance—fascinating! And to know not merely the answers but the impassioned feeling behind them. To meet the monastery organist at last, in the flesh—the young man he might himself have been! There was music to discuss, too—Bach *versus* Wagner. A whole philosophy of life was involved. Fascinating. But he had no time in which to indulge himself in these intellectual pleasures.

Therefore he said, curtly, in answer to the young man's Franciscan disclaimer, "Whatever you choose to call yourself, you will agree

that if men are to die it should be to some purpose. If your campaign succeeds, all that is effected is that a number of young men, including yourself, I must regret to say will die, and they will die achieving precisely nothing! I want to emphasise to you that it will all be so much waste of life. I understand that this doctrine—this philosophy—you preach is based on the assumption that though it may involve a certain amount of loss of life it must triumph in the end because for every score or so of people who die there are another score or so to take their place. I must assure you that this is fallacious. There can be no such ultimate triumph, because modern warfare thinks nothing of complete extermination."

"If you exterminate us all, Commandant, you defeat your own ends—you will then have to get the ore out yourselves! You can kill people by the thousand, but you cannot make them do what they are resolved not to do. It is there that we who hold these ideas of non-co-operation with evil triumph in the end. Ultimately you can only kill us, and not one of us—I must in turn assure you, Commandant—not one of us is afraid to die."

The colonel ran his fingers along his moustache and suppressed another sigh. To be brave is good in any circumstance. He acknowledged defeat.

"I accept your assurance. As long as you and your followers are quite clear as to the consequences of your folly I have no more to say."

"We will pray for you. Commandant when we come into our kingdom."

The colonel motioned to the soldiers at the door and Steven was shown out.

Only the men standing quite close to the colonel saw that his forehead was slightly damp, and they attributed it to the heat of the room. They could not be expected to understand that their commandant had been holding a conversation with a ghost

Anton hoped, quite intensely, that the minister's propaganda would prove ineffective. It was not merely that he did not want trouble, and that quite sincerely he wished to avoid further bloodshed, but that it was a tragic waste for as good a man and as good a musician as Steven Tronder to die prematurely.

But when on the final day for the conscripts to report only a handful turned up he repressed another sigh and had the minister arrested.

The shocking waste of it! Why did people throw away their lives? Yet still he hoped. He did not have Tronder shot out of hand; he had Ling plastered with notices informing the citizens that the minister was being held as a hostage; if all those who had failed to report did so within three days he would be released, and no punishment would be meted out to those who surrendered, though they would be taken under escort to the north. It should never be said that he had not been patient; patient and lenient.

When the three days' grace expired and not one of the absentees reported, he had the market-square flanked on all sides with troops. He had Steven Tronder marched into the middle of the square, his hands tied behind his back. He had him bound to a cattle-pen, and he himself gave the order to the firing-squad. Tronder faced the guns unblindfolded, at his own request. He looked straight into Colonel Anton's eyes, and Anton looked as unwaveringly into his, and gave the command.

Under the commandant's orders the body was left in the square all day, with an armed guard. The mayor's request to have the corpse removed and given Christian burial was refused. At sundown a squad of soldiers came and removed it, and what became of it none of the townsfolk knew.

The following day the round-up of the resisters began, and after that there were shootings every day for a week in the market-place. Joseph and Alun Vesteralte were amongst the first batch to be shot. They all died bravely, and every day the bodies were left in the square under armed guard and removed in the evening.

After the execution of the first batch the mayor collected a delegation of the leading citizens of the town, including the doctor, and asked for and was granted an interview with the commandant. He prayed that a further appeal might be made to the resisters to surrender; let leaflets be dropped to them in the mountains by plane; let their friends and relatives go to them in their hiding places and beseech them.

"This little peaceful town already runs with blood," he pleaded. and the tears streamed down his grey furrowed cheeks.

"It is my regret that it does so," Colonel Anton said.

Dr. Bard protested sharply, "It is you who give the orders for these atrocities."

The colonel's pale cold eyes looked directly into the doctor's dark burning ones.

"It is your people who force the ugly necessity upon me."

"In your country you count patriotism as a high virtue. We are not less patriotic in this country, Commandant."

"Quite so. It is unfortunate that your patriotism does not fit in with our present struggle. Again it is a matter for regret."

He swept the papers in front of him together as a sign that the interview was at an end.

The deputation turned to go, moving dejectedly towards the door, docile from sheer hopelessness. Only immediately opposite the colonel the mayor remained, unmoving like an old grey rock with the tide going out all round him. He made a small beseeching movement forward with his hands.

"Commandant," he said, "Commandant."

A soldier touched his arm and still he stood there.

"We've suffered enough, Commandant. You're human like the rest of us. Under that fine uniform you must be human somewhere. You're a married man, perhaps, a father——"

"Take him away," the Colonel said, without looking up from his papers.

Two soldiers closed in on the old man. He struggled, feebly. "Commandant," he sobbed, his voice rising hysterically, "Commandant—for the love of God——"

Then he pitched forward between the soldiers, his knees sagging, his body crumpled. The soldiers carried him out and laid him on the floor in the corridor.

Ivor Bard knelt down beside him. People crowded round.

"He's had a stroke," the doctor said. "One of you help me carry him out to my car."

8

And so it went on, the roundings-up, the shootings, the deportations to the north, the rising tide of bitterness and despair, the air-raids, the terrible day-to-day uncertainty, and the winter closing in.

The soldiers shovelled the snow away in the streets. The commandant required the town kept tidy and efficient, and his men did the job better than the old men who were all that was left of the male population, all the young ones either having been shot or conscripted for the ore-mines. There were no longer concerts in the market-square; or organ recitals in the church. An elderly minister replaced Steven Tronder. He urged neither collaboration nor resistance; everyone, he said, must search his own conscience as to what he should or should not do. He was not popular. People despised him, for the most part. They said he was afraid to commit himself, one way or the other. That it was his duty as a minister of God to give a lead to the

people. It was true that the new minister was afraid, but it was also true that he did not know how to guide his people. It seemed to him that they were all helpless ; resistance meant massacre, yet co-operation seemed cowardly and dishonourable. He prayed for guidance, but no light was vouchsafed him. And everyone was afraid, not merely of the commandant and his patrols, but of each other; no one knew whom he could trust with his ideas on co-operation or non-cooperation. And the word co-operation became more and more sinister. Though no one was prepared to say—and the new minister least of all—where co-operation began or ended. Endlessly the minister turned the question over and over in his mind. Did the shopkeepers co-operate when they served the invading troops with goods? Should they shut up shop and refuse? You had to live. Did the engine-drivers co-operate when they took their trains out of the stations on time and carrying enemy soldiers? Ought all life in the town to come to a standstill during the occupation? But then the people suffered. And there would be more shootings, more massacres. The commandant could exterminate the entire population if he chose. . . . That he was capable of complete ruthlessness had been demonstrated. Had they not seen the market-square run with blood, day after day?

With Steven Tronder's death the spirit of the people seemed to die in the little town, and the dark days and the bitter cold pressed on them, so that everything was dark and hopeless, outside and in.

Young Mrs. Vesteralte moved into a room in the town. It was not practicable to go to and fro over the country roads now that winter had set in. The troops kept the road out from the town and through the valley cleared, but it froze and became a sheet of ice overnight, and the Jong, cold, difficult ride became too exhausting. She fastened the shutters at the windows, therefore, and padlocked the gates, and said good-bye to the house till the spring.

Through the long winter it huddled there at the foot of the mountains, the snow piling up on its roof and mounting up round it until it was all but buried. The valley no longer flowed out tranquilly to the edges of the town; it lay flat and white, locked in the frozen snow, icy winds howling over the white mountains that were no longer barriers against the despairing north. The gulls flew inland. It was not a harder winter than usual; it only seemed so, because there was nowhere a lighted window to give a heartening glow in the cold darkness that held the world and crept into the heart.

PART I—PAUL

PAUL DETTIN'S earliest memory was the wide street, deep in dust and flanked by wooden houses with balconies and verandas and deep eaves which, with the church with the pale blue onion-shaped dome, and the low-built school-house, comprised the village of Prendel. Along with this memory was the winter-smell of the house, double windows closed against the intense cold, and the heat from tall tiled stoves drawing a rank strong smell out of the wooden walls. From November, when the river froze, till March when it began to thaw, the windows were never open, the air in the rooms never changed. You could feel it on your face like fur, smotheringly. When you went outside, a fur hat pulled down over your ears, fur gloves on your hands, fur-lined boots on your feet, the change of atmosphere always came as a shock. The brilliance of the frozen snow was blinding after the dark interior, and the icy coldness stung your eyes. When you came indoors again the hot sour smell made you feel sick at first and you felt you couldn't breathe, but you got used to it just as you got used to the outdoor coldness after the first shock.

That was the first memory, the sour winter-smell of the house, and the dazzle and sting of winter outside, and bound up with this the jingle of bells on sleighs driven by men with astrakhan hats and brigandish moustaches, and learning to skate on the frozen river. It was the first memory because winter was longer than any other season, and, with its sharp contrasts between indoors and out, more sensational. But by the time he was about eight years old all through the long winter Paul lived in a dream of the summer, because summer meant the forest and the lake. The dark forest and the shining lake, like a fairy-tale strong lord and lovely lady who lived happily and inseparably together at the edge of the world. According to the school maps there was a great deal of world beyond the forest and the lake, but it had no reality. The dusty summer road out of Prendel led to the forest, and the forest led to the lake, and what world there was at the remote far side of the lake was as unreal as the angelic heaven alleged to be beyond the clouds.

Every summer the Dettin family spent a month at a chalet beside the lake, the dark forest stretching behind. At the back of the chalet the windows opened straight out into the trees. Everyone except Paul preferred the front rooms, because they looked out over the water and got the sun ; everyone except Paul agreed that at the back the rooms were too dark, and that you felt shut in. But Paul loved

the forest, and it could not come near enough to the house for him. He liked the feeling of the trees holding out their arms to the windows, and the windows, opening out, holding out their arms to the trees. He liked the feeling of living in the tree-tops which the upstairs rooms, and the balcony, at the back of the chalet gave him.

In spite of two sisters and a brother Paul was a lonely child. There was only a year between Christine and Nadia, and two years between Nadia and Michael, but between Michael and Paul there were four years, which meant that when Paul was eight Michael was twelve and Nadia fourteen, and Christine fifteen ; they formed an adolescent group, and he was still a child, outside of it. His sisters tended to mother him, in a bossy way, and Michael was inclined to bully, and all three older children considered that their mother favoured Paul and made a baby of him.

Mrs. Dettin did in fact favour her youngest child, and fretted because he resisted the cosy, over-emotional relationship she was always trying to establish between them. She was altogether an over-emotional unhappy woman. As a girl of twenty she had married, under pressure from her parents, a schoolmaster of forty. Stuffed full of his book-knowledge he considered himself superior to her ; it would be true to say of him that he knew almost everything that didn't matter and nothing that did. When she had married she had been all emotion and instinct—and instinct had told her that Richard Dettin was not the natural partner for her. Within a few months he had killed all spontaneity and gaiety in her and given her an incurable distaste for the sexual relation. It was not that Richard Dettin was a hard or cruel man ; he was merely unimaginative, completely incapable of getting inside, or even glimpsing, the heart and mind of anyone else. For him there were no half-tones in life ; a thing was good or bad, true or false ; he believed in discipline for its own sake. He took it for granted that husbands and wives and parents and children loved each other ; that is to say they stayed together and looked after each other's needs, and this was called Family Life, which he believed in unquestioningly as he believed in God, and the State, and his own intellectual superiority. He wanted to be proud of his family ; he wanted them to be a credit to him. It pleased him that his daughters were pretty and his eldest son intelligent, and it displeased him intensely that the youngest child, Paul, should be a dreamy little dunce whom no amount of caning and lecturing made any brighter at lessons. That his family were all afraid of him did not disturb Richard Dettin in the least ; he called this fear 'respect', and it was right that the head of the family should be respected. But for Paul he would have been completely satisfied with his life ; he had a good wife—she was a good

cook and housekeeper, a good mother, pleasant to look at, and docile—he had pretty daughters, an intelligent son—but the youngest child spoilt this satisfactory pattern. He observed to his wife more than once within Paul's hearing that they had had one child too many. . . .

Paul hated his father, was impatient of his mother, and indifferent to his brother and sisters, but it didn't matter because from the time he was eight years old until he was sixteen, when he went away to the university town of Minns, on the Baltic, and his life changed, he loved a girl of his own age, Elsa, daughter of a forest game-keeper whose house was a little way along the lake from the chalet. Elsa was a tiny doll-like creature with china blue eyes and long flaxen plaits which she later wore twisted round her head. She was an only child, and lonely, and responded immediately to the advances of the dark boy who came with his family to the chalet every summer. She had lived all her life in the forest and knew it as intimately as other children know their own back-garden. She knew the names of flowers and trees and birds and animals; she knew which were the edible and which the poisonous fungi; she knew where strange brilliant mosses were to be found, and where baskets full of blueberries could be gathered. Paul was completely fascinated by her, and from the day when she put a tiny brown hand into his and told him he was nice, and that she liked him, he loved her with a sudden uprush of all the love that had been dammed up in him till that moment.

Paul could never get over the doll-like prettiness of little Elsa. She was so tiny it was hard to realise that she was the same age as himself, and with her long fair plaits and her long full dresses she was like an illustration to a fairy-tale. The annual month in which he was free to run wild in the forest with her was pure enchantment. It is not too much to say that he lived for it, since he hated school and made no friends there, and was lonely in his home. When his sisters found out about Elsa they were always saying, mockingly, "Paul's got a sweetheart!" Then he would go very red and hate them. He could not have said why he hated that mockery so much. It had something to do with reducing to the ordinary something remote from everyday; in some dim, undefined fashion it was a violation of something delicate, tenuous, a dragging out into the daylight of something secret—something that belonged to the green twilight of the forest. Elsa was precious to him because she was all he had. Elsa liked Paul and was glad to have someone to play with for a month in the summer, but that was all. Her life was full of small childish joys and excitements, and she was as extraverted as a young wild animal.

When they were both fourteen Elsa seemed even lovelier to Paul,

and by then he was romantically and hopelessly in love with her. At fourteen Elsa was a pretty coquettish thing who knew that she attracted the boys and enjoyed the knowledge. It was generally considered that she would 'break a good many hearts' before she finally settled down into marriage. Paul was intensely jealous of her admirers and suffered all the exquisite pain of calf-love. He would like to have kissed her, but he did not know how so daring an act of gallantry might be achieved. And he was filled with the dread that she might laugh at him. He had endless fantasies in which he kissed her passionately and *in* which she promised *to* marry him *in* a few years' time. In those fantasies they sat together under the trees while he unweaved her long plaits, and then they lay down together, their arms about each other, and her soft fair hair, straight as rain, spread over them like a cloak. But when they met he was awkward and shy, and painfully aware of her indifference to him. She was sweet to him because she was sweet to everyone; she was coquettish and gay because that was her nature with the opposite sex, but he was very well aware that he had no special interest for her, and rather less than some of the others she mentioned.

It was almost a relief when at sixteen he was sent to Minns, to the university, and had much else to think about.

2

Minns was a pleasant little Baltic town, proud of itself as a seat of culture. It had colleges, museums, an ancient fortress, churches with slender Gothic spires, a baroque palace whose stately gardens were now a public park in which good open-air concerts were held, and upon whose large ornamental lake the students went boating. It had narrow cobbled side-streets with old houses with fish-scale tiles and overhanging upper storeys. It had inns with swinging wrought-iron signs of bunches of grapes and fat town burghers. It had an opera house and a fine municipal library. It had a harbour in which the graceful four-masted grain ships from Finland, bound for Australia, rubbed sides with dirty little tramp-steamers from Estonia, and smart 3000-tonners from Sweden.

Paul, a student's cap on his head, a pile of books swinging in a strap from one hand, would wander restlessly round the harbour. He wanted to travel. It was for him as though the whole world lay across the Gulf of Finland. But first he had to get through his student years, and then there was his military service, and both seemed pointless, since

he was not interested in any of the careers for which the university was supposed to fit people, and he did not want to be a soldier. He liked music, though not to the point at which he wished to be a musician or compose; he liked poetry, but with no wish to attempt to write it; he liked looking at pictures, but with no desire to paint. And he was hopeless at examinations.

When his father thundered at him, when he failed exams, or barely scraped through them, "What *do* you propose to do for a career?" he could not reply, because it seemed useless to attempt to explain to a man like his father that he did not want a career—that he did not want to be anything, but only to *be*. He was convinced that one way or another he would be able to earn his living. You could always go as steward in a ship; if it came to that, though it would horrify his parents, you could always go as an ordinary deck-hand. You could get a job in a cafe—any kind of a job. He could not see that it mattered how you earned your living when there was no one thing you particularly wanted to do. He was quite certain that he did not want any of the careers his father had in mind for him as possibilities. He certainly did not want to be a schoolmaster or a businessman or a lawyer. His father, he knew, wanted his sons to be a credit to him. He wanted to be able to say, 'My son the doctor—', 'My son the lawyer—' Michael had acquitted himself well at the university, passing his examinations with honours, and when he had finished his military training he was to go into *the* editorial department of a newspaper. One of the professors at the university had arranged this for him; he knew the editor very well and liked to give a helping hand to promising young men.

It seemed strange to Paul that his brother should be considered promising. He could only see him as a red-faced, domineering, pompous, and rather stupid young man who could listen to music without knowing whether a piece was by Mozart or Tchaikovsky, and who believed that success and money-making were the same thing. He had no wish to emulate him—even had he been able to. At eighteen, too, Michael had a dull young lady of good middle-class family to whom he became betrothed, amid family approval on both sides. Michael's future was as clear-cut as Paul's was nebulous. In time, no doubt, he would become a famous editor. Paul thought that he himself would never be a successful or a famous anything, but that eventually, when he was through with the university and his military training, life might be fine and beautiful. He would travel; he would listen to Wagner at Bayreuth, Mozart in Vienna and Salzburg. And at some point a lovely girl—with fair hair straight as rain—would melt into his arms in a soft, impassioned declaration of love. . . .

During his two years of military training Elsa faded. He thought of her less and less, and finally not at all. Two years is a long time when horizons are changing and widening all the time. He formed a friendship with a good-looking, lively young man called Carlos Maine. Carlos was not particularly intelligent—Paul considered his taste in music deplorable, quite as bad as Michael's in fact—but he was good-natured and gay and had considerable personal charm. But for Paul he had, above all else, the poise of sophistication. Paul would like to have been just such a person, to have just such *savoir faire*. Carlos always knew what to say to girls, how to behave with them; he was never shy and red and awkward. He was never moody and depressed. His approach to life was such that it never failed to excite him with its promise of adventure. He called Paul an old stick-in-the-mud; he was too serious, he declared, too romantic, too sentimental. Life was fun—if you allowed it to be; if, that is to say, you took your fun where you found it . . . which meant, Paul discovered, taking your girls where you found them. He admired Carlos enormously; he admired his dashing good looks, his worldliness, his gaiety, his generosity. He could even forgive him for saying that Wagner was a bore and that he'd sooner listen to Strauss any day. Carlos also admired Paul; he admired his intelligence, his sensitiveness, his capacity for love and loyalty. He was reliable, Carlos felt, as he himself could never be. He was an old stick-in-the-mud, but he felt an affection for him he felt for no one else—certainly for none of the girls he was always making love to. Fundamentally he despised girls; fundamentally he found them rubbishy, trivial, playthings. All except one girl—his sister Katerina.

"You wait till you meet my sister!" he was always saying. "There's a girl for you! You'll have to admit you've never seen a girl can hold a candle to her! You'll fall madly in love with her! And you'll have a lot in common with her, too—poetry and music and all that. When we're through with all this you must come and stay with us—"

The influence of Carlos Maine on Paul Dettin was profound. Looking back, years later, it seemed to Paul that but for him almost everything would never have happened. It was Carlos who set the whole course of his destiny. But for Carlos he would never have met Katerina.

Carlos Maine's father was managing director of the Baltic Shipping Company, whose offices were along the harbour at Minns. The family

lived in a charming faded yellow villa outside the town. The house seemed to Paul a miniature palace. He had not realised before how much difference money can make—though at the back of his mind he had the feeling that even had his father as much money as Carlos's father he would not have lived anything but austere. There was an anti-life Calvinist streak in Richard Dettin which would have frowned upon the warm rich comfortable life which the Maines took for granted ; he would have considered it soft, decadent, and if not actually immoral at least conducive to loose living. Richard Dettin feared that wine and soft beds gave rise to lecherous thoughts, so he himself drank water and slept on a hard bed and required his family to do likewise, that the flesh be mortified. The Maines, however, had no desire to mortify the flesh ; they lived fully in their bodies and enjoyed life. They were very glad to have plenty of money. It must be so *uncomfortable* to be poor, Mrs. Maine thought. She was a dark beautiful woman, in her fifties, and run a little to fat, but as her husband considered that women should be voluptuous in their beauty it didn't matter. She wore black velvet in the evenings and too much jewellery—very beautiful jewellery. Her background was candles in massive silver candelabra, massed red roses, brocade cushions and curtains, soft lights. Meeting her it was easy to see from whom Carlos got his charm and Katerina her dark vivid beauty.

Katerina was gay and vital, like her brother, but more thoughtful. She was not content that life should be merely 'fun' ; she sought its pattern and purpose. She was interested in the new ideas stirring in the world—the conception of a new world order. One of her first questions to her brother's friend was whether he was interested in these new ideas.

"I knew you two would get on famously," Carlos said, happily.

Paul spent a week in that house before going home to his bitterly reproachful family. He had intended spending only the week-end there *en route* for home, but they were all so pressing—and he enjoyed being there. It was a new world to him, and an enchanting one. He was fascinated by Katerina ; that a girl could be so lovely and yet so highly intelligent seemed almost too good to be true. He felt he understood why Carlos had always insisted, proudly, "My sister's different ! Wait till you meet my sister!" She was different—excitingly different.

Whether it was Katerina seated at the piano after dinner, wearing a long-sleeved mediaeval gown of crimson and gold that emphasised the brilliant darkness of her hair and the lovely lines of her young breasts, Katerina playing and singing by candlelight, the epitome of feminine charm and beauty ; or Katerina trim and businesslike by day

in a neat suit and flat-heeled shoes, walking in the wooded grounds of the house with him and discussing the new world order, she put a spell on Paul Dettin. Was this really the girl he had been looking for all these years—not the fair-haired playmate of his childhood, the little doll-like Elsa? He didn't know. He only knew that he had never even remotely dreamed of anyone like Katerina Maine.

At home the contrast with the life from which he had just come was almost insupportable. Had Christine and Nadia always been such sexless, dreary creatures? Had his home always been so stark? His father so grim, his mother so bleak? He shivered in the unheated rooms. There was no heating in the Dettin home during the summer months—however chilly the weather might be. After a night in his own bed he wakened aching all over, having grown used to the deep softness of a Maine bed. He missed the warming wine with the meals; he missed the soft glow of candlelight, the flowers everywhere, the amusing stories and laughter, the blessed feeling of *relaxation*. . . . That, above all, he suddenly realised, was what the Maine home gave him; you could relax there, mentally and physically, you could give yourself up to mental and physical ease. It was not the difference between a rich home and a poor one; the Maines were not all that rich, and the Dettins were not all that poor; it was the difference of atmosphere, the difference between a home in which people give the Yea to life, and the home in which it is denied. It came to Paul, his first night back in his own home, that if he had come in with bottles of wine and an armful of red roses he would have been considered drunk or mad, and the whole thing a wicked waste of money in any case. His mother was younger than Mrs. Maine, but he could not imagine her in the sort of dresses Mrs. Maine wore, or Christine and Nadia dressed as Katerina dressed, though Nadia was only a year older than Katerina. They would all three have considered such dresses indecent, with such an expanse of bosom revealed—but then they themselves, it came to Paul, hadn't the right kind of bosoms. . . . That a woman should have breasts occurred to him for the first time—the thought came to him with a sudden picture of the full lovely curve of Katerina's breasts revealed by the low-cut, tight bodice of her rose-coloured evening gown, and he felt a quickening in his blood that was quite new to him.

His mother wept because she was pleased to see him home again, she wept because he had delayed his coming a week to stay with his 'rich friends', she wept because she supposed his home would not now be good enough for him, and because she supposed—though he had said nothing about it—he would be going away again. And his sisters wept because their mother wept.

"Really—" Paul exclaimed helplessly, bewildered, "really—what are you all crying about?"

At which they wept the more, for his heartlessness.

Carlos, when he told the Maines about his tearful welcome-home thought it exquisitely funny; but Katerina said it was contemptible, a form of moral blackmail; she despised people who wept in that facile fashion. What did they do when they really felt something? Besides, it was all so spurious, she declared.

Spurious or genuine Paul found it intolerable. As a child he had shrunk away from his mother's over-emotionalism; now, he realised, he had his sisters' to contend with as well. Michael was lucky to be married and out of it, he thought.

His father did not weep over him. He demanded, sternly, what he was proposing to do with his life.

Paul told him, "I can have a job in the Baltic Shipping Company—Carlos's father has kindly offered——"

"Has kindly offered you a clerkship, eh? Is that what we spent money on sending you to the university *for*? I wasn't asking you about a mere job—I was inquiring about a *career*——"

"For a career you need a vocation—I haven't one." Then, recklessly, since it had to be said sooner or later, "I'm prepared to do any honest work that will give me economic independence and leave me some leisure in which to do the things I want to do—go to concerts, travel a bit——"

"That's all the return you're prepared to make for a good education?"

"I was never keen on going to the university—you knew that."

"I hoped you'd get a little more sense as you got older, but it seems I've raised a half-wit after all. I always feared as much. Presently you'll want to marry, I suppose. Are you proposing to keep a wife and family on a clerk's wages?"

"Plenty of men do, I believe, and on less."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," Richard Dettin cried, furiously.

Paul resisted the temptation to demand, "Ashamed of what?" He even felt in that moment sorry for his father; he realised how bitterly he had disappointed him—humiliated him, even. Yet he could not feel that he owed anything to his father—this superior, sarcastic man from whom he had never felt affection, and for whom he felt none.

"You'll break your mother's heart," Richard Dettin added, as Paul remained silent. "You know she dotes on you—God knows why!"

"If she loves me her chief concern should be my happiness—and I intend to be happy whatever any of you say."

"Even if it kills your mother, eh?"

"It won't kill her. People don't die so easily."

"Get out!" Richard Dettin said, savagely. "Get out of my sight. Before I kick you out! You make me sick!" He was trembling with rage. Paul knew that if he had still been a child his father in that moment would have taken a belt and thrashed him into unconsciousness, and at the thought the stir of pity he had felt for his father's frustration was extinguished, and he filled with a black hatred that made him feel physically sick. And then suddenly something in him cried, Katerina, Oh, Katerina! It was as though something hitherto tied up in him had broken loose at last, broken out of its bonds, so that at last he knew what he wanted.

4

He did not break completely with his family. He could not bring himself to be ruthless; it was not so much that he loved his mother as that he pitied her. Her doting love for him was her only emotional outlet. It was unfortunate for him, but the fact remained. He could not avoid hurting her, but he could hurt her as little as possible. When, therefore, he started work in the Baltic Shipping Company he took a room in the town and went home at week-ends. It would have been too far to go to and fro every day, and in the winter impossible. He pointed out to his mother that whatever job he had, even if he had one of which his father approved, he could not have lived at home. He also pointed out that he had not left home to go and live with his rich friends—so that she could not reproach him with preferring one home to another.

He always dreaded the week-ends at home—the tears, the reproaches, the demands, the exhausting, smothering possessiveness. His mother complained, endlessly, that he lived the greater part of his time away from home, whereas he could have become schoolmaster in the village-school and lived at home. The only acceptable excuse for leaving home was if one married; only then was it to be borne.

Paul never argued with his mother and sisters; they were made like that, family conscious, possessive, and nothing, it seemed, could alter them. His home was a house of frustration, as much as the Maine house was a house of satisfactions.

The Maines would have liked him to live there, but he thought it

better not ; partly because then his family could not reproach him, and partly because he felt it important to preserve his independence. It should never be said of him that he 'sponged on his rich friends, or took too great an advantage of their generosity. He visited there several evenings a week, and those were the only times when he felt he really lived. Alone in his room with the books and the gramophone records he had collected he was intolerably restless. Sometimes he would be compelled to go out and walk about the town ; he would wander in the palace gardens, take a boat out on the lake as he had in his student days, try to concentrate on a book, sitting on a bench under a tree, or listen to the music when there was a concert ; sometimes he would go and sit in a cafe, drinking green wine and watching the people, but seeing before his mind's eye all the time, the laughing face of Carlos, the vivid image of Katerina. And all the time waiting, waiting, for the next time when he would go again to the villa.

He was in love with Katerina that first summer, but she gave him no encouragement. They went to concerts together, they walked in the park together, he took her out on the lake ; they discussed music, poetry, and the new trends in Europe. In the winter they all three, she and Paul and Carlos, went by sleigh out into the country and drank mulled wine at cafe-restaurants—snug wooden chalets—in the woods. Then they would drive back flushed and excited, urging the driver to whip up his horses over the frozen snow. Sometimes there would be other young people at those forest chalets, and then they would dance—there was always someone with a piano-accordion. For Paul those moments when he held Katerina's slender body in his arms were pure heaven. Once again the winter was beautiful and exciting, as it had been when he was a child. There was even, again, the sour winter-smell of a wooden house, the heat of the stove drawing the strong rank smell out of the wooden walls. And even in a mediaeval gown by candlelight Katerina did not look more beautiful than wrapped in furs, with a Cossack cap pulled down round her face, her cheeks flushed from the sting of the cold air, her eyes sparkling like the frost itself. He liked to bring her violets to wear in her grey furs, big fat round posies which she accepted gracefully, but with no idea how big a proportion—or disproportion—of his wages they represented.

Then one night when he was at the villa it came on to snow very heavily, and the whole family insisted that it would be ridiculous for him to struggle through such a blizzard back to his room in the town when he could have a good warm bed on the spot. On other wet or snowy nights he had been similarly urged to stay, but he had always gone—stubbornly adhering to his principle of not 'imposing' himself. This time, however, he stayed, gratefully. They had drunk Tokay at

dinner and he felt warm and drowsy and relaxed and quite unequal to battling with the driving snow.

He was given a room with long red brocade curtains and a four-poster bed with a red canopy. A pair of elegant silk pyjamas of Carlos's were laid out on the bed for him. Both the room and the bed itself were very warm, and he fell asleep almost as soon as he sank into the luxurious mattress . . . and wakened with a start when a light fell across his face. It was a moment before he realised that he lay looking up into Katerina's candle-lit face.

She smiled at him and set the candle down on the bedside table.

He could not have said what she wore ; he had only a hazy impression that she was wrapped in filmy layers of soft material the colour of moonlight, that her dark hair fell loosely about her shoulders, and that her beauty was almost unreal.

"I came to see if you were comfortable," she said, softly.

She gave a low excited laugh as he pulled her down to him, without speaking. Even at the time it astonished him how simple it all was.

After that he always stayed the night when he visited at the villa, and Katerina always came to his room and remained with him till morning. He did not know whether her parents knew, but it was no secret from Carlos.

Sometimes it all seemed to Paul like something in a dream. He could not believe that anyone so ordinary as himself should have such great good fortune. He loved her to the point of idolatry. He believed that it was the great romantic passion of all time ; that no two people had ever loved as they loved, and that they would love for ever in this way, because it was unthinkable that they shouldn't. 'Tis ever wilt thou love, and she be fair'. It was a long time, some months, before he realised that in spite of her passionate response to his passion she was not in love with him. She liked him ; she was fond of him, and at first she enjoyed the excitement of his passionate adoration. It was the basis of his attraction for her, because, physically, she did not think him anything remarkable. But to mean so much to someone, to be able to rouse such intensity of passion in someone, was very gratifying. For a time she could not resist playing up to it, but by the spring she was beginning to weary of his unsophisticated ardour, his quite inexperienced caresses. His simplicity and sincerity which had at first touched her began to bore her. He was by no means her first lover, and she had certainly no intention of his being her last. His wistfully expressed hope that one day they might be able to be married shocked her. When she married she was not going to marry a little nonentity like Paul Dettin. The man she married would have to be

dashing, handsome, distinguished, experienced, brilliant—and rich. He would have to be all that to make the sacrifice of one's freedom worth while. Marriage, after all, was a serious business. A passing love-affair like this with young Dettin was something quite different, and really, young and inexperienced even though he was, the boy ought to know it.

She did not break with him in the spring, but she had by then succeeded in disillusioning him as to the possibility of any permanence in their relationship. She also made it clear that though she was very fond of him and thought him 'sweet' she objected to his referring to 'our' love.

"Your love," she corrected him, gravely

He was terribly hurt and shocked.

"You mean you don't love me as I love you?"

"You never really thought I did, did you, my Sweet?"

"I thought so—yes—naturally. I thought all this couldn't have happened unless you did."

She pressed his head against her breast, smiling. He was so young, so stricken, so—vulnerable. She felt full of tenderness as she tried to make him understand.

"Darling, I'm a little older than you—a little more experienced I love you very much, you must believe that, but if I never saw you again after today, though I should be sorry it wouldn't break my heart as it would yours. I'm not made that way, any more than Carlos is. We don't take things so seriously. This isn't a great love, darling—it's much better to face it!"

"I suppose so."

He felt utterly shattered. He no longer knew what he felt or thought. Only that he was intensely unhappy—and the unhappiness persisted, after that, even when he held her naked body in his arms and her arms were round his neck and she was kissing him passionately on the mouth. It never ceased to seem strange to him that anyone could be so ardent without being in love. For a long time his mind resisted the idea that Katerina might have a purely physical passion for him; the idea offended his innate romanticism, besmirched his idolatry.

They went on all through that spring and summer. They even had a holiday together. She had him enrol in a Youth Movement organisation of which she was a member. This organisation arranged camping holidays for its members, and steamer excursions, and mountaineering holidays, and encouraged group discussions on the ideas of the new world order. In June Paul and Katerina went on a steamer trip across the Gulf of Finland with a crowd of other young

people, and one of the places at which they went ashore was the little town of Ling. . . .

They broke away from the others and explored the town; they stood in the square outside the town-hall at mid-day and watched the little painted figures come out from the clock-tower and move jerkily round to the music of an old folk-song; they went into the church and admired the fifteenth century glass, and then they walked out of the town and headed for the mountains across the valley.

It was a still blue and gold day and the only sounds were the tinkle of bells on the grazing cattle, and the occasional call of a ship out in the Sound. Paul thought that he had never known such a deep, pervasive peace. It was deeper than the peace of his boyhood's forest, for there the stillness was flecked all the time with the notes of birds, and there was something brooding in the darkness of the forest, something sombre even in enchantment, whereas the valley was held in sunshine, it lay spread candid and shining to the face of heaven, nothing sombre or secretive about it, and flooded, as the sunshine flooded it, with that immense sense of dream-like calm, of utter serenity. His soul filled with the peace and beauty of it, and it seemed strange to him that he could be walking hand in hand with the lovely Katerina in this beautiful peaceful place, aware of its beauty, and of hers, and loving her so passionately and so tenderly, and yet at the same time feel so intensely unhappy. What should have been all joy was all sadness—a sadness that the beauty and peace of the place only intensified.

But there was no unhappiness in Katerina. She liked being with Paul; he was easy and gentle to be with; there was no one she would sooner have had with her on that holiday. And the fact that she could be so light-hearted, so unaware of the ache in him, added to Paul's unhappiness. Ah, if only she loved him as he loved her, everything would have been perfect! But that was a forbidden subject. He had learned that only to touch upon it was to wreck everything. He had no right to ask more of her than she chose to give—it was, in fact, useless, since she had no more to give him. She gave him her lovely body; she gave him her friendship, affection, and, at odd times, when he had irritated her by wishing aloud, sadly, that she could be in love with him, she gave him to understand that he was very lucky that she gave him so much, that there were many who would count themselves rich with far less.

Increasingly she made him feel that she made a favour both of her friendship and her body, and he began to resent it. His pride began to assert itself. He considered that he gave her a great deal more than she gave him, for all her looks, her charm, her brilliance, since he gave her

his love. He had a right to more from her. Very slowly something began to die in him in relation to her. It came to him that love cannot go on eating out its heart indefinitely. He began going less often to the Maine villa, and when he did go he did not stay the night. In this way, quite gradually, without scene or quarrel or pain, their relationship ceased, and they were merely friends. He had moments of intense grieving for the passing of something beautiful, and times when he ached for her, body and soul, almost more than he could bear. He still thought her the most beautiful creature he had ever seen, but he was glad not to be her lover any more.

Carlos reproached him with not going to the house so often. "Just because it's all over between you and Katerina in that way——" he protested.

"In time it will be easier," Paul said. "Just now, to be near her like that and realise that everything is over is a little painful."

"You take it all too seriously," Carlos said. "It was fun while it lasted, wasn't it, and nothing lasts for ever—not even," he added, laughing, "not even life!"

Paul tried to explain, "For me, you see, it was more than just—fun. Perhaps it all sounds very exaggerated and romantic and sentimental o you, but I adored her."

"But of course! Katerina was made to be adored! People will still adore her when she is a very old woman!"

Paul could only say, painfully, "It's a little painful for the adorers, that's all."

"Nonsense! It's delicious for them! You know you had a perfectly wonderful time whilst you were adoring Katerina—be honest, now!"

"So long as I believed she loved me as passionately as I loved her I was happy—happier than I ever dreamed could be possible. But when she made me realise that I was taking seriously something that was only an affair for her—then I was unhappier than I ever dreamed could be possible!"

"It's what I always said," Carlos told him. "You take everything far too seriously."

Paul sighed. "I suppose so." It seemed useless discussing it further with Carlos. They looked at life quite differently. He could envy Carlos his light-heartedness, but he knew he could never be like that.

"Cheer up," said Carlos, "there are plenty of other girls!"

"You said yourself there was no one like Katerina!"

"Girls who will suit you better, all the same—girls who will love you! Girls who will love you till you can't bear it!"

Paul could only smile wanly. There were times when he and Carlos did not speak the same language.

5

He went away that summer, sailing as assistant-purser in a smart white-painted pleasure-cruising motor-ship of 6000 tons from Minns. For the most part he disliked quite intensely the people who went on the cruises—they ordered the stewards about and pestered the life out of the purser and his assistant with trivial and frequently inane questions—but he was travelling at last, and the newness of the life and the places took his mind off Katerina.

He made several voyages in the same ship—there were winter cruises to the South—and had a few unimportant affaires, a Spanish girl in a bar at Las Palmas, a Swedish girl passenger travelling alone and rather more intelligent than the rest of the ship's company, a French woman, a widow, who came aboard at Cherbourg. He went with the purser to a brothel in Lisbon and was astonished by the possible permutations of the sexual act—variations on a main theme was how he thought of it, With more bewilderment than distaste. Undoubtedly you lived and learned.

By the time he went home again, the following spring, he felt a great deal older, and it made him less impatient with his mother and sisters. They seemed to him really rather pathetic, his unhappy mother, his sisters withering on their stalks, since none came to deflower them. Even his father seemed a little pathetic—the conceited strutting schoolmaster who knew everything that scholarship had clamped between the covers of books and nothing that was written in passion and pity and terror in the book of life itself.

He said to his mother one day, "Christine and Nadia ought to go out more—they'll never get husbands sitting at home so much. And they ought to take more trouble with themselves—dress more interestingly and make themselves up a little. Look at the way Nadia scrags her hair back——"

His mother looked at him quite piteously. "Just because you've seen a lot of painted foreign women on your travels you want your own sisters to get themselves up and go chasing after men! Christine and Nadia are good decent Christian girls, and with Michael married and away, and you never here, they're all I have left, and you want to take them from me!"

She began to cry, in her helpless fashion.

Once her tears would have made him impatient. Now he said

gently, patiently, "It's natural for people to fall in love and get married and have children, and a terrible waste when women just grow old never having known a man's love. "Something dries up in them. Christine and Nadia aren't thirty yet, and it's happening to them already. What will they be like at forty?"

"Some women aren't cut out for all that sort of thing. Christine and Nadia aren't! They're not interested in men."

"Then they'd be better in a convent! They'd at least get spiritual satisfaction then! As it is, they've got discontent written all over their faces! They're drying up before your eyes!"

"You want to get them away from me," his mother wept.

He gave it up. It was terrible, he thought, how mothers sought to bind their children to them, out of their own unhappiness, trying to make them compensate for their own dissatisfactions. If his mother had been happy with his father she would have wanted the same kind of natural happiness for her daughters; as it was she wanted to protect them from the misery that marriage represented for her, and hold them close to her, emotionally, to make up for the love her marriage denied her. And whatever natural impulses and romantic longings Christine and Nadia Dettin had had as young girls, as they neared thirty and failed to attract the opposite sex they took refuge in a kind of bitter pride in their celibacy. At least no man should make *them* miserable, no sex beastliness defile them; they would remain pure till the day they died, and if anyone thought they were unhappy in their celibacy they were very much mistaken—oh, very much! They were perfectly happy as they were, thank you! . . . But they weren't, Paul thought, looking at them after eight months' absence. They might deceive themselves they were, but they were joyless, and growing old before their time; they were flat-chested, thin, colourless—*sapless*. And with that thought he had a sudden vision again of Katerina, brilliant, vital, glowing with life and passion, and the old ache came back to him.

But he did not go back to Minns. He kept away from the Maines. Instead he went to Ulrich, the capital. He had a little money saved from his trips and had time to look round before taking another job. He looked up the headquarters of the Youth Movement Katerina had had him join. He discovered that they had a club, and discussion groups, and, being lonely, went along. He found there young men and women of his own age, in the early twenties, discussing the things he had discussed with Katerina, and it brought her close to him again. His interest in these ideas, which had lapsed after he had gone to sea, revived. There was a girl called Maria, who was very enthusiastic. She was not a patch on Katerina for looks, but she had a

pleasant intelligent face, and she was a good speaker. She was the club organiser, and very efficient. She and Paul became friends. He aroused the maternal in her ; he seemed so lonely. She found a room for him in the apartment house in which she herself lodged, and which was better and cheaper than the dingy hotel to which he had gone on his arrival in the capital. She persuaded the secretary to find a job for him in the movement. "Though you should really be working for the Party," she said. There was always a note of reverence in her voice when she spoke of the Party. Paul was grateful to her, and he liked her, and she fell in love with him. She loved him very devotedly ; she loved him increasingly after he became her lover, and would have given up all her Party work to marry him and keep house and cook for him and be the mother of his children. Paul was touched by this devotion, but he had no more intention of marrying Maria than Katerina had had of marrying him. It was ironic, he thought, regretfully, how the relationship between himself and Katerina was being repeated all over again between himself and this good earnest girl. He wanted to say to Maria as Carlos had said to him—and as Katerina herself had said in effect—"You take it all too seriously !" but he could not hurt her. At least, not deliberately; that he did hurt her, unavoidably, since he couldn't give her all that she sought in their relationship, he was sadly aware.

He became increasingly interested in politics, in the rising tide of nationalism in his country. Certain major injustices had to be righted and a new world order adopted, or a war more terrible than any the world had known before was a certainty. Either, it seemed to him, there must be this renaissance of a new social system that was a new way of life, or world-disintegration. That the way of life his Party hoped to achieve was right and good seemed to him self-evident; it had inspired leadership, and it had youth on its side. It was a challenge to the apathy of the old order, with its crumbling systems controlled by old men whilst youth was preoccupied with good times, decadent as those who governed them. Maria continued his political education where Katerina had left off, but he soon went far beyond Maria, and by the time he was twenty-two was a paid worker in the Party.

The following year he managed a literature stall for the Party at a great international exhibition held in a neighbouring country. The stall was inside the pavilion representing his own country; sometimes people passed by, scornfully or indifferently ; sometimes they were interested and he was able to persuade them to accept well-produced booklets explaining the ideas and ideals of the new order. Three years later he did the same job at a similar exhibition, but by then he had

beautifully produced brochures showing the Party's achievements in his own country to distribute. By then he had broken with Maria, and had had only casual affairs, and few of them, during the last few years. He had less and less time for amorous adventures, and, as his work demanded more and more of his energies, less inclination for them. Sometime before he left her Maria was complaining that he was 'married to the Party'. When he left her he took a room in the centre of the town, above a cafe.

He met Carlos and Katerina again at a big Party rally organised in the capital. It was five years since he had seen her, but he could meet her now without pain. She had been married for two years to an army officer of good family, ten years older than herself. This he already knew, from Carlos, with whom he had maintained a fitful correspondence. At thirty she looked as beautiful as ever, was as vital and gay, and as beautifully dressed. Her enthusiasm for the Party had not faded, and she was, she said, delighted to have the opportunity of congratulating Paul on the valuable propaganda work he had been doing during the last few years. She had watched his activities from afar, she declared, and even taken to herself some credit for them.

He laughed and freely acknowledged, "The seed you sowed didn't fall on stony ground, you see !"

Her eyes glowed, a dark lire that was yet bright, and he felt a little giddy, as of old, when she turned her gaze on him. (Oh, but she was fairer than the evening star, and all was dross that was not Katerina!)

"Then it was worth-while—that time we had together?"

"How can you ask? It was worth-while in every way!"

"You got hurt," she reminded him.

He shrugged. "Who doesn't? *C'est la vie.*"

She laughed and pressed both his hands.

"Darling, darling, you've grown up at last!" Carlos came in at that moment—they were sitting in Paul's room awaiting him—and she turned to him, radiant.

"Carlos, isn't it marvellous, he's learned to shrug at life at last, our little Paul! I reminded him that he had got hurt over me and he actually shrugged and said '*C'est la vie* !' "

Carlos turned his own brilliant eyes on Paul. His smile was quizzical. "That's what I call progress!" he said.

"One has to come to terms with life—or die," Paul said.

He moved about his room pouring wine for them—a bottle of Tokay which he had saved specially for this occasion—opening a packet of very special sweet biscuits, polishing frail blue Venetian glasses only brought out on special occasions. He was immensely happy to have them there in his room. He filled with pride looking at them—

his brilliant beautiful friends, so gay, so distinguished, so, somehow, *shining*. They seemed to light up his drab room with its littered papers, stacked books, typewriter, ugly wallpaper partly covered by Party posters. They were decorative, and so few people were that. When Katerina came into a room it was as though someone had brought in a bouquet of exotic flowers.

Paul had gathered from Carlos that she was very happy in her marriage. "Apparently," Carlos said, "the handsome major fills the bill of her requirements, though it was a fairly exhaustive one !"

Carlos himself had not married—he hoped to keep clear of the net to the end, he said. He was still working in his father's office, still taking his fun where he found it. He was sympathetic to the idea of the new world order, he said, but temperamentally unfitted to work for the Party. "They want serious men like you, Paul."

"So you have a use for seriousness after all ?" Paul teased him.

"In the right place !" Carlos answered.

Paul poured out the wine and they drank to the New Order.

There was a sound of martial music and they went to the window and looked down over the outstretched striped awning of the cafe to the street below. There advanced along the broad tree-lined boulevard, flanked by cafes with window-boxes gay with petunias, and dotted at regular intervals with lamp-standards with petunia-box necklets, a company of smartly uniformed soldiers, ahead of them an officer on a prancing horse, behind them at exact intervals apart from each other, a procession of tanks and bren-gun carriers. The brass instruments of the band to which the men marched flashed in the morning sunshine, and the sunlight flashed on the buttons of the men's uniforms ; they marched with a brisk rhythm, their heads held high, and when they had passed there came the tanks with their deafening roar ; in the clear blue sky aeroplanes flew in formation. Crowds, held back by the police, lined the sides of the roads ; flags blossomed amongst the boulevard trees like bright flowers ; banners stretched across the road, from the tree tops, carrying the slogan of the New Order, 'The Morning of the World.'

It seemed a fine sight to the three young people watching from the room above the cafe. When the procession had passed they turned to each other with shining eyes, and Paul filled the glasses again.

"D'you think there will be war ?" Carlos said.

"Nobody wants it, and there's no need for it," Paul answered.

"There are political lunatics at large——"

"Nobody would be lunatic enough."

"All the same, there are enemies of the new order," Katerina

objected. She wore a spray of dark red roses on her cool cream linen suit and the scent of them *filled* the little room. Paul remembered them always, and how she looked standing there by the window looking down thoughtfully into the sunlit street, her face a little shadowed by the large drooping brim of her summery hat.

He answered, exultantly, because of the scent of the roses, because of the Tokay warm in his blood, because of the excitement of the marching soldiers and their brave music, "If they attack us they will perish! We shall triumph because ours is the Morning of the World, and theirs the twilight!"

They drank to the Morning of the World.

They had a few days together after the rally before Carlos went back to Minns and Katerina rejoined her husband in the capital. They went to concerts and operas—and Carlos still insisted that he preferred Strauss to Mozart, and that Wagner was a bore. They walked about looking at beautiful old yellow baroque churches, wandering in art galleries looking at Dürers and Bieughels and Hodlers, strolling under the trees in the public parks where the grass was long enough for hay, and swans drifted on dark ornamental pools set about with stone Venuses ineffectively concealing their charms with coy hands and wisps of drapery. Summer lay heavy and golden over the lovely baroque city and its wooded gardens. The boulevards splashed with sunlight and shadow under the tall plane trees, were like paintings by Manet. All summer seemed concentrated in the gaudy pinks and purples of the petunias in the cafe and lamp-standard flower-boxes; in the red and white stripes of a cafe awning, and in the shout of young voices out at the stadium swimming-pool. Summer was in the hot dry grass of the public parks, and in the deep dark coolness of the town woods, and the splash of fountains in the ornamental basins. All summer in the glide of a swan, in the trail of willow to the water. All summer in the hearts of the three young people who walked and talked and laughed together, listened to music, looked at pictures, and drank to the Morning of the World.

It was the last of the happy times. Soon after that the clouds darkened and the storm broke upon a world in which men marched but not to music.

PART II—ANNA

IT could be said that Anna Hansa was the daughter of a second-rate soprano and a ham-actor, and on the bare bones of fact it would be true, but it does not alter the fact that she was born with a real feeling for music in her and the gift of song.

Anna was an only child because her mother was too much occupied with what she persisted in calling her 'art' to have time for maternity. She had Anna, as it were, inadvertently. Gerta Hansa was a pretty, vain, bird-like little creature, aware of her limitations as a singer, but full of a pretty childish vanity over her small-town successes. Not for her Vienna, Paris, Berlin, London, but was it not better to be the star of a small town than a nonentity in a capital? She did not even sing in the capital *in* her own country, but what did it matter—the provinces adored her. And adoration was the breath of life to her. She had to have it, from the public, from her husband, from her child, from her friends, relatives, servants. For the most part she had it. 'Everyone' loved her; she was irresistible—so pretty and sweet. Most people found charm even in her vanities. It was necessary to pamper her, too; she was so delicate; a gust of cold air and she would develop a cold and cough for weeks—and that is something a singer cannot afford to have happen. Her house was like a hot-house, therefore, and she herself the most delicate and precious plant in it.

Her husband, John, was a red-faced, handsome, hearty man, inclined to drink too much, and hopelessly unfaithful to his little Dresden-shepherdess of a wife, but devoted to her. He came of farm stock, but he had developed a passion for acting early on. Even in his village amateur dramatic society days it was easy to see that he had no real talent for it, that it was mainly a matter of vanity, of innate exhibitionism, but he had the driving force of desire, plus a capacity for hard work, and of course his flamboyant good looks, and a good deal of personal charm. He was determined from the time he was about ten years old that he was going to be an actor and nothing could deter him. When his parents saw that nothing could be done about him they put him to an academy of dramatic art, from which in due course he graduated to small parts in the provinces. He met Gerta in a musical comedy, in which, having no voice worth speaking of, he had only a very small part indeed, but in which she was leading lady. It was love-at-first-sight so far as two such vain, egotistical people could be said to love; whatever it was, the marriage worked. He had thought her adorable when he first set eyes on her, and he continued to think her

so to the end. She thought him the handsomest man she had ever seen, and she never changed her opinion. They suited each other very well, playing up to each other's vanities, magnificently over-rating each other. He thought that with sufficient training she would have become a Galli-Curci; she was convinced that he could play *Hamlet* if he only set himself to it. Neither believed this about themselves, but both liked the other to think it.

She would go about declaring, 'Of course John is really a *very* good actor, given a decent part——'

He would insist, "The trouble with Gerta is that she under-rates herself. . . ."

They were in all ways a mutual admiration society. It was very satisfactory.

The tall narrow little house in which Anna was born and spent the first five years of her life was characteristic of Gerta's personality. It was full of feminine fripperies. Frilled muslin curtains were tied up with bows; there were flowering plants in pots everywhere, bric-a-brac everywhere, singing birds in gilt cages, everywhere bows and ribbons and silk cushions and knick-knacks, and everything finicking, dainty, ultra-feminine. It was a doll's house; a museum-piece of femininity.

This house was Anna's earliest memory—the house and the frou-frou of her mother's long flounced dresses as she went from room to room in it, this house full of the ripple of piano notes and her mother's thin sweet voice running up and down scales and bursting into song, suddenly, as a bird does.

Gerta was glad that since a child had happened to her—a fact which she never quite got over—it was a girl. A little girl was really only like having a large doll to play with and dress up. Unfortunately Anna wasn't as pretty a little girl as she could have wished, but, if the truth be admitted, rather a plain little thing—the sort of little girl that other women are apt to describe as 'a peaky little thing'. Gerta overdressed the child and even, for parties, made her up a little, touching up her lips, adding colour to her pale face, even 'toning up' her naturally fair hair till it was almost as golden as her own aided fairness. But what most little girls would have enjoyed Anna hated. From the first there was a hard core in her that opposed her mother's too persistent femininity. In Gerta's own mind the child adored her; she was convinced that the child saw her as lovely and romantic and different from all other children's mothers. That her own mother was different from other children's mothers Anna, at five years old, was only too well aware—and she hated it. Other children's mothers went out into the public gardens and played ball with them, helped them to make

dolls' clothes, were interested in hearing about school. Her mother never went out except in a taxi, never played with her, was not interested in anything except dressing-up. Dressing-up for a game of make-believe was fun, but not dressing-up as her mother understood it, which was merely to put on a lot of fine clothes to do quite ordinary things in, and clothes which limited you because you mustn't spoil them.

She found her father a much more human person ; he would sometimes act a piece for her and make her laugh. He could recite things. He liked to be asked to read to her or tell her stories—and there was nobody who could read stories or tell them so well. She liked being taken to the theatre when he was in a play. Being taken when her mother was on the stage was boring, because it was all singing. Early on Anna decided that she didn't like opera. But she herself liked to sing, and she liked learning the piano.

But what she liked most was to get out into the public gardens and run about—bowling a hoop, sailing a boat on the pond, playing ball, or just skipping along a path alone. Sometimes her father would take her to the gardens, but more often it was a servant ; it was never her mother. Anna liked the trees and the wide stretches of grass—sire felt released there, free, just as in the house she felt imprisoned, smothered. She liked looking up at the sky free of lace-curtains and closed windows. It was lovely to look at the sky with its blue lakes and its great white mountains. Sometimes at evening there would be stretches of golden sand along the lakes and seas in the sky ; you could even see the ribbing marks on the sand where the tide had gone out. If you could walk there you could walk for miles, it was all so wide, and you would not meet anyone ; you could be blessedly free and alone. No feeling of being shut in up there ; no feeling that whenever you turned round you could collide with something or knock something over.

And then, suddenly, before she was six years old, it all came to an end, the trill of scales, the burst of song, the singing birds in their gilt-cages, the frou-fou of long flounced dresses, the smell of perfume and powders, the sense of being shut-in. In a wet cold autumn Gerta caught a cold from which she did not recover ; the thing which mustn't be allowed to happen to her happened ; she developed bronchitis and died. John Hansa did not have to do a dramatic act ; he was genuinely distraught. For ten years he had lived with the little singing bird in the pretty cluttered cage, and he did not know how to live without her. He felt utterly lost, and the more he drank because he felt miserable the more he found the need to drink. He drank so much that he felt terrible next day, and then he had to drink *because* he felt so terrible ; it was the usual dipsomaniac vicious circle. A married sister, Tilda.

took charge till after the funeral. Then, she said, he must make up his mind what he was going to do—whether he was going to keep the house on, or sell up. If he was going to keep it on he must get a house-keeper, and he would do best to send Anna away to school. If he wasn't going to keep it on she would stay on till after the sale, but she would be glad if he would hurry affairs up, as she was neglecting her own family by staying with him. She couldn't, with five young children of her own, offer to adopt Anna. She had better go to her Gran. It would do her good to live in the country, the peaky little thing that she was.

John sold. What was the use of keeping the cage when the bird had died? What did he want with a home any more? "There's your child," his sister reminded him, severely, when he said this. He regarded the bewildered little Anna besottedly.

"I'm no good to her," he said, thickly. "I don't want her around reminding me of her mother ail the time!"

Anna turned in terror from her aunt to her father, then ran to him.

"Daddy, I want to stay with you! Let me stay with you!"

She clung to him, sobbing, wildly.

"It's no use," he repeated. His words were blurred at the edges as they were most of the time since Gerta had died. He pulled himself together for the theatre in the evening, but sometimes just a little he was blurred at the edges there too, and lately he had been forgetting his lines. "No use at all," he insisted, with alcoholic over-emphasis, and made a movement of brushing the child from him as though she were a fly or a crumb on his waistcoat.

Her aunt pulled her away from him, gently.

"You will go and stay in the country for a while with Gran, and then we will see. . . ."

Her father poured himself out another glass of neat spirit.

"That's right. You will go to the country. I will go to the devil. Everything's arranged."

His sister tightened her lips. E
resist being theatrical. . . .

2

A child's grief is soon spent. Anna sobbed wildly the day her aunt took her away from the only home she had ever known or could imagine, and on the train out to the country she sat in her corner crying quietly, almost secretly, refusing all injunctions to look out

of the window and see the fields, the cows, the waterfalls, the high mountains.

The Hansa farm was at the foot of the mountains where they came down close to the Sound, and lay back only one meadow's breadth from the water. The easiest way to reach it from Ling was to take the steamer up the Sound. There was a landing-stage only about half a mile from the farm, and the steamer would stop out in the Sound on request and anyone wanting to land there could go ashore in a small boat. At the sight of the steamer Anna's grief began to ebb, to be replaced by an excited wonder. When the steamer stopped out in the Sound, with a ringing of bells and a chug of water, and, it seemed to Anna, a piece of the ship's side was taken out and a rope-ladder thrown down the side, her eyes were as sparkling as a few hours ago they had been tearful.

Aunt Tilda disliked, quite intensely, going over the side of the steamer and down the rope-ladder into the little boat rocking alongside ("And at least three sailors looking up your skirts," she said, indignantly) but Anna had never known or imagined anything so exciting, from the moment when you turned your face in to the ship's side, put a foot down cautiously on to a rope rung, and then your other foot, and a big man in a blue jersey and high boots reached up to you from the boat rocking below you, making you feel beautifully safe, to the moment when you realised you had stepped down into the boat and sat where the big man directed you, very close to the water and the steamer looking enormous as you look up at it. Then when Aunt Tilda had somehow clambered into the boat, sitting there stiffly as though she mistrusted the whole business, the men in blue jerseys pulled mightily on the oars, and soon there was a big piece of water between you and the steamer, and a great white fan of water chugging out behind it as the steamer went on its way, getting smaller and smaller very quickly, whilst the meadows and mountains you had seen distantly from the steamer-deck grew bigger and bigger, till at last with the little boat bumping alongside the landing-stage, green slime clinging to its posts, they were right on you. . . .

Then you scrambled up, feeling a little giddy, and it was as though you had arrived in a strange land.

Gran Hansa was a widow. Her husband had died two years ago, and she ran the farm with her two younger sons, the elder of whom, Andrew, was twenty-five; the youngest, Hendrick, was eighteen. Matilda was thirty, and John, thirty-five at the time of his wife's death, was the eldest. Gran, at sixty, was as straight and trim and very nearly as energetic as she had been at twenty. Her face was lined like a map, Anna thought—and she loved maps—a very old yellowing

parchment map, with all the rivers and tributaries and boundaries marked in fine wavy lines. She had white hair that had been fair, and the blue eyes common to the people of those parts.

Andrew and Hendrick were tall young men with rough clothes and straight fair hair inclined to fall over their foreheads, except on Sundays and special occasions—such as weddings or funerals—when they plastered it down flat; on those occasions they wore dark town clothes and looked altogether different; then, but for their large rough hands, they might have been bank-clerks.

Everyone called Hendrick 'Ricky'. He smiled easily, and it was the sort of smile that lights up a face and is reflected in the eyes. Both brothers were quiet, but whereas Andrew's quietness had something taciturn about it, Ricky's quietness was dreamy, and this dreaminess was suggested again in the slowness of his movements. He was not as good a worker as Andrew, neither as efficient nor as energetic, but as he was good-natured and willing he was always being given odd jobs, and on the whole worked harder than anyone.

Anna liked him instantly, with a child's intuitive liking, because he smiled directly at her as though she were his special friend, and from that moment she felt that he was hers, that he was on her side. She had hardly set foot on the farm before he had taken her hand and led her off to the milking-shed, and she had there, from his hands, her first taste of warm milk. Then he showed her the goats and promised to show her how to milk them. He took her into the rickyard and together they climbed a ladder till they came to a shelf where a chunk of the hay had been cut out, as though it were a slice from a huge yellow cake, and here they sat a while and looked out over the landscape—the green pastures flowing gently down to the still, shining water. On the other side of the Sound a few small wooden houses were discernible, blue smoke spiralling up from their chimneys and losing itself in the thin gold light. Cattle grazed near the water's edge. There were the small reed-like cries of water-birds.

The child from the town sat on the haystack absorbing it all. Everything was new and fascinating. But above all she liked the quietness, and the feeling of space. No clutter of things; no sense of being shut in. She wished she could grow wings and take off from the haystack and glide down the wind like a gull, and come to rest on that still smooth water. Even in the house there was no feeling of being shut in, as in her mother's house. In Gran's house everything was so big and plain and bare, so free of clutter. For the first time she felt she could breathe in a house.

She made an odd picture that first night in the austere farm-house kitchen, the little pale town-child with her beribboned, fussy dress

which was the plainest Tilda had been able to find in her elaborate wardrobe. She looked so delicate, Ricky thought, like a flower. . . .

There was hardly any question of Anna settling in to her new home—she was at home at once. She had not left home so much as come home. Gran soon saw that she had the right clothes. She wrote out a list, and next time Andrew went into Ling, for the market, he took Anna with him. It was a great excitement to be perched up on the driver's seat of the trap, the brown pony bobbing up and down just below. In the back of the trap were crates of live fowls and boxes of eggs, and under the driver's seat a box of flimsy dresses Gerta had had made for her living doll, but which, Gran said, were no earthly use to an ordinary human little girl living out at a lonely farmstead among the mountains. This box of finery Andrew was to dispose of at the first second-hand clothes' shop he came to in the town, taking what he could get for it. Gran had kept back only one dress—a little affair of cream net imposed on pink silk, with rose-buds sewn all over it. This, she said, would serve in case the child was ever invited to a school party or summer fete or anything of the kind. What the child needed for the winter already closing in on the valley was strong boots, thick stockings and underwear and woollen dresses. She also needed a thick dark green serge waterproof cape with a hood, such as everyone wore in those parts, from the old men who were out in all weathers down to the youngest of the children.

Anna liked driving along beside the Sound, silver in the pale autumn sunlight. She liked the feeling of protection the mountains gave heading the valley and shutting out the world beyond—the world that was now a closed episode in her life, the world of tall stifling houses, of dressing-up, of taxis, big stores, crowded pavements. When they reached the little town and went clattering along the water-front, over the cobbles, she liked seeing the ships, some with tall masts that stood up like a thin wood of saplings in winter, others with funnels, with collars of colour near the top. She liked the busyness of the harbour so different from the scurry of the towns that seemed to have no meaning. Here you could see clearly what was being done, and understand it—ships being loaded and unloaded. She felt that she could watch the gulls for ever, wheeling and swooping with their fretful cries and the lovely spread of their wings, some of them tipped with black, some of them so pure in their whiteness that they were dazzling against the pale blue sky.

Uncle Andrew showed her the clock in the market-square, and they arranged to come back at mid-day so that they would see the little painted figures come out whilst the tune played. He pointed out the houses with their stepped gables and told her how old they were. He

showed her a narrow street where the houses leaned out from the top storey till they nearly touched. He pointed out the town-hall with its fine broad sweep of yellow steps and its noble entrance pillars and the handsome ornamental work over the porch—together a noble piece of architecture, said Uncle Andrew who was a great believer in civic dignity. Anna did not understand about architecture or dignity, but she saw that the town-hall was a nice bare clean-looking building, with nothing fussy about it, and she approved.

She approved, too, of the small unpretentious shops. Going shopping with Uncle Andrew was a very different business from going shopping with Mamma. Going shopping with Mamma had been a hot and exhausting business in which box after box was brought out, shoe after shoe, or garment after garment, tried on, and as likely as not nothing bought at the end. With Uncle Andrew you went into a small dark little shop, said what you wanted, and it was produced, wrapped up, paid for, and that was an end of it. One dark red woollen dress to fit girl of six, small for her years, said Gran's list, and one dark red woollen dress was produced of the required size. One pair child's strong school-boots. One child's winter cape. And so on. It was all very simple and easy—and satisfactory. And Anna watched it all with eager eyes. She thought she had never had a nicer dress than the dark red wool—unless it was the dark green wool bought because Gran said she would need one on and one off. As to the good waterproof cape it seemed to her a far finer garment than the black fur coat trimmed with ermine her mother had bought her last winter, and which had cost so much that it hardly bore thinking about.

"Everything good and useful and sensible" said Uncle Andrew as they came out of the last shop, and the satisfaction in his voice Anna felt in her own heart. Nothing fussy. Everything good and useful. Clothes you could wear without having to think about all the time. Clothes in which you could play. Clothes in which you could help Gran in the dairy, Ricky in the byres, Uncle Andrew in the fields. Clothes in which you could spread muck, milk a goat, chop wood, dry dishes—everything plain and good and useful.

3

Up to the time she came to live at the farm Anna had not been to school. Gran decided that she would not send her in the winter, over the snow-bound roads, but that she should start in the spring. That meant not till after Easter, for spring came late to that northern valley.

There was a school-house about a mile from the farm, to which the children from the farmsteads of that part of the valley went, roads and weather permitting. Andrew took the milk-churns to a collecting place quite near the school, at an hour of the morning convenient for taking Anna along with him. She came back for the mid-day meal, but sometimes in the summer she met Ricky along the road as she neared the house and then they would sit down under a hedge, drink milk, eat home-made bread with thin slithers of golden goat's-milk cheese, munch apples, and feel at peace with the world. Anna would tell Ricky various incidents of school-life; Ricky, having nothing of such interest to report, would usually tell her stories—Nordic folk-lore and fairy-tale—or answer her endless questions as to what was beyond the mountains, what was the other side of the Sound, what the islands were like, and difficult things such as how far off from the clouds was the blue sky. . . . Ricky had an apparently inexhaustible store of information, and misinformation. Until she came to the farm Anna had never consciously loved anyone, but she loved Ricky. It was significant that whereas Andrew was always Uncle Andrew, Ricky was never anything but Ricky.

It was Ricky who encouraged her to go on with her piano lessons, and to sing. They often sang together over their picnic lunches.

"Teacher says I've got a voice pure as a bell," she told him one day. "She often has me sing solo during singing lessons, in front of all the class. She says I can have piano lessons if I like, and to ask my Gran."

"Wouldn't you like to?"

"Not specially."

"But then you could be a musician when you grew up and play at concerts. Or perhaps you could sing, like your mother."

She answered him emphatically, "I don't want to be a singer."

Her vehemence startled him. "Why?"

But she couldn't tell him. She only knew that she did not want it. Being a singer meant scales up and down a piano in a tall narrow house. It meant clothes and fussing, and nothing plain and bare, good and useful. None of this was conscious in her at that time, but the hatred of artificiality had been firmly rooted in her during those first five years.

He persisted, "But if you go on with the piano you will be able to accompany yourself when you sing, and you will be able to sing and play to Gran and me and Andrew; we'll have little concerts on our own. We've got an old piano and I would get it tuned up, and then we could have some music in the winter nights when it gets dark so early and all of us sitting round the fire with nothing to do."

Gran favoured the idea of Anna continuing her music; it was very nice for a girl to be able to sing and play, though she didn't intend that her grand-daughter should make a living of it. Playing and singing and the stage were all one to her. It was all one whether you were a singer at a theatre like Anna's mother, or an actor like her father; it all came to the same thing—the stage, and that stage life was a bad life Gran Hansa was convinced. She had always opposed the idea of John becoming an actor; if she had had her way there would have been no giving in about it; it was his father who had finally given in and let the boy go to an academy of dramatic art, so that he could earn his living painting his face *like* a woman and cavorting about the stage *in tights*—that he ever had any part in which he didn't wear tights couldn't have occurred to her. And what good had come of it? He had married a vain silly doll of a woman who had died on him young, and now, God help him, he seemed to have taken to the drink. . . . Gran was determined that Anna should not have that 'flighty' sort of life, however prettily she might sing and however much gift she had for music, inherited from her mother. But to play the piano at home, and to be able to sing a little, to entertain the family circle, and later on a husband, that was another matter, and when she heard from Ricky that at school the teacher was interested in her musical gifts she decided that Anna should have lessons. She had the old piano tuned, and Anna had to practise at home, and take a piano lesson once a week at school.

Anna didn't mind the lesson at school but she hated the practice at home—until Ricky, who could play a little himself, offered to practise with her, so that, he said, in time they would be able to play duets. They were very soon playing simple duets, and whilst it might not have sounded much to Anna's parents it sounded very fine indeed to Anna and Ricky—and not so bad to Gran and Andrew. The next stage was when Anna accompanied Ricky in simple songs; in this they worked on a mutual-aid principle of 'You cover my mistakes and I'll cover yours', and the result was tuneful if not note perfect.

Anna became very fond of her music-teacher, Miss Kyra, who had the glamour that attaches to being foreign, and who was young and pretty and so popular with children that the little ones in her kindergarten class clung round her when they left the school-house for home. Anna also liked to walk part of the way home with Miss Kyra, and in doing so discovered that she too loved and was popular with small children. This, with her admiration for Miss Kyra, determined her to become a school-teacher when she grew up, and perhaps like Miss Kyra she could also teach music and singing to older children.

When she told Ricky that she wanted to be a school-teacher so that she could have lots of small children loving her, the way Miss Kyra had, he said, "But when you grow up you will marry and have children of your own !"

She shook her head. "I shall never marry—never !"

He looked at her, smiling. "What makes you so sure ?"

"Because Miss Kyra said when I asked her that you can't marry an uncle—not even if you love him ever so !"

Ricky was silent a moment, then he said, "Even if it was allowed you wouldn't want to marry me when you're grown up. When I was little I used to think I wouldn't ever want to marry anyone except my sister. Now I shouldn't at all like to have to marry Tilda, even if it were possible !"

Anna was silent, and when she next spoke it was about something else. She had been thinking that if she lived to be as old as Gran—which at that time she estimated to be about a hundred—she would never want to marry anyone but Ricky, and thinking this she felt a deep sadness that yet in some way was happiness, too, a kind of happy sadness.

4

The years flowed past peacefully as the waters of the Sound, a soft uneventful succession of the seasons, in which things of moment were the calving of a cow, the dropping of a foal, Anna's passing of an examination in music, a wedding or a funeral at a neighbouring farm. There were occasional jaunts into Ling when Gran suddenly decided she must have a new bonnet to wear at church, or Anns needed a new pair of stockings, or something was wanted for the house. There were fair days. There was church on Sundays.

Every summer Aunt Tilda came out for a few weeks' holiday with her three youngest children—the two eldest, being boys, went with their father. Aunt Tilda prided herself on being 'modern', that is to say she held strong views on husbands and wives having their holidays apart, and being as semi-detached as possible in as many ways as possible. It was part of her 'emancipation' to become a school-teacher ; it took her away from the country and widened her horizons. She had married the head-cashier of a bank and looked forward to a comfortable middle-age as a bank-manager's wife. She was tall like her brothers—too tall for a woman, most people thought, and angular Anna as a *child* was a little afraid of her. She had an impression of her as a tall thin lady with high collars to her dresses and bows down her

front. She was a little frightening to a child because of her matter-of-factness. She prided herself on the fact that there was no nonsense about her. She had 'no patience' with the subtleties of human nature. She believed in people making efforts and pulling themselves together. She had no patience with John going to pieces over Gerta's death. She had, if the truth be told, very little patience with a woman who died as easily as Gerta had. She was good if there was a wedding or a funeral to be dealt with. She was a good manager. Her brothers found her domineering. Her mother declared that the trouble with Tilda was that life had always been too easy for her, so that she was deficient in imaginative sympathy—or, as Gran put it, in her simplicity, couldn't feel for others.

She had decided without any consultation with anyone else that after Gerta's death the child should go to Gran. That a woman of Gran's age, who had brought up her own family, might not want the responsibility of a young child did not occur to her. . . . Though it had occurred to Gran, a little resentful of Tilda's high-handedness, that when you have five young children one more made no difference, and that it would have been a better idea if Anna had been adopted into that family. But Tilda decided, 'Anna shall go to Gran', and that was an end of it. And that it had been a good idea was evidenced by the ease with which the child had settled down at the farm, and how much more robust she had become. It meant a little extra work and worry for Gran, perhaps, but then Gran had been used to work and worry all her life. That that might be a very good reason for relieving her of some of it in her old age was another of those things which could not have occurred to the energetic, managing Tilda.

Anna did not care for the three girl cousins who accompanied Aunt Tilda every summer—Melsa, Netty, Irma. Melsa was her own age, and in childish fashion flirted with Ricky, and Anna would feel sick with possessive jealousy. When Ricky let Melsa bstride his shoulders and carried her pick-a-back round the rickyard, or played swinging-on-the-gate with her, Anna would feel as though she could die of hate and misery. All three children were spoilt and domineering. They despised Anna as a country kid.

Anna always had to play the **piano** and sing **for Aunt** Tilda's benefit, 'So that I can see how you're getting on with your music.' She was always very critical, and would never have admitted that she was jealous because Anna was so much more advanced than Melsa and Netty.

"Of course she'll never be a musician," Tilda often observed. "Except, perhaps," she would add, "in the third-rate sense her mother **was**. What she needs when she finishes with the village school is

some good sound commercial training. Charles could probably get her into the bank. Then if she doesn't marry it won't matter. It's a safe job and she'll get a pension."

"Why shouldn't she marry in God's good time?" Gran demanded once when Tilda said this.

Tilda smiled. "Well, the poor child doesn't look like growing up a beauty, exactly, does she?"

Gran said shortly, "I didn't grow up a beauty, and neither did you, but we got husbands, didn't we?"

"It's a matter of personality," Tilda evaded. "Anna may develop, of course. At present she promises to be a little—colourless!"

"Anna's got character," Gran said fiercely.

Tilda's smile became even more supercilious. "Well, we shall see, shan't we? Water always finds its own level, doesn't it?"

It was always a relief for everyone when Tilda and her family went back home and the atmosphere of the old house was released from her oppressive practicality.

5

The pretty Miss Kyra came to the house to give Anna her extra music lessons, and year after year Anna took exams and passed them, 'with honours', 'with distinction', and one more certificate would be framed and hung in the farm parlour. They were all very proud of Anna's certificates, with their red seals and important-looking signatures, and the red stars indicating distinction or honours.

"It will be a terrible waste if Anna doesn't make music her career," Miss Kyra said one day to Gran.

Unfortunately she said it just after Tilda had been there 'laying down the law' as to What should be done with Anna when she left school, and Gran was not to be dictated to. She pursed her wrinkled old lips.

"There's going to be no more Hansas taking up stage-life!"

Miss Kyra tried to explain that it wouldn't be the stage, that the concert-hall is a quite different matter. Or she could teach at an academy of music. . . .

"Anna's going to be a school-teacher, till such time as she marries a decent man and settles down and raises a family," said Gran, so emphatically that there was nothing more to be said about it.

Miss Kyra believed she had an ally in Ricky.

"Couldn't you get round your mother to let Anna take up music as a profession?" she urged.

Ricky said, "Anna wants to be a school-teacher, and people should do what they want to do."

"Even when it's a waste?"

"It's never a waste to do what you want to do. It's a great thing to know as clearly as Anna what you want to do—not many people do. Knowing what you want is half way to getting it."

Is it, Miss Kyra thought, bitterly. Is it? Supposing you want to marry someone who is hardly aware of you except as a school-ma'am who comes once a week to give your niece music lessons?

But she was wrong in thinking Ricky wasn't aware of her. He was very much aware of her, and he had, moreover, the uneasy feeling that she was 'after' him. She had a way of leaning on her bicycle and keeping him in conversation, instead of going home after she had given Anna her lesson; always hanging round him, was how he thought of it, and it irritated him. It wasn't that he didn't like her, but that he didn't want her. He didn't really want any girls. Miss Kyra was pretty enough. So were plenty of other girls who gave him side-long looks, in church, and at dances. He was a good-looking and amiable young man, not aloof and taciturn like Andrew. He was twenty-eight and he supposed he ought to be thinking of getting married; or anyhow of having a girl. He had liked them well enough up to about a year ago, but he hadn't fallen in love with any of them, and lately he hadn't even liked any well enough to kiss them after a dance. Now when he thought of girls he could only see Anna. But Anna was his niece, and anyhow what was there so special about Anna? She was no great beauty. She wasn't, really, a patch on a girl like Miss Kyra. She was a small thing with a quiet manner and a gentle smile. You'd hardly notice her at a dance—a mouse of a thing. What was it then? He couldn't have said. He only knew that when Anna was out he was restless until she came in; that when he met her unexpectedly at the turn of the road or coming across a field something in him quickened. He only knew that it gave him a curious pleasure to watch the lift of her small head and the movements of her small hands, when she sat at the piano. That when she called him by name in her soft voice he had a feeling of happiness, that when she was with him, walking in the road, or in the milking-shed, or standing by him whilst he harnessed the pony, every small thing had a new significance.

When she went away to a teachers' training college in the capital, not merely the house but the whole countryside seemed desolate, and he lived only for the holidays and her return. When she came back, he thought, she would be different—changed by the new life. But she was just the same. She still came and leaned against the lintel of the

milking-shed whilst he milked, came and stood by him whilst he harnessed the pony; joined him in the fields on fine warm days for the mid-day snack.

In the winter of Anna's first year at the training college Gran got bronchitis and after a few weeks in which she coughed herself into exhaustion she died. Anna felt as though the grave dug to bury Grant in was a hole dug into her life, and one that could never be filled in. The dear good gallant old woman with her face like a map, and the peasants' hands rough with work in field and dairy and house, Gran who had worked hard ail her life and raised up a family and wanted always only what was good and useful and sensible, nothing rubbishy.

There had been some talk of trying to trace John whilst the old woman was so ill, but Tilda, who had been the only one in touch with him since Gerta had died, said that he was last heard of in Australia. He had probably, she said bitterly, drunk himself to death by now. Tilda went back after the funeral, and soon after that Anna returned to the capital. She had offered to miss a term, to stay home and keep house until they could get a housekeeper, but neither Andrew nor Ricky would hear of it. They could get a daily girl *in*, they declared. Gran wouldn't want that she should interrupt her studies just when she was making such good headway.

So Anna went back, and when she came home again at Easter it was to Andrew's wedding. He had married the girl who had come in to help till they could find a servant. She was the daughter of a small farmer and she had long had an ambition to marry one of the Hansa young men. On the whole she favoured Andrew; he was not so good-looking, perhaps, but he was steadier. Besides, marrying him would make her the mistress of the house. She knew what she wanted, and Gran's death gave her the opportunity to go after it. She melted the taciturn Andrew with her soft eyes and her splendid cooking and general house and dairy efficiency. She was a good-natured girl, broad and plump as to figure, but pleasant faced. She looked what she was, strong and clean and healthy, good and sensible. Gran would have approved of her. She would have known at a glance that she was the sort of young woman who would know how to rear ducklings by hand, make good bread, rear healthy children. She made a buxom rosy bride, and Andrew a rather sheepish bridegroom. He always looked all wrong in the ready-made town-clothes that all the country people wore for 'best'. Ricky thought that as a bridesmaid Anna looked like a little fairy, or a young girl at her confirmation_____

The bride was obviously nervous of Anna.

"You'll think I'm intruding in the house," she said, anxiously, on her first day in the farm-kitchen. "I wouldn't like you to feel that. It was your home before it was mine——"

Anna set her at ease immediately.

"It's you who are the young mistress here now, Rilke," she said. "You are the mistress of the house. I know they say it's bad two women to one hearth, but I won't be here much, only for the holidays."

Rilke's eyes glistened with tears of relief and gratitude.

"Perhaps you'll be getting married yourself one of these days?" she suggested.

"I don't think so," Anna said.

At eighteen it was still Ricky or no one, and it couldn't be Ricky.

6

Andrew's wife was a success. That is to say she got along well with Ricky and with Anna—and with her husband. She was as efficient and hardworking as Gran as the mistress of the house. And she bore a fine healthy son in the first year with a minimum of fuss.

"If only Gran could have stayed to see!" Anna brooded.

And to see her graduate to her first post, as infants' teacher in a state school in the capital.

The years flowed one into another, uneventfully, placidly, as the tides of the Sound, and she was twenty-four the Easter she came home, excitedly, with a collection of brochures to show Ricky.

She spread them out on the table before him on her first evening home, after supper. They were alone, Rilke upstairs with the baby, Andrew mending a bicycle puncture in the back-kitchen.

Anna pulled the oil-lamp nearer.

"Ricky, look—an international exhibition in the summer! Every country is going to have its own pavilion. There will be people and things from all over the world. People will be able to see Chinese temples and Burmese pagodas without ever having to go to the East! Isn't it a wonderful idea? I thought we could perhaps go for a few weeks—it would be like taking a world-tour! You could get away after the hay-making—just about the time when school breaks up. As soon as I saw the posters about it I went round to the information bureau they've opened up in the city and got all the literature. They told me at the bureau that anyone thinking of going should make hotel arrangements at once, as the city will be very full with people from all parts whilst the exhibition's on. They said they would make all

arrangements—hotel, rail tickets, everything. Oh, Ricky, wouldn't it be lovely to go together, don't you think?"

Ricky said, breathlessly, "Wonderful isn't the word! Anna darling, it's a dream of an idea!"

"Then I can tell them to get rooms for us in the big city?"

"The big city!" His rough hands closed over hers on the table. "Oh, Anna, my heart, won't we be the greenest country cousins that ever ventured out of their own green valley? Won't we be lost in the big foreign city?"

"Not if we keep together—very close!" She laughed, excitedly. "We must never let go of each other's hands for a single instant once we're out in the streets!"

She pulled another booklet from under the pile. "Look—our own country is going to have its own pavilion—isn't it fine? Won't we walk round it feeling proud? It ought to be the finest there—we'll show the whole world how far ahead of everyone else we are in hygienic farming! We'll show them our lovely cottage crafts——"

They pored over the illustrations together, their faces close, their hearts beating fast with excitement.

When Andrew came in they looked up with shining eyes.

"We're going abroad in the summer—to an international exhibition!" Anna cried.

"After the hay-making," Ricky felt bound to add.

"The devil you are!" Andrew said, wonderingly. No Hansa had ever been abroad, or even wanted to go.

"The devil and all we are!" Anna answered him. "Come and look—the whole world is going to be represented, including ourselves. Isn't it a wonderful idea?" She said again, "It'll be like touring the world!"

Andrew came to the table and began poring over the brochures with them.

"When we come back perhaps you and Rilke could go——" Ricky suggested.

"My own country's good enough for me," Andrew said, in his stiff fashion. It was not that he disapproved, but that he shied away from anything strange like a wild animal—with all the wild animal's instinctive mistrust.

"Don't you hate to think of all the lovely exciting places you'll never see—even in an exhibition?" Anna asked.

"From what I can make out, the world outside this valley isn't much—a lot of politicians yammering and trying to land their countries into war, and a lot of people making money out of the sweat of others."

"There are things, besides people,"* Anna urged. "Beautiful churches, old buildings, museums full of lovely things——"

Andrew straightened himself up from the table, flinging a brightly coloured leaflet back on to the pile.

"There's things besides people here—mountains, and sunsets, and moonlight on the Sound—they'll do me." He went out.

Whilst he had been talking Ricky and Anna had exchanged glances ; their eyes smiled. Andrew had been born, lived all his life, and would die in the valley—like Gran. But they were of their generation—restless, hungry for a sight of the wonders of the world beyond the mountains, beyond the Sound. . . .

When they were alone again, Ricky said, "I shall be worried all the time between now and the summer in case anything happens and we can't go !"

7

Nothing did happen, and they went. They travelled all day and crossed two frontiers and arrived in the big foreign city at night, when all the sky-signs were blazing. They felt completely dazed, and kept close to each other, holding hands, like children. A taxi-driver took them to their hotel and charged them twice the legitimate fare. They ate a meal in a cafe-restaurant, which was no novelty for Anna, but something completely new and bewildering for Ricky. Eating in public would take a lot of getting used to, he thought. The babble all round confused him. His forehead was wet with sweat from the ordeal.

When they had eaten they went out on to the boulevard. It seemed to them both like stepping out into a great surging sea of people.

"Could you ever *imagine* so many people ?" Ricky kept exclaiming.

"It smells different here," Anna said. "At home the air smells of hay and byres, and the cold smell of mountains and water, and a little bit of the sea. Here it smells of coffee, and strong cigarettes—oh, and garlic !"

"And drains," said Ricky, with a countryman's contempt.

When they got tired of walking they sat on a cafe *terrasse* and drank coffee in tall glasses and watched the people, and the sky-signs zig-zagging behind the boulevard trees, and because they sat very close and held hands people looked at them and thought they were lovers, the small fair girl, and the countrified looking young man in his early thirties, and it came to Ricky as they sat there that in all likelihood people would think this, 'And I wish we were,' his heart cried.

'I wish we were !' He faced the fact now. It was somehow easier to face it away from home, the two of them uprooted from their green valley and in a strange land.

The thought came to Anna, too, that people would take them for lovers, and again she knew the happy-sadness she had known as a child, and she thought, 'I shall be an old maid, because I shall never be able to love anyone else as much as I love Ricky.'

8

In the morning they crossed the river and made their preliminary tour of the exhibition. It was very clever, they thought, the way it was arranged, taking in whole boulevards and public gardens, and a square, all fenced off as though it were a vacant site just waiting to have an exhibition erected on it, instead of being part of a big city. Strange that a city could be so vast that you could rope off whole streets of it and never miss them ! And all the buildings that had been erected looked so permanent—wonderful structures that even if they were only wood and plaster, as Ricky suggested, looked as if they had been there for years and would be there for years more. Cafes had been set up, bands played under trees, fountains plashed in the sunshine, thousands of flags of all countries stirred gently in the warm wind. Despite the guide-book, and their careful study of it beforehand, those two from the green northern valley had no idea where to begin. They wandered in and out of pavilion after pavilion, looking at things till their heads swam. The last place they went into that morning before they felt they positively must sit down, was a pavilion like a Grecian temple, very noble looking, and cool, with fluted columns at the entrance.

Just inside, a dark young man at a table smiled pleasantly at them and asked if he could interest them in the achievements of the new world order.

Anna smiled and took the brochure he held out to them. She had had so many leaflets and booklets handed to her that morning that one more made no difference. She took them all automatically.

They did only a very superficial survey of that pavilion. Their feet burned with so much walking on hard surfaces. When they came out into the sunshine again they sank down at the nearest table at the nearest cafe.

Whilst they were waiting to be served they turned the pages of the last brochure to be handed them.

"It's beautifully produced," Anna observed. "I suppose they really have achieved something with their new order——" A pleasing photograph of children playing caught her eye. "Child-welfare, nursery schools, maternity clinics, and all that. And social security."

Ricky said, looking over her shoulder, "I suppose so. It seems to work out all right for them, and they seem to want it. If the people of a certain country want a certain kind of government, like these people, or a certain kind of social system, let them have it, but they've no right to try and force it on the rest of the world."

Anna went on turning over the pages, slowly. They were very good photographs.

"And then again," Ricky said, after a moment, "it depends whether you find all these pictures of tanks and bren-gun carriers and men marching with steel helmets on their heads—all this display of military power—it depends whether you find it inspiring or not. It gives me the creeps! If that's all part of their precious new order save me from it! *That's* what I call an inspiring picture, now!" He arrested her hand at a photograph of a wheatfield with the sheaves stooked in rhythmic pattern; there were hills in the distance. They lingered over the picture, then she turned the page.

"Or that!" he exclaimed, and they paused over a picture of an orchard in full bloom, blossoming boughs with a suggestion of wind stirring them, and small clouds driving over like puffs of smoke.

"Like Ling valley in May," Anna murmured.

Their coffee came and they sipped it and went on talking about the pictures in the brochure and the new order for which it was propaganda.

"Take our country now," Ricky said. "We don't have wars because we're not imperialist. We're mainly an agricultural country and we've lived much the same for generations. We don't want slices of other people's countries—we don't feel a need for expansion; we're not concerned with boundaries. We're a small country, a small nation, and proud of it, and that is our strength, and our security against wars. We've escaped the curse of industrialism and imperialism."

When they left the cafe Anna left all the literature she had collected behind except that last brochure. She kept that because of the pictures of blossoming orchards and harvest wheatfields—the things she understood; the safe, gentle things of the world of green pastures and still waters, the things that belonged to an order as old as God.

In the spring of the following year, at a school prize-giving, a tall young man with eyes bluer even than Gran's came over to her to speak to the child whose hand she held, and who, it seemed, was his nephew.

The boy exclaimed excitedly, "That's my uncle ! He promised he'd come ! He's going to take me out and buy me ices !" He leapt forward to greet the man.

The man smiled over the child's head at Anna.

"Are you Miss Hansa?" he inquired.

She nodded, smiling.

"I've heard so much about you I feel I almost know you !"

Then, after a moment's candid appraisal, "Perhaps you'd come and join us at the pastime of eating celebration ices? We'd both like it very much, wouldn't we, Peter ?"

"Of course she must come," Peter agreed. "I'd never have scraped through my music exam but for her ! She deserves an ice !"

"Peter—hush!" She looked up into the man's amused eyes. "I'm afraid he's got rather cheeky this term——"

"I'm afraid you must think it runs in the family !"

They left the school and went out into the soft spring sunshine and sat on a *cafe-terrasse* and ate pink and white ices, and across the road from the cafe purple lilac crowded over the grey walls of the school and the air seemed full of it, softly exciting yet with a kind of tenderness in it. They talked and laughed and sometimes Anna caught the man's eyes lingering on her, and the colour came up into her face and her heart quickened, and that was something that had never happened to her with Ricky, for all her love of him. She knew before she left the cafe that this was something different ; something she had never thought to experience. . . .

That was how Anna Hansa met and fell in love with Victor Vesteralte, whom, as we know, she married a month later. They were married in the capital because, in spite of everything, she had a feeling of having been disloyal to Ricky. Actually she did him a good turn, for she broke the spell for him as Victor had broken it for her, and shortly after her marriage Ricky married the pretty Miss Kyra. He married and went away with his bride to her own country, so that Anna did him a second good turn, and one far bigger than either of them could possibly have foreseen at the time.

PART III—PAUL AND ANNA

WHEN the thaw set in and the roads were passable once more, and patches of grass showed again in the pastures where the snow was melting, Anna felt a restless desire to return to the farmstead at the foot of the mountains. Andrew and Rilke were strongly opposed to the idea ; they urged that she should go and live with them. A woman wasn't safe living out in such a lonely place with no man in the house ; any soldier who took it into his head could stroll out there when he was off-duty and molest her. . . . Anna knew better ; there was no such danger ; they were all far too well disciplined. But she had first to get permission to change her address ; the commandant had decreed that there should be no movement of civilians without his knowledge and consent. She must go to the town-hall.

At the town-hall she did not see the colonel. She was shown into a room in which Captain Paul Dettin sat at a desk very nearly as large as the colonel's. She saw a thick-set, dark-haired, serious-looking young man who vaguely reminded her of someone. He looked up from the papers on his desk as she entered the room.

"Good morning. You are Mrs. Vesteralte? Be good enough to be seated, please."

He indicated the chair at the other side of his desk. His tone was not so much curt as business-like. He spoke the language of the country with only a slight accent. He had before him the application she had handed in in writing before the appointment for the interview could be made. The colonel did not want his staff's time wasted with frivolous matters.

Dettin summed up the particulars before him. "You are the widow of Victor Vesteralte, farmer, and you have been living for the last three months over the pharmacy in Market Street?"

He glanced up at her and she nodded. She was thinking that this was the officer who had given the order to fire on the crowd in the market-square on the day of the invasion—only the commandant had made invasion a forbidden word ; he considered that it encouraged resentment ; the affair was to be referred to as the occupation. He was young to be a captain, she thought ; young to have the murder of so many people on his conscience. Only, of course, people like that hadn't any conscience. They had only something they called their duty.

"You are a school-teacher here in the town and you moved in from your late husband's house when the roads made cycling to and fro difficult. That is correct?"

She nodded again. A fair-haired young lieutenant leaning against the mantelpiece, one foot on the fender, stopped picking his teeth for a moment to say, "You should answer the captain Yes or No." His tone was severe.

The colour rushed up into her face. Dettin made an impatient movement.

"It's all right," he said, quickly, and continued :

"You now wish to return to your old home. Would you be good enough to state why ?"

"Naturally a woman prefers her own home to a furnished room in someone else's house." She spoke sharply. All this impertinent formality because one wished to live in one's own home !

"Who else would be living in the house with you ? Some friend or relative ?"

"Only the young woman who was my servant before."

"Where is this young woman living at present ?"

"In the valley."

"She has asked for permission to move to your house ?"

"Not yet. She waited to see if I had permission to return to my own home." Her voice was bitter.

"Your house is at the far end of the valley, at the foot of the mountains, I believe ?"

"Yes."

"Would you not be very lonely there ?"

"Not more lonely than I have been since you killed my husband in cold blood——" She broke off, on the verge of tears.

She plucked restlessly at the lace edge of a handkerchief in her lap. This impertinent cross-examination. . . .

Dettin looked steadily at her. "What we have to decide when anyone wishes to make a change of address is what possible motive might lie behind the reason given. From our point of view you are a young woman with good reason to hate us, asking for permission to go and live by herself in a lonely place."

"We all have reason to hate you. You've brought the war to our country—death and destruction——"

"I am sorry—but you will appreciate that that is something I cannot discuss here."

"It's something you'll all one day have to answer to God for !" She was tearing the small lace handkerchief to pieces. He was aware of the note of rising hysteria in her voice.

He said, quietly, "I must ask you to calm yourself. I am trying to help you. I have no wish to make difficulties, but there are certain formalities to be observed. You were a friend of the minister, Steven

Tronder. We have reason to believe that you assisted him in his campaign. You could have been shot with him for that. In our eyes, therefore, you are a suspicious character. If, living out at this lonely place, anything in your conduct should seem even faintly suspicious we should be compelled this time to arrest you."

The angry colour which the lieutenant had brought up into her face had ebbed, and now she was very pale—paler than when she had entered the room.

She said, faintly, "I want only to live in my old home with my memories. You will have nothing to complain of."

Dettin picked up his pen with undisguised relief. He had been terrified that she was going to be hysterical—or faint. He still carried his horror of feminine tears and scenes. . . .

"On that understanding we can give you permission. If you will please sign here——" He pushed a form bearing his own signature over to her.

He watched her whilst she signed. She was so tiny. Like Elsa. The thought startled him. It was the first time in years he had thought of that tiny doll-like creature. But this woman had the same smallness, the same colour hair, and she wore it twisted round her head in plaits, as Elsa had when he had last seen her. It was that same kind of fine straight hair, too. The plaits were thick. When it was unbound there must be a great weight of it—a great silky mane. He switched his flow of thought off, like turning off a light in a room, as she pushed the form back to him.

He said briskly, "You have permission to go immediately—today, if you wish ; but your maid may not join you until she has sent in her application form and received permission. You understand ?"

She nodded and rose. The lieutenant spat into the fire, loudly.

Something made Dettin get up and open the door for her.

"Good morning," he said.

"Good morning," she answered him, barely audibly.

The lieutenant shifted his weight from the mantelpiece.

"I don't know why that woman wasn't arrested along with Tronder," he observed.

"The colonel was against it. He considered her part insignificant."

"You mean he couldn't face having a woman shot !"

Paul shrugged and reseated himself at the desk.

"Perhaps. If so I don't blame him."

He disliked the Lieutenant Corder and had no wish to discuss the matter with him.

Corder persisted, "You'd think the old man would be indifferent—

he has no use for women. The devil of it is he seems to think no one else has."

Paul went on writing. The lieutenant was determined to be heeded.

"There are no brothels in this town, Dettin, have you discovered that?"

Paul said curtly, without looking up, "I've no use for brothels."

"Neither have I, in the ordinary way, but we may be stuck here for years. We've been here nine months as it is." Then, as Paul still went on writing, "I suppose it's all right for you sexless people——"

Paul refused to rise to it, and Corder went out.

When he was alone Paul laid down his pen and pressed his hands to his face a moment. Sexless! My God!

There were some goodlooking women in this town. At first he hadn't had time to notice them, there had been so much to attend to; but now that everything was running smoothly, and there was this stir of spring in the air. . . . Presently it would be intolerable. Presently the blossom would be out everywhere—how was he going to keep away, then, the memory of walking in that valley with Katerina? Why had he had to come to this place, of all places? He had reckoned to be 'over' the business of Katerina years ago. There had been Maria since then, and other, more trivial affairs. He had been able to meet Katerina without pain that last summer before the war. Why must her ghost come back now to torment him with the memory of her flame-like beauty, her passionate nakedness? Katerina, the apotheosis of desire—that was the answer, of course. And it was so long since he had even touched a woman's hand, even talked with a woman. So long since he had sat down in a place that was anyone's home. Just to see a woman stuffing the sticks into the tall tiled stove such as they had at home; a woman with an apron tied round her waist—to see her take a cup down from a shelf, lay a cloth on a table, just to be with a woman sharing those small domestic things, away from this atmosphere of men and uniforms and war. . . . As to that atmosphere in which one ate by candlelight at a table decorated with crimson roses, drank Tokay and listened to Mozart—it was difficult now to believe it was nothing more than frustration's fantasy. It had all come back to him that day in the church with the Colonel, listening to Bach—and he had felt his soul dragged up by the roots.

Lieutenant Corder complained endlessly of his enforced celibacy. They were all tired of it; they shut him up when they could; because he was younger he considered his lot harder to bear than theirs—or, as now, he accused them of being sexless. Actually his problem was very much simpler. If there had been a brothel in the town or a few street women it would have been disposed of. His problem was no

more complicated than that. It would have astonished young Max Corder if he had known that secretly Paul envied him. If you were Paul Dettin and had been in love with Katerina Maine the brothel and the prostitute would not have solved the problem. Then the hunger for feminine society went deeper than sex. There was the devouring need for emotional outlet, and for the beauty and warmth and peace that comforts spirit as well as flesh. In his leisure moments he indulged an endless fantasy in which some girl or woman smiled at him, in this town in which no civilian smiled at any soldier, and they built up a friendship, went for walks in the valley together, perhaps, and in time she invited him to her home ; he became part of a family circle again, and life was ordinary, normal. . . . Just that. This kind of life was so desperately lonely. There was this overwhelming sense of homelessness—of all those homes closed against them, the enemy. You wouldn't expect it otherwise, of course, but at times it was almost unbearable. That and the hatred you felt about you everywhere, in the streets, in the cafes, the restaurants—in the way the people moved away from you if you looked in at the same shop-window or came to the same newspaper kiosk ; the way the cafes and restaurants emptied if you came in, food and drink left half finished on the tables. And then the small things : he had offered his seat on a crowded bus to a woman ; she had refused it, coldly, and though he had remained standing she too had continued to stand. Then a civilian had got up and offered her a seat and she had taken it at once, graciously. All manner of small things like that. You couldn't blame the people ; as the Vesteralte woman had said, they had had their neutrality violated, the war forced upon them. But hadn't his people had war forced upon them too ? It was not they who had declared war.

In the bad moments of war-weariness and homesickness he often fell back on that thought ; it comforted him, strengthened him, made him glad again to be doing the job he was doing for his country, glad to be doing it at any cost. To believe in what you were doing was everything. And he did believe, passionately. It was only that sometimes the old deep human hungers assailed him. And the way the Vesteralte woman's hair reminded him of Elsa had started them up again that day in early spring—that and Max Corder's taunt. . . .

The Vesteralte woman, so small and pale and bitter, with her pale gold hair twisted round her head like a crown—living by herself in that lonely farmstead at the foot of the mountains. Supposing one day, later on, he called—just to ask if she was all right, if there was anything he could do for her. . . . Perhaps then, when she was settled into her own home again, she would not be so hostile. Perhaps she would even smile a little and chat with him a few moments at the door :

perhaps, even, she would ask him in for a glass of milk or a cup of coffee. . . .

Again he switched off his thoughts like a light in a room, and picked up his pen, pulling the papers on his desk towards him, resolutely.

2

The girl, Sonia, was glad to come back and work at the Vesteralte farm, and she was given permission to move in. She had married the farm-hand, Greig, but he had allowed himself to be conscripted for the north, and she was unhappy living with his people and too proud—in her status as a married woman—to go back to her own family. She was a stolid girl, mentally and physically, but she was a good worker, and she was devoted to Anna. Also she had the virtue of not being afraid to be left alone at the farmstead whilst Anna was away at the school in Ling, or when Anna had cycled out to visit Victor's parents, or Andrew and Rilke, which she occasionally did.

Andrew had not been conscripted, as he was the only man on the farm. Ricky would have been caught in the net if he had not married Resi Kyra and gone with her to her own country, whose neutrality had not been violated, and was not likely to be—since international finance and big business must have somewhere to operate in the midst of warring nations. Ricky had felt the need to get right away when he married Resi. He had deep down in him the feeling that he would never love anyone as he had loved first the child and then the girl who had been Anna. But now Anna was a married woman, and for him it meant that the girl who had walked hand in hand with him at the international exhibition existed no more than the child who had sat with him on the haystack the first day she had come to the farm. To remain continually with the scenes associated with her was to evoke an unbearable nostalgia for lost worlds. His mood was very much—

I was a child and she was a child
In this kingdom by the sea,
But we loved with a love that was more than love——'

That Resi had loved her, too, was a bond between them. He and Resi danced at Anna's wedding, but Victor and Anna did not dance at theirs, for they went away to Resi's country to be married from her home; it was Resi's special wish, and he was glad. Something had finished with Anna's wedding; the tale was told, and had a happy ending; he preferred to leave it there.

At the time Anna had been hurt and grieved that Ricky had gone away like that, without saying good-bye; now it seemed to her that by marrying Victor she had saved Ricky's life. Had she not married they would all still be living together, and the net would have closed round Ricky, and quite certainly, she thought, he would have resisted, have been one of those who faced the firing-party in the market-square. Now, one day, they would meet again—that infinitely remote 'one day'. To meet Ricky again was now the only thing left worth living for, the only meaning left in life. Just a little she found echoes of Gran in old Mrs. Vesteralte, but only thin echoes. The old couple no longer worked the farm upon which three fine sons had once worked. After the shooting of Alun and Joseph the old man collapsed; a light had gone out in him; it was as though his body lingered on long after his spirit had departed. He had a stroke from which he recovered, but his strength was spent. The old woman sold up the farm and moved into a cottage. The proceeds of the sale and their savings left them enough to live on for their remaining years. It cheered the old couple—as much as they were capable of being cheered in their stricken state—to see Anna occasionally. She herself had aged almost out of recognition since the shooting; but there was something unquenchable in her; she wanted to live long enough to see peace in the world again, she said, and by the grace of God and the strength of her will she hoped to do it. It helped Anna, too, seeing her mother-in-law.

They would sit talking about Victor by the hour, and it helped them both. The old woman would tell about him when he was a little boy; she would bring out old yellowing photographs that Anna had seen many times before but was never tired of looking at. In turn the old woman liked to hear, over and over again, the story of the first meeting between Victor and his bride, how they had eaten pink and white ices on a cafe *terrace*, and there had been a smell of lilac on the air, and how, when they had left the cafe, they had crossed the road to where the purple lilac crowded over the school wall and regardless of who might see him, or what anyone might think, Victor had broken off a piece and asked Anna to wear it, and how she had it to this day, all brown and dried-up as it was. Their hearts swelled and broke as they talked of him, but it eased the pain, all the same; their talk let the pain flow, whereas at other times it was dammed up inside them with an ache almost too much to be borne.

At home Anna would talk to Sonia about Victor, and the girl, heartsick for her own man, would listen with untiring sympathy. She felt that she understood how it was with the young mistress because it was how she would feel herself if anything happened to Greig. And

when she was fretting over him, Anna would remind her, sorrowfully, "At least you know you will be together again one day. At least you know he is alive in the world. You can look at the same stars and feel close to each other, in spite of separation."

"It's something," Sonia would admit, tearfully.

"It's everything!" Anna would insist, passionately.

3

On a sunny Sunday afternoon in May, when the valley was full of the fruit blossom, like puffs of smoke, or drifts of low cloud, Captain Paul Dettin walked out of the town telling himself that it was a day for walking in the country. He walked to the far end of the valley, telling himself that he would find the waterfall beside which he and Katerina had picnicked on that heart-aching lovely day.

The waterfall was up in the mountains behind the farm, so that it was quite legitimate that he should go so close to the farm-house that he could hear a piano being played inside. And what more natural than that, loving music as he did, and starved of it, he should slip in at a side-gate and follow a narrow path that led directly to the window whence the sound came? He stood pressed back against the hedge that bounded the path, and he could see the back of Anna Vesteralte as she sat at the piano. The music that flowed from under her fingers flowed over his heart. It was *Jesu bleibet meine Freude*. The piece was nearing its end by the time he reached the house. He closed his eyes, and when the piece came to its abrupt lovely end opened them just as Anna swung round on the piano stool and confronted him. She flung up the window.

"What do you want?" she demanded, her eyes flaring with anger.

He looked at her a moment still dazed with the music running in his brain,

"Forgive me—I heard the music as I passed on my way up to the waterfall. I had to come."

He came forward a few steps. His eyes beseeched her, "Don't send me away. I'm so desperately lonely." He said, "I wondered if I might dare ask you to play it again—I heard only the end properly."

She looked at him, steadily, the faint colour which anger had brought to her face drained from it, leaving it paper-white. She said, "It was you who gave the order to fire that killed my husband. Why should I do anything for you—except kill you if I had the chance—and the courage?"

He paled a little himself at that, there was such concentrated hatred in her voice and eyes.

He said, quietly, "I am sorry your husband was killed that day. Very sorry indeed. But it's your own countryman who fired upon my men you should want to kill, not me. We intended only peaceful occupation. Somewhere in my country there is a young wife who mourns her soldier husband who also died in the market-square that day. The whole incident was tragic. I cannot see that it does any good to make a personal issue of it. You don't suppose," he added, in a sudden rush of bitterness, "that I enjoyed that day, or that for that matter I enjoy being here?"

"Then why did you ever come? Your conscience must have told you it was wrong to invade a neutral country—terribly, criminally wrong?"

"This country was bound to be occupied by one side or the other—if it hadn't been us it would have been our enemies. If you think about it you must realise that. It was merely a question of who got here first. Again you put the blame in the wrong place. It was not my country that declared war."

She said, scornfully, "Your country merely wanted to dominate the world unhindered!"

"That is not true. My country wanted to establish a new world order. At the international exhibition just before the war——"

She gave a sudden cry, interrupting him.

"Now I know where I've seen you before! The day I came to your office at the town-hall you reminded me of someone. You were the young man in charge of the new world order literature stall at the exhibition—weren't you?"

"Yes. 'Can I interest you in the achievements of the new world order? Odd I should have said it to you."

She said involuntarily, "I've still got the brochure! It was the only one I kept of all I collected that day!"

He followed her up quickly, eagerly, "Have you really still got it? I'd love to see it again! It would be a glimpse of home! Dare I trouble you?"

He felt a desperate need to sustain in her this unconscious relenting—to prevent her from becoming aware that she had relented and going back on it. He had no idea how to do it. He could only act on the impulse of the burning urgency in himself.

"We issued several brochures," he rushed on. "There was one specially nice one we distributed at the second exhibition—there were some lovely photographs of our countryside. One was of blossoming orchards——"

"J know. It made me think of this valley at this time of the year—I'll find it—"

She turned away from the window. He came close to the window, his hands on the sill.

"If I might come in whilst you look," he said, adding, suddenly nervous, "If I wouldn't be intruding——"

She looked back at him. She said neither yes nor no, and there was neither assent nor refusal in her look. Only hesitancy. One part of her mind said that he had no right to come in. Another that he might as well come in as stand out there. He came in.

He laid his cap on the top of the piano and loosed the collar of his tunic. He looked appreciatively round the room—books, flowers, the open piano, some knitting lying on a chair. His gaze came to rest on her. She had stood watching him.

He said, sweating with nerves, "Forgive me. It's so long since I've been in a room that was a home. You can't imagine what it feels like! It's like getting back to civilisation. May I look at your books?"

"If you wish. But there are none in your language, I'm afraid."

"That doesn't matter. There's some lovely poetry in yours."

He went over to the shelves, pulled out a volume at random. His hands were trembling. She couldn't turn on him now, she couldn't; there was a limit to human cruelty, and a limit to how much one could stand. . . . He opened the book, blindly. His nervousness was such that the page swam and he could not read a line.

She rummaged in a drawer and found the brochure and went over to where he stood. He replaced the book he had taken out and took the brochure from her, and then she became aware of his trembling, and of the dew of sweat on his forehead.

He was ashamed of his trembling hands as he stood by her, but knew no way to stop it.

"Yes," he said confusedly, "yes—that was the last brochure the Party brought out——"

She looked at him curiously, and a thin flame of pity flickered up in her.

She took the brochure from him. "Come and sit down," she said, and led the way over to a settee covered with flowered material that matched the curtains. She and Victor had bought the material together in the capital; they had seen it in a shop window and been taken with it, it was so summery and bright and cool looking.

They sat down and he took out a handkerchief and wiped his forehead, then sat with one hand gripping the arm of the settee and the other clenched on the seat. She sat a little apart from him, **the**

brochure open in her lap. He leaned forward slightly so that he could see the pages as she turned them.

She turned the pages slowly, and he told her about each place depicted and she listened without speaking as his enthusiastic words rushed over her like a torrent, but when they got to the pictures of tanks and troops she closed the brochure.

"Those pictures spoil it all," she said. "All that led to everything that's going on now—all this horror-----"

He wanted to protest that it was not so, but he dared not risk saying anything that would turn her against him, so instead he said, 'Thank you for letting me see it all again. I suppose now I should be going on to my waterfall. Only it's so restful here.' He hesitated, then said, recklessly, "I wonder if before I go you'd play that piece-----"

She gave him a curious little smile. "You're 'persistent, aren't you?"

But she got up, and he did not risk an answer.

She played for him, and he sank back relaxed. Oh, but this was blessed beyond words, unbelievably blessed! He closed his eyes and gave himself up to it.

When the piece finished he rose immediately

"Thank you," he said. "Thank you."

She saw to her astonishment that his eyes were wet.

He fastened the neck of his tunic and took his cap from the top of the piano, whilst she stood waiting beside the door.

"You had better go through the front door, not the window," she said, with a little smile. "It's more dignified!"

He followed her out into the cool hall. . . . He was aware of white-washed walls, dark heavy furniture, red bricks, highly polished, hand-woven rugs, blossom spraying out from an earthenware pitcher.

He paused and looked round. "It's lovely," he said, "Monastic. It smells of pine."

She smiled. "It's the polish we use on the floor and furniture. It's used everywhere in the country houses in these parts."

"It's such a good clean smell. Like the pine forests of my home. Perhaps some day you'll let me tell you about them?"

"Perhaps."

He had the wisdom not to press the point.

"Good-bye for now," he said, and, fervently, "Thank you again—for everything."

"Good-bye," she said.

With a quick salute he was gone, striding down the path. She closed the door before he reached the gate. She knew that he would look back.

She stood with her back against the closed door, her heart beating furiously.

"I must have been mad," she said to herself, "having him in the house ! Stark raving mad ! Supposing anyone got to hear of it ? Supposing he tells anyone and it gets around ? Now he will come back. Now he thinks he's welcome here ! I must put a stop to it—somehow I must put a stop to it !"

But knowing nothing of the tumult he had left in Anna Vesteralte's mind Paul Dettin strode back down the valley, without another thought for the waterfall, walking on air, like a man in love and full of confident hope.

4

Paul lived for weeks on the memory of that time—less than an hour—spent with Anna Vesteralte. He went over and over it, every word spoken, every glance and movement Anna had made. She had smiled at him when she had let him out ; he had not imagined it ; he remembered it, exactly how it was, only a little faint smile—but a smile, unmistakably, none the less ; he remembered the creases it made each side of her mouth, a deeper crease one side than the other. And when he had said perhaps he might one day be allowed to tell her about the forests of his own country she had said Perhaps, which was anyhow a half promise that he might be permitted to call on her again. In his starved state everything was precious to him. But he was resolved not to pester her ; she should see that he was not going to be a nuisance, and he would do nothing to embarrass her. He was glad she was living out at the head of the valley, safe from the air-raids ; he would have worried about her had she been in the town at nights. He behaved like a young man in love for the first time ; he took to sitting in the cafe opposite the school at the hour when the school broke up for the day, and the day when she was met by Dr. Bard he felt a spasm of jealousy—and was astonished at the violence of his feeling. Was the fellow her lover, he asked himself, furiously, and then, ashamed of his jealousy, what in God's name was it to do with him if he was ? She was entitled to any happiness she could find ; she had suffered terribly—tragically. "And it's all our fault !" No, no ; it was the fault of the powers that had made this war ; the rest was all tragic inevitability. That was what he must make her see *if* they were to be friends. His order to fire on the crowd was as justified as all the shooting that followed, and for which the colonel himself gave the orders. You cannot have the people of an occupied country firing

on your troops ; you cannot have them sabotaging, or attempting to sabotage, your struggle. He would reason with her, make her see this, so that she would feel no bitterness towards him personally. Then they would be friends. He would explain to her more fully about the new world order, his country's aims and ideals, countering all the propaganda against it—all the hate propaganda that had made the war possible. Because if people really understood what it was all about, the salvaging of civilisation it represented, how could they have risen to destroy it ? It seemed terribly important that she of all people should understand. Ah, if only he might talk to her—really talk to her ! He longed for it with the burning, feverish intensity with which he had longed for Katerina's love. If only Carlos could have been with him ! But Carlos had set his heart on being an airman. He hadn't the temperament for the humdrum life of a soldier, even as an officer. He could never have stood the inevitable lulls. He would have gone mad, Paul thought, on a job like this—just sitting in an occupied country, keeping order. He needed a job in which he could be active all the time; the air force was the place for him; he had all the requisite adventurousness and courage. If ever Carlos was taken prisoner he would die of inaction. He would get out, Paul thought, if he died in the attempt.

When he heard that summer that Carlos had been shot down in a terrific air-battle and perished with the rest of the bomber crew, he felt as though part of himself had died. It seemed quite fantastic that he would never again see Carlos's big untidy writing on a page, full of grotesque mis-spellings, never again hear him laugh, see him swagger across a cafe *terrasse*, or enter a restaurant as though he owned it. He always walked as if he owned the earth. And in a sense he did own it ; the world was his playground. He loved life, ardently, but knew how to shrug at it ; *C'est la vie*, he would say, with a shrug, when a girl let him down, or he lost, money at the races, or a woman he had thought would be easy of her favours snubbed him, or when the banking account he had thought well furnished proved to be over-drawn—*C'est la vie*, but adding always, with his flashing smile, *Vive la vie!* Incredible that the three of them would never sit on a cafe *terrasse* again, or under the dark cool boughs of chestnut trees, drinking the wine of the country, or beer so cold that the outsides of the tall glasses were dewy with the condensation. Why if one of the three had to be taken must it be Carlos ? Why not me ? Paul thought, in his despair, there are plenty of people like me, ordinary people, but people like Carlos are rare. . . . Why leave people like Max Corder and take Carlos Maine ? It didn't make sense. It robbed life of all meaning. He couldn't any more, he felt, come to terms with life.

In his misery he felt an aching need to go to Anna Vesteralte, put his head down on her breast, and weep. He had to talk to someone about Carlos, and there was no one, and in his imagination Anna was all womanly tenderness and pity. He had thought about her so much since that Sunday afternoon that he even called her Anna in the endless conversations he had with her in his mind. In his imagination he had already told her all about Carlos, Katerina, everything. His impulse to go to Anna was the impulse to go to a trusted friend. It was no longer the excited restless longing he had had before, of a man for a woman's society.

He went on the first Sunday after he had received the news from Katerina. He could have borrowed a bicycle and gone out on a weekday evening, but he did not care to embarrass her by going after dark, and when her maid would be there. He went in the open sunshine of a summer afternoon, so that anyone seeing him would merely see one of the foreign officers out for a country walk.

The blossom had gone from the valley now, and it was lush with young summer, as when he had walked there with Katerina. He had been unhappy then, but he had not, then, known the black misery that possessed him now. He walked slowly, hardly aware of the sunshine or the beauty of the valley. He approached the Vesteralte farmstead with no quickening of the heart, but with a certain heaviness—the dread that she might not be at home. Oh but she must be in, she must be in—he needed her so terribly.

She was in, and alone, Sonia having, as usual on Sunday afternoons, gone to her people.

Anna saw him as he turned in at the gate, off the road, and her heart beat furiously. So he had come back after all! She had been so relieved when the weeks had gone by and he had not come again. She had believed he had after all decided to allow his visit to be an isolated incident. What right had he to come again? She would complain to the commandant. By all accounts he was very particular about the behaviour of his men in regard to the civilians.

Paul was completely unaware of the anger in her face when she opened the door to him.

"You had no right to come," she said, stonily. Even then he was unaware of her anger.

"No, I had no right," he answered. "But I had to come. My best friend has been killed—my only real friend—I had to tell someone, and there is no one—only you——"

"Why come to me? Your men shot my very dear friend Steven Tronder in cold blood. I loved him as though he were my brother."

He hardly heard what she said. "I loved Carlos as though he were

my brother. My brother means nothing to me. Carlos was everything. We were at the university together. I owe everything to him——"

He leaned against the lintel of the door and she saw that his face was grey and wet with sweat, and that there were dark shadows under his eyes. He looked ill, she thought—haggard, and curiously young.

She said, helplessly, "It's not fair to come to me," but she stood aside, and he followed her in.

He laid his cap on the massive dark chest in the hall, beside a bowl of yellow roses.

Something in him came to *life* at the sight and scent of the flowers.

"You had blossom here, last time," he said, and it seemed to her there was a kind of gratitude in his voice, as though she had placed the roses there specially on his account.

She made no comment but led the way into the sitting-room. The piano was open ; there were more roses, pink and yellow and red, in a bowl on a low round table, and more on the top of the book-shelves and on the window-ledge. The room was cool, and smelt muskily of the roses.

He sighed. "It's wonderful to be here again." .

She indicated an armchair by the low table. "I'll make coffee," she said.

He said, quickly, "Oh, but you mustn't, please—I don't want to be any trouble—if I could just sit and talk for a little——"

She said, firmly, "It's no trouble. You can amuse yourself with the books for a few minutes——"

Alone in the kitchen, making the coffee, she said to herself, over and over again, "He had no right to come here. It's got to stop. I must tell him it's got to stop, or I'll speak to the commandant. He has no right to pester me—me of all people !"

She put the coffee on a tray, with shallow bowls and a plate of biscuits. She laid the tray with a clean tray-cloth, lace-edged, one of Gran's, and put out a sugar-bowl of old silver and the best tea-spoons.

When she came in he was still sitting sunk in the armchair where she had left him. He sprang up the moment the door opened and took the tray from her and set it carefully on the low table, whilst she moved the roses away.

She sat in the chair opposite his and poured the coffee. The mere sight of her eased his spirit. She wore a flowered summer dress with a square neck and a tight bodice that emphasised her slight figure, and he felt that he could not look at her enough. There was hunger in his eyes as he looked at her, taking in the flowered dress, her shining braids of hair, her pale grave face, her small fine hands pouring the

coffee, but it was the hunger not of sex but of a terrible loneliness. His gaze compelled her to look up as she placed his coffee beside him, and she knew that it was not sex, and there was again that stir of pity in her.

"Your friend was a soldier?" She felt he needed this help from her.

He accepted her help, eagerly. "No, an airman—a bomber-pilot."

"So he did his share of killing before he was killed himself?" She could not repress the uprush of bitterness in her.

"His country's enemies, yes."

"Women and children and old people are not anyone's enemies."

"When they are killed it is part of the general tragedy of war. We didn't want this war. The last time we were together, Carlos, his sister Katerina, and I, we drank a toast to the Morning of the New World. Carlos and I thought there would be no war because nobody wanted it and there was no need for it, but Katerina was wiser than either of us—she reminded us that there were criminal lunatics at large. The war came a few months later. That was two years ago. I'll always remember it because it was just before the great rally, and there was a procession, and everything seemed fine—the sun shining and the drums beating and the banners streaming across the boulevard, from tree to tree. We felt gay, as though the world was ours. Carlos was always like that, though—the world was always his football. He had such gaiety and courage, always——"

He wiped the sweat from his face, and stirred the sugar in his coffee, absently. Anna sat sipping hers, watching him.

"When those two came into a room," he went on, "something happened. As though someone had turned on a light, or drawn back some curtains and let in sunlight. There was something *shining* about them—do you know what I mean?"

She nodded. She said quietly, without bitterness, "Yes, my husband was like that."

But he was staring into the past, and she knew that it was as though she had not spoken. In the little silence she added, "Drink your coffee—or it'll get cold."

He looked down at the bowl of coffee, then, as though surprised to see it there, picked it up and drank a little.

"It doesn't make any kind of sense that something shining like that should be quenched——"

She said, relentlessly, "It doesn't make sense that my husband should have been killed that day in the market-square, or that a saint like Steven Tronder should have been shot in cold blood!"

He looked at her, blinded by his own misery, and again it was as though she had not spoken, and anger rose in her.

"Why should you expect me to feel for you in the loss of your friend, when you can't feel for me in the loss of my husband—or for any of the women who have lost their husbands and sons since your people came here?"

The anger in her lifted voice broke through to him.

"I do care," he said. "You must believe I care. But when it all happened to you you had someone to go to—your family, your husband's family—I have no one—only you. I had to come to you—don't you see?"

Her face was full of bitterness as she answered, "I see that you are full of self-pity and being a man wanted a bosom to weep on!"

He said, humbly, "Yes, I wanted exactly that. I wanted it so badly I felt I should die wanting it. In the nights, after I got the news about Carlos, I used to bury my face in the pillow and pretend it was your breast."

The colour came up into her face.

She said sharply, "You mustn't say such things to me! It's insulting!"

"It isn't insulting, and you know it! It's a compliment."

"Not coming from a man in your position. Any woman would do—any old hag—now or at any other time——"

"That is insulting! If any woman would have done I needn't have lived celibately these last two years. But perhaps you don't believe?"

"I don't know you, so how should I believe anything, one way or the other?"

"Then why accuse me, as you did just now?"

She was silent, her heart beating fast with anger. What right had he to speak to her like this?

He rushed on before she could speak.

"It was tenderness I wanted after I got the news about Carlos—someone—something—to take his place. The human need for comfort. Supposing after your own tragedy you had had no one—mightn't you have turned to the first stranger who seemed at all sympathetic? Mightn't you—Anna?"

She started at his use of her name.

"I am not Anna to you!"

"You are Anna!" he insisted. "In my heart and mind and blood all day long, till sometimes I think I shall go mad—Anna, Anna, Anna!"

He buried his face in his hands. She sat looking at him, distractedly. She said, helplessly, "I am sorry, but I don't see how I can help. . . ."

Before she had realised that it was happening he had flung himself down beside her, his head in her lap, his arms round her waist.

"Don't send me away !" he pleaded. "Don't send me away !"

With a kind of instinctive pity her hands went up to his head, brushing the hair back from his forehead. Thick dark hair, with a wave in it, and a little greasy, so different from Victor's, which had been fair and straight and silky, like a child's. He used to get teased about it. Strange to be stroking hair that was not Victor's. Strange and all wrong. It was all all wrong. . . .

She pushed him away suddenly.

"You must go," she said. "You've been here long enough. You've no right——"

He scrambled to his feet immediately, and she rose and stood facing him.

"You mustn't come here again. If you do I shall report you to the commandant."

"It means everything to me to come here."

"It's not fair to me. Supposing anyone found out ?"

"If I come only when you are alone in the house no one can. Your house is not overlooked and no one comes up here. If I saw anyone about I should pass on. I wouldn't let any harm come to you. I love you."

His voice was quick with the urgency of his pleading. It was as though he pleaded for his life, she thought.

"You can't love me. It's sentimental and ridiculous."

"I suppose it seems like that to you. To me it's everything—life."

She turned away from him, sighing. "You make everything so difficult. You're so young. . . ."

"I'm not a boy. I'm thirty. I've had love-affairs before. I was Katerina's lover——"

"I don't care how old you are. I still say you're young. And I don't care how many love-affairs you've had, so you needn't boast !"

"I'm not boasting. I meant only that I'm not a romantic boy in love for the first time, only what I feel for you is different."

"The circumstances are different, I suppose."

"No one has ever reminded me of my first love as you do. We were both eight years old when I fell in love with her. I loved her till I was sixteen. When she was a child she wore her fair hair in long plaits down to her waist, and when she got older she twisted them round her head as you do. She was small and pale like you—and very sweet. I found her in a big dark forest. It's a very romantic story—wouldn't you like to hear it ?" he was smiling now.

She did not answer his smile. "No. You talk altogether too much. I want you to go."

"Won't you play for me before I go?"

"Do you promise to go then?"

"I promise."

"On your honour?"

"On my honour. Thank you for believing in it."

He resumed his seat and she went over to the piano. She turned over a few sheets of music, uncertain what to choose, and what made her decide on Brahms's *Wiegenlied* she could not have said. As the softly repetitive opening bars flowed under her fingers the melody seemed to flow over her heart too, full of a soothing tenderness. She forgot that she was playing for Captain Paul Dettin of the army of occupation. She began to sing as naturally as a bird on a blossoming bough breaks into song, and with the tenderness of a mother crooning a child to sleep. It was the first time she had sung since Victor's death. The song was a favourite of his. She had often sung it on those Sunday evenings when he and Steven Tronder had been sitting deep in the big armchairs puffing at their pipes. She sang softly, happily, back in the past.

*'Schlaf' nun selig und süß,
Schau' im Traum's Paradies'.*

The song came to its gentle close, and she got up from the piano with a dazed expression, like someone coming out of a trance. She had sung pain to sleep—pain and the present had slumbered in a dream of beauty that belonged to the past—and happiness. It was a shock to waken and see the strange face and the hated uniform.

Paul started as though he, too, had been in a trance. He got up.

"Yes, yes" he said confusedly, though she had not spoken, "I know. I must go now."

He moved blindly to the door, then, automatically stepped back as she came close. He opened the door and followed her out into the hall.

She stood by him, waking for him to pick up his cap. He looked at her, then, wordlessly, his arms went round her, pinning her to him, and all the hunger of the years and all the anguish of loneliness and loss was in that kiss.

Anna had not known that a kiss could be like that. She hardly knew that he had gone till she heard the front door close, then she realised that his cap was gone from the top of the chest, and that she stood leaning against the wall where she had swayed, faintly, after he had

released her. She went back into the sitting-room and sank down on to the settee, trembling in all her limbs. She looked helplessly round the room at the familiar objects as though seeking their aid—the reassurance of their everyday ordinariness; Victor's photograph smiled at her from one end of the mantelpiece, Ricky's from the other; there were the roses she had cut and arranged that morning on a chair by the window, her work-basket and some stockings she had been mending when she had been interrupted . . . but on the low table in the middle of the room the coffee-pot and two bowls, and the old silver sugar-basin, and the best tea-spoons, and Gran's tray-cloth with the hand-made lace. . . . Evidence of her guilt; her terrible guilt. What would Gran say if she could know, and Victor and Ricky and Steven—and Rilke who admired her so, and Sonia who loved her and looked up to her, and Victor's parents for whom she was the last light left in the darkened world? Oh, it was terrible, terrible. . . . She buried her face in her hands and wept as she had not wept since they had come to tell her of the tragedy in the market-square.

Paul kept away from her for weeks. He would have liked to have written to her, but all letters were heavily censored, both outgoing and incoming. He could have sent his batman out to the farmstead, or to the school, with a message, but it would arouse curiosity in the man and he would talk amongst the others, and he felt he dared not risk starting any scandal. He sat often in the cafe opposite the school and saw her leaving, and longed with an almost intolerable ache to go and speak to her, but it wouldn't do, he told himself, it wouldn't do—not in a town the size of Ling. For a few days he lived in the dread that she would come to the town-hall and report him. It was not the reprimand from the colonel he feared, but the fact that it would utterly prohibit him ever visiting her again. The colonel would forbid it—and it could not even remotely occur to him to disobey his commanding-officer.

When a fortnight had passed and she had not reported him he forced himself to wait another week, and then headed for the valley again. It was a grey day, with a cold wind that seemed to blow from all directions—a wind that runs over the nerves and seems to draw them to the surface. The house had a shut-up look as he approached it. He felt that if she were not at home he would die.

As it happened had he gone last Sunday, or the Sunday before that, or the one before that, he would not have found her at home, as she had very carefully gone out, resolved not to be in should he call—

as she feared he would. This Sunday, because it was grey and cold, she had stayed at home, telling herself that if he had come three Sundays in succession and found her out he would give it up. She saw him coming up the path, and something happened to her heart : it seemed to turn right over, as in an air-raid, and she felt sick. She got up and went to the door like someone acting under hypnosis. She opened the door and stood aside to let him enter. He gripped her so fiercely to him that she felt as though the breath were being crushed out of her body.

When the kiss had exhausted itself, he said, "Thank God you were in!"

She asked, faintly, "Did you come last week?"

"I haven't been since that day. I was afraid!" He caught her to him again. "Oh, Anna, don't let me be afraid any more—it's been such hell! I need you so terribly—more than you can possibly know!"

She said in the same low, faint voice, "You're being terribly unfair to me. All this makes me so unhappy. There must be some other woman who would do as well. Girls in different circumstances—who didn't lose anyone in the occupation—who wouldn't have it on their consciences——"

He kept an arm round her as they went into the sitting-room. She sank down into a corner of the settee and began to cry, quietly.

"Anna, my darling, don't! Nothing bad will come of this. Only peace—and happiness. You'll see. I promise you—on my honour. And you believe in my honour, don't you?"

He noticed that the handkerchief into which she wept so bitterly was like the one she had plucked at that day in his office. All that seemed a very long time **ago** now. He seemed to have lived through exhausting years since then.

She said, looking up, making an effort to stop crying, "It's not within your power to promise. Do I look like a woman at peace and happy?"

"But you will be," he insisted, "if only you will stop worrying. What is it that's worrying you? You think you ought to hate me, don't you, and you don't. If you hated me you wouldn't have played and sung to me—even to get rid of me! You would have reported me to the colonel."

"I thought of doing so."

"The fact remains you didn't! And you didn't because in your heart you don't **hate me**. In **your heart** you have as much need of me as I have of you. **We're both** lonely and wretched and caught up in this horrible **war**——"

"I thought **you believed it a right** and just war?"

"It's a most horrible and unjust war ! It was forced on us as it was eventually forced on you !"

"The other side also say it was forced on them—by your country's aggressiveness!"

"We sought to right ancient wrongs—ancient injustices. Must I remind you again that it was not we who declared war ? War was declared on us and we had to fight. We hoped to the last it would not come to war—and before occupying your country we made an offer of peace to our enemies——"

She moved restlessly. "I know—on impossible terms. What is the good of going over it all ? You must know we can never see it the same way. Why can't we agree to differ, for God's sake ?" She felt too nervously exhausted to go round and round the same arguments in circles. They thought along quite different lines, started off with quite different premises. Starting off with the premise that white is black you can 'prove' that all colours are the same. Starting off with the premise that the new world order represented the greatest good for the greatest number you could justify the over-running of peaceful countries, with all attendant horrors. If you didn't accept that premise no amount of argument could convince you that the violation of neutrality was other than a crime beyond forgiveness. But what was the use of saying it ? He would only try to convince her, all over again that his precious New Order, the basic principles of which were completely unacceptable to her, and to the people of her world, was right and good. The mere thought of all that propaganda poured out over her again made her feel weary. She was prepared to accept the sincerity of his beliefs, and leave it at that. And that he was sincere she could not doubt ; his sincerity burned in his eyes, vibrated in his tone, whenever his patriotism and loyalty were invoked.

"By all means let us agree to differ!" he said, eagerly. "I want only to convince you that there's nothing wrong in it if we comfort each other a little during this bad time—don't you see, Anna, my darling, if you'll let us we can make a little oasis of happiness in the wilderness of living—a very secret oasis that we perhaps won't be able to go to very often, but which will always be there—waiting for us. Don't you see, my darling ? Something we'll remember all our lives with tenderness—without regret !"

She put up a hand and touched his face, wonderingly, as he leaned towards her. She looked at him, intently, searchingly.

"It's a good face," she said at last, hardly aware that she said it.

"Perhaps you're right," she added, after a moment, "and there isn't anything wrong if we can find a little happiness together. I don't

know. I don't seem to know anything any more, and there isn't anyone I can ask."

"Ask your heart," he suggested, and put his hand over it. "It's beating so fast! Oh, Anna, you're so small and sweet!" His arms closed round her.

"You make me so happy!" he cried between kisses, "So incredibly happy!"

Something stirred in her and flamed into life; not something which had been dormant since Victor's death, but something she had never known before, something never roused in her by Victor. She put her arms round his neck at last and pulled him down to her.

6

Before he went he did everything that was needful, shut up the ducks and hens for the night, lit the oil-lamp in the hall, so that Sonia should not let herself into a dark house—"I always leave the lamp for her," Anna had said—lit the lamp beside Anna's bed, closed the shutters and drew the curtains, brought her milk and biscuits on a tray, washed and dried and put away the plates and glasses they had used, so that nothing should be betrayed to Sonia. And everything he did was an act of love.

When he had done everything necessary he went up to her room and sat down beside her on the bed.

"Everything is done now," he said, "and I must go. You know how much I wish I could stay! It would be heaven to wake beside you in the morning."

She leaned back against the pillow, her hair lying in a pale braid on each shoulder. She took his hands, smiling at him.

"I shall be thinking of you walking away through the dark—are you sure you won't be shot at sight by your own patrols?"

"I know the pass-word—and the valley-road isn't patrolled." He bent forward and kissed her forehead. "It seems all wrong to be leaving you here alone like this. Are you sure you're not frightened?"

She laughed. "Of what? The owls and foxes?"

He got up. "I must go," he said again, as if to convince himself.

At the door he blew her a kiss. "Sleep well."

She smiled. "Bless you," she said.

She heard him run down the stairs, the closing of the front door, his quick step in the garden, then fading away down the road. Before turning out the light she lay in a long reverie. Surely something which made two people happy, and did no harm to anyone else, something

which was an oasis of peace and tenderness and beauty in the wilderness of death and destruction and misery of the outer world could not be wrong—could not be anything but positive good? She wondered what Steven would say about it. Ah, why had she no friend to turn to? But she had one—there was Ivor Bard, the faithful Ivor. It was true that last time he had come to see her, at the school, she had accused him of being an open collaborationist because she had heard that he had been treating the colonel at the town-hall for ear-trouble. "If he had come to you it would have been different, but for him to send for you, and you to go, tamely, like that——"

"The man was in pain," he said, simply.

She had demanded, angrily, "What should it matter to you if he suffers the agonies of hell? Does he care how much the people of this town suffer?"

He had answered, quietly, "I think he probably does. He is only a professional soldier doing his job——"

"A professional killer, you mean!"

He had shrugged, and they had parted on that. He had wanted to know how she was getting on, if there was anything he could do to help.

"And I told him I wouldn't accept help from him *if I was dying*," she reflected, with a little rueful smile.

But now she felt a need to talk with him. As Paul had said, you had to open your heart to someone; there was this human need for a confessional. . . Confessional? That suggested a sense of guilt. Did she feel guilty? She didn't know. Right and wrong had grown blurred at the edges; nothing was simple or clear-cut any more, but complicated and diffused.

She turned out the lamp and fell immediately into a deep dreamless sleep—she who for so long had slept so badly

She went to Dr. Bard's house the following evening, going late, so that she was the last patient in his surgery. She did not care to make it openly a non-professional visit. The doctor was already losing popularity in the town, and if Mrs. Vesteralte were seen calling on him, other than professionally, it would have given rise to gossip. The atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust continued in the little town. Everyone's actions were suspect. How was it that Mr. So-and-So at the warehouse was still able to run his car when everyone else's had been commandeered? How did Mrs. Someone-Else come by the chicken

she was indiscreet enough to tell a neighbour she cooked for last Sunday's dinner? Why didn't the new minister come out openly as Steven Tronder had, on the question of non-cooperation? And a great many people were critical of the doctor for going to the town-hall to treat the colonel. Why couldn't the colonel have called in one of his army doctors? The answer, of course, was that Ivor Bard happened to specialise in ear, nose and throat trouble. The people who knew that—as Anna did—maintained that nevertheless the doctor should have refused to see the colonel except at his house, or at the hospital, instead of accepting the command. After all, a great many young men in the town had received a command from the commandant, and they had refused to obey—and paid for their defiance with their lives. People whose sons or husbands had been shot for non-cooperation despised the doctor, and remembered how he had refused to ally himself with Tronder in the resistance campaign. Some of them said frankly that it would not surprise them to learn that he was hand in glove with the invaders.

Anna knew what was being said about the doctor in the town; she learned it from the other teachers, and from the children themselves repeating what they overheard their parents saying. Any visitor to the doctor's house, other than during surgery hours, was open to the damaging suspicion of being 'in with' the doctor, with all that that implied of 'collaboration'.

Bard looked as surprised as he felt when Anna was shown into his consulting-room. He rose, but was afraid to offer her his hand for fear she refused it—and she was afraid to offer hers for the same reason.

She said, quickly, "I came during surgery hours because I didn't want any talk—you know how people are these days!"

"Alas, yes!"

"I don't want to consult you professionally—I wanted your advice on a personal matter—if you can spare me half an hour——"

"As much time as you like. But why not have dinner with me? It would make a pleasant change in my bachelor existence! I eat alone every night."

"They say in the town except when you dine with the commandant!"

"Do they say that? Interesting! The colonel came here once, at the end of his treatment, and we got to discussing the East and Chinese ivories. I took him upstairs to show him my collection and we spent a little time talking about Eastern art and philosophy. We had a glass of wine whilst we talked"

"It comes to the same thing," Anna said. She pulled off her gloves,

"It's what I want to discuss with you—the whole question of—not exactly collaboration with the invaders, for it's not that——"

She paused, searching for the word.

"Fraternisation?" he suggested.

"Yes. Being friendly with these people who have invaded our country. Most people think we should have nothing to do with them outside of what is absolutely necessary. I thought that myself, as you know, last time we met. Now——"

The colour came into her face.

"Captain Dettin came to my house yesterday, for the third time. On the other two occasions I was cold to him. Yesterday . . ." she faltered, then finished, resolutely, "I let him make love to me!"

He looked away from her, moved a paper-weight on his desk. If she had confessed to him that she had murdered the captain he could not have been more astonished.

He said, "You can report him to the commandant for pestering you—if his attentions are unwelcome."

"After his second visit I thought of reporting him. Now I couldn't. I don't want to. The awful part is, you see, Dr. Bard, I now want him!"

He looked at her then. There was a look of distress on her face—of desperation, almost.

He said, quietly, "Why is it awful? From the point of view of what is called illicit love—or from the point of view of fraternisation?"

"I suppose it's awful from both points of view, but I hadn't thought about it from the moral view-point, I'm afraid. I've never really thought about these things. What worries me is the thought that this man was responsible for the death of Victor, and the others. It was he who gave the order to fire that day in the market-square."

"The order was not given out of the blue. A farmer called Hanker fired first and killed one of the soldiers. I should say that it was he who was responsible for the death of your husband and the others."

"Then you defend that massacre?"

"I never defend the taking of life for any purpose whatsoever, not even that good may come. It is an article of faith with me that we are not entitled, ethically, to do evil that good may come. I discussed this with Steven Tronder. I told him that I would not give an overdose of morphia to a patient to release him from suffering. I consider that Parmer Hanker was wrong to fire, and that Captain Dettin was wrong. I don't defend the action of either. But if it comes to a question of responsibility, as a realist as opposed to a sentimentalist——" he smiled, faintly, "I maintain that Hanker was responsible for all those deaths that day. Hanker started the killing, and violence begets violence. Captain Dettin merely did his duty as a soldier."

"He could have had his men fire over the heads of the crowd."

"Forgive me if I remind you that we are not discussing what he could have done or ought to have done, but what he did do, and with whom rests the responsibility for that day's slaughter."

"That is what Paul—Captain Dettin—himself says."

"It seems to me an indefeasible case."

"What do you think Steven would have said—about Paul and me, I mean?"

"Steven preached the Christian ethic of loving your enemies. His objection to your relation with the captain would not have been because he is one of the invading troops, but on purely moral grounds—the Christian objection to illicit love." He smiled. "For me that is always the stumbling-block in Christian teaching. It is why with the utmost admiration for the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount as a rule for harmonious living I have nevertheless never been able to call myself a Christian!"

Her hands moved restlessly in her lap. "I've never had to think about these things. I was completely unawakened till I met Victor, and I was already twenty-five by then. Now it seems to me that though I loved Victor in a way I'd never loved anyone—something that was quite different from anything I'd ever known—what I feel for Paul is something different again—I don't understand——"

"People arouse different things in us. The impact of one personality is necessarily not the same as the impact of another. In the intimate relation between men and women there is tenderness and there is passion; in the perfect relationship there is a fusing of both."

She looked at him a little fearfully. "There can be tenderness without passion, can't there?" She spoke almost in a whisper.

He nodded. "And passion without tenderness. I hope you will be spared that experience though. It's so desolate—and lonely."

She said, in the same low voice, "It's not like that with Paul. He has gentleness and sweetness. All the same I'm frightened when I think about it. He says only happiness will come of it, and that two people being happy without doing anyone else any harm can never be wrong."

"I should say he was right there. What are you afraid of?"

"We're so different, really—his background and mine. And the things he believes in—hateful things, some of them, militarism, imperialism, the suppression of personal liberty and of opposition. How can one really love someone who believes in such things?"

"*'Le coeur a ses raisons—'*" he suggested. "You know how it goes on!"

"*'Que la raison ne connaît point'*. I know. But they're not really valid—those reasons of the heart, are they?"

He laughed. "Human life revolves round them, nevertheless !"

"And what a mess most of it is !"

"I don't agree. It's the reasonable people who make a mess of things by missing everything. It's the trouble with this new world order—its awful reasonableness ! Man is naturally bad, the apostles of it declare, so he must be governed by a few leaders who are assumed to know what is good for the bad stupid masses, and if people don't like it they must put up with it because, their leaders say, it's all for their own good, and anyone not recognising that fact must be suppressed, one way or another. It's reasonable enough, on the face of it you get an efficient state, a well-disciplined society with every kind of social security, and for those who are good at toeing the line, it works out well enough ; they've nothing to worry about ; the state assumes all responsibilities, takes care of everything. But there's no place in such a society for the rebel. There can be no dissentient voice—which gags the writer, the poet, the painter, and the revolutionary, right away. There's no freedom. Perhaps the majority of people don't want freedom—they only want a comfortable home, a good job, a few pleasures, and a pension in their old age. But it's the rebels and dreamers, the unreasonable people, who keep the soul of the world alive—the people who reach, quite unreasonably, for the stars—the intractable people for whom freedom is the breath of life. People like Steven Tronder—crazy, but inspired !"

"I thought you held him responsible for the deaths of all the young men who were shot ?"

"I think he was mistaken—but then, as you know, I believe in life on any terms. His conduct, and the conduct of all of them, was the antithesis of reason, for reason said make the best of a bad job—but it was magnificent. As to you, my dear, it is unreasonable that you should feel drawn to Captain Dettin, but the fact remains that you do. After all, what were the reasons why you married Victor Vesteralte ? Did you stop to ask yourself what his political ideas or religious views were, if any, whether the farm paid or not, how much he had in the bank, whether you would like being a farmer's wife ? Of course you didn't. You married him for all the unreasonable reasons of the heart. I can't see that it matters what views a man holds as to the way the world should be run, provided his ideas are selfless, disinterested, sincerely idealistic, provided he sincerely believes, that is, that his ideas really are for the happiness and betterment of humanity. One can admire and respect such people even whilst profoundly disagreeing with them—as I admired and respected Steven Tronder."

She got up, suddenly. "I've taken up too much of your time, but I'm grateful to you." She held out her hand.

He said, taking it, and smiling, "Have I said the things you hoped I would say?"

She returned his smile. "Yes. One has this weak need for confirmation."

"Human need," he corrected her.

He opened the door for her. "You're not lonely living in that lonely place by yourself?"

"No. I have a maid, in any case."

"You're safe from the bombs out there."

"That's not important. It reminds me—if you want any help at the hospital with air-raid casualties I could give you an evening or two a week. I have examination papers and exercise books to correct most evenings, or I'd offer more."

"Thank you. I'll remember. We may need someone. You realise it's grim work, of course?"

"I don't get sick. I was brought up on a farm."

"At times one needs to have been brought up in a slaughter-house, I'm afraid."

"I wouldn't fail you."

"I'm sure you wouldn't."

When she had gone he went upstairs to his study where he kept his cabinet of ivories. There was a carved ivory ball of lotus-leaves and dragons, centuries old, which, when he was worried, he liked to handle. In the contemplation of its perfection of beauty he found the meaning and purpose of all life. Since Man had it in his power to create absolute beauty all else might be forgiven—the baseness and brutality and ugliness. Here was the justification of human life, the Divine apology for Man. Then truth which had been obscured by the grunt and sweat of living became clarified, and it was again possible to believe—as one must believe if life was to have significance—in 'that of God in every man'.

Ivor Bard was a very lonely man since, in order to protect her own name from scandal, he had allowed his wife to divorce him fifteen years ago. It had wrecked his practice in the capital; for a few years before settling in Ling he had been a ship's doctor. It was in this capacity he had gone to the East. He had never met another woman he wanted to marry. He was intensely responsive to loneliness in people. The loneliness and the aloneness. It was what drew him to Colonel Anton—the deep loneliness of the man. In Steven Tronder he had been aware of the aloneness, but he realised that Tronder was never lonely, since he lived in the brotherhood of man. He had been drawn to the minister from admiration, and a kind of pity. Such people were so vulnerable to the shafts of the world. Tronder and Anton fascinated

him as a parallel study. In each there worked the dynamic of singleness of purpose, but they represented two extremes ; they were Christ and anti-Christ. Anton knew nothing of the heart's reasons ; he lived in a world of reason, of mathematical precision. He had two relaxations, Bard discovered—music and chess. Bach's music for its mathematical purity, its appeal to the reason rather than to the emotions, and chess for its logic. He had admired a very beautiful ivory chess set of Bard's.

"You play ?" he had inquired.

Bard had smiled. "Rather well, I believe."

"I too."

"If you would care for a game, Commandant, I am at your service any raidless evening."

The colonel had bowed, drawing his heels together with a little click.

"Thank you. It would give me pleasure. It would be better that you should come to the town-hall than that I should come here—better for you, if you understand. Any evening at the town-hall after eight—I will let you have a pass, so that you have no trouble with the patrols."

Up to the-time of Anna's visit Bard had not gone. The air-raids had kept him busy at the hospital, with casualties, and even when there were no casualties he had to be there, and on raid-free evenings he had felt too tired.

Now, as he stood reflectively turning the ivory ball of lotus-flowers and dragons in his fingers, thinking of Anna and her troubled face, he decided to go. He would give the colonel a game, and he would see this Captain Dettin who had caused such turmoil in the soul of Anna Vesteralte. He had seen him on the street—he knew all the staff by sight—and when he had attended the colonel at the town-hall, but now he would look at him in a new light. Human nature was endlessly interesting, and no amount of psychological theorising would explain away its moving, tragic, beautiful mysteriousness.

He had thought a great deal about young Mrs. Vesteralte since he had gone to the school in a last attempt to dissuade her from encouraging her husband's brothers to refuse conscription. He had always remembered that quenched look in her eyes, and the feeling he had had that only the passion of hate in her kept her going. Then he had urged her against that madness, that noble unreason, he had admired—and had earned her contempt. Now it was she who came to him, to confirm her in passion of another kind, a passion of love, in all its unreasonableness, and he had been able to confirm her in it, and had earned her gratitude. He wondered if she realised that in

each case his counsel had been the advocacy of life against death, love against hate.

He had pitied her, deeply, that wet autumn day with the wind blowing the rain into their faces, and the bitter wind of war blowing through their hearts. Now he envied her, because she had achieved something he had failed in fifteen years to achieve—an escape from inner loneliness. If she had turned to him that autumn day! The realisation that you could draw so close to people in their loneliness without their being aware of it intensified the loneliness—that consuming loneliness—in yourself. But this young Captain Dettin had succeeded where he, Ivor Bard, had failed. Dettin had gone to her out of his loneliness and had not been rebuffed by her initial coldness and had finally succeeded in invading her heart. Well, wasn't he after all here in the role of invader?

Dr. Bard smiled ruefully and replaced the ivory ball in the cabinet. He would give the colonel his game of chess and read what was to be read in the face of the triumphant young captain, who had, evidently, lit something in Anna which the husband she had deeply loved had failed to light. He was glad for her, but a little anxious; it was important that she should not be hurt. She would have been astonished, he thought, if she had realised just how important that was to him.

8

When he was not forced to concentrate on military matters, Paul lived in an endless reverie of Anna. It was a reverie in which the past and the future flowed together. In his mind he wrote her endless letters, endlessly conversed with her. He was a man possessed. It was Katerina all over again, but more intensely, because the force of circumstances gave him a greater need for Anna than he had ever had for Katerina. Katerina had possessed him by her beauty; Anna's power was something that went deeper; she possessed him by her response to his consuming hunger; she was the blessed answer to his most passionate prayer. Katerina was the body's flame; Anna the heart's desire. She was the reincarnation of the child Elsa who had put her hana into his in the dark forest and released all the love dammed up in him and ended his loneliness. Thinking of Anna he felt the same kind of happiness he had known then; there was trust in it, and gratitude, and eagerness, all the gladness of his boyhood's summers. When he talked to Anna of Elsa he evoked for her the whole of his childhood's background.

And the need to talk was as strong in him as the need to love and be loved. For two years there had been no one to talk to. Before the war there had been Maria—patient, sympathetic, devoted. Before that there had been Carlos, with his lively imagination. In the army there was no one, and the loneliness closed in on him again. If he could be said to have any friend in the army it was Max Corder. The young lieutenant had his points; in friendship he had a certain easy-going amiability and good-nature; he and Paul had very little in common apart from their enthusiasm for the New Order; outside of that their tastes and standards were different, and if they had met in normal circumstances they would have had no interest in each other; as it was, they worked together and liked each other well enough, and Corder, at least, would have had no hesitation in calling Paul his friend. But when Paul thought of friendship he thought of Carlos. Friendship was something which illumined life; it was a giving and a receiving; with young Corder he felt that he neither gave nor received anything of any importance. After the war they would drift apart as casually as they had drifted together, knowing very little more about each other than in the beginning. The arrangement suited Corder well enough; a friend was someone to drink with, someone to 'let off steam to' when you were fed-up with the war, or had had a row with a third person, or fallen foul of 'the old man', and for all such purposes Paul Dettin was adequate. There had been times when Paul had been glad of Corder's companionship. At least they had their impassioned patriotism and their devouring homesickness in common.

But drinking and talking with young Corder could never ease the inner loneliness in Paul. He never wanted to take Max into the secret places of the heart, or enter into his. Yet all the time there was that deep need to enter into another person's life, intimately, and have that person enter into yours, yielding up the citadel of self, letting down the drawbridges of heart and mind. To be unable to do so, to be denied in that need, was to be moated round with loneliness.

It took Anna some time to realise just how much that letting down of mental and emotional drawbridges meant to Paul Dettin. At first she was a little impatient of his continual return to the subject of Elsa; but gradually she began to realise that in this first-love was rooted everything that made up the personality of the man. The closer she approached to the lonely boy of that dark Baltic forest the better she understood the man. She began to perceive the profound influence the background against which he had grown up had had upon him. At first she had dismissed as sentimental romanticism his insistence that in her he had found Elsa again; gradually she began to

realise that his feeling that he had done so was of tremendous importance to him. It meant that his love for her was a home-coming. At first she had wearied of his incessant talk of his country ; then she began to realise that it was bound up with his feeling for her. She was Elsa, and Elsa was his childhood, his boyhood, the dark forest and the shining lake ; she was his restless, dreaming young manhood in the little university town of Minns, with its Gothic spires and wrought-iron inn signs, stepped gables and mediaeval towers ; she was his passionate love for the whole of his country ; she was the core of that love. It was the boy who had loved Elsa in the dark forest through all those Baltic summers who had drunk to the Morning of the World in that last fateful summer before the storm broke. Gradually she began to understand, and from being impatient became patient, and then, finally, interested. It was like piecing together the segments of a jigsaw puzzle. He had this need to present her with his life whole, and she developed within herself, as she came closer to him, the need to receive it. That she should know about Elsa, and his sisters and parents, the wooden village of Prendel with its wide dusty street, the summer chalet beside the lake, the smell of the Baltic winter, seemed much more important than anything he could tell her about the new world the Maines opened up for him, or the new world order he came to serve. His immature love for Elsa had affected him more profoundly than his passion for Katerina, and, significantly, it was of Elsa and his home life he talked most.

He never tired of insisting on the points they had in common—outweighing their differences, it seemed to him—and the way in which their lives had been steadily converging through the years. In the fact that they had actually come face to face at the International Exhibition, and that he had come to her town, passed the farmstead in which she was destined to live, and that the war should have eventually brought them together, he saw the hand of destiny. It seemed to him most wonderful, not mere coincidence but the working out of a predestined pattern.

It seemed strange to Anna, too, but less remarkable than it seemed to Paul, for to her the workings of God, fate, destiny, whatever one chose to call the power that wove all the threads of human life into an intelligible pattern, were always mysterious. That she should eventually have met Paul Dettin did not seem stranger to her than the chance way in which she had met Victor Vesterlalte at the school prize-giving. But Paul would not have this; Victor was one of her fellow countrymen, and even if her life had been differently arranged, even if her mother had not died and she had not been brought up by Gran on the alley farm, she would probably still have been a school-teacher and

gone to work at the state school in the capital, and even if Victor had not gone to that particular prize-giving it was highly probable that he would have met her, eventually, at another.

"Whereas, we are people of different nationalities, brought up in different countries, moving in quite different worlds—the chances of our meeting were a million to one! And then all the time against our different backgrounds the similarity of our lives—each of us brought up in the country, each of us lonely in our childhood. Then when we have grown up and fallen in love—losing that love——"

But that she would not accept. There was no parallel there, she pointed out. She was married to Victor. . . . When he replied that the legal ceremony made no difference, that he was actually Katerina's lover longer than she was Victor's wife, she realised that he had completely missed her meaning. How could she make him understand that by being 'married' to Victor she did not mean the wedding ceremony, but that deep sense of belonging that flowed between them, and which, once one has known it, one can never feel with anyone else. She resented the implication that the passion he had felt for Katerina bore any resemblance to that deep love she had felt for Victor; it roused an instinctive anger in her, as did any suggestion that what was between him and her was in any way related to her relationship with Victor. In moments of passion she could say 'I love you', to Paul, but at other times if he referred to 'our' love, or spoke of 'us' in their relationship, there was this quick instinctive resentment. Only between herself and Victor could 'we' and 'our' and 'us' apply, and that Victor was dead made no difference; there could never be that deep intimacy, that complete belonging, with anyone else. Paul had no right to assume that she loved him as she had loved Victor—as she still loved Victor. There was no affinity between them. Paul was strange to her; his foreignness was more than a matter of nationality; he was foreign to her, personally.

Once, with deliberate cruelty, resenting him, she told him this.

He told her, "Nationality has nothing to do with love between men and women, any more than age has. A man and woman are attracted to each other, or not, and that's all there is to it!"

"On a purely physical plane, yes, but I was thinking of something more than sex!"

He frowned. "Would you say there is only sex between us?"

She hesitated a moment, a little afraid, before plunging in the knife, then said, definitely, "If we are to be quite honest with ourselves—yes! How could there be anything else? What have we got in common—really?"

His face darkened and he turned away from her. He said, curtly,

"I only know that if this place were a brothel and you were a prostitute in it I wouldn't be coming here."

She knew that he was terribly hurt, and that for him at least it was not true that there was only sex between them. For herself she did not know; away from him, she asked herself endlessly what, really, she felt for him, beyond the passion he roused in her. There was pity in her for him, and out of that pity tenderness; but never that sense of belonging she had known with Victor, and always, behind everything, the sense of guilt, of betrayal, not merely of Victor, but of his brothers and Steven who had died in their resistance to the invader. Even, in some ways, she felt her relationship with Paul to be a betrayal of Ricky, who would certainly have stood firmly with Steven and the others and died with them had he been in the country. Would she ever be able to tell Ricky that she had taken as lover one of the invading troops? And not merely one of the invading troops but the actual officer who had given the order to fire that had killed Victor. Then, to save her conscience, she would inwardly protest that she had tried to keep Paul away, but he had pestered her; but for him none of this would have happened; then would come the need to hurt him, to be revenged on him, and to appease her conscience.

Paul understood well enough how it was with her, but this conflict of her passion for him and her sense of guilt over it troubled him; he had hoped that in time she would come to accept their relationship simply, as he did, find in him a refuge as he found a refuge in her. But if he pleaded with her on these lines it only angered her.

"Your country was not violated as this one has been," she would remind him, bitterly, "and though you have had a friend killed in the war, you have not had your nearest and dearest murdered in cold blood!"

To that there was no answer he had not already made. He would feel that he could not go on explaining his attitude about it all. He was very well aware that the war had brought tragedy to her country, and to her personally; but this war, which was not, he insisted, of his country's seeking, was a tragedy for the whole world. And if his country did not win—which was of course unthinkable—it would be an even greater tragedy for the whole world.

But this argument only plunged them into ideological conflict, and then they would feel the war within themselves; then the war would seem to get right down inside them, their whole beings, body and soul, turned, then, into a battlefield on which was waged the life and death struggle of emotions *versus* intellect, love *versus* hate, a terrible, bitter war that disintegrated them, emotionally, as the material war going on outside and all round them disintegrated the world. The

war raged most fiercely in Anna, because until she deliberately hurt or angered him, it was easy for Paul to love Anna—she had only to set aside her bitterness and resentment ; so far as he was concerned there were no other obstacles. But it was very hard for Anna to love Paul, because these obstacles were not easily set aside ; they could be thrust down out of sight, but every now and then they swam up to the surface of consciousness again, full of a terrible accusation that flooded her with guilt.

And apart from the ideological war between them there was Anna's sense of disloyalty to Victor personally, to their marriage. She brooded over it, and exasperated Paul once by telling him, "It's a kind of unfaithfulness!"

He protested, "You can't be unfaithful to someone who is no longer there to be faithful to!" He didn't want to hurt her, but it had to be said.

"There's such a thing as keeping faith with the dead," she flared at him.

"Is there ? What does it mean exactly ?"

"It means not doing things you know they'd disapprove of!"

"Would Victor disapprove of your being happy?"

"With you, yes! Besides, I'm not happy!"

"Then why don't you keep me away ? You easily could. You've only to report me to the colonel, you know that!"

"If you weren't so thick-skinned you'd stop away without my reporting you!"

"I happen to love you—and need you."

"I'm tired of hearing about your love! You don't know the meaning of it! Sex is all you know about!"

He was slow to anger, but on that occasion he lost his temper completely. It was a favourite theme of hers, in one of her fits of resentment, that all he knew about was sex.

He got up. "You needn't bother to report—I'm going, and I'm not coming back till you send for me. I'm tired of hearing about your pure and noble love for your precious husband. It's nothing but Victor, Victor, Victor, every time I come here, and I've had enough of it! You say you couldn't feel passion with him and it's been demonstrated that you do with me, and if you feel it degrades you I don't want it. We could have been happy together, but you won't let us be, so I'll leave you in peace!"

She was sick with fear, and made an effort to keep him.

"Passion is purely physical, you know it is!"

"Speak for yourself. For you it apparently is. Anyhow, you **needn't** be troubled by it any more—so far as I am concerned."

He went out and slammed the door. In an instant she was across the room and out in the narrow hall beside him, clinging to him.

"Paul—I get overwrought! I get so terribly guilty and frightened! Try and forgive me! Don't go! Please don't go!"

Afterwards she despised herself for pleading with him . . . afterwards, when she felt safe, the disaster of his going averted. It was all part of the war in her.

"I must go. It's no good. You're always saying these things. It's obvious that deep down in you you hate me, and that all I do is rouse sex in you, and then you resent me and it adds to the hate, and it all goes round in a hateful vicious circle!"

All the horror of the scenes and tears of his mother and sisters was working in him—the old deep horror of everything pitched in an over-emotional key. He knew the old recoil, and the desire to escape.

She realised that she was alienating him and made an effort at control. She said, quietly, "I don't hate you. You know I don't. I need you just as much as you need me."

It was not true; even as she said it she knew it was not true; she had Victor's parents to go to, she had Andrew and Rilke; she had Ivor Bard. But she had to make him feel this. Having, perversely, destroyed his faith in her, she had now to build it up again. Having done all she knew to destroy his *amour propre* now she must do all she knew to restore it—if she was to hold him.

He was soft and sentimental and easily reached, and she knew it. She smiled at him, and he melted like snow in the sun.

His hands closed over hers. "Anna, beloved, it's horrible to quarrel like this! Why do you say such things? You know I love you. It isn't just a war-time affaire. After the war I'd like you to come to my country and for us to be married. But perhaps that just seems madness to you?"

It did seem madness to her, but she was filled with pity and tenderness again.

She said, gently, "Let's go and sit down and talk about things."

They went back into the room and sat down, and he talked—with an eager hopefulness she could not share. He was convinced that she had only to come to his country and see the new order functioning to see at once the good in it and to support it. That he might settle in her country simply did not occur to him—so profound was his belief in the new order. The thought came to her with a sudden up-rising of bitterness. She let his talk flow over her, but she felt completely outside of the dream his words spun. She had no faith in a joint future. It was impossible to see ahead. In the first place, what guarantee was there that they would either of them survive the war?

And if they did, who could say when the war was going to end, and how? How could one possibly know what one was going to think and feel and want when it was all over?

She said at last, after his first eager rush of post-war plans, "We don't know what's going to happen. The war may go on for years yet. You may be moved to another place and we mightn't meet for years—you might meet someone else. Anything might happen! It seems to me we all of us move in a dark forest—it closes in all round us and we can't, yet, see the way out. And when we do finally get out we have no idea what sort of world awaits us outside!"

"I'm not afraid of the dark forest! I was brought up in it!"

"Not in this particular one."

"In this particular forest the birds sing very sweetly at times, and I know that eventually we shall get out into the sunlight!"

"You have great faith!"

"Of course I have faith! We're not going to stay in the dark forest for ever! But whilst we're in it we might as well listen to the birds and gather the flowers and blueberries like the boy and girl who walked there all those years ago!"

She smiled. "Romanticist! The bombs weren't falling all round outside the forest when that boy and girl went gathering flowers and blueberries there!"

"If there had been they'd never have noticed," he assured her, with the simplicity of happiness restored.

But we are forced to notice, she thought, but she said nothing; what did it matter if in his romantic, sentimental way he over-simplified things? They needed each other in the dark forest in which they walked. And sufficient unto the day. . . .

9

There was a Sunday evening when heavy clouds gathered ominously over the mountains and there was a wild scurry of wind along the valley. People taking their Sunday evening stroll along the waterfront, and promenading the main street—they did not use the square any more—looked anxiously up at the sky and agreed that it was 'blowing up for a storm', and turned their steps towards home, hurrying. Women closed the windows. Cafe *terrasses* emptied. People who had gone visiting hesitated as to whether they should hurry home before the storm broke, or wait until it should be over.

One of those who decided to try and beat the storm was Sonia. Once it started raining it might go on the better part of the

night, she reasoned. And if there was thunder Mrs. Vesteralte, all alone at the farm, might feel nervous. It was not nice to be all alone with a wild storm blowing and the thunder echoing in the mountains. Besides, Mrs. Vesteralte was so jumpy these days she might easily mistake the thunder for an air-raid if it came before the rain. Sonia's mother agreed with her that it was best to cut the evening short and make a dash for it. . . .

So Sonia said good-bye to her family, mounted her bicycle, and pedalled like the wind itself up the valley, arriving back at the farmstead a good hour earlier than she usually returned on a Sunday evening, and beating the storm by a short head, for a few drops of rain had just begun to fall as she wheeled the bicycle into the yard, and the wind had dropped.

She put the bicycle away in the shed and let herself into the house through the dairy. A short distance along a narrow stone passage from the dairy was the kitchen, and opening out of the kitchen was the living-room. As she came into the kitchen Sonia heard voices, and then, before she had time to wonder who was Mrs. Vesteralte's visitor, the door opened and Anna said, sharply, "You're back early tonight, Sonia!"

"It was blowing up for rain," Sonia said, "so I thought I'd better get in before it started. . . ."

"We have a visitor this evening," Anna said. "The colonel sent one of his officers to see me—they may want to requisition the place. I was just going to make some coffee; perhaps you would be good enough to do it now that you're here—"

"Certainly, Mrs. Vesteralte," Sonia said, meekly. Beyond Mrs. Vesteralte she could see the young captain she had often noticed in the town. He did not look at all like an officer sent out to see about requisitioning anything; his hair was ruffled and the neck of his tunic unfastened. And Mrs. Vesteralte had spoken with a strange new sharpness when she said 'You're back early', as though it were an accusation; also she had a queer look about her—a flushed look. . . .

Sonia went through to the scullery to put on a spirit-stove to heat water for the coffee, to save re-lighting the kitchen-fire. It was a funny time for an officer to come about a requisitioning order, and on a Sunday, too. There had been no car in the road—the captain must have walked out. Usually an officer with a requisitioning order came out in a car, accompanied by two privates, and he stood very stiffly and correctly at the front door, with his men behind him, and when he had notified the owner of the house he saluted, clicked his heels, and marched away. . . . Perhaps the captain had taken a fancy to Mrs. Vesteralte! But even if he had, he wouldn't be inside the house.

looking all at home like that, unless Mrs. Vesteralte had asked him in.

When Sonia was safely beyond ear-shot, in the scullery, Anna said bitterly to Paul, * "I always knew we'd get caught one of these days!"

He tried to soothe her agitation. "It'll be all right. You handled the situation perfectly. When I've gone you'll impress upon her the importance of not mentioning to anyone that you'd asked me in, for fear of giving rise to talk."

"How do I account for having asked you in?" Her tone suggested that he was entirely to blame for being there.

"You can say that as I came unaccompanied we had an informal chat and it seemed natural to suggest my coming in——"

"It would be most unnatural to suggest anything of the kind, or ever to have the informal chat, and Sonia knows it! The girl's not a fool. She knows how people talk about Dr. Bard because he plays chess with the colonel and how they resent it, and that those two waitresses were sacked from the Municipal Cafe for being friendly to Lieutenant Corder when he came in—and now she comes home unexpectedly early and finds Victor Vesteralte's widow, of all people, entertaining Captain Dettin! Mrs. Vesteralte going one better than the doctor and the waitresses, in fact!"

"You will put all the blame on to me. You will say you couldn't get rid of me, and what a relief it was that she came back when she did. She's a simple girl, and fond of you, you always say—she's not likely to cause trouble."

"People can cause trouble without meaning to——"

She broke off at the sound of a door opening and rose and opened the door into the kitchen.

"I'll take the tray," she said.

Sonia handed the tray to her mistress, and looked past her into the living-room and observed that the captain had combed his hair and fastened the neck of his tunic.

"If there's nothing else you'll be wanting I'll go to bed," she said.

Anna answered, firmly, "I'd like you to stay up till the captain's gone. He'll be going in a few minutes. I want a word with you."

"Very good, Mrs. Vesteralte," Sonia was all humbleness, but she thought, as she went back to the scullery, "Mrs. Vesteralte of all people! If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes I'd never have believed it! The captain, too—him that gave the order that killed her husband! If she had to have someone she'd have done better to pick the lieutenant. . . . It's a wonder the master doesn't turn in his grave!"

Anna, pouring coffee with a hand that was not quite steady, said, violently, "We can't meet here any more. We'll have to think of somewhere else. Or finish everything."

He said, quietly, "Rather than that any harm should come to you I'd finish it. I could ask to be posted to another place."

"No. I couldn't be left alone now." There was panic in her voice.

"That we should finish everything was your suggestion, not mine!"

"Oh, I know, I know! I say these things!"

He sighed. "Yes, you say these things, and they hurt."

"I love you—you know that."

He finished his coffee and rose. "Sometimes I wonder! I'd better go now. We'd better not meet for a few weeks. You could send me a letter through the doctor, to the town-hall, perhaps—he could leave it when he goes to play chess with the colonel. Perhaps he would advise you what is best to do. Perhaps we'll both think of something."

He drew her to him. "Darling, don't worry. No harm shall come to you, and somehow we'll find a way to go on meeting, keeping our precious oasis secret." He kissed her, gently.

She sighed and rested her head a moment on his shoulder.

"I'm not always very nice to you, Paul, but I couldn't do without you now."

He stroked her hair. "You won't have to."

"It's a very dark forest just now, isn't it?"

"We'll come to a clearing, soon, don't worry."

She went with him out into the narrow passage where the roses dropped their petals on to the oak chest. Sonia had lit the lamp; it had grown so dark outside.

He picked up his cap and gloves.

She was at once anxious.

"You'll get very wet—perhaps you should wait? It's raining hard—"

"I won't notice the rain—I've too much to think about."

She went to the end of the passage and opened the front door. The rain was driving down the valley as though an invisible army were pelting the earth with steel rods. The mountains had disappeared. The guttering along the house was overflowing and pouring down at the gable like a waterfall. Water spurted up from the stones of the path where the steel rods struck, and the rods beat a tattoo on an upturned milk-churn in the yard.

Anna protested. "You can't go through this!"

"We can't keep Sonia up. I'll shelter at the hay-hut down the road."

He stepped out into the deluge and strode down the path. At the gate he looked back with a smile and gave a small salute.

Anna closed the door and went down the passage to the kitchen.

"Sonia !"

The girl emerged from the scullery.

"You wanted to speak to me, Mrs. Vesteralte ?"

"Yes. I want to impress upon you that no one must know Captain Dettin came in this evening—you know how stories get around. It was his first and it will be his last visit, but that won't stop scandal circulating if anyone knows. You must give me your solemn promise not to say a word to anyone—not even to your parents ! Only you and I must know he has been here. You understand ? You must not even write and tell Greig."

"I promise faithfully not to breathe a word to anyone, Mrs. Vesteralte. Are they going to take the place over ?"

"I don't know yet. The captain has to report to the colonel."

"It would be a pity if we should have to go from here."

"In some ways. But I may put in an evening or two a week at the hospital, and in that case I should have to take a room in town. I couldn't stay here during the winter, anyhow, if I am to go on teaching."

"I suppose not. Well, if there's nothing else, I'll go and turn back your bed——"

Anna said quickly, "There's no need to do that. Go and get the coffee-tray and rinse the cups. I'm going to bed now. Good night."

"Good night, Mrs. Vesteralte."

Sonia went through to the living-room to fetch the tray, and Anna rushed upstairs to her bedroom, locking the door behind her. She drew the curtains, lit a candle, then sat down on the tumbled bed and buried her face in her hands. The rain—the treacherous betraying rain—drummed against the windows. She tried to think, but it was no use ; she was too nervously exhausted. Why had everything to be so difficult ? Could she trust Sonia ? Did the girl suspect anything ? When and where would they meet again ? She did not know the answer to any of these questions. She only knew that she couldn't give him up—not now. Somewhere, somehow, there had to be a way out of the dark forest that encompassed them both.

Sonia did not want to get Mrs. Vesteralte into trouble, but she simply had to tell someone. If Greig had been there she would have told him as a matter of course, because however solemnly you promised not to tell, there were no secrets between husbands and wives—everyone knew that ; your husband or your wife was always the exception

in any promise not to tell. Husband and wife, after all, were one flesh. But Greig wasn't there, so what more natural than that she should tell her mother? One's mother, after all, was perhaps even closer than one's husband. Besides, she had to know what to do—had to have advice. . . .

Sonia cycled out in the morning, whilst Anna was away at the school, specially to discuss the matter with her mother.

Mrs. Winters was at the wash-tub, outside her small chalet-like house when Sonia arrived. It was a fine sunny day; the storm had cleared the air; it was a good drying day for the Monday wash.

"Anything wrong?" Mrs. Winters asked, anxiously, as Sonia got off her bicycle.

"No. Only I've got something to tell you. I'm worried." She leaned the bicycle up against the wall of the house.

"It's about Mrs. Vesteralte," she said. "You must promise faithfully not to tell. She made me promise. But I've got to tell you because I don't know what to do. You see when I got in last night she'd got a visitor—Captain Dettin. She said he'd been sent by the colonel about requisitioning the place."

Mrs. Winters leaned forward over the wooden tub, her arms up to the elbows in soapy water. She demanded, sceptically:

"At that time of the night, and on a Sunday?"

"Well, that's what I thought! It seems funny——"

"If they'd wanted to requisition the Vesteralte place they'd have had it long ago. Why should they want it now? Besides, the colonel never sends any officer out alone—the officers always go in a car with two privates. It's all very formal and correct. You know what the colonel is—everyone does. He wouldn't dream of sending an officer out alone to interview a woman living alone—and late on a Sunday evening, of all times! I don't believe a word of it—she's playing the same game as the doctor, if you ask me, more shame to her, and the best thing you can do, my girl, is get out before you get a bad name along with her!"

"Oh, I wouldn't like to leave her all alone, like that. She's been good to me, and I'd sooner work for her than anyone. You know how sweet she is!"

"Sweet or no, you can't afford to live in the same house as a woman carrying on with one of the foreign soldiers!"

"We don't really know that she is carrying on!"

"If you're so sure of it what did you come running out here for like this first thing of a Monday morning?"

"Well, I'm not absolutely sure, but I don't really think **Mrs.**

Vesteralte would do a thing like that. I mean, she was so fond of the master."

"She was fond enough of him, but they were only three months married, and he's been dead a year. She's young, and she's lonely—but all the same it won't do, and you can't afford to be mixed up in it. Your father was telling me he'd heard in the town that some people tried to get hold of those two waitresses and cut off their hair. They were chased all up the main street, and if the doctor hadn't been passing in his car at the time the crowd would have got them! Rescuing them isn't going to do the doctor any good, either. He's already had a brick through his surgery window!"

Sonia went pale. Her mother added, "So you see, you can't afford to take any chances. It only wants to get around that the captain comes out to see Mrs. Vesteralte, and before you know where you are people will be saying he brings another officer with him for her maid—the young lieutenant he goes about with, perhaps."

"But it won't get around if we neither of us tell anyone," Sonia pointed out.

"How do you know who saw him come and go from the farm last night? There are always people about in the valley on a Sunday night. Anyone sheltering in the hay-hut down the road would have seen him leave there, and any number of people probably saw him arrive. Your father is sure to say you must leave there."

"Don't tell him," Sonia pleaded. "I promised I wouldn't tell anyone, but I had to tell you. I felt worried. Only don't tell father. He might go and let it out to someone at work."

"It's right and proper I should tell your father," Mrs. Winters said, firmly. "But you needn't be afraid he'll talk. Your father's an oyster when the occasion calls for it. I'll talk to him this evening, and you'd better come over tomorrow and I'll tell you what he says."

Sonia stayed long enough to peg out some clothes for her mother and drink a glass of milk, then cycled back to the Vesteralte farmstead. It had been a relief to tell someone, but she felt restless and unsettled. All the way along the narrow white ribbon of the valley road she brooded on the matter. Her father would be sure to back her mother up and say that she must leave Mrs. Vesteralte, and she did not want to do this, whatever Mrs. Vesteralte was up to; the more she thought about it the more strongly she felt she wanted to stay. She began to regret telling her mother. She wondered what Vera Halter would say. Vera was her great friend; they had been at school together, and left together, Sonia to go to the Vesteraltes, Vera to the Krubes. She felt a need to discuss the whole matter with Vera.

Back at the farmstead she hurried through her work and in the

early afternoon cycled into Ling. She took a shopping-basket so that if by any chance she ran into Mrs. Vesteralte coming from school she could say she had come in for some things, though she hoped to be back before Mrs. Vesteralte left the school.

The mayor lived in a tall narrow house with stepped gables and two flights of steps leading to the right and left of his front door. At one time he had lived over his tailoring business, but when he became mayor something more imposing seemed called for. Sonia went round to the back and found Vera in the large kitchen, very clean and warm, cleaning silver. She was a pleasant-looking girl with animated brown eyes, and an abundance of fair hair coiled in plaits over her ears. A tip-tilted nose gave her face an impudent look, and she had a quick flashing smile. She was not particularly surprised to see Sonia, who often looked in when she was in town doing the shopping. When Vera was baking there would generally be something warm and delicious straight from the oven.

"We've got the doctor coming to dinner tonight," she said, indicating the silver, and laughed, adding, "It's a wonder he doesn't bring the colonel with him, they're that thick! Only the mayor would have another stroke if he so much as suggested it—he hates him like poison, and I don't wonder. We don't hold with collaboration in this house!"

"It's about that I came to see you—to get your advice," Sonia said.

Vera regarded her with interest. "Don't tell me you've fallen for the handsome young lieutenant? You heard what happened to those two girls the other night? If it hadn't been for our collaborationist doctor they'd have had their heads shaved! He picked them up in his car just in time! The crowd hurled stones after the car!"

"I think it's horrible!" Sonia said, violently. "But it's not me that's fallen for anyone, but Mrs. Vesteralte, by *the* look of things, only you mustn't say a word to anyone—it would be terrible if it got around!"

"Her with her lovely golden plaits wound round her head and just asking to be cut off! But you can trust me. What's she been up to?"

Sonia told her about the captain and the requisitioning story, and how her mother said she mustn't go on working for Mrs. Vesteralte, because of it, and how her father was bound to back her mother up, and what did Vera think?

"Of course," said Sonia, "there might be nothing in it at all. She said it was his first and last visit."

"Do you believe that?"

"I don't know what to believe. It seems funny the one Sunday night I get in early—and Sunday night's the only night I'm out——"

"She's a fool if she is playing that game—a woman like that living on her own in that lonely place, and the widow of a man killed on the day of the invasion—people would never stand for it——"

"No one must know," Sonia said, urgently.

"These things get out. Anyone might have seen him coming or going."

The thought comforted Sonia. If the story did get around it meant it wouldn't necessarily be her fault. Actually it was very unlikely that anyone would have seen the captain coming or going, for the townspeople did not walk out to the far end of the valley, and if the scattered valley dwellers went anywhere on a Sunday they went into the town.

"My mother says I ought not to stop there—that I'll end by getting myself talked about along with her."

"I think she's right. It's too big a risk."

"Perhaps he won't come again?" Sonia persisted, hopefully.

"Of course he'll come again! The whole lot of them are bored stiff, and you've only got to give them half a smile to have them making nuisances of themselves. In a way I'm sorry for them—but they've no business to be here. Certainly they've no right to expect anything from any woman here, and they won't get anything from any self-respecting woman. I'm surprised at Mrs. Vesteralte!"

"I suppose she was lonely," Sonia suggested, feeling that she must defend Mrs. Vesteralte in spite of everything.

"All the same she should have known better," Vera said, severely, rubbing energetically at a silver candlestick. "The doctor ought to know better too. I wonder the Krubes let him come here. But they make excuses for him because he's a doctor and can't refuse to attend to anyone who is ill. All the same I don't see why he has to play chess with the colonel——"

"Is that what he does?"

"So they say."

"Perhaps he can't very well refuse."

"Of course he can refuse! Nobody can be made to do anything! They couldn't make those boys go and get out the ore, could they?"

"They killed them, though."

Vera tossed her head. "They were heroes. **It's** when you think of actions like that that you can't help despising people like the doctor and Mrs. Vesteralte. You must leave her, Sonia. You mustn't think of staying on with a woman like that—it would make you almost as bad as her!"

"D'you really think so?" Sonia was distressed.

"Of course I do. It would be condoning her conduct, wouldn't it?"

"I suppose so." Sonia was beginning to feel acutely unhappy and to wish she had kept the secret. It had been a shock to find the captain with Mrs. Vesteralte like that, and she had not known what to think, or even what she felt about it, beyond the sense of shocked surprise. Now she knew less than ever what she felt or thought about it. It was difficult to think of Mrs. Vesteralte, who was so good and kind, doing a wrong thing; and difficult to think of deserting her.

"Maybe there was nothing in it—nothing to worry about," she said, getting up to go.

"If the officer had merely called about requisitioning the place he wouldn't have gone on a Sunday and he wouldn't have been there at that time of the night! You take my advice and clear out before the mob that was chasing those two girls comes howling out after you two I Even if it was all innocent the story's bound to get out, and people are going to talk. You know what it's like since the occupation—everyone suspicious of everyone else!"

"It's frightening," Sonia said.

"Not if you're careful to be above suspicion."

"I suppose so. Well—I must be going. You won't tell a soul, will you? Promise!"

"Not a soul," Vera said, "I promise."

They embraced, and Sonia left. A few minutes after she had gone Mrs. Krube came down into the kitchen. She was an amply built woman who before the occupation had enjoyed being the mayor's wife. She had been very snug in her comfortable bourgeois life, enjoyed the civic functions she attended with her husband—she enjoyed wearing evening dress and feeling important; her elbow-length white kid gloves had been symbolic of everything she valued. Now she was nothing; a foreign officer in jackboots and a uniform covered with ribbons and medals ruled in her husband's stead; she herself had become the wife of a local tradesman; complacency was replaced by discontent, and she had hardly heart left for exercising authority over her servant.

"That was Mrs. Vesteralte's maid who left a few moments ago, wasn't it?" she demanded.

"Yes, madam."

"Hasn't she anything better to do than come here, wasting her own time and yours?"

"She was worried about something and wanted my advice. Something to do with Mrs. Vesteralte having that Captain Dettin to supper." Had Sonia said he had come to supper? She couldn't remember,

But she had an idea that that was it—that Sonia had got back early on Sunday night and surprised them at supper ; or anyhow having coffee together. It would be difficult to say whether Vera had intended telling Mrs. Krube, after promising she would not tell anyone. She only knew that she enjoyed telling it. It was difficult to keep a piece of news like that to yourself, after all ! Besides, the telling of it warded off Mrs. Krube's annoyance over Sonia calling, and, final sop to conscience, the mayor ought to know what was going on. . . .

"Indeed ?" Mrs. Krube was all attention. "I'm surprised to hear that—Captain Dettin, of all people!"

"It mustn't get around, of course," Vera said, polishing a silver entree dish.

"For Mrs. Vesteralte's sake I hope it won't," said Mrs. Krube . . . and went straight upstairs and told the mayor.

II

The mayor had recovered from his stroke, but it had left him older and greyer and more sagging than ever. The heart had completely gone out of him and he no longer made ineffectual efforts to maintain any hold on affairs. He had the feeling of being done for, physically and spiritually. He could no longer keep up any pretence of authority. The colonel was military governor of Ling, and the mayor was not even office-boy, and everybody knew it.

He had given up going anywhere since his illness, and the only visitor to the house was Dr. Bard—whom some people criticised for being too friendly with the colonel. Peter Krube knew what was said about the doctor, for Mrs. Krube reported all the gossip to him, and she herself disapproved of him, but old Krube would hear nothing against Ivor Bard. The doctor was different. No doubt it paid him to keep in with the commandant, then he could run the hospital how he liked, without interference. He refused to allow that Bard was a 'collaborator'—hadn't he been one of the delegates to the town-hall, and hadn't he spoken up and held the colonel responsible for the town running with blood ? What if he did play chess with the colonel ? No doubt he would play with the devil himself if the devil could give him a good game ! The doctor was not afraid of the commandant—that was what it came to, and the commandant respected the doctor. . . . But this Mrs. Vesteralte and Captain Dettin business, reported to him by Mrs. Krube, was something quite different. He discussed it with the doctor at dinner that night. He was worried. There had already been one ugly incident in the town. Whatever young Mrs.

Vesteralte's motives, whether she was sorry for the young officer, or whether she herself was lonely, the matter must go no further, he urged. The story would be all over the place in no time—Mrs. Vesteralte's maid had been unable to keep her mouth shut, and their own maid, Vera, had also had to pass on the story, and she would not rest with passing it on to her mistress, any more than Mrs. Krube would rest with passing it on to her husband, and all the people they told it to in strict confidence would in strict confidence pass it on to others. . . .

"Mrs. Vesteralte should come into town and work at the hospital and live there," the mayor urged. "She must establish her conduct as above reproach. You must persuade her! I can't understand her—entertaining Dettin of all people!"

"She ought to be ashamed of herself," Mrs. Krube said. "But perhaps the doctor approves of such conduct?"

"I neither approve nor disapprove. I merely say that human beings are—human! Mrs. Vesteralte is very lonely, and so is Captain Dettin—if they can find any kind of comfort in each other *it is* surely their business and no one else's."

"Then you do approve?" Mrs. Krube accused him.

"Approval suggests that I think it a good thing, and I don't know if it is a good thing; that's something only the people themselves **can** know."

"Hair-splitting!" Mrs. Krube snapped.

Old Krube said, impatiently, "The thing is not whether the doctor is splitting hairs, approving or disapproving—the thing is that Mrs. Vesteralte must be warned of the possible consequences of friendship with this Captain Dettin or any other of the colonel's troops, and that as a friend of hers it's up to the doctor to warn her."

Bard promised, readily. He was very worried. He sent Anna a note to the school the following day asking her to come and see him during surgery hours that evening, stressing the urgency of it.

When she was shown in to his consulting-room he came straight to the point.

"The mayor asked me to see you," he told her. "Your maid has talked. This is a very serious matter for you, Anna."

It was the first time he had used her Christian name, but in her agitation she did not notice it. She went pale.

"She gave me her solemn promise she wouldn't tell. I told her the captain had come about a requisitioning order and that I had rashly offered him coffee. I told her that he had never been there before and would not be coming again."

"It doesn't matter what she promised or what you told her. **She** told her friend, Vera Halter, who is maid to the Krubes, and **the girl**

told Mrs. Krube and Mrs. Krube told the mayor. I dined there last night and the mayor is worried and Mrs. Krube is indignant. Goodness knows how many people Mrs. Krube has told today!"

"I must see Paul immediately. Perhaps you would take a note to him at the town-hall?"

"I will take a note for you, but you will be very unwise to see him. You should not see each other again for weeks—until the whole thing has blown over. If you keep away from each other it will. But you should move into the town—you must be where everyone can see you and what you're doing. The mayor suggested you should work full time at the hospital and sleep there, and I am entirely agreeable to this."

"But I can't—don't you see I can't? I must see him! We can't suddenly be cut off from each other like that! We need each other! What else have we either of us got to live for in all this ghastliness?"

"What you've got to live for—what we've all got to live for—is the time when it'll all be over. Then we can all remake our lives."

"We've got to survive first!" Her voice was bitter.

"The chances of survival are greater than of going under. The war will end, and more people will be left alive than will have died. You and Paul Dettin stand a chance of sharing in that survival and of shaping a future together, if you both still want it then. But for the time being you can only do each other harm."

"Last time I came to see me you gave me your blessing and urged the reasons of the heart!"

"You had not then had your secret discovered. So long as it remained a secret only happiness could come of it. Now that it is a public scandal, or on its way to being, only harm can come of it. Surely you can see that?"

"I refuse to be intimidated by a lot of gossip!"

"I'm afraid I must deplore your commonsense whilst admiring your spirit! You probably heard that I rescued two girls from an infuriated mob only the other day. An angry mob is a very ugly thing, let me tell you! What I would suggest is that you write Captain Dettin a note, which I will take to the town-hall tomorrow, telling him that the secret is out because your maid did not keep her promise not to tell anyone, and that both the mayor and I strongly urge that you should come and work and live at the hospital until the affair has blown over. Or anyhow that you shall not meet again for the time being. If you write to him now I shall see he gets it tomorrow."

She wrote to him, but she said nothing about the hospital suggestion; only that they must not meet for a while, and that she would try to think what was best to do. She concluded, "Nothing shall

take our oasis from us for long ; somehow we will find a way back to it."

She felt bitter and angry. All the way home she thought of the things she would say to the wretched Sonia, Sonia who had professed affection for her and to whom she had shown affection and treated as a friend. She would send her away—at once ; she did not want anyone so treacherous working for her. She would live there alone, and Paul should come secretly whenever he could. Life which had taken so much from her should not destroy this small oasis of happiness in the wilderness of living.

Before she reached the house she saw the chalk markings on the walls, and her heart quickened in a sudden fear. When she got off her bicycle at the gate she could see quite plainly what had been chalked on the door and on the walls on either side—the single word, in enormous letters—'Collaborationist!'

She felt sick and for a moment thought she was going to faint. Then the mist cleared and with her heart pounding she went on up the path.

On the chest in the hall, beside the bowl of late roses, she found a note from Sonia.

Dear Mrs. Vesteralte, I got back today and found what had been written on the door and the walls, and I am too frightened to stay. Please forgive me. I think you should go and stay with your uncle and his wife tonight. It is not safe here any more. Whoever did the writings might come back, and stones through the windows might be the least of it.

It was astonishing, Anna thought afterwards, how sick one could feel without actually vomiting. Sick with rage; sick with disgust. The incredible beastliness of people ! What wrong had she ever done to whoever had come and chalked that accusation on the walls ? And Sonia was responsible for it all—Sonia to whom she had shown nothing but kindness and affection ; Sonia whom she had treated as a friend, and trusted. Now, terrified by what she had herself started, the wretched girl had gone off and left her. . . .

Anna went slowly up the stairs and into her bedroom. She, too, was frightened. She couldn't stay in that place alone now. She was being driven from her home not by the invaders, but by her own people ; it was a very bitter thought. 'Collaborationist !' She shuddered. Those two girls pursued by the crowd ; all that horrifying talk of cutting off the hair of women who were friendly with the invaders, and of shaving their heads. . . . Anna was trembling as she moved about her room taking clothes from drawers and cupboards and packing

them into a small suitcase. At any moment, it seemed to her, a lynching mob might come charging out along the valley.

When she had packed, she closed and fastened securely all the windows and shutters, and locked all the doors. She strapped the suitcase to the carrier of her bicycle, and then, on a sudden impulse, in an uprush of bitterness and anger, seized the yard-broom, wetted it under the tap in the yard, and scrubbed the chalkings from the walls and door. Why should the poor house stand there branded like that? There were no tears in her; only this intensity of sick anger and disgust at human malice.

As she cycled into Ling the air-raid warning sounded, and the guns opened up, shatteringly, almost immediately. People ran for cover in all directions. Anna pedalled blindly on to the hospital.

She found Dr. Bard in the entrance-hall engaged in conversation with the chief casualty officer. As Anna came in he excused himself and went over to her.

She said, quickly, "Someone has written 'collaborationist' up on the house and Sonia has run away, terrified. I decided to take your advice and come here. I seem to have come at the right time! God!"

She clutched his arm and her body went rigid before the tremendous cleavage of air as a bomb hurtled earthward. . . . There was that sense of the body being torn in half, of being engulfed in a world's end chaos, and then the dazed, bewildered realisation of life still left in the body.

"That sounded like the direction of the Stadium," Bard said. "If it is, the casualties will be tremendous." The Stadium was occupied by the troops as living quarters. He turned to her. "Look here, we need someone in the office to record casualties as they come in—those that are conscious; your job is to take their names and addresses, and pin identification labels on them, before they go up to the wards. Keep a record of their names and addresses. Here you are—"

He took her into the office, indicated a large book like a ledger, a box of plain cards, and safety pins. "I'll see you later." At the door he looked back. "Dive under the table if we get another near one."

Outside, in the street, there was the clangour of fire-engines and ambulances rushing to the incident. The sky was full of the drone of 'planes and the ear-splitting crash of guns. Shrapnel came down like some monstrous iron hail. Nurses and porters came and went in the dimly lit entrance-hall. A sister came in and gave some instructions. And then the casualties began to come in . . . Anna had a sense of having been caught by some endless nightmare from which she could not escape. Stretcher after stretcher halted in the hall whilst she stared into faces covered with blood and dirt and oil and

took such particulars as were possible. A girl voluntary worker who had joined her in the office had rushed out to vomit and was not seen again for the rest of the night. Anna went on mechanically, moving in a nightmare dreamed in hell. The condition of the people on the stretchers was so horrible that they themselves ceased to bear any relation to reality, and horror was lost in the impersonalness of unreality.

There were a great many soldiers, and at one point Paul's face loomed up for a moment from amongst the nurses, orderlies, air-raid wardens, ambulance workers. He had another officer and some non-commissioned officers with him and was giving instructions. There was a momentary gleam of surprise in his eyes when he saw Anna ; he gave a quick salute and was lost again among his men. The guns continued to crack the sky wide open and the earth from time to time rocked in the small earthquake of a bomb-hit. The nurses flitted about in the dim blue light of the hall like huge white moths ; once the matron bore down like a large grey owl. A sister came into the office in which Anna waited and deposited an armful of clothes covered with blood, oil, dust and dirt.

"They want sorting," she said. "The nurses haven't time—they're rushed off their feet—and two of our voluntary workers have fainted——" She looked hopefully at Anna.

"I'll do them," Anna said. "I don't get sick."

The sister went out and left her with the pitiful pile. She was still sorting them when the all-clear went at last and a few minutes later Ivor Bard looked in.

"There's coffee in my room," he said briefly. "Get along and I'll join you when I can. My room's in E. Wing, ground floor."

He went without waiting for an answer. Anna straightened herself from her grim task and suddenly realised her exhaustion.

She went along to a bathroom and washed. A nurse swabbing out enamel bowls in a deep sink exclaimed, "My God, what a night !"

Anna agreed, and asked to be directed to E. Wing. The long dimly-lit corridors had the endless perspective of a dream. They seemed to go *on* for ever, to converge into eternity. The walls seemed very high and she herself very small ; several times they seemed to be closing in on her and the far end of a corridor assumed the proportions of a tunnel. It was all part of the unending nightmare dreamed in hell.

She came at last to the door upon which Ivor Bard's name was written, and pushed it open. Paul stood by the fireplace. She felt suddenly on the point of collapse.

"What are you doing here ?" she asked, faintly, and groped for a chair.

He pulled one forward for her immediately and she sank into it.

"Dr. Bard sent me up here to wait for you—I told him I wanted to see you if possible before I went back to the town-hall. He gave me your note this evening before all this started. Let me give you some coffee."

He turned to the doctor's littered desk. A coffee-pot, cups, and a plate of sandwiches had been placed in a cleared space.

She said, as he poured coffee for her, "I'm so tired I could die of it!"

"I know. I'm like that myself. I suppose you know the Stadium was hit—just as the men were sitting down for their evening meal."

She took the coffee from him. "I heard it was a direct hit. It's frightful."

"It was the worst raid yet. But even in the midst of all that hell it was wonderful getting a glimpse of you."

"Did Dr. Bard tell you why I'd come here tonight?"

"Yes, and that Sonia had cleared out. It's horrible. I could murder that girl!"

"I suppose she had to tell someone. I shall stay here for a bit and then take a room in the town. Darling, take some coffee yourself—you look all in."

"I must get back. I only waited to see you. I shall be in and out of the hospital all this week. We'll get glimpses of each other at least—it'll be something."

He bent and kissed the top of her head. "We won't worry," he insisted. "Nothing can separate us now."

She put out a hand and took one of his and pressed it against her cheek.

"It'll work out," she said. "Somehow we'll find a way out of the dark forest. We won't be defeated."

He pressed the hand that held his, and in that moment, in spite of **the** exhaustion that drained them both, and the uncertainty of the future, a warm happy confidence flowed between them; tenderness and the sense of belonging were renewed. Only death itself, it seemed to them both could part them now.

To the great relief of the Head Anna resigned from the school, to work full time at the hospital. She was well aware that if she had not resigned she would have been dismissed, because of the stories circulating about her, but she would have left in any case. To live and

work at the hospital, close to Ivor Bard, and to feel her usefulness, and be absorbed in it from morning till night, meant a great deal to her at the time, when the world all round her had grown hideous and devoid of satisfaction. She had no time for bitterness or brooding ; there were no unoccupied hours in which to eat her heart out with longing for Paul ; when her work in the office finished at six in the evening she ate a meal with the rest of the administrative staff in the hospital then took her place at the switchboard for half the night. The switchboard work was purely voluntary, but she dreaded above all things to be left alone with her thoughts and her longing. Sometimes Paul would come in and stand for a few moments at the door of her office and talk. He never committed the indiscretion of coming in purely to see her, and he never lingered talking to her for more than a few minutes. Yet the days when he did not come were empty for them both, and the days that held those few minutes were lit up.

She so settled into the routine of that life that when at the end of a month Paul said suddenly, "We can't go on like this—we must find you a room !" she had a sense of shock.

She felt that she must discuss the matter with Ivor.

"Paul thinks it's time I took a room," she told him. "Would it be discreet, do you think?"

"Provided you take a very discreet room and Paul comes to it very discreetly. You obviously can't go on living in the hospital indefinitely, like a nun in a nunnery, never going anywhere or doing anything but work. You've been working twelve hours a day for the last month, and it's too much."

"I seem to have lost my nerve for anything but work. The thought of taking a room and letting Paul come there terrifies me. Supposing he is seen ?"

"Why should he be ? No one is on the streets at night ; and the black-out doesn't permit of watching the comings and goings of one's neighbours—even if there were any to watch ! And he knows what time the patrols pass—not that it would matter if he was seen by them."

"Except that some of them may have developed contacts in the town and might talk—fraternisation seems to be increasing, by all accounts !"

"Well, but he won't be seen. Why not take the room over the pharmacy again ? It has the advantage of being close to the town-hall, and it's private, with its own staircase, and there would be no one else on the premises after six in the evening. It happens to be empty again at the moment—the last tenant having evacuated after the big raid."

"And you think I ought to take it ?"

"But of course. What is the stop in your mind?"

"I don't know. I've got used to living this way I'm all right li. this, it seems to me."

"You'll be all right dead, if it comes to that! Positively no effc is required of you when dead, but it's not interesting—on the contra it's positively——" he smiled, "deadly! And you have not on yourself to consider. J doubt if Captain Dettin considers that he is i right as he is!"

"He got along all right before he met me."

"You no doubt got along all right before you met Victor!"

She looked at him, sharply. "Is that fair?"

He smiled. "Perfectly!"

She was silent, but the next time she saw him she told him she h taken the room.

When she told Paul his eyes lit up

"When do you move in?"

"This evening."

"I'll come at nine o'clock."

"It's a hideous room."

"What does that matter? We'll fill it with flowers!"

"Have you any idea what flowers cost at this time of the year?"

"Have you any idea what it means to me to able to come to y again?"

It ought to mean the same to her, she reflected, when he had gon but did it? She hardly knew; there was a faint stir of excitement her, but behind it something a little resentful, the old mistrust that H impulse towards her was mainly sexual, and behind that again her sen of guilt in regard to him.

But Paul was wildly elate. There must be flowers and wine, wha ever they might cost. He knew where he could procure both, thoug there might be a little difficulty.

The proprietor of the wine shop had had one son conscripted f the north, and one shot in the round-up of resisters; in the beginnin he had been resolved to sell nothing to the invaders. When the colon had sent down for several dozen bottles of wine for the mess he ha received the message that there were no wines available. He had the signed an order that what was wanted be requisitioned. Capta Dettin had been in charge of the job. He knew exactly how much wa left in the cellar—and knew that the man would not want to se to him, and that, buying as an individual, he could not compel hin He could report him for refusing to sell, but that would not get hi] the wine that night, and he was determined to have it that night.

When he walked into *the* shop the man greeted him as surlily as 1

had expected, and when he asked for wine he was, as he also expected, told there was none, only beers and soft drinks.

"You have half a cellar full of wines," Paul reminded him, patiently.

"It is not for sale."

"In that case you will not be allowed to remain in business. I will report the matter to the commandant."

"The commandant will find there is no law compelling a man to sell his goods if he does not wish !"

"Whilst this country is under occupation no goods may be reasonably withheld."

The man's round face crimsoned with anger. He appealed to two men who had come into the shop.

"See how we poor tradespeople are treated!"

One of the men muttered, "Why don't you sell the captain a bottle and be done with it? You'll only make it hard for yourself !"

"And lose business !" Paul put in quickly. He began counting out notes and laid down on the counter exactly twice the price of the wine.

The shop-keeper scowled.

"I don't want your money !"

"It's as good as anyone else's—and twice as much !"

"You've got to live," one of the waiting customers murmured.

"Not with the help of those swine!"

Paul picked up the notes from the counter, and walked out. He was disappointed, but not angry. He understood the wine-shop keeper very well. In his position he would have acted in the same way. But he had to have that bottle of wine, if he had to break into the cellar and steal it!

Whilst he was striding along the narrow cobbled street, searching his mind for ways and means, the sound of quick steps behind him made him turn. He saw one of the men who had been in the shop.

"Excuse me, Captain-----"

Dettin saluted.

"Here is the wine you wanted, Captain."

"Did the old villain decide to sell to me after all?"

"No, Captain, he sold it to me, and I am selling it to you, but he knows that it is for you. He wants twice the price for it, which you offered, and I am entitled to some commission, Captain, as I am doing you a good turn, so it is more than you offered. It is three times the price now, Captain."

Paul hesitated. One ought not to subscribe to this sort of 'black-mail'. But why should anyone do him or any other of the invading

troops a good turn—for nothing? He pulled out the notes, three times the price of the bottle.

"Here you are. It's highway robbery, but I am obliged to you."

"Thank you, Captain, I am obliged to you."

The man stuffed the notes into a wallet, raised his hat, and hurried off, leaving Paul clutching the bottle.

Well, that was that. Now for the flowers. . . .

The flower-shop was kept by a small fierce dark woman who was a rabid anti-collaborationist. She had heard that some young school-teacher's name had been associated with that of Captain Dettin, and she recognised him when he walked into her shop.

"What can I do for you, Captain?" she demanded, in an aggressive tone, as the door swung to behind him.

He smiled pleasantly. "You can sell me a dozen of those red roses, Madam."

"They are already sold."

"It is a regulation, Madam, that what is displayed must be sold if asked for. Otherwise I must report you to the commandant and your business will be closed down."

She stood stolidly behind the counter, her dark eyes glinting with hate. She was short, thick-set, middle-aged—not the kind, it came into Paul's mind—who might be melted with a compliment. He took out his wallet.

"It is a pity to lose business, Madam, particularly with perishable goods."

He laid notes on the counter then turned away and went over to the window and began counting out twelve of the long-stemmed roses. She watched him without moving, or speaking. When he had selected the twelve he smiled and saluted.

"Thank you, Madam, good morning."

As soon as he had gone she picked up the notes, which more than covered the cost. If the captain helped himself after she, a helpless woman powerless to prevent him, had refused to sell to him, at least her conscience was clear. . . .

A woman came into the shop for some violets. Whilst Madam was extracting a bunch from the bowl in the window the woman said, "I passed one of the officers carrying a nice bunch of roses—he looted them, no doubt?"

"You don't think I'd sell them to him, or any of them, do you?" Madam demanded, sharply.

"Certainly not, Madam," the other woman said, "knowing how strongly you feel about collaboration!"

"No doubt he wants them for that school-teacher! If I had my

way I'd more than shave her head! I'd strip her and march her naked round the town!"

"It's disgusting," the other woman agreed. "I wonder the mayor doesn't issue a proclamation forbidding fraternisation on pain of imprisonment."

"The mayor! He's no better than some of the others. I know for a fact he has Dr. Bard to his house, socially, and everyone knows how thick the doctor is with the colonel!"

"Really! I hadn't heard that! D'you mean to say——" She leaned eagerly across the counter, and Madam replied, her eyes as glinting and eager as her customer's, "Certainly I mean to say! I thought everyone knew——"

Paul meanwhile, having been refused by three taxi-drivers was accepted by a fourth, and got himself driven with his wine and roses back to the town-hall.

Corder looked up as he came into the office.

"Good God, don't tell me you persuaded somebody in this unspeakable town to sell you something?"

Paul said, throwing his cap on to a peg of the hat-stand, "I don't know whether 'persuaded' is *le mot juste*. I was flatly refused in both shops."

"Did you loot the stuff then, for God's sake?"

"It almost feels like that, though I paid several times over."

"These people are swine!"

"That's what they say about us!"

"What right have they to? We treat them decently, but they try to down us at every turn."

"I suppose we'd do the same in their position."

"We wouldn't be in their position. Can you imagine us being invaded? We'd fight!"

"What chance has a small nation against a powerful one?"

"None at all. That's why if they're sensible they ally themselves with the powerful one."

"They have their own nationalist pride—it may be mistaken, but it determines their course of action."

Corder's eyes flashed. "Don't tell me you've fallen for all that rights of small nations twaddle?"

Paul thrust his roses into a jug of drinking water.

"The New World Order recognises the rights of small nations."

"Within the order, yes! These people by not co-operating with us, by obstructing us and trying to sabotage our war effort, make themselves the enemies of the New Order as much as if they were fighting against us on the battlefield!"

"It is possible to feel a little sorry for them, none the less."

Corder jabbed a rubber stamp down on to a paper. "That girl friend of yours is softening you, Dettin! I suppose she makes propaganda for her beastly country?"

Paul answered, a little bitterly, "We both make propaganda—for what good it does either of us!"

"There's only one way to stop a woman talking nonsense!" There was a leer in Corder's tone, and Paul made no comment.

He was not disposed to discuss Anna intimately with Corder.

Corder persisted, "They collaborate all right in bed! Given the right tactics you can make a woman believe anything you like—even that you love her!"

Paul sat down at his desk and reached for the telephone.

He said, "What is important is what you succeed in making her believe out of bed!"

"Helped out by wine and flowers, eh?" Corder's tone was sneering.

"Helped out by something you wouldn't understand," Paul said, curtly.

There were times when he and the lieutenant hated each other. And then they hated the war that forced them together and bound them to each other, and the war seemed endless.

13

There was an open fireplace in Anna's room over the pharmacy. She burnt pine-logs on it, and was reminded of the farm kitchen. Waiting for Paul she sat beside her fire and did not think of him at all, but of Gran, and Ricky—Gran sitting by the fire, her gnarled hands in her lap, one foot tapping out the rhythm of the duet she and Ricky played at the candlelit piano, covering up each other's mistakes as they went along. Ricky, my darling, her heart cried, painfully, are you happy—so far away in Resi's country. When Victor died you wrote that you hoped I'd find happiness again, find Victor again in someone else—what would you say if you knew the truth? Would your heart be closed to me, Ricky? If so, I mustn't know; I couldn't bear it. . . . Perhaps I haven't really found happiness again; sometimes I wonder; sometimes it seems that all I've found is a drug to deaden pain. Happiness was what we knew when we wandered about together hand in hand at the world's fair, and people took us for lovers; happiness is what Victor and I knew that spring and summer in the valley. That was happiness, leaning on Victor's arm as we walked along the water-

front on Sunday summer evenings ; that was happiness when Steven Tronder came to supper and I played and sang whilst he and Victor sat and smoked their pipes, and the room grew darker and the stars came out ; that was happiness when I knew I was going to have a child . . . happiness belongs to the past. But this dark forest of the present—is this happiness ? The dark forest and the war inside oneself, the intellect fighting the heart, the mind's resistance to the dark unreasoning flow of the blood, the mind insisting, This is war, not peace ! The blood answering, There is no truth but this, Male and female created He them. No peace outside of this. . . '.

Brought back to the present she moved restlessly, threw another log on to the fire, rose and lit tall candles in a wrought-iron candelabrum she had bought in the town that day that the room might have at least one thing personal and beautiful to redeem its impersonality and ugliness. Paul with his eagerness, his intensity, and the immediacy of her response to him, and on the ebb-tide of passion, the flow of tenderness—was this love ? How did one know ? How did one know ? Love was Victor and lilac crowding over a wall on a gay spring day ; love was the agony of the day they brought him home on a farm-cart, his eyes staring in death—what had this stranger to do with all this that was flesh of her flesh like her unborn child ?

Then his step on the stair and the irresistible quickening of the heart, and shutters closing down over the questioning mind. Paul with his wine and his roses and his eyes alight ; Paul with his arms about her as though he would never again let her go.

"Anna ! It's a lifetime since I've held you in my arms ! How did we exist all that time ?"

It was the magic renewal of enchantment in the blood, beyond reach of the mind. There was the old sense of their blood flowing together, their hearts beating to the same rhythm, the amazed wonder at such immensity of happiness. . . .

She arranged the roses in a vase and stood them by the candles so that they glowed like flame ; he uncorked the wine and poured it, and they drank To the future'.

"To Us" he insisted, "in the Morning of the World." For a moment he was back in that room above the cafe on the boulevard, back in a summer morning in which men marched to martial music, triumphant brass and a beat of drums, when all was confident and hopeful. . . . There had been roses in that picture, too, drenching the room with their strong scent, roses pinned to Katerina's light summer suit, roses and white wine and sunshine. Now it was roses and red wine and candlelight—and a distant rumble of guns, and love and passion in the midst of death and terror. He looked round the

room, bewildered by its strangeness, missed the books, so strongly was he back in the past with Carlos and Katerina. Anna drew him back to the present.

"It's a hideous room," she said.

"It's a refuge—that's all that matters, surely?"

Resentment flared up in her.

"It's hateful living with other people's ugly things when you've got nice things of your own!"

"You lived here last winter without minding much, from what you told me."

"I was too miserable, then, to care about anything. Besides, I came here voluntarily, then, not because I was prevented from living in my own home, as I am now."

"You would have come into the town for the winter, in any case."

She was silent; at the back of her mind she held him responsible for the ugly room; it was because of him she had had to leave her comfortable home before the winter set in. Deep down in her she resented him and sometimes the resentment swam up to the surface. . . .

He was aware of the uprush of resentment, and he knew by experience how quickly it could burst its banks if not checked at the outset.

He said, resolutely smiling, "No doubt the captain could arrange for some things to be brought here from your own home—there are army lorries, and soldiers with not a great deal to do!"

The shadow vanished from her face.

"Could you arrange that? It would be wonderful! If we could have the piano——"

"That could no doubt be arranged."

He had a sense of disaster averted. He refilled their glasses. "We shall fill the room with happy memories," he said, firmly, and took her again into his arms.

That room did, in fact, become inhabited by the ghosts and echoes of happiness. The sense of entering a secret world was stronger there than it had been at the farmstead, where there had always been the slight strain involved in the possibility of Sonia's early return, or a neighbour calling. In the room above the pharmacy no one saw Paul come or go, and he was able to stay until early morning. Relieved of the strain, and of the memories of Victor inescapable in her own home, Anna could more easily lose herself in immediate happiness, and then it would seem to her that her blood, drawn to this man who was her lover, came closer to truth than her mind which fought him and the idea of him; then he would cease to be the enemy, the invader, the instrument of death and destruction, but merely a victim of war like herself. What else could he have done, she could ask herself

then, but fight for the country he loved, the ideas and ideals in which he passionately believed? She would ask herself this in the after-glow of the peace with which he left her; lying in his arms there was only the mindless flow of the blood in passionate response mounting to ecstasy, and through the whole rich dark tapestry the bright threads of a lyric happiness and a pervading tenderness. For Paul the deep tenderness he felt for Anna was of supreme importance. All the gentle romanticism he had felt for Elsa was in it, and all the hungry reaching for everything that Katerina had denied him in their relationship. All his boyhood's loneliness was in it, and all his need to escape from the violence and ugliness of war, it had a curious soothing, healing effect on him, as music had.

By his eagerness and his emotional dependence on her he roused a strong maternal instinct in Anna. She would feel this soft flow of maternal feeling in her when he sat looking into the fire, talking about his home and family—the over-emotional mother with her smothering, possessive love, the domineering intellectual snob of a father who had never for a moment doubted that he was right, the sisters and their hungry mothering of the 'little brother' who was the substitute for sons and lovers in their ingrowing virginity . . . and through it all there moved the picture of the dark, solitary, restless boy for whom the problem of life was not a career but merely to live. Listening to him, Anna would want to be to him what his mother had failed to be, to make up to him for all the lack of understanding meted out to him; she would have the feeling that she could never do enough to make up, and then she would draw his head down to her breast and murmur soft foolish tender things as though he were still the little boy who so badly needed love and understanding. She would feel anger over the indifferent young girl Elsa, and bitter about the brilliant Katerina who had so little use for his sincerity and tenderness. For them, too, she had somehow to 'make up'. But at other times she would be completely submerged in the power of his physical need for her. In passion he had a quality of intensity that had an almost mesmeric effect upon her; through it he seemed to absorb her into himself, so that for the time being she ceased to have separate identity; nor was there any lessening of this intensity as time went on; the miracle was perpetually renewed. Throughout that autumn and the long winter he very seldom missed a night in coming to her, and very seldom did he leave before the early morning, and in the deepening mental and emotional intimacy of their relationship the last barriers of her resistance to him were broken down; her capitulation was gradual, but it was complete. Whatever she had felt for him in the summer—and she did not attempt to analyse it—was nothing to what she felt for him that

winter, when she acknowledged that, right or wrong, she was in love with him. She no longer compared her feeling for Paul with what she had felt for Victor, or tormented herself with the idea that what she felt for Paul made her disloyal to Victor. Victor belonged to the past, a world that had been shovelled into the grave along with the men who died in it ; Paul was of the present, and it was in the present that one was compelled to live. One did the best for oneself, made for oneself an oasis of peace and beauty in the howling wilderness of living. Imagination could not reach to the future, and therefore it did not exist.

14

It seemed to Ivor Bard, watching her, that Anna went about that autumn and winter with the soft dreaming look of a young bride or expectant mother in her face. She had lost the strained haggard look which had robbed her of youth and attractiveness. Now there was upon her the glow of a woman who is in love and loved, her whole being irradiated from within, her eyes reflecting it, her whole body warm and vital and alive with it, that radiance of the bride, which whatever medical science might have to say about it in terms of sex glands normally functioning, nevertheless goes beyond the physical. He was glad for her present happiness, but asked himself, from time to time, as they all moved through the dark forest of the world at war, what happened in such relationships when, inevitably, the army moved on?

Paul had confided to him that he hoped that after the war Anna would come to his own country and that they would be married; he gathered that Anna had not committed herself, and he was glad ; one does not discuss permanent relationships in a changing world. Nevertheless, he was troubled, and he was particularly troubled on an evening when he went to the town-hall to play the colonel a game of chess and was given the colonel's regrets that he must cancel the arrangement. He knew what it meant. In the ebb and flow of war there had been indications lately that the tide was changing. He saw it not merely in the heavily censored news that came through but in the faces of the colonel and his staff. Reinforcements had been sent to Ling, and the roads outside were an endless stream of military traffic. There was fierce fighting in the north ; the country was not merely occupied territory but looked like becoming a battlefield. People were beginning to whisper together, fearfully, of the prospects of 'liberation'. The important thing was to keep one's head, of course, not

lose one's sense of proportion ; the landing in the north was small, and it looked as though it would be disposed of, the new invaders thrown back into the sea. All liberation talk was sternly suppressed—so far as it is possible to suppress an idea. No one dared express the idea openly. There were posters all over Ling—and all over the whole country—warning against discussion of military events; subversive propaganda was punishable with death. No one dared ask a neighbour or a friend, 'What do you think will happen ?' Someone might overhear and report you to the commandant ; or the person to whom it was said might carelessly mention to someone else that you had said it; it was all too risky; nevertheless there was this uneasiness, this dread, this sense of something going on that the ordinary person was not allowed to know, but which must ultimately powerfully affect the ordinary person's life.

On the evening that Ivor Bard received the colonel's apologies and regrets he drove back to his house and sat a long time in his book-lined study turning the ivory ball of lotus-flowers and dragons in his fingers, contemplatively, seeking through the eternalness of beauty the answer to Pilate's eternal question. There had been, he reflected, an English poet who had answered, with the simplicity of profundity, the profundity of simplicity, that beauty was truth and truth beauty, to which he had added the assertion that that was all we knew or needed to know. Wars came and went, like the statesmen and generals who made and waged them, and civilisations were dissolved in the chaos of their own creation, but the perfection of beauty of a carved ivory or a Bach fugue or an Attic marble was absolute; it was timeless and eternal. A single ball of ivory that you could hold in your hands like an apple was ultimately of more importance than any war, however world shaking or world destroying; it was more than the most impassioned and heroic love ; war was a mere incident in history, love a mere episode in a single human life, but beauty survived centuries and their dissolving civilisations ; its truth was the same yesterday and today and for ever ; ultimately it was God.

This was its touch upon the blossomed rose,
The fashion of its hand shaped lotus leaves——

He remembered a conversation with the colonel. The colonel had said, "What becomes of your carved ivory under the wheels of a tank ? And who can hear a Bach fugue when the bombers roar overhead and the ears are split with the cannonade of guns ? When civilisation is destroyed, who will create your absolute beauty ? Who will play the Bach fugues, or listen to them ? Man is the spirit that

creates beauty. Destroy Man and you destroy everything—including what you call the emanation of God."

"If you believe that, why are you a soldier?"

"I'm not greatly interested in the survival of Man, What I am interested in is—chess." He had passed a hand across his moustache and smiled, his thin, dry smile. "The moves of kings and bishops and knights and pawns. You will agree with me, doctor, that it is intensely interesting, both to watch and to play—and as a professional soldier I do both. I watch with professional understanding, and play with professional skill."

"I still maintain that my ball of ivory outlives your generals and kings and dictators, and that your tanks and bombers cannot ultimately destroy it. This particular piece of ivory, that particular marble, can be destroyed, but not the eternal values they stand for, and out of which they were created. It's another way of saying that you cannot, ultimately, destroy the soul of man."

"Not even by destroying Man himself?" The colonel's thin smile was faintly ironic.

"You can destroy men—but not Man."

"Isn't that a little sentimental for a man of science, doctor?"

But then it had been the doctor's turn to smile.

"No, Colonel, it's fundamental."

It came to him that in this matter of first and last things what bound Anna and Paul together was bigger than the war; it was the stroke of genius on the part of God made manifest, the triumphant assertion of life over death, the eternal intention eternally renewed. Anna Vesteralte, of the little town of Ling, and Paul Dettin, of the Baltic village of Prendel, were of no importance, and their joys and sufferings, their griefs and ecstasies, were of no importance; they would die and be forgotten; they were little people leading little lives; whether they loved each other or not, and what came of it, was of no more importance than the ant crushed underfoot. Individually they were nothing, but they were an infinitesimal part of that tremendous whole that was humanity surging and struggling across the earth's surface; they were an expression of that blind, primordial power that some people call Natural Law and others the Will of God. Man rose up against this natural law, this divine will, this fecund, creative Purpose; he laid waste the earth—the fair, blossoming earth, the nobly created cities—and destroyed his kind in hundreds of thousands, in millions, and along with the physical destruction from guns and bombs, the spiritual destruction from the poison of hate and lies, yet still, in the midst of death and destruction, the drive of the primordial life-force.

and men and women drawn together, naked in flesh and spirit, crying, 'I love you'.

Those two, little people, of no importance, of different countries, different nationalities, different ideologies, mentally at war with each other, but coming together driven by the power of a force greater than nationalities or ideas; they were primitive man and woman in the miasmic swamp ; they were an expression of that Original Intention for which kings and dictators and statesmen and generals are of no more importance than the ant beneath the foot, individually nothing, collectively, as part of the supreme plan, everything ; their wars nothing, their loves nothing, but their part in the cosmic scheme of creation everything.

But because there was nothing you could do about the whole you had to devote your attention to the units of which it was composed. As a doctor your first function was—to keep them alive—though you could not prevent them from slaughtering each other out of hand in the name of this or that ideology or set of ideals. And whatever your intellectual attitude you could not be, emotionally, indifferent to their sufferings, physical and spiritual. Anna Vesteralte had no special contribution to make to society ; there were millions like her ; whether she was happy or sad, alive or dead, made not the slightest difference—a man called Paul Dettin would believe, for a time, that his heart was broken, that was all, but Paul Dettin was of no importance, either. Nevertheless, you cared. You were not, thank God, a creature of pure reason—interested only in chess, in human beings as pawns in a long, complicated game—but of emotion. You loved and you cared—magnificently, illogically. And the more you turned the exquisite carvings of lotus-flowers and dragons in your fingers the more passionately you cared that the individual units should break off from the ghastly destructive whole and revert, in their blind, instinctive urge, to the creativeness of the Original Intention. You were dedicated, professionally and personally, to that Original Intention. In a word you believed in life. Life ever lasting ; not as the orthodox religious people understood the term, but as the protoplasmic force asserting itself in endless succession. In practical everyday terms it reduced itself to looking after the mayor when he had a stroke, attending to the commandant's ear, treating the bomb casualties at the hospital—and worrying about Anna Vesteralte.

He sighed, and replaced the ivory in the cabinet. Poor little Anna, so insignificant, yet so inescapably a part of the Original Intention as she moved in pain and ecstasy and confusion through the dark forest.

That second winter of the occupation in Ling Colonel Anion felt an intense need for two things—for action, and for music. The numerous routine activities which filled his days were devoid of satisfaction. It would have suited him very well if he had had to defend Ling street by street and house by house in order to hold it. It would have suited him equally well if G.H.Q. had sent him to the north to defend the ore and help throw the enemy—who had been fool-hardy enough to land there, as a first step to liberating the entire country, which, of course, was nonsense—into the sea. What did not suit him was being cooped up, inactively, in a town the size of Ling, dictating communiques and inspecting troops even more bored than himself. He was well aware that his men were virtually prisoners-of-war. Like prisoners-of-war they organised concerts and plays and discussion groups to pass the time when they were not on duty; the town had nothing to offer but two small cinemas and a number of cafes. The men used both, but the films were in a language most of them did not understand, and at the cafes the atmosphere was unfriendly, sometimes even hostile. The great need of the town, from the point of view of a large company of an army of occupation, was a brothel, and not merely was there no brothel in Ling but no amateur prostitution. The women, as a whole, were most inconveniently moral. Here and there, Anton knew, a man would have a 'success' with a woman—usually a woman in the house in which he was billeted. Or a man like Lieutenant Corder would get round a girl. So far as he knew Captain Dettin was the only one who had been able to form any kind of permanent arrangement. The men behaved very well on the whole, under difficult circumstances. Occasionally an indignant woman came to the town-hall to complain that a soldier billeted on her had 'made advances' to her, or to her daughter, and asked to have him removed. Anton always had the man removed; he even reprimanded him and imposed some minor disciplinary punishment. It was all very difficult, and though he himself did not share this sexual need, he understood very well how this enforced inactivity worked in the men; they needed women as an outlet; he himself needed music. There was no organist at the church now; it was a thousand pities Steven Tronder had been so obstinate that they had had to shoot him like that—a shocking waste. He made inquiries amongst his men in the hope of discovering an organist amongst them, but drew a blank. Then, as it happened, he chanced to be on the street the day a squad of soldiers, acting under Paul's instructions, were moving Anna's piano up to her room over the pharmacy.

The men were easing the piano in at the front door when Anton came up. They immediately abandoned the piano and jumped to attention. A sergeant was in charge and Anton addressed himself to him.

"What is all this, sergeant? A concert party?"

"No, sir. Acting on Captain Dettin's instructions, sir."

"Where did you get this piano?"

"From a farmhouse up the valley, sir. Name of Vesteralte, sir."

"Vesteralte?"

"Yes, sir. Everything in order, sir?"

"Everything in order, sergeant. Go ahead,"

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

Anton went on across the square to the town-hall. Vesteralte—that was the name of the woman Captain Dettin was associated with. If he remembered rightly her husband had been killed in the square on the day of the occupation, and after living in the town during last winter she had subsequently applied for permission to return to the farmstead. Presumably she was now back in town again for the winter and Dettin had had her piano brought in for her.

Later in the day he found an opportunity to speak to Paul about the matter, having first looked up the records and discovered that Mrs. Vesteralte was living over the pharmacy, and working at the hospital during the day.

He asked, abruptly, when they were alone for a few minutes, "Does Mrs. Vesteralte play the piano well?"

Paul was startled by the unexpectedness of the question, and the colour came up into his face.

"She has inherited some musical talent from her mother, who was a singer, and she studied music as a child and young girl. I think it would be correct to say that she plays rather better than the average amateur, sir. There are a few things she plays very beautifully—I think you would agree, sir."

"I should like the opportunity of judging." The colonel passed his hand over his moustache. "As you arranged for the delivery of the piano, would you be good enough to arrange for a little recital one evening?"

"Might I be clear, sir, whether it is a command, or a request?"

"It is a request, Captain, but you will bring your influence to bear and ensure that there is no refusal. You understand?"

"Yes, sir. Is there any piece you would specially like to have played—if I can arrange it?"

"Can she play *Jesu bleibet meine Freude*?"

"Very beautifully, sir."

"I would be grateful just for that. Would you tell her, please? I would take up very little of her time." He looked at Paul, and added, "Of yours and her time together."

"Thank you, sir. We shall be honoured to entertain you."

The colonel smiled his thin smile.

"It was a pity we had to lose the church organist. He was a line musician."

"He was a close friend of Mrs. Vesteralte's."

"Thank you for the warning, Dettin." There was the same dry, ironic smile.

Paul realised that he had committed Anna in advance to entertaining the colonel. He also realised that the request was tantamount to a command. He had the feeling that Anna would realise that it was a command, and would resent it ; her resentment of the occupation of her country was as strong as ever ; nothing could alter that, nothing justify it in her eyes. He himself had ceased to be the enemy for her ; she accepted him because she loved him ; but she had no reason for accepting the colonel, or all that he represented. He felt that he knew Anna well enough by now to know in advance her reaction to the request. He decided to ask Dr. Bard to persuade her—or at least to prepare the ground for the discussion which he himself would have with her in the evening.

When he was able to get away, he went to the hospital, and was fortunate enough to catch the doctor just as he was about to leave on his round of visits to his private patients. He had a brief conversation with him on the steps of the hospital.

"I'm worried," he told Ivor. "The colonel saw Anna's piano being moved in, and wanted to know if she played well, and I told him she did. Now he wants her to play for him one evening. It's practically a command, and I know Anna will hate the idea. You know how she feels about things, and for her the colonel is the villain of the piece ! I'm seeing her this evening and must put it to her—I wondered if you could say something to her before I do—persuade her. She'd listen to you, I feel."

Ivor smiled. "I don't see why Anna should be coerced into playing for the colonel if she doesn't want to, you know."

"You play chess with him."

"I do it of my own free will. If the colonel had commanded me I should probably have refused."

"It's going to make it very difficult for me if Anna refuses."

"She will no doubt realise that."

He persisted. "It would help if you would say something to her."

"You're afraid of her?"

"With us there's so much pushed just out of sight—and a thing like that could so easily bring it into the foreground again."

"I'll see what I can do."

Paul thanked him and they parted.

Later in the day Ivor visited Anna in her office and told her, "I saw Paul this morning. He had just left the colonel, who saw the piano being moved into your room and hopes you will play for him one evening!"

The angry colour rushed up into Anna's face immediately.

"Impertinence! It's a wonder he doesn't command me to!"

"It's a request, apparently. The old man has a passion for music—particularly for Bach. I think his idea of heaven is a place where when you're not playing chess you're listening to Bach!"

"Or giving orders for people to be shot!"

"I don't think he enjoys that, you know. He's not the ogre you probably think."

"He's the military commander of this town, and he gave the order for Steven to be shot, and I have not the slightest intention of obliging him."

Ivor resisted the obvious retort, and said, patiently, "You will make things very difficult for Paul, if you refuse."

She went off on another tack. "I can't play for just anyone. I couldn't play for anyone I hated. I've never played for anyone except Victor and Steven, and Ricky and Gran, and Paul—people I loved."

"Paul will be with the colonel when he comes—play for him. Let it all be for him."

She gave Ivor a curious look. "You like the colonel, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I find him *simpatico*"

"In spite of the fact that he had Steven murdered in cold blood—looked him in the eyes and then gave the order to the firing-party."

"It takes courage to do that."

"It takes a monster to do it!"

Ivor shrugged. "The fact remains that Colonel Anton is not a monster. He is a man of considerable sensibility—and very lonely. If he hadn't been a soldier he would have been a monk."

Anna made a restless, impatient movement, her lips compressed. Then she said, "I'm sorry—I'm not interested. For me Colonel Anton is the devil incarnate, and Paul can tell him so with my compliments!"

"You will put Paul in an impossible position."

"If he presses the point he puts me in one——"

"You know you're being very illogical?"

Her eyes flashed. "It's not illogical to hate one's enemies ! It's un-Christian, but it's not illogical."

"You don't hate Paul." He had hoped not to have to say it, but he felt that she forced him to.

She went white as paper. "You dare say that to me !" The words came little above a whisper.

"Yes, I dare say that to you, Anna Vesteralte. Colonel Anton is no more and no less guilty than Captain Dettin. Captain Dettin also gave an order in cold blood and looked on whilst it was carried out. It didn't prevent him from becoming your lover. You love him and he loves you. You have discovered for yourself that he is not a monster. Your attitude to the commandant is false—melodramatic, novelettish ! You feel you must refuse him his small request as a sop to your still guilty conscience over Paul ! I'm sorry, Anna, but it had to be said !"

She said, still almost in a whisper, "I think I'm going to faint."

He gave her a shrewd look, then went over to her.

He moved her from the office chair in which she sat to an arm-chair, opened the window, and lowered her head to her knees. He took her wrist between his thumb and forefinger, taking her pulse.

Presently she gave a deep sigh and leaned back.

"Better?"

"Yes. I'm sorry. You dragged everything up to the surface, and it was too much—that dreadful day of the invasion, and Victor brought home on the farm-cart, and all that conflict I've known over Paul——"

"I'm sorry. But it's never any good pushing anything out of sight. Stay here. I'll get you something to take."

He went away to the dispensary and when he came back with a small draught in a medicine glass the colour had already come back to her cheeks.

"I'll take you home in the car," he said, "and stay with you, *if* I may till Paul comes."

"You are kind."

"Not a brute?"

She smiled and reached out and pressed his hand.

"You are the finest person I know, or have ever known !"

"Steven Tronder was that."

She said quickly, "Steven was fine, but not quite human. Steven was a saint, and saints are born. There's hardly any virtue in their goodness—they can't help themselves. Goodness is a vocation with them. The really fine people are the human ones—who could so easily be angry and impatient, but manage not to be !"

There was deep tenderness in the smile he turned on her.

"It's a very fine unsolicited testimonial, anyhow, and I'm grateful—knowing how little I deserve it! Now swallow that draught and we'll go."

In the car she said suddenly as he got into the driver's seat beside her, "You're quite right. I'll play for the colonel."

He laid a hand a moment on her knee. "Bless you," was all he said.

It was the first time he had been in her room. She apologised for its untidiness—the dead fire in the hearth, the spilled rose-petals, unemptied ash-tray, the guttered candles.

"I tidy it when I get in in the evenings," she explained.

He insisted that she rested whilst he swept up the hearth and got the fire going. He drew the dark curtains across the windows and lit the candles.

"You are very domesticated," she said, with a little smile, watching him.

"So my wife used to tell me."

She was startled. It was the first time he had ever mentioned that he had been married.

"What happened to her?"

"There was a divorce, at her wish, fifteen years ago. She married again and I lost touch with her."

"I'm sorry."

"It didn't work, so it was better ended."

"You didn't fall in love again?"

"I didn't want to, and I didn't give myself a chance. I went to the East. I needed a philosophy by which to live, and I felt that the ancient wisdom of the East might provide me with the answer to my questions."

"Did it?"

"Yes. I discovered that I was only hurt and unhappy because of my miserable little ego. I learned a great deal from an old wise man, a swami who lived by the begging bowl. I used to mock at such phrases as being 'in tune with the infinite', 'at one with the Absolute'. The swami showed me all this as reality and the rest as illusion. Shedding selfhood I found peace. I worked for a long time at a dispensary in the jungle, and then at a leper colony. I came home after two years because I realised that in that life I was hiding away from the things that had hurt me; I had to go back to my own world and be of it—I was using the leper colony and the jungle as a woman afraid of life might use a nunnery; it was escape for me—and escape is that self-indulgence from which I had to be released."

He broke off. "**But** this is all very boring for you, I'm afraid."

"It interests me. Do you talk to the colonel of all this ?"

"Yes. He understands very well. Physically we've gone quite different roads; spiritually they run strangely parallel."

"It's difficult to think of you and the colonel as being at all alike !"

"That's because you judge by external things—which are of no importance."

"The colonel takes life—you save it. That's not unimportant, surely ?"

"The colonel sees life as an endless game of chess. I see it as the working out of an endless cosmic pattern. We both have our professional parts to play in the game, in the pattern, and we both look on it with professional detachedness. I have saved my thousands, and the colonel has slain his ten thousands, but it's the opposite side of the same medal. In India I learned that there was Vishnu the Preserver and Siva the Destroyer, in a trinity in which Brahma is the Creator. I had to go to the East to realise the nature of ultimate reality ; the West is so wrapped in delusion, always mistaking the material for reality, till all life is lost in a welter of meaninglessness!"

"The colonel is surely a materialist ? He could hardly be a professional soldier if he weren't!"

"I sometimes accuse him of materialism, just as he accuses me of sentimentalism, but we're both concerned, from our different angles, with the fundamental values of life and death—we're both deeply involved in the business of living and the business of dying, creation and dissolution, and yet outside of all the *Sturm und Drang*—doing our jobs dispassionately, and more lonely in the process than I suspect either of us care to admit !"

"Then you haven't found peace after all ?"

"I found relief from the conflicts and torments that were destroying me after my marriage broke up, but I am not yet at that spiritual level Steven Tronder was rapidly approaching—and which perhaps he actually reached when he faced the firing-party unblindfolded. I doubt if I ever shall reach it—shedding selfhood doesn't make one less vulnerable to the pain of the world. Even Jesus wept, if you remember !"

"If you allowed yourself to fall in love again it would be an end of loneliness. I mean, of course," she added, "if the person you fell in love with also fell in love with you !"

He smiled. "It would be very fine, but these things happen or they don't."

"Don't you rather shut yourself away from the possibility of it happening?"

"Not consciously. Is that how I seem to you ? The aloof ascetic ?

I suppose it's merely an unconscious self-protection. I don't want affairs, you see—not any more. I've no moral objection. It's simply that such relationships leave one lonelier than ever—that spiritual desolation of which we spoke once before. And it so happens that when I do fall in love I don't evoke the right response in the other person, so I tend to shut myself away from the whole experience——"

There was the sound of a step on the stair.

'Paul,' Anna said.

Paul started as he burst into the room and saw the doctor there.

'Anna wasn't very well, so I brought her here in the car and thought I should wait till you came. It's nothing serious—she was a little faint, that's all. Now that you're here I'll be getting along—my house-keeper will be wondering what has happened to me.'

Ivor picked up his hat from a side table and turned to go. At the door he looked back, smiling.

"Why not invite me when the colonel comes for the musical evening? I'll bring some wine and we'll make an evening of it."

Anna smiled. "It's a very good idea."

Paul agreed, eagerly.

When they were alone he went over to her, kneeling down beside her chair and putting his arms round her.

"I was going to discuss it with you—about the colonel coming here. You're sure you don't mind?"

She stroked his hair, smiling. "Ivor has persuaded me that I don't! I hated the idea at first."

"I was afraid you would. But he's all right, the old man, and he would like you to play our piece—*Jesu bleibet meine Freude*. I thought you might like to play it tonight, presently, if you feel well enough."

"By way of rehearsal?"

'You don't need rehearsal. For old times' sake!'

'It seems odd that the colonel should like that piece. What has he professional killer to do with the pacifist Nazarene?'

"Perhaps the words mean nothing to him."

The words aren't incidental. Bach wrote it as a religious piece, o those words."

"Perhaps in his own way he does feel that Jesus is the joy of man's desiring. People aren't all of a piece. They're complicated." He hesitated a moment, then said, "Just before I left to come here I got the news of my mother's death. It seems she'd been ill for a long time, but my sisters didn't want to worry me, as they knew there was no chance of my getting leave to go home."

She drew him close to her. "I'm so sorry.' There seemed nothing else to say.

"It's what I mean about people being complicated. I never felt I loved her much. She irritated and exasperated me. At most I could feel pity for her. When I got the news about Carlos I felt as though everything had crumpled. I don't feel that about mother, only a sort* of weeping inside because I couldn't love her or make her happy, and now it's all over and too late I keep thinking how much more I might have done to make her at least less unhappy."

He pressed his forehead to her breast. "Oh, Anna, Anna, the awful pain in this business of living!"

She could only hold him to her and murmur, "I know, I know!"

But she didn't know, he thought; no one could share another's loss, the dreadful loneliness of death. Anna, for all her love of him, could no more understand how he felt about his mother's death than he could understand how she felt about her husband's; there was no parallel in the two experiences. She at least had not been eaten out and in with remorse as he was—that most futile and agonising of all emotions. He thought of his mother crying when he came home after the first time he had stayed with the Maines, and his impatience. He had known that she was hurt, realising his unexpressed comparisons of his own home with that of the Maines, suspecting, too, no doubt, that he compared her and his sisters with Mrs. Maine and her daughter, without stopping to compare the difference in their lives; Mrs. Maine had always led an easy comfortable life; she could afford beautiful clothes, she had time in which to be decorative and to relax, such as she, Richard Dettin's wife, bringing up four children on a village school-master's salary, had never known. He had seen her tears and realised that she was hurt and resentful, and he had done nothing to comfort and reassure her. At the time he had told himself that even if his parents had the money they would not lived as the Maines lived, because they had not merely the feeling for comfort the Maines had, they also had not the taste. Now it seemed to him that he could and should have discounted all that and done something to ease the pain in his mother, instead of being impatient.

Then there was that time when he came home from sea, after eight months' absence. He had not been impatient, then, he remembered, but he had been unnecessarily brutal, it now seemed to him, telling his mother that Christine and Nadia ought to dress more becomingly and make themselves more attractive. He remembered the piteous look of sheer terror in her eyes, for all the world as though he had advocated that his sisters should go on the streets! Why had he not had more sensitivity, recognising that he and his mother were of different generations, belonged to different worlds, had different standards?

It was something to know that Michael had been with her during

the last few weeks, but her youngest son was her darling, her ewe lamb . . . and he of them all had been the most impatient of her, and her hungry, demanding love.

He did not weep, as he had wept for Carlos ; there was this dry tearless torment turning in him, this sense of guilt for which there was no expiation, no absolution all the days of your life. If he had loved her he could have wept for her ; but he had not loved her and could only suffer under an emotional self-flagellation.

Presently, when Anna lit the candles on the piano, and played *Jesu bleibet meine Freude*, he sat sunk in the armchair by the fire feeling the tender beauty of the music flow over him but without bringing him either peace or joy. If only Jesus could be the joy of one's desiring ! If only one could be good ! The modern psychologists said be happy and you will be good ; perhaps it was because he hadn't been happy that he hadn't been able to be good, had been impatient of his mother's unhappiness; if he had been happy himself he might have been able to help her. But having failed to be good, it would ease the spirit to know the path of atonement. Steven Tronder might have helped him; but they had shot Tronder, which as the colonel had said earlier in the day, was a pity, only it was more of a pity than the colonel knew.

He stayed as usual till morning with Anna, but for once he had no desire to make love to her—and was grateful to her for understanding this, and for her sympathetic tenderness. What would he have done without her, his dear love, in those bad times ? How would he ever be able to repay her for all her goodness to him ? Ah, but he would, he would, he told himself, one day, when they emerged at last from the dark forest into the Morning of the World. . . .

That the Morning of the World, as he understood it, in terms of the New World Order triumphant, might never break did not even remotely occur to him, despite the set-back in the north and the general feeling of uneasiness beginning to stir even as far south as Ling.

Because she was a little nervous of meeting the colonel, Anna, when all was prepared for the supper party, sat at the piano and played. The music flowing under her fingers soothed her and gave her confidence. It had been decided to make the colonel's visit an 'occasion'. Paul had secured a chicken and had it delivered to Anna already cooked ; Ivor had provided wine from his small cellar; Anna had bought flowers

with money which Paul had insisted on giving her, urging that it was easier for her to get them than for him. "Get roses if you can," he had said. "Never mind the price ! In any case they won't charge you as much as if I went for them myself." She had found a few red roses, at an exorbitant price, and arranged them as a centre-piece on the table, flanked by red candles. In the morning Paul had sent round one of his men, who had been a piano tuner in civilian life, to tune the piano.

Anna had not known what to wear, and her wardrobe had not offered much choice. She felt that the occasion called for something special, but she had only her best dress, which she had bought in the capital with Victor on their brief honeymoon. She had worn it to a few concerts and theatres, and a few times to church during her short married life, and that was all. She had thought that after Victor's death she would never wear it again. She had a strong sentimental feeling for it, because he had helped her choose it, and it had been a wedding-gift from him. It was of black taffeta, with a tight bodice and a square neck cut rather low ; the skirt was full and the sleeves long and tight ; there was a narrow white frilling at the neck and wrists. It was a dress at once both demure and provocative. The black enhanced the pale gold of her hair and the whiteness of her throat and her chest.

She had opened the door to Ivor—who had come early, at her request—wearing it, and he had exclaimed immediately, "How lovely you look !"

She flushed with pleasure, but protested, "I expect in the eyes of the commandant, used to fine ladies in all the big capitals, it will seem very village-dressmaker and provincial !"

"The colonel isn't used to ladies, fine or otherwise," Ivor assured her.

"I'm terrified of him !"

"You needn't be. He's probably much more frightened of you."

She stared, incredulously. "The commandant—frightened of a nonentity like me?"

"You're as much an unknown quantity to him as he is to you !"

He went over to the piano and lifted the lid and lighted the candles.

"Come—compose yourself. Play something till he comes. Let him enter to music. It will set him at ease, as well as you."

She seated herself on the stool and smiled at Ivor over her shoulder.

"What shall I play?"

"Something light and simple. One of Schubert's songs, perhaps."

She began with a happy sentimental song of spring and love and gathering may-blossom, and singing and playing was back in the past, with Victor and Steven at the farmstead on a Sunday evening, the two men puffing contentedly at their pipes, herself the happy young wife, and everything right with the world. The world in which she sang and played in an ugly furnished room over a pharmacy in the town, the blacked-out world of bombs and terror and horror, of shootings and suspicion and uncertainty, ceased to exist. Her spirit inhabited the world of which she sang, the world of spring and love and blossoming boughs, a world that was happy because it was safe and peaceful and hopeful.

She followed with Brahms's *Wiegenlied*, and when Paul arrived with the colonel, half-way through, she did not hear them. She sat for a tranced moment with her hands still on the keys, and it was the colonel's "Charming! Charming!" which brought her back to reality.

Then she stood up, flushing, confused, whilst Paul made the formal introductions.

The commandant, seen at close quarters, seemed to her much taller and broader than when she had glimpsed him on the street, or at the hospital, or driving past in his imposing car. Taller and broader and greyer. He seemed to fill the room, and it was not merely his tall figure, she thought, but his presence and his shadow. His eyes were deep-set and blue, she noticed, blue-grey, so that you thought of steel-helmets and battleships and armoured cars; but they had that curious pin-point keenness in them of a falcon's eyes. There was altogether something falcon-like about his lean face, with the aquiline nose and tight-drawn skin, she thought.

He had elaborately good manners, but he was so stiff and correct that it was impossible to imagine him relaxing in an armchair, leaning back, unbuttoning the neck of his tunic, relaxing. He sat stiffly on the edge of his chair, his feet in their high boots turned out, one a little behind the other, as though he wore spurs. He said 'Pardon', and 'Excuse me', and 'Please', and 'Thank you so much', a great many times, with numerous little stiff, curiously deferential bows, and every now and then he passed an old veined hand across his grey close-clipped moustache. Military etiquette apart, it seemed somehow right and proper to Anna that Paul always addressed him as 'Sir', and that Ivor addressed him as 'Commandant'. Intimacy was unthinkable with such a man, or even the mildest informality. When suddenly, during a discussion at supper, Ivor suddenly exclaimed, "My dear Anton!" she was not merely startled but deeply shocked.

They had had a fair amount to drink. Before supper Paul had produced a bottle of Tio Peppi.

"Bach and a taste for dry wines go together," Ivor observed, approvingly, as Paul drew the cork. "If you knew that a man's favourite composer was Mendelssohn you'd expect him to drink the sweetest possible Amontillado before dinner and Graves or Sauterne with it. Bathos and Barsac—Strauss and Asti Spumanti!" He turned to the colonel. "Do you know, Commandant, that in England where I once had the misfortune to spend a month, many of the natives, who have no music in their souls, firmly believe that there is very little to choose between cider and champagne? What can you do with such a people? There should be notices up on the cliffs all round that island, 'Not fit for human habitation,' so that people will be warned against landing there! Their food is unfit to eat, their climate unsuitable for anything but the lowest form of life, and so backward and uncouth are the people that they actually believe that central heating is unhealthy!"

Paul handed round the glasses of sherry.

"Where on earth did you get it?" Anna demanded.

He laughed. "Didn't you know that the modern army always travelled around with a first-rate wine cellar?"

"I knew an English officer who used to go skirmishing in the desert with bottles of Kümmel in his pistol holsters," Ivor assured them. "And portable book-cases to carry his *Encyclopaedia Britannica*!"

The colonel swallowed his sherry in one gulp, then twirled the empty glass round in his fingers as though wondering what to do with it; Paul refilled it immediately.

"Thank you. Thank you so much," the colonel said, and then sat looking at his filled glass as though in surprise.

"I was in England once," he announced. "For some jubilee affair or other—a royal wedding or a coronation or an abdication, or something——"

"Not an abdication," Ivor murmured.

"Well, well, something of the kind. Various nations were represented and there was a lot of pageantry. They do that sort of thing extraordinarily well, I must say. And old churches. They owe a good deal to the Normans, of course, but some very fine old English glass—learnt from the Flemings, no doubt. The fellow in whose house I was quartered took us sight-seeing after the jamboree—Oxford and Cambridge, you know, and what they call the Shakespeare country, very pleasant, but too many picture-postcards and tea-shops and car-parks. They've no taste, the English, no sense of decor—the Odeon cinema opposite the genuine Tudor inn. No sense of values. A pity."

The colonel swallowed his second glass of sherry **and** then at Anna's

suggestion they seated themselves at the table. Ivor carved the chicken, Paul opened and poured the Montrachet supplied by Ivor, and the colonel complimented Anna upon the combined effect of the roses and the candlelight.

"Charming," he said. "Charming."

"One tries to preserve some sort of normal standards in a mad world," she told him.

"Quite so," said the colonel. "Quite so."

"It isn't only the destruction and slaughter which are so horrifying in war," she pursued, "but *the* way it robs life of its graces, all the small refinements that make the difference between a civilised and a barbaric way of life. You came up against it yourself when you suddenly felt the need for music."

Anton smiled his thin smile.

"The fact that tonight we have wine and roses and music shows that war does not altogether rob life of its graces, surely?"

"It's just a small oasis we have managed to make for ourselves in the howling wilderness, Commandant."

"We should probably find it very tedious to live all the time in the oasis, you know! A period of enforced abstinence is a contributory factor in ultimate enjoyment—if I may say so. Desire enhances the delight of consummation."

Ivor began passing round the plates with the neatly carved white meat lying on them.

"How efficient you are!" Anna exclaimed.

He smiled. "I didn't study surgery for nothing!"

Anna circulated the salad and the macedoine of vegetables.

When they were all served, she raised her glass. "Here's to the future," she said.

The colonel and Paul immediately rose to their feet.

"To the Morning of the World."

Anna and Ivor exchanged glances. Ivor murmured between half-closed lips, audible only to Anna, "If you ask me, the morning looks a little cloudy, according to the latest reports."

When the colonel and Paul were reseated, Ivor said, "You were talking just now like an Epicurean, Commandant. It is a principle of Epicurean Hedonism that greater pleasure is often to be obtained by withholding than by indulgence, as opposed to Aristippus, who was all for the pleasure of the moment."

"The war forces Epicureanism upon us," the colonel answered. "To use Mrs. Vesteralte's metaphor, we cannot go often to the oasis, therefore the pleasure of such journeys as we are able to make is intensified."

"Is that a justification for war, or the case for asceticism?" **Ivor** demanded, smiling.

"It is both, Doctor. War demands asceticism."

"It is also responsible for every kind of licence! The traditional 'brutal and licentious soldiery', not to mention the brutal and licentious civilians living up to the philosophy of Aristippus on the principle that you never know but what the next bomb has your name on it—and because war loosens up morals, anyhow, particularly amongst women."

"I was thinking of soldiers in the field—soldiers on active service are compelled to live ascetically, so also, when the country is unaccommodating, are soldiers inactive as part of an army of occupation."

"My dear Anton," Ivor exclaimed, impatiently, "are you suggesting that frustration and asceticism are one and the same?"

The colonel brushed his hand across his moustache and smiled.

"My dear Doctor, let us not talk at cross-purposes. I am thinking of the soldier dedicated to his cause, not the unwilling conscript. In an army of conscripts every frustration, from shortage of cigarettes to lack of women, is irksome and to some extent demoralising. When men fight for something in which they believe they accept the enforced asceticism of their lives as the saint accepts the mortification of the flesh—the abnegation of self in the service of an ideal. Then, I suggest, you get that fine flowering of the spirit which is the whole case for asceticism. The soldier and the saint follow quite different roads to salvation, but their lives run parallel." He smiled. "It is the symbolism of the monastery and the castle which we have discussed before. You get the parallel again in the ecstasy of the lover and the ecstasy of the mystic."

Paul moved round the table refilling the glasses. Bending over Anna he was aware of the delicate scent of her skin and of the faint warmth that emanated from it, as though, he always thought, her blood ran very near the surface. . . .

He said, "A man might become a soldier from the highest patriotic motives, but if he has not the temperament for the ascetic life he will suffer under it. For some there is no flowering of the spirit without fulfilment in the flesh."

The colonel took a deep draught from his newly charged glass.

"There speaks the voice of youth. It is harder for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for youth to renounce the flesh, if it lacks the ascetic temperament. Yet I would remind you, Captain, that St. Francis was a man of hot blood and a soldier before he was a saint."

"Is that a warning, sir?" Paul's eyes rested upon Anna, across the

table from him, her face and hair and breast soft in the candlelight. Katerina brilliant in crimson and gold had not seemed to him more beautiful. Tenderness and desire flowed in him. It seemed an eternity till that moment when they should be alone together.

"It is a warning against generalisations. It is a question of spiritual development. You know what Nietzsche says—life, if it is not to be trivial, must be hard, just as peace if it is not to be contemptible must be victory. . . ."

"Material or spiritual peace?" Ivor asked.

"Both. The victory over self is the essence of asceticism."

"There I agree with you, of course—the abandonment of selfhood not in the negation of life but in the grappling with it, the overcoming of all that self-interest that impedes what you call the fine flowering of the spirit."

The talk flowed on ; the second bottle of Montrachet was emptied ; the candles began to gutter. Anna heated water in a saucepan on the open fire and made coffee ; Ivor produced a '75 brandy, apologising that it was not better.

Anna declined the brandy and went to the piano. She played first Beethoven's little piano piece, *Für Elise*, and then three of Bach's short preludes. Without waiting for comment she continued almost at once with *Jesu bleibet meine Freude*.

The colonel sat very straight and still, outwardly rigidly unrelaxed, but as given to the music as he had been in the church when the organ had thundered through the *D Minor Toccata and Fugue* under Steven Tronder's hands. There was again the familiar lift of the spirit, that sense of the heavens opening on the fields of light. Absolute beauty, absolute peace. This was the Ultimate Reality, this the final dissolution of selfhood in that universal self that is God.

He was again the boy who had lain in the pinewoods above the river, listening to the plain-song of the monks in the monastery chapel. Down below was the little town with its narrow streets opening into intimate, cafe-flanked squares, with its old yellow baroque cathedral, its rushing river, its avenues of chestnut trees. Across the river was the grey castle, not hidden in the trees like the monastery, but shouldering clear of them, as though impatiently, and from the castle, bugle-calls that seemed to challenge the sunset. The far-away and the long-ago, with Nietzsche and Machiavelli and Napoleon replacing Rousseau and Jesus and St. Francis as his heroes and teachers, but the same sense of dedication turning in him, that sense of vocation, of a life devoted to a single purpose, selflessly, not in any spirit of self-sacrifice, but of necessity. Not for him the passionate mistress, the devoted wife, the joys of love and parenthood, but, what was his real victory, not even

the desire for them, so sternly had he disciplined himself as a young man. St. Francis had made images of women in the snow, and in an agony of spirit had cried out that he might yet have children ; he had known no such visitation of the devil. He had known only one love and she had died whilst he was a mere lieutenant, but from her he had inherited his capacity for self-discipline, his innate asceticism. He and his mother had understood each other very well, without need of verbal expression. She was a soldier's daughter who had married a soldier and raised a soldier son. She had bequeathed to her son her deep aversion to emotionalism, the austerities of her mind—she was deeply read in philosophy, both Western and Eastern, listened only to Bachs music, had no use for poetry, was a brilliant chess-player, and despised the romantic and the sentimental—and a capacity for sublimating a passionate nature into a passionate devotion to the search for ultimate truth. They loved each other intensely, Anton and his mother, but it was implicit in the flow of understanding between them ; any expression of emotion between them was quite unthinkable. They never kissed, their hands never met, and when she died he did not weep. For him she died only in her body; her spirit had remained with him . . . and any composition of Johann Sebastian Bach was the emanation of her ice-cold, ice-clear spirit. He never heard that cool, clear music, like a mountain-stream running over stones, but he was confirmed in his belief in her—that mathematical purity of intellect for which she stood.

The music came to its abrupt, clean-cut ending, and he bowed slightly to Anna, turning on her stool.

"Thank you," he said. "Thank you so much."

He got up. "You have been very kind," he added. "I am deeply grateful. I should like to go now whilst your lovely music is still fresh with me."

Ivor said, "I will come with you, if I may, as I've no pass to be out after curfew."

"By all means."

Ivor took Anna's hand and raised it to his lips.

"It was a lovely party," he said. "Thank you for everything——" he smiled. "Including the lovely dress !"

Paul accompanied them out of the room and down the stairs.

A soldier scrambled out of the car, saluted, and stood to attention beside the open door.

Before getting in, the colonel addressed himself to Paul.

"I am grateful to you for arranging this evening, Captain. It has given me great pleasure."

"Thank you, sir."

He saluted, smartly, and the colonel disappeared inside the car, followed by the doctor.

When the car had driven off down the dark empty street Paul turned and ran back up the stairs.

Anna had closed the piano and was leaning back in an armchair beside the fire, her arms limp over the arms of the chair.

She smiled as Paul burst into the room.

"It went well, I think, but I am very tired now."

He came over to her and knelt down beside her chair, putting his arms round her.

"They've both thanked you, but I thank you more than either of them. You played so beautifully, Anna, it was like that very first time."

She stroked his hair. "It seems a long time ago now, doesn't it?"

He took both her hands and kissed them. "We've come a long way along the road since then. I thought I loved you then, but it's nothing to what I feel for you now!" He fingered the white frilling at the neck of her dress.

"It's a lovely dress."

"It was a wedding-present from Victor. I thought I'd never want to wear it again. Tonight I put it on as much for you as for the colonel. I wanted to be a credit to you. But I suppose it's nothing to what your Katerina wore in the evenings for parties!"

He frowned. "Don't talk of her."

"She was beautiful and you loved her."

"She didn't mean to me a hundredth part of what you mean! Anna, you don't seem to understand, you're all that I ever wanted in life—everything that began in me when I was a child and fell in love with a child called Elsa. Everything that went on aching in me all through the Katerina affair and in all the lonely time afterwards. Without you, now, life wouldn't have any meaning. Oh, Anna, Anna darling, you must believe me!"

She smiled, sadly.

"I believe that you believe what you say, but if we were separated you would find a way to go on living—you'd discover that life still had some meaning. There would still be all the things you believe in and fight for—your struggle for the Morning of the World, as you call it!"

"A man can't fight and struggle with no heart in him. But why talk about separation? Nothing can separate us!"

"Your troops won't be in occupation of this country for ever."

"When victory is won we shall evacuate, of course, but that will only mean a short separation. I shall go home. I shall be

demobilised and get a job, and then you will be able to join me and start a new life in a new country—we'll know the morning of the world together."

"Oh, Paul, Paul, be a realist ! How can you be so certain of victory ? The war isn't going well for your country—you know it ! You must know it better than I do even, because you've got more information. Your enemies have landed more troops and they've not been thrown back into the sea. They're steadily advancing ! People are saying it may only be a matter of weeks before we shall be liberated !"

"Why do you listen to such gossip ? It's true our enemies have effected landings and made certain advances, but any question of our getting out is unthinkable !" He spoke almost angrily.

"Your enemies have powerful allies, whilst yours are deserting you. Didn't your hero Napoleon say that God was on the side of the big battalions ?"

He answered passionately, "We can be outnumbered, but we can't be outfought ! You heard what the colonel said at supper about willing soldiers fighting because they are dedicated to a cause. He spoke of the fine flowering of the spirit—don't you realise that our whole nation has known this flowering of the spirit, and that it's something which mere weight of numbers and force of armour cannot destroy ? Don't you realise that even if we were defeated militarily, which of course is unthinkable, but even if we were, don't you realise that the moral victory would be to us ? You can kill men, but you cannot kill an idea. We should rise again in such an event, because evil can only triumph for a time."

"Your enemies say that of you—that you must be destroyed eventually because evil can only triumph for a time and your time, they say, has come."

The sweat broke out on his forehead in his nervous intensity.

"Anna, are the forces that fight against us good or evil ? Ask yourself ! Who was it who declared war ? Who is it that stands for vested interests and private profits and all the corruption of international finance ? You can be impartial because you are neutral. Ask yourself !"

"Your country doesn't stand accused of those things, I know, and your enemies are open to those charges—I know that too. But your country stands accused of persecution and aggression and the desire to rule the world !"

"It's true we persecute—we persecute evil. It's true we offer aggression—against injustice, and as to dominating the world we have something to offer ! We offer a new way of life—something clean and

fine, not merely social and economic advancements, but a renaissance of the spirit !"

She smiled. "You talk like one of your own pamphlets !"

"But it's true—the world is sick. You must see that it *is*—financial slumps, unemployment for millions, social inequalities and injustices of every kind, homosexuality rampant—decadence everywhere in art and life, people leading perverted, sterile lives and painting, writing, and composing every kind of rubbish ! And no one believing in anything except making money—the church a sham, education a farce, humbug and hypocrisy everywhere !"

"I agree that the world is sick. What I am not yet convinced of is that your New Order is the best solution—that if it wins it will bring the spiritual and artistic renaissance you promise. So many things sound good on paper and in the mouths of propagandists."

"What the New Order could achieve was in process of being demonstrated."

"It was also being demonstrated that it involved a great deal of shooting, hanging, beheading, imprisonment. To us outside it looked like a tyranny."

"People rise against tyrannies. Our people didn't rise. They were happy, and when the threat came to destroy what they were building up they fought as people have never fought in history—they fought to defend what looked like a tyranny to outsiders. Though I might add it only looked like that because of the concentrated force of propaganda put out against us !"

He got up and poured the remains of the second bottle of wine into a glass and brought it over to her.

"I don't know why we have to go over this all over again. I longed for the moment when we should be alone together, and these discussions, with their disagreements and misunderstandings, seem to blow like a cold wind over our love."

He gave her the glass. "Drink to us—our future," he urged.

She smiled and sipped. "To us!"

She handed the glass to him and he repeated the toast, then replaced the glass on the table and drew her to her feet.

"The future is ours," he insisted, vehemently.

She sighed and leaned her head against his shoulder.

"Make me believe, my darling—I want to so much—so much!"

When he left her in the early morning, whilst it was still dark, before she slid into sleep again she recalled all the wild things said in the night, it had been so easy to believe then. Now the night's candles were burnt out and the roses were dropping . . . and there was a distant air-raid siren, and a boom of guns, and that sick fear of realisation

that whatever **the** protagonists of the New Order might assert, out of their impassioned faith, the guns and armies of the forces of liberation were hourly drawing nearer.

17

At the end of October Anna decided to visit Andrew and Rilke at their valley farmstead before the winter set in and the snow made the roads impassable. There was already a feeling of snow on the air.

She had never felt close to Andrew ; he had never been even a pale shadow of Ricky, and she had never felt that she had anything in common with the plump, placid Rilke, but Gran, she thought, would have liked her to keep in touch, and with Ricky and Resi so far away, and the war-time difficulties of correspondence, Uncle Andrew and his wife were all the family she had. They were a link, too, with Ricky, who contrived to write to them occasionally. Andrew, moreover, felt that it was his duty to keep in touch with Anna, and since he could not leave his farm to visit her she was in duty bound to visit him. She had not been to the farmstead since she had left her own. She had written to Andrew and told him that she had moved into the town, as it would be more convenient for the work she had taken up at the hospital, which during raids involved night-duty. He had replied that he had heard that 'collaborationist' had been chalked up on the walls of the Vesteralte farmstead, and her name was associated with one of the commandant's staff, and he was very worried; what did it mean? She wrote, briefly, in reply, that it meant that some people had malicious tongues, and he had not written again.

She did not notify him in advance of her intended visit, and the first person she saw when she got off her bicycle at the rickyard gate was Sonia.

The girl was coming out of the milking-shed which flanked the rickyard. She stopped dead when she saw Anna and went white. She stood staring at Anna as though mesmerised.

Anna wheeled her bicycle across the yard and when she came up with Sonia demanded, "What are you doing here ?"

"I've worked here since the end of the summer," the **girl** answered.

"Since you ran away from me, that is ?"

The girl nodded and her eyes filled with tears.

She burst out, "I didn't mean any harm, honest I didn't, Mrs. Vesteralte. But it was such a shock seeing you with **the captain like that—I just had to tell someone !**"

She began to cry, wiping her eyes and blowing her nose on the corner of her blue and white striped apron.

"Whom did you tell?"

"My mother—I was worried; I had to tell someone."

"So you've already said. Whom else did you tell?"

"Only Vera Halter."

"Maid to the mayor! Why did you have to tell her, of all people?"

"My mother said I ought to leave you, and I didn't want to. I thought I would see what Vera said—someone of my own age, not so narrow-minded, like. Only she said the same. Then when I got back and saw what was chalked up I was frightened. Oh, Mrs. Vesteralte, ma'am, I wouldn't have done you any harm—not for worlds! Please believe me! When I heard people talking about you I got so worried. I think I would have died if anything bad had happened to you."

"People don't die of remorse, Sonia. It's all right, don't cry. Nothing bad has happened."

"I wanted to ask you if you'd take me back when the war's over."

"How do I know what I'll be doing? I doubt if I shall go back to the farm. Nobody knows what's going to happen. We can none of us plan, when we can't see an inch ahead."

"But if you *should* go back?"

There was such a passion of pleading in the girl's wet eyes that Anna smiled.

"If I should go back, I would take you back—if you still wanted to come."

The girl said, tremulously, "I would like you to give me a tremendously important secret to keep so that I could prove to you that you could trust me. I would never fail you again—never! I'd have Greig with me, you see, to keep me right. We'd serve you faithfully all our lives, Greig and me."

"We'll leave it at that, shall we?"

She began wheeling her bicycle towards the house, when Sonia seized it.

"Let me, ma'am."

"Is the master in the house?"

"Yes, ma'am, and the mistress. You know we've got evacuees?"

"I didn't know. Who are they?"

"Miss Irma and her two children. Mrs. Alsen she is now. She came here when they started bombing the capital. We won't be occupied much longer now, will we?"

"Not by the present forces, but by a liberating army. It will still be an occupation; we shall merely change one military governorship

for another, that's all. And in the process the country will be turned into a battlefield—as it already is in the north."

Her voice was bitter.

Sonia made the profound observation : "It doesn't seem to make any difference whether you're neutral or not nowadays !"

Andrew came out of the house as she approached it. He was very little different, Anna thought, from the man she had known twenty years ago ; there were more lines in his face, that was all. He had the weather-beaten look of all people who lived hard, close to the soil. His face mapped the years. It was as though at twenty-five life had done all that it was going to do to him ; the rest would be merely a matter of repetition, the rotation of crops, the seasonal changes of weather, the seasonal functioning of the animals, the calving and the lambing, and the succession of market-days. So that at forty-five it was merely that the lines of the map were engraved a little deeper ; he had been an oldish young man ; he was a youngish middle-aged man.

He started when he saw Anna approaching.

"You're a stranger," he said, a little dourly.

"I know. I've had you on my conscience all this time. I thought I'd better come before the winter set in."

He stepped aside for her to enter the house.

"Rilke," he called, "we've got a visitor! Anna, of all people !"

Rilke came out of the kitchen into the back-kitchen, rosy and smiling. In eight years of marriage she had produced four children and was expecting her fifth.

She greeted Anna warmly, kissing her on both cheeks, and drew her into the living-room, with its blue china on the big dark dresser, and shining brass copper beside the open fire. A child crawled about the scrubbed brick floor. Anna smiled down at it.

"Your youngest ?" she inquired.

"No, Miss Irma's. Aunt 'Tilda persuaded her to come here with the two children when the bombing got so bad a few months ago, and it suited us to have her and the children rather than have strangers from the town billeted on us, or, likely, troops."

They chatted for a little about the family—Cousin John was in the bank and married ; Alex was now twenty-six and a successful lawyer ; Melsa and Netta were still unmarried, and it had been a disappointment to Aunt Tilda when her youngest daughter had married first, "And a nobody at that," said Rilke, "an accountant in an insurance office. They're happy, and quite comfortable. I don't know why your Aunt 'Tilda gives herself such airs. After all she and Andrew **and** your father and Ricky were all brought up in the same way, on this

farm. You'd think she'd been born a fine lady, the way she goes on."

"It's because she wasn't that she does !"

"The girls are the same. Before the war they used to come here for summer holidays, using the place as though it were a hotel, never making their own beds or giving a hand's turn with the dishes or the meals."

"Is Irma like that, loo ?"

Rilke shrugged. "She's not so bad as the others. She's had to learn to do a few things since she got married. They've only the one maid. That's hardship to her. I had no one till I was carrying again this time, and Sonia offered——"

She looked at Anna. "I was sorry about all that upset I never believed a word of it, of course."

"About my being a collaborationist ?"

Rilke nodded.

"It depends what you mean by collaboration," Anna said, fingering the glass of goat's milk Rilke had set down on the table beside her. "It's quite true that I have formed a friendship with Captain Dettin. If we both survive the war we shall be married, I expect."

They had to know sooner or later, she thought.

The colour came up into Rilke's cheeks. Her blue eyes were round with shock.

"You'd never do such a thing—you that was married to Victor Vesteralte ?"

Anna said, steadily, "The only reason for marrying a man is that you love him and he loves you. Nothing else matters."

Andrew scraped some mud off the heel of his boot on the iron beside the fire.

"Are you proposing to go and live in his country when it's all over ?"

"We haven't discussed it in detail. I might."

"You must be mad! They're going to lose the war—I've always said so. There'll be starvation there, and everything bombed flat."

"We could go to another country, no doubt."

"You could. But not him. They won't let them out. They'll keep them there to build up the things they've smashed, and that have been smashed because of them. And quite right."

Anna crumbled an oatcake on her plate.

"You never did approve of anything I did or wanted to do, Uncle Andrew. You never approved of Ricky and me going to the international fair. When I wrote and said I was marrying Victor you said

I hadn't known him long enough. You didn't approve of my staying on at the farm after Victor's death, and you didn't approve of my moving into the town!"

Rilke put in quickly, "It was always of your good Andrew was thinking, Anna."

At that point a young woman entered holding a three-year-old child by the hand. Mother and child had the same blue-grey eyes and silky pale gold hair. Anna had not seen her Cousin Irma for years, but she seemed not to have altered since they had played and quarrelled together on the farm.

"A surprise visit from your Cousin Anna," Andrew said in his dour way.

The two girls embraced, and Anna made appropriate remarks about the child.

"You're looking well, Anna, in spite of all the bad times you've been having in Ling."

Irma's tone was almost resentful.

"We only had one bad bombing spell," Anna told her. She added, "I work hard at the hospital, but I like it."

"I hear you've been getting into trouble," Irma said, sitting down and taking the youngest child on to her lap. Her eyes, Anna thought, had a harassed look.

"She's just been telling us she's going to marry the officer who ordered the shooting in the market-square on invasion day," Andrew stated.

Anna said quickly, "Don't ask me how I can, Irma! The question becomes monotonous. I used to ask myself how I could, but having settled it to my own satisfaction I can't keep on going into it for the benefit of other people—who wouldn't understand, anyhow. What about Ricky? I haven't heard for some time."

Rilke answered her.

"Resi is ill again. She's had to go to a sanatorium. She started having haemorrhages. I always used to say that high colour she had was not natural or right."

"I'm so sorry. Poor Ricky! I must write."

"Tell him your own news when you do," Andrew said, curtly.

"Of course."

"He never fell for all that New Order stuff the fellow at the international exhibition tried to sell you."

"Neither did I, and I haven't since. But all the other side say isn't true, either."

"What's going to happen to the farm if you clear out when it's all over?"

"I wanted to discuss that with you. I wondered if you would like to take it over?"

"I've got all I can manage with this place."

"Then perhaps Ricky would like to come back and farm it."

"With a sick wife?"

"They could get help. Probably Sonia and Greig would like to go back. I couldn't run the place alone, in any case. But I couldn't sell it, either."

"I should think not! No Vesteralte land has changed hands for hundreds of years. If those bastards who are now your friends hadn't wiped out all three sons——"

She cut in on him. "It's no use going into all that. Victor, Joseph and Alun have gone. The old people are too old. There are various Vesteralte cousins but they're all comfortably settled on the land where they are——"

"Or dead!"

"They're out of the picture, anyhow!"

"You'd better go and discuss it with the old people," Rilke suggested, in an attempt to keep the peace.

"It's no good. The old man is as good as dead, and it would only worry poor old Mamma. I know what she would say. 'You're Victor's widow; it must rest with you.' And it does rest with me. I'd like to see Ricky there. He belongs to this valley."

"And when Ricky dies? Resi can't have children,"

"There's your eldest boy."

Andrew was silent, and Rilke said, eagerly, "Let's go and find the children!"

"I must go soon," Anna said. "It gets dark so early now." She turned to Irma. "Come with us, Irma?"

"I'd rather not. I've been out all day with the children. I need rest. It's what I came for. We've been through a terrible time. . . ."

When they were outside Rilke said, "Irma's always pretending she's suffering from the effects of the bombing. She's always telling us that we here don't know what war means! She wasn't anywhere near the capital when they had the big raids, but she's terrified. But it isn't only that. She has to do without her maid here. The girl refused to come with her. She said she'd sooner risk the bombs than be buried alive out here. That means Irma has to mind the two children herself, and it makes her irritable and nervy. I'm sorry for her, but what can I do? Sonia does quite a lot for her, but there are four other children in the house, besides hers, you see! There's Tom and Letty coming in at the gate now." She waved to them and called, "Here's your Cousin Anna!"

The boy was like Ricky, Anna thought, as he came close ; he had a certain look of his father about him, but he had inherited his mother's smiling eyes and ready friendliness, and the combination was Ricky. He smiled readily, like Ricky, and there was something warm and easy about him that was essentially Ricky. It astonished her that she had only just noticed it. Supposing Ricky should take over the farm, and this boy finally inherit it—for himself and his heirs for ever? It would be as though Ricky's son had inherited it ; this boy could so easily be Ricky's. . . .

The little girl was merely a small reproduction of Rilke, fair and rosy and plump ; at eighteen she would be exactly as Rilke had been at that age. And at eighteen the boy Tom would be exactly as Ricky had been at eighteen . . . when she herself had been the little girl from the town and they had scrambled up on to the haystack that was like a cake with a slice cut out, and looked out over the shining Sound where the gulls swooped, and she had wished that she could grow wings and take off from the earth with such easy grace and glide down the wind.

In that cold grey late autumn afternoon twenty years later the gulls were still swooping over the Sound with their quarrelling cries, and the smoke from the little wooden homes huddled at the foot of the hills on the other side was going up in blue spirals. In those little houses people were still living the same lives ; and a child that could have been the child she was then waved to her from a ledge of the haystack. Ah, the still waters and the green pastures, how would she ever get them out of her heart if she went to live in a foreign land ? Yet Ricky had loved all this and gone away to start a new life in another country, with someone he loved.

They stood by the haystack, Rilke's two younger children clamouring round them, rosy, flaxen-haired little things, all Rilke's, Anna thought ; only the eldest boy had anything of Ricky.

"That's a good idea," Rilke was saying, "about getting Ricky to come back and run Victor's place. In a few years' time Tom would be working for him—in a matter of no more than five or six years, maybe, and then, as you said, if he could eventually come into the place. . . ."

Rilke had the good peasant shrewdness that Gran had had. It wasn't anything to be despised, Anna thought ; it had been acquired through generations of hard-working, weather-beaten men and women wresting a living from the soil ; men and women who knew the value of the good earth.

"Talk to Andrew about it," Anna said. "In the meantime I'll write to Ricky. You might sound Sonia, too, about coming to work

for Ricky and Resi if they come back. She wants to come to me, but I probably won't be here."

"You're serious about all that? I mean," she added, "I can't seem to imagine you living anywhere but in these parts. You belong here, like the rest of us."

"Ricky went, didn't he?"

"We're hoping he's coming back!"

"Perhaps if I go I'll come back one day!"

Rilke pressed Anna's hands. "Let's hope so. If people belong in a place it's unnatural for them to go apart from it, I always think, like leaving someone you love. You can love a place like you can love a person, I always say."

"Yes," Anna said, heavily. "Yes. That's true."

She didn't go back to the house to say good-bye to Andrew or Irma. Andrew, she felt, was hostile; Irma indifferent. She had said what she had to say, and now it was time to go.

She rode back along the Sound in the fading light full of a nameless sadness. Resolutely she did not turn her head when she came to the cross-roads. She felt she could not bear to see, far away at the end of the valley, the house to which she had come as a bride less than two years ago. All this planning that Rilke's son should inherit the place, when it should have gone to Victor's son, her son. . . . Everything had ended and begun, that still sunny day the summer before last, her brief idyll with Victor, the life in her womb, all the happy dreams, all the contentment; and that day had begun the journey through the dark forest, the path that led her to the man who had given the command that had killed Victor, the man who loved her with a tenderness equal to Victor's and a passion of which Victor was incapable. . . . Was there really the sunlit clearing at the other side of the dark forest—that sunlit Morning of the World in which Paul so passionately believed? How could anyone tell? Only one thing was certain, that there were deeper, darker stretches of the forest to traverse yet. . . .

There was no disguising the fact that winter that the tide of war was on the turn. The army of occupation had not been able to throw their enemies back into the sea, though reinforcements were rushed up by land, sea, and air. All over the country, in valley villages, and in little towns like Ling, people were whispering together that 'it wouldn't be long now'. Some of them whispered it fearfully, with dread, on **the**

principle that the devil you knew was better than the devil you didn't know, and that liberation from one lot of invaders only meant occupation by another,' and bombing and death and destruction in the process. Other people, who hated the invaders and all they stood for were glad that they were shortly to be free of them, and would gladly have got into uniform and helped in the fight if it had been their government's policy ; as it was, they deplored their government's non-resistance. But mostly people were neutral, and terribly afraid. They had had a taste of bombing since their country had been occupied, and they had seen what had happened to other countries which had been used as battlefields. People in little towns like Ling—and outside of the capital most of the towns were little places like Ling—could not imagine what it must be like to have street-fighting *in* your actual midst. They tried to picture it in terms they knew—the town-hall bristling with machine-guns at every window, men dodging round corners with tommy-guns, tanks charging down the high street, the market-square one large gun emplacement, the warehouses blazing, the mayor's house a smoking ruin, the church and the school turned into an arsenal . . . they could not imagine it ; they could picture it happening in some other country, some other town, but not here, at home, amongst familiar faces, familiar things. Where would the children go to school? Where would the mayor live? How could they carry on ? They had seen their minister and batches of young men shot in the square; these things had happened, yet still they could not imagine the major tragedy, the war coming so close that it was in the next street, in your own street. . . .

But inexorably the tide of war rolled in, closer and closer to Ling. The bombardment of the capital was like not so very distant thunder. Ling itself was stuffed with troops. The instructions from headquarters were that at all costs Ling, with its harbour and rail communications, was to be held.

After the second big air-raid on the harbour a wave of panic washed through the town ; people who were unable to crowd into the already overcrowded trains took to the roads with their bundles and their laden perambulators—and were turned back by the soldiers. The commandant issued an order that there was to be no evacuation. He had the town plastered with proclamations to that effect.

When he saw the proclamations Ivor Bard was horrified. He went straight to the town-hall. He had no difficulty in seeing the colonel.

"Commandant, you can't do this! It's absolutely imperative that we get the women and children out ! It can be properly organised—I quite understand that you can't have evacuees crowding the roads

but one train at the disposal of the civilian population on an announced day would be sufficient. The air-raid wardens and the first-aid units would supervise everything, under my instructions. It can all be organised so as not to interfere with military traffic or operations. I and my staff would co-operate to the utmost."

The colonel said, briefly, "I'm sorry, Doctor, but that one train that would be enough is what we haven't got! There aren't sufficient trains for troops!"

"A measure like this will bring every kind of sabotage down on you—the people are terrified and desperate!"

"For every act of sabotage a hundred civilians will be shot!"

"You can't wipe out the whole population!"

"If necessary we can—and will. I'm sorry, Doctor, but war is war. It leaves no room for sentiment."

Ivor stared at him aghast.

"Haven't you any normal decent human feelings, Colonel? Or are you really nothing but a stuffed uniform?"

The colonel passed his hand across his moustache.

"It is not the time for a discussion of ethics, Doctor. I do my duty as I see it. I am a soldier devoted to the service of my country, and I should no more think of deflecting from my duty for a sentimental reason than I should think of not making the move in a game of chess that finally wipes my opponent off the board—I do not have to consider his feelings. I am out to win."

Dr. Bard made a final despairing effort. "I can raise a fleet of cars from civil defence and first-aid units—have I your permission to use them to get the mothers and children out?"

"I'm sorry, Doctor. I had thought I'd made it clear that I must keep the roads clear for military traffic."

"If I disobey your instructions, Commandant?"

Again the old veined hand across the grey moustache.

"There is not room for cars and tanks on these narrow roads, and the tanks are the stronger vehicles."

"Then let me have the use of a 'plane for one day."

The colonel made a motion of his hand to the soldiers at the door.

"I'm sorry, Doctor."

Ivor went white to the lips.

"You filthy murdering swine!"

The soldiers closed in. The colonel pulled a sheaf of papers towards him and the doctor was pushed out into the corridor.

"Swine!" he shouted again.

"Get out!" one soldier said.

"Think yourself lucky not to be arrested!" said the other.

Sick and blind with fury Ivor got into his car and drove at top speed to the mayor's. He was determined to get the women and children out of Ling if it was the last thing he did.

Vera answered the door to him and admitted him. She looked pale and strained, he noticed.

"It's a good thing you looked in," she said, "Mr. Krube's not so well today."

People were beginning to give up calling him the mayor, Ivor noticed; they hadn't a mayor any more, only a military governor; after eighteen months of occupation they no longer tried to deceive themselves.

As Ivor removed his hat and coat and laid them on a tall-backed chair in the hall, the girl asked, "What do you think's going to happen, Doctor? Will there be fighting here, do you think? I'm frightened! Everyone is! It's terrible that we're forbidden to evacuate."

"It's what I came to see the mayor about."

"Had you thought of getting up a delegation to see the commandant?"

"That's no good. I've just come from the commandant. He won't move. We must now try to help ourselves."

She said, fervently, "Please God you'll find a way, Doctor. I'd gladly help in any way I could. I've got a married sister with three young children living here——"

"We'll get them out somehow."

She showed him into the room in which the mayor sat by the fire. It was a dignified, old-fashioned room, panelled, and with heavy furniture, the window cluttered with potted plants and ferns of all descriptions. The mayor looked strangely small and shrunk in the massive chair, under the great fireplace with its dark overmantel. Ivor remembered the many times he had seen him standing with his back to the fireplace, patting his corpulent belly, the thick watch-chain with its imposing seals dragged across it; a strutting, rather pompous little man, laying down the law. . . .

"Here's the doctor looked in on you, sir," Vera said, and crossing to him flicked some dandruff from his collar and shook up the cushion behind him, like a fussy nurse.

The old man said, a little querulously, "I'm pleased to see you, Doctor, but I didn't ask them to send for you, you know. In fact I said to my wife only this morning there was no point in it. There's nothing you can do for me. I'm up one day and down the next."

"All the same, now he's here the doctor can prescribe something for you," Vera said, pertly.

She looked at the doctor. "The mistress is **out** shopping. I'm

sure she'd like you to prescribe something for Mr. Krube. She said this morning he needed a sedative or something."

Ivor nodded and the girl went out. Ivor turned to the old man.

"Nobody sent for me, Mr. Krube. I came to discuss something with you. I've just been to see the commandant about this no-evacuation order. Something's got to be done, and at once. It can only be a matter of days now before this town is turned into a battlefield like all the other places in our poor country. The best of our young men have been killed off—we've got to save the children somehow."

"What do you propose?"

"I'm going round to the civil defence depots and first-aid posts to discuss with the chiefs such transport as they have—they have a good number of cars and lorries and first-aid vans. I want them sent to the hospital tomorrow morning, first thing. I'm going to the school this afternoon to ask the head to announce in every class that children must tell their parents that those wishing to be evacuated must come to the out-patients' department of the hospital tomorrow morning at eight-thirty, where I shall have my transport. I can't hope to be able to get them all away in one move, but I shall keep the others at the hospital until the cars and vans and lorries come back. We shall take the mothers and children and old people first, and make as many journeys as may be necessary—all day long, till we've got them all away. Civil defence and first-aid have plenty of petrol. You're a sick man, Mr. Krube, and I'd like you and your wife to be amongst the first lot that goes off. I want you to give Vera the day off today and have her run round the whole town notifying as many people as she can—mothers with children under school-age who wouldn't be reached through the schools. She's offered to help. She can get other people running round, and they can send others, and so on. I want your wife to go into as many shops as possible and start the story about the evacuation—but only where the proprietor is known to be reliable, and not if there are any soldiers there, of course. Vera, too, must be careful about that. It's touch and go whether we can carry the plan through, but with care and co-operation we ought to be able to."

"It sounds all right, Doctor, but where do you think you're going to evacuate us all to?"

"There are a number of places well off the route of the incoming troops—mountain villages that this incoming tide won't touch. People must sleep in barns and hay-huts and byres, if need be—in churches and schools—anywhere where there's a roof over their heads and no likelihood of bombs and shells. It'll only be for a few days, till the present forces have cleared out or been driven out and the other lot

are settled in, then they can all come back. The important thing is to get them out of this town before hell is let loose in it—which could very well be within forty-eight hours from now ! I'll send my car for you and Mrs. Krube and Vera tomorrow at eight o'clock. Is that all right ? And you'll send Vera out at once ?"

"I don't see how you're going to bring it off—we've been ordered to keep off the roads. The roads are blocked with tanks, lorries, gun-carriers, and God knows what ! They'll shoot us off the roads, or just mow us down with their tanks !"

"The colonel told me all that just now. But we're not going on the main roads. There are lanes and paths and tracks, and if necessary we'll drive across open country. Once we get out into the open a lot of the younger and stronger people can get out and tramp the rest of the way. The great thing is *to get them out of the town !*"

He banged out the last few words with a clenched fist on the massive shining mahogany table.

"You can't hope not to be seen. You'll be shot at sight !"

"If we're on the roads, but we won't *be* on the roads! By the time the troops have got their instructions what to do about people on the footpaths and in the byways and fields we'll be away."

The old man smiled a wan smile.

"It's a bold scheme if you can pull it off, Doctor !"

"Then you'll come ? And I can count on any co-operation you can give ?"

"Of course—gladly. Perhaps you'd like to explain to Vera yourself what you want her to do ?"

"Thanks, I will. Be ready at eight sharp, won't you, and let everyone you can know, but don't use the 'phone, of course, or write anything, or get within earshot of a soldier ! Now I'll just write out that little prescription for you. . . ."

19

Ivor found immediate response wherever he went with his scheme. There was a burning fury of indignation everywhere over the no-evacuation order. Everyone was convinced that it could only be a matter of a few days before the invaders were forced out, but their retreat would be accelerated by air-raids and bombardment, and from what had happened in other parts of the country it was highly probable that they would stay and fight their way out, street by street, rather than pull out before their enemies arrived.

Ivor had civil defence and first-aid units, school-teachers, and his

hospital staff, ready and eager to co-operate. Not everyone would get the news of the evacuation scheme in time, if at all, he knew, but at least the majority would know, and it was understood that the old and infirm, and mothers and children, were to be taken first; afterwards they would take as many of the able-bodied people without children as they could. At Anna's suggestion a whole party of school-children in charge of teachers and mothers were to be taken out to the fields outside the town and instructed to make their way on foot, keeping well away from the roads, to the Vesteralte farmstead. Teachers, doctors, nurses, members of the hospital administrative staff, Mrs. Krube, various councillors and their wives roped in by her, all had similarly useful practical suggestions to make.

Anna was unutterably shocked by Ivor's account of his interview with the colonel.

"How *can* he?" she cried.

"Because he has disciplined every natural instinct into the iron-grey casing of militarism!" Ivor answered, bitterly.

"**But** the man who hungers for music—who could listen so raptly to *Jesu bleibet meine Freude*——"

"Could give the order for the organist who played it to be shot, and look on whilst the order was carried out! D'you think he wouldn't have me shot if it seemed to him his duty—and you too? He would do it with an infinite regret, but he would do it!"

She buried her face in her hands, shuddering.

"It's too horrible! Is that what they understand by their Morning of the World? Is their sunrise all blood? Is Paul like that too?"

"I don't know. But I do know that the colonel would expect him to have you shot if the occasion required it! Which reminds me—husbands and wives and lovers, we know, tell each other everything, but this is something you mustn't tell Paul, and if you'd arranged to see him tonight you must put him off. We shall none of us get to bed tonight—every car and lorry that goes off, every party that goes on foot, must have its supplies. They'll be coming in all the afternoon, and tonight we must sort them and get them packed. They're doing the same at the civil defence depots."

"I *had* agreed to see Paul tonight—could you get a message to him at the town-hall?"

"I don't know. I was more or less thrown out this morning, and it'll attract attention if you go yourself. You'd better be at the room at the appointed time and then tell him you've got to work tonight, and that you're sleeping at the hospital."

"Yes, I'll do that."

It was more difficult than she had expected. Paul arrived in an overwrought state. The forces being pushed back in all directions looked like becoming a rout. Anything might happen now from hour to hour. Ling was ringed round : the enemy was now only a few miles away.

"Of course they won't break through, but it means that this may be my last chance of seeing you until we've thrown them back."

She said, almost angrily, "They won't be thrown back ! How can you go on deceiving yourselves? They'll be in this town if not tomorrow then the day after !"

"In that case"—bitterly—"this is good-bye!"

She took his hands. "Paul, because it may be good-bye, not like that !"

He caught her to him in a sudden rush. "Anna, if the worst should happen and we have to get out—we'll meet again, won't we? You won't go back on everything? I love you as I've never loved anyone else and I could never love anyone else after all this !"

He kissed her, wildly, and then she said, 'Paul, tell me something—you know the colonel has forbidden evacuation, don't you realise that it means that I am one of the people condemned to remain here and wait to be killed? Doesn't that mean anything to you? Doesn't it make you see how wicked and cruel the colonel's order is?'

The sweat broke out on his forehead, as always under strain.

'You can't expect me to criticise my commanding officer's decisions. The issues at stake are far bigger than any personal ones ! It's hellish for you, but it's hellish for me too—it's hellish for all of us, soldiers and civilians equally, but some of us will survive, and why shouldn't it be you. and equally why shouldn't it be me?'

The sweat broke out on his forehead, as always under strain.

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She sighed and moved away from him.

'You're evading the issue. But I couldn't expect you to face it. If you faced the issues you'd see how much blood there was involved in your sunrise ! How much blood and suffering and cruelty !'

"You can say that to me now—when it may be the end, and then God only knows when and where we shall meet again ! But perhaps underneath everything you hate me—perhaps you don't want us to meet again ?"

She turned to him with the tears running down her face.

"Oh, you know I want us to meet again ! You know—you must know—that the prospect of our being separated and not knowing, as you say, when and where we shall meet again, is hell to me as it is to you ! Only this impending massacre of civilians is too much, and that **you are prepared to sacrifice me along with them—it all seems so**

horrible ! I don't profess to understand. But there's not time to talk about it all now—I've got to go."

"Can't I come late tonight when you get in from the hospital ?"

"I'm sleeping at the hospital tonight—they're expecting heavy raids. There must be someone there."

It came to her that if they parted now they would have parted on a lie. Terrible to have to lie in the last hours.

"Why must it be you ?"

"Perhaps like you I can't criticise my commanding officer's decisions !"

"I accept the rebuke. Good-bye then—with luck we shall meet tomorrow."

He asked again, when they had kissed. "You will come to me, won't you—when it's all over ?"

"You know I will. But it may not be possible for some time."

"I realise that. But so long as I have your promise."

"You have it. Now I must go. Don't kiss me again——" She smiled, wanly, "You know that if we begin we never want to stop ! You'd better take me in your car, to the hospital, if you don't want me shot by your patrols !"

20

There was a shattering raid on Ling that night, in the vicinity of the harbour and the railway station, and a number of casualties were brought to the hospital. A wide area near the water-front was ringed off because of delayed-action bombs, and the road by which Ivor had planned to get his cars and lorries unobtrusively out of the town was cut off. It meant that instead of going out by the 'back-door' they must go out by the 'front'. The only alternative was to go out in the other direction, but that way lay only a main road running straight to the next town, and for miles along the side of that road, precluding any possibility of getting off it, ran a camp put up by the occupying army. They would have to go out right through the centre of the town to the main road that headed for the valley and turn off into the open land on either side. The snag about that was that at the head of the road ; when it left the town, was a machine-gun post, and a patrol ; there were no convenient side-turnings to dive down as there had been on the now inaccessible planned route.

Ivor called a hurried conference of his drivers and they decided that there was nothing for it but to risk the danger area ; those who didn't care to take the risk would have to stay behind ; a delayed-action bomb

didn't usually go off under twenty-four hours. In any case the danger wasn't greater than remaining behind in the town. They would have to come to an arrangement with the police, of course, but they expected no trouble there; it was probable that each of the police had a wife and child or children or some other relative in the convoy of evacuees. None of the drivers was afraid to take the risk, and when it was put to the crowd everyone was agreed that the risk of being caught by the bomb exploding was less than the risks involved in staying behind.

Civil defence wardens hurried off to have a word with the police. They were back within twenty minutes. There were six policemen guarding the roped-off areas; five were in entire sympathy with the plan; but one was bitterly opposed to it. He had no one to be evacuated; he regarded the whole evacuation scheme, going against the commandant's orders, as madness; everyone involved in it would be shot, he declared; and when the people got out into the country, what were they to do? Apart from the danger of the bomb going off and blowing the whole lot sky-high any minute. He would have nothing to do with it. No car or lorry should pass the spot where he was on duty. . . . Every kind of argument had been tried on him, but without effect. . . .

"What we propose," one of the drivers said, "is to rush past him. If necessary we shall have to knock him down. If he's killed it's his own lookout!"

There was a chorus of assent.

The driver who had first spoken asked:

"What do you think, Doctor?"

"I entirely agree," Ivor said.

"Then we'll get away with the first lot."

"Strictly mothers and children and old and sick people—this may be the only lot we may be able to get through, remember!"

They were in entire agreement.

"One thing more," Ivor said, as they were about to go to their cars and lorries. "That policeman who is against us may give us away, or someone he complains to may. Any one of us involved in this can be arrested and shot. Even at the eleventh hour like this I don't see the commandant letting us get away with it! No one will think any the worse of any driver who prefers not to take the risk. It's more useful, after all, to be alive than dead!"

Someone said, "We may all be dead this time tomorrow, anyhow! We might as well be a bit useful whilst we're still alive!"

One or two of them laughed. They went off, Ivor thought, as though the whole thing were a lark. . . .

The evacuees crowded into the cars and lorries in the courtyard round which the hospital was built. There were last-minute changes of plans—mothers giving up their places so that other women's children might be squeezed in with their own. Several old people decided at the last moment that they had no right to take up space with their old bodies that were near to the grave anyhow—that the young people had more right to the places they occupied. Amongst those who withdrew at the last minute were Mr. and Mrs. Krube. Vera had no intention of going until the last; she was no longer the terrified girl who had met Ivor the day before. In trying to help she had lost all her fear. "Having something to do takes your mind off yourself," was how she put it. She had been in touch with everyone she knew who had young children. "Get the children out first," had been the slogan throughout the town ever since Ivor had got to work.

The convoy when it finally started off was something like six children to one adult. Not a single child of all the crowd that, as instructed, had gathered in the out-patients' at eight-thirty that morning was left behind. It was astonishing, Anna thought, how many children you could pack into an ordinary saloon car once you started.

The blinds of the cars were drawn down. Every vehicle had a red cross on its sides and on its roof. The convoy leaving the hospital attracted no particular attention. That 'ambulances' should be about after last night's heavy raid was to be expected.

The convoy got through. No one quite knew what happened to the policeman who tried to hold them up—whether he stepped aside in time or was knocked down, and no one cared. The stream of vehicles rushed past and out into the open country. The people left behind at the hospital waited patiently for their turn to be taken. Ivor estimated that the last car should be back by noon—the car, that is to say, which had the farthest to go.

In point of fact the last car was back well before noon, but the driver got no farther than the outskirts of the forbidden area, where he was held up by two soldiers who pointed pistols at him. He was handcuffed, thrust into a waiting van, and driven away.

When he got to the town-hall he found the rest of the drivers there, and with them the doctor, all handcuffed.

The drivers were shot in a batch in the square during the afternoon, as an example. They died bravely.

The colonel had the doctor locked up under guard. He wanted to think about him. That the drivers were guilty was self-evident; they had been caught in the act. The doctor's part in the affair might warrant investigation. He was a very good doctor. It was the old question of avoiding waste. He sighed. He had hoped the shootings

were finished. According to his information the doctor had organised the whole scheme ; he was therefore as guilty as the drivers, who would never have acted but for him.

He was still brooding on the unfortunate affair after the shootings when he was informed that there was a young woman by the name of Mrs. Vesteralte demanding to see him.

"We told her you were busy, sir, but she said if we told you who she was you would see her."

He ordered that she should be shown in.

The shootings had been audible at the hospital, and taking it for granted that Ivor had been marched out with the others Anna had had hysterics. By the time she had recovered it had been discovered that the doctor was not in the batch—the bodies were left in the market-place, as before, under armed guard. When she was told this she had rushed round to the town-hall.

She had not stopped to tidy herself. She was dishevelled and haggard from her recent hysteria. Her eyes were wild, her hair was coming down, her face and clothes were wet from the water which had been thrown over her to bring her to her senses. She looked like a mad woman of the most violent kind, and the soldiers had tried to get rid of her. To pacify her they had taken her name in to the colonel, and were astonished when he ordered her to be shown in.

Both Paul and Lieutenant Corder were in the room when her name was brought in. Paul paled, and the colonel said, "It would be better if you left us, Captain."

"Very good, sir." He went out.

It could not occur to Paul to argue about it. He met Anna, between two soldiers, outside the door. Her appearance horrified him. She seemed to him hardly recognisable.

"Anna!" he said, involuntarily, but there was a strange kind of fear in him, as though they were enemies. That anyone as essentially quiet and gentle as Anna could look as wild and violent as she looked then was terrifying.

She stared at him for a moment with her tormented eyes.

"If there's a God you'll all pay for this one day !" she cried.

He had no time to reply ; she was pushed into the room.

Colonel Anton was also startled by her appearance. For him, too, she was almost unrecognisable. Was this wild-looking, bedraggled creature really the gentle charming woman who had been his hostess so recently, gracious by candlelight, and playing Beethoven and Bach with such delicacy ?

"Please be seated," he said, and indicated the chair at the other side of the desk.

She said curtly, "I prefer to stand. I want to know what you intend to do with Dr. Bard. You accepted my hospitality the other night and I have a right to know. Dr. Bard is my friend, and he was yours."

"If Dr. Bard were my brother it would not affect any decision I might make concerning him. As I explained to the doctor only yesterday, there is no room for sentiment in war. The doctor, unfortunately, is guilty of inciting a number of people to an act of gross indiscipline. It is a very serious matter to flout military law in this way."

"Then you've no ordinary human feelings? It doesn't mean anything to you that only the other night you drank Dr. Bard's wine, that he allowed himself to be labelled collaborationist in order to come here and treat you when you had ear-trouble, and to come here night after night to play chess with you? You don't feel gratitude for any of this?"

Lieutenant Corder smiled his sarcastic smile and spat into the fire. Anna remembered him from the interview she had had with Paul.

She spun round and confronted him. "You can sneer, you cheap little amateur gangster! If God is just you'll get what is coming to you, like the rest of your rotten kind!"

The colonel said, patiently, "If you would keep to the point, Mrs. Vesteralte. . . . No good purpose is gained by abusing one of my officers. You were suggesting that any gratitude I might properly feel to Dr. Bard, for services rendered in the matter of chess and wine and medical attention, should influence my decision regarding him. I'm afraid I cannot agree. I should consider myself wanting in integrity if I permitted anything of the kind. Actions are right or wrong in themselves, quite independently of one's personal relations with the person concerned. I have not yet decided what shall be done about Dr. Bard. I'm afraid that is all I can tell you. I appreciate your concern for him."

He passed his hand across his moustache, then added, before she could speak, "I might add that it was suggested to me that as the doctor's assistant and collaborator in this scheme you should be arrested along with him."

"Then why didn't you? Why stop at anything? Why not massacre in cold blood every single person who had anything to do with the scheme?"

"Some mistaken, unethical sense of chivalry, no doubt. No man is infallible."

"But you come near to being as infallibly inhuman as makes no odds!"

The colonel motioned to the soldiers. As they closed in on each side of her she made one last despairing effort, all the savagery falling

away from her, her voice broken now with an agony of pleading, the tears running down her face.

"Colonel, one day you'll have to meet your Maker like the rest of us—isn't there enough blood on your conscience? Even if he did wrong in disobeying your order, Dr. Bard is a good man—he couldn't bear that the children should stay to be massacred—it isn't wrong to want to save little children, Colonel. . . ." She was sobbing now. "You can't be all that inhuman, Colonel—it was for the children he did it——"

"Take her away," was all the colonel said.

21

Anna never knew how she got back to her room, how she dragged herself through the street and up the stairs. She collapsed on her bed and sobbed herself to exhaustion. When the siren went she did not move. There would be another hellish raid, but she had no strength to get up and go to the hospital. She was exhausted from the sleepless previous night, from the terrible strain of the day, from the shock of Ivor's arrest, the horror of the shootings, her fit of hysteria, the agony of her interview with the colonel. She could only have dragged herself to the hospital to have collapsed in Ivor's arms—Ivor, gentlest, dearest and wisest of friends, but Ivor was not there, and Ivor might be the next victim in the market-place—Ivor, selfless as Steven Tronder, and as near to sainthood.

She lay still with the feeling of being at the very heart of the deafening tumult in the outer world. Bombs crashed and the house shook. She shivered and felt sick, so terribly sick. There was the familiar commotion of ambulances and fire-engines rushing to 'incidents', bells clanging; the familiar flash of gunfire, livid as lightning, that got in between the blackout curtains, the familiar drone and dive of 'planes. Hell let loose once more. Well, thank God, at least some of the children and young people were out of it tonight—thanks to those who had died that afternoon in the market-square, and the man who might die on the same bloodstained spot tomorrow. Surely it was a weakness on the colonel's part not to have had him shot with the others? Are you sure it wasn't a weakness, Colonel, like that mistaken chivalry which decided you to let me go free? Can it be that somewhere inside you you have a small spark of humanity? That humanity which, as a good Nietzschean, you despise? Steven used to insist on 'that of God in every man. O God, if there is indeed that spark in the soul of Colonel Anton breathe on it, foster it, fan it to a flame of compassion, for

Jesus Christ's sake, Amen. . . . Oh God, who gavest Thine only beloved Son to die in agony on the cross for the redemption of mankind, hear my prayer! There are so few good people in the world, God, let this one be spared. Jesus promised that whatsoever we asked in His name that wouldst thou grant; this I ask in Jesus' name, in the name of Jesus Christ, Saviour of Mankind. . . .

The agonised intensity of her prayer drained the last of her strength and whilst the guns still banged she fell asleep.

She was wakened by someone shaking her shoulder. She opened her eyes and looked up into Paul's face. He had drawn back the curtains and a grey light filled the room. It was morning. His face was grey as the morning; his eyes had the sunken look of sleeplessness and strain.

She asked, confusedly, as she sat up, "Has the all-clear gone?"

"Hours ago. Anna, we're getting out—now—this minute! I oughtn't to be here—I just rushed in. My men are waiting. We received our orders from headquarters last night. They've rushed up ships and transport planes. We've got to get out whilst there's any harbour left—we haven't time to rebuild it. The others will be here in a few hours. It's good-bye, Anna."

"Ivor . . ." she asked quickly, "what about Ivor?"

"He was ordered to be shot. I don't know what happened. It was all confusion after we got the order to evacuate. If he's still alive the new military commander will release him. I must go, my darling. Kiss me. Don't let all this horror come between us. It was always beautiful in the oasis, in spite of everything. I love you, and I'll wait for you, even if it's years."

She clung to him. "I love you, my darling, my darling. . . ."

They clung together despairingly, then abruptly he put her from him and was gone, stumbling down the stairs, out into the street where men stood massed in even ranks, motionless, waiting. There was the raucous shout of command, then the tramp of feet.

Anna stood leaning her head against the window-pane.

There they went in the grey morning, the foreign soldiers who had entered so confidently in the bright sunshine two summers ago, getting out, retreating, going ingloriously whilst the going was good, leaving the little town littered with their tanks and guns . . . leaving their trail of smoking ruins, heaps of rubble, bloodstains, corpses.

There was Paul at the head of his men, marching away defeated. Captain Paul Dettin of the army of occupation. Paul Dettin from the little Baltic village, the young man at the international exhibition, 'Can I interest you in the New World Order?' Paul who had believed, who still believed, in the Morning of the World. . . .

Marching, marching, marching, the men who had brought such sorrow to the peaceful little town, visionaries of a new day, whose sun rose out of a bath of blood.

She pressed her face against the window-pane.

"Paul, my darling, my love!"

It was as though the body could break in half with the agony of heart and mind—as though it were too frail a vessel to hold such a burden of torment.

When the last column of men had marched away and there was no longer even the fading echo of the marching feet, doors and windows burst open ; people ran out into the streets, waving their arms, waving handkerchiefs, waving flags, shouting, laughing—laughing with the tears rolling down their faces.

"They're gone! They're gone! We're free!"

Flags and handkerchiefs waved from every window. In the streets people joined hands and danced in rings. From somewhere came the sound of the national anthem.

Soon after the last ship had pulled out, the last 'plane taken off, the first company of the new army arrived ; there was a tramp of marching men, a roar of tanks and gun-carriers in the narrow streets, and a new army was in occupation.

Anna lay on her bed listening to the cheering and singing. She dozed a little and was wakened by the tremendous roar of the tanks, and in the tumult did not hear steps on the stairs.

Then the door burst open and Ivor stood in the room, haggard, dishevelled, unshaved.

She sprang up and rushed to him. His arms went round her.

"Ivor! Oh, thank God, thank God!"

When they had embraced he said, "Is there any of that brandy left? I need it."

"Most of it's left. It hasn't been touched since the night of the party."

She produced it for him from a cupboard, with two glasses.

She said, "It's wasted on me, but I feel all in."

As he raised his own glass she noticed blood on his hands.

"What happened?" She indicated the blood.

"There was a fight. One of the guards in charge of me seemed to think it was his duty to shoot me out of hand after the order to quit came in. I went for him and knocked his revolver out of his hand. Here it is." He tugged it out of his jacket and laid it on the table.

"Did you lay him out?"

"I shot him—dead."

He swallowed the brandy and went over to the wash-basin in a corner of the room.

The water as it ran over his hands turned red against the sides of the basin.

"Strange, isn't it—Ivor Bard, the apostle of non-violence, killing anyone?"

She reminded him, "You are also the apostle of life at any price, and it was your life or his."

"My life or his—but I'll never know if I was justified. Perhaps the poor devil had more right to live. I shall never know. Perhaps he had a wife and kids. All the way here I kept thinking about Steven. I didn't have to ask myself what he would have done. I know. It seems I'm not of the stuff that saints and martyrs are made of. One aspires to the dissolution of selfhood but is caught up in one's personal life after all!" His voice was bitter.

She knew the conflict in him, the sense of personal failure warring with a defiant insistence on the right to live.

She said, quietly, "I'm glad your instinct to live asserted itself. The world needs people like you."

"Has one the right to preserve one's own life at the cost of someone else's? Unless something outside myself provides the answer I'm going to ask myself that question to the end of my days."

He threw water over his face, dried his face and hands, and went over to a dim, mottled mirror and combed his hair.

He replaced the comb in his pocket and turned to her.

"I want you to come with me to my house, Anna. There's something I want to show you—an ivory ball of dragons and lotus-flowers. I want us to look at it together and let its beauty, and all the centuries-old wisdom in that beauty, flow into us. It might heal our spirits, and God knows they need healing! Perhaps we'll find the answer Pilate failed to find. . . ."

She tidied herself and they went down the stairs and out into the street. The air struck sharply cold on their faces.

A crowd of people were gathered in the market-place watching the new troops unload. An icy wind blew the first flakes of snow over the roof-tops. The tarpaulins on the army lorries flapped like sails, and the foreign soldiers blew on their frozen hands and looked anxiously at the heavy sky. The gulls flew inland and settled on the stepped gables of the houses, and the soldiers said it boded a hard winter.

EPILOGUE

THE Ulrich relief workers were of various nationalities. They were housed in a shabby, bomb-shattered hotel near the mountain of rubble that had once been a handsome, cathedral-like railway station. Across the road from the hotel was the hollow shell of a Gothic cathedral. The centre of the town had been gutted out completely. Without having seen them it was impossible to imagine the tree-lined boulevards flanked with cafes, or the faded yellow baroque churches and civic buildings, though here and there a blasted tree still stood, bleached white and silver, a signpost to desolation, and here and there an ornate doorway sagged over a heap of bricks and charred timber. In what had been the town-square was an encampment of huts for homeless people. The population was fed from mobile canteens driven by the relief workers. The people queued up morning, noon, and evening, at given posts. It was the same all over the country, but Ulrich was one of the most heavily bombed towns. It was without water, light, or transport. There was dysentery and typhus. Relief workers became themselves in need of relief and were moved on in relays to less devastated areas ; all other places seemed almost rest-camps after Ulrich.

After a few months only a handful of the original recruits to the unit remained. Among them were Dr. Ivor Bard and Mrs. Vesteralte. The reason they stayed on was the reason why they had got themselves sent there.

They had seized the opportunity of a few hours in Minns en route to Ulrich, to look up the Maine family. The Baltic Shipping Company still existed—the offices, at least, were still there—and Mr. Maine was still alive. He greeted them warmly as friends of Paul Dettin, whom, he said, with tears in his eyes, since Carlos's death he had come to think of as his own son. He told them where they could find Paul—that is to say that he had gone to the capital, but what he was doing there, or his exact address, he didn't feel justified in telling them. They would come across him sooner or later, he said. If after six months they hadn't found him they could get in touch with him again, and they would re-consider the situation. It wasn't, he added, that he didn't trust them ; but that in the world as it was today, plunged in chaos and darkness, the splendid morning they had all hoped for had become the dark night of the soul, the journey to the end of the night, one formed a habit of caution. . . .

Anna sighed. "It was like that in our country during the occupation," she told him. "We understand very well."

"It is the Dark Ages come again," Mr. Maine said.

"If I find Paul I shall marry him," Anna told him.

"You think that now," Mr. Maine replied, "but when you find him, if you do, you may change your mind. You would have to be braver than most women to marry Paul Dettin now."

"Perhaps she loves more than most women," Ivor said, curtly, a little irritated.

Mr. Maine stared out of his office window at the damaged harbour and the few battered ships lying there. He made no comment, and they knew there was no more to say.

Their train did not leave until the evening, and they walked about the streets of Minns, and for Anna everything was the living illustration of everything that Paul had told her. The centre of the town was little damaged. There were still the slender Gothic spires, the inns with their swinging wrought-iron signs of fat burghers and bunches of grapes, the old houses with their fish-scale tiles and their overhanging upper storeys. There was the faded yellow facade of the baroque palace that Paul was so fond of, and the gardens in which he had so often sat, neglected now from the years of war, but with the same avenues of trees, the same ornamental lake upon which he and other students had gone boating. There was the bandstand where the open-air concerts had been held. There was the opera house where he had first heard *Tristan and Isolde*; the public library where he had spent so many hours. His ghost walked in the narrow cobbled streets and came hastening towards her down the avenues of trees. It was spring and the chestnuts were like great Christmas trees with white candles.

"Paul, my darling, my love," her heart cried, "where are you?"

Then the stricken capital, inland, the dingy hotel, the long queues of haggard-looking people with their resentful eyes and their shabby clothes, and the terrible feeling of despair and bitterness and the disintegration of a nation. Warding off the rather touchingly naive advances of a lonely young fellow-countryman, John Freeder, a driver in the unit; getting out of the rubble-heap of a city and walking with Ivor, always discussing the same thing—how to trace Paul. Sitting at a cafe whose upper storeys were ruins, drinking synthetic coffee, watching the drab crowds going past, hour after hour, searching faces. Faces, faces, faces. But never Paul's. And all the time the tormenting thought, "Supposing he isn't here after all?"

Ivor counselled patience. "Sooner or later," he urged, "if you don't see him he will see you. One of these days he will spot you at **the** cafe, or in the street, or at the canteen. Give it six months, as old Maine said."

"Why do you think he was so secretive?"

"There can only be one reason. You can kill people, but not an idea."

"Paul said that once."

"Well, then——"

"You mean——"

"Yes, of course. What else?"

Then one midday when she had almost given up hoping, when she was standing in the mobile canteen, dishing out the midday soup to the long queue of men, women and children, not looking at the faces because she found the suffering in those faces intolerable, a voice said, very low, "Anna!"

She had the sense of her heart turning over, then looked down into Paul's face. He looked exactly as she had seen him last, grey and haggard. For a moment everything swam, then she said, in a whisper, "Wait," and turned away.

She muttered something to the woman next her about having seen Dr. Bard in the crowd and needing to speak to him urgently, and before her colleague could protest at her disappearance had rushed out of the van and down the steps.

Paul was waiting a few yards away. He wore flannels and the blue-green jacket with brass-buttons he had worn at the university, and it came to her that it was the first time she had seen him in civilian clothes. She caught at his hands as she came up to him, then leaned back faintly against a hoarding from which tattered war posters flapped forlornly.

"I thought I'd never find you," she said, breathlessly.

"Where can we go?"

"There's the hotel where we're all staying just round the corner from here. They'll all be out just now."

"All right."

As they turned away he asked, "How long have you been here?"

"Nearly six months."

"Why did you come here?"

"Why do you suppose?"

"For the same reason they're all here, I imagine, to ladle out soup to the undeserving defeated! There must be a great kick in such Christian charity!"

"Paul!" She stared at him. His mouth was thin and tight. There was a terrible bitterness in his face.

"Also it's an experience, isn't it? Quite a zoo, in fact, with the animals fed regularly twice a day!"

Her eyes filled with tears.

"Paul! Ivor and I volunteered for relief work in this country in

the hope of finding you. We got ourselves sent here to Ulrich because we learned that the Ulrich unit had a few hours in Minns. We saw Mr. Maine at his office. He told us you were in the capital, but he wouldn't tell us any more."

"Good for him! There aren't many people you can trust nowadays."

She caught at his hand.

"I kept my promise, Paul. Didn't you want me to?"

"I daren't believe you would, and it was all so ghastly here at the end that I could hardly care. One's own personal hopes seemed so trivial compared with the tragedy here."

She pressed his hand and they walked on in silence and came to the hotel.

As they went up the dirty broken steps he said, "I've passed here nearly every day for months."

They went on up the bare staircase and came at last to her room. She turned the key in the lock as they went in.

It was a large gaunt room with striped wallpaper, an iron bed, a table and chair, a wardrobe, a wash-basin—but of course no water in the taps. White gauze took the place of glass at the big old-fashioned window.

She stood with her back against the door and put her hands on his shoulders.

"Whatever you thought before I came, you're glad I'm here now, aren't you?"

He put up his hands and removed hers from his shoulders.

"I don't know." He went over and sat on the bed, his head in his hands. "You can't imagine what hell it is here," he said.

She had gone very white, but she knelt down on the floor beside him, drawing his hands away from his face, forcing him to meet her eyes.

"I think I know. But now there will be the oasis. It was always beautiful there, you remember, however horrible it was outside. I love you, Paul. I've *newer* ceased to love you. You needed me then, but perhaps you need me more now."

"I'm not the man who kissed you good-bye that morning two years ago, Anna."

"I'll make you happy, and then you'll be the same. We'll go away from this tragic country——"

"Go away? What in God's name do you mean? What do you take me for? Desert my country when she's in her direst need? What do you think I came to this town for? Don't you realise that we've suffered only military defeat—that the movement still exists?"

That it's growing and spreading and gathering strength all the time, underground?"

"I thought you would be working in the underground movement, Paul. I expected that."

"Yet you calmly suggest I give it all up and walk out on my comrades!"

He got up. "I'm going back to the queue. It's my only chance of getting anything to eat till the evening."

"There's no need, Paul. I can get you something from the kitchen here——"

She got up and put her arms round his neck.

"Paul—kiss me!"

For a moment she had the feeling of him holding himself rigid, away from her, then suddenly his mouth was on hers with the devouring hunger of their first kiss.

"Anna," he cried brokenly, when the kiss was spent. "Oh, Anna, my darling! There's been ice round my heart for so long!"

"It's melting now," she whispered.

Without speaking they went back to the bed and lay together, pressed close. She put up a hand and touched his face.

"I'll stand by you, whatever you do," she said, softly.

"Beloved!"

He raised himself on an elbow and looked down at her, smiling.

"You're just the same," he said.

"You are now, too."

The lunch hour passed and people came and went on the stairs; several of them tried the handle of Anna's door and demanded angrily where the devil she was, and what was the idea in locking her room when she went out, no one else did. . . .

When the house had settled down again to its after-luncheon occupations—some read or wrote in their rooms, others went out—Anna got up, did her hair, which Paul had loosened from its braids because he liked to see it spread out, shining, on the pillow, and went up to Ivor's room.

She found him, as she expected, sitting at the table writing.

He knew by her flushed cheeks and shining eyes what she was going to say.

"Don't tell me," he said smiling. "I know what you're going to say—you've found Paul!"

"He's in my room," she told him.

"I guessed it. I was one of the people who tried your door. I've never known you lock it before. Commandant was furious that you walked off from the canteen at midday like that! What happened?"

"Paul was in the queue. I brought him here. Now I want you to go and stay with him whilst I go and get some food from the kitchen."

"You'd better let me go and bring it to you. I'll say you're not well and I'm taking your lunch to your room. Incidentally, I suppose you haven't had any, have you?"

"I'm not hungry."

"All the same, you must eat. I'll make it as big a helping as I can, then you can share it. What does Paul look like, by the way?"

"Haggard—and he's rather thinner. He says it's hell here." She hesitated a moment, then added, "He wasn't very easy at first."

"Poor boy, I can understand. Well, go back to him and I'll see what food I can raise."

2

That evening they all three went to Paul's room. It was little more than a cellar. The top part of the house was badly bomb-damaged and uninhabited.

"I don't pay any rent," he said. "There's no one to pay it to! God knows who owns the place or where the people are who once lived here—dead probably! I just came here and took over the miserable bit of stuff that I found here—it had evidently been used as an air-raid shelter; there was practically only the camp-bed. I moved in a few things of my own, bit by bit. The duplicating machine was the trickiest thing. . . . Sooner or later I shall be run to earth, I suppose, but I'm not registered—I've no papers, no identity card—"

"You mean you're living illegally?" Ivor asked.

"I have to. I couldn't do the work I'm doing if there was any official track of me. Officially I don't exist."

"How do you manage for money?"

"I'd rather not answer that question."

"I understand. I'm sorry."

"But if we get married, how shall we manage?" Anna asked.

"We can't get married yet, Anna darling. I've just said—officially I don't exist. If I tried to get married I should bring down the whole of officialdom about me. I can't afford to."

"Obviously not," Ivor agreed. "But why don't you and Anna clear out?"

"We've already discussed that," Anna said quickly. "So long as he feels he has work to do here I don't want him to."

Paul reached forward and pressed her hand.

"Bless you, darling."

What happens, then ?"

The only alternative is for Anna to disappear and come and live here with me illegally, but I don't favour the idea !"

Ivor said sharply, "She mustn't do that — it would be disastrous." Anna sighed. "It'll work out."

Paul smiled, sadly. "You always used to say that, Anna. Somehow it'll work out, you used to say."

"And you used to say that somehow we'd get through the dark forest and come out into the sunlight — But there doesn't seem to be any sunlight !"

"We're not out of the forest yet !"

'You have your old faith, still in spite of everything !"

"How else could I keep going in this hell—if I didn't believe that eventually, somehow, sometime, good must triumph over evil, the dark night have an end ?"

Anna stayed the night with Paul. Walking back to the hotel alone Ivor pondered the problem of those two and was deeply worried. He could not for the life of him see how it could possibly work out. In due course the relief organisations would withdraw, and in what capacity could Anna then continue to remain in the country ? And what sort of life would it be for her if she did ? Their only hope of any decent sort of future, that he could see, was if Paul would be reasonable and agree to get out of the country and start a new life elsewhere with Anna. He couldn't get out legally, but plenty of people had got out of countries illegally. Could Anna's love overcome Paul's fanatic devotion to his country—his fanatic faith in its ultimate rebirth—a rebirth in which he felt bound to assist ? It didn't look like it. And added to all this was the fact that the authorities were hot on the trail of the underground movement. They were determined to tear it out, root and branch, and to be quite ruthless in the process. Sooner or later Paul would be forced to abandon his activities. Then, out in the open, with no papers, no legal existence, how was he going to exist ? And if the underground movement proved stronger than the authorities anticipated, and went on for years—what happened to Anna in all that time, a foreigner in this drained, exhausted, ruined country ? But that was the point at which he had started. It was like seeing a film round a second time, Ivor thought, ruefully. . . .

When he tried to discuss it with Anna she would merely look distressed and repeat, helplessly, that it was no use worrying ; sufficient unto the day. Perhaps when Paul realised the impossibility of the whole situation, that the time would come when she must get out of his unhappy country, he would come to his senses, realise that he had to choose between the work he was doing and the woman he loved.

"But then," she said, wearily, "I sometimes think he's quite capable of choosing his country ! With an infinite regret—in the way, no doubt, that the colonel decided you must be shot. These people are like that."

"Can't you make him see that what he is doing is quite futile, and a vain sacrifice of your joint future ?"

"No more than I could make the colonel see that it was monstrous to think of shooting you—or than you could make him see that it was monstrous to forbid the evacuation !"

"No use appealing to his love for you—urging, I mean, the principle that it's not what people assert, however passionately, that matters, but what they do about it ?"

She shook her head.

"You don't know Paul if you think that would work ! He will never question higher authority. Once it was the colonel ; now it's the ghost of a destroyed leadership. He would no more allow personal issues to intervene than the colonel would."

"I wonder what he would have done if the colonel had decided that you must be shot—if he would have interceded for you, made any effort to save you ?"

"I don't know. I simply don't know. He would probably have shot himself as the only way out of an impossible situation. It would be the final evasion."

"You realise, I suppose, that you are in an impossible position yourself regarding him? How can you endure living here, in this terrible rubble-heap of a place, in his cellar of a room, for years—an illegal existence dedicated to a futile struggle in a completely hopeless cause ? You can't go to a less bombed place like Minns, because he dare not show himself openly ; he has no freedom of movement—even the people whose papers are in order have very little, as you know. Besides, the core of the underground movement is evidently here——"

"I know—I know——"

He heard the hopelessness in her voice, and urged, "You should ask him what he means by his love for you. You can't say you love someone and then wilfully condemn them to a hellish existence."

"This fanaticism that burns in him is beyond reason. It's the fanaticism of the defeated. To use a phrase the English have—the dead who won't lie down !"

"He will destroy you as well as himself."

She was silent.

He persisted. "Is it unthinkable that you should give him up ?"

"How can I go off and leave him now ? He needs me more than ever now."

Ivor said, drily, "He has never needed you less ! You needed each other during the war ; your relationship served some useful function then—it was a relief from loneliness, you found refuge in each other. It ended, so far as any purpose was concerned, that wintry morning two years ago when the troops marched out. A novelist writing it all as a story would have ended it there—the artistic ending, the logical ending. There was a thing to say, and it is said now ; There was a thing to do, and it is done now ; the High Song is over . . . ' "

"Unfortunately life hasn't any of those nice neat artistic endings. Life doesn't end at the peak of drama, it is full of anti-climax ! The long slow wea iness petering-out . . . " Her tone was as dry as his.

It was deadlock, and he knew it ; they both knew it. It was a terrible thing, Ivor thought, when he left her, and it could be a tragic thing, to be the prisoner of one's emotions. He was resolved to make one more effort to get Paul to see the hopelessness of the situation ; clearly he must either give Anna up, or give up his present activities and way of life.

He never had that talk with Paul, because something happened. The authorities made a new drive to eliminate the underground movement. Soldiers raided every basement and cellar and hideout in the place—including Paul's place. They confiscated the duplicating machine and a stack of leaflets ready for distribution. There was nothing in the place to identify the owner of the room. Soldiers waited in the bombed building opposite, watching for his return.

They waited in vain for Paul Dettin. He was on his way to see a comrade under cover of the dusk that evening when he saw soldiers with fixed bayonets splintering the door. He slipped in amongst the debris of a battered pill-box and watched through the slit. He saw the soldiers go in and he saw them come out dragging sacks of what he knew would be leaflets and stencils. He saw them go on farther down the road and dive down into a basement, in which lived another active comrade. Paul did not go home that night. He went to the back of the hotel in which the relief organisation was housed and clambered up into one of the lorries.

He stayed there a long time, till the whole house was silent, the last candle extinguished, then slipped out. The front door, as he had feared, was bolted and barred. He went up the fire-escape at the back, a spiral of twisted iron, only to find the door at the top impossible to force. The idea occurred to him of throwing stones against Anna's window, then he remembered that there were no window-panes, and stones against gauze would make no impression.

He went back to the lorry and tried to think. He had no place to go. He must somehow get back to Minns. Carlos's father would

shelter him for a bit, and between them they would think what to do. But to get back to Minns he needed money, and all he had was hidden in his room; even if he dared go back—which would be madness, he was convinced—the soldiers had probably found it. He needed an identity card, too, if he was going to make a train-journey; he would have to show it in order to procure a ticket; and even if he jumped the train the military police frequently boarded the trains for inspection. Also he needed clothes. He must dress in accordance with whatever identity card he secured; at present he looked like what he was—one of the people of the country, and a rather disreputable one at that. Perhaps Anna could get him an identity card from one of her colleagues, one of the neutrals, or one of the conscientious objectors to the war—it would have to be from someone not hostile to a person like himself—and a suit of clothes. Right now he could do with an overcoat. He shivered in his thin student's jacket and huddled in the corner of the van in an attempt to get out of the draught that seemed to come in at all points.

He was too cold to sleep, and the night seemed interminable. He was also very hungry, but that was a sensation he had grown used to; it accompanied him always, like a shadow that was sometimes longer and sometimes shorter, but inescapable. He often thought that if ever the day should come again when he wasn't hungry he would miss his hunger; it would feel strange, unnatural, even.

The cold in the lorry became unendurable. He scrambled out and groped his way round to where the cars were parked. They were all locked and he failed to force any of the windows and dared not risk attracting attention by the noise of breaking them.

In desperation he went round to the front door of the hotel and banged loudly on it. He had to bang several times before he heard a shuffling within and a glimmer of light approached. There was a rattle of chains and a clatter of bolts and then he was looking into a red bearded face crowned with tousled grey hair. He said quickly, in his own language, "I want to see Dr. Bard, very urgently. It's a matter of life and death."

The red face stared at him suspiciously for a moment, above a wavering candle, then demanded his name.

He gave a fictitious one. "He'll know," he added.

The red face told him to stay there and he would try and wake the doctor. He went slowly up the stairs, like a fat old woman in his long dressing-gown, and left Paul in darkness. Paul immediately removed his shoes, and when the red face was toiling up the second flight of stairs to the second floor—and Dr. Bard, he knew, was at the top of the house—he darted up the dark stairs, carrying his shoes, to Anna's

room on the first floor. If her door was locked, he thought, his heart beating wildly, he was lost.

Her door was not locked. Against what or whom should she lock her door? Certainly not the shy young John Freeder. Paul turned the handle and felt a great flood of relief in him when it yielded. He closed the door, softly, and turned the key, then went over to the bed. He touched Anna lightly on the shoulder and she stirred; another pressure of his hand and she woke.

"It's me, Paul," he whispered. "Don't speak!"

There was a sound of steps descending the stairs; a gleam of light showed for a moment under the ill-fitting door—a door that had never been designed for that particular room, but was part of the emergency repairs.

"What is it?" she whispered, fearfully.

He pressed a hand over her mouth, and sat rigid, every nerve strained to listen. After what seemed a very long time there was the tread of steps reascending. A door closed on a landing. That would be red-face, he thought. Far away in the silent house there was the faint sound of another door closing. That would be the doctor's.

He took his hand from Anna's mouth.

"The military have raided my place and those of other comrades," he whispered. "I dare not go back. I must get out. I want you to help me. There's no one else."

"Oh, Paul, what will you do?"

"Go to Carlos's father in Minns. But I need money and an identity card and clothes."

He was shivering.

"Get in with me," she said.

He took off his clothes and got in with her. Clapsed close to her warm body the desolation of separation swept over him in a tidal wave. Were they never to be safely together?

They talked in whispers.

"John Freeder's the same build as you—and even a little like you."

"Who's he?"

"One of our drivers—a fellow countryman."

"Would he help?"

"I don't know. He's very strongly opposed to the things you believe in. He would have liked our country to have fought. But the point is he fancies himself in love with me, and it's probable that if I told him I wanted some clothes for a friend in trouble he'd let me have them without asking questions."

"The identity card is just as important."

"That's a lot to ask."

"He could give out that he'd lost it." He had a flash of inspiration. "He could go to the authorities about it. It could be suggested that the loss of his identity card might link up with the stranger who called the previous night demanding to see Dr. Bard and then disappeared before the doctor was brought from his bed."

"It might be an idea—John's room is on the ground floor. . . . It would be feasible. But I don't want to get Ivor into trouble."

"How could it? He was got out of his bed to see someone whose name he doesn't know. I relied on the fact that being himself he would come downstairs even though the name meant nothing to him. This person has in the meantime made off. What then did he come for? In the morning John Freeder finds his identity card has been stolen. His room is on the ground floor—very convenient for the thief! Two and two make four, don't they?"

"The only snag is that then the police get busy looking for someone bearing the identity card of a Mr. John Freeder."

"By the time the owner of the card has discovered the loss and notified the police the present holder of the card will be over the frontier!"

"I'll tackle John in the morning. Oh, Paul, another separation! If you're going to get out why don't we get out together, right out of this tormented country? We could go to Ricky—we'd be in a neutral country—safe. We could be married and start a new life! Oh, Paul, why not? The hunted life you're going to lead from now on—and the uncertainty and separation! Being unable to write to each other we'll be utterly cut off from each other again! And this new drive on the movement means the end—you know it does!"

He said, stubbornly "That remains to be seen! So long as there's a spark of life in it I intend to go on with the fight!"

She knew exactly how he would look, lying there in the dark beside her, his lips compressed into their stubborn line. She had seen that look on his face so often when she had argued against his belief, and, as he had once said, it was like a cold wind blowing over love. It was useless to argue with him; she could only cling to him, weeping softly. He held her close to him, staringly wide awake, his mind going round and round, but never for a single moment approaching the possibility of giving in; how to go on waging the fight, how to keep the spark alive, the single lamp of hope, as it seemed to him, in the darkness and disaster that engulfed his country.

3

In the morning he dressed and locked himself in whilst Anna went up to Ivor's room.

She told Ivor what had happened, what Paul had told her, and what was proposed.

"Do you know," he said, "I had the feeling that the visitor might be Paul, giving another name ! At first I couldn't think why he should take the trouble to knock the hotel up like that and then make off. But lying in bed thinking about it it came to me !"

"It wouldn't have done for him to have seen you—even under another name. It might have meant your being questioned by the police as to what your visitor looked like, and so on. What I want you to do now, Ivor, is to go and get my breakfast and bring it to my room—so that Paul can share it. He daren't risk joining the canteen queue. There's sure to be a check up of identification cards this morning. You can say I've got another sick headache and can't get up for breakfast. They'll have to take your word for it—as you're a doctor!"

"What do you propose after that ?"

"That Paul shall lock himself in my room whilst I get hold of John, and you, perhaps, find out how the land lies outside—how many they rounded up last night, and whether they're actually looking for Paul."

The information with which Ivor came back in due course was that there had been over two hundred arrests in the town, and that the military police were looking for three other men, whose names were known to them. Paul Dettin was one of them.

Paul said, savagely, "I suppose out of two hundred there would have to be one fool who would keep an address book or not have the guts to stand up to cross-examination !"

"Apparently they've got the leader of the underground movement and the entire executive committee."

Paul was silent.

"They are to be tried immediately," Ivor went on.

Paul cut in, "Why do they bother to try them? The trials are a farce ! Everyone knows they'll all be found guilty and sentenced to imprisonment for life, and the leaders shot !"

How was it any worse, Anna found herself wondering, than the tactics of the New Order, which merely imprisoned all opposition indefinitely without even the formality of a trial ? When it didn't have them exterminated out of hand. . . . Yet her heart ached for him. She was intensely aware of the bitterness and despair in him.

"I was going to add," Ivor continued, "that the military are stopping people everywhere to inspect their identity cards. You show your identity card at the beginning of every street and at the end of it. You can't enter a shop or cafe without showing it, and every queue is being tooth-combed. The hunt is most certainly on." He looked from

Anna to Paul. "This is very serious. You will have to get out of the country, and at once. The alternative is a life-sentence or execution—quite certainly."

"You do realise it, don't you, Paul?" Anna pleaded.

"It's the end of any possibility of any kind of organised work for your cause," Ivor insisted. "Your one chance is to slip the frontier into a neutral country. You could travel together to the frontier, after that you would have to do what was found possible. With money most things are possible. There is a river. There are boats. They can't guard every mile of it. People have swum the frontier, and they have climbed it—over the mountains. I don't doubt they've even flown it. You would have to decide on the spot how it could be most safely effected. We can let you have money. With an identity card you ought to get to the frontier without any trouble. But you must go tonight. Incidentally, I've got a gun you can have—there's only one bullet missing."

Paul sat on the bed with his head in his hands. Anna looked at him pityingly.

"We thought we were out of the dark forest, darling, but we weren't. But this time we'll really get out."

She went over to him and put an arm round his shoulders.

"I'll leave you," Ivor said. "Lock the door after me. I'll bring food at midday. Your sick-headache is lasting all day—till I see you both off tonight."

"I've got to see John Freeder."

"I'll see him for you."

"I'm afraid it wouldn't work. I've got to exploit all my sex-appeal, I'm afraid."

"I'll tell him, privately, you want to see him and to wait for you in his room after lunch."

"What will they say tomorrow when they find I've disappeared without explanation?"

"Commandant will say it's no more than she expected of a foreigner, and a neutral at that, and will report you to headquarters and probably to the local governor, but by that time you will be *in* another country. John will connect your disappearance with your request for clothes and identity card and feel, quite rightly, that he has been fooled and cheated, and he will be very hurt, poor boy, and probably a little angry. I shall say that I saw it coming—that you had been moody and temperamental for a long time, hence all those sick headaches—that the strain of staying on here so long was evidently too much for you—"

"Do you think I shall have any difficulty at the **frontier**? I mean they won't send me back, or anything awful?"

"You will get your papers checked and stamped and your passport endorsed. Your reason for travel is that your only surviving relative, your Uncle Hendrick Hansa, is seriously ill in a sanatorium."

"But it's his wife who is seriously ill in a sanatorium!"

"Evidently the passport authorities misunderstood you!"

He went out, and Anna locked the door after him.

When she went back to Paul he pulled her down beside him on the bed and leaned his head on her breast.

"Oh, Anna, Anna, I'm so tired—will there ever be any peace for the two of us—just to be peacefully alone together . . . I feel it's all I want now."

She held him close to her.

"We're near the end of the long journey now, my darling. We're at the far side of the forest at last. It's only a step now out into the open."

"You used to say it was I who had great faith. Now it's you who seem to have it all!"

"Nothing can defeat us now. We've been through too much."

"Such horrors! Such pain! And we were going to be happy in the Morning of the World!"

"We will, my darling, we will! The morning of our own private world! You'll see."

His arms tightened round her, despairingly

4

Ivor had said to John, meeting him in the yard tinkering with his car, "Anna's coming to see you after lunch. She's worried about a friend of hers and thinks you may be able to help her."

It excited and pleased that simple, serious young man to think that he might be able to help Anna Vesteralte—thereby making her indebted to him. Besides, it was a vote of confidence in their friendship that she chose him to help her, not that middle-aged doctor fellow with whom she seemed so 'thick' that at first he had feared she was his mistress. It had been a great relief to him to discover that she was a widow, and was not the mistress of Dr. Bard, and he had stayed on in Ulrich, in spite of an attack of dysentery, in the hope that their friendship might develop into something nearer the heart's desire.

Anna liked John Freeder; a little he reminded her of Paul, the same rather stocky build and a certain intensity about him, and the feeling of an eager friendliness and warmth. Only John was an essentially happy person, she thought, whereas Paul had an underlying melancholy.

She liked John, but he struck no spark in her. What she had responded to in Paul was his deep need of her ; John, she thought, would never deeply need anyone. He was too extroverted, too self-sufficient. He would have gusts of sexual craving, but it was all a surface thing, there was no deep emotional hunger in it. He was a 'nice boy'. She felt she understood the English phrase very well. He had given up a good engineering job in order to do relief work ; he sought some compensation for his country's neutrality which had denied him an active part in the great struggle ; it was in some sense, too, Anna knew, a form of atonement for that neutrality, of which he was deeply ashamed. During the occupation he had continued with his own job—there had been no question of conscription for the north, and in this again he had felt himself cheated. The war had meant for him nothing but frustration ; when it had finished he had felt the compulsion to get away. Now here he was in Ulrich, eager, energetic, and experiencing another form of frustration in his love for Anna Vesteralte. It seemed almost too good to be true that after all the months of keeping him at a distance she was at last coming to him to ask a favour. . . .

He went to his room immediately after lunch, dusted the mantelpiece and the one chair and his portable gramophone and the window-ledge ; was careful to see that a Mozart record was on top of the pile on the chest-of-drawers, and that his quite hideous pyjamas were safely tucked out of sight under the pillow. When he had combed his hair, and lit a cigarette to give the impression of being negligently at ease when Anna arrived, he felt there was nothing more he could do. He decided that she should find him lying on his bed smoking and reading. He wondered what he should read—Ludwig's *Life of Beethoven* would make a good impression, since he understood that Mrs. Vesteralte was musical, but it was too cumbersome to handle lying on one's back. He decided on a slim volume of Selections from the poems of Baudelaire, in French ; he didn't read French very well, but she was not to know that. . . .

So Mr. John Freeder was discovered lying on his bed reading the poems of Baudelaire.

"Come in," he called, when Anna knocked, and as she came into the room stubbed out the end of his cigarette in the saucer on the chair beside the bed, then laid the book aside, sprang up, removed the ash-tray from the chair, pulled the chair forward.

"Do sit down," he urged. "Is your head better ? Dr. Bard told us you'd been laid low by another of your attacks. I'm so sorry."

She sat down.

"Cigarette?"

"Thanks, but I don't smoke."

"Of course you don't—how foolish of me. I do hope the smoke in here doesn't worry you—your head, I mean——"

"My head is much better, thank you, but I am very worried. A friend of mine is in trouble. I thought you might be able to help." She hesitated, then took the plunge. "I wanted to ask you if you could let me have some clothes—he is the same build as yourself. It might be possible to return them later on."

He was instantly suspicious. "Someone on the run?"

She was aware of his suspicion. "Not exactly that, but he is in danger of his life if he doesn't get out of the country."

"He has only to go to the military governor and demand protection."

"He can't do that—for personal reasons. Oh, John, you mustn't ask me questions—please! But you must help me. There's no one else, you see——"

"Dr. Bard——"

"Ivor is a darling, but he wouldn't understand."

The implication that he, John Freeder, had more understanding than Dr. Ivor Bard was distinctly flattering. And the way she had spoken his name—she had never called him John before, and it sounded lovely the way she said it—so intimate.

She saw the look on his face and was ashamed. Having to do this to someone like John Freeder was awful—like tricking a child.

"You must believe that I can't explain to you yet," she persisted, and her voice was softer than the cooing of wood-pigeons in spring-time woods. "My friend has been foolish—indiscreet—but actuated by the highest ideals. I'd like to leave it at that for the present and ask you to trust me——"

She laid a hand on his arm, pleadingly, and his blood melted.

He said, confusedly, "I do trust you—of course—anything I can do to help—clothes, you said—I haven't much——"

"Any old things would do——"

He began rummaging in a suitcase in a corner on the floor. He produced an old pair of flannels and a sports'-coat.

"These do?"

"Splendid. You're a darling, John!"

"Glad to help. Anything else?"

"I'm afraid there is, and it's something rather big——"

"You mean your friend will want some cash? I could let you have a little——"

"It's not that. My friend needs papers if he is to get away—an identity card."

"That's a tall order! I mean—really, you know——"

Still in the soft wood-pigeon tone she answered him. "I do know, but it's a matter of life and death——"

He was distressed. "But how can I—possibly?"

"You could always lose it. People do lose their identity cards. Or it could have been stolen. Only last night someone came here asking for Dr. Bard, knocking him up in the middle of the night, and when he came downstairs—old Mr. Franklyn answered the door—the man was gone! Heaven knows what he actually came for. Theft, in all probability. He could easily have slipped in your room and stolen your identity card whilst Mr. Franklyn was upstairs waking Dr. Bard. You've only got to report your loss to the police tomorrow, mentioning your suspicions, for the whole thing to link up. Dr. Bard and Mr. Franklyn would of course confirm that a stranger called in that mysterious fashion in the middle of the night, and no suspicion would come near to you."

He looked at her admiringly. "It's just like a detective story, the way you've got it all worked out!"

"But this is real, and desperately serious, John."

It was lovely the way she said his name. After this they must surely be really friends, much more intimately friends. Nothing brought people closer than a shared secret—especially a rather guilty secret like this!

He took his wallet out from the inner pocket of his coat, extracted his identity card, and laid it in her lap.

"There you are—and good luck to your friend."

"I can never thank you enough!" She sprang up with a good imitation of spontaneity, took his face between her hands, and kissed his forehead. "One day I will do something for you," she added.

He flushed. He hardly knew what he was saying. "There's something you can do for me now! You can kiss me—properly, not in that maiden-aunt fashion!"

Almost before she had realised what had happened she was crushed in his arms, and he was kissing her, fiercely, on the mouth. Her instinct was to writhe away from him, from the unfamiliar lips, the little scrubby toothbrush moustache; astonishing, it came to her, how one's man kiss could be so different from another's, it was strange and rather terrifying . . . but she owed him something, she told herself, desperately, and when it had gone on almost unbearably long forced herself out of his arms.

"I must go now," she said. She felt breathless, shaken, and rather sick.

"You know I love you, Anna," he pleaded. "You do like me too, don't you, just a little?"

It was an effort to say it, for she had never liked him less than in that moment, in spite of his generosity and trustingness, but she forced herself to say, gently, "You know I like you, John dear—I like you a lot." Oh, why couldn't people be generous without expecting payment in some form or another? Though of course it would never occur to John that he was exacting payment. He would be shocked at any such suggestion.

"Can't you stay with me a little while now?" His hand moved tentatively towards her breast. She moved away.

"Not now, dear. I've got all this business of my friend's to see to and though my head is much better I really don't feel very well. Another time, perhaps."

"Tomorrow?"

Tomorrow. Where would she be tomorrow?

"Tomorrow," she promised. "At the same time."

She had to submit to another scrubby kiss before she finally escaped. She knocked softly on the door of her room and Paul opened to her. She slipped inside and relocked the door.

He asked quickly, "Did you get an identity card as well?"

"Yes."

"Any difficulty?"

She smiled at him, confidently. "It was all quite easy."

He took the clothes from her without comment and began to change.

5

The night journey to the frontier was uneventful. There was an inspection of identity cards, and no query raised over the one Paul showed. After all, why should there be? Anna could ask herself that afterwards, but when the military police came to the door of the compartment her heart raced madly and she could feel the blood draining out of her face.

Normally the journey would have taken only a few hours, but the train bumped and crawled and jolted over the damaged and hastily repaired track and frequently stopped altogether. Ivor had insisted on their taking first-class tickets, but it made no difference; trains were few, and people crowded in where they could. There was no heating, and the night was cold. Anna and Paul huddled together, and the same thought was in them both—if only when they left the train it was the end of the journey, the end of all the heart-ache and fear and anxiety; if only a warm bed awaited them, and the knowledge that

they would wake together, in each other's arms, to begin a new day—a new life! If only !

They sat with their hands clasped, aching awake in a compartment full of people who dozed or soundly slept. They both felt as though they would never sleep again, until they did so together, in safety, in blessed peace and security.

It was early morning but black dark when they reached the frontier. They shivered in the cold air.

Paul said, "Why don't we spend a few hours at one of the station hotels ? I can't do anything till it's light. Your friend isn't likely to get up before it's light to report the loss of his identity card, and there's hardly likely to be an inspection in that hotel in the small hours of the morning. We've got a few hours in hand. We might as well spend them together."

She leaned her head against his shoulder. "If you really think it's safe——"

There was a frowsy hotel which stayed open for the benefit of travellers who did not wish to continue their journey till daylight. They arrived at it in company with a few other people. Once again they showed their identity cards. They had to fill in forms and sign a register. Paul signed John Freeder almost completely illegibly.

An old night-porter, shuffling in carpet slippers, showed them to a hideous room, icy-cold, with an unattractive bed. The sheets had a previously slept-in look, Anna thought. But what did it matter? These were their last few hours together before the last and most dangerous part of their long and difficult journey through the dark forest together. They were alone together in a room, with a locked door, and a bed on which they could lie together. They lay down in their clothes, under an eiderdown that seemed less unwholesome than the sheets.

"What will you do when I've gone?" Anna whispered.

"I shall leave when you do as though we're crossing the frontier together. I shall tear up my identity card and drop it down the nearest drain, and then walk along the river. I may find a boat ; I may find a bribable man with a boat ; I may swim it. Wherever there are woods I shall keep to them."

"They may have soldiers in look-out towers posted along on both sides."

"Quite likely. I am a good under-water swimmer, and I shouldn't attempt to cross in broad daylight, whether I swim it or get a boat."

"It's terribly worrying and frightening. Couldn't I come with you?"

"You can't swim. It would lessen my chances of getting across.

But you mustn't worry, my darling. We've survived so much. Why should we be defeated now?"

He kissed her and they clung close.

It seemed very soon that the birds began their morning tumult and cocks began crowing. There was a stir of people moving in the hotel. Grey light peered in through the slats of the shutters. Ah, if one might turn over and sleep again, till the sun was up, and then go out into the ordinary, safe, uneventful day. Had they any idea how blessed they were, all the millions who that morning were free to do that?

"It's time to go," Paul said, and Anna knew that it was the same for him as for her, the whole being shouting, No, no, not yet—just a little longer, O God, just a little longer.

They got up, tidied themselves, kissed in a kind of agony, and went down the stairs. A fat bald man in his shirt-sleeves was in the reception desk. They paid their bill and went out into the grey morning. There was a square with a few budding plane trees. The dark figures of people carrying suitcases were moving in the direction of the bridge which would take them into another country. Ah, if only there were no barriers, no officials; if only a pair of lovers might walk across that bridge hand in hand into freedom, into a new life, into peace!

"I'll leave you here," Paul muttered. "I won't come any further."

They were a few yards from a wooden hut into which the travellers were filing with their passports; the exit from the hut was on the bridge. There were soldiers with rifles at either end of the bridge.

Paul pressed her hand.

"With luck we'll be together in a few hours—tonight! Then no more partings for the rest of our lives!"

Her eyes were blinded with tears.

"You won't lose Ricky's address?" She knew he had memorised it but she had to ask him.

"Of course not. Warn him that I may turn up late at night and looking like a tramp who has been a long time on the road!"

She pressed his hand but could not speak.

"You'd better go, darling. I'll walk a way down the river and watch you cross the bridge, but don't look back or wave. You'll know I'm watching you."

She looked at him, the tears streaming down her face.

"Good-bye, my darling. God go with you."

Then she was walking away towards the hut, and he was walking in the opposite direction, a dark, stocky young man in shabby clothes, walking briskly as though he knew exactly where he was going.

6

At ten o'clock that morning driving his car laden with medical supplies John Freeder was held up by two military police who demanded to see his identity card.

He played his part very well. He pulled his wallet out of his pocket with a show of complete confidence, went through the various papers and snapshots and letters it contained rapidly, assumed a puzzled expression and went through them again.

"I can't understand," he said. "I can't have lost it for I never put it anywhere but in my wallet."

"Is anything else missing from your wallet?"

He went through it again.

"Nothing, that I can see."

"No money?"

"No." He looked at them in consternation. • "But this is serious. It must have been stolen! I sleep on the ground floor at the hotel—and something odd happened the night before last. Someone came banging on the door asking to see Dr. Bard. Mr. Franklyn opened to him and went to fetch the doctor. When he got back with the doctor the man had gone. I don't say there's necessarily any connection, but on the other hand that identity card could hardly have fallen out of my wallet, could it?"

"Where do you put your wallet at nights?"

"It stays in my pocket, in my coat hanging on the chair beside my bed."

"We'll drive back to the hotel with you."

They got in the back of the car and he drove them back to the hotel.

Both Dr. Bard and Mr. Franklyn were out when they arrived, as he expected they would be. Whilst they waited for their return the two police examined the premises, noted the position of the front door and John's room, and the distance away of Dr. Bard's room at the top of the house.

They came back later and interviewed both Dr. Bard and Mr. Franklyn, who amplified the story of the stranger's visit in the middle of the night.

The stranger's visit, the missing identity card, the three men on the run. . . . It added up all right. The police got busy on the telephone in all directions—wanted, a man carrying an identity card bearing the name John Freeder. Police cars patrolling the roads picked up the radio-relayed warning. Identity card check-ups to be taken at all railway stations; watch the frontiers.

By that time the identity card bearing the name John Freeder was

floating in any pieces in the sewers under the frontier town, and the man who had carried it was cutting across fields and plunging through woods along by the river. He had hunks of bread and slices of tinned meat in one pocket, and the loaded service revolver Ivor had given him at parting in the other. The sun had come up as the day wore on and the air was warm and soft, and heavy with the scent of hawthorn blossom which was like banks of snow everywhere. A line from the Flemish legend of Tyl Ulenspiegel came into his head, '*In the sweet month of May, when the may-hawthorn was coming into flower.*' And then there was that little sentimental song Anna sang sometimes—in other worlds long ago—'*Im Mai Monat*'— There was another sentence in Ulenspiegel he liked, too, '*Who said that strawberries are sweet in the morning? Thy kisses are far, far sweeter.*' Ah, they had been, dear God, they had been, but not kisses taken in the grey light of morning at a frontier town, a dawn full of the utmost hazard, not kisses salt with the tears of parting.

Towards midday the sun grew hot. He sat a little while under the trees and ate some of his bread and meat. It was a good idea of the Almighty's, he thought, to make anything as delicate in its spring greenery as a birch, and set it against the sombreness of pines and firs. It was the forest and the lake all over again, the one so strong and dark and masculine, the other so delicate and shining and feminine. And that was another good idea of God's, *Male and female created He them*. He fell drowsy in the midday warmth, and from the sleepless night. It would be pleasant to sit and sleep; but he must be going.

He came out of the wood and on to a stretch of moorland; there were clumps of gorse, golden with blossom, and occasional groups of firs. He crouched down beside a gorse-bush and peered across at the opposite side of the river. It looked unpromising; a great open stretch; it would almost certainly be patrolled . . . and there, by God, was a patrol coming along on this side. He dropped lower down behind the bush, his heart thumping. His hand fingered the revolver. Supposing he shot the swine out of hand? But better keep his bullets in case of need. Besides, the shot might attract attention.

He waited till the patrol had passed out of sight—there were two of them, sauntering, flicking at nettles and docks with their canes as they passed; they might have been out merely for a pleasant country walk—then went on not walking upright any longer but dodging between gorse-bushes, warily

This was the very devil. The moorland seemed to go on indefinitely; no trace of any sheltering trees. He began to wonder if he would have done better to have gone up the river instead of down. But the map had suggested this as the more likely route; to have gone in

the other direction would have entailed unavoidable town-walking; there was a built-up area for miles along the river that way.

Presently he made his way over to the edge of the low cliff above the river, still keeping to the cover of the bushes. Easy enough to scramble down; there was a stretch of beach below; the same on the other side, the bit of beach, and the low cliffs—easy enough to scramble up, but not much cover on the other side, the same as here, gorse-bushes and occasional firs. He went on. He had to make a detour to avoid a village, and then he had difficulty with a main road. There were bomb-craters and the wreckage of burnt-out tanks, and exposed areas of scorched earth. There were people on foot and on bicycles. He broke into a sweat, dreading at any minute to see a uniformed figure bearing down on him and demanding his identity card. He had difficulty in working his way back to the river, because of villas built along its banks, their gardens going down to the water. Gardens, with boat-houses....

He got safely past the villas to where the moorland, not yet given over to builders' plots, began again. He crouched amongst the gorse and studied the ornamental little houses; they were mostly flimsy affairs, typical riverside bungalows, summer places, all verandahs and ornamental woodwork. It was doubtful if anyone was living there now; several of them, he noticed, had been bombed.

He stayed amongst the gorse till it was dusk. He ate the rest of his bread and meat, and even allowed himself to dose a little. A cold mist creeping up from the river roused him. He sat up, shivering. Then got up and moved cautiously over to the garden of the nearest house and peered over the broken fence. There was *no* sign of life; no lights anywhere; the garden had evidently had no attention for a long time; it was a mass of long grass and weeds.

He slipped under the fence and into the garden, following a path along by the fence; a row of flowering trees, lilacs, laburnums, red hawthorn, screened the garden off from the moor. At the end of the garden was a rotting boat-house, and rocking on the shadowy water a small dinghy. He looked anxiously around for the oars. Yes, they were there. There was water at the bottom of the boat; he pushed her out, gently; she seemed all right; if she sank under him halfway across he could always swim. He got into the shade of a willow tree that overhung the river, it was like long green hair, he thought. He peered through the hair at the other side of the river. The trees seemed to come down to the water.

He went back to the boat-house and waited for the dusk to deepen. It was like waiting for zero hour before a landing. He felt as though his whole nervous system were a spring tightly wound up. An owl called, eerily, and a bat flew out of the boat-house, almost across his

face. The night-creatures going on duty. He accepted them as signals and got into the boat. He took down the oars resting on two beams stretched across under the roof of the boat-house, untied the boat, and pushed out into the river. She was taking in water all right, but she ought to make it ; he pulled a rusty can out from under, the seat ; whoever had owned her had evidently been in the habit of baling her out. . . .

It was just light enough to see the river banks, low sandy cliffs of shrubs and trees. The water was all shadows. It felt terribly exposed out there in the open. He pulled hard towards the trees on the opposite shore.

Then suddenly he became aware of voices, shouting ; the sound came clear across the water. Instinctively he pulled harder on his oars. At first it was just a shouting, and a confusion in his head, and an instinctive fear. Then he began to realise that the voices had thinned out to one voice, and it shouted to him to "turn round and come back, or I fire !" He attempted to quicken his pace and a bullet whizzed past him. He heard whistles blowing, and, confused, not knowing what to expect, pulled out his revolver. He laid it across his knees and pulled on both oars again. There was the throb of an engine, and then a motor-boat was bearing down on him. He snatched up his revolver and fired at the figure at the wheel. Instantly another figure sprang up in the bows, and now the boat was near enough for Paul to see the uniform . the uniform, and the eyes narrowed along the barrel of the gun.

He lifted his revolver again, but before he could fire there was a shot that seemed to fill the world, shattering the sky and water, deafening and blinding him ; there was a cry that he did not know came from himself ; he no longer had a self. He collapsed in the bottom of the boat choking with his own blood.

The dinghy slipped sideways down the river. It went very fast, its oars dragging loose in the rowlocks and finally breaking free and losing themselves in the water. The men in the patrol-boat let the dinghy go ; less than half a mile down the river there was the weir.

Just before it reached the weir the dinghy capsized, but life had already gone from the body it flung into the water, and in another moment everything had disappeared from view.

Begun at Oak Cottage on the First Day of February, Nineteen Hundred and Forty - five, and finished at the Tudor House, Tewkesbury, on the Last Day of April of that Year.

