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THE CHILDREN

By the same Author

THE FAMILY

THE CHILDREN

by

NINA FEDOROVA



COLLINS

48 PALL MALL LONDON

1942

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1942

I must be cruel, only to be kind.

Hamlet—

All the characters here and the events are
fictional. Not one of them has ever lived,
and nothing of the kind could ever happen,
especially in our times.

PART I

1

" HAVE YOU any children? "

" Six."

" Six?! "

The lady behind the counter looked up. Hostility was in her eyes. She said nothing to the customer standing on the other side of the counter, but addressed another lady, at her right hand, in a voice intentionally insulting and loud :

" Mrs. Brown, did you hear that ? *Six* children. Egoism or imbecility ? How can we help people if they are like *that*, with *six* children ? "

She knew she should not speak like that to the alien woman's face. But the habit of being secure and always right and never impeachable misleads people very often. So Miss Grouse said once more with disdain :

" Six ! We should give the refugees some good reading on birth control . . . "

Miss Grouse was a migratory bird. There was no climate, no geographical zone, no pageant of life—civilised or savage—which could be spared her fleeting presence. In every magazine everywhere, if one examines the picture of a public celebration—be it the inauguration of somebody into something or the stately funeral procession of one whom nobody knew while he was alive—one can always be sure to see, somewhere in the corner, Miss Grouse smiling out of her artificial jaws. In a corner only, for Miss Grouse never managed to become the soul of any event at which she assisted. It would, certainly, have gone just as well without her immediate presence.

The truth about Miss Grouse was that whatever she did or did not do—it turned into a labour in vain. How she could achieve such a first-class failure was really inexplicable. Immensely rich, she could easily have turned out well. The best schools, the biggest churches, the most efficient educators, the most eloquent preachers, the whole industry of the world, were ready to serve her, to make her beautiful, clever, fashionable.

The most expensive doctors, resorts, and medicines, the best flatterers in the best societies, the immense possibilities of charity work on the five continents, the best music, picture galleries, universities, libraries—all spent their efforts upon Miss Grouse in vain. She never had been either pretty, or clever, or sweet, or ornamental—not even healthy.

Suddenly she met the customer's eyes. Hatred looked out of them, the more poignant and striking since it was looking out of the gentle and weary feminine face.

"How do my children concern *you*?" she asked and her breath grew short and audible.

"*How*?" Miss Grouse's voice sounded hideous with hatred too. "We are charity workers. This is a charity rummage sale. . . . You *need* help, we *give* it. Here you buy *our* things almost for nothing and the money again goes to the poor of Tientsin. *For statistics' sake*, may we have your gracious permission to know how *many* you are . . . ?"

"You are helping me? With *that*?"

And as if seeing the room for the first time the woman pointed with an open rounded gesture of her arms.

One can rarely view a more repulsive sight than that of a rummage sale, provided things are really old and dirty. Those were.

Embracing the room in a single glance the woman finally looked at the thing she held in her hand. It was a pair of socks. Woollen they were but well worn. Fifteen cents. She looked intently, as if those old, colourless, pathetic socks coming from the feet of a mysterious benefactor had hidden somewhere in them the key to the problems of poverty and rummage sales. Then slowly she put them back and looking straight into Miss Grouse's face she said sadly and simply:

"In a few years you charity ladies will stand on this side of the counter too . . ."

Here Mrs. Brown, who acted as the president of the sale, cried:

"Get out!" and she lifted her hand. Although the hand was empty, the woman at the other side of the counter winced, and the thin, pale girl beside her whispered:

"Let us go . . . Mamma, let us go . . ."

The room seemed suddenly flooded with malevolence and hatred. Everybody looked at everybody else with intense

hostility. Not that those people, almost all of them women, were base or cruel, no, they were mostly kind people. Only they had lived so much and so long on fear, anxiety, suspicion, that even the best of them grew liable to fits of malfeasance, which came as a wanton blindness toward oneself.

"Get out!" Mrs. Brown said again, almost low now, for she felt choking.

A tense silence pervaded the room. Customers—Russians and Chinese—and the charity workers behind their counters, all were silent. Hardly half of them could guess what it all had been about, still everybody's heart beat quicker, astir with the awakened hatred of class to class, of race to race, of one human being to another.

The girl took her mother under the arm and they crossed the room under the flushing eyes of the beholders.

Suddenly a very young girl, tall and slender, quickly walked toward Mrs. Brown's counter, and as if her words had been released by a spring, she cried in a voice full of emotion:

"You!" But instantly afraid and timid she finished gently: "You are not altogether right"... and she ran out of the room.

In the storm of voices the best heard was that of the stout Mme. Klimova. Knowing but little English she did not catch what the girl had said. Still—"Lida," she cried in a shocked twang, willing to show that she, Mme. Klimova, was on the donors' side.

Several customers, poor Russian women, left the room. One of them, her foot on the threshold, said grievously, addressing nobody in particular:

"No place is left upon the earth where people do not hate each other . . . the Lord's wrath on all of us . . ."

Miss Grouse spoke with indignation. She was a "sociologist" by education. Although she always had plenty of space for herself, the problem of overpopulation had become her special concern. Extra children affected her as an affront. She sanctioned only three per family. Happily there were no spots on her own conscience. *She* had not made the situation any worse, being neither married nor menaced by prospects. Hers was the pure flame of philanthropy toward others.

Mrs. Brown, born a monolith of common sense, regained her emotional balance as quickly as she had lost it:

" Be ready for any impudence once you attend a rummage sale."

And her words sealed the incident. Mrs. Brown, the President. Mrs. Brown was the president everywhere, in every society she stepped into. And this was unanimous, her election to the presidency. Nobody ever said a word against Mrs. Brown's being the president. Never, even to one's bosom friend, not even behind her back.

Mrs. Brown gave so much : her actual presence, her personal guidance, care, and attention. She even gave money. Sometimes. In cases of direst necessity.

Making other people happy was Mrs. Brown's vocation. Why not, if one knows how ? And she was a connoisseur of ways and means. For thirty years she practised her cleverness on the vast and sterile fields of China.

A banker's wife, she never believed that money was very important. She, personally, valued so much more those abstract things. The wonder was that after thirty years of living exclusively for the suffering part of humanity neither the health nor the wealth of Mrs. Brown had been impaired. No. The more she gave the more she had. The more humanity suffered, the more excited Mrs. Brown became, with all those new opportunities of presidency before her. Mrs. Brown had always risen superior to the tasks life thrust on her. And there she stood now—big, stout, wealthy, healthy, busy, all aglow in her cerise dress with galloons and tassels and big buttons. She looked like a general leading an everlastingly victorious battle.

Mr. Rind, the honoured guest, an American, a traveller, with his curiosity always ablaze, had not caught the key of the scene. " What is that ? What happened ? " he repeated, looking round.

But Mrs. Brown's glance iced the tongues and he found no volunteers to explain. The temperature fell back to normal, and the rummage sale looked again a rummage sale, no more a force of human passions.

Even Mme. Klimova—after having shown that her sympathy had been as usual with the powerful, for they always knew the means to prove they were right—even Mme. Klimova forgot the incident. Hers was not an easy purchase to manage. She wanted a wedding dress. Yes, for herself. An attire fit to wear when she was married in church, to a general. A dress in which

to start a new existence as " Madame la Generate "... after a long dawdling as somebody's widow.

The rummage sale could not offer many wedding dresses of Mme. Klimova's size. The possibilities soon narrowed down to only a few loose draperies, generously feminine in design. When paying a dollar and fifty cents she tried to show her courtesy once more and said to the lady behind the counter :

" Some Russians are even worse than Chinese. When Chinese are poor they behave."

But the lady did not deign to understand her English. She gave change and said curtly : "Thank you."

2

THE GIRL whom Mme. Klimova had called Lida looked quickly along one side of the street, then the other, her light-blond hair tasselled by the fresh October wind, interfering with her vision. At last she saw the two figures crossing the street farther down and ran after them.

With a movement timid and gallant at the same time, she introduced herself :

" Please, meet me," and she shook hands. " I saw at once you are newcomers here. At Tientsin we know all our Russians, if only by sight. We live near, here, on the English Concession. . . . Will you come to our house ? Mother would be so glad."

Although Lida and her mother were only two and alone in China, they never gave up the habit of speaking in a style of grandeur about themselves as a " family." Lida always said " we," and their room in the attic was a " house " in her language.

The woman, Mme. Platova, and her daughter, Galina, considered the invitation in silence.

" But, perhaps, your mother is busy ? " the woman said at last.

" Oh, no ! " Lida answered radiantly. " Not at all. It is Mother's best day, all free."

The invitation seemed tempting. The Platovs had come to Tientsin early in the morning and planned to leave at midnight. They could not indulge in expense and had decided to

spend the day just moving around the town. Now it was a temptation to have a rest.

"But are you sure your mother has nothing to do? ... Would not we be intruders?"

"Why, no," Lida assured them. "Mother is on night duty. She is a nurse in the hospital. She has all the day for herself now . . . And she will be so glad. Please come ..."

Meanwhile she was rapidly making decisions:

"I will not buy that sweater . . . in any case, I cannot go back to that sale," and being amply aware of a dollar squeezed in her left fist she went on mentally plotting: "Thirty cents for five buns . . . some butter, milk . . ."

"Thank you," Mme. Platova said. "I think, perhaps, we might . . . just for a moment."

The attic room was high up, and both Lida and Galma had to help the tired woman up the narrow stairs. The door was flung open gaily and they were met with a cordial welcome.

Poverty frankly and brazenly grinned at them out of each corner. The room was pervaded with its breath. It mantled the walls, shaded the window panes, polished the furniture. It slept with dust, and danced with sun rays. In time it would gnaw deeply into brains and hearts. It is poverty that makes steps cautious, words prudent. It stunts ambitions and grinds down hopes. It makes a fizzle out of the life of so many families.

Still it can be lived with. It just becomes a part of one's existence like a chronic disease.

In that room the visitors felt instantly at home. They were the same class.

They were all—visitors and hostesses—wearing clothes from which all radiance of colour and design had faded away long ago, as had also many of their hopes, illusions, many images of love and devotion. All that was left was the sheer substance of tissue, woof and warp, warp and woof—and also the mere substance of life—days and nights, nights and days, until that sheer substance would be worn through, into a nothingness, a hole, a gap made of vacuity, with no more threads to support it, no more woof and warp, and then no more days and nights.'

Colours turn to grey with a pauper, but a friendly welcome, even to poverty, pours forth a golden light. Both visitors and hostesses were glad to meet each other.

While the girls went downstairs to the kitchen, busy with preparations for tea, the mothers began an earnest conversation. Mme. Platova, again excited, told about the incident at the rummage sale.

Now she felt differently about it, and her face and voice showed repentance,

"Least of all could I stand that reproach for having had my children. Those scientifically-minded people presume that having no country, no money, no fixed social standing, one must not bear children. But, my dear, exactly because we have nothing else we need our children so much—to concentrate on them what feelings we would otherwise spend on something else. I have noticed that it is always childless people who are so very eager about birth control. . . . Still there is a religious point of view in life as well. If one's children can be born healthy, is it not a duty to have them . . . ? Oh, dear, it is *they*, our children, those like my *six*, who will be taken to fight the next war . . . to fight and die . . . to protect sterile lives and barren efforts to make life fair and square. . . ."

And again her breath became short and difficult.

"You said war," her hostess asked softly. "Is it evident that there will be soon another war in Europe? I read almost nothing, and even those Munich days have no clear meaning to me."

While the question of the coming war was thus discussed, the girls brought in tea.

The decorum of four planned and regular meals a day had been dropped by the Family long ago. Dropped and forgotten. Tea and bread were their usual diet; anything else could break in occasionally, but not necessarily. The tea was hot and gave warmth, the bread was thick and gave one the feeling of having eaten—thus the rite of feeding oneself was performed, even if somewhat perfunctorily. A scientific attitude toward food—vitamins and calories—is not popular among the refugees in China.

But tea poured, buns nicely cut into quarters, and sugar, and milk, and butter—that was a tea to be offered with the loidly smile of a hostess.

All were in haste with their first cups*. Then followed a moment of relaxation and slower drinking.

The girls with their cups sat at the window, for there was

no place at the small table, and Lida was telling Galina in whispers the story of her great love.

It was always puzzling to Lida that put into plain words that story invariably turned into a poor thing, like this.

There was an American boy in Tientsin. That boy was the best boy in the world. His name was Jimmy. Lida and Jimmy met. They fell in love. Jimmy gave her a watch, that one, now on her wrist. But Jimmy had to go to the United States. Lida had to remain. They promised to love each other forever. They wrote letters.

That was all. Still, even in that shape, it seemed absorbing to another girl, and from time to time she gave out exclamations, as if being told things incredible and wondrous.

The mothers were busy with their conversation too.

"How many children have you?" Mme. Platova asked.

"Children?" Lida's mother repeated slowly, and she clasped her thin hands lightly, in a quick gesture of restraint. "Lida is my only child. We used to be a big family. Some left, some died. . . ."

"Are you a widow?"

Mother's fingers clasped tighter. "No," she said, "Lida's father lives in Russia."

"In Russia!" Mme. Platova's voice rose high with interest.

"Are you expecting him to come here? Or do you plan to go there?"

"No," Mother answered slowly. "Neither." She unclasped her hands and her tired fingers lay quietly on her knees. "Lida's father left us for good. He married a second time. He has children from his second marriage. Two boys. They all live happily."

Mme. Platova felt uneasy. She instantly turned to another topic.

"Perhaps I must tell you more about us. Why we are here, at Tientsin. My eldest son, Vladimir, lives in Shanghai. He has a job there—he plays the violin in a night club. Well, the job pays—monthly he sends us forty dollars—thus is our rent paid at Harbin, where we are living. Still I cannot keep quiet: a night club is not a proper place for a boy. Vladimir is twenty-one . . . the things he sees there . . . the things he hears. Some say night-club musicians turn always drunkards. They have to keep late hours—first it is a cup of coffee, then a glass of

beer—two, three years—and one's child has bad habits. . . . Another sorrow, my child Galina——" she moved her head toward the window where the girls whispered—" this child is unhappy ; she hurt her spine long ago, and has constant pains. Doctors sent us to Peking, to the Rockefeller Institution, for X-rays. . . . Ah, X-rays too cost money."

" Yes," Mother said shortly, " yes, everything does."

" We went to Peking, to the Rockefellers . . . They even grew interested in her case. Now I cannot leave her here or send her home alone—and to take her with me to Shanghai—means *two* tickets."

Mother put her hand on Mme. Platova's knee and said warmly :

" Leave Galina with us, and with God's help go to Shanghai. This room is all we have—still it offers space enough for the three."

Mme. Platova's face grew lighter and lighter, until it became radiant.

" Oh, thank you," she said and smiled the pathetic smile of those who accept a gift and find nothing to give in exchange. " I will be so quiet then . . . so quiet."

" Mamma," Galina cried, " Lida can sing ! *Really* sing ! Oh, Lidochka, sing for us . . ."

" I am afraid it would not sound well," Lida said. " I sing better in twilight, when I do not see things . . ."

But the visitors pressed her eagerly.

" Lida," Mother said, " sing us the romance Granny liked. . . ."

And Lida sang the old romance. She sang it in the old style of pure lyric, her voice high, quiet, melodious.

. . . *Remember, you gave your sacred promise*

To love the poet until he dies . . .

The room instantly yielded to the charm of music. With the first sounds of the song poverty readily and quickly disappeared. A different room built itself for each of the four women. Sudden peace of soul and mind washed away the remnants of cares and sorrows. When the room was pure and ready, Beauty solemnly stepped in and worked the rest of the magic. She made the girls face the future and the women—the past. Here Joy, in streams, burst forth in the four hearts and

hastily cured and healed and soothed and smoothed—until there remained no seams or scars on their memories. Laughing Imagination rushed forth and boldly drew gigantic pictures of things sweeter than they could ever be in life.

This was the only sure happiness in life—the happiness in the non-existent.

3

GALINA tapped at the door.

" Lida, it is three o'clock."

She had to repeat it twice, for Lida was far away from the real world. Only the second summons reached her mind. Still she read the page till the end :

" Charlotta stood up. She attempted to withdraw her hand. I held it still : ' We shall see each other again/ I exclaimed, ' we shall recognise each other under every possible change. I am going,' I continued, ' going willingly, but should I say for ever, perhaps, I may not keep my word. Adieu, Charlotte.' "

With an effort Lida tore herself away from the book. She closed it. She sighed. She looked at Galma with distant eyes.

" Lida, it is three o'clock. You asked me to call or else you would be late for your lesson."

" Thank you, Galina. I am going right now."

Galina gently shut the door and went on downstairs. But Lida could not bring herself back to real life. She had been reading Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*.

Her teacher, Mme. Manuilova, taught her not only music and singing but also languages, literature, history, manners, everything. They were in the " romanticism " period, *Sturm und Drang*, *The Blue Flower*.

The door opened gently. It was Galina again.

" Lida, it is three o'clock."

" *We shall recognise each other under every possible change*" Lida said," *Jimmy and L* *We shall recognise . . .*"

" Lida, dear," Galina insisted. " You will be late."

" Yes, Galina, I am going right now."

Lida went to the window and put her head out. She could

see only the high-ridged roofs, the tops of the trees, all bare now, and tall sooty chimneys. She lifted her eyes higher—sky ! The sky. Vagueness is the charm of the sky for the young eyes of a romantic . . .

" *We shall recognise each other under every possible change,*" she whispered, "Jimmy and I . . . I know we shall. Even now—with the Pacific Ocean between us, do I not recognise him everywhere, under any disguise, for all which gives joy to me is Jimmy—disguised, still he. This space, this depth of the sky—it is our love. And that ray of the sun playing there, on the edge of that roof, is Jimmy's smile, pale because it comes from afar. . . . Still I recognise . . ."

" Lida ! Are you coming ? " Galina's voice came from below the stairs.

" Coming ! " Lida cried in answer.

Lida did not have Jimmy's photo. Had she not him always before her eyes ? Was he not always present in her thoughts, whatever she did, wherever she went ? Could she forget him ? Could she ever forget him ? Even if she tried hard ? The time and space between them, winds and ocean, were not strong enough to sweep away their love.

" Lida ! "

" Coming ! "

One cannot drop things easily, things cherished unto one's heart . . . things which bring happiness. They could be torn off only with the heart itself. Sweet memories . . . one returns to them, one returns and returns . . .

" Lida ! "

" Coming ! "

She was really coming down now.

One returns, Lida was thinking. For one is thirsty for every drop of happiness in this life. . . . For the drop itself, then even for its shadow, then for its memory, then for the memory of its shadow . . .

On the steps of the entrance a dog was sitting. Dog. He had no other name. He remained Dog. He never answered that funny name of Don Juan Tenorio which Carlos Diaz, his third master, had tried to give him once. He suspected there was something behind that otherwise sonorous name. It seemed not dignified, not quite a good name for a self-respecting animal. Long names are usually suspect. Since the boy Carlos had left for a boarding school, Dog was left to himself.

On the steps he was now sitting. Quietly. Concentrating on the vision of his own inner life, the obscure life of an animal. Dog might have been taken for the "Thinker" by Rodin, for there was more likeness than difference between the two.

"Dog," Lida called to him. She sat beside the dog on the steps, embraced his reluctant neck with her arms, and said again in a whisper :

"Doggy, we are neglected . . . we are forgotten . . . we have no letter this week. . . ."

Dog remained stony calm. Not touched. Not at all. He knew the fickleness of human affection. They talk to dogs when they have no letters. . . . What is a dog to happy people ? A nuisance, usually. Making an effort to escape Lida, and her whisper, and her embrace, he moved a little, politely but decidedly, and then again, as if frozen, merged into his favourite shape—a dog on the steps, brooding over his own problems.

"Doggy, we are not loved so much any more. . . . What do you think ?"

Dog refused to think. Non-interference. Non-response. Quiet is the ideal of a philosopher's life. Affections are scorned. An intelligent dog once disappointed would not believe in human loyalty. . . . This musing, this happiness of spirit, this phlegm of body—is not that the only one actually happy animal state ? To sit there gazing at nothing in particular . . . oh, let a dog alone. . . .

But:

"Doggy," Lida said again, "I am going now. Keep sitting here, waiting for mail. Anything may happen. Suppose we have a *special delivery* ?"

Dog raised his head and gave her one of his rare direct glances—eye to eye—a glance of omniscient and shattering understanding. It was as if Dog said :

"And what about *me* ? What about those *who were born dogs* ? Whose powers of understanding are so much broader than their means to live on it ? Who are bound to *remain* dogs, whatever they know, whatever they feel. . . ."

Lida felt uneasy under that steady and lucid gaze, deeper than human in intelligence. She rose up. She had to go.

As she went down the street she thought over her lessons. The composition was written. "Romanticism" in literature she understood well. She had to work over her style. Similes.

Metaphors. She composed them as she walked and each one turned to Lida's own feelings : " Sweet as my love. Hot as my anxiety. My sterile joy, my fruitful sorrow . . . "

And solfeggio ? She sang in a half-voice :



And with that low sound for letters she entered her teacher's house.

Mme. Manuilova's life was brightened only by Lida's presence. In her youth Mme. Manuilova had been a great opera singer. Those were radiant years of fame and love, each day raising her higher and higher, to great happiness, to brighter fame, and then suddenly broken to pieces with nothing left out of all that splendour, except memories sharp and cutting, as pieces of crystal which were once a wonderful whole. Happiness turned into a painful deception. Life turned into a doleful nothingness. Her name known all over Europe now brightened the memories of only a few old lovers of music. Her face adored, admired, worshipped by those who saw it near, by those who saw it only from afar, by those who saw it only on picture postcards, thaj face now bore scars of pain and wrinkles of time. Old, old . . . The famous voice was now as unsure as the feet of a child at its first attempt to walk.

Old age found her alone in China, living and counting and counting—which would come to an end sooner : her money or her life ? In China, cut off from European musical interests, with not a single joy or hope in the future, she found Lida and saw in her the possibilities of a great singer. Mme. Manuilova offered her help and guidance free. Together, they started a new life, Lida moving toward a glorious future, Mme. Manuilova living once more in her artistic youth.

To-day, lessons finished, she said :

" Now, Lida, one of these days I should like to see your mother. We must discuss some plans concerning your future."

" Plans ? My future ? "

" Yes. I should like to take you to Harbin for Christmas and

to see you singing in concerts there. In the spring we will go to Shanghai. And before all that you must have your first appearance here, at Tientsin. Just this day I had an invitation from Mrs. Brown."

"No, Nadejda Petrovna, no. . . . You are not serious?"

"Yes, Lida, it is time you begin. . . ."

"I cannot. I will be afraid. . . ."

"That is why you must begin. You have to go through it."

Suddenly Lida was all radiance.

"Oh, Nadejda Petrovna, oh dear! *Really*, you think I *can* sing in concerts? I must write a letter about that to Jimmy!"

All the rest of that day Lida was exuberantly happy. There was nobody in the house to share it. Mother was on duty at the hospital. Galina had gone to church. The Diazes, who gave a free room in the attic to Mother and Lida, had gone somewhere, too. She found the house quiet and empty. Only the Chinese cook was in the kitchen peeling potatoes for the Diazes.

"Cook," she said, standing on the threshold of the kitchen, "Cook, have you heard me sing?"

"No. To-day me have not."

"Not just to-day, how I sing in general. . . . What do you think? Is my singing grand? Ah? Say, Cook?"

The cook looked attentively at the potatoes in the bowl.

"All singing," he said, "has its points. . . ."

"What do you mean by 'points'?"

"Standpoints. . . ." he said subtly and coolly, and his hands grew quick with potatoes.

Lida felt disappointed. She stood in the frame of the door opening into the back yard. November. . . . barrenness of soil, deprived of covers. A few dry stalks of rose mallow stuck up out of furrows in one corner. . . . a few weeds tall and grey in another. Last spring's flowers. They had become dry weeds dismally swayed by the wind. They gave out a light, dry, almost imperceptible sound, but Lida's ears caught it, and her heart repeated the rhythm. The autumn winds have dismal tunes.

Lida took a few slow steps into the yard.

The face of the fishpond was dead, unresponsive. Its greenish efflorescence smelt of decay.

She went to the Diazes' sitting room and sat at the piano.

When nobody was in the house, these hours were hers for practice.

She began to play. But she had an urge to sing, to sing in a whole voice, a song she sang once for Jimmy, in the garden.

Softly the door opened and Leon entered the sitting-room. He was the Diazes' eldest son, about twenty. He was tall and strikingly handsome, in the best and noblest of Spanish styles.

He slowly approached the piano and stood behind, listening.

"Leon!" Lida cried when she felt his presence. "Leon, happy news!"

"A letter from Jimmy? Special delivery?" His tone was gentle, but mocking.

"No!" Lida suddenly grew sad. "Not that much. But Mme. Manuilova said I am ready for concerts. Really, she said. Are you astonished?"

"I am never astonished at you, Lida," Leon said softly. "You deserve every happiness."

"Why? How do you know?"

"Because you never think you deserve it."

"Leon, you always say something which makes me feel a *senorita*. With you I feel always in an opera box! Come nearer, listen! I have music in my heart. I begin to think in music. I feel I could create music, by myself."

He leaned against the piano and looked at her with admiring attention.

"All the world could be expressed in music. People, too. Your mother is this—listen—from Bach . . . your father is this from Beethoven, my mother is Tchaikovsky's *Symphonic Pathetique*. . . ." And she played and sang melodies to illustrate her words.

"And I?" Leon said.

"You, Leon, you are Brahms's 'Second Hungarian Dance.' Here is your vitality. Listen . . . your hidden feelings. . . ." And she sang it in a full radiant voice.

"My hidden feelings? Have I some?"

"Oh, I do not know why I said 'hidden.' All my life I will remember you at these sounds of Brahms."

"And you, Lida? What are you in music?"

"I and Jimmy? We are this . . . no! For us I must create music myself." She grew shy and said timidly: "I tried, listen"—and she sang and played:

*Quand Us hlas refleunront
Dans ce jardin nous reviendrons . . .*

Suddenly she struck a shrill false note and, jarred by it, stopped.

Leon bent. He took the finger which made the fault and bringing it to his lips he tenderly kissed it.

4

MME. PLATOVA came back to Tientsin. She looked smaller and less vital. She resembled the residue of a fruit from which all the juice has been squeezed, and taken away to feed somebody else ; the pulp left behind hardly could be suspected of ever belonging to a fruit. Or else she looked like a horse which had too long belonged to a merciless master, who beat it and beat it and made it work, and trot, and gallop, unaware of what this was to the horse.

Mother instantly knew how the visitor felt by the look in her eyes. She insisted that Mme. Platova would rest overnight, and only then return with Galina to Harbin. A room which can house three women is always ready to house the fourth.

Thus again the two mothers were sitting at the small table with their cups of tea, which in this case had to replace a supper. After the first cup Mme. Platova was able to talk. Of course, conversations never help where practical problems are involved, still a sorrow well told becomes not only bearable but almost attractive.

" What I cannot put up with is the casualness of our existence. Really, we feel no solid ground under our feet. We never know what our next day will be like. In vain we try to bring into our children's life some principles of stability, continuity . . . all topples and topples. . . . Every day one has to begin with the very beginning. . . . We plan this, we try that. . . . There is no unity nor sense in such a precarious existence."

" That used to be my worry, too," Lida's mother said quietly, " when I was younger. Then I found out that there is *always* an inner miiti in one's life. Everything which happens

is answering a need for its coming. . . . I found that out for myself and gave up worry . . . everything has sense. . . ."

" Oh, you did ? " the guest's voice sounded eagerly. " But *what* exactly have you found for yourself? You mean you know *why* all that sorrow came your way ? "

" I think I know," Mother said slowly. " I was proud. Very proud. Not because of my looks, or breeding, or money—no, worse than that. I was proud of myself . . . mine was a spiritual pride. . . . I came from generations of proud people. I kept apart and lofty. Never willingly mixing with others. Well, life is pitiless to the extremes, bad or good. There is a certain moral law, as well as a physical one, which works to bring the extremes to a level . . . I wholly deserved my fate. My life had to be a lesson in humility . . . only it took me twenty years to find joy in my acquired knowledge. I am glad I had it. Pride is a mortal sin."

" Yes, the only beautiful mortal sin," Mme. Platova answered.

" Exactly. I was under the spell of that cold and false beauty. I am glad Lida is not like me. She begins with humility. . . . Her life will be easier."

" It makes me good to listen to you. . . . Really, I am, perhaps, too preoccupied with the small things of life, and miss its bigger conceptions. . . . But, you know, it is hard to be a philosopher with six children in the house . . . for whom one finds no place in the world. We have even no passports for them. . . . Must we try to get back to Russia? Must we try to send them abroad, if only the boys . . .? *Where, how* could our children be sheltered from the horrors of life? Where would their life be easier? To send them abroad? "

" I did," said Mother low, " I let my nephew Dima go to England. A rich English lady adopted him. A good and kind woman. . . . And now—is not England under the threat of a war too? Will not our Dima face there just those things from which we tried to shelter him by sending him to England? "

" With England it seems so unbelievable"

" Yes. We let the boy go. But then again . . . suppose we kept Dima here. He was underfed, always, from his birth. He was growing up a very delicate boy . . . he could develop consumption. . . . Such a dear boy. . . ." And she sighed.

" Let yourself take it this way "—now Mme. Platova eagerly

entered her role of a consoler—"nobody knows about the future—should there be a war in England or not—meanwhile the boy had a sea voyage, and this means so much for a child, for health and for his brains too. He had plenty of air, plenty of food—they have wonderful fare on those liners—new interests, good treatment—why, only rich people can afford things that your boy is having. This change may render him so much stronger that he will meet better whatever happens to him in the future. . . ."

The room seemed brighter with every word. The tea tasted much better, too.

"We race with time," Mme. Platova was saying. "Every year of quiet life is very important. It makes children so much stronger, more stable morally. It builds them. Every year is important . . . every month. . . ."

"Every week," said Mother.

"Every day, every hour. . . ."

And they sighed, both looking relieved and reconciled.

"Now about my son, Vladimir in Shanghai. Goodness . . . I arrived in Shanghai late in the evening. I found his poor room all bare, but tidy. I looked over his things, counted his linen . . . you know the way boys sew buttons on, or mend . . . I cried over his shirts. . . . Then I felt I could not wait for him any longer. It was eleven o'clock and he could not come home until three o'clock in the morning."

"Do they keep such late hours?"

"They do. I left the house. Shanghai is, in a way, fascinating at night. The streets were full of movement and lights . . . and the people. . . . You never see *that* sort of people during the day."

Here Lida and Galina entered the room, both iresh and cold, eager for tea. They put their cups on the window sill. Their supper—two sandwiches—was neatly arranged for them on two separate dishes. Busy with food they paid no attention to what Mme. Plato va was saying.

"That was the first time in my life I had entered a night club. 'Stop Here * was the name. It was bitter to think there was no other place, no other work for a son of mine. . . ."

And she sighed.

"I had hardly entered when I saw a terrible brawl going on. Afterwards I knew what it was. Just a group of the American

marines who had to return to their barracks before midnight. All were drunk, of course. There was one who did not want to go, just refused to move. The others, who could still think, realised the grave consequences of being late. They pushed him, they tried to drag him, all the rest of guests and waiters helping, but he turned out to be the strongest of the crew, a prize athlete. He just kept sitting there. Then they began to beat him. . . ."

Here the girls began to listen.

"It was a terrible sight. This man, all red in face, his muscles tense and his neck purple, sat at a table and two marines kept beating him with a flowerpot. They held it by the stem of the plant and—under command of the onlookers—they beat and beat him on the head. . . ."

A sigh of terror rose in the room.

"Finally, the pot broke and the earth covered the man altogether. Then he rose up—in the clouds of dust—sneezed, and cried out: * If you want to kill me, take another flowerpot. . . .'"

The girls burst into laughter and the women began to laugh too.

"Well," Mme. Platova said, "at that moment I did not laugh. I knew my son was somewhere there. In case of murder he could be involved. . . . I rushed forward and cried: 'Son, son, where are you?' Then the marine rushed toward me and cried: 'Here I am, Ma!'—and he hugged me and cried with drunken tears: * They beat me, Ma! * I was afraid at first. Then I saw Vladimir. He knew I would be soon at Shanghai, he recognised me and ran toward me too, and he cried: 'Mother!' and then to the marine: * Let her go, She is my mother!' ' Maybe, she is mine too. She looks like one I' the marine cried, and wept and did not let me go. . . ."

The girls now laughed heartily.

"Well," Mme. Platova said again, "it was not so gay for me at that moment. . . ."

"And what then? What then?" the girls pressed her.

"The other marines urged that man to go, but he said he would move only if I led him by his hand, as his mother used to do, when he was a child. All urged me, too. All were drunk, except the waiters. They were eager to put an end to the brawl, so they just pushed us out. Vladimir went with me

. . . and there I was walking amidst a drunken crew of American marines, leading by the hand a big man, who sobbed, while the crew sang :

*" My mother said
I never should . . .
Play with gypsies
In the wood . . . "*

The girls laughed until tears came. Mme. Platova seemed on the verge of anger, but again she gave in and laughed too.

" And the people on the streets were looking with glee. . . . I felt terribly unhappy. . . . Imagine how it all seemed . . . "

" But, Mamma," Galina interrupted her, " you always said that the important thing is not what things *seem* but what they *are*. . . . "

" And what *are* they, or *were* then ? " Mme. Platova said almost angrily " Your mother in the group of drunken men, at night, in an unknown town. . . . Well, happily, in the open air that big man soon came to himself. He understood, he had to be in the barracks before midnight. He let my hand free, he thanked me, calling me ' Mother,' and insisted on giving me a present. He actually gave me one American dollar and insisted that I keep it."

" You have it ? "

She looked for it in her handbag and finally found the silver dollar. It was the first American dollar they had ever seen. A big one, a heavy one. Real money of silver or gold is rare in Asia.

" Mamma," Galina said suddenly, " he was a good man. What if he was drunk ? I think he was a good man."

" And what will you do with the dollar ? " Lida said and caught her mother's reproachful glance. Her question was not " good manners."

Here Mme. Platova laughed gaily :

" We shall spend it for our Christmas tree. I always manage to give my children a Christmas tree. This year it will be with presents. After exchanging this dollar I will have eight of our Harbin dollars. We are eight. One can do things at a dollar per person ! "

And again they all laughed.

Still, however hearty laughter is not a solution to problems and Mme. Platova went on now sadly :

" I had to leave my son there. . . . So far, Vladimir is all right, but I shall not have a moment of peace now. A young boy. . . . He is handsome, too He pays our rent. Still I asked him to come home and live with us. * Our house is dull without your violin/ I said. * You loved Chopin.' * Chopin is Chopin everywhere,⁵ he said. ' I love his music even better when I see the squalor of this life around me. . . .' Well, I left him there." . . . And she began to wipe tears with the end of her handkerchief.

It was time to go to sleep. They all had to go to bed at the same time, for there could be no spare space to move in the room. The only comfortable bed, a sofa, was given to the guest. Mmc. Platova protested at first, but too tired after her three-day journey, she finally gave in.

Meanwhile a great wind arose outside, in the outer world. It came from the desert of Gobi and brought with it some sand not yet spent on the way. It slashed that dead dust of the desert against the walls and windows—with a howl and desolate sighs. Thousands of low sounds arose and made a symphony—the whine of wire, screeching of a loose piece of thin iron, tapping of a wooden board, strange pinching sounds around the walls, as if somebody—blind—were cautiously moving around, trying to find the door and to be let in. . . .

Only Lida was deaf to it. She had had a letter from Jimmy that morning. She went to church to thank God for it in the evening, and now, happy, she slept and the doleful wind symphony was a lullaby to her.

The less happy are less ready with sleep.

The mystery of sleep was slow to come. It lingered on the threshold of life, prelude to unconsciousness, to a halt in living, to a hint of death.

When it came at last, all were at rest. Then deeply hidden, in the subconscious, an intensive motion began : disordered thoughts, occasional acts, unfinished sentences, tangled emotions, things one has been afraid to face, or those on which one lingered willingly—all began to interweave, to tie, to fix into a pattern, into a unity . . . and the soul was ready for a new day, which approached—all done, all ready, as fate.

5

LIDA opened the window and looked down into the yard. There, below, the gate had clicked. She was on her guard for that sound. No matter what else she was doing, she was always listening for the mailman's steps. Every moment could bring Jimmy's letter. This time it did not.

Leon was crossing the yard. He looked up and met Lida's eyes. From the attic window, so high above, she seemed illusory, unreal. She looked at him only for a brief moment, her eyes dilated and darkening with disappointment. His face grew sombre with the reflection of her disappointment at seeing him. No, he was not that grinning Chinese mailman, she would not rush downstairs with a cry of joy to meet him.

Even seen from the attic, Leon was very handsome. But Lida was not the one to notice that. Too busy with her thoughts, she made no sign of recognition. She did not even smile. Perhaps she did not know it was Leon. She knew it was *not* the mailman. All the rest of the men in the town were of no interest to her.

And she disappeared into the attic. The window frame clicked.

Leon stood a minute longer looking up at the dead face of the closed window. With a reticence characteristic of him he made not a single movement to show how he felt. But that immobility for one full of his youthful vigour was a revelation in itself.

Lida was dejected. For two weeks now she had not received any letters from Jimmy.

There are certain moods of a human soul so burning, so deep, that they still remain beyond description. To be in love is one of them, to wait for letters—another. Lida went simultaneously through both. She was living not from morning to evening, but from one mail to another. Those were the sharp moments of expectancy ; time in between had to be endured, somehow suffered through.

She looked round and the room seemed barer to one now bereft of hope.

Her dress, freshly ironed, lay on the sofa.

My dress, Lida thought, and she grew lost in memories. // was Granny's choice—and where is Granny now? Mrs. Parrish bought it for me, but she went away and I cannot even really remember her face. How Dima admired me then! He jumped around with his Dog. Peter said nothing but I knew he was happy seeing me so beautifully dressed for the party in Jimmy's house. Where are they all now? And the Professor? "My homage to youth and beauty" and kissed my hand. Nobody ever has been so courteous to me. Then Mr. Sung saying so strangely: ⁶⁶ "Those swallows came from Africa" . . . all, all gone . . . but this dress remains. . . / shall wear it to-day again . . . and none of them around me. . . .

The door opened and Dog came in. He looked up. He saw things, their dimensions and proportions, from a different angle. He never was charmed with what he saw. Being a dog he saw no colours. For him the brightest attractions were smells. Among smells, the scents of food, and animals, and people. Among the people those who smell naturally, of their flesh. He hated the scents of chemical compounds. And that girl, whom they called Lida, smelt of soap. Cheap soap. The cheapest soap. Here was the reason why Dog could not support Lida's, nearness for a long time. But she was unaware of it.

"Dog!" she said sadly. "Doggy, we are singing to-day in a concert, for a great public. What do you say?"

Dog said nothing. He only moved his jaws.

"Could not you say something? Just a word for me. Just * Dear Lida, do not worry. . . .' Say it."

This was stupid, and the dog turned to leave.

"Do you remember Dima?" Lida asked him.

Dog lingered on the threshold.

"Dima was a dear boy. How we loved him! We cannot ever reconcile ourselves to his absence. Can we?"

That silly talk. . . .

The dog looked at Lida once more. With scorn, almost with superiority. And left the room.

Again alone, she looked for something to cling to with her sadness. There was only her dress.

How does it happen, she thought, that the deepest feelings die, while the things connected with them remain? What gives endurance to things? Could not we learn from them? Why do they not move into the past? Why is it that for things alone life exists as an eternal

present ? *Only they enjoy life in reality. For a living soul all is past. . . . I can hardly perceive something with my feeling and instantly it is gone. . . . How strange, that the deadest things are the longest living. . . .*

Later in the afternoon she went downstairs to the Diazes' sitting-room> ready for her concert. The mere fact of wearing again her splendid dress—really magnificent with all its flounces and frills—elated Lida, and she entered the room with an aerial lightness.

The Diazes were a peculiar family. Each of them could speak several languages, yet they were mostly silent. Noble and quiet in appearance, they presented a beautiful and strange picture of still life when they sat together. Lida was always startled when she happened to step into a perfectly silent room and found it full of people. They would not move even their heads in sign of greeting, but only smiled faintly. Nobody was ever ill or unhappy, or very happy in that family. They were the same, always. Never in haste, never in pain, never afraid, never in ecstasy or indignation. But volumes would be required to retell only the Countess's life alone. She was born in a Russian aristocratic family, lost every one and everything during the Revolution, married Count Diaz, whom she had known while he was attached to the Spanish Embassy, and left for Spain. She saw another revolution there, with losses of lives and property in their family, and then left for China exactly in time to witness the Japanese invasion.

They did not belong to any political party, were repelled by the wrongdoings of each, and fatalistically endured poverty and exile. They remained always themselves—noble, quiet, and invariably benevolent to all.

Seeing Lida in her evening splendour, Maria, the daughter of the family said :

" Beautiful."

And the Countess asked :

" Ready for the concert ? Who is coming for you ? "

" Nobody. I am going by myself."

The idea of a young girl, fatherless, with her mother busy, going alone to her first concert seemed pathetic.

" No," the Countess said, " you must not go alone. Where is Leon ? "

" Leon will not be home until nine o'clock," said Maria.

" But I can go alone, all right," Lida said. Her excitement was dropping, for a reason she could not perceive.

" How do you plan to get there, Lida ? " the Countess asked.

" I will walk."

" Walk ? In this dress ? "

" I could take a rickshaw. I have ten cents."

Here the Count rose.

" I shall go with you, Lida, and will remain there until Leon comes. You, my dear, send him as soon as he returns," he added, addressing his daughter.

" I shall help you to dress," the Countess offered, and they both left the room.

When the Count came back he wore his best suit and looked so distinguished that Lida suddenly felt important and all in a holiday mood. Shivering with anticipation, she left the room. The Count helped her into a taxi and Lida, shaken by this luxury, thanked him all the way. He listened first with a charming deference, then said :

" Before a concert it is better not to talk for a while."

When Lida entered the auditorium she was followed by cold, almost hostile glances. The audience consisted mostly of ladies. It was an " International Friendship " reception, and foreign Tientsin was well represented. Lida was the only Russian there, for Russians are poor and international friendship is costly.

Mrs. Brown was the president there, too. Her strategy of giving charity concerts was simple, but the outcome always successful. She fixed the prices for tickets and sent invitations. Those invitations were considered a great honour. They were looked forward to, counted on. Failure to receive one meant almost social disaster. It happened when one's social career was moving downhill. Of course, one could *buy* a ticket at the entrance, but that meant signing one's social ostracism with one's own hand.

In this elite gathering of foreign Tientsin Lida was unknown, and her appearance in a gala dress seemed near to being an offence. The ladies looked at her accordingly, but faces brightened when the Count entered the field of vision. Even those who did not know him felt happier, there could be no mistake about *him*. He produced something near to a mild sensation.

Seeing so much splendour around and so little friendliness Lida took her seat timidly beside the Count. Only now did she understand how she would have felt alone in that brilliantly lit and very spacious room, full of people so sure of their worth and superiority. Looking at the Count she felt proud to be with him.

I could have a father Like him, she thought, and the idea of having *n* father seemed to her unbelievable luck. She tried to *look* a Count's daughter and was sitting softly erect as she had been taught at home when Granny was alive, for Granny knew everything about good manners and was sure they made social life beautiful.

Meanwhile a lady opened the performance. She played a harp. That was the first harp Lida had ever seen.

This opening item on the programme was more picturesque than musical. The scheme of colours had been carefully worked out. The harp was golden. The lady's hair was dyed to match the harp, while her dress—the brightest blue velvet—was conceived to strike a note of contrast. The velvet was arranged to fall down in curved, almost audible folds. The next item was the lady's hands. While her bare arms almost matched the harp in a surprising goldness of flesh, her nails, geranium petals, struck a contrast to the dress. So much refinement needed a frame, and *music* was a frame to the lady.

The lady was thanked with applause, and the next performers took their places.

Six gentlemen and six ladies sang old Scotch songs. It was a most interesting event, only it had no relation to music. All the ladies and the gentlemen had no voices and less ears. None was younger than fifty. They could not even keep the measure, every one performing by himself, although the oldest gentleman, an octogenarian Scot, stamped his foot and moved his eyebrows and swung his fist to portray the melody.

Still there was a pathetic—if not beauty, then attractiveness, in the scene. All those people were old. All were moving quickly down the hill of life. They scarcely hoped to see Scotland again. Yet in spite of long lives of travels, of events, of foreign countries, foreign languages, alien climates, alien songs, they kept intact a certain warmth toward their cradle, their mother—Scotland. Nothing was better, nothing was dearer, nothing could efface or erase her from their hearts. And they sang her—The Glorious

Native Country—in false old voices, without tune, or measure, or rhythm, yet sang her with warmth and love.

The six ladies and six gentlemen bowed with dignity and sang encores. Then the Scotch voices from the audience asked for one song more. The chorus talked a little among themselves. It seemed they were not sure they could oblige their public with it. Finally they took the challenge and vocalised something utterly unlike a song. Lida felt bewildered, but the audience became noisily appreciative. Lida was naive. She did not know that a "concert" does not always mean "music." The other thing she did not know was the social standing of the singers. They were, from right to left, a banker, a lawyer, a minister, a doctor, and two owners of big estates, and some of the audience were their subordinates.

Here Mme. Manuilova came to take Lida and with a failing heart she felt that she was afraid to sing before the audience.

Timidly she ascended the platform and stood under the cool eyes of the audience. Contrary to custom, Lida was not met with applause. As the artists were to receive nothing for their participation, Mme. Manuilova felt pricked by that lack of courtesy to the young girl, especially significant after the generous appreciation given to the others. But Lida was so afraid and shy that she had not noticed any difference in the reception. She just stood shyly and a little clumsily, slightly trembling all over. * . . She felt scared. Suddenly she saw Leon.

He entered the auditorium and walked quickly to his place in the third row. He looked at Lida. He had never seen her in that evening dress, never had seen her passably well-dressed. Now she stood there—higher than anybody else—all white, all young, shy, timid, modest, beautiful. He looked, as he went, and smiled, and his eyes were luminous with admiration.

Mme. Manuilova began to play, and suddenly everything changed, all was different.

With joy, with delight, with elation, Lida began to sing. Nothing but music existed in the world.

The room grew misty, moved away, disappeared. Lida rose in the air, and slowly began to move upward. She soared over life.

She sang and a tear rolled down her cheek.

What is that . . . ? Why that tear ? somebody thought for

her, in the background of her mind. / *am singing*, she answered quickly—not to interrupt that joy and happiness.

There are beautiful things that we admire, and enjoy in the full presence of our critical powers. There are other beautiful things which are so congenial to our souls that we enjoy them without criticism, and suffer while enjoying. In a mysterious way they project our personality against the background of eternity, and one feels how humble is one's fate, how limited one's powers, how finite one's talents, and how fleeting one's life. This was the kind of charm Lida's singing had for Leon.

Every sound of Lida's voice evoked immediately an answering vibration in Leon's breast, as if it were he who was singing—nay, as if they were singing together—Lida and he—as if those wonderful sounds were begotten by them both, at the same time, in one mutual breath.

The storm of applause was tremendous for an audience so reticent and well-balanced as that was. It was more than applause. It was an acceptance of Lida. Now she *existed* at Tientsin. Now she was *known*, to be recognised, remembered, talked about. Her poverty, nationality, her social standing, were forgiven.

Here Mrs. Brown—dignity in lilac silk—approached solemnly. When Lida looked at her and recognised the lady from the rummage sale she gave a low cry and trembled. But who was she to be remembered by Mrs. Brown? Mrs. Brown could not more discriminate between two customers at a rummage sale than she could between two flies which had been especially troublesome in summertime. She approached Lida grandly, but looking down into her face—youthful, pathetic, wistful, beautiful—she suddenly made a quite un-Brownesque movement. Before the unbelieving eyes of the onlookers she kissed Lida on the brow and said .

"Angel, you made me cry!" And what was more unbelievable, she took off her beautiful Chinese pin which fastened the flowers to her breast—and gave it to Lida, the pin and the flowers too.

6

WITH Mrs. Brown's flowers in her hands Lida was on her way home. Leon was taking her there in a taxi.

" You know," Lida said dreamily, " every time I have seen a car, in the evening, all lit from within—like ours now—and two young people sitting inside—like us now—and flowers—like those in my hands—I used to wonder how happy those two people might be. For one who treads the streets forlornly . . . alone . . . in twilight, in wind and cold—they seem a dazzling vision of happiness. Now this happens to me, and I feel nothing except sadness. . . ."

" No letters this week ? " Leon said with gently mocking compassion.

But she did not notice the mockery.

" Almost *two* weeks," she answered, and with the grace of a bird she turned her head aside to hide her face from his view.

They sat silent. She—not looking at him. Trying to imagine and then to believe that he was Jimmy. He—with vigilant hope, on the watch for her every movement, trying to imagine and then to believe that she was his bride. Sitting close to each other, in the same car, they were moving in different directions, chasing diverse mirages, and the distance between them grew speedily, for in her thoughts she travelled farther and farther away, to that wondrous town in California with the silvery name of Berkeley.

Once there, she made an effort to sweep the crowds aside and to find Jimmy among them. She moved away from reality so speedily that her mental vagrancy reduced to nothing her physical presence. Leon looked for possible means to keep her with him a little longer.

" I think your mother would like to know about the conceit," he said at last. " Let us go to the hospital and tell her."

" In the taxi ? "

" Yes, in this taxi."

" But it will cost too much."⁵¹

" Lida," and Leon took her hand with the flowers into both of his, " news. You see before you a rich young gentleman. Want details ? "

" Oh," Lida cried with joy. " Really ? I have heard that some property is being restored to your family. I am proud to be with you. You are my first rich friend. All right, pay for the taxi.⁵"

" I can do more than that. I can marry and live anywhere and give my wife almost everything. ..."

" Oh, I should like to be your wife, if only you were Jimmy," she said, and they both laughed.

At the hospital Mother congratulated Lida :

" I am glad you sang well, my artist," and she kissed her. " Now go home and rest."

Leon felt he could not let her go. He invited Lida to a fashionable restaurant for supper and asked Mother's permission to take her.

" Please, please "—the girl v/as all excitement—" may we go ? I have never been in a restaurant. I have seen them in movies. Mamma, it is such a luxury . . . palms . . . music. And I am very hungry now. . . ."

Mother granted her permission.

Ready to go, Lida gave a hasty look around the room and suddenly it struck her as something unreal. A poorest hall in a poorest hospital. And she clearly saw herself, standing in the middle of that dingy room in her white dress, with flowers . . . her mother in the pitiful uniform of a nurse . . . Leon—handsome and healthy . . . and rich now. Somewhere, behind those walls, were hidden all the terrors of illness in poverty, and death in exile. . . . With a startling clairvoyance she saw it all from a distance, as the many-sidedness of life. . . . " *What keeps it all together* / " she thought, and a flush of unexplainable fear shook her. She trembled.

" What is it ?* What is the matter with you ? " Mother asked.

Leon caught Lida by the arm.

*' She is tired."

" Perhaps it is better for her to go straight home. . . ."

" I will take care of Lida," Leon said. " We will not be late. We shall sit quietly at our supper and then go home. I will take care of her."

The fresh November air helped instantly.

" Yes, perhaps I am too tired to-night," Lida said. " Let us have a nice supper."

In the restaurant she was so impressed with its splendour that she spoke in whispers.

"Are you *sure* you inherited that money? Otherwise, let us go home."

Leon sat her at a cosy small table under a palm. (*Real? Artificial? And she touched it. Artificial. All dry.*)

"Yes," she said aloud. "Splendour. I wonder what they serve for supper. In a place like this. . . ."

Suddenly she felt that Leon was looking at her intensely.

"Why are you looking at me like that? Have I said something stupid?"

"No. You have not."

"Are you expecting I will?"

"No," he said* "It is because you are charming. More, you are beautiful. Even more, unique. I love you."

Lida's head jerked up.

"No," she cried. Then she laughed, "It was a joke," and she smiled. "That is what they say while waiting for supper under an artificial palm."

"No, Lida. I would not make a joke of that kind. This is most serious. I would be happy to marry you."

"Leon"—she was rising now. "You must not talk to me like that. You know all about me. I am sorry . . . however hungry, I had better go home. You sup alone. . . ."

He rose too.

"Do not," he said softly. "Whatever I feel, I will say no more. . . . I am sorry. . . ."

"Well—" Lida softened too. "I shall stay with you. . . . Only do not say those words any more. Do not spoil this evening for me."

She said that word "spoil" simply, which made it a harder blow. Still Leon did not show outwardly how much he felt wounded.

There was no time for further love-talk, for the waiter was standing at their table with the menu.

"What will you eat?"

"I? I will eat everything that they give for supper."

Meanwhile the other guests came in.

Mrs. Brown was sitting with Mr. Rind in a niche and telling him about her social activities in what she thought to be a confidentially low voice. Invisible, she could be heard clearly

all over the restaurant, and Lida pulled Leon's sleeve.
" Listen ..."

They could not hear what Mr. Rind was saying, for he really spoke confidentially low. But after intervals of silence, which were, evidently, Mr. Rind's replies, Mrs. Brown's voice would fill the room.

" No more Japan for me. . . ."

Silence.

" None. We had five Japanese ladies as members of the International Friendship. We have none now."

Silence.

" Of course not. One cannot *quarrel* in a club of friendship. There are other ways."

Silence.

" Well, there could be no empty chairs ... or nobody could hear them when they spoke ... all the bridge tables could be filled. . . ."

Silence.

" Well, there was *one* protest." This time the voice sounded gloomy. " Mrs. Nakamura came. She is clever, was educated in the United States." Here Mrs. Brown's voice changed to a hiss. "' Madame President,' she said, ' will you kindly explain the principles of this club which is called " International Friendship " ? I joined it just because of its name. I would not bother to enlist in a—say—Red-haired Club. . . . I came to this one for friendship—and—see—*how* I am treated.' ' Mrs. Nakamura,' " the voice was its natural basso again, " I said, and I looked hard at her black Japanese hair, ' certainly you could not join a *Red-haired Club*, and perhaps even less a club of *friendship*.' She seemed offended and cried, ' Why ? What do you *understand by international friendship* ? ' * Mrs. Nakamura, ' I said, * we understand by friendship something quite different from the thing you *call friendship with China* ' "

Here some feeble sounds, which were Mr. Rind's laughter, showed approval. Then followed silence. Then again Mrs. , Brown said in her basso :

" No. Never. None of the five Japanese ladies has ever come to see us^again." Silence.

" How very amusing," Lida said, " and everybody enjoyed the story." For, in fact, everybody had listened to it.

They decided to go home on foot.

When they came to their house Lida halted on the steps. The air was cold and still. She lifted her face and looked up to the sky, now bright with stars. She looked at the small fleeting clouds and at the mysterious moon.

Leon took her hand.

"Now, Lida, under this sky, let us try to find out what *is* love. *Why* really do we love?"

She did not move her eyes from the vision of the sky. And standing thus—in the halo of moonshine—with the big shadow of the house behind, she said:

"Why? I do not know. . . . Perhaps because it was spring then. . . . We lived all together—our Family—Granny, Dima, Peter, our dear friend the Professor . . . Mrs. Parrish, that funny Mme. Militza . . . life was so full, so full. . . . We sang often. . . . I had won the swimming championship. . . . I met Jimmy. . . ."

Then she eagerly turned her face to Leon.

"Now, when you ask me, I really think I know *why* I fell in love. Because I was *happy* then. I fell in love to *complete my happiness*. . . ."

He looked at her with tender, but still mocking eyes.

"With me it was different. I met you when I was tired, disgusted with life, almost distressed. . . . We had no money . . . in this foreign country. . . . Mother trying to work and keep us *men*. . . . Father terribly unhappy because of that. . . . I felt humiliated at being helpless while young and strong. I met you when I was *terribly unhappy*. I fell in love with you to *complete my unhappiness*. . . ."

They both laughed.

"You see," Lida said. "You must not ask. There are no rules of laws. Each case has its individual logic."

And with light steps she entered the house.

He remained in the hall while she was going upstairs, and the sounds of her presence moved away with her. The staccato sounds of high heels against the steps. . . . Steps higher and higher, sounds lower and lower . . . then the sound of her door closed. Good-bye, love! There was, there could be no power, no force strong enough to make her understand, to make her run down the stairs and say something to alleviate her innocent cruelty.

7

LIDA'S departure for Harbin had been decided upon, and this caused talk in the small circle of Tientsin where Lida was known. Her recent success at the concert was much commented upon, and her "brilliant future" was thenceforth taken for granted. Of course, nobody meant her immediate future, but some time "afterwards," when all her schooling had been completed. Mme. Manuilova's name and fame gave a kind of guarantee to Lida's artistic career. People began to pay more interest to "the family." They began "to drop in" to the attic, interested and benevolent.

Mme. Klimova was one of the first to come. While she shrank from intruding upon anybody's grief, she always came first when any shadow of fortune was cast upon one's abode. She came "to share," of course.

In spite of the fact that Mme. Klimova was going through a very colourful phase of her life, she did not feel particularly happy. Yes, she had married the old man and had every right to be referred to as "Madame la Générale" Shabalov, but owing to one of those mischievous, though unexplainable, whims of the great public nobody was in haste to give her that title. No. Instead they began to call the General "Mme. Klimova's husband." The poor General was never known under his proper name. He had been a "lizard on relief" at school, a "thistle" in the barracks, an "old horse" to his first wife, "the General with Maps" during his beatific years as a widower, and was now promoted to the doubtful honour of being "Mme. Klimova's husband." Why the public is jocose at the expense of some people, leaving in peace the others, nobody knows. The fact that General Shabalov readily answered *any* nickname showed his fatalistic attitude towards public opinion.

Mme. Klimova planned her second marriage to be one of these "unions of friendship" in the American style, for according to her information, women never grow old in the United States, and they go on marrying successfully as long as they live—the first time, for love; then, for social standing; then for money, for friendship, for career, for advertisement—well,

there are different reasons why a lady might like to marry a gentleman once more.

But the old General was not versed in American styles of living. It seemed he was trying to forget the fact of being married to Mme. Klimova at all, and, instead of that affectionate friendship which she expected him to cultivate, he developed something quite different, being laconic all the livelong day and fast asleep at night. Thus he could hardly be regarded as company.

And that was not all. Another marriage to which she had looked up and forward for the last twenty years, the marriage of her only daughter Alia, seemed to have taken a queer turn. Alia was a dancer, a ballerina. Alia danced somewhere in the Pacific Islands, in places where everything could happen for a talented girl. Marriage is the thing which usually happens to girls, talented or not. Still nothing of the kind happened to Alia until, at last, Mme. Klimova had a letter. Alia was actually coming home, to mother, bringing her husband too. The ballet troupe had dispersed after a bankruptcy—and the artistes were all trying hard to get the fare to get home to their respective mothers. Now this was only natural, but Alla's husband seemed to have timed his appearance badly ... a husband who cannot *provide*) a husband of a *mixed* race, a husband whose name Mme. Klimova could not even pronounce . . . for it was something like Mr. Ngnuiahma. "Mr." proved nothing, and Mme. Klimova, who had for twenty years daily speculated aloud, before audiences of envious people, about the glorious facts and possibilities of Alla's life and career, now had to find a new footing on which to meet the unexpected situation.

And she spent hours in speculations on what the truth of Alla's marriage might be.

The truth of this queer situation, as of many others, was much more simple and humane than the idle speculations of people would perceive. In Alla's marriage, however sad and humble a fact it had been, there existed a pathetic quality, a peculiar fascination which pertained to the lives of the fatally unlucky people.

It came about like this.

Nobody can organise a child's failure better than its own mother, especially if she happens to be a stupid egoist. The

most fantastic plans are often concocted over the poisoned fire of a mother's exaggerated ambitions.

Mme. Klimova always knew, through her sacred maternal instinct, that it was Alla's destiny to be a world-famous dancer, the first ballerina upon the five continents, the unique one upon the globe, of a talent never before seen. Alla's uncouthness, Alla's bony clumsiness, her reluctance to dance, her tears, her prayers, seemed of no consequence. Just a sign of her stubbornness inherited from her father, of course.

In Alla's youth, after the first World War, humanity seemed crazy about dancers. All the charm of girls seemed to be narrowed down to two skilfully tapping feet. Mothers of all social standings, or without any, tried their best to teach their daughters that quick way to happiness and glory. Then a change came. Suddenly very many people gave up their own dancing and many more lost any interest in dancing of any kind at all. The smaller the demand the higher the competition. All of the opportunities which are the by-products of dancing were lost, and many a ballerina of Alla's indifferent type had to face dancing now as a pure art, in its elemental substance.

Alia danced before the public about twenty years. Hers would be too gloomy, too sorrowful a story to tell. Let it be not told. Let it be mentioned only that whatever happened to her, whichever country, climate, and zone she danced in, however desperate the financial situation of the ballet troupe, whatever the humiliation, the desolation of her life—never, not even once, did Alia fail to send her mother the monthly allowance and the weekly letter. And she did that with grace, with endearing words, with hopeful hints, leaving no room for guesses about her life.

Mme. Klimova accepted the money and the letters as her due. She always looked for one thing more, which had to be Alla's marriage to one of those fabulously rich princes of India or some other exotic land, about whom she liked to read in French novels.

Now Alia was married to a Mr. Ngnuahma. And who was he?

He sprang up out of one of those thoroughly mixed breeds about which science has—so far—little to say. His birth—in spite of being exactly as births usually are—was condemned by the Church, disapproved by Law, scorned by customs, scoffed

at by society, and mocked even by his own relatives. But Nature—blind to all that—persisted in bringing forth, into her scheme of mankind, Ngnuiahma children too. Half-castes.

His birth was not a joy to his young mother. Neither was he welcomed by the rest of her family. He never sav* his white father.

Thus Ngnuiahma was born *thrice* a pariah : of mixed breed, illegitimate, and poor.

Still he was alive. Still he grew up a human being.

In the turmoil of our modern life (is it a decline or evolution of civilisation?—opinions differ greatly on that point) mankind has no time to take specific care of its pariahs. Meanwhile the pariahs* number is steadily growing. Some sophisticated minds have even begun to speculate whether just those unwanted ones will inherit the land after all the "pure" races have killed each other trying to prove which of them is the purest.

Unattended, Mr. Ngnuiahma entered life. Whichever were the problems to face, he faced them. He said nothing. He was taciturn.

This was not altogether strange. In* our times more and more people plunge into taciturnity. Maybe they have their reasons. Maybe there is nothing more to say, seeing how things are going. Perhaps a human word is not an efficient means to anything after all. In any case, the charm of words is steadily declining. It becomes evident that the times of *talking over* one's problems are gone, and the times of bitter silence begin to take their course. Mr. Ngnuiahma and his kind were the first to understand this, instinctively. He and his kin never had created a song, a tale, they kept no diaries, never wrote annals or literature. They never revealed what they thought about life. They left that to others.

Mr. Ngnuiahma was made a Roman Catholic. One could see him often in church. Motionless, standing in the shadow of a pillar, he would gaze up into Christ's face, with a steady look. Perhaps, Mr. Ngnuiahma's was not pure faith, but unquiet doubt or, even worse, just curiosity. Perhaps not salvation, not redemption, were the ideas captivating him, but a wondering greed for the mysterious and fantastic. He never explained what he wa^ looking for in a church.

There were not many paths of life opened to Mr. Ngnuiahma from which he could choose. He took up commerce, buying

something, then trying to sell it quickly. The profit from that had to keep him alive.

In time of wars the Ngnuiahmas are given uniforms and guns. They usually don them and fight. Somehow they never make ardent soldiers. Theirs is not the inspired cause, a choice between freedom and slavery. They have simply to choose whose slaves to be. They have even been known to fight gallantly on both sides of the *same* cause.

What the new masters would bring to the islands was different. What they were looking for was always the same : they wanted the Ngnuiahmas' wood, their rubber, metals and minerals, coal and oil. And they wanted the Ngnuiahmas to work for them too, because the islands' climate is too hot for white labour. In addition they wished Mr. Ngnuiahma to behave. There was always a moral code adapted to the current moment of industry and history, and sometimes a special Messianic yarn. Ngnuiahma accepted that too. He said nothing. He remained silent.

Was this Mr. Ngnuiahma a friend of the white man's civilisation ? Or a foe to it ? A blessing ? A danger ? White people were too busy with their own problems to notice what was really going on outside and around them.

His marriage to Alia came about in this way.

In his capacity of wandering salesman, he sold Alia two pairs of artificial silk stockings and when he was tying up the small bundle, Alia said tactlessly (for there was not the slightest provocation to say it) :

" You know, in the Russian language we have no word for ' half-caste ' ? "

If she had said that Russians were birds, not people, it could not have produced more impression upon Mr. Ngnuiahma. He dropped his sales case and for a while stood thus—bent, with his arms outstretched over the fallen bundle.

" Yes," Alia said, " we have none."

The language they both spoke was English, a foreign language to both of them, and they spoke that variation of it which people like them speak in places like those islands.

Mr. Ngnuiahma slowly took his bundle and without a single word or sound he left the room.

He came in another week's time. And when Alia bought another pair of stockings, now the cheaper ones, and Mr.

Ngnuiahma was ready to leave, he halted on the threshold and—his hand round the doorknob—he asked :

" In your country, what do they usually say, instead of a <half-caste' ? "

Alia, stretching the poor silk between her long and terribly thin fingers, said nonchalantly :

" We have no synonym for ' half-caste.' "

" So what do they usually say ? "

" They say nothing. Or if they had to, they would explain it in many other words : his father is of such and such nationality, and his mother is of such and such. . . . "

" And what then ? "

" That is all."

Mr. Ngnuiahma slowly left the room.

When he came again, after a longer absence, and Alia—with all the ballet troupe on the verge of bankruptcy—bought a single pair of the cheapest stockings, Mr. Ngnuiahma started the conversation even before his bundle was properly tied.

" In your country, are there some half-caste people ? "

" I do not know," Alia said, sadly looking at the newly-bought stockings. " I do not remember Russia very well. But, of course, there must be," she said now with more of animation. " Russia is a very big country, one of the three biggest in the world. In Russia lived more than one hundred different peoples . . . yellow too. . . . Of course, they intermarry and have children. . . . "

" And they never call children names . . . ? "

" Those children ? No more than the other children . . . of pure race, I mean."

Mr. Ngnuiahma neatly tied up his bundle.

Then he stood erect with his bundle defiantly swinging in his hand and asked once more :

" You said you left your country long ago. . . . How could you be sure there was no such a word . . . ? "

" I know my native language perfectly well. I am educated. There is no word equivalent to ' half-caste.' I heard other Russians saying that too. Nobody could suggest a synonym. We have a word *polukrovka*, but it is applied only to horses. . . . "

Mr. Ngnuiahma made a slight movement back. Then he moved forward as if ready to leave the room, but then again—

his brown fingers with the whitish nails round the doorknob—he halted.

"And do not they . . . would not they . . . use that animal word for a human person also?"

"Oh, no. Or, perhaps, low people do, in the way of swearing at one, when anybody would say anything . . . but officially . . . in a passport or just in a conversation—never."

Then something struck her mind and she saw the situation clearer.

"Mr. Ngnuiahma," she said gently and simply, "it is not important what people say, it is important how they feel, behave. . . . We, Russians, are not a very good people, not the best. . . . But we are real, natural, almost never hypocrites. . . . We accept life. . . . Well, nobody there would reproach one with his birth . . . he would be just a child . . . that is all. . . ."

Then in a lower voice and a slower tone Mr. Ngnuiahma asked:

⁶⁷ "And if they would wish to humiliate one . . .?"

"They would find something . . . for which one is responsible . . . not the birth, or being a hunchback, or a dwarf . . . that, no. It is exactly what they would not . . ."

"Good-bye," Mr. Ngnuiahma said in a whisper and left the room.

But on the steps he stood quietly for a while. It seemed he did not even breathe. Then slowly he went down the street of his native town.

When, in three months' time, the ballet troupe went to pieces, the manager committed suicide, the prima ballerina eloped, Alla's dancing partner got an excellent job as a waiter in a hotel, and Alia herself, alone and dejected, in pain from consumptive coughing, was in the lowest despair ever known to a human soul—the door opened and Mr. Ngnuiahma quietly came in. In a few words he made his offer clear—and Alia married him, for he wanted to take care of her, to bring her home, to her mother, because the hot climate was killing her.

That was the kind of marriage Alia and Mr. Ngnuiahma concluded. Their marriage was not that of love, neither that of convenience, nor of friendship, nor calculation. It was not youth beckoned to by another youth, nor a hope linked to another hope, nor loves united, nor fortunes combined, nor two

ambitions twisted in one. . . . No, it was a humiliation married to another humiliation, a loneliness clinging to another loneliness, two wrecks linked, two failures joined. But if there could be joy in having a partner when approaching the final scene of a tragedy, not just to stand as a lonely actor before the cool audience waiting for the curtain—well, then this joy was Alla's. The Church blessed their union. The Law sealed it.

But how and to whom could one tell a story like that? Who would listen to it and think it worth telling? The stones about silent, unlucky people are difficult to understand.

Was it strange, then, that Alla's letter about her marriage put Mme. Klimova in a state of bewilderment? Still Mme. Khrnova had to announce the news, for Alia was coming home very soon. Mme. Klimova, who always was very respectful of public opinion, since she was often on its side, now braced herself to face the situation.

8

"AT LAST, at last, Lida," said Mme. Klimova, when, breathing hard after climbing the stairs, she appeared in the attic room . . . "at last . . . no more nonsense about your funny American bridegroom . . . a good career, instead of groundless hopes. . . . How do you do, people?" she said, seeing there were three person in the room.

As always, Mme. Klimova's visit was ill-timed. An interesting conversation between the Countess, Mother, and Lida was interrupted and—they silently agreed—could not be begun again in the newcomer's presence.

But Mme. Klimova was talking herself:

"At last I will be able to introduce you to my Alia, who is coming here soon, and tell her you are a clever girl, who knows better than marry, as my Alia did."

"Alia married? Alia is coming here? Oh, tell us, tell us all . . ." Lida cried.

Alia had been a kind of myth at Tientsin, among Mme. Klimova's friends: always on the threshold of fame, always refusing exotic princes' love, always a proud victim of the envy and intrigues of her rivals in the ballet troupe. All the success

which only a feverish expectancy could imagine was expected to befall Alia.

" Yes, she married and she is coming with him ... eh ... "

" With whom, with whom ? " Lida cried.

" Whom ? With her husband, of course. *Whom else ?* "

" What is his name ? Is he Russian ? "

" Russian ? No. "

" But his name ? "

Mme. Klimova twice opened her mouth and twice closed it, before she was able to say :

" I tried and tried to remember his name. ... It is unusually difficult . . . "

" Is he an Englishman . . . ? Is he French ? "

" He is a French *subject* . . . "

" Oh, how very, very interesting. "

Suddenly Mme. Klimova grew angry.

" *What are you so excited about, Lida ?* What do you see so interesting in it ? I came here to talk about *you, your* future, and you give me not a minute to come to myself. When and where are you going ? "

" I am to spend Christmas in Harbin, and sometime in spring I go to Shanghai . . . "

" And then ? "

" I do not know. Mme. Manuilova says I must spend about four years in a school. "

" Which school ? "

" I do not know. Somewhere to prepare for opera. "

" But which country ? "

" I do not know yet. "

" Well, Lida, your plans are no more sound and certain than could be expected. "

Actually Lida's future had been discussed before Mme. Klimova's arrival. The Diaz family planned to return soon to Spain. The Countess loved Mother and Lida and considered the possibilities of help and support. But not a hint of all this was given now to the visitor. Once more Mme. Klimova's sallies to affectionate friendship were doomed to failure.

But the chief thing was done, the news of Alla's marriage " broken," and she could push on to another topic :

" Have you had any letters ? "

. They had. Still they were reluctant to discuss them with

Mme. Klimova, for letters are often things of the utmost importance, almost sacred for those who live in exile. Thus Mother mentioned the one easy to discuss.

"Just the other day we had one from Irina. You remember her? She was our lodger last year."

"Do I *remember* her? Well, this is a question. Was not I present at her wedding, when she married that American soldier? What is she writing about? How she likes the United States?"

Mother, unwilling to talk much, said to Lida:

"Will you read the letter, Lida?"

And Lida read:

What was really astonishing to me here, in the U.S.A., is their overwhelming desire of possession. They have so many things, they adore things, and they really believe they possess them now and forever. For me, who never remember having more property of my own than my trunk could contain, it seemed at first odd, embarrassing. When Harry first brought me to our farm I felt alien—*why* and *how* could all this be *mine*? And he—meanwhile—was all the time apologising that it was a gas' stove, not an electric range, or that our car was five years old. But soon I changed completely. The things which brought that change about were two: *work* and *land*.

Only now have I discovered the fascination of work, when it is planned and continuous toil, leading to a certain achievement. I cried when I saw the buds on the bushes I had planted. I had a kind of fever to plant, to see those seeds, to hold them on my palm, then to put them into soil and wait and wait for their wondrous appearance in tiny leaves and stems. I was charmed by that easy power of augmenting life in my garden.

The second—my love, almost passion for land—is, I think, hereditary from my ancestors, all of whom were land-owners. I can never feel like that toward anything else of mine. I belong to this lot of land. It has its hold on me more than I on it. It draws upon itself my thoughts, my wonder, my efforts, my joy.

Life, which has been for me always uncertain, dependent on things somewhere outside of me, full of constant fear and anxiety about work, money, passports, is changed. Work ties days into a united scheme, into a succession of efforts and results. Life is now for me a sensible *whole*, my *life*, which I can

direct, into which I put certain tasks for myself and look forward to their achievements. . . .

" Well, well," Mme. Klimova cried, " is not that a *perfectly stupid letter* ? Instead of telling us about skyscrapers, hotels, society, fashions . . . really, I thought she would be clever . . ."

And she rose to leave.

Meanwhile the old General has been downstairs with the Count.

The thing which astonished Madame la Generate about her husband was the ease of his intercourse with people. He entered any house as if it were his own and was always met accordingly, as one of the family. He never had excuses, or apologies, or compliments to pay to those around him, but just would sit down, take his maps, and start a war monologue. People around were free to listen or to ignore. He was a gre^{at} connoisseur of wars. Wars fascinated him. Wars and destruction were, for him, the main sign of our modern times, as a renaissance of arts or Protestantism in religion happened to be in other epochs. He was a strategist by education, and had in the past both withstood and undertaken many battles. But wars were not only his ex-profession, no, they were his major subject of interest, his art, his vocation, his hobby.

He approached them in the style of a Russian mind—as a problem in abstraction, conceived in elemental purity and worked in vacuum, without another thought of their being alive and clothed in flesh of human bodies. Such an approach is that of an artist, a sculptor who hews the marble, and breaks it, and hammers it, and carves, and incises—never thinking *what it is* to the *marble*.

This day when the General opened his maps, the Count quietly moved his chair nearer and they both sat bent low over the table with the maps on it—the General orating in ecstasy, the Count giving out only quiet monosyllables in Spanish.

Thus the ladies coming downstairs had found them.

" Are you not tired of *my* husband ? " Mme. Klimova cried, and the fact that the Count, always perfectly courteous, did not answer astonished her.

" *What* -are you looking at ? " she cried again and in small steps ran toward the table. " Europe ? But there is *no* war in Europe?"

" Europe ? " Mother repeated in apprehension and went to the table too.

" Europe ? " the Countess said and looked toward the table.

" Ladies ! " The General rose and held the map in his hands.

" Ladies—yes !—it is *Europe*. Look at her ! She is a beauty. She is a gracious country. Look, for she will change soon."

" How . . . how will it affect England ? " Mother asked in a small voice.

" We shall not live long enough to see the whole of it , . ." he began.

But Mme. Klimova interrupted him.

" Away with prophecies ! You are now a married man. I do not know," she went on, " why *all* the good prophets and philosophers were either single or quarrelled with their wives. Why ? What *do you* think, dear Count ? "

The " dear " Count was sorry, that problem never presented itself to him in that special aspect. And again he was attentively listening to the General.

Mme. Klimova, feeling excluded, yet bound to enjoy every single moment of visiting a Count, went to the chair and, pushing Dog aside, sat herself heavily.

But it is precisely when visiting a Count that one does not push, even animals. Dog stood up and looked steadily into Mme. Klimova's salmon-coloured face, his nose moving into a surf of infinitesimal wrinkles. She misunderstood his attitude, and taking it for an expression of affectionate devotion she tried to pat his neck with her plump hand.

This was far more than Dog could stand. That woman never knew *what* the scent of her water-lily face powder did to his olfactory nerves. He rolled his eyes and growled.

" In some houses even dogs have a mania of grandeur," Mme. Klimova muttered and hastily withdrew her hand.

9

THE TALK and preparations for her trip to Harbin kept Lida in a state of growing excitement. After her lessons she went shopping with Mme. Manuilova, who bought her clothes. She was given three outfits. They followed one after the other like this : a dark grey tweed suit, a dark blue silk afternoon dress, and—who would expect to own one ?—a very fashionable evening gown : a long black full skirt with a white—no, silvery, for it shone—jacket. The fact that different shoes and gloves had to be worn with each seemed enchanting! Mme. Manuilova said, " A real lady would not leave her house without gloves and a hat," and Lida felt she had rarely been a real lady before.

Then Mme. Manuilova gave her a trunk, and Lida had the proud pleasure of packing. In the evenings she wrote a long letter to Jimmy telling him with rapture the old but always fascinating story of a Cinderella :

. . . And gloves too, for a real lady would never leave her house without gloves and a hat. I will keep all those things tidy and fresh to be dressed properly when we shall go out together in Berkeley . . .

Lida accepted presents simply, as if it were quite natural for some to give, others to take. She was never busy with doubts or sophistry. She possessed the precious gifts of integrity and belief, and so none of the trash of petty suspicion, envy, jealousy, would stick to her.

On the eve of her departure Lida made several calls. One of them was on Mme. Klimova, who had let her know that Alia arrived and was " at home " in the afternoons.

Alia was doomed to be at home all the time. She came home to die. Like animals, people like to die where they were born.

Alia came home to forget the pain in her chest, in her side, and her throat, her utter exhaustion, the unbearable feeling of tiredness. She was dying of consumption.

She was dark in the face and haggard, suggestive of nothing—go much as the clay from which mankind was made and into

which Alia was ready to return. She was terribly thin. Her hair, skin, and the poor flesh she still wore on her skeleton did not seem to be hers, but things apart, an imitation, a fancy dress, all worn and wrinkled, put on to present the morbid parody of a tired woman, put on by Alia to play her last role in her show.

Among womenfolk only old actresses can hammer out such a perfect effigy of a soul spent to its utmost.

Her coming home brought joy to nobody.

When Mme. Klimova opened the door and saw Alia and her husband—she silently stood aside and let them in.

It was the General who broke the silence and became fidgety in his welcome. But even his eyes were furtively searching Mr. Ngnuiahma's person. Seen in plain daylight, Mr. Ngnuiahma was a short, dark, thin man, clad in clothes which would certainly look European if worn by a whiter man. An elusiveness, a certain secretiveness, permeated the whole of Mr. Ngnuiahma's person, and for the keenest eyes it would be difficult to state what was his moral and intellectual standing. His looks gave no key to it. The one thing which was certain—although he gave no key to it either—was that Mr. Ngnuiahma was poor. That was exactly what Mme. Klimova could not bear. Had he been a prince, had he come covered with jewelry, with an exotic crown on his head, she would have smiled and curtsied. But Mr. Ngnuiahma was poor and looked it.

Some people are like that. Their mien cries out their financial standing. One can safely gamble nine against one that their room was not paid for last month, although one meets them in a public park or even in a theatre.

As far as *words* go Mme. Klimova said nothing to her son-in-law. Why should she? And how? She could not speak *his* English, he could not speak *her* French. No, she said no words. She only knitted her brow, she only narrowed her eyes and her nostrils trembled slightly—and thus she looked during those few weeks that he could endure staying in her house.

Of course, she had spoken to Alia. She brought to the latter's recollections all her maternal hopes—now deceived; all her efforts—now vain; all her sacrifices—so badly rewarded. Alia said nothing, she only wept.

The old General was of no help. His voice somehow got on his wife's nerves, to disturb which was rather dangerous. And

then she always had *her* heart; about that fact she implored everybody to remember.

To Mme. Klimova's final disappointments Alia brought almost none of those sweet "souvenirs" which ballerinas are so fond of possessing and so proud of displaying. She searched all of Alla's belongings and found only two or three things worth taking for herself.

One of them was a beautiful leather case with a complicated design of gold and colours, like the book-bindings on the precious old prayer books of ancient times. It belonged to Mr. Ngnuiahma—no, to his mother, or exactly, to his father.

Thirty-six years ago Mr. Ngnuiahma's father had left it behind, and Mr. Ngnuiahma's mother, a girl of fifteen, kept it as a sacred amulet. Suppose he should come back to ask for that leather case. But he did not come. She waited nineteen years, then died, and the case she gave to her son.

Ngnuiahma had opened the case, not once but many times. It contained a calendar for 1903. There was no January at all. No February either. It began with March 1410, and on the leaf was written :

" *La qertu me se'dwt. Le peche me possede*" And below :

" *Uamour—fleur minuscule . . .*"

It had been written in an elegant masculine handwriting.

When Mme. Klimova saw the case, she took it. She opened it, threw away the leaves of the calendar, thin and yellowish, and said :

" It sec you do not need that. It will make a box for my hairpins."

When Lida called, only Mme. Klimova was noisy. She performed the ritual of introduction, but Lida could not say a word, so much was she shaken with Alla's appearance. Alia coughed. Mr. Ngnuiahma was not "at home." Lida more felt than could understand the gloomy atmosphere of the house. And Alla's lace made her feel unhappy for the rest of the evening.

" Now go ! " Mme. Klimova cried. " Sing, charm every man on your path, choose the best one and marry him. Do not forget to invite me to your wedding ball."

" But I am engaged . . ." Lida began.

" You are still full of that nonsense ? " Mme. Klimova asked with indignation. " Lida, never have I expected that

from a girl of your class. That love story with a boy who is famous only because he is absent. . . . Who just simply does not do anything : neither a proposal, nor an engagement, nor any kind of arrangement. Who never gave a ring, never writes letters . . . one must be a lunatic to call this a love story. Meanwhile a real, flesh-and-blood Spanish Count lives in the same house . . . young, handsome . . . no, I simply cannot . . . I meet too much of lunacy on my way. But they say lunatics have their lucid intervals influenced by changes of the moon. . . . Pray, Lida, on one of those days only *look at Leon*. . . ."

"But," Lida said naively, "I see him quite clearly. I like him. And he proposed to me, but I refused."

"What . . .? *You what . . .?*"

"I refused, I said I loved Jimmy."

Mme. Klimova stared at Lida's face with a sharp hawk's glance : no, the girl was not lying.

"*One* word to you, Lida. Only *one* word more. *Ton* are a real communist, *you* are a born anarchist . . . *you* are one of those who destroy hierarchy and traditions . . . to refuse a *Count* . . . no, I cannot . . . my heart is too weak, I must not talk about that. But if I were your mother, I would throw you on your knees to repent and deplore your behaviour and pray for forgiveness before God. Why blame communism or Nazism or Jews when our *children* are the real cause of our ruin ? They do not want to carry on tradition. You . . . in one stroke you could re-establish the glory of your family . . . and you ? Oh, Lida, you fully deserve your fate . . . I wish you *would* marry that *Jimmy*"

On her way home Lida was mentally saying good-bye to Tientsin. The thought of her departure made her more observant. She went along the English Concession and wondered how much the town had changed since the Japanese invasion. The concession was overpopulated and those groups and crowds of people—never busy, never happy—gave the atmosphere of something unreal, as if the real life were going elsewhere and here were only a temporary halt, a rest room for actors, waiting for the new role Fate will make them play.

Even the proportions seemed different : houses lower, the wall surrounding them higher. Faces were blank, windows

curtained. The town had become the place of hiding, and did not seem to belong any more to the world of reality.

Mme. Manuilova announced that they would have a travelling companion—Mr. Rind, an American—who planned to visit Soviet Russia, and who was going to Harbin for his visa.

Mr. Rind was a traveller. At least he classified himself as such under the corresponding question in hotel registers. Mr. Rind was hardly ever asked personal questions. He belonged to that type of people who, being extremely curious themselves, yet manage not to arouse much interest in their own persons. In Mr. Rind's case, he was questioned in Tientsin only at the respective consulates where he went for visas, by the dentist who examined his molar, and by Mr. Lang, who tried to make Mr. Rind's left shoe fit perfectly. The total information thus compiled showed that Mr. Rind was a traveller, of medium height, of moderate weight, with passably good teeth and a funny salient bone near the big toe of his left foot. Of course, Mr. Rind was more than all that, but Tientsin accepted his existence as a *status quo*. Rinds have to exist either as a cause for something coming or as a sequel to something past.

If he said he was a traveller, perhaps he was one. Why not believe so simple a statement? Why doubt and suspect anything that anybody says anywhere? Credulity saves time.

Thus Mr. Rind was a traveller.

The principal types of travellers fall into two quantitatively equal groups: those who come to teach and those who come to learn. In between are purely philanthropic souls who travel only in order to let themselves be admired, usually free. Others expose their achievements to the public gaze only for money—as animal circuses, whose charm is always appealing, and ballet troupes, whose fascination does not work straight away and usually has to be explained. Then there are single travellers who trot around the globe on foot, on a bike, on scooters—on what-not, and try to pay for that what-not out of the pockets of the natives. Then there are travelling geniuses, single, or with a wife or two, but without children, for geni, we were told, bear no fruit. Then there are female travellers, with reasons and a logic all their own. To say nothing of commercial travellers.

Mr. Rind—pronouncedly—*did not* belong to any of these

groups. He travelled single. He was welcome, for he knew when to appear and when to disappear at his best.

Under nationality, Mr. Rind wrote "American," meaning he came from the United States. But he could be of any nationality as well, for there was in him no peculiar trait which would suggest his being this or that. He had no salient point on which to hook somebody's idle curiosity, nothing too characteristic or strange. One meets such gentlemen daily. They are usually gray, rather than blond or dark. Well-shaven. They wear decent clothes—if not altogether new, then well-pressed, and absolutely clean shirts. If they wear spectacles, the glasses are of a smoky-blue tinge. In any circumstances their nails are clean and cut short, although nobody ever had seen them with scissors. They do several good deeds per day, although always on a rather smallish scale : candies to children, cigarettes to soldiers, ten cents to beggars, polite words to old ladies, but always *nothing* to newspapermen.

All this being external, one had no clue to Mr. Rind's inner self> which he kept hidden with rather unusual care.

10

THE three days' trip to Harbin was a fascinating experience to Lida. Mme. Manuilova and she travelled second-class, Mr. Rind in first-class.

Neither Mr. Rind nor Lida recognised the other when Mme. Manuilovzl introduced them, and no references were made to the rummage sale. Lida looked differently now. Only her overcoat was old, all the rest of her attire was new,, elegant, and becoming. The best traits of her race and breeding stood forth readily against the background of a fine tailored suit. One could instantly see she was tall, slender; she moved with grace ; her eyes were a beautiful mixture of grey and blue, the blue scarcely distinguishable ; her hair, gold and silver ; her complexion, although pale, had the pink foundation of health ; it was the tenderness of her youth that made Lida look fragile. Mrs. Brown's beautiful jade brooch and Jimmy's watch on Lida's wrist added the final touches and made her look what she was not—a rich and care-free girl.

She was in a state of glorious excitement. The melancholic grandeur of the Chinese landscape slowly unrolled past the tain windows. Seen through Lida's young eyes it acquired the fascination of beautiful pastels. The hills, the plains, the humble villages under a brooding colourless sky, lit by the cool wintry sun, had for her the vague magic of a prelude, of the first page of a book unread, of a story untold.

Mr. Rind spent most of his time with his new companions. They had meals together and Lida's enjoyment of things astonished him.

"To begin a day with a cup of coffee!" And she would look into her cup with admiring eyes.

"Oranges?" she would say. "At breakfast? Let us save them for dessert after dinner."

When Mr. Rind said that oranges were not meant as a dessert but as food, for they had vitamin G. . . .

"Oh, it is a joke," she would answer. "I do not believe it, they are too expensive to be eaten as regular food."

Oranges and the like were a "luxury" for her and her enjoyment of them was touching to see. She saved the candies Mr. Rind gave her and then confessed:

"They will be a present for my friends the Platovs with whom I shall stay at Harbin. And these I shall keep for Mother."

"Does your mother like them?"

"I do not know. I have never seen her eating candies. We never buy them. But once we had chocolate and Mother liked it."

Lida was never tired, or nervous, or bitter, or envious. She never complained. She told Mr. Rind about the Family, some of them in Soviet Russia, and a little cousin Dima in England, adopted by Mrs. Parrish, a rich English lady.

"Of course, one does not give children away like that. But Dima needed better food than we could afford. When I happen to worry about him I start imagining him enjoying the plenitude . . . eating eggs in the morning, perhaps bacon too—why not, if people can afford it?—and milk, and coffee. . . ." She sighed, for she shared a love for coffee with all the rest of the womenfolk in her family.

"And Peter. . . ." She sighed again. "I loved my two cousins, I grew up with them. My mother loved all of us equally, and we had Granny. . . . Peter left us willingly. He could

not stand exile. Having no passport, no work, he left us and went back to Russia. . . ."

"Went?"

"Yes, went, on foot."

"On foot?"

"Yes. Why not? The General with Maps, Mme. Klimova's husband, did it on foot—from Petrograd to Vladivostok, and all the time fighting against Reds. . . . He just retreated and retreated, occasionally giving a battle . . . and crossed two continents . . . it took four years. . . ."

"Did he hate the Communists that much?"

"He? Not at all. Military people do not fight because they *hate*. No, they often *admire* their enemies."

"Well, well," Mr. Rind would say, "then why could not they come to some decision peacefully? Why kill each other?"

"They do not know why. This seems to be a puzzle. Actually all people are good. Cruel people must be a rare exception, for I have never met one . . . I mean one who would be cruel on his own choice."

She told about Jimmy too. And again the story of her great love seemed strangely plain, a tale without a plot. The fact that there had been no letters for the last few weeks did not improve it, offering no climax at all.

Meanwhile they crossed Manchuria, the country recently subjugated by Japan. The "Rising Sun" flag waved greetings (or was it a threat?) from the roof of every official building. That "sun" seemed too bright for the occasion, too suggestive of the blood poured out so recendy on that very soil, under that flag. There was something unquiet in the air, and the sound of a funeral flute was the only voice rising from the landscape. It was always the same flute—day and night—the same melody, the same desolation, as if it were not played by somebody, but rose by itself, the breath of the mourning earth.

Poverty, dejection, decrepitude—in everything: in the low huts of the villages, in the shabbiness of clothes, in the ill-health and degeneration of human flesh. They made the eyes sore and the heart heavy.

The passengers were not those of the past times. In addition to their general appearance of poverty, fear, and anxiety, they had a look of hopelessness in their eyes. The Chinese scarcely spoke at all. The Japanese kept smiling and bowing low to those

who belonged to the ruling military classes. The Russians were restless and noisy, but the appearance of one Japanese officer would make them silent. The whites had not yet worked out a submissive attitude toward their yellow rulers, and the appearance of one of them was felt afresh as an almost unbelievable humiliation. And the Japanese—always unpleasantly self-conscious among alien people—were also, though invariably arrogant and cruel, not very sure of themselves, as if expecting a sudden blow from behind.

The beautiful, well-dressed Lida seemed so much an exception that, as she told Mr. Rind, she was taken for a foreigner by the other Russians.

"Until I began to speak, of course," Lida added, "for it is almost impossible to meet a foreigner with a good knowledge of Russian."

This was true. In spite of months of study, Mr. Rind could not boast of success. He could ask for necessary things, he would, sometimes, understand the answer, but his articulation had nothing in common with Russian speaking voices.

On the second day, they saw a group of queer people at a wayside railway station.

There were several men, dark-haired, swarthy-skinned, loud-voiced, much gesticulating. Several women among them, although wearing European clothes, looked decidedly Oriental. All were talking and shouting, as if in a fury or despair. This avalanche of gesture and sound was poured forth on to a lone woman who stood in the midst with three small frightened boys clinging to her. She was evidently of their race, and her children were dark and curly-headed, like the rest of them.

Mr. Rind immediately wanted to know whether that lone woman was in danger and what she had done to bring upon herself the boiling wrath of so many people. Lida—anxious too—did not understand their language, but she jumped down from the train and rushed to stand defiantly beside that woman, who was so small, so dark, so appealing, with her face half-hidden by a black shawl, wrapped around her head and shoulders.

The sight of Lida's timid bravery stirred Mr. Rind's memory. He had an obscure recollection of having watched that scene before. It was Lida of the rummage sale, only the dim recollection did not clearly enough identify the girl.

Lida presently came back to him with the story. Those

people were Armenians. The lonely woman was a widow. She had eleven children—eight girls and three boys—and could not feed them. This community of Armenians, all poor too, had collected money for twelve tickets to Shanghai, in the hope that the Armenians were richer there and would help. Their guess failed, she could not find an adequate help in Shanghai and so she had given all the eight girls to the Roman Catholic nunnery there. She had just returned to tell the Armenian community what she had done, and that was the cause of the present upheaval.

Mr. Rind failed to understand why such a seemingly happy solution should bring forth so much of siege and cannonade.

"Mr. Rind," Lida said reproachfully, "Armenians are of the *Gregorian Church*, and now her eight daughters will be *Roman Catholic*. It is hard on them."

Here one of the Armenian women, her face streaked with tears, approached them and spoke to Lida in Russian :

"We do not want that woman back. . . . We must not give shelter to a traitor. Our fathers knew how to die for their religion. For centuries we lived as martyrs under the Turks . . . we did not turn Moslems. . . . We keep alive only if they let us be ourselves, otherwise we fight and die. Almost every one of us had martyrs for faith or freedom among our forefathers. . . . Why should not she ?"

And with new energy she turned again upon the small, black, silent widow and her trembling boys.

"Mr. Rind," Lida cried, entering his compartment later in the evening, "Mr. Rind, do you know *what* happened ? That Armenian widow is on the train again. . . . She had no house of her own to go to and they did not want to take her to theirs . . . so they bought her and her three boys four tickets and now she is on her way again."

"Where is she going ?" Lida's eagerness was so contagious that Mr. Rind felt much concerned with the widow's destiny too.

"She is going to Harbin. There are some Armenians there and perhaps she will find help. . . ."

"Well . . ." Mr. Rind said.

"She is in a third-class compartment . . . I am going there again. . . . She speaks Russian a little. . . ."

And Lida left the car.

When she was late for supper, Mr. Rind decided to go and look for her. He found her in an overcrowded third-class car. She was sitting beside the black-clad widow, two dark boys were sitting in a row close to them, and on Lida's knee was cuddling the small curly-headed child. He clung to Lida, and she, embracing him with one hand, held in the other her box of mints and in turn offered them to the widow and the boys. The two older boys ate the candies with such mournful looks, with such a bitter determination, that—although Mr. Rind knew about all the sorrow which had befallen that family—he found the picture of them now a rather comical one.

II

AMONG the many ways of making people¹ die on a large scale, economic pressure is, perhaps, the best. If not the quickest, it remains the surest. Decently worded as a sonorous slogan, it can be no less effective, while so much less expensive, than a war. And it is not dangerous as an undertaking, for victims fall on only *one* side of the frontier. Manchuria was given both—war and economic pressure—under the sympathising but reconciled eyes of the rest of the world.

The White Russians in Manchuria were doomed to that inglorious end. Here was a civilisation actually declining, but somehow it failed to attract much attention. Humanity lost the chance to conduct a valuable autopsy. Possible causes of the fall of the old Russian ideology were not defined and no real remedy was suggested. Personal experience is apparently more welcome than a warning.

The Russians of Manchuria, who had built Harbin forty-five years ago, were now invited to clear the stage and to do it quickly. Restrictions on all possible jobs and professions soon narrowed their means of earning to almost nothing, "To be or not to fee" became a daily question, a guess answered this way or that way only in the evening, when the day was gone and one found himself still alive.

Not long ago these Russians were useful and active citizens of their native country; now they had turned into everybody's nuisance abroad. As the non-conformists to the communist

regime, they had either to die or to run away. They chose the second and sometimes regretted the choice, for, whatever people say, no country is very eager to welcome refugees.

Only a few Russian refugees were lucky enough to find jobs in their previous professions. The bigger part of them had to depend purely on their capacity for invention and adaptation. Those who succeeded were lucky too. The rest depended on nothing, except charity. These instantly started the process of dying out or of moral degeneration, which—thanks to poverty—is the same as dying out, only in a slower and more painful way.

But the chief distress of the Russian refugees in Manchuria was the complicated political situation. Soviet Russia was their persecutor ; Japan, their trap ; China, an indifferent witness. The lives of many depended on the current relations between Soviets and Japan, the refugees being plotted against between those two and paying with their lives for the successes and failures of both sides.

Yet Harbin remained a vigorous town—with churches, with schools, hospitals, theatres, music, libraries—all kept by Russians, for love of *culture* dies last in a cultivated person.

Lida's train came to Harbin early in the morning. It was cold. The sky was of the same tender, celestial blue as it was on that "second day," coming out of the hands of its Creator. Small, puffy clouds resembled balls of cotton carelessly dropped from somewhere above. Here and there on the ground lay patches of the snow, disintegrating, under the sun rays, into glistening crystals.

The bustle and noise were Oriental. But dominating all the turmoil of the railway station, voices of the people, hoots and whistles and honks, were heard the solemn and majestic sounds of the heavy church bells. A heavy chorus of copper voices. Then suddenly, at intervals, the merry and hurried peal of smaller silver church bells would rush in, trying to overrun each other in gay, breath-taking haste, as if they had been told exciting news and could not help crying it to mankind at the top of their silvery voices. But the big copper bells would not stand the interruption for long. They paused, took in air, and then drowned the rest of the world in the flowing Waves of deep-basso humming sounds.

It was a Sunday.

There is a peculiar charm in the social life of the small provincial towns, which cannot be experienced anywhere else.

The big towns are but deceiving friends and poor teachers. The quick throbbing of a big town's heart makes feelings feverish and quick to pass. The ever-changing whims make the past ridiculous and the present shallow. One's life is chopped into a hash and one continually needs some spice to divert the suspicion that the hash is not tasty.

But life is *wine* in smaller provincial towns, the slow wine of the grapes of wisdom. One lives there more at leisure, with greater understanding and gusto. Things to come are foreseen, anticipated or apprehended—and *discussed*. Things gone are brooded upon, weighed, dissected—and again *discussed*. Everybody is genuinely interested in anybody else, the rise and fall of fortunes, careers, loves, reputations are everybody's concern. There is nothing of that hasty indifference with which people are met and forgotten in big towns. There can be no better school of life than a provincial town, like Harbin.

In 1938 Harbin was poor, subjugated, but struggling. It was noisy, quarrelling, optimistic, artistic—in short, human. At the top of commerce still stood two or three families who had had no cash for the last ten years. There were one or two philanthropists who had given their last help twenty-five years ago. Yearly there would rise a local beauty and—marrying a foreigner—she would blow away. There were always musicians and artists struggling for a ticket abroad and—in a little while—being heard on the radio from the capitals of the world. There were inventors, swindlers, men of science, men of wickedness, the local genius, the town fool, the local prophet, the town poet, the lady kleptomaniac, the best liar, the saindiest saint, the blackest sinner—all gradations of human virtue and vice. Story-telling, diary-keeping, memoir-writing, annals-composing, archives preserving—all were going full swing at Harbin.

Mr. Rind went to the best hotel where he took two rooms. Mme. Manuilova went to the same hotel, but took the cheapest room. Lida went to stay with the Platovs.

12

" GOME HERE, every one ! Look ! Only *look* ! She is a *beauty* \ " Thus Lid a was introduced to the Plato vs.

Glafira, the eldest daughter, met her at the station, and they went on foot to the small wooden house in Mo-diagow, where the poorer Russians of Harbin were usually to be found.

With Vladimir in Shanghai, there were only five young Platovs at home. They all rushed forward to greet Lida, and Mme. Platova emerged from the kitchen, with a benign smile, in a halo of vapours and smells.

Looking at them one would hardly think they were *one* family, so different were they in appearance, character, and bearing. Glafira was full of life, and courage, and laughter. Galina was silent and timid. Mushka—eight years old—was a puffy and pale little girl, with eyes always astonished, always ready to feel offended and to weep a little. The boys looked differently too : Grisha—golden-haired and freckled—a smiling optimist, busy and helpful ; Kostik—with the curly dishevelled head of a dreamer, always diligently and silently busy, having in him an obstinate urge to build, typical of an inventor. The trait they had in common was a peculiar intensity of life, though differently centred in each separate case.

Their welcome to Lida was most cordial, and she instantly felt at home. Quick friendship sprang up between her and Glafira.

Never afterward could Lida remember in detail how the house looked, for instantly she became busy, absorbed by the Platovs' life. Of course, the house was poor, even the necessary comforts lacking, but filled with the stream of young life and eagerness it seemed as cosy, cheerful, and even poetical, as a nest, for which appearances do not matter.

A " corner " was prepared and waiting for Lida. A narrow bed, an icon at its head, a postcard showing mild spring flowers pinned on the wall, a chair—and the Platovs were proud to show Lida " her place."

The climax of the Platov day was when Father came home. Once a rich fur dealer, he now filled the humble position of

manager of a store selling cheap furs. His work was hard, badly paid, and dangerous for his health. Furs brought from Mongolia were sometimes infected with anthrax, and that illness usually proved fatal. Thus the closing hour of an exhausting work day was always a blessed moment for Mr. Platov.

Stooped, clad in a shabby coat, smelling of hides and furs, he would trot home. And once across his own threshold, he became the important, adored, and admired head of a family.

His arrival was always waited for, and a ritual of welcome established.

His pet, Glafira, helped him to wash and change. A small closet was arranged for that purpose. As there was no running water in the house, she would bring him a big jar of pleasantly warm water, soap, a towel, a clean shirt, his robe. She would stand behind the curtain, on her guard, in case Father should need something else. Meanwhile she would tell him about the happenings in the house during his absence, for things always keep happening in big families.

Galina would noiselessly move chairs to the dining-table, and the boys would bring dishes. Mushka, with Father's slippers, would approach the closet and push them under the curtain.

He would come out another man : fresher, younger, but with an air of grave dignity, which he rarely had outside of his home.

The supper menu was always a secret but there were never unsuccessful or untasty meals at the Platov table. Everything always succeeded in that kitchen. If there were no sugar or not enough butter, there was always Mme. Platova's gift of invention and make-believe. The other Platovs did the rest, for all of th[^]m were always hungry.

Mme. Platova would approach the table grandly, with a steaming pot in her hands, and say solemnly :

" A soup. With potatoes *and* carrots."

And the soup would eagerly steam forth its smell of potatoes *and* carrots. It would like to smell of meat, and cream, but it cannot. Still it was always enjoyed, for however different the Platovs were in appearance, they had one common trait—they possessed the gift of appreciation of what they had.

A soup !

Soup is one of the greatest human inventions. Hot, steaming, on wintry days it saves much of human health. It is a symbol

of domesticity, honesty, stability, dignity, and integrity. Spoiled people never eat soup. They like fancy things. Rich people do not like soups, they have more refined things to eat. Lazy women never make soup, for it takes care and attention. Ambitious cooks would not waste time on a soup, for it is not ornamental. Good, honest mothers are always on the soup's side.

Consider its varieties as to the thickness, ingredients, modes of serving. One can put in meat, or fish, of course, or vegetables—one by one, or all together. One can put there bread, milk, butter. Even a chicken. Some say—even a turtle, but those are "rumours." But what you have in your house, of course, you can put into your soup, or else you can put there nothing—every time you will have a new, pleasant variety, to keep warm, to feel full, to be healthy.

There is only one substitute giving the same warmth and energy—wine. Given the choice, one had better take soup. The Platov family did, and they never regretted it.

Pieces of sugar, slices of bread, portions of milk—all was counted in that house. Father and Mushka, the oldest and the youngest, had the *best* pieces, the two boys the *biggest*, the girls had the rest, but Mother was not hungry because, if one would believe her words, she had eaten while preparing food. Food was counted, that is, except soup. One could have two plates of it, or even three, with no damage to the pocket-book, for by adding some boiling water when preparing it, one could augment the soup's quantity indefinitely.

Father, sitting at the head of the table, would cross himself and start eating. Then all would follow his example, and that first course would be eaten slowly, in silence.

Surprises would begin usually at the second course, for which "happenings" were served. And the third course was tea. Sometimes that second course would be a piece of meat, which "happened," or a piece of pie which "happened" to be sent in by a lady living in the next house, or some fish when a friend would catch it in the Sungari River, but if nothing "happened," then tea would follow the soup immediately.

Tea was the most important, interesting event of the day. It meant relaxation. The first cup was given to the father. His teacup was an old one, brought from Russia, good pre-war porcelain. It was big, generous-bellied, and there was an inscription in big golden letters which read, "Please, one more."

The last golden letter had disappeared from the surface no less than five years ago, but the Platovs not only could still read the inscription but also showed it to visitors : " Look ! Old orthography." At the same time Mushka would bring him his books. They were two—Pushkin's poems and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Mr. Platov never condescended to read any other book.

The rest of the family kept busy with small jobs—mending, writing, washing, knitting—but always attracted by the samovar, they would approach the table and pour one more cup of tea. The samovar was old, from Russia too, from the very place where the best samovars were made, from Tula. It could sing. Its voice was small and piercing, at times, and timid—at other times brazenly boastful. On what this depended, it would be hard to find out : was it the quality of the charcoal, or the occasional currents of air between the pieces of coal—who knows ? That samovar had so many melodies that an average symphony orchestra would be smitten with envy. Listening to those sounds, the lather could forecast the weather, the mother knew how her family felt, as if the samovar voiced their common mood.

If the samovar stopped singing, Galina would silently bring more charcoal. This was enough for inspiration. Real artists are easily started on a new burst of effort. If somebody's hands grew cold or numb, one had only to put them to the samovar's side. There was no end to the small services which the samovar obligingly discharged for Platov's family.

Occasionally somebody would start a " celestial travelling." Although there was no special ritual for its beginning, every one recogriused it the minute it had been started.

A typical " celestial travelling " would begin like this.

Glafira, mending a sock, would suddenly halt and, looking at the hole, would say musingly :

" How strange ! The hole is just like South America."

" South America ? " Grisha would raise his head from his book. " They have summer there right now."

" Summer ? It depends *where* ... if nearer to the South Pole. ... " And Kostik would be busy with the map.

" Mamma ! Why don't we *ever* go to South America ? " Mishka would ask in a voice trembling with apprehension that she was not being given *all* the best in the world.

" How would we get visas ? " All would speak now.

" That has been our mistake." Mme. Platova would poke her head out of the kitchen. " *First*-we looked for the visas and then went where the visas said to go, We must *first choose the country*, the one which suits- us well, and *then* try how grand we are at getting visas. . . ." And she would disappear again.

" It all depends on luck," Glafira would say gaily. " We might go, and live there happily, having our *own*, big house. ;.."

" And a garden," Galina's sigh would be heard.

" With trees ? Mamma ! With trees ? " Mushka would cry.

" What else ? " The father would put his book away. " A garden *means* trees. Good fruit trees. . . ."

" I will water them." This from Grisha.

" In my room," Galina would whisper almost inaudibly, " I should like to have white curtains and a pot of geraniums under the window. . . ."

" I will build an electric engine," Kostik would say in a businesslike tone, " water, light, electric fan, refrigerator, radio."

" The radio must be in the farther part of the house "— Mme. Platova was again on the threshold. " Remember, Father *needs rest*. . . ."

" Well," Father would say placidly, " sometimes. . . ."

" But Father will *not* work," and Glafira's voice would sound almost indignant. " What is the *use* of going there then . . . ? *No !* He would take a drive in his carriage . . . and then rest . . ."

" Mamma, Mamma, what is the name of the horse ? They never told *me*. . . ." And tears would make Mushka's voice tremble.

" Valparaiso," Kostik would say in a basso.

" But I want a kitten," Mushka would cry.

" And I want a dog," Grisha would answer.

" You may have them, you may have them." Father would be all generosity.

" And also an ass. . . ."

" Only not near *my* window . . ."

Mme. Platova would enter the room with a decisive step and say almost angrily :

" Stop it ! There is nothing better than a *cow* in the family. . . . *A cow we buy first. . . .*"

In this family Lida was to spend the six weeks of her visit to Harbin.

13

MR. RIND'S first move was to go to the Soviet Consulate for a visa and permission to stay in one or two places while crossing the U.S.S.R.

" Can you speak Russian at all ? " the Consul asked him in English.

" Almost not at all," Mr. Rind confessed. " I studied it at Tientsin and I have Russian friends, but I did not make much progress with the language. I can ask some questions and understand answers, if spoken in simple words, but that is all."

" What newspapers have you read here in Harbin ? "

Mr. Rind said that he had read none. Being unable to read Russian, Chinese, or Japanese, he depended on English, but they took a month to come from Europe or America. Could the Consul recommend somebody with a fine knowledge of English, Russian, and Chinese to help him read the papers ?

" Well," the Consul said readily, " I will be glad to help you. There is nobody on the staff free now . . . but I can send someone. . . ."

Only then did Mr. Rind realise that he had invited a communist into his service, and that perhaps the Consul had his own reasons for being so ready to help ; perhaps he wanted to know more about Mr. Rind while waiting for Moscow to approve granting him a visa.

But to refuse now would not be civil.

" And after all *what* am I afraid of ? " Mr. Rind braced himself with this question. " I am not connected with any political party. I am not prejudiced. I am ready to visit the country, to see it and then *honestly* to build my opinion of it."

Still his anxiety grew and grew until it became out of any proportion to the fact. Even his dreams were disturbed that night. He saw a huge man with a mass of tangled hair on a heavy head, with long drooping moustaches and an unkempt black beard. They had a quarrel. The man clenched his fist and beat the table. Mr. Rind tried to persuade him by cold reason and superior reserved manners. But the man only rolled his small, black, and fierce eyes, stamped his foot, and said :

" Ha ! " Neither of them had any clear idea what the quarrel was about, still they quarrelled. Mr. Rindfelt rather than knew that *he* was right and the man was wrong. Suddenly the man seized a chair and began to smash things with it. *These things were Mr. Rind's.* It was an outrage. Full of indignation Mr. Rind woke up.

The first thing to do is to decline the Consul's offer, he decided.

At the same moment the door opened and the Chinese waiter entered with his morning tea. On the tray was also a letter in which the Consul wrote that the person in question was due at the hotel at ten o'clock.

This left no way to a decent retreat and Mr. Rind decided mournfully to bear it.

He thought : *In a day or two I shall say I have got all the instruction I need, and we can part . . .*

Yet his morning was spoiled.

A communist, he thought. *More, a triumphant communist! Interpreting current events. . . . Will he be polite and self-restrained? Or will he try his propaganda and tricks on me?*

And the vague recollection of his nightmare dimmed his eyes.

Perhaps he is not a teacher . . . but just a bandit . . . perhaps, with blood on his hands. . . .

At ten o'clock there was a knock at the door.

Here's the scoundrel now . . . Mr. Rind thought and he added aloud ;

" Come in."

The door opened and a girl stepped in timidly. She was almost a child. Her round and pale face, bobbed hair, her grey eyes, clear and naive, her white blouse and black skirt—of the cheapest cotton—her heavy shoes, made her look a child from an orphanage. A life of poverty and privation was pathetically stamped on every detail of her appearance and clothing. There was a light in her eyes, the kind of light one sees in the eyes of a devoted dog, cruelly treated, or a tame bird, or a child in a long illness—it was resignation, credulity, and hope.

Mr. Rind gasped.

" How do you do," he said, and introduced himself.

In a melodious voice she said that she was—her official name—Comrade Dasha, that she knew Russian and English well, that she could speak fluently the local Chinese dialect

and read newspapers, but that the books of Chinese classics were beyond her knowledge.

This latter could have been an excuse for sending her away, but Mr. Rind did not catch it.

Was it the contrast to what he had been expecting, was it the light in her eyes, or was it her pathetic incongruity with the idea of a triumphant communism—Mr. Rind did not know. He only felt that when she entered his room she entered his heart too, for the door of his heart stood open for her to enter. Without reason, he instantly felt a deep tenderness toward the girl, a kind of blind, pitying affection. She had all of that mysterious charm which is denied to all except children, flowers, and birds. It is their peculiar detachment from the common cares and the established values. Never had he experienced such sudden surrender before the timid eyes of an unfortunate child, a willing surrender and a vague feeling of guilt, and a poignant desire to protect, to make happier, to see a smile in her eyes.

"Please sit down," he said gently.

Mr. Rind opened the newspapers. He explained his requirements.

Comrade Dasha first read the article quickly for herself and then described its contents to Mr. Rind. It was evident at once that she was a well-trained translator. She immediately grasped the essentials, explained the leading idea, and always used the most accurate words. Her mind was simple, clear, and logical, devoid of deviations.

When Mr. Rind expressed his pleasure and praise she looked at him with grateful eyes. She said she had received her education in a special school which prepared young people for future work in foreign countries. She had been trained in Chinese, and she had been looking forward to living and working in China.

"What kind of work?" Mr. Rind asked.

"Propaganda," she said simply.

Here a noise rising from the street outside attracted their attention.

"What can that be?" Mr. Rind asked, as they went to the window.

"A Chinese procession," Dasha said.

An immense crowd was moving slowly along the street.

Chinamen clad in rags. Some of them were carrying banners, poles on which were fastened broad strips of cloth with the inscriptions in huge Chinese characters. From time to time, as though at a signal, they would stop, wave their banners, and shout fiercely in unison

"This is a political demonstration," Dasha said. "They are in favour of Japan and the New Order."

"Do the Chinese like it?"

"Those people?" And Dasha pointed her finger in the direction of the pavement. "They are hired. They have no political knowledge at all. They cannot read their banners, and they do not care. You can hire them for anything. Such people are easy tools in any hands."

They watched the procession silently for a while.

"Let's go down where we can see closer," Dasha said.

On the street, in her cheap and ugly coat and beret, Dasha looked even more like a child from a charity institution; she wore only things which sheer necessity obliged her to wear, and even those were of the cheapest, though practical, quality. Mr. Rind, tall and even elegant in his coat, made a queer-looking companion to Dasha.

The street was blocked with the procession on the pavement and the curious onlookers on the sidewalks. It was almost impossible to move.

"You wait here," Dasha said, "I shall go and look closer at the inscriptions and ask people what it is."

She plunged into the slowly moving crowd and disappeared. Presently she reappeared, exhausted, her beret in her hands.

"Gratitude to Japan, for release and freedom.⁴ It is the municipal council whg pays."

"Pays what?" Mr. Rind asked.

"Money," Dasha said simply. "All those in the procession are hired at ten cents per man, to march from the bank of the river to the Green Market, that is across the towri. They have to stop four times, before official buildings, and cry there the slogan for fifteen minutes each time. For every hundred Chinese there is one leader—a Japanese—who is responsible for seeing that photographs are taken at the right moment. It is also he who sees that the terms are kept."

"But why is Japan ddmg it?"

"Building up a public opinion—in Japan and abroad. The

photos will be sent everywhere to show how glad Chinese are to have the New Order in Asia."

Suddenly the procession stopped. Cries of indignation filled the air. Again Dasha plunged into the crowd.

Soon Dasha reappeared again.

"They are asking for a tip," she said, "or else they won't move any farther. They ask five cents extra per man, but the leaders only offer two."⁵⁵

The noise grew stronger. Some of the marchers began to tear away the strips with inscriptions and throw down the poles. They seemed wild with rage, and Mr. Rind asked Dasha if they would not be safer in the hotel.

"Oh, no!" Dasha laughed. "They are not angry at all. It is only a show."⁵⁵

A loud shout rose from the head of the procession. Hastily the Chinamen took up their poles and banners again. They were grinning contentedly. Raising their voices in a hearty slogan-cry, they began to move.

"Finally they agreed on three cents extra per man," said Dasha.

14

MR. RIND began his acquaintance with Harbin society at parties. The first party he attended was given by the Pitchers. It produced upon him a quaint impression.

The house was big and comfortable, even luxurious. The Chinese servants were many. Clad in silk robes, they moved about noiselessly like shadows.

Mr. Pitcher was a long and solemn gentleman across whom one could almost see written "Made in England,"⁵⁵ and then—in smaller letters underneath—"pre-war production."⁵⁵ He never spoke. The only two words he had been heard to utter during the last ten years were "of course."⁵⁵ But even those he did not say the way everybody else would. No, he would not take the trouble to open his mouth. He squeezed them from between his teeth. His teeth were mostly gold, of first-class workmanship.

His wife was a Russian by birth, of good breeding, of cool manners, of intelligent and polite speech, full of tact, always

properly and modestly dressed. Strangely enough, all those accomplishments made her an almost comical figure in modern society,

Both Pitchers' presence produced the effect of a cold shower offered precisely at the moment when one is longing for a bit of warmth.

The guests were many and queer too.

There was a voluble Italian gentleman, Mr. Capella, dark and restless, who interrupted every conversation. There was a lady with prominent black eyebrows and moustaches. She was of an enigmatic nationality. The fact that she spoke well any language in which she was addressed proved that she could not be either English or American, or French, or German, or Italian. Only Russians and Chinese can show such great linguistic capacities in Manchuria, yet Chinese she could not be, and being Russian she denied. The lady wore real diamonds and they made her look suspicious.

There was a Swedish traveller who had been everywhere, and a Jewish journalist who knew everything. There was a Norwegian missionary who was not a Norwegian at all, for his mother was Dutch and his father a Belgian. There was a plump German doctor who laughed continuously and his lifeless wife, looking old enough to be his mother and clad more shabbily than would be decent for his servant. There were several young ladies, very fashionable-looking indeed—all breasts and legs, and faces lit with pointless smiles.

But the star of the evening was Miss Clark. She was there with her father, a benevolent American gentleman.

Miss Eva Clark was tall, slim, over-*elegant*, and too noisy. She was the flower and the fruit of the latest work in progressive education. All the newest and most startling discoveries in the fields of heredity, free will, subconscious, self-expression, and everything else Mr. Freud wrote about were applied to Miss Eva Clark's development. The only aim of that costly process had been to keep her happy, and to Mr. Clark's great astonishment, she never was, for the pursuit of happiness is a heavy race. Happiness *is* so quick to go.

Miss Clark lived in luxury and she, herself, became an item of luxury. She was like a wonderfully cut diamond, which is radiant if light is thrown upon it, but when put to trial by fire turns into coal, a pinch of simplest soot of no value at all.

She was sumptuously dressed and adorned with jewellery. Her face was deformed by her make-up. Her eyebrows were comically long and thin, her cheekbones were grotesquely red, her lips were like two parts of an orange, and the deep blue shadows under her eyes were quite incongruous with the freshness of her skin. Miss Clark had done everything in order to mar the gentle loveliness of her youth. And yet she was still lovely, for nothing could disguise the fact that Nature had intended her to be a simple, nice, and sweet girl of twenty-three.

Miss Clark filled the house with her chatter and movements, and she made every one around her feel unquiet. She took for granted that the party, the guests, and all the world were created and brought together with the single aim to look funny and to amuse Miss Clark.

In a smaller room aside, in a corner, three gentlemen were sitting, forming a united and animated group. One of them, with a tanned face, big black eyes, and black hair—on the whole very distinguished and attractive—was speaking. He spoke with heat, with pain, with passion. From time to time he made a desperate gesture, as if he were delivering a valedictory before an open tomb. Then the second gentleman would pat him with his hand and say something in a low, melodious voice. This second gentleman was quite remarkable. His long oval face, framed by long dark hair and a long narrow beard, was pale, almost transparent. It was an ascetic fact. His eyes, big, grey-greenish in colour, were luminous and gave forth rays of light. Yet the gentleman produced the impression of being blind to the world around him. It was as though he were living somewhere whither nobody else could follow him, looking past things and through them, sweeping from the field of vision all that was usually to be seen. He had hands of extreme nobleness and beauty—serene and lofty, sad and wise.

The third gentleman said nothing. His face was repulsive—round, coarse, with a short pug nose. He looked like Socrates, but, of course, nowadays people like that can expect to go unidentified. This gentleman was clad not only very shabbily, but also slovenly. He was almost in rags. Yet he sat with perfect ease and poise, attentively listening to the conversation.

The hostess approached this small group, all Russians and men of science, and introduced Mr. Rind.

Mr. Petrov, the doctor of physics, continued his speech in

the same passionate manner, only "out of courtesy toward Mr. Rind he now spoke in English.

"What is my position now?" he asked bitterly. "The base of my science is shaken. Since I accept the principle that there is no division between matter and space, physics as an exact science no more exists. The laws of Newton are no longer true. That beauty, that divine law of gravitation, is ruined. . . . And electricity? Light? What do we know about light? Nothing for sure. . . ." And he made a tragic gesture and nodded his head.

Professor Voloshin, the gentleman with the ascetic face and luminous eyes, patted his hand gently.

"And chemistry?" Professor Petrov said with increased bitterness in his voice. "We do not even now know exactly what water is, for it is not H_2O any more. Science is betraying us. We do not know the simplest things which we use daily. What is a telephone? We based our teaching on its being made of metal. But one fool made it of wood—and it worked. According to its theory in science it *must not work*, yet it does. It is mocking us. The vulgar practice is defying the noblest theory, the sacred principles of science. . . ." And in despair he gloomily lowered Ijis head.

"I put it on moral grounds," he began again. "Have I a moral right to go on teaching physics at universities when I know that there is no sure science in it any more? It still contains many serviceable hypotheses, but in time those may prove to be wrong too. What is my duty? To go on with those fragments of doubtful theories or openly declare the bankruptcy of physics? Strictly, there is not much of natural science left "which could not be suspected of proving false. Somebody must take courage and announce it to the students. . . . We must not deceive our children."

All this astonished Mr. Rind.

"Sir," he said politely, "life's actual situations—I mean *practice*—must have the last word. Actual experience shows that the laws of physics and chemistry *do work*. They help mankind to make life richer, easier, more comfortable. Since we *have* water, and it serves all needed purposes, since it *does* turn into ice and always works in steam engines at the temperature we expect it, I do not understand your discouragement. Those doubts exist only in some minds, let us say in the very few minds

of our best scholars. They are of no importance to the daily life of mankind. Then why are you, sir, in such visible trouble about it ? "

" Sir," said Professor Petrov, " I am in despair, because it means the end of what we call our civilisation. You will reply that wars, famines, economic depressions, kill civilisation. But they are only the visible and logical sequences of those ideas in a few human minds. And my mind is one of them. In this, my mind, I now bear that germ of doubt which will grow, develop, propagate, infect the other minds and finally ruin civilisation for which we all worked and which is so dear to us all. . . . Faith, sir, faith and knowledge mean creation, doubt and ignorance mean destruction. When the ideas of my mind become the daily ideas of masses—our world will be in ruins. . . ."

" Then, perhaps," said Mr. Rind, " perhaps . . . you could abstain from making your ideas known. . . ."

" Sir," Professor Petrov said bitterly, " the truth has a fundamental quality—you cannot hide it for a long time. An idea, once born, is quite independent of what one wants to do with it. Better to be courageous and admit the basic fact : our civilisation is lost . . . the remnants of it, the material things, still exist if only through inertia of our ideas of them—all those machines, houses, books—but they are only the dying cells of a disintegrating dead body. . . . The soul of it is lost. . . ."

" What would you say to that ? " Mr. Rind asked Professor Voloshin.

The latter turned upon him his radiant eyes and said :

" I am a philosopher, a metaphysician. We have dealings with ideas, not with things. We have lost nothing."

" Sir," Mr. Rind asked again, " I have heard that you have been working for twenty years on a book about the immortality of human ideas and human souls. This subject, although so unusual, seems vital. May I ask you, are you not as disappointed in your work as is your worthy colleague in his ? "

" No," said Professor Voloshin, " I am not. The bankruptcy of science does not mean the end of faith. The Egyptian science, the Assyrian, the ancient Greek—they rose, then fell and were gone. People live on faith which is eternal. The vision of immortality is nearer to the human soul than ever before."

" Then what is your word on the coining disasters in terms of human soul ? "

"The people of ancient Egypt," said Professor Voloshin "were of a high and continuous civilisation. They sometimes had perfect glimpses of truth. They believed in resurrection of bodies, but they thought that only those bodies would be able to resume life which were conserved in their integrity of shape. Thus—mummification. That may be a symbol for the souls. Only those souls live and are able to go on living—whatever the conditions might be—which keep their integrity, and as long as they keep it. The disintegration leads to ruin and—in time—to death. Many of those whom people take for living are actually dead. The outward signs of life in the body do not prove that the soul is alive. The evidence of people moving or breathing or eating is not the evidence of the presence and activity of their inner, spiritual life. It is often only the mechanised inertia of processes, the metamorphosis of the spiritual into final material process. With spirit gradually dying out, those beings became subjugated exclusively to the laws of matter. They go to the lower planes of existence, as unanimated matter. This process is as old as creation, and, from this point of view, there is no novelty in the future.⁹"

He said all this in a serene tone, but a chill went up and down Mr. Rind's spine.

"But where is the evidence . . ." he began.

"'Evidence'?" bitterly exclaimed Professor Petrov. "About the 'evidence' you may ask our colleague, Professor Kremenetz. He knows what evidence is."

And Mr. Rind felt himself dismissed. He understood that while all this discussion had been only a matter of bewilderment to him, it had held some vital importance for those two. They evidently wanted to be left alone. As if understanding that, Professor Kremenetz arose and with perfect manners entertained Mr. Rind while piloting him into another room.

"Oh," he began lightly, "it is my colleagues' standing joke about me and evidence. Allow me to tell you this anecdote.

"I fled from Russia in 1921. I had absolutely no money. As my speciality is rather rare—Sanskrit—I could hope to find a situation only somewhere in a big university. I decided to go to Paris. But I had to earn something on my way there. In my youth I had spent years in India, studying Sanskrit. One of my friends there—a Yogi—taught me several tricks, as a joke. I decided to use one of those tricks as a means to earn my

living. The procedure was simple. In a village or a small town, somewhere in the market place I would spread on the ground a piece of carpet, sit down, take a cup, and chant a bit over it. As soon as a crowd had gathered, I would take a seed, pass it to be examined by the spectators, and then put it into the cup. Then I would chant again, with more zest, and made some mysterious gesture, never touching the cup. The seed would burst into shoots, then a stalk would grow out of it, higher and higher, in tune with my always accelerating chant and gesture. The stalk would grow about three feet high, it would burst out "its leaves and, finally, one bud. The bud would change into a single beautiful flower, fresh and fragrant, swaying gently before the eyes of my public. Then it would fade, the stalk would wither and curl, and soon nothing would remain, except only the seed in the cup. The performance would take about twenty minutes and it fed me all my way along."

This was most unusual, to say the least. Still Mr. Rind kept his mind logical.

"But," he said, "why do your colleagues make a joke of this? Why did they say that you know what *evidence* is?"

Professor Kremenetz looked at him with an odd flickering in his round and prominent eyes.

"Sir," he answered at last, "although the onlookers saw, and even sniffed the plant—*there was nothing*, except the cup and the seed."

Suddenly Mr. Rind felt tired. He moved away toward his hostess.

"Who are those three strange gentlemen?" he asked aloud. (*Qyacks? Charlatans?* he asked himself.)

"Professor Petrov has a European name in physics. Professor Voloshm is known only to a very small group of philosophers, and those worship him. He lives in Soviet Russia and is here on a short visit. Professor Kremenetz is an authority on Sanskrit."

Mr. Rind moved on but the conversations in other rooms seemed no less odd.

Mr. Clark, a business man, was interested in trying out some enterprises of his in Manchuria. A Chinese gentleman, an ex-captain of the Manchurian industry, had been invited to the party. Mr. Rind was introduced to them just as they began their business talk.

" My worthy sir," said the Chinese gentleman to Mr. Clark whose attention was on the alert. " My worthy sir," he repeated with a sudden intimacy in his tone, " before you start any commercial connection within the walls of this humble town I should like to draw your most esteemed attention to my private notions. Pray, take my poor-in spirit words in the most friendly confidence. As an old citizen of this modest town, I am extremely flattered to give you those proofs of my sincere friendship and good will. Knowledge is of great service? especially to the most honorable newcomers. In this country of many complicated relations a new man should be irrevocably at a great disadvantage, whatever his previous experience might be. . . . Too many, my worthy sir, too many alien interests blend in and partake in a simplest commercial business ..." and with a subtle smile he closed the narrow slits which he skilfully used as eyes.

Here a servant approached them offering a tray with refreshments. The Chinese gentleman with the utmost politeness and care helped Mr. Rind to the nicest bits. ' He bowed. He smiled. He was all shining. His bronzed round face, his oiled, mirroring black hair, his silken dark purple robe—all exuded a vibrating sheen, disquieting and even hostile, while his manners were suave.

Seeing Mr. Clark's eyes engrossed with questions, he began again.

" My worthy sir," he said, " let us continue our friendly discussion of the well-known topic. There is a humble proverb of ours : ' The truthful words are never pleasant ; the pleasant words are never truthful.' I am the happiest of the modest men alive knowing how much risk I have spared you by letting you know this esteemed proverb through these poor efforts of mine." He paused. " You plan to start commercial transactions here ? " he said briskly in a quite different voice.

Mr. Rind understood that the real talk was about to begin.

The Chinese gentleman smiled faintly as one who had just performed successfully a hard task and now humbly hoped to be left in peace.

Mr. Clark waited a moment, then asked :

" I am afraid I have not quite understood what you said about commercial business here ? "

" Said ? " The shining gentleman seemed hurt. " A prudent

merchant 'never says' anything about his profession. I do not remember, to my humblest and most respectful regret, that I have *said* more than a current joke that any commerical business is a queer play of chance."

"So what would be your advice in my particular case?" was Mr. Clark's direct question.

Such a blunt inquiry was like a blow to the shining gentleman. With visible effort he tried to conceal how much he was hurt before he resumed his poise and murmured :

"May the celestial powers avert from me the arrogance of giving advices to the worthy gentlemen of the United States, the worthiest of whom are, without any doubt, you, my distinguished sir. I am most unhappy, if I *did* produce the impression of giving advices. For of all, my worthy sir, of all the proverbs ever heard the best to follow is, 'The best policy of all is to do nothing,' " and he closed the slits of his eyes and mouth, as one who had no more proverbs to offer.

15

LIDA went to parties too.

The people she mixed with were White Russians. The social life of these people was kept purely Russian, which meant that everybody, however poor, maintained an "open" house, to which any one could come at any time he chose and be welcome. At the appearance of a guest—however untimely and unexpected—a Russian lady instantly stops washing linen or scrubbing floors, dons a bright, and sincere, smile, and starts serving tea. The quality of the tea and its accessories vary depending on the grade of poverty of the house, but the discussion which invariably accompanies tea has a constant quality. It is always about life—life in art, in politics, in religion, any kind of life, except that miserable daily existence which has been theirs. Their actual life seemed too mean to merit any discussion. It was quite beneath one's contempt.

Always the talk, whatever the difference of opinion, would come to the same conclusion : after having endured wars, revolution, poverty, hunger, thirst, fear, and exile, life seemed beautiful. Only the most pessimistic would insist it was not

exactly beautiful, but only worth living. Great is Slavonic vitality!

The younger generation, whose adolescence and spiritual formative period were spent abroad, looked at it differently. They had little of their parents' stability and did not possess clearly marked class or personality distinctions. The vicissitudes of fate had a greater effect on them. One could see their physical weaknesses and guess their moral instability. Biologically they were a poorer breed than their parents. A certain negligence marked the bearing and manner of many of the new generation. Their adaptation to life usually took the easiest way: lowering one's cultural and moral standards for the sake of less suffering and struggle. Yet those of them who were blessed with talents developed them to an astonishing brilliance, although almost invariably with a peculiar one-sidedness, with none of that broad-mindedness and free approach which characterised the old Russian intelligentsia.

Lida met many people, old and young, and listened to their conversations at parties.

"Novels?" said an elderly lady with indignation. "I cannot find *one* I like, and I read in five languages. Literature has become the most backward, the most declining of arts. . . . With the old life passing away, with a new era to come, with hundreds of problems to face, to live with, to undergo, literature nevertheless is still busy with morbid guesses in the style of Freud's theories. A healthy human being just cannot be for long entertained like this. . . . No, literature has ceased to be a power which could educate generations and mould national characters. . . ."

"I really do not know what has happened to the world," another old lady was saying. "Look at youth. We are not parents, we are criminals. Youth needs authority. And we suddenly give in—parents' authority, churches' authority, everything. Our children were left without immediate guidance. But youth *needs* ideals, youth is eager to follow a leader. And when everybody near them steps back, naturally they look to somebody farther away. If a fanatic comes along, children blindly follow him. Of course, it is *our* fault, mothers' first, fathers', second. Women began that stupid non-interference with children's life and spiritual growth when they left that to the school, to an occasional teacher, or a book, or a friend.

Small wonder if our children turn into a weapon in our enemies' hands. . . ."

But Lida did not have time to listen to this kind of talk. Her place was among the younger generation and their interests, and then she was so much concerned with the programme. The chief feature of the evening presented all the variations on the theme, "Christ, When a Child, a Garden Made."

*Christy when a child, a garden made.
And many roses¹ flourished there,
He watered them three times a day,
To make a garland for his hair . . .*

The Poet read the poem. Then Lida sang it. Then it was sung in a chorus. Then the violin and the piano played its arrangement in music by Tchaikovsky. Then the orchestra played it as a symphony by Arnesky, arranged after the Tchaikovsky music.

Then followed a general discussion of his theme of poetry and music, and an analysis of the details of technical expression and performance. Lida and a pianist named Sergei Orlov were the two most admired artists, and the guests insisted on hearing them. Lida was shy and could not speak before so many people. But Sergei Orlov spoke at length and with inspiration.

"Music is the highest of arts. *Composing* music is *real* creative work. . . . It creates actually of nothing-^and achieves the most powerful appeal."

And Lida—listening—asked herself:

Could I create music ?

The Poet read Alexander Blok's poem to the Unknown Beautiful Lady, and with exultation Lida felt how much meaning could be implied by words. What was reality for a poetical mind? Of course, not the material world. That Beautiful Lady who came

*. . . Every night at time appointed
(Or is it only my dream of you ?) . . .*

Like Jimmy. Was he real after all? Why mourn his absence | when his constant presence was' an actual item of Lida's life?

Then the Poet read Blok's last poem :

. . . *What are the storms' of life, if roses,
 Tour roses bloom for me in fire . . .*

and again its projected meaning threw her away from reality.

But music . . . music. *Could I create music?* Lida asked herself again.

She put on her coat and went out on to the balcony. She closed her eyes and stood there under the cold sky, high and black, under the shining stars. She stood listening, absorbing the sounds. The indistinct voices in waves of dulled sounds came through the wall . . . steps on the hard pavement of the street . . . somebody's low and sly laughter . . . a feminine voice saying somewhere with a wondering wistfulness : " Oh, how I loved life ! "

And quite unexpectedly she heard all that as music. A voice in her mind said :

Arpeggio . . . passionata . . .

She opened her eyes : *But was it I who created music ? Was that my music ? My own ?*

She tried to reconstruct the music, but she could not. There were parts of it, fragments, but the uplifting unity of the whole was gone.

No, she decided, this music was not mine. I only heard sounds in a new way.

She looked at the sky.

A celestial travel, she thought, travel of the imagination . . . in sounds . . .

And suddenly she heard that music again, but now with still newer splendour, as a symphony all of her own.

Lida stood thus with her face uplifted and the music unfolded its triumphant theme louder and louder. It rose and spread and filled the whole world around.

" Lida ! " Glafira opened the door. " Everybody is looking for you. . . . It is time to go home."

Sergei Orlov walked home with them, saying on the way :

" Art requires self-sacrifice. One has to forget everything else and give one's life to it."

And Glafira, laughing, asked :

" Sereja, how far have you gone in your asceticism ? You know, Lida, in order to have less material cares, Sereja continuously practises self-denials. Sereja, tell us . . . "

" I can go three days without food. ... I can go a whole day without a drop of water. . . ."

Glafira laughed again.

" And how long without music ? "

" Without music ? " Sereja stopped. " Without music I would not be able to live a single day through. For me music is my impression of life. Whatever happens, I hear it in sounds."

At the corner they saw a lone man standing motionlessly, with his face upturned toward the sky. It was the Poet.

" Igor ! " Glafira cried. " What are you looking for ? Have you lost something among those stars ? "

" I have found," the Poet answered. " Look," and he pointed toward the constellation of the Great Bear. " There, on that yondci star, lives the Chinese God of Poets, Mr. Wen Gh'ang. JHe is immortal. Wearing a long blue robe he walks there quietly, at his leisure. If he rode, he would mount a white horse. He has only two attendants. Their names are ' Deaf as Heaven ' and ' Dumb as Earth ' ... he has chosen those two, lest they should give away his professional secrets. . . ."

" How very beautiful ! " Lida exclaimed. " Where do you get such stories ? "

" I have a friend, a Chinese poet and scholar. We tell each other . . ."

" And what is your *latest* theory ? " Glafira asked, laughing.

" My latest theory is about drama," the Poet said, shivering cheerfully in his poor coat. " In (Jrama lies the great possibility of resurrecting the classic tradition of art, of unifying human ideals of poetry, and of creating the *one* universal language for the whole of mankind. We must bring drama back to the pantomime ... with universally understood climaxes of emotional significance. Artists only show—plastically—and only few exclamations are allowed. Those few and primitive words will lay the foundation to a new language—a universal one. ..."

" And who is living there in the constellation of the Minor Bear ? " Lida asked suddenly.

" There ? " The Poet did not grudge the interruption. " Mr. Old Man of the Southern Measure."

" What does he look like ? "

" He has a very high forehead, and a long white beard . . . he is the god of Longevity. He writes into his ledger an entry opposite every newborn child's name. He controls life."

" And when he writes. . . . What then ? Can it be changed ? "

" No," the Poet said firmly. " The old gentleman is too indolent to make changes. It is fate."

Glafira, who had a matter-of-fact mind, said :

" Let us move. It is cold. Our Poet will be frozen." Then looking at him she said gently :

" Life will be hard for you, Igor. A dreamer does not fit well into modern life."

" Life was always hard for poets," Igor answered. " They never fit. Our time is neither better nor worse for poets than any other has been."

16

" MR. RIND, do you like the arts ? " Dasha once asked.

" The arts ? What arts ? "

" Arts in general. Poetry, music, dance . . ."

" I could stand some, I think," Mr. Rind replied.

" Then let us go to the Workmen's Club. You will see our proletarian arts."

" Are they something new ? "

" They are different. We discard all which does not promote our ideals. We are for union in arts too, not for disintegration, therefore we do not encourage individualistic flights into nonsense."

" Now, now . . . you speak like a textbook."

" We think their worth is in keeping us warm and lighted on our way, while we are building a new life," Dasha went on. " I do not like all of them," she confessed. " I like only poetry and singing."

" You must not try your propoganda on me," Mr. Rind laughed.

The next afternoon they went to the Club. It was a communist Club, although it did not bear that name openly. Dasha explained that owing to the disquiet in the town they would have an exclusively artistic programme, speeches and discussions not being allowed. The police had to be present.

The Club was situated at the edge of the town. It was the usual small-town theatre building.

Mr. Rind and Dasha found seats in the sixth row. At once Mr. Rind began to look around discreetly. Groups of people speaking loudly, laughing gaily, slowly filled the other seats.

They were proletarians, there could be no doubt of that. The stooping shoulders, the heavy steps, the square knuckles—all labelled them working people, the descendants of generations of working classes.

There was a certain lack of self-restraint: voices too clamorous, gestures too broad, faces too outspoken. If they wanted to stare, they stared or coughed, or sneezed, without trying to hide the fact. The petty conveniences of social life were absent. All were poorly clad. The girls were not too pretty and the women were neither powdered nor well-groomed. They seemed faded, tarnished, as if their freshness were washed out in toil. Their hands were heavy, and their movements somehow clumsy.

Although communism was new, it nevertheless had already produced a standardised type, and with more or less prominence those new traits were found in each person there. It was a simplicity, almost a rudeness of clothing, of manners, of faces, of speech. But that rudeness was based on some quality, however coarse, of integrity, as if they had been hewn in haste out of the same stone, not long ago, as if they had not yet acquired the polish which comes from constant use, and moved with unstable pace, blindly pushing the fragile things out of their way.

Their relations among themselves seemed to be extremely friendly. A kind of spiritual unity, compactness, characterised that gathering. Instinctively Mr. Rind felt alien and on his guard.

Dasha said to him that a young and famous ballerina from Soviet Russia, a Sasha Vorobieva, would dance.

When the ballerina appeared on the stage she upset all Mr. Rind's ideas about dancers. She was a very young girl, thin, somehow squat, with a round flat face. Her eyes were narrow, the cheekbones high and the mouth wide. She was almost ugly.

She wore black cotton shorts and a woollen pullover. On her bare feet a pair of ballet slippers. In her bobbed hair she had a cheap round comb, like Dasha's. She looked like another girl from the same orphanage.

Yet ballerina Sasha Vorobieva was met with tremendous applause. She smiled back simply and stood in a sturdy, unflattering posture, her hands in the pockets of her pullover.

Then she took off her pullover and threw it aside—and this sudden fleeting movement of her arms was strangely suggestive of the wings of a bird. But then again she was standing quietly in her white sleeveless blouse—again almost ugly.

The sounds of the piano rolled forth and a sudden change swept over the ballerina. She was tall now, tall and slender, all grace and fluent lines. At the first chords of music she rose on her toes, all tension, like a vibrant chord. In a continuous and fluent movement she left the earth and moved in air. She lifted her arms, high, then suddenly broke their lines into sharp angles at the elbows and put the palms of her hands flat to her cheeks. Her chin was high and the skin drew tight on her face. She was all moving angles in the outline. Her face grew pale and eyes remote, as if she were moving backward, farther and farther and faster and faster. Then in a sudden and powerful motion she was high in the air, she soared, defying the laws of matter, of weight, of gravitation. Her face, all drawn, was a tragic mask now, but her eyes were full of bright triumphant light. Her arms, her body and legs, in their constant fluent movements, created a series of unbroken lines, where past and future met, and the eye could not catch where she really was at any given moment. Then, in a final movement of her dance, she threw up her right hand, and it seemed that with her palm she flung upward the eyes and hearts of the audience.

"It is 'Inspiration,'⁵" Dasha whispered.

After the tempest of applause ballerina Sasha Vorobieva stood again an ugly child, only now she seemed smaller.

Then followed singing, and Mr. Rind's heart softened. Then a man on the stage called "Comrade Dasha."

"It is for me," Dasha said and hastily she thrust a piece of paper into Mr. Rind's hands. "Translation," she said and quickly walked down the aisle. The man on the stage gave her his hand and she clumsily jumped up to the stage. Dasha seemed to be universally known and liked, for people looked at her with friendly and encouraging smiles. Then she began to read a poem, "On This Lofty Spot," by Yanka Kupala. She read with restrained fervour, with an exquisite sense of rhythm and measure. Enthusiasm and faith rang in her voice.

*On this lofty spot the mansion
Of the landlord used to stand,
Where the gilded idlers feasted
Having grabbed the people's land.
Now the people handsome houses
Have erected on this ground ;
School, and club, and home of culture
For the villages around.*

*On the fields the bonded peasants
For the landlords used to slave,
Steeped in misery and darkness
From the cradle to the grave—
Now the happy kolkhoz farmer,
Free from fear and from despair,
Cultivates the soil with gladness
And obtains his rightful share.*

*On this lofty spot the mansion
Of the landlord used to stand
Grand and showy in appearance
Yet in truth was built on sand.
Now the people build their mansions
Homes of culture—and they feel
Free New Russia builds her future
On the rock of common weal*

Mr. Rind listened and was sad. He pitied that faith, that pathos—and that child. For he sincerely saw no future for communism. What did that child know about it all ? Had she ever seen those " gilded idlers " feasting ? No, she was not yet born at the time they " feasted " in Russia. And the kolkhozes where peasants have their " rightful share," she did not live there herself. She loved and hated on the basis of hearsay. Somebody told her about kolkhozes—" this is good "—and she believed, and vehemently conveyed her belief to others. In answer to her faith and eagerness one could not help but believe in those ideals—dim, untested, and problematic. Mr. Rind saw then how dangerous Dasha could be as a propagandist. With her purity and adamant faith, with that childlike and

simple approach to people, with those eyes of hers which could not lie, she seemed the incarnation of truth. And he thought that he must try to change the course of Dasha's life.

"I can and I should like to give you means to go to the United States," he said on the way home. "You would go through a college there, if only for a while to see life from another point of view."

"Capitalistic ?"

"No. Democratic."

She looked at him with her childish gaze and then said :

"Do you think I am not happy as I am now ? Do you want me to live on charity ?"

"No," said Mr. Rind, "but you are very young, and very naive. And you are giving your future, the whole of your life, to ideas which you have accepted without criticism, which you even cannot criticise, having not seen better. You are not fair to yourself. Why not spend some years abroad ? The rest of your life is at stake."

"Mr. Rind," she said, "you are kind, but you do not understand. Why do you pity me ? Because you have been accustomed to think that richness and comfort are equivalents for happiness and sense of life. The roughness of my existence hurts you, because you like me. But for the millions of other girls, you accept it without objection. You have no idea of universal justice. And you would like to make me see things in your distorted way . . . to draw me centuries back mentally. And you would like to make me see things in your distorted way . . . to draw me centuries back mentally. And you think you are doing me good. You want to give me the insignificant things bought for money and, instead, ruin in me what is my happiness — my life of service to a common cause, my part in the active work, in the building of future life^just and happy for all."

"Youth and inexperience are speaking in you," Mr. Rind said. "There are other things in life, too. Marriage. Family. . . ."

"Oh," interrupted Dasha, "stop there ! That is your pitiful bourgeois prejudice : one lives to be paid with happiness. You make a bargain of life. Mr. Rind, nobody wants to live only for money. . . . Money is not sure any more. . . . The very base of your philosophy of life is shaken. . . . We contributed to it," she said with a modest pride. "In your system

you give your girls silk stockings, instead of freedom. . . . We communist girls are different. We accept poverty. We accept misery. We count on no personal rewards, nor even on personal happiness. We do battle. Women now stand in the front ranks. . . ."

"Dasha," Mr. Rind addressed her sadly, "all this means much suffering. . . ."

She stopped. She looked at him with startled eyes.

"Do you think one can live without suffering?" A wondering pity was in her voice.

"Do you mean one could live without suffering?" she repeated. "But look!" she cried. "Only *look* around! What do you see?"

He stopped and looked around.

They were on the border of the Chinese part of Harbin, in Fu-dia-dian. The pavement was crowded with vehicles, rickshaws, and people who crossed the street wherever and whenever they chose. Commotion dominated the whole. It was the peaceful commotion of over-population. Although in the noise and bustle of the street small events continually took place—people falling down, being overturned by or in a rickshaw, pushing or being pushed away—the peaceful Chinese did not make much of these events. Only the extraordinary dexterity of Chinese drivers and passers-by saved the moving mass from crumbling down and being trodden upon. There were deep pits and holes in the pavement.

"Do those people not deserve a better life?" Dasha asked. "Look at the poverty. Look how bravely they fight to earn something. . . . Listen."

Mr. Rind could not analyse all the sounds he heard. Life itself made sounds in China. The artisans and wandering salesmen, the blind musician, the fortune-tellers—all had their instruments belonging by tradition to their profession, and those instruments gave forth the special sounds particular to them. The cobbler beat a small gong, the tinker made sounds with thin pincers, some had special rattle-boxes—and almost all helped themselves with special throaty cries.

And the whole was impregnated with smells. The smell of food predominated. Hot food was sold in the open: fritters, pancakes, roasted chestnuts, and other things which Mr. Rind could not identify.

Everything was dusty and dirty : curbs, pavements, walls, windows, and more than half of the people, for poverty was but too visible. Beggars of all kinds and states of invalidity and deformity cried aloud their desolation. They cried in vain, for nobody paid any attention to them.

At the corner, Mr. Rind saw a terrible sight : a body—although still living, it could not be called a human being—a body half-naked, half-covered with rags of sackcloth, crawling on its fours. The exposed parts of the body revealed some terrible skin disease.

" Leprosy," said Dasha shortly.

" What ? " Mr. Rind gulped.

" Leprosy," Dasha repeated.

" But is he allowed ... " Mr. Rind began.

" Illnesses are free in China," Dasha said. " The most terrible contagious diseases prevail the year round—untaxed—here. . . . Poverty, ignorance, poor sanitation ... "

" It's disgusting," Mr. Rind said with feeling.

" Isn't it ? " she answered with irony. " But pay attention to the details. See how many there are. In all, China has 500,000,000 people. This means every filth person on the globe is a Chinese. And they bear 14,500,000 babies yearly—into these conditions. This is a thing worthy of reflection ... is it not ? "

" But look here," he said suddenly. " Let's get away. The illness might be contagious. . . . "

" Of course it is. . . . But why not stay ? All human beings *are* brothers, yes . . . ? Why not go and approach that our brother ? Why not touch his hand ? "

" Now ... no more of those silly things "—and he grasped her hand. " Are you not afraid ? "

" Afraid ? " She looked at him closely. " Of what ? "

" What ? " He was angry. " Illness ! Death ! "

" Death ? " She smiled a new and strange, exalted smile. She said " death " with flight in her voice, as a poet would say " glory," or " love," or " beauty," or " youth." " Why *not* death, Mr. Rind, if it helps our brothers ? "

17

MR. RIND'S feeling for Comrade Dasha developed into an exquisite and affectionate friendship. It was mutual, too. However great was the outward difference between the two, they had something in common. They both secretly yearned for a warmer life and for less loneliness.

There were also emotional motives. Mr. Rind had never given much scope to his instincts. His love for children, his eagerness to protect, his will to help, were hitherto hardly unfolded.

Dasha was an orphan. She never had known her parents and had no idea who they might be. She was bred in an orphanage. Nobody remembered who had placed her there. She was written down into the ledger as a "female child N67." At that time Russia was in a post-Revolution transitory phase. All was constantly changing: the place of the orphanage, its staff, methods of education, even names. From "female child N67" she had been promoted to "Octiabrina," in honour of the October Revolution, but she could not pronounce her name very well and therefore, when she was five years old, she became finally established and recognised in this world as Dasha.

Nobody ever came to claim Dasha. She was nobody's. She belonged to the state.

She had gone through the terrors of a motherless infancy, in a country stricken with poverty and misery, in an orphanage to which the government's budget tried to give as little as possible. Children refused to live without essentials, name after name was crossed off the ledger and Dasha moved up to become N8. Still she went through her doleful childhood, always underfed, always pale, always afraid of something—from hand to hand—those cold and too brisk hands of hired nurses—from class to class—led by the overworked yet still fanatical teachers, from room to room shared with other orphans. Every one in the orphanage was in haste, always trying to do more quickly his work and to get away. Everybody was always tired. Children were treated as a collective burden, all given the same food, the same clothing, the same lessons, medicine, and tasks.

Although interested in the collective achievements of the group, teachers were indifferent to individuals.

Then Dasha was accepted into a girl pioneers' group—and a whole world was opened before her. Here she met, for the first time, an interest toward her personally, sympathy, co-operation. She answered these with such a warmth, with such a devotion, that at once she became a centre of the group, an outstanding figure. This attracted to her the attention of the adult leaders and she was accepted into higher groups of communist youth organisations. Her credo was formed there instantly and forever: there were only two groups of people, wanton oppressors and innocent victims, and her duty became clearly cut—she had to fight against the first on behalf of the second. Now with joy, with faith and hope, she moved from the pioneers into the Comsomol, and from there to the school of propaganda; then from Russia to Manchuria, studying the Chinese language, making friends and meeting different people following the same line. She was happy.

Still there remained in her heart the obscure longing of a child for a family—just to nestle her head on mother's shoulder, to lean upon father's strong arm. When she happened to see her friends with their parents tied to each other by the unbreakable right of birth, she felt a pain in her heart. When she saw the simple and natural way in which love and devotion cement a family—given as due, taken for granted—she felt the bitter sadness of a beggar standing alone at the crossroad with an outstretched hand.

Now they found each other—Mr. Rind and Dasha—and a mutual affection, steadily growing, tied them to each other.

Mr. Rind was both attracted and aghast by the appalling consistency of Dasha's nature. They spent hours in eager conversation. They spoke with the utmost sincerity. Communism was their constant topic. Mr. Rind attacked it, Dasha defended it. He assailed her with his education, logic, experience as weapons. She had only her fanaticism as a fortress.

She defended her political credo with passion. It was her only credo, her only spiritual possession. In it was the essence of her future. It was her whole life. She did not aspire to have another. She had no personal plans, no personal ambition. The Communist Party was her only domain.

"But your system of terrorism . . ." Mr. Rind would say.

" Mr. Rind," Dasha would answer, " we stand before the sheer necessity of exterminating our enemies. Otherwise how can we establish our system ? We *paid* for our victory. Were we not persecuted before ? Are we not persecuted now in many places of the world ? Do we hide ourselves ? Do we prevaricate ? Do we shrink before the risks or dangers ? Our battle is cruel but it is honest too. We kill, we are exposed to be killed. They are not *our* inventions—those prisons, forced labours, executions. We inherited them as methods and we experienced them also, before our victory. We openly challenge the world. We say who we are. We call for a battle. We meet our foe, we do not hide behind the corners."

" Still that hatred, revenge . . ." Mr. Rind kept to his humanitarian grounds. " That retaliation—' eye for eye . . . ' "

" Eye for eye ? " Dasha cried and a dark flame burst forth out of her eyes. " You are mistaken, Mr. Rind—not ' eye for eye ;' we value our comrades more than that, we take *two* eyes for one."

And Mr. Rind listened to her with tenderness and sadness. Thus small boys speak about battles and victories. And Dasha ? In bygone times she might have been a nun and with the same ecstasy of passion she would defend her mysticism of faith and walk straight to an auto-da-fe, and sing while being burnt. Or she would be a self-sacrificing mother, an ardent artist, a heroic social worker. Hers was the path of self-sacrifice. She was made for communism in our times.

" But," Mr. Rind would say, " you follow blindly, there is no criticism in you."

" You do not understand, Mr. Rind. Our duty is to obey, not to criticise. Communism went through that preparatory phase. Now this system is put on trial. Our duty is to keep it going. Lenin challenged us, the youth of Russia—our life has to be an answer to his challenge. We go through life under his flying colours. We will not lower them, whatever happens. On us the trail is being made, we carry on the experience into the future. We give communism an opportunity actually to be operated . . ."

" But suppose," Mr. Rind said, " that this blind obedience, all this sacrificing and martyrdom of youth, suppose they are done in vain. Suppose communism should fail. What then ? "

" Suppose it should prove vain . . ." Dasha said and her

breath broke. Mr. Rind saw how painful that idea was to her. " If this should happen ..." she began again, " then mankind will have to work out another and better system of social order and then fight and die for it."

" But you, Dasha ? Your life, misspent and ..."

" Do not say *my* life, it would be the life of a whole generation."

" But nobody would be able to give you your life and youth back."

" Mr. Rind," Dasha said, " I do not like the way you put it all : ' your life,' ' your martyrdom.' Why ? It is much simpler. We are not heroes, or pets, or something. We are just plain workers. What we do—is our conception of our duty. This is simple human honesty. There is no need to call it by the biggest words you can find in a dictionary. Life is not a play, nor a romantic novel, it is a forge."

Little by little small details of conversation helped Mr. Rind to a fuller picture of Dasha. She was only twenty. Her life was one of daily privations. She knew nothing of luxury and comfort. For instance, she had never tasted chocolate. When Mr. Rind offered her a box of candy she refused, because she did not want " to form the pernicious habits of luxury "—she said those words in her usual grave manner. She lived as an ascetic and behaved like a stoic. She never had a separate room for herself, never owned a trinket, never wore any but the cheapest dresses. Like all the rest of her girl comrades, she bobbed her hair not because of the fashion, but because the shorter the hair the less it demands of soap and water—and those were their efforts to save the party's money. She wore a small round comb in her hair, because, in the long run, it would cost less than hairpins, which could be easily lost, thus underlining the party funds. She lived on the strictest and most economical budget, she grudged every expense for herself, for she was living on party money, and it must be spent on the coming world revolution. Dasha never had silk stockings, face powder, handbags, straw hats, ribbons, laces, perfumes, brooches, rings, scarfs, and other things of that kind. And she never wanted them.

Mr. Rind pitied her, and she pitied Mr. Rind. In her opinion, America was a capitalistic country, politically and socially backward and, therefore, doomed and unhappy. When Mr. Rind said the American workers had the highest standard

of living in the world, she accepted that and only said that higher salaries do not make people freer. Russians are paupers, but they have the joy and pride of building a free life for the future, for the coming era of universal happiness.

She pointed out to Mr. Rind how lonely he was in his own class where all is founded on competition, while in her class life meant co-operation. She would find a home and support and welcome everywhere on the globe where there is a communistic unit.

Dasha refused Mr. Rind's offers of candies, of fruit, of luncheons, of teas, of cinemas. She needed nothing. Only once she halted before a florist's window and, looking at a sheaf of roses, said :

" I should like to know who, and to whom, and when one gives things like that . . . I wonder . . ." And she was lost in contemplation.

" Well, Dasha," Mr. Rind said, " suppose you tell me when your birthday is, and I will send you flowers like those "

" No," she cried eagerly, " I would be ashamed of that money spent on me. Now, when every third child on the globe is underfed. . . ."

Mr. Rind was not inclined to listen to Dasha pleading humanity's cause. He smiled.

" You prefer then to wait until every girl of the universe will have roses. Those are your ideals : every girl having the same roses at the same time. Would it not be tedious ? Would it not make it stale ? "

" Does it seem tedious to you to know that everybody has one's cup of tea in the morning, like you ? It must make one's breakfast not stale, but more enjoyable."

Lida and Dasha had seen each other occasionally in the lounge of the hotel, when Lida came in with Mme. Manuilova, and Dasha was leaving with Mr. Rind. Both girls knew each other through Mr. Rind's description.

One day they met face to face and instantly recognised each other. Belonging to Russia's two hostile parties, they could never look for a real meeting. But now they met and one minute seemed a long time, while they studied each other with open interest and curiosity.

Then Lida—first—moved forward the two steps which separated them and offered her hand.

"Let us be friends," she said sincerely.

Dasha hesitated for an instant. A dark light of caution flickered in her eyes. Then she made a broad, spontaneous gesture and shook Lida's outstretched hand.

Between those two girls—personally—there was no grudge, no rivalry, nothing to forgive or forget. They both were poor, fatherless—because of the same revolution. They both were young and pure and kind. But the shadows of the previous generation's hatred had made them mysterious to each other, as monsters, cruel, treacherous, base. Only their youth was so fresh in them that they still could be moved by the natural human desire to meet one another without reservation, openly.

18 .

"CHILDREN, let us sing," Mother Abbess said. And perhaps there was nothing else to do. There was no food in the convent and no supper was given to anybody. Mother Abbess tried to disguise the fact with ritual. These were her last days in the convent, and she proclaimed that evening as one of fasting and prayer for her safe travel to the other convents. Now she had a dozen small girls gathered around her.

"Now let us sing, children," she said, and in a broken and thin but true voice she began the hymn to the Holy Virgin : "We have no other help, we have no other hope, but Thou. . . ." And the children readily followed. It was a very old tune, one of those whose origin is lost in the twilight of the bygone centuries.

The children sang standing in a small flock, like heavy and clumsy birds, pathetic because wingless. Mother Abbess was sitting. She even prayed sitting now. Her numerous illnesses and pains were slowly dragging her to the tomb. Feeling the approach of the end, she had begun to ponder over life and her sins, as is proper for a Christian whose one foot is in the grave.

Mother Abbess had never been very clever. She was not educated either. And she had nothing of the hypocrite in her soul. Thus simply and sincerely—with astonishing clarity—she saw herself and her sins. They were many. The experience was terrifying. There seemed to be no commandment, not a rule

which she—by deed, or word, or thought—had not broken. Her sins were many.

Fasting days, for instance. Had not she broken them often ? Of course, there were so many, they were so strict, so hard to go through. . . . She used to break them because of illnesses. But, perhaps, her illnesses were sent to her as a test for one of weak spirit. No. Yes. It was a sin every time. A sin of disobedience, of self-indulgence, of leading astray the nuns by her impious behaviour. Even in one simple cup of coffee early in the morning on a holiday, she drank a peril to her soul, for on holidays she was allowed to eat only *after* the Mass, at noon. Forsooth, her sins were many. . . .

She bent her head lower and went on singing. Her voice—feeble yet true—sounded above the children's fresh but uncertain voices

The singing done, the girls made the sign of the cross, stood for a short while, then bowed and sat in silence.

A slight movement was going among the girls. They looked at each other from under the white kerchiefs which they, as novices, wore on their heads, and their eyes were bright with curiosity. Then one girl—as though by prearrangement—stepped forth and said :

" Mother Abbess, have you ever seen the Holy Virgin ? "

This question instantly brought Mother Abbess back to life. She lifted her head and her face, eaten with pain, was now illuminated with joy.

" Twice," she said, " I have seen Her twice. The first time I was a small girl, and I had just been brought to the convent and left alone. I was afraid. I cried and wanted to run away. I got up at night, crawled to the door and opened it. And there she stood—behind the door. . . ."

She was silent for a while.

" And what did She say to you, Mother Abbess ? " asked the same girl.

" She ? Nothing." Mother Abbess seemed astonished. " What could She say ? She knew how hard life was at the convent. She only looked at me and laughed. . . ."

A chair scraped in a dark corner of the room. It was a menacing sound. Mother Thais sat in that chair. Mother Abbess's inclination to laugh was Mother Thais's open wound. In her estimation real Christians would never laugh. Ought

not. Nuns even less so. And the Abbess—breaking all decorum—laughed often and usually at the wrong places. Now describing the Holy Virgin as actually laughing was a grave fault. She moved and made her chair screech. . . .

Mother Abbess understood. In this period of her life she oftener and oftener began to find fault with herself.

"That's enough talking for to-day," she said. "One more prayer and you go to bed."

Just then somebody knocked at the door and a voice was heard saying :

"In the name of the Father and Son and the Holy Ghost..."

"Amen," said Mother Abbess and the door opened.

There stood a young nun with a visitor.

Visitors were welcome at the convent at any time of day or night. There were some people who could come only in the depth of night, in secret, some ashamed of others, some of themselves.

It was not very late now, only about nine o'clock. The visitor was a woman, elderly, tired and visibly poor. She held a parcel in her hands.

Mother Abbess's eyes instantly fastened on that parcel. When the visitor began with the usual formula of greeting, she interrupted with the hasty words :

"Have you brought something for us in that parcel ? "

Again the chair in the corner screeched, but Mother Abbess paid no attention this time, for all this evening, whatever she did, there—underlying all—was her thought that the children were hungry. When they had prayed to the Holy Virgin, Mother Abbess's prayer had been a practical one—she asked for food, and to be given it immediately.

"I have brought some food," the visitor said, "but I want to explain first ..."

"You can explain later, my dear. . . . May I have the parcel . . . ? "

The chair screeched several tones higher and several moments longer, but Mother Abbess was now in her element. She opened the parcel and her eyes smiled, while she said :

"Rice, tea, sugar. . . . May God save your soul, my dear ! " She made a sign of the cross over the food. "Oh, God's gifts," and she sighed. "We have something for to-morrow. . . . And what is this ? "

" Apples," said the visitor.

A sigh rose from the group of children.

" Apples ? May God remember your name, dear sister ! Apples ! How many ? Fifteen ? Children, you are twelve ? "

She rose. She looked at the icons in silence for a moment. Was it a *miracle* or simply *apples* ? She was tired. She decided to treat them as *apples*. So she said :

" My little ones, you sang and prayed late in the evening. Here is your supper. Look at the apples. Round. Red. Beautiful. • Eat them slowly. Munch them carefully. Enjoy them. Christ liked apples, I am sure. Fruit, you know . . . God's best gift. . . ."

The girls approached one by one and she gave them each an apple. Then she dismissed them with her blessing. Mother Thais made a movement to follow the children, but Mother Abbess checked her and asked the young nun to go with them. She looked carefully at the remaining three apples and then gave one to the young nun too.

Left alone, the visitor began to speak :

" I have to repent my sins against you. Last Sunday, at Mass, I sinned. You asked for help and I thought : begging and begging . . . we have no quiet time for prayers with that Abbess. . . . I knew it was bad to think, so to-day when I was coming home after my work, I halted at the grocery store and I thought I might buy some food for the children here. But even while I was buying them I grudged you that money. / *am poor myself—I thought—/ have to support my invalid husband.*' We are all alone in the world—and here I am giving almost my last . . . are there no richer people . . . ? Must I have no common sense . . . some . . . just to keep my scant wages for ourselves ? Perhaps to give but not so much as to deprive ourselves . . . and why am I doing that ? Do I love humanity so much ? No. I rather hate people . . . and, still that pity, that, perhaps, ridiculous softness which makes me do things against my better judgment. . . . Even here, giving you that parcel, I was not doing it with an open heart. I was thinking—*Well, who will help me when in need ?* "

Suddenly a light came into her eyes and she continued in a brighter voice :

" But when you admired the apples, when you said ' *round,*'⁹ a childish joy took possession of me and I felt glad I brought them after all. . . ."

" Well, where is your sin ? " Mother Abbess asked. " You gave us the things you needed yourself. Of course, you grudged privation, but this is quite natural, human. Only things we do not need ourselves are easily given. I am sure that widow in the Gospel thought: *What a fool, after all, I am to give my mite. . . .*"

The chair in the corner gave a brisk screech.

Mother Abbess went on :

" Reasonable people are out of place in a Christian church. Consider, my dear, nobody knows anything for sure—why we live, and how we die. . . . Is it not ninny to believe things of the utmost importance on the basis of a myth ? . . . Faith is good for fools and children. . . ."

Mother Thais coughed and said loudly :

" Pray, forgive my insolence, Mother Abbess . . . it is late. May I have your orders for the meals for to-morrow ?"

" Now, now . . ." Mother Abbess said. She looked at the apples again, and after a moment of visible hesitation (she grudged giving, too) she gave the two last apples to the visitor and said :

" To you and your husband. . . . Apples are good for health. . . ."

Mother Abbess would not listen to her protest but kissed her and sent her on her way.

" Now," she said to Mother Thais, " how many people have we to feed to-morrow ? "

" You, Mother Abbess, forty nuns and fifty-nine children^ then of course, as usual, beggars will come . . . to-morrow is 4 holiday—we must count them—if for one meal only—about thirty beggars."

" And what have we in the way of provisions ? "

" Well—nothing," Mother Thais said, astonished at the naivete of the question. The Abbess looked at the small parcel of provisions.

" Well, Mother Thais . . . it is not worth while counting *people* if we have no food. Tell Mother Cook to serve all we have for the first meal."

" But, Mother Abbess . . ."

" Yes, *all*."

Mother Thais sighed sardonically and left.

Mother Abbess was, at last, alone.

How she knew does not matter but she knew this was her *last* visit to this convent, the oldest convent she had founded in China. She planned to visit the other three and then to die. She was not exactly dying but *leaving* this world, for her faith in the hereafter was invincible. This earthly world she could perhaps doubt, but not the next one.

It was the hour of her lonely prayer. After it she had to make her "rounds" and then to sleep with only the usual interruption for midnight prayer.

She approached the icons. She had to kneel. This was a painful exercise for her now. She winced, but balancing herself with her arms, resting them against the wall for support, she knelt heavily. Everything went black for a moment and a gnawing pain cut across her stomach. She knew that this pain was beyond medicines, beyond surgery, beyond healing.

"Jesus Christ," she whispered, "Jesus Christ . . ." She looked at the icon lit by the red light of a *lampada*. His face was severe and His lips tightly closed.

She felt her body—a heap of tired flesh, of gruesome pains, distorted organs, dry bones—ugliness, decay, poisoned with old blood, cold sweat—and from that mass she gave up a look of luminous light, of resignation, of love, and called :

"Jesus Christ . . ." The usual words of prayers would not come to her mind. She put away "words" now, even those of prayers. In her last days she wanted to speak to Him in *her own* words.

"Jesus Christ, make me free of my worn-out, my decaying body. Thy servant is ready to depart . . ."

At this moment a voice said outside the door :

"In the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost."

"Amen," said Mother Abbess, and she tried to "get up." She could not. Helpless, she moved her arms along the wall.

^ young nun entered and rushed to help her up. Following the nun a visitor stepped in. As soon as Mother Abbess saw the visitor she instantly forgot her own pains.

The face of the visitor bore signs of such despair, of such desolation, that Mother Abbess's pains just faded away. Of course an ordinary observer would not see even half so much, but Mother Abbess had acquired an unerring feeling for hidden

human misery through long experience. She instantly dismissed the nun.

The visitor—an elderly lady—mechanically sat down on a chair without invitation. She closed her eyes, and the mask of her skin was dark and heavy.

Mother Abbess knew the woman by sight. She was a Russian refugee, in the past very rich. She lived on the money she had occasionally invested abroad before the Revolution. Mother Abbess knew that the lady had a grown son.

The visitor sighed, opened her eyes, and said :

" I am coming to you in despair ... I am ashamed of what I have to tell. Perhaps you know that I have a son. We are only two in the world. Until just lately he has been the most devoted, the best son, one could wish a son to be. Now . . . perhaps you know, or have heard—the town is full of rumours ... he has become a drug addict. I cannot blame him. Like so many other smokers he tried those new cigarettes on the market. There was a mixture of heroin in the tobacco, but he and the other young men did not know that. He caught the habit. ... It is my fault, my sin. Too proud I have been of my son. I heard of this thing happening to others, I never applied its possibility to *my* son. . . . You know his passion was music. He was acknowledged the best violinist in the town. He had freedom to go, to come when he chose. . . . Seeing him pale, irritable, I thought this natural for a young man and an artist. In his misery, he told me the truth himself. ... I was ashamed to send him to the hospital for regular treatment. He promised to fight his weakness. He gave me his word. I believed. Little by little he changed. I had no more authority over him. He began to lie. He stole money . . . and to-day, when I refused him money for heroin ... he lifted his hand against me ... he beat me. ..."

She sat for a while in silence.

" Then I remembered my mother's words. She said them to me as she was dying. ' If one day it would seem to you there is no help—remember, *prayer* will help.' So I come to you now."

" We shall pray day and night," Mother Abbess said slowly. " I will put four nuns on prayers, each six hours daily in succession. We will pray with no interruption. Tell me the Christian name of your son and go in peace."

"Vadim," said the visitor, and rose slowly. She went to the door, as if in a dream. Then she remembered something. She came back and giving an envelope to Mother Abbess said :

"Here is money for the convent."

"Sister," Mother Abbess said, "however poor, we will pray without money. In any case, you are poor yourself. . . . No⁵

"Mother Abbess," the visitor answered, "I am not exactly poor. Take this money for the children here in the orphanage."

"If you can afford, then of course. . . . Go in peace. Day and night we will pray until you come to tell us your son is healed."

Alone again, Mother Abbess went to the corner and now easily kneeling she began to pray Christ to help "Thy servant Vadim" She forgot her pains or, perhaps, they stopped just then, for she bowed and whispered and poured out tears with her prayer.

Then she opened the envelope. It contained three hundred dollars. This much she had never expected to find. With a light step she went on her round.

In the room where the children slept the air was so damp, heavy, malodorous, that her heart fell. She thought of those poor lungs being poisoned for life. No better were the rooms of the nuns. Utter poverty, crowded conditions, rugs instead of beds. . . . Yet in every room, in the corner, was lit an everlasting light, a *lampada* before the icons, and there, on her knees, was a nun praying for those who slept.

Mother Abbess made the sign of the cross over the sleeping ones. All was silence. Some breathed heavily but those sounds were drowned in a kind of inner silence coming out of the walls, it seemed.

Mother Abbess went to the church which was in the same building. Several *lampadas* dimly illuminated the altar, and there—before it—four nuns were silently praying on their knees. They prayed for Russia.

All was in order. Mother Abbess sighed. She went to her room and started praying for Vadim again.

At midnight Mother Seraphima came to her cell. Mother Abbess loved Seraphima more than any other nun. In the midst of so much poverty and struggle and disease Mother Seraphima kept her pink round cheeks and merry language. She accepted

everything with a gallant smile. It seemed as if tiredness, pain, melancholy, doubts, had no hold on her. Mother Abbess's dream was that Mother Seraphima would be the Abbess of the convent after her death.

It was a settled rite that when Mother Abbess was at the convent Mother Seraphima came at midnight so that they might pray together. Being women they usually had a good chat, too. After prayers Mother Abbess asked Mother Seraphima to start the first six hours praying for Vadim, lest they should wake one of the nuns. At the beginning of the day it would be easier to establish regular courses of prayer for him.

Now the day was at its end. All labour and endeavour done, Mother Abbess lay on her narrow iron bed and slept as peacefully as a small, innocent child.

19

THE MORNING began with a turmoil in the crowded girls' dormitory. Sinner Vera, nine years old, was its cause and its victim. She was given the nickname of "sinner," for she persisted in practising a mortal sin : she was a liar.

Caught in the act, she would look round with wide astonished eyes, for she never noticed the moment when she deviated from the path of truth. ' She would show signs of repentance, would give promises to reform, and then in a short while one could see her again surrounded by an eager audience of fascinated girls, until one of them, of a sceptical nature, would cry :

" It cannot be true. You are a liar."

And Sinner Vera would be dragged away for more repentance. The usual judge was Mother Abbess, or else Vera would be led for an extra confession to Father Luke, who gave pardons. The astonishing thing was that those two were rather mild with Vera, and the sinner came back always much happier than she left.

Little Vera paid a price for her imagination which was so colourful, so vivid that it could not keep in pace with real life, chained to facts. It always would tear itself away and soar high over the laws of reality.

If Vera could have written her tales, she would have been

called a poet, but she told them and her public gave her the name of a liar, and her activity was branded with the word of " sin."

Late in the afternoon before, Mother Thais had stood behind the door, in the shadow, and listened to Vera's inspired recollections of her earlier childhood.

" Yes," Vera was saying, " my Angel Guardian used to come every night to watch over me while I slept."

" And what was the Angel like ? "

" He was a boy, with beautiful, beautiful wings. His wings were so soft—feathers, you know—but not real feathers, they were all transparent and gave out light. . . ."

" Light ? "

" Yes, like candles, only paler, but his wings would not burn, but only illuminate one"

" Did you talk to him . . . ? "

" Always. Sometimes late into the night. I would tell him about myself. He would tell me about heaven. Every girl there has a separate room, full of birds and flowers. . . . Nobody ever scolds one. . . . One has no fasting days. . . . In fact, one is allowed to eat all one wants, all the day long. Nobody works. Nobody prays. Nobody is ill. And a Christmas tree stands in every corner. Angels flying all around, busy with the housekeeping. . . ."

Here Mother Thais had stepped forth and said briefly that Liar Ver% would go to confession and retell the story to Father Luke, and that she herself would bring Vera thither next morning, at the early Mass.

Now, in the morning, she had hardly approached the dormitory when she heard Vera's inspired voice.

" Why does He not help ? But God is very poor Himself, by now. . . . He gave and gave things away, and people asked and asked, now He has nothing, nothing more to give. . . . Then He gave Christ. They took Him too. God has no more children and cannot help. He is very old and sad, that is why one must take care of Him now, pity Him, as he pitied people before. . . ."

" But whose are all those things ? "

" Why, people's. You cannot find a nobody's coat, or nobody's garden, or anything"

" Cannot He give those ? "

"How? What kind of a God would He be then, taking other people's things . . . ? He knows that would be a sin."

Here Mother Thais stepped in.

Standing amid the crowd of girl novices, holding the sinner's hand tightly, she said :

"Now, Novices, I order you, step forth and tell me what else she lied about."

A small and thin girl, with greenish face, came forward and said :

"She told me that the apple trees are women, because they bloom and are beautiful. That God will take all of them afterwards to His paradise."

Another girl, small and round, stumbling in her dress, for novices' dresses must be long and touch the floor, said hesitantly :

"She said she would eat any food, even meat, during Lent, if she knew how to get it. She said she felt stupid when she was hungry. . . ."

It was seven o'clock, and the early Mass had to begin in fifteen minutes. The girls were forming rows, when Mother Abbess entered.

After the usual greetings she said :

"Children, you were fasting yesterday. To-day you will not attend the early Mass, but will have your breakfast right now. . . . A good porridge it will be, with milk. Eat well, then thank God and be ready for the late Mass. Mother Cook is waiting for you. Go in peace."

When the children left, she saw that Vera stood miserably clutched by Mother Thais's hand.

"What happened?"

"The usual thing, Mother Abbess. She told her stories again, meaningless stories and sinful. . . ."

"Mother Thais," and Mother Abbess sighed, "let her go, just for this time. I am very tired. It is painful to have punishments on such a holiday. Go, Vera . . . and try to remember, truth is the best lie ever told. . . ."

Vera safely away, Mother Thais started:

"Forgive me, Mother Abbess, but there must be limits. The girl is an obstinate liar. Her influence might be pernicious. . . ."

Mother Abbess knew it, still she said :

"Remember, both her parents were killed before her own

eyes, a six-year-old child then . . . it had something to do with her reluctance to see the truth. To He is perhaps her way to believe that one can change facts. . . ."

" Still, Mother Abbess, this is a convent. She is a novice, she must be checked . . . for ' a lie is mother of all vices.' "

" In Vera's case that mother will be childless. . . . What is the use in our inflicting punishments when God will finally forgive everybody for everything . . . ? "

" What ? " Mother Thais cried.

But Mother Abbess went out without another word.

The late Mass was long and solemn. It took four hours of praying, and singing, and standing, and bowing, and kneeling. Sitting places are not allowed in Russian churches. One must not be seated in the presence of God. Only real invalids can sit for a while at the bench near the back wall.

All the fifty-nine novices stood in rows and their deportment was perfect. Those long services were a training not only for spirits, but for the body too.

They all wore a kind of uniform. Very long grey cotton dresses, coarse and clumsy, and white kerchiefs on their heads. Shoes were their despair, and Mother Abbess's too. One could not buy them, and nuns and novices usually wore discarded old shoes sent to the convent as alms. Those shoes had a way of never fitting anybody. The poor feet were bruised, and very painful it was to move and stand all the day long. Since the dresses covered the feet, nobody saw what clogs they were wearing.

The black-clad nuns filled the left wing. Mother Abbess stood near the icon of Our Lady. The church was full as usual. There was no standing place and many prayed on the steps of the entrance. Mme. Manuilova, the Platovs—all were there. Lida joined the chorus and sang with joy during the entire Mass.

On holidays, after the late Mass, three meals were usually served in the biggest rooms of the convent. At the first, to which all the people who rfd been at the Mass could come, Mother Abbess herself presided. The seconf meal was served for nuns and novices. The third was given to the beggars. The meals usually consisted of hot tea and everything else the convent happened to have on hand that day. It sometimes would come down to almost nothing, except tea. Still to prepare it, to serve

it, to clean things, meant extra work, and the holidays were the hardest days for the nuns.

The honorary guest was Professor Voloshin. Mother Abbess saw him in the church and personally invited him to call. He was an authority on religions, and the present company tried to entertain him and themselves accordingly. In vain Mother Abbess, who always had been more curious about life than anything else, tried to guide the conversation toward realism. One of the guests, a man with furtive features and strangely yellow eyes, said in a suave voice :

" Our poor Russian Church. . . . It is so hard to know that it is being ruined by Bolsheviks. Clergy being exterminated . . . the end of Christianity in Russia."

" A church cannot be ruined by an outward force," Professor Volosliin said. " Not the clergy but the folk are its body, its custodians, its life. Her only danger lies within. The ruin of churches in Russia concerns buildings, number of clergy, number of parishioners. But if many of weak belief fell away, a smaller number, but more important in quality, discovered their religious souls and joined. . . ."

" Still, the Christian influence is going out of life in Russia."

" The centuries-old Christian influence has permeated so deep the very attitude toward life that it has become an essential part of the psychology of a great many people. They have it, even if they would not call it by the name of Christianity. Consider people without religion as a foundation of culture. Japan, for one. They have no conception of sin, of brotherhood and the like, and in spite of being a vigorous race they could not, nevertheless, create higher values—as arts' philosophy, and so forth. Japan's best minds are always other countries' boarders, always fed with somebody else's bread. That dooms Japan's growth, as an organiser and a ruler of other peoples. In Russia we have about a hundred smaller nationalities and tribes, yet none of them, during centuries, died out or were exterminated, for, with all our faults, we have a better idea of brotherhood. . . ."

Here Mother Thai's, with her mind still rigidly fixed on the *Sinnēr Vera* affair, started another discussion.

" Honourable Professor : in the Scriptures there are words about hell and expiation for sinners. But *some* support the opinion that God will forgive everybody for everything. May I ask you humbly : where is the truth ? "

Professor Voloshin answered :

" I rather incline to the latter. Our Church is mostly of this opinion. There are three Great Christian Churches : the Roman Catholic—a Church of power and order, the authoritative and militant founded on Saint Peter ; the Protestant—the dogmatic daughter of the intellectual Saint Paul ; and our own Saint John's, based on his words : ⁴ ' God is love.' As the followers of the Saint John teaching, we believe that everything will be forgiven to everybody, because of God's love and His mercy."

" And what would you say, Father Luke ? " Mother Thais asked the priest of the convent.

Father Luke was a product of the post-Revolution period. He was born in a rich family, bred in a military school. He married, had a child, participated in the World War, fought against communism—never thinking whether there were a God to all that, or not. Then suddenly he had been converted and became an ardent believer.

Addressed by Mother Thais on the question of whether God would forgive all the sinners, he lifted his pale ascetic face and began :

" I think, too, God will forgive all."

" But how ? But why ? " the older nuns asked.

" Because . . ." Father Luke said, and for a minute he shut his eyes, " because . . ."

In a brisk vision—like a flash of lightning—he saw himself sitting on the floor in a small and smoky Burial; hut, in Eastern Siberia. His friends' the officers of the retreating White Army, were lying around, some wounded and delirious. A Buriat, who had recently come from the town of the Ulan-Ude which had been taken by Reds, was telling what he had seen there. Among those whom he saw executed he named Father Luke's—he was Captain Karpov at that time—wife and his only daughter, ten years old. The Buriat said that after being shot the victims were robbed of their clothing, then buried.

" Who were the executioners ? " Captain Karpov memorised those six names forever. He rose and with his revolver in his pocket started for his home town. He walked for twelve hours. He did not think of the dangers *for* himself. He went for revenge, to kill those who executed his wife and his child.

When at last he arrived and approached the house of one

of his sworn enemies, he saw a child sitting on the bench before the gate. The girl sat with her back to him and with a shock he recognised his daughter's coat. The executioner's daughter was wearing the coat, a small grey coat, smeared with the blood of his own child. His child's blood ! He took the revolver and aimed. At that moment the girl turned toward him—and he saw the thin pathetic face of a sick child smudged with tears. An innocent face.

Captain Karpov threw away the revolver and blindly went away. He quit his previous life for a new vocation. He became a priest.

That was the vision Father Luke saw. He opened his eyes, and said, answering Mother Thais's question :

" If even people forgive, then why not God—who is perfection ? "

" Well," Mother Thais said, " this is not theologically right, I think."

It was not. It is hard to reconcile many experiences with theology. There was not much theology in that convent either. It was a faith raised to a new level of thought. It was a faith freed from the iron shackles of idle custom and dry letters and brought upward to the, eternal truth of love. Those priests of the new school were not strong in dogmas. They believed from their inner urge and experience. The old theologians were rare. This convent was not, perhaps, a convent at all, as far as theology was concerned—it was just an old woman who loved humanity and could not stand its pains without trying to help.

" And why not forgive all ? " Mother Abbess said. " Man-kind are just children. Then whose children are they ? God's or nobody's in particular ? Being God's they have their guidance, love, they have their home—and live happily. If they are nobody's they go to orphanages, which are many—the orphanage of Science, of Socialism, of Materialism—they go there and live on a meagre pittance . . . never exactly happy. . . . And what is a bad child ? A bad child is an unhappy child, a neglected child. It is a fruit of somebody's negligence—immediate or through generations. The negligence of parents, or church, or school, of society, or governments, or science. In the long run—that child turns into a nuisance for them. If those negligences are many, children become a collective nuisance, a mob, dangerous if led by bad rulers."

This conversation went on for at least two hours.

At last every one left. The tables were cleared out. A quiet permeated the air, and the little sounds here and there seemed not to break the repose, but to intensify it.

Mother Abbess was ready for her rest when she heard a rude voice and the door slammed somewhere. She went in that direction quickly. Doors should not slam in a convent.

An elderly nun, with a tired and angry face, was there.

"What happened?" the Abbess asked in a severe tone.

"Oh, Mother Abbess, as if we have not fuss enough here on holidays. We have spent hours on those meals. ... A beggar was here."

"Where is he now?"

"I sent him away. . . ."

"Without help?"

The nun stood silent.

"Suppose it was Christ ..." the Abbess said.

"Wh . . . what?"

"I said, suppose he was Jesus Christ," Mother Abbess said louder, "in disguise, as He used to come."

"Oh . . ."

"Run after him, try to find him."

The nun rushed away. She came back after a while,

"Well . . . did you find him?"

"No," the nun said, "I could not find him. There was nobody on the street . . . he had disappeared."

"Hm," said Mother Abbess.

20

THEY had nothing to tell each other and sat in silence at the opposite ends of the room.

Why has he come^p Mr. Rind thought as he looked at the short, massive, slovenly clad figure of Professor Kiemenetz. The guest said nothing and did not even look at his host. The expression on his heavy face seemed frozen forever.

Mr. Rind tried to guess : *Is he, perhaps, hungry ? I could invite him . . . but in a restaurant . . . how to bring him there in that outfit of his . . . ? Should I have dinner sent up here ?*

" *The Queen of Spades* by Tchaikovsky is the most popular opera among middle-class Russians," Professor Kremenetz said unexpectedly, and then added : " Will you kindly lend me a needle •> "

" A needle ? " Mr. Rind was at a loss. " What kind of a needle ? "

" To sew. My right sleeve is falling off. "

" Sorry, I am afraid I have none / " and Mr. Rind looked at the uninvited visitor with bewilderment, which he tried to make polite.

" Then would you kindly allow me to ring the bell for a servant t "

" If you please . . . "

" Boy, " Mr Kremenetz said to the servant when he came, " a needle and a black thread to tack on thrs sleeve. " He said that in Chinese and the servant answered obligingly :

" May I offer my humble efforts in sewing on your honourable sleeve ? "

" Thank you, but I have plenty of time myself while you, of course, have many other things to attend to. "

Then Mr. Kremenetz, in his usual exquisitely polite manner, asked for and received Mr. Rind's permission to do mending in his presence, and taking off his coat he began to sew dexterously, in silence.

" Have you ever been in America ? " Mr. Rind asked in an attempt at conversation.

" Yes, several times," and Mr. Kremenez took a button from his pocket.

" In New York ? "

" Yes, three times," and he diligently drew the needle through the holes in the button.

" How do you like New York ? "

" Old-fashioned."

" Wh-what ? "

" Old-fashioned," Mr. Kremenez said louder. " I mean a town not following the latest tendencies in life and science. . . . Backward." He bit off the thread and making a knot started to sew on the lining of the sleeve.

" On what are you basing your opinion ? " Mr. Rind asked in a cooler tone, trying not to show how much he felt offended by his visitor's casual remark.

" There are many reasons. . . . Which side of the question interests you most ? "

" You mentioned science ? "

" Yes. Biologically, such big towns mean degeneration. Psychologically, they accentuate hatred and envy. Economically, they show deficits, if one takes into consideration prisons, asylums, and the like which are needed to keep towns going. From the hygienic point of view, they are a threat to health. . . ."

" Arc there other motives ? "

" Many. Such towns are harmful to talent, dangerous for honest civic and political workers."

" Something else ? "

" Yes. They are—in many of their parts—ugly in appearance, vulgar linguistically, dangerous during wars . . . would you like some more motives ? "

" No, thank you."

" You are welcome." Mr. Kremenez bowed. He looked with pleasure at his coat, put it on, and said :

" Now nobody could find a word against my looks, for I am going to the opera to-night." And bowing again with deference to Mr. Rind, he asked .

" May I have the honour to invite you for dinner here, in this hotel, and to be my guest at the opera afterwards ? "

" Oh thank you." Mr. Rind bowed in answer. " I am going to the opera with my friends."

" And the dinner ? "

Mr. Rind took the challenge and accepted.

To his astonishment Mr. Kremenetz's looks startled nobody, He was greeted with a kind of reverence by the customers of the restaurant and with homage by its servants, for this was China, where a scholar is always held in a high esteem, whatever might be his attire or his financial standing. For Russians, too, a glorious scientific reputation has always an irresistible charm, stronger than that of money or a high official standing.

The dinner turned out to be a most pleasant affair. The host was gay, witty, and courteous. The dishes perfect. But Mr. Kremenetz did not talk alone. Mr. Rind, too, from time to time ventured with a question.

"Nature is lavish,"¹³ Mr. Kremenetz was saying. "There is always over-production and waste in her industry. I am sure she is feminine," he added in parenthesis. "Too many creatures to fit her own pattern. She has no plot, just amuses herself with the process of creation. So many find themselves outside of the jslay, on the margins oi life. Nobody's sweethearts, you know. I was one of them : the seventh child of my parents. The third husband of my wife. The second stepfather to her son." He paused.

Mr. Rind thought that this moment would be proper to offer one's sympathy, but Mr. Kremenetz proceeded :

"This is a happy situation. I have lost my country, my social rank, my library, my manuscripts, my property." He sighed happily. "And with all that, my responsibilities. Now I can enjoy life. Wholeheartedly. I live how I like. This is happiness."

"But I understood you have had to live in lonely places, in India, far from civilised people. ..." Mr. Rind tried his common sense on the professor.

"As to being civilised or not, people are basically the same in their conduct," Mr. Kremenetz answered; "only clothes are different, for civilisation means mostly clothes. And that is of no importance."

"JBut the absence of comfort, dirt . . ."

"Comfort is tiresome, even stupid sometimes. It takes much time too : eating in style, asking how one is doing, admiring the weather, reading news, answering letters . . . congratulating on the newly born, attending funerals . . . it just takes away the gusto of life. One gets so tired. . . ."

" But there are pleasures . . ." Mr. Rind ventured.

" They are the same in the savage countries," Mr. Kremenetz answered.

The conversation wandered aimlessly, at random. Mr. Rind enjoyed his host. He relaxed in the ease which seemed to be Mr. Kremenetz's aura.

Even wars seemed natural and easy to the professor.

" Why," he said, " tailors sew, writers write, soldiers fight. Everybody busy with one profession. Routine of life."

Over the coffee he grew moody.

" I was not always thus happy. . . . I fought my way through. . . . It was not easier than any other struggle for "freedom, peace, and happiness," and he nodded his ugly head.

At the second cup of coffee he went on.

" My case I have superior brains," he added modestly. " I could not, I refuse to take part in all the stupidity, madness, and cruelty which is the present civilised hie. . . . An intelligent human being cannot. . . . I fail to adore humanity enough to want to make its sufferings my chief concern. Therefore I broke my ties with the actual life long ago. . . . I do not live as a social unit any more, am not connected with somebody else's struggle, successes, failures. . . . I have almost no real being. . . . I exist in my imagination. I encircled myself with myself. From time to time I give a look around, but never find anything attractive. . . . I have no longing for a change. . . . I am perfectly happy as I am . . . a free gentleman." And he sighed happily.

21

THE PITCHERS had a beautiful house of their own. Comfortable too. And hygienic, of course. All the things that belonged to them had to be clean, in good taste, of high price. One's own bodily comfort was the thing the Pitchers were living for.

The part of their existence exposed to the public eye seemed enviable. It invariably brought one to the conclusion that they had a plenty of happiness too. But this was a delusion, for they had not, although that lack was well hidden under the quiet dignity of their deportment.

There is nothing more suspicious than too much dignified tranquillity. It attracts an observer's eye at once as something incongruous with the turbulence which is life. Only death gives that perfect balance, that peace for which one struggles vainly through life. Its presence in a living being is the dangerous sign of a spiritual coma. An irresponsive soul is a soul half-dead.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Pitcher might be called "emotional misers." They would not let any of their emotions grow to the warmth of an affection. They could give away their time, the things, their interest, even their money, everything except their hearts. They were always careful *not to feel*.

The nearest they came to an emotional show was the bouquet of flowers given by Mr. Pitcher to his wife on her birthdays. She had had twenty of these bouquets from Mr. Pitcher.

Flowers. The sighs of spring, the smiles of summer. Is not it a crime that *any one* may buy and offer them to any one else? And that cold men may give them to ugly women as one gives some hay to a horse? Flowers should be sold only to a man in love. The man in love should send them only to the one he cherishes. And before the flowers are sold the florist should ask: "Are you in love? How much? How deep? How long?" Why bother about the price?—he will pay anything, the man in love. No man is poor when he is in love. No woman is plain when she sees flowers in a man's hands.

A woman of Mrs. Pitcher's type would consider a passionate

love, even for her own husband, bad manners, something near to indecency. She is always virtuous and often childless. She speaks occasionally about self-esteem and chamber music. She likes white gloves, but would not use perfumes. She never tells stonies and sits perfectly erect at her dinner table. She is not interested in gossip and good eating, and her figure looks perfectly dry at every season. Such a woman is a rare specimen among Russians, and she usually marries a foreigner, preferably of a Nordic tribe.

Mr. Pitcher, an Anglo-Saxon, was a descendant of long generations of people who had allowed themselves to be only moderately alive. His heart beat at half speed. He felt even slightly offended at every touch of real life. It was beneath his dignity to be sincerely human, and he carefully tried to disguise the fact that he was a living flesh, a man, *Homo sapiens*.

Life created Mr. Pitcher and then rather doubted her own achievement. In order to make him human she tried on him her strongest weapons ; beauty, pity, work, and hunger. Still Mr. Pitcher showed riot a single sparkle of excitement. Then life began to try on him everything at random—with the same results. Mr. Pitcher was unimaginative : if he had been presented with all the splendour of the temptations offered to Saint Antonius, Mr. Pitcher would have sat among them and demurely smoked his pipe.

After twenty years of the most dignified marital life the Pitchers not only remained strangers to each other, but also had not discovered the least attraction for or interest in each other. Still they continued to drag along the heavy chain of their mutual insincerity and to make believe to society it was a nuptial blessing. During all those twenty years they moved farther and farther—each in Ins own direction—until they had nothing in common except, again, the house, the money, the furniture.

However their relations remained outwardly the same.

" Good-morning," Mrs. Pitcher would say daily, at eight o'clock.

Mr. Pitcher would look up politely, from behind his newspaper, nod his head and say nothing.

" A cup of tea?"⁴

" Of course."

That was the morning. The rest of the day was about the samè.

Life moved smoothly for the Pitchers. He had liquidated successfully his business in Manchuria. They were rich. They lived on income. There seemed to be no reason whatsoever for them to live in Manchuria. All the world lay open to them, the universe with all its wonders, mysteries, and beauty. But the Pitchers were never attracted by such things.

They continued to live at Harbin. Why? Perhaps, only because they had built their house there. Or, perhaps, because there was nobody anywhere waiting for them to come and live elsewhere.

Moderately sociable, they lived actually in a desert. Later in life, they made attempts to populate the desert. They thought about a dog, a cat, a bird, a fish, and even an adopted small human being. But they were so much afraid of any kind of trouble and responsibility. Let's have a dog, But would it not bring fleas into the house, smear carpets and, perhaps, even the sofa? And bark? No, the idea of a dog had to be dismissed. A cat? Would it not molt early in spring, shed its hair, miaow? And then cats never ask permission to bring kittens in—of course. Well, birds are better, gleeful, innocent birds, you know. But can a canary be an emotional outlet? It is too small to balance the burden of human loneliness. Of course, it chirps. . . . But meanwhile it would scatter seeds and splash water. And the Pitchers instantly saw those seeds and splashes everywhere—on the floor, on the furniture. Finally they bought an aquarium and two books of information and instruction. The silent stealthily moving small fish were a rather sickening sight for the eyes. The fish became sick too. One by one they passed away, and the aquarium was removed. Alter that the Pitchers took to substitutes. Having failed to revive themselves through some connection with life they turned to the inanimate things, to the mechanical movements: he took to reading of the detective stories, she—to knitting.

In recent years Mr. Pitcher lived only for reading detective stories. Begun as a casual pastime, that reading became an obsession. Mr. Pitcher turned into a rare connoisseur, an authority on all possible sorts of crime and criminals. The more he read, the less alive he seemed. All that pernicious study of the worst of which a human being is capable dimmed his nature. It moved into shadow the rest of human activities, and Mr. Pitcher lived in a distorted world where crime was the sole

motive and the criminal elite forged the fate of mankind. One by one he lost all ties of interest toward real human beings. The loss of interest was strangely followed by inarticulateness. He used fewer and fewer words, until "of course" became his only answer to all the complicated reality which was life. "Of course" meant passive acceptance.

Mrs. Pitcher took to knitting. She knitted and crocheted first the curtains for their bedroom, then the bedspreads and the tablecloths. Soon almost all of her things were, if not knitted, then crocheted. That continuous twisting of thread twisted something in her nature too.

Thus the Pitchers spent their life—their days, their evenings. He with his criminals, she with her hooks and needles. He—pursuing; she—twisting. He—spying, detecting, trying to guess, to find out, to catch, to cage, to execute. She—counting stitches, turning here, twisting there, making it hold, making it tight.

Behind their windows life was on the boil, at its full swing—a human life of joy, of pain, of passions, of human ambition, grandeur, and tragedy. The Pitchers paid no attention to that. They were busy.

At ten o'clock they would go to bed, quite broken and tired, for their vitality was gradually deserting them. They went to bed always with an obscure anxiety and vague fear of illnesses, of death. Those were the saddest moments of their days.

They would go to bed at ten o'clock, and would lie quietly under blankets. Only slowly would they fall asleep." He—first, while detecting his criminals, hiding round the corners, behind the boxes, gripping his gun. She—all rigid with apprehension lest her stomach hurt her, or her liver, or kidneys. Cramps? Colics? What have I eaten? Oh, those *canned* sardines. I shouldn't have . . . am I poisoned? Would this be terrible . . .? And all the time seeing—but so clearly—the pattern of her salt knitting and counting somewhere on the background of her vision and emotions—two three, four, purl, one, two, two, two . . .

Then they would fall asleep. He would dream of dark houses, empty basements, spacious rooms, dark suspicious gentlemen, forged cheques, broken safes, stolen diamonds. She would sleep lightly, moving and moaning from those imaginary fleeting pains here and there, imaginary but acute as the real ones, even more, for although there was nothing corresponding

to them in her body, they none the less tortured her nerves, exaggerated through their one-sidedness. Sometimes she would have her dreams too. Hers were about the food she had eaten, and then about wool, skeins, balls, needles, and again wool and patterns—two, two, two, purl one . . . three, four, one.

Mornings were the most difficult time for Mrs. Pitcher. To open one's eyes to an empty, frightening day. . . . She had to coax herself into existence, every morning aresh. . . . Her pains were stronger at the dawn of every new day. A vague nausea at the mere idea of moving, of getting up, of dressing, eating, speaking—of living. And her spacious house and comfortable setting seemed a solid trap for her spirits. She was caught in that cage of an easy life, with no cares, no self-sacrificing, no devotion. She was pushed into that cage by fear of privations and suffering. She was locked there by habit.

But slowly she would get up and, trying not to look around, start a new day of the same routine.

In the mornings they would again have nothing to say to each other, except :

" Good-morning. A cup of tea ? "

"Of course."

22

MR. RIND had never expected to find in Harbin an auditorium of such beautiful architectural proportions and inner ornaments. It formed a part of the Railway Employees' Club. 'Built by Russians long ago, in times of prosperity, it stood as a relic of the past.

The audience was remarkable too. Mr. Rind saw that the assembly was quite different from all the other gatherings of Russians he had so far met. Good manners and good breeding were characteristic of this one. They were unmistakably good society.

An atmosphere of excitement and joy pervaded the whole.

It was contagious. Mr. Rind felt his heart exhilarated by the sounds of tuned violins, even beating a little faster, impatient to see the curtain up, for a good audience is a part of enjoyment, bringing in that joyful animation which is a gift of those who love music.

He saw Lida with Mme. Manuilova. Lida almost danced into the auditorium, while her teacher entered solemnly and slowly.

Then heads turned around, for the Belle of the Town was making her picturesque entrance.

She did not use the main door, but appeared in the frame of the small side door and stood there for a while looking before her with those big grey eyes—sad and wondering—the eyes of romance.

The greatest of her talents was the gift of make-believe.

Tall, exquisitely built, with the small head of the immortal Psyche—all delicate, fragile, melancholic—she had the charm of absurdity, for she looked absurd as a living being, a modern young girl of the small and poor provincial town. She was clad in a pale-yellow taffeta dress, cut low at the bodice and very long and full in the skirt. She held in her hands a small muff made of tiny fresh roses and warmed there her long white fingers. The fact that she was supposed to feel chilly in the overheated room and sought warmth in that cool muff added to the absurdity of the vision as a whole.

But she appealed to an obscure longing for the romantic and she had the gift of creating illusions.

Of course all knew, but willingly forgot, that her dresses she sewed herself, the taffeta was begged on credit from a Chinese pedlar, the roses were given by an unhappy florist madly in love with her, and her girl rivals had no doubts that the Belle's stockings were richly mended. . . . But is it of any importance of what beauty is made ?

There she stood, her exquisite head tilted a little toward her right shoulder—and she seemed to have no connection with the trivial details of life. Just because she looked like a Psyche, a Manon, a Mignon—everything, except a common, living girl—she was the acknowledged belle of that fantastic town.

She was escorted by three men : the florist, Mr. Capella, and Mr. Wren,

Seeing the third, Glafira—in the last seat in the last row—felt a pang in her heart, and for a moment closed her eyes.

" Look at this audience," Professor Kremenetz was saying. He stood in the front of an open box, grand in his freshly mended coat, and bowed to his friends. Professor Kremenetz and Mr. Rind had both been invited by the Pitchers to share their box.

" Look at that audience," Professor Kremenetz went on again. " After the World War the economic situation of Europe was shaken, but here, at Harbin, it is unbelievably absurd. If you should search all that audience for money you would not find one hundred dollars. Only a few Russians earn regular salaries. The rest live on them. A system of a mutual cross-indebtedness has developed in this town. Besides being indebted to each other, they all—in whole and separately—are indebted to the Chinese—merchants, tailors, shoemakers, landlords . . . and still every year they have a good opera, concerts, symphony. If somebody fails entirely we hear about a suicide. And this usually is performed in style too. The victim goes once more to an opera, a ball, or to church—to have one's last drop of joy—and then die, leaving a letter behind. I have a collection of those letters . . . they make fascinating reading . . . letters of warm good-bye and best wishes. . . ."

Mr. Rind had nothing to say. The Pitchers were silent too. They were *outsiders* where the problems of life were concerned. They only looked down from their box upon other people's joy. Life was not *their* feast. . . . They had nothing to add to the

fe'te. They felt like statisticians invited to fill the stage, to ke^{le}P to their fixed places, and to remain silent. Other people wi?U make the show.

- As to Mrs. Pitcher, only her body was sitting there, in the opera box, clad with the proper consideration for the place, for the fashion, her age and position—that body was sitting erect and even its mouth was saying something from time to time. Still, in spite of that evidence of her physical presence the real Mrs. Pitcher was far away. She was wandering in the wilderness of her self.

Lately Mrs. Pitcher had felt uneasy. An obscure anxiety, a strange dullness of thoughts and feelings, those fleeting yet frightening pains all over her body—they had grown stronger. She could not even knit. The knitting which first served her as a rest and a hobby, then as a refuge, as a substitute which kept her from thinking, the knitting which finally turned into an obsession, into a mental illness—that knitting had lately lost its hypnotising force. She could no longer knit. And she suddenly found herself buried under the avalanche of ideas, pains, and fears from which she had been hiding for years behind her knitting. A frightening intercourse started between the Mrs. Pitcher as she was designed by Nature. The real Mrs. Pitcher rose up naked, unhappy, forlorn, with the exaggerated fears of approaching old age, sufferings and death, with the consciousness of an utterly misspent life—that Mrs. Pitcher faced her conventional living shape in wrath and resentment, ready to smash it to pieces. So far the conventional Mrs. Pitcher had held on. She tried to keep on. But occasionally she broke off.

As yesterday.

She was sitting at her usual place, with her usual mien, when Mr. Pitcher entered the room. He looked for something here and there on the table, left the room, came in again, and finally asked :

" What day of the'month are we to-day ? The thirteenth or the fourteenth ? "

The fact that he said something more than his usual " of course " made Mrs. Pitcher instantly furious. This unexpected feeling shook her.

" *What day . . . ?* " She was trembling with rage. " Why do you ask *me* about days ? Why should / be able to tell the days apart ? Have I a date, or a job, or am I planning a trip

that I would follow *days*? What are *days* for me? What is *time* for me? The thirteenth or fourteenth you say?" she cried violently. "Have I a joy for the thirteenth? Or a lover to be seen on the fourteenth . . .?" She did not remember what else she said, for with a loud sob she ran to the bedroom, banged the door, leaned her back against it, and stood there suddenly cold with bewilderment.

What have I done? What have I said? Why did I say it?

Those questions sprang up in her mind but she did not follow them. She saw an abyss opening before her. She saw some terrible change in something essential in her, and that was terrible and hateful, hateful. . . .

At dinner she said :

^c "I am sorry. I think I am ill. I must see a doctor."

"Of course," Mr. Pitcher said hastily. "Of course."

That is why she had bought tickets for the opera and invited two guests.

Seeing people might help me, she thought. Aloud she said :

"Would you like to go?"

"Of course," Mr. Pitcher answered.

And now sitting in the box under the bright lights she thought back on that scene. She tried to find out whether she had not ascribed an exaggerated importance to that outburst. She felt hot with shame.

Why those words about "a lover"? She moved uneasily. Why did I say it? What made me say it? Is it possible that somewhere deeply in me I think about a lover?

People passed before her eyes. People speaking, greeting each other, smiling. . . .

Those women, she mused, they all look so poised, as if none of them had ever found out what I have found out. . . . But what have I found out? . . . That my life is nearing its end and that I never enjoyed it . . . / never lived it. I kept it in store, preserved it untouched . . . and now I see it all spent. But how could that happen?

She leaned forward a little and looked down on the audience. But it seemed to her she saw only flowing water. A river. Not transparent, not fresh. Heavy, slow waters.

Suicide, she thought quickly and bitterly. *But why? Why?*

She did not notice that the curtain was up, but the music changed the trend of her thoughts :

What is life? I and my life—we are not "one." I am bigger than

my life. I take it, I spend it. It is in me, I am its receptacle. I am the cup. My life is the wine. Poured into. I have not drunk it, I splashed it. I do not know even its taste. It is gone, but I, I remain. . . . What about me? For what purpose is the cup, empty of wine?

She shivered lightly.

Tes, I know now that my life has been misspent. But what is a life properly lived? Who knows? I am afraid of this opening emptiness. Who created me with care and then pushed me away to drag along without guidance . . . and all the time stealthily measured my days, taking them from me?

Suddenly she looked straight into Mr. Pitcher's face.

What is he thinking about? He is remembering my outburst certainly.

But Mr. Pitcher was not. There was a struggle going on in his memory. He knew that Pushkin's *Queen of Spades* had a criminal hero in it. That was why he had accepted so willingly the invitation to the opera. A crime in music . . . a pleasant change, of course. He tried to guess who would kill whom. He vaguely remembered that there was something about gambling. . . . Yes, it was worth while seeing . . .

After the first act of the opera, which contains the famous duet, "The Coming Evening," Mr. Pitcher began to talk. Being not questioned or in any other way challenged to speak, he said spontaneously, to himself:

"Of course," and grew silent, and then said again in a lower voice: "Of course. . . ."

The opera with its compelling charm captivated Mr. Rind's attention at once. It gave the peculiar happiness known only through the arts: a sudden intensifying of one's own personality. The world seemed wondrous, feelings fresh, and the shadows not yet gathering.

There was a moment of climax for Mr. Rind in the middle of the opera. The orchestra began the third entr'acte and Mr. Rind was taken by the penetrating sweet sadness of music peculiar to Tchaikovsky.

It was clear at once that those violins were playing about loneliness; about old age, and death. Yet there was nothing dreadful in it at all. It seemed to Mr. Rind that those human horrors, now brought to their height by violins, then thrown to their depth and then again lifted and thrown'forth in waves, had the beauty of grandeur in them. It was the throbbing

poetry of human suffering, the pathos of the last acceptance of the inevitable : old age, loneliness, death. In their sombre beauty they seemed no less beautiful, no less grand than the songs of youth and joy. It was like the sight of an autumn forest at sunset—that gold in gold, that fire in fire, that joy in sadness. Splendid are forests in autumn at sunset—gold on earth, gold in heaven, yet the leaves are falling, one by one, slowly, insistently, falling down, and the rays of the sunset making them shine, making them glitter'. . . and still all of them—leaves, and rays, and the forest, and the sunset—all fading, all paling, all dying under the mantle of coming shadows, of an inevitable night. A moment more—and there will be no gold, no light, no life, only mist will remain, and twilight, and dampness—both on the earth and in the sky—all will be the like, the same, all—mist, dullness, darkness. Old age, loneliness, death.

When the third act began, he saw an old woman on the stage—the Queen of Spades—an ominous old lady, but how utterly, unspeakably old, how irrevocably standing on the brink of her grave. Mr. Rind suddenly felt as if he too stepped cautiously—one foot only—into her tomb.

How could they achieve that effect ? he thought.

The Queen of Spades was sitting by the fire dying in the fireplace. The portraits of her deceased people on the walls. Her old-fashioned room full of dead souvenirs. The faded flowers—immortelles—the stuffed birds—all was dead or dying in that luxurious room on the stage. The white cap and flowery ribbons looked grotesque on the old woman's head. And shaking from efforts and nodding that terrible head she began to sing in a screeching voice :

. . . *Mon cœeur qui bat, qui bat, qui bat,*
Je ne sais pourquoi . . .

Suddenly a chair moved with a slight noise and Mrs. Pitcher, rising, whispered :

" Sorry, I am not well . . . I am going home. . . . "

" Of course," said Mr. Pitcher, and rose too.

On the stage the Queen of Spades was remembering her youth.

" *Mme. de Pompadour !* " she sang, and Mme. Manuilova—in her chair—made a movement, as if a vista had opened straight

•into her past, moving backward : from Harbin, to St. Petersburg, to Paris.

"... *Why those tears . . . ?*" sang the lonely Liza against the bleak background of St. Petersburg at twilight, and the Platov family grew tense with compassion. The Platovs—all the seven of them—were sitting in the cheapest seats, in the last row. They were squandering the dollar given by the marine in Shanghai.

"... *My youthful dreams, you have deceived me . . .*" Liza sang . . . and Glafira's heart—twisting with pain—throbbed its young desolation in unison. *I shall write to Vladimir*, she thought quickly, *I must share with somebody my grief. . . .*

"... *Day and night . . . I torture myself with the remembrance of you . . .*" and Lida's face—acutely happy and unhappy at the same time—sparkled with tears. *Three weeks . . . / Three weeks without letters ! But I could sing like that too . . .* she consoled herself hastily and relaxed in enjoyment, lifted high, to the ceiling, with the sounds of Liza's soprano.

Then Herman, a tenor, with everything at stake on a single last card—his love, his career, his honour, his life—with that same card in his hand sang :

. . . *What is Life ? Mere gambling . . .*
Good and evil—meaningless words . . .
To-day you win, and I to-morrow,
Then why befoes ? . . .
Let him who fails lament
And curse his fate . . .

And Professor Kremenetz with the absorbed look of a philosopher on his round and ugly face looked like Fate itself.

"How do you like the music ?" Professor Kremenetz asked after the curtain fell.

Mr. Rind made his usual reply : "I am not a connoisseur of it." Then he added : "I should say it is, perhaps, too emotional, too much passion in it . . ."

Mr. Kremenetz seemed astonished. "But one likes operas exactly because of their absurd routine of passion. Only absurdity makes things charming. The soprano always desperately in love. The contralto ready with advice. The tenor passionately unhappy. The baritone jealous because of the tenor. Fate with

a basso voice pronouncing the verdict . . . I like to see nothing amiss in the way of absurdity and passion. Passions are, perhaps, the most real and enjoyable parts of our life. . . ."

At Mr. Rind's reluctant movement he said :

" Take it from one who is consciously giving his life to a passion and never regrets it."

" I think the best philosophy is ' nothing in excess,' " Mr. Rind ventured.

" But who can prove that the best philosophy brings more happiness ? The Philosopher's lot is never very much envied by the average man. Philosophy is like a rainbow—one can easily live without it. It is low temperature and rare pulse. . . . The full Hie is felt as a kind of intoxication in colours, in sounds, in movement. You will never meet happier and more harmonious human beings than so-called *grands viveurs*. I should prefer the mould of an *Almaviva* than of a *Marcus Aurelius*."

Mr. Rind did not remember *Almaviva* and therefore could not balance his mould against anything.

" Twenty years of passion, to which I sacrifice everything. . . ."

" You mean science," Mr. Rind said. " Sanskrit."

" No. Gambling," Professor Kremenetz answered.

Mr. Rind was startled.

" Do not be surprised," said the professor. " For you are a gambler too. Everybody is. Only you have chosen business, while I take cards. You are a hidden adventurer, with your impulses ail veiled and your cards only imaginary visions in your mind. I enjoy seeing the play of chance in its pure procedure. You play with your cards insured. I play with all my fortune before me on the table. I take a stronger pleasure from life."

Mr. Rind said nothing.

" According to Heisenberg . . ." the professor went on.

Heisenberg ! Who else ? Mr. Rind thought.

" According to Heisenberg," Professor Kremenetz went on, " nature herself abhors accuracy and precision above all things. We take after her. Think only about fingerprints. Nature, in addition, allows a certain—so to say—margin of errors. . . . Here you find me. Do not feel offended, Mr. Rind."

" In this life of ours," the professor continued dreamily, " iifour life so orderly and reasonable at the first glance, there

is a preponderance of the irrational forces. . . . I am and always was fascinated by the play of chance in this world. It is really breathtaking. . . . A dealing of cards—and one is born. Marriage—a lottery—career—a race, friendship—backing horses. War and politics—chess. Society—a poker game. A tatal throw of dice—and one is dead."

23

THIS particular "celestial travelling" started even before they had entered the house after having heard *The Queen of Spades*.

And what was quite unusual, it was Mr. Platov who opened the venture into the unknown.

"We are going home, to Russia," he said as soon as they were in the yard of their house.

"No, we are *not*," Mme. Platova answered firmly, halting on the steps, her hand on the knob of the door.

"*We shall* . . . Consider what we are missing when we live abroad . . . what our children are deprived of. . . . After having seen that opera, the one I knew since childhood . . ."

"A Soviet citizen's life is not all operas," his wife retorted.

"Mamma, let me open the door, the children can catch cold," and Glafira gently pushed Mother aside to let the children in.

"Well, we have to shoulder the hardships . . . but we go!" and Mr. Platov threw off his hat.

"To start with: have you visas?"

"I am going to-morrow to the Soviet Consul . . . I shall request them."

"And you hope to be given visas? Passports?"

The boys' eager faces emerged from behind Mother's back.

"Are we going? Oh, *are* we? To Russia?"

"Father," Mme. Platova cried, "stop that silly chatter! Have pity on your children."

"Mamma! Mamma! I am afraid . . . I do not want. . . . I have seen pictures of famine. . . ." And Mushka began to

"They . . . their bodies were so thin . . ."

"Then we shall leave you here," Kostik said, and he opened his geography book. "Here it is. Russia. I am not afraid. I will go. . . ."

"Dear people, first take off your things." Glafira emerged from the kitchen. "Tea will be ready soon. Galina, do not forget you are wearing Lida's stockings. . . . Change now. . . . And, please, include Lida in the conversation. . . ."

This was a rare instance of celestial "travelling" indeed. Mme. Platova was not working in the kitchen, as usual, but sat opposite her husband—and it seemed as if they travelled alone, forgetting about their children. Glafira, silently moving around, gave hot tea to everybody. The boys stood beside their father, eagerly listening, while Mushka clung to her mother's side and looked frightened. Galina and Lida sat quietly in a corner and listened too, moving their eyes from one speaker to another.

"Let us put this discussion on the ground of principles," the father went on. "Why did we leave Russia? Were we running away from sufferings? Or death? Or self-sacrificing? No. Only remember *when* we decided to leave. The government declared that the native country does not count, for their goal was International Devolution. Russia had to pay for it. Even the name *Russia* could not be pronounced any more. . . . You remember, you said we must not help the people who do not love our country and actually harm her. . . ."

"Yes, yes," Mme. Platova answered, and with warmth—as if it were the problem of her present day—she cried: "So unexperienced in foreign politics they were . . . belittling Russia . . . they just met the wish of Lloyd George . . . met him half-way, when he said: 'We do not want a *strong* Russia any more!'"

"Aha!" Mr. Platov cried. "But the Soviet leaders *changed*! They did not let Russia fall down altogether. . . . Our country is strong again . . . she *counts* in international relations. See? Therefore," and his voice sounded solemn, "Iforgive her enemies. . . . We, Russians, Red and White, meet again as citizens marching toward the same goal: the welfare of Russia. . . . For this I am ready to live and to die. . . . And I shall take my three sons there. . . ."

"And the other differences of opinions?"

"They can be tolerated."

"What? Christian faith. . . . You would consent to give up *this*?"

He was silent, then said slowly: "Perhaps they will change that too."

"No, oh no!" she cried again. "Remember only the day when we crossed the border. . . . that night, a cold, starless night. . . . Could I forget that? Can I ever forget that. . . .? And the moon tearing through clouds just at the moment we crossed the border. . . . Oh Lord! Those sounds of guns shot after us. . . ."

He was silent.

"And I"—she was weeping now—"remember, I asked how we could carry the children. . . . I could not carry much. . . ."

"And I took Gahna and Glafira to try. . . and. . . ." Mr. Platov said slowly.

"Father! I remember! I remember," Glafira cried and tears rolled down her face.

"And I took Grisha. . . and he was so thin. . . . but I could not carry even him. . . . for I thought about Kostik. . . . and he had to be born soon. . . ."

"And *me*? Mamma! Mamma! You forgot me!" and Mushka sobbed.

"You were not with us yet. . . . You were born later, at Harbin. . . ."

"Uh! Uh! Chinese!" Grisha mimicked. "Kunia! \\"

"Mamma! He is teasing me! Listen, Mamma!"

"Then," the mother wiped her tears, "then Glafira said, 'Let me go by myself, Papa will take Galina and Grisha. I will run after you with Vladimir. . . . I will run quickly. . . .!'"

"And we all were so weak, so hungry. . . ." And Galina began to cry quietly.

"Children!" Mother said suddenly in a brave voice. "Look around! Only *look*! This room, this tea! We are all here, all the family together—oh, thank God! Oh, thanks for His mercy!" \

"Life is not *that* only. . . ." The father braced himself for new argument. . . . "Now when their policy is changed for the better. . . ."

"And then they change anew, and we run away again?" Mme. Platova cried—and suddenly she said what she should not have said:

"Remember *what* happened when we were crossing the river."

A silence fell on the room. All looked at Galina. She put her head on the table and began to cry, noiselessly but with despair. Then the mother approached her gently and kissing her head said :

"My dear ! That is life . . . face it. . . ."

"I will never forget . . . I cannot . . ." Galina said quietly but in a desolate voice. . . . "Never. . . . All my life . . . whatever happens . . . never . . . that is why I ask you to let me be a nun . . .⁵ I do not want to live . . . I shall have no peace. . . ."

What she could not forget was this. They had crossed the border—as criminals—under the shadow of night. There were about twenty persons. They had to run across the river Amur as quickly as possible. Smaller children were carried by parents, the others ran by themselves. Glafira was far ahead. Galina, in her father's arms, had seen two girls drowning. The ice broke under their feet.

They cried for help.

Their mother carried a smaller child. To linger meant death for all. She just cried : "Lord ! Look at us !" and ran on.

After a silence Glafira said :

"Parents, you must know that we are not so tied to Russia as you . . . we can live everywhere. . . ."

"What ?" her mother cried. "What ? How *dare* you—a daughter of mine ! You are a Russian. Better renounce me. . . ."

"But Mother," Glafira said gently, "we do not remember Russia as you do . . . I remember only hunger, fear, tears, persecutions, again fear. . . ."

"It does not count. What is a government ?—It passes. . . . The rulers—they also die."

"Mamma," Kostik interrupted, "I saw Stalin in a cinema, he looks perfectly all right."

"Oh, I am speaking in general. They die one day, the rulers, but our fields, our rivers . . . oh, ours is a sainted land. . . . Nowhere people prayed as much as in Russia before and, perhaps, now. A country built on prayer, on songs, on the ideas of brotherhood . . . oh, no ! God will save a country like oitfs !"

" Lida, how do you feel ? " Glafira asked. " Would you go to Russia now ? "

Lida looked up. She felt small because of the thing she had to say. But she said it:

" I am in love with an American. If I marry him his country should be mine."

" And Russia ? "

" For me it is the same as with one's family. When a girl marries she belongs to her husband altogether."

But then she felt she had better explain herself.

" I feel differently. It is because I do not remember Russia at all, or I was not given a broader education, or my brain is too limited—but I have no interest in politics at all ... I think inner dispositions mean more than outer regulations when it comes to making people happy ... I like all people, not only Russians ... I can live everywhere without nostalgia. ... I am sorry I must say this, I know you all feel differently . . . but it is the truth, I had to say it. ... For me *life* would be my future family . . . arts, and as to the rest—my equal affection and benevolence to any living human soul. . . ."

" Is not that a perfect ⁴international citizenship ? " Mr. Platov asked.

" Only based on *humanitarianism*, not on *communism*" Mme. Platova said pointedly.

" The question of property in common is not so important after all," Mr. Platov said. " You see children would, perhaps, meet each other in a perfect union and understanding."

" Not *we*" Mme. Platova said, and this brought the "celestial travellers " home.

Only Grisha had not said a word. He was adoringly listening to Lida. He would like to go where she went, to feel how she felt.

For Grisha had fallen in love with Lida at first sight, at the first sounds of her voice.

Love is dangerous for a boy of fourteen. It forms one's attitude toward women forever, and one's conception of love for the rest of one's life. Grisha did not know what luck was his in having this kind of first love.

Although an optimist, Grisha had his moments of despair when his personal life seemed to him a sheer infamy, his looks almost an insult in connection with his aspirations. He felt' he

had been born for great deeds, for world fame—and here he was a freckled boy, sometimes having no shoes to leave the house in winters. Heroes need settings. Fate seemed to be against him.

Begin with the name. Great people are mostly Alexanders. As to appearances, are the heavily freckled noses obstacles to fame—or are they not? And hair! Those infamous clusters—could such things grow on the head of a hero? Is this head fit for laurels? Their single presence put one in the back rows. As to the inner endowments—they were all right. Grisha felt strong, brave, invincible, fearless, noble—everything.

Falling in love was just the thing heroes begin with.

Following the code of a knight's behaviour, Grisha never opened the secret of his love to anybody. Only he took a special care about Lida's three pairs of shoes, and they shone his love as eloquently as footwear possibly could do.

That evening was full of impressions for Grisha :

The Qyeen of Spades, the talk of Russia—and then she—Lida, the Unique One—who could live everywhere and love everybody. She was above those problems of life, living in her special sky, apart, a finite universe by herself.

A constant "celestial travelling" was now going on in his small heart. Only he travelled alone, without any partner, without a compass, without a map. But his boat had beautiful sails and a banner, and his soul sang, and his heart defied the dangers.

Is not a "celestial travelling" the best part of any life, whatever the goal, however different the course?

24

"MR. RIND," Lida said, "could you ever guess whom I met to-day?"

Lida saw Mr. Rind almost daily when she went to the hotel to call on Mme. Manuilova. And now they were all sitting in the lounge.

"How can I guess?" he answered. "There are many people whom you could meet, and then only very few whom we both know."

"I have met that poor Armenian woman who gave her eight daughters to the Roman Catholic Convent."

"Well . . . what is she doing now?"

"She does not know what to do with her three boys. She has never been trained to do anything except keeping her own house, and the boys cannot earn their living. . . ."

"Why can't they?"

"Oh, Mr. Rind," a reproach was in Lida's voice, "first, they are too young, twelve, ten, and four, and then here even people with the finest knowledge and skill cannot find any work. . . ."

"Well, what is she planning to do?"

Lida looked around suspiciously, then bent to Mr. Rind's ear and whispered:

"She plans to give the two elder sons to the communists . . ."

"What?"

"To let them be communists. . . . They will go then to Soviet Russia, and have some living and schooling there."

"Hm . . ."

"Do not 'hm,' Mr. Rind, please, do not. . . ." Lida spoke reproachfully. Enough people said "hm" to her. . . .

"You can understand—she has nobody, nobody to help. . . ."

"But there must be some principles . . ." Mr. Rind said.

"'Principles are for richer people'—that is just what the woman said: 'first you eat, then you remember you have principles.' But, Mr. Rind," Lida cried eatherly, "let us go and see her! She invited us to celebrate their Christmas with them. . . ."

" When is it ? "

" The woman does not know exactly "—and Lida began to plead warmly the woman's cause. " For centuries Armenians had their Christmas on our Russian Epiphany day, the sixth of January old style, or the nineteenth of January new style. . . . And they have their Pope who is called Catholicos, although he is not a Catholic, they are Armenian—Gregorians. Now, see what happened. . . . If Catholicos says something it is always true and his word cannot ever be repealed. . . . Well, after the Russian Revolution some Armenians began a regular siege around Catholicos : ' Let them have their Armenian Christmas with the Russian, on the seventh of January new style, which is the twenty-fifth of December old style, which is Russian Christmas, thus the Christmases would coincide, better to have them at the same time.' Well, he was old and tired. . . . He said at last : ' Well, let it be. . . . ' But then *what* happened ? ^b Lida's eyes were round with astonishment at such happenings, and Mr. Rind's head was buzzing because of styles. . . ." *What happened ? "*

" The Soviet government abolished Christmas entirely. . . . Some of the Russians abroad began to raise their voices to have Christmas with the rest of the Christian world. That is, on the twenty-fifth of December, which is only the twelfth of December, old style. Some accepted, but you know the fasting time became so short, people did not feel ready to celebrate . . . and—you know *what* else happened . . . the New Year > new style, would be now in the fasting days and . . ."

" Lida," Mr. Rind said, " keep to the woman."

" If you like. . . ." Lida seemed offended by Mr. Rind's lack of interest. " The woman . . . Catholicos cannot *twice* change the date of Christmas, could he . . . ? And so the Armenians split into two groups. . . . The older people did not accept the change—even in the name of Catholicos. The younger accepted. But again they were celebrating their Christmas all alone in the world."

" But the woman ? "

" The woman started her usual fasting. Oh, Mr. Rind ! " Lida cried. " I never *knew their* fasting is so very, very severe. Our Granny used to keep all the fasting days, but then she could eat fish. . . ."

. • " But the woman ? "

" The woman *cannot* of course, no meat, no milk, no butter, no eggs—nothing, nothing. Oh, Mr. Rind, they say, everything *cooked* is a sin. . . . Only bread is allowed, water, then some raw vegetables, but here—what raw vegetables could one get . . . and they are so very, very expensive. . . ."

" So the woman ? "

" Oh, she eats nothing, Mr. Rind, *nothing* and she started the fasting ahead so many days as to be ready—suppose Christmas would be sooner . . . new style . . . but it is not ..."

" But how did she know it isn't ? "

" Oh, Mr. Rind, they have a ritual, the priest must come and announce that Christ was born, otherwise He could not be . . ."

" But the woman ? "

" She is *waiting* for the birth of Christ, and she is fasting. . . . Oh, she is so thin, so weak, so exhausted. ... " Lida's eyes were sparkling with tears . . . " she can die before He would be born . . ."

" Couldn't she start eating ? "

" To *break the fast*? *Never, never.* Other people can do that, *she—never.* She would better die, she said . . . and, Mr. Rind, now she thinks it will be on the old—the very old style . . . and she asked me to come and celebrate with her ... let us go ! Mr. Rind, let us go ! You know then she can *eat* everything and we could, perhaps, bring her something nice for supper."

Mr. Rind meekly said :

" Well, we shall go. . . . Yes, we shall bring her food."

Several days later Lida said :

" To-night we shall go to see the Armenian woman. Her Christmas is to-morrow. We shall meet the holy day with her."

" When shall we go ? "

" In the evening, somewhere about ten o'clock."

" Why so late ? "

" Her Christmas begins at night. ..."

There was nothing to say to that, and the visit was agreed upon.

At ten o'clock of the same evening Mr. Rind and Lida went to see the old Armenian woman, whose name was Haikanush. She had a small room, full of things of unknown age, destination, and value, as if the happier or richer were throwing there the things which they were sure they would never need themselves.

The woman wore the same black dress and the same black shawl that hid the upper as well as the lower part of her face, only the eyes and nose were exposed to the observer. But those eyes and nose were a picture in themselves, testimony enough on which an observer could read a sad story of life of an uneven struggle against misfortunes ; of tears—shed in loneliness ; of hopes deceived, of dreams broken, of expectance betrayed ; and finally—of a peculiar *strength* which comes out of desolation and despair only, and is often stronger than any other strength.

The three boys were sitting motionlessly and mournfully in the three corners. A table covered with a snow-white napkin stood in the middle of the room.

As soon as the guests came and were seated, the woman extinguished all the lights,

" This is their custom," Lida whispered—" they lived for ages under the Turks and had to celebrate their holidays in the greatest secrecy, or else they would be simply killed on the spot."

For a while they sat in silence and darkness. A strange feeling entered Mr. Rind's soul, too. It seemed that while they were sitting thus, in darkness, something was being prepared for them, something of the greatest joy, felicity, and blessedness.

It was so easy to believe, there in that darkness, that mysteries did exist and miracles did go their rounds.

Suddenly a cautious knock was heard at the door. A movement, hasty cautious steps—and the woman opened the door. Several dark and silent figures slid into the room and noiselessly the door was shut. Nobody said a word. A match was struck and Mr. Rind saw a tall man—extraordinarily tall and handsome—with dark eyes burning in a thin face with a silvery beard. Everybody had a wax candle and they lit the candles and stood in a close circle, shading the fire of the candles with their folded palms, to hide lights. Then the priest said something.

He said it simply and briefly—but it made them all start and shiver, Mr. Rind too, for he knew what the priest said. Child Christ was born, just now, just there, that very moment, among those dark figures. He was born, in spite of all—the faith lost, the sins in full tide ; in spite of those eight girls given to an alien monastery, in spite of the boys ready for communism, in spite of Mr. Rind and Lida's different creeds. He was born for all of them.

.Now they all sang a carol. Then the candles were extin-

guished, and the visitors left to perform the same miracle at other houses.

The lights in the room were lit. Now this was another room, another woman, another mood. This was *joy*, the real joy, which is not immediately connected with timely things, but comes as a reflection of things above.

Now Haikanush had another face, sparkling with happy tears, as if she wore diamonds of many carats and purest water.

She laid the table and Lida helped with things brought by herself.

This was a supper to remember always : the woman eating at last, with a grateful and pious expression on her face, the boys less mournful, but not less silent, Lida happy to tears, and Mr. Rind—a spectator to all this.

Before they left, the woman told Lida to thank Mr. Rind and to tell him she wished him and his country happiness. Mr. Rind was curious to know how she reconciled all this—her flaming faith with the giving of her sons to a different life.

" Master," she said, and Lida translated, " my heart is broken . . . I am a lone, poor, illiterate widow left with orphans. . . . Children need a strong ruling hand . . .^o Mother is love, father is a rod. . . .' My love is not enough. . . . I ran the risk of raising a family of eight whores and three criminals. I am giving my children to those who are willing to take them—to give them bread and shelter—and the rest is left to God ! "

25

THE nineteenth of January (the sixth in the old Russian calendar) is a great holiday, that of Christ's baptism in the Jordan River. This day concludes the two weeks of the Christmas celebration and marks the climax of amusements and festivities. On the eve, according to an ancient custom, youth is busy with fortune-telling. That is the only day through the year when this occult occupation is not frowned on by the clergy, who yield, for the sake of youth's amusement, to that old pre-Christian custom which has persisted through thousands of years.

The Platov children kept the tradition and all, except Galina, had questions to be asked from fate. Glafira and Lida tried the oldest and the easiest rite. In twilight they left the house and went in different directions. When Lida saw a lonely passer-by she approached and asked timidly :

" Would you kindly tell me the name of my bridegroom ? "

" Why, lakov, of course," the man said laughing.

And, all shaken, Lida realised that lakov in English meant exactly Jimmy. Her anxiety—she still had no letters—was alleviated by this single word, and she ran home all radiant from happiness.

Glafira returned in a rather vague mood. Her passer-by had just laughed at her request and said :

" You little fox, you know well yourself what your bridegroom's name will be."

Meanwhile Mme. Platova prepared a salted fritter and all the children ate, except Galina again. This meant that, being thirsty, they would see, in dreams, the answer to their heart's desire. Lida and Glafira put their combs under their pillows, to make the future bridegrooms appear and help with hair-dressing. This provoked laughter, for nowadays girls' bobbed hair does not need as much help as those knee-long blonde tresses of their grandmothers.

That night was rich in dreams, in sighs, in sounds, in whispers. Only Galina slept quietly.

Lida dreamt of Jimmy, of course, but he loomed far away, he brandished something in his hand, but it was not her comb.

Then she saw Mr. Rind, who was standing on a sea rock and, pointing down to the waves, told Lida she had to jump down and drink. But she could not, for the water was hot and salted.

She woke up to see Glafira sitting on her bed. In deep whispers the latter confessed to Lida her love. In plain words it sounded no richer than Lida's. It ran thus.

Mr. Wren had come from Australia two months ago. He was of Russian origin, but with his parents naturalised there he was now a British subject, which sounded like being a prince to the girls of nations trodden upon in Asia. Mr. Wren was almost rich. People said he had come to marry a Russian girl. *All* the eligible Russian girls of Harbin were after him.

Glafira's love story was the poem of a tragic one-sided love. They met. She fell in love. He did not. He never said anything special and was often seen as an escort of the Belle of the Town. That was all.

Glafira opened her secret only to Vladimir, her brother in Shanghai, first, because they were the closest pals in the family, second, it was not such a heavy shame to confess one's failure at a longer distance. Lida was the second person to share in the burden.

"Believe me," Glafira whispered, "it is not only because he is a British subject—no! I would love him in any conditions, for he is so . . . so lovable . . . I am stupid, or something, but I cannot fall in love with the boys around here, whom I have known so long. Love must come from the unknown. . . . And I cannot fall in love with poets or dreamers. . . . I love Mr. Wren because he is so gay, strong, powerful . . . he bears no traces of humiliation, or poverty, or defeat. . . ."

And she began to cry.

"But what am I to him? Lida, to *whom* belong those young, strong, happy boys? *Whom* do they marry? *What* must a girl have to attract their love?"

Lida did not know, either, and they both shed many tears, happily abandoning themselves to their sorrow. Only young girls can cry like that, only young girls in love, for there is such force in youth that even tears and sorrow taste sweet and balmy.

In the morning—whatever the dreams—all the family went to church.

After a long Mass, the religious procession with crosses, icons, and banners came out of every church building and

joined in one procession to the river. The Sungari River was called the Jordan for that single day. A place for the ceremony had been duly prepared. An ice hole had been cut to serve as a font. A splendid cross, fifteen feet high, had been hewn out of ice and perched erect on the eastern side of the font. Sculptured by an artist, the cross bore beautiful ornamental rebels cut in ice. It sparkled splendidly. Sometimes, under direct sun rays, it threw high a pillar of dazzling light.

The air was filled with the triumphant sounds of church bells. They were heard farther on days like this—cold, still, and clear.

The joined choruses of the churches sang prayers along the way. Church banners—in silver, gold, in bright colours of the ancient icon paintings—hovered over the crowd. The Bishop led the procession.

The Bishop of Harbin was an old, smallish man with the wistful face of an innocent child. That round face expressed all the stability of a non-questioning faith, which could look at the hell of his and believe in God, see a corpse and believe in its resurrection, see a crime and pity the murderer. His was that beautiful, blithe acceptance of life known only among Christians. He was one of those who knew that the explanation of life cannot be found in the transitory, woeful changes of material existence, but in the wisdom which comes after one has experienced and accepted them.

Tens of thousands of people followed the Bishop, for practically none, except those too old or too small, would remain at home on such a day.

That day seemed to be always the coldest throughout the year, still men walked bareheaded, their beards covered with hoarfrost, even their eyebrows, even eyelashes. The clergy, about forty in number, stood around the Bishop while he performed the rite of plunging the cross thrice into the font, which was to make that water pure and holy for that single day.

Then people approached the font one by one and took away water in bottles. This water had to be preserved throughout the year, until another sixth of January, and it was made to serve different purposes. It was sprinkled over a sick child, or in a new house, or in a garden.

The last item of the ritual was the bathing of the volunteers. Bathing in that cold was a rather venturesome deed. Usually

the bathers wore bathing suits and fur coats (one's own or lent for the occasion). They would take off the coats, remain for a moment in the open, to accustom themselves to the change of temperature, then, making the sign of the cross, they would plunge in the font of Jordan. The first touch of water would be felt as hot, even burning, then a terrible shock would bring the realisation of cold. One would hurry out of the water. The coat would be thrown on and the bather driven home.

When the Bishop bent and plunged the golden cross into the waters, all the crowd sang. Following the old custom, people opened the cages with birds, especially brought for the occasion. The birds usually were tame doves. They would soar high in the air, over the cross, in slow circular movements. All that singing, the sounds of bells, all that sparkling of light, brightness of banners, all that excitement, fascinated Lida. She had never seen a Jordan on the ice. It appealed not only to her religious feelings, but to her artistic emotions too.

In the afternoon she decided to go and see the Jordan once more, now in the sunset light.

The bank of the river was high. The horizon lay open, before Lida's eyes, and the surface of the river seemed flooded with the purple brightness of the sunset. Here and there people were walking in small groups—holiday strollers, or lovers. The air was fresh and cold and a light wind rose and fell, coming from the open space of the river.

Lida stood there living through one of those rare moments when the relaxation of the inner self brings one near to non-existence. Those moments are neither felicity nor sadness. They have no emotional tinge. Alien to any motion, they are lived in a twilight of self: eyes seeing, ears hearing but mind and heart asleep. Suddenly she felt somebody touch her arm. With a start Lida came to herself and looked around. Dasha stood beside her.

"Worshipping *the ice* to-day?" Dasha asked.

"No, *the cross*," Lida answered.

"That cross?" Dasha said in an intentionally mocking tone and pointed her finger down at the cross, lit with lights of sunset. "Praying to *that ice*!"

"The cross . . ." Lida repeated.

"But its substance is *tee*. People were actually worshipping a block of ice to-day."

"Dasha," Lida said gently, "do you want to say those people were not believers?"

"Believers in what?"

"In *whom*. . . In Christ."

"Hm," said Dasha and laughed. "I don't think anybody now believes in Him—honestly. Some still cling to churches, for churches are such a cosy shelter for the weak."

"Dasha," Lida said again, gently. "The first question is about oneself. . . . Why start by doubting others?"

"You are ridiculous. Of course I do not believe. More, / *hate*. Christianity kept progress back. It was given too long a trial as a system—imagine two thousand years utterly useless, wasted."

"Oh!" Lida said, and tried to move away.

"Stop!" Dasha caught her hand. "Let me hear your argument. How could *you* believe in One who had all the power and for centuries could withstand tears and prayers of those who clung to Him . . . to see sufferings and never interfere . . .?"

"I do not know," Lida answered. "I do not even feel a need to know. I have no urge to *question* God. I just believe . . ."

"Praying for hell for your enemies . . ."

"No," Lida said now eagerly. "You miss the chief point. You mix the outer attributes of the believers with the inner state of a soul . . ."

"Sounds rather misty," Dasha said in a scoffing tone.

"Listen," Lida said. "In my family we almost never *speak* of religion. I am not a connoisseur of dogmas . . . I am not interested in theological argument. I am not an ardent churchgoer. Even in church, I am attracted mostly by the mystical beauty of the rites. I even cannot say that I pray often. But with all my being I kncfw—and never doubted and will never doubt—the *existence* of God. I live happily because of it. Dasha," she said and her voice trembled, "we both are fatherless . . . but I never feel lonely, or lost, or left alone . . ."

"Ha!" Dasha smiled. "This is a poor way to talk about religion. What do you think about Christ? Would you die for Him?"

"I?" Lida was as if at a loss for a moment. "For Him? You mean to be forced to renounce Him and commit a blasphemy? Oh! In that case I will better die . . . always . . . at every moment of my life!"

She breathed quickly and Dasha was looking at her with severe, mournful eyes.

" Are you lying ? "

" No. I am not."

They stood both, for a while, in silence.

Suddenly, without any provocation, Dasha raised both her arms and with her palms uplifted, ready to receive, she cried impudently :

" Hallo ! God ! If Thou art there, strike me now that I may believe in Thee too ! "

And she laughed loudly.

Lida—petrified—looked at her. Horror at this unprovoked, intentional blasphemy shook her. She covered her face with her hands and blindly ran forth, away from Dasha.

26

MRS. PITCHER sat opposite the doctor. Only his writing-table separated them and she felt keenly his observant eyes. They moved from her brow to her mouth, her shoulder, her right hand which she forgot to move from the top of the table and now felt sealed to the varnished desk by the doctor's one look at it. Then his eyes encircled her as a whole and kept her thus projected upon the screen of his vision. It was a pitiless gaze. She began to tremble slightly.

" Tell me the usual routine of your day.!"

In a hesitant voice she drew a picture of a day at the Pitchers'.

He was silent for a while as if waiting for something more to be added. She kept silent too, all the time nervously conscious of those big envelopes lying close to her right hand, almost numb by now. She knew they contained her verdict, written in figures and X-rays, the verdict upon her health and her life.

But the doctor was not in haste.

" Tell me all the outstanding events of your life for the last fifteen years."

She was puzzled.

" Really, Doctor," she said. " I can't remember that anything of importance has happened to me since I married . . ."

" Have you lived here ever since then ? "

" Yes."

" Do you go away in the summer-time ? "

"Yes. Sometimes."

"For instance?"

" We went twice to Japan, twice to China resorts, then to places here, in Manchuria."

" And nothing of importance has ever happened there to you ? "

" Nothing."

" Do you like summer trips ? "

" No. I prefer to stay at home. It is more comfortable."

" Have you ever had adopted children ? "

" No."

" Have you had pet animals ? "

" No."

" Bosom friends ? "

" No."

" Lovers ? "

" Oh, no ! "

" Who is your favourite poet ? "

" Really ... I am afraid I am not interested in poetry."

" You read novels ? "

" I do not read much. In fact, I do not like modern novels."

" And the old ones ? "

" You mean classics ? I have read them long ago."

" Do you study languages ? "

" No, I speak Russian and English from childhood. Of course, I can speak a little Chinese, but only to my servants, that kind only."

" Do you belong to some societies, charity or otherwise ? "

" No. I am not a good mixer with social workers. I dislike their type."

" Are you interested in arts ? "

" No. . . . Of course, we go sometimes to concerts."

" Are you interested in sports ? "

" No. I was educated in an old-fashioned family. I played tennis when I was younger."

" Are you very friendly with your husband ? "

" We never quarrel."

" This is not a proof of affection. Have you many interests in common ? In politics, for instance ? "

" We never discuss things like that."

" What do you say sometimes after having read the newspapers in the morning?"

" I never read them."

Again he was silent for a while.

" Do you work in your garden ? "

" No."

" Your husband does then ? "

" No. We have a coolie. . . . A Chinaman."

" What is his name ? "

" Oh, I do not know. . . . Just ' Gardener ' I suppose. . . . "

They talked like this for half an hour longer. He asking questions, she answering " no." Before her own eyes her life unfolded in the negative. She said, or felt, or thought nothing on the principal events of life.

Then the doctor gave her the envelope and said that she had no illnesses of any kind, as far as a physical illness can go, but that she was on the blink of total and final inner bankruptcy, and that there was great and imminent danger. What he said after this statement was perplexing. He said only a radical change could save her. He said the best way would be to give up all her comfort, physical and mental, and rush to meet life afresh, to open a critical eye on everything, first of all upon herself.

He called her a narrow egoist. He said that life implies living, and she did not live, and now—although not broken—her physical and mental machine was all covered with rust. She needed activity. Would not she try to give away all her property and start to earn her living ?

Mrs. Pitcher shuddered and said honestly she would not be able ever to do that.

Again the doctor was silent, then he drew before her eyes the course of her treatment. Being a hardened egoist (he again repeated that hateful word), she had to start the treatment by pleasing her emotions. Let her arouse her curiosity about life and people in general. Every day after breakfast, she should take long walks into those parts of the town where she had never been (for there were such places even at Harbin for Mrs. Pitcher). She had to open her eyes and her ears towards life there . . . well, the doctor said, this will be the beginning only. . . .

He spoke some more, and she understood. He wanted her to enlarge the strict schedule of her life, to let in more feelings, thoughts, activities. . . . Otherwise? Well, he told how a coolness towards life and people turns into indifference, then into hostility. And then? Well, there were nervous illnesses, mental too. No, she was not there, not yet, but rapidly moving in that direction. . . . Why was he sure she could change? Because that *tedium vitae* was not inborn in her, but carefully cultivated through life. That was why he was so openly talking to her about herself, as if that had not been she but her assumed disguise. Tear it away now . . . if she was afraid of casting off the whole of it at once, proceed by slow motion.

She promised. She thanked. She said she understood.

And she had really a firm determination to change herself and her life too.

She left the doctor. For a while she stood at the street corner outside his house.

Suppose I begin straight now. . . . Suppose I go in that direction. . . . I have two hours before tea-time.

And she went. She tried to look round with the new eyes, unprejudiced, critical eyes.

What did she see?

Poverty. Houses in decay. Movement of people. People in cars (rarely), in rickshaws (oftener),-and on foot (most often). The farther she walked the more poverty she saw, and more of movement too. No cars, less rickshaws, more of passers-by. Then there were only passers-by and undisguised poverty all round.

Where have the riches gone? she thought. This country used to be rich. This town was one of the most prosperous in the Far East. Manchuria is one of the most fertile areas. . . .

There was a block filled with a garden and a poor wooden building of a church in its middle. Bells were announcing the service and people were moving thither.

Beggars of all ages and conditions of poverty and illness crouched on the high steps. Dirty, in rags, some smelling of wine, others of tobacco—and all of them of poor human flesh unwashed, cold and unfed—those people had nothing of gloom or despair about them. They kept eagerly talking among themselves and greeting those entering the church, as if there lay no human barriers between people, and the differences of class and finance

were of no importance at all. There was no feeling of humiliation or shame.

"How do you do, daughter?" and an old wrinkled hag in quest of alms stretched out her hand. "Help an old woman, in the name of Christ, help a childless mother, be a darling daughter to me. . . ."

She entered the church. She looked round—at icons, at candles, at people. . . . Who goes to church? Unlucky people, of course. A recently widowed husband, a forsaken wife, orphans of all the possible variations, an unhappy lover, an invalid, a pauper—a repentant with darkened conscience.

When Mrs. Pitcher left she saw a new figure among the crowd of beggars before the church entrance.

In a small vehicle, with a single long shaft, a torso was perched. It was exactly a torso, for it had neither legs nor arms, nothing attached to it except the head. The head wore an old fur hat of a soldier and the face—all pale and swollen—gaily sparkled its brown eyes. The vehicle had been driven by a boy who stood now aside with his hat in his hands, upturned for collecting alms.

A pang of disgust shook Mrs. Pitcher.

"How do you do, sister?" the torso said, singling her out of a small group of those leaving the church, because of her high-class fur coat.

Trying to keep her breath in, remembering the doctor's words, Mrs. Pitcher cautiously approached the vehicle.

"What is . . . the matter with you?" she asked.

"With me? . . . Nothing," the torso wondered gaily.

"Where . . . where are your . . . limbs?" And Mrs. Pitcher felt painfully that she did not know how to talk to a beggar.

"German technics," the torso laughed. "I have been mutilated during the World War."

"Who keeps you?"

"What?"

"Who takes care of you?"

"Care? This boy. He drags me around."

"Is he yours?"

"No, hired."

"But . . . there are government pensions . . . for invalids, I mean. . . ."

" Phew !" the torso whistled, and all the beggars began to laugh.

" She fell from the moon I " the voices were heard. " And she is Russian, she speaks Russian." ... " Who *cares* about old invalid soldiers?" . . . "God only," cried an old man. " Only *God* . . . for some people still give alms in His name."

Mrs' Pitcher hastily gave a dollar to the torso, and one more to the crowd of beggars on the steps.

Before leaving, she looked once more straight into the torso's face. It was *gay*^ nothing of despair or woe could she read in it.

And wondering she went away.

She was not late for tea.

The silver implements were brought in noiselessly by the shadow of a servant, the Pitchers' number one boy. It all seemed unreal for a while.

Still, strictly observing the ritual, she poured tea, after the customary solemn ritual about cream or lemon, cake or scones.

She unfolded her napkin. She took her cup. She drank her tea. It tasted the same as it had for years and years, and its taste brought Mrs. Pitcher to real life.

She sighed. Here she was, at home. Here they were, decent people. Without the humiliation of running after one's daily bread, with no imminent problems to solve. A well-ordered existence with no room for vagaries of mind or senses. Subdued feelings, subdued voices. Lives in the shadow of somebody else's struggle. At last, she was at home.

The art of conversation was never a strong point with the Pitchers and their class. Taciturnity implied better manners. Tea is meant for drinking. A chat over meals seems rather vulgar. Conversation was allowed in reasonable doses only.

" Have you heard about the riot at Mukden ? " Mr. Rind, who was their guest, asked.

" Of course," Mr. Pitcher said.

" What do you think about it ? "

There was no other answer, except a slight movement of Mr. Pitcher's shoulders.

" A cup of tea? " Mrs. Pitcher offered.

" Thank you," Mr. Rind replied.

" This riot means, probably, new complications in the international relations here," Mr. Rind went on again.

Nobody said anything.

"A cup of tea?" Mrs. Pitcher said to Mr. Pitcher.

Mr. Pitcher bowed.

"The Soviet Government has sent a note," Mr. Rind went on after his second cup.

"A cup of tea?" said Mrs. Pitcher to Mr. Rind.

"Thank you," was his answer.

This was a nice evening, with sponge cake, with hot and strong tea, with thick cream and sliced lemon. What if the conversation was meaningless?

Mrs. Pitcher looked into her cup and suddenly saw there the torso. It was a lightning moment of vision, but she saw him—gay, almost happy. The idea that somebody like him could be happy, seemed suddenly rather offensive.

27

NEXT MORNING, after breakfast, Mrs. Pitcher went for a walk. Again she went to those parts of the town where she had never been before.

She walked and mused about the general decrepitude of the town. In spite of the general high opinion about the cleanliness of the Japanese, that was proof to the contrary. Now they were governors, owners and masters, and yet nobody ever remembered the town in such a state of degradation.

Suddenly Mrs. Pitcher saw a small piece of cardboard stuck to a windowpane:

"Children for rent."

She stopped short.

What could that mean? and a sharp curiosity—a feeble echo of the Mrs. Pitcher of her youth—suddenly stirred in her. She stood in amazement and suspense for a while, then decisively she entered the yard and knocked at the door of the house. A woman opened the door but did not invite Mrs. Pitcher farther than the porch, where she stood looking at the visitor with an unfriendly, suspicious eye.

"What do you want here?"

Mrs. Pitcher did not know what to answer. The woman closed the door behind, as if not to allow Mrs. Pitcher even a

chance look into the dwelling, then—aggressively and defensively at the same time—she asked again :

" What do you want, madam ? Why do you go around disturbing honest people ?¹

" I should like to know the meaning of the inscription in the window. . . . "

" If you don't know, then better walk straight on by," the woman said sharply.

Something of the tenacity of her youth woke up in Mrs. Pitcher.

" Is that your advertisement ? . . . I came to talk business. I am not an idle visitor."

The woman changed her attitude. She surveyed Mrs. Pitcher with a critical eye and asked :

" What do you need to rent a child for ? "

" Well," Mrs. Pitcher answered vaguely, " to keep me company, I guess. I am too lonely," she added with a simple and piercing sincerity.

" Ah ! You have just lost your own child ? "

" No," Mrs. Pitcher was in haste to explain, " I never had one."

" Forsaken by your lover ? "

" N-no. . . . "

" Giving up drinking ? "

" No. Just feeling lonely "

The woman looked at her once more with her scrutinising eyes, and Mrs. Pitcher felt as though she had been pinched. Then stepping back, the woman said :

" Come in. Welcome."

There was a kitchen, which looked somehow lame, for the walls, the ceiling, even the stove, had no continuous vertical lines, but were reclining one upon the other in this direction, in that. The things which are usually level in a kitchen had in that room bumps and curves, as if they had been painted by an ultramodern artist whose imagination functioned only in circles.

The woman took a crooked chair, with its varnish peeling, and after having dusted it with her palm put it firmly on the floor, in answer to which the chair squeaked indignantly. Then she said curtly :

" Sit down here."

¹ Mrs. Pitcher sat down cautiously, trying to withhold her

weight, but the chair met her in a most accommodating way and they felt cosy—Mrs. Pitcher and the chair. Only then she saw clearly the ravaged face of the woman—sallow, wrinkled—the open annals of her active life. She was more "creature" than "woman," Mrs. Pitcher thought.

"Let us talk business," the woman offered. "You begin."

Mrs. Pitcher was at a loss. She looked at her fingernails and sighed.

Then the woman went on volubly.

"I myself do not have children for rent. Another woman lives here, those are her children. Only, I think, all the best number are taken by now. . . . Of course, if you offer higher price . . ."

"Who rents them?"

"Different people. The baby is still with that young idler Nurka."

"How old is the baby?"

"Who knows—about eight months, I guess. . . ."

"What is the baby doing?"

"Doing . . . ?" The woman smelled strongly of spirits. "Do you know Nurka?"

"No, I think not." •

"Congratulations. She is just an animal. A swindler, that woman is, and a whore to boot, and a thief, of course, and a drunkard . . . good society is not a proper place for her . . . jail is crying aloud for her, I am sure. . . ."

"But the baby?"

"The baby is all right. . . . Since she is asking alms for the baby's sake, Nurka cannot abuse it, or else those lazy women on the streets, the busybodies, you know, they would instantly interfere. . . ."

"Is the baby well fed?" Mrs. Pitcher became suddenly solicitous about the baby.

"Of course, or else the baby would not last long, would she?"

"No, she would not," and Mrs. Pitcher was now really and deeply concerned. "Does it cry often?"

"Who would rent a crying baby? No. She is rather quiet. Then again she is given her portion of poppy seeds, she is, before she is on the streets."

"But . . . but would not that . . . rather harm the baby?"

The woman looked up with a suddenly suspicious eye.

"Does this concern you? The baby is not yours."

"Of course not. . . ." Mrs. Pitcher went on hastily, "I was rather wondering *how long* the baby would last. . . ."

"Do not worry. . . . The baby has an easy life. . . . One could almost envy her luck. All she has to do is to cry a bit."

"To cry a bit?"

"Sometimes Nurka needs it crying. Then she gives her a good pinch. And the baby cries. Such a responsive child!"

"But why does Nurka want the baby to cry?"

"^c Dear me! One sees at once you are not in the profession. Suppose two lovers stroll by . . . a lady and her escort, a fine gentleman. . . . Now lovers are generous, when they *notice* one. A silent woman at the corner . . . they would never guess why she is there. Here Nurka gives the baby a pinch. It cries. 'A baby!' exclaims the lady. 'A child! Oh, poor baby! It cries!' and she would whimper herself, 'Oh, give her some money. . . .' If the gentleman cannot hurt her feelings with a refusal, can he? . . ."

"I see. . . ."

"Some people like to ask questions . . . but this cannot make Nurka shy . . . not her . . . No, she has her story ready."

"And what does she say?"

"What? For each person the story *must* be different. One cannot move different people with the same yarn."

"Is Nurka married?"

"Now cmony I Nowadays fashionable women do not marry, women with careers even less. . . ."

"How much does Nurka earn?"

Suddenly the woman grew exasperated.

"You think an animal like Nurka would ever tell the truth? Believe me"—and she leaned near to Mrs. Pitcher's shoulder—"believe me, there is not a *dwp* of honesty left in that woman. . . . Take my word of honour for that. All she pays for renting the baby is two dollars."

"A day?"

"A month. . . ."

Here the woman changed her attitude to that of utmost friendliness and, moving nearer, she tapped Mrs. Pitcher's

knee with her big hand of five swollen fingers and said invitingly :

"Dear lady, rent your company here . . . we do not ask much. . . . I will act as your agent . . . let me earn some Pity a helpless woman, a poor woman of feminine sex. . . . That other woman—the mother—is not good at business, she has no brains. . . ."

"Where is the father?"

"The father? Killed."

"Who killed him?"

"Really! The murderer did not leave his address, you know. . . ."

"Who was he?"

"A bricklayer—working there in the Japanese military buildings. . . . Then somebody came and said: 'Do not wait for him for supper to-day, he is dead.' . . ."

"But perhaps he was not killed, just died."

"Perhaps. . . ." The woman was not interested in the father.

"Does the widow . . . was she very unhappy?"

"She would be, if she had time." And in a false tone she began again :

"Rent the child! Pity that poor woman, a widow with orphans, *orphans*, lady . . . hungry orphans, and me too . . . their best friend, their only support . . . rent the child"—and a drunken tear rolled down her utterly hypocritical cheek.

"Well," Mrs. Pitcher rose up. "Send their mother to me. Here is my address. . . . Perhaps I will rent a child. . . ."

"But me? You forget me?"

"Afterwards," Mrs. Pitcher said, "I will pay you the commission." Then, seeing the woman's face, she hastily took twenty cents from her handbag and giving it she added :

"In case I rent the child, I will pay more."

She was ready to go. But the woman, greedily looking at the card with the address, said :

"But *honestly*, for what purpose do you want a child?"

"Tell the mother exactly this—a lonely woman would like to have a child rented . . . not a very small one . . . to teach it to read, write, work—for company."

"For how long?"

"Let us begin with a month."

Just then quick steps were heard outside, the door was flung open and a boy rushed in. Nikitka.

"How cold . . ." he began, but seeing a lady in the room he stopped short. He was a splendid boy : snub-nosed, with round cheeks, an eager, optimistic child, intelligent and quick. One takes to such boys readily and gaily. He stood as one who is used to being attacked unexpectedly but who is not afraid of honest physical combat.

"Lady to rent children," the woman introduced Mrs. Pitcher.

"What kind of job?" the boy asked, businesslike.

"Just to keep her company."

"Do you feed your company?" The boy was all excitement now.

Mrs. Pitcher was unwilling to disappoint the eager question in those eyes. She said :

⁶⁶"I feed them well."

"Madam ! Take me for a company." He lisped with haste and excitement. "I can run errands, sweep floors, I do not smoke, nor drink ever ! As to stealing—believe me, not a penny will ever disappear in your house . . . not even a lump of sugar. . . . I never use bad words, I take my oath !" And he swore. . . . "I know what good company requires. . . . One has to restrain oneself for the sake of politeness . . . otherwise where is the difference between good society and a bad one . . . ?" He approached nearer. Looking at Mrs. Pitcher imploringly, he lifted up his face—and breathed onions.

And she saw his thin neck, so rarely washed, his scrubby hands, his broken nails, the hungry expression—of eyes, of face, of body—and in haste to give him joy—not to let him stand imploringly and waiting—she said without thinking of Mr. Pitcher's permission :

"Yes, I will employ you."

He made a sharp movement, then stopped abruptly. His face worked, gathering tiny wrinkles around his short nose. Then he remembered, evidently, how he should approach a lady. He made a grotesque bow and said gallantly :

"Millions of thanks, gracious madam !"

And suddenly Mrs. Pitcher felt a strange movement in her heart: she felt that she *liked* everything. This room, that window, the stove, even the woman, and especially the boy,

Nikitka. It was not that she admired, or approved . . . no, she just took them—as living beings—into the circle of her concern. She saw the ugliness too, but she felt she was fast losing her fear of unattractive appearances. This was *life*. Its charm, which makes one prefer to look at an ugly crawling animal than at a beautiful human corpse, feeling more in common with any kind of life than with most beautiful phases of death, that charm—healthy and sound in its core—began to revive Mrs. Pitcher's heart. Not that she grew kinder, or better, or happier, no, she just felt more *alive*, not so alien to all people and things. This could be the beginning of many things—good or bad.

She rose smiling.

" Good-bye," she said. " Nikitka, you and your mother come to discuss the final arrangements . . . any time."

Suddenly she felt that her appetite for luncheon was high. She longed for her silver coffee-pot, as a labourer is ready for his meal at the end of a hard day.

28

ON that fatal day:

" Mr. Rind," Dasha said, " won't you go with me to a meeting to-day ? "

" Why should I go ? I will not understand much of it."

" But this is a special meeting. There will be a delegate from Moscow. He will speak."

" What about ? "

" He will draw an outline of the world situation. Suggest the lines of our behaviour and activities."

" Is he someone whom you know personally ? "

Dasha was silent for a moment.

" Yes," she said slowly. " I know him. We have been for a while in the same youth group."

" Well, then I will go. When will it take place ? "

" To-night, late. It is a secret meeting. Do not say a word to anybody. We shall have to go to the outskirts of the town to one of the schools there. . . ."

This Mr. Rind did not like. But Dasha said the police usually knew about secret meetings, and only pretended to know

nothing. According to Dasha, Comrade Bugrov was an outstanding orator, a leader, and his speech would be of great interest and importance. She promised to translate so that Mr. Rind would understand everything. It was obvious that Dasha was greatly interested herself. He decided to go.

Dasha came for him at ten o'clock that night. They went on foot. The distant sky sparkled with stars. The day-time bustle and noise was gradually sinking into quietness. A kind of exhilarating freshness filled the air. Dasha seemed excited. She could hardly keep from running to that meeting.

They left the more populated streets and went into the quiet, almost unlit quarters, and the beauty of the night became more visible. Its charm grew in measure as the artificial lights and noise were left farther behind. At the corner of a garden Dasha halted for a moment. She stood with her face uplifted towards stars. Their pale light threw shadows on her childish face. Her eyes narrowed.

"On these marvellous nights," Dasha said slowly, "I feel a longing to fly ... like a bird ... to new places. ..."

"Well," Mr. Rind said, "you might try. Take an airplane and fly to America. . . ."

"No, no," she said hastily, "I don't mean to another country ... I mean to fly away, to forget everything I have been, or seen, or knew. To be free. ... It seems strange, this feeling. I cannot fight it. ..." Her voice fell to a whisper.

But she made a quick movement with her head and added :
"It is only a moment, then it passes."

"It is youth, I think," Mr. Rind said. "And perhaps it comes because you are tired too. . . . You have none of the pleasures proper to your age ... no joy. ..."

"No, no, it is not that. I am not sad. I am not tired. I love my life. I made my choice deliberately. Only I feel, it is not all ... that behind all these things there is something else . . . higher . . . and that escapes me. ... I try to see it, to catch it. ... I fail. ..."

Her voice broke.

"It is youth" Mr. Rind said decidedly. "It will pass. You will feel happier then."

"But I do not complain. . . . Oh, you have not understood. ... I like everything high. Great distances, fathomless depth, open space, great winds, things flying. . . ."

Mr. Rind tried to say something and did not find words.

But Dasha said quickly :

" We must not be late ! " and they walked again along the dark and quiet streets.

Silent figures moved here and there. Such a number of passers-by seemed unusual for that street at that time. The comrades were coming to their secret meeting.

Dasha halted and pushing a board in the fence stepped into a yard. She made a sign to Mr. Rind to follow, and when he was in she fixed the board back into the fence.

They were in a garden. Through the branches of the trees, now leafless, a big house was seen, high, dark and quiet.

To that house Dasha led him. They entered it through a small side door, went down several steps, along a series of corridors, then upstairs. The house was almost unlighted, only here and there a shaded lamp gave light enough to distinguish steps or doors. In spite of darkness, the house seemed strangely • alive. A whisper came from above, someone moved ahead, someone breathed behind ; beyond the walls, in other rooms, everywhere, cautious voices and muffled sounds were moving in one direction.

They entered a room. It was an auditorium. The big, half-lit room was packed with people. The windows were darkened with shutters and curtains.

Mr. Rind looked round and a sudden excitement took possession of him. After the lonely walk these hundreds of people seemed a bracing change. He felt positively young, boyish. Here were risks and dangers. An adventure. It challenged a daring mood in him.

Dasha held his hand tightly and piloted him to a place where they could sit.

Mr. Rind looked at the people round him. Youth predominated. Boys under twenty with clear eyes, full of eager life. The girls were mostly variations of Dasha's type—simple, even crude in appearance, all poorly clad, with bobbed hair and not the slightest signs of fashion or coquetry. The women had pale and tired faces and often a kind of masculine clumsiness of manners. There were also elderly men. Those did not form a type but were personalities. Mr. Rind was a bit startled at their looks. One was a big and quiet man, who seemed to be a combination of powers—physical, nervous, mental. Another was

pale and underweight, with the pathetic eyes of a sick child. The third had flaming eyes of hatred, and the fourth—an incarnation of dull obstinacy and cruelty.

Only a few spoke in whispers. The majority were quietly sitting and waiting.

The big forceful man and the two others went to the platform. It was not high, only two steps led to it. They sat there at the sides of the table. The central place was empty. Behind that central chair there was a door, closed.

The big man had a short conference with his comrades at the table, then stood up and said something. Dasha whispered to Mr. Rind that the committee felt uneasy, Comrade Bugrov still had not come," they wondered if something could have happened to him.

At this very moment the door behind the chair opened and a young man stepped in. A wave of joy—in whispers—rose in the room.

The quick movement that Dasha made, the electric jerk of her head, her sigh, her smile, suddenly opened to Mr. Rind what was in her heart : love was there. She looked at Comrade Bugrov and her eyes shone and her hands trembled.

Bugrov was a young man. He could not be even thirty. He was of medium height, thin and slender. He smiled and his narrowing eyes made him look boyishly aggressive, adventurous, brave. . . . Mr. Rind felt that he liked him as he liked Dasha, as if that type of youth had a claim on his affection.

Comrade Bugrov began to speak. His words sounded ponderous in the solemn silence. Dasha, dissolved in her attention, forgot her promise, and Mr. Rind had no translation. But without understanding his words Mr. Rind knew that Comrade Bugrov could only speak the truth. If his truth were not the universal truth, still it was a sacred truth to Comrade Bugrov himself. The instinctive desire to contradict another's truth awoke instantly, and Mr. Rind tried to break the spell. At the same time a small voice of envy rose in him too : how much easier it was to believe, as the audience did ; to put the burden of responsibility on somebody else's shoulders and leave to oneself only a feeling of devotion. How it could simplify life.

But Mr. Rind knew it was not his nature to believe like this.' He moved his shoulder, to throw away the spell. He

felt he was an alien soul, a mind of a different cast. He was only an observer in this audience with its dead silence.

Then it happened. In the complete silence, in a pause between two of the orator's words, there came a thin metallic squeak. And Dasha—alone among hundreds—suddenly, with the lightning intuition of a loving heart, Dasha alone caught its meaning. With a brief cry she rushed forward, jumped on to the platform and stood before Comrade Bugrov, sheltering him with her body. Mr. Rind had not yet caught his breath, as one after the other came the sounds of three shots. Dasha swayed, but still she stood screening Bugrov, pushing towards the door at the back of the platform.

Bugrov disappeared through that door. The door banged. The auditorium broke into a tumult.

People ran towards all the exits. Mr. Rind saw and heard nothing. He had reached the platform. With one arm supporting Dasha, he tried to open the door through which Bugrov had fled. But the door was now barred on the other side. Dasha slumped against the table and the weight of her body moved the table and Dasha moved with it.

In all the chaos of cries and movements, Mr. Rind heard only that rasping sound of the table and saw only that sinking movement of Dasha's body. It seemed a strangely slow movement. He had time enough to understand that she was falling. He caught her in his arms. He held her, and carefully tried to find a better position for her. She grew heavier all the time. He saw her eyes, open wide, and heard her voice. She said something. He did not know what. She spoke in Russian. She repeated the same words several times, whispering now.

It was as if they were all alone in that room, in the world. He looked at her in heartbreaking despair, and she asked for something, and he could not give it to her. There was nobody and nothing to help.

Suddenly Mr. Rind felt something hot and moist down his front—and with awakening terror he understood that it was blood, that Dasha was wounded and dying.

His will came back to him. They had to get out of there. He had to get her out, to find an ambulance, a doctor, a hospital—help.

Where to go? How to get out? Holding her closer, he felt more and more of her blood moistening his body. Dasha—was

dying. She was now limp in his arms and her eyes began to cloud. Her lips did not move any more.

Mr. Rind looked around. *The biggest door must be the shortest way out, he thought. On the street . . . the police must be near somewhere . . . or a car . . . to the hospital . . .*

He carried her to the big door at the back of the auditorium, stepping over the overturned chairs and benches. . . . There was no one in the room now. He walked alone with Dasha in his arms.

He found himself in a corridor and then, at last, in the chill winter air.

But that was not a street. It was a yard. Some buildings and a yard filled with lumber—chunks, shavings, and boards.

He stopped for a moment and then clearly heard Dasha say something. Bringing his face very close to hers he whispered :

" Dear child . . . what is it? Say it in English ? "

Then he saw her eyes and understood that she would never speak any more, any language. . . .

He wanted her to die in peace. He brought her to a pile of fresh, clean wooden boards and put her there. He did not unclasp his hands as he was lowering her body, and looked again into her eyes. In the uncertain light of the coming dawn, her eyes were almost dark. She was looking at him too. They were linked by that awesome look and Mr. Rind felt himself falling, not bending over the pile of boards, but falling with a terrifying speed, whirling into an abyss. Dasha was falling too, she was ahead, leading their fall. They were falling together into a fathomless abyss at a mad speed, all the time accelerating. The wind whistled in his ears and the darkness fell from above.

They reached the bottom. Dasha reached it first. She struck against it and instantly their flight broke and an empty space looked at Mr. Rind out of her eyes. She was dead.

Mr. Rind stood erect. It was real. He saw her body, himself, and the fragrant new boards . . . stains of blood even fresher . . . the white snow . . . all visible in the grey light. All real. To be seen and accepted as life. His clammy hands and sticky clothes . . . all true. . . . He stood there forgetting place, time, life suspended. '

Then he became aware of two men running across the yard. One cried, " Do not leave the witness behind," and disappeared around the corner. Mr. Rind did not understand those words.

The other man slowly (or so it seemed to Mr. Rind) approached Mr. Rind and looked at him with the calculating eyes of a boxer. His thought was almost visibly working in his mind. But Mr. Rind made not a move. Then the man quickly lifted his hand and struck him a terrible blow on the side of the head. Mr. Rind fell down, beside Dasha's body.

29

MR. RIND came to himself but he did not open his eyes. Opening them meant that he would return to terrible knowledge, to a new assault. He tried to crawl back into the darkest corner of his consciousness and remain there a little longer.

But there were people—outside—who disturbed him. They touched him. They spoke to him. No, he would not open his eyes.

Then a soft hand touched his brow and a soft voice said :

" Mr. Rind, do you hear me ? "

Mr. Rind fought the voice. He had successfully crawled back into that cloud which was inside him and was anchored there.

" Mr. Rind," the voice said again, now very near.

No, he would not return. No, he would not. He clutched the cloud, he clung to the screen. . . . He liked that space within himself, empty, and dark, and quiet. Mr. Rind wanted to be one with it. Still they tried to tear him away.

" I am sure," the voice said, "he is Mr. Rind. Telephone the American Consul."

Mr. Rind returned to his dark. Swiftly he enveloped himself in it, and lay quiet.

Later, suddenly, he opened his eyes. They met chaos. All was in a quick disorderly movement. He closed them, then opened again. Things were now moving in circles. There was a window, and an open door with darkness behind, faces, parts of other things. Their movement made thin luminous lines. Then things began to move slower. They moved towards two centres—one was the window with light in it, the other was Mr. Rind himself. His body established the balance and movement stopped. Things were fixed now.

It was a room. He was lying in a bed. Daylight was behind the window. Several persons were standing at his bedside.

"You are all right," a man said. He was clad in white. "You are quite all right. Your skull is not broken. You may leave the hospital before long. Your Consul will be here soon and he will arrange everything. ..."

Mr. Rind made a movement and said :

"What happened?"

The man put his hand on Mr. Rind's shoulder and said :

"Be quiet. The Consul will tell you all."

"But why am I here?"

"The police brought you here. 'This happened to be the nearest hospital."

Then Mr. Rind remembered.

"Oh," he cried, "that child!" And a fit of shaking swept him.

The day was hazy. People coming in—friends, police, the Consul—all looking at Mr. Rind, all talking, asking questions, nodding heads and sympathetically smiling. The vision of them was mixed with the pain in his head and the clouds in his thoughts. All visitors stepped heavily, especially the police, and breathed noisily, especially the Consul. The doctors all the time touched either him, or the ice bag on Mr. Rind's head. There was no peace, no quiet.

In the middle of the day when Mr. Rind was, at last, left alone with a nurse, the door was suddenly flung open and Comrade Bugrov quickly stepped in. The nurse barred his way, but he pushed her away with a quick gesture and approached Mr. Rind's bed. He bent low over the bed, looked at Mr. Rind with eyes which seemed sunken deeply and reflected no light, and Mr. Rind thought with astonishment that Comrade Bugrov was almost old. The visitor took Mr. Rind's hand, squeezed it with force and said something, then abruptly turned away and left the room.

Then heavy sounds approached, coming from a distance, unpleasant and clumsy. They passed by Mr. Rind's room. People were carrying something. The nurse ran to the door and stood holding the knob, lest the door should open.

Those were people carrying Dasha's body away. All the formalities with the police having been performed, her body was given to the people who claimed it, to the Workers. The comrades

carried Dasha's body on a stretcher. She was not heavy, but the stretcher was too big and could not be easily manipulated in the narrow passage.

Then the Consul appeared again. Mr. Pitcher came with him. The Consul told Mr. Rind that this hospital was too noisy for him. To his regret, there was no American or English hospital in the town, so they decided, with the doctor's consent, to take Mr. Rind to the Pitchers' house, where the patient would have more peace and comfort.

"Of course," Mr. Pitcher affirmed, "of course. . . ."

Then the Consul said that the doctors had found no danger of any kind in Mr. Rind's condition, only he had to lie quietly abed several days more, before he would be strong enough to go out again.

Although Mr. Rind's memory recorded all the words the Consul said, he did not understand their meaning. He lay there and looked at them and tried to fasten his attention to something. He showed more concern when he found himself being carried on a stretcher to an ambulance. It was disquieting to feel oneself being carried away.

Mrs. Pitcher found herself suddenly busy with two more people in the house, for Nikitka came to live with them, at the same time Mr. Pitcher brought Mr. Rind home. With the economy of efforts and emotions which were characteristic of her, she arranged everything quickly, but only half-successfully.

Mr. Rind was given a big room, the farthest from their own, a well-trained Chinese servant all to himself, and the laughing German doctor to call on the patient daily. Only the German doctor did not laugh when seen professionally, and his face was so different then that Mr. Rind could never recognise him.

Thus the routine was established, and Mr. Rina's constant presence in the house could be half-forgotten.

On the fourth day of his life at the Pitchers', Mr. Rind was awakened by music. Sounds of a band, solemn and threatening, came from afar. They pierced the walls, they stabbed the roof, they drilled the glass of the windows through, and rolling to Mr. Rind's bed woke him to reality. Coming from a distance as sea waves of a great length, they broke at Mr. Rind's feet in sharp menacing splashes.

Trying not to listen to them, he turned over. Still they were

approaching and he had to meet their challenge. He rose and drew the curtain aside and flung the window open.

Cold air, bright light, and the heavy, almost palpable sounds of the music rushed in and filled the room. Everything in the room, every atom, particle, or mite, instantly responded with a throb and vibration. Mr. Rind looked out of the window.

In the halo of the sunlight reflected in the crystals of snow, in the icicles, in everything which could reflect light, in all that rainbow of sparkle unconnected with warmth, Mr. Rind looked down on Dasha's funeral.

Comrade Dasha was being given the best funeral of an atheist and a communist.

There, below on the pavement, a huge procession was moving slowly . . . hundreds of people in orderly lines . . . an orchestra . . . and there—in the very midst of the crowd, high on a bier, covered with a flag so red that it seemed alive and throbbing—was her small coffin. It was almost a child-size coffin, for Dasha had had no time to grow her full length. . . .

Mr. Rind trembled.

Visions flew before his eyes . . . how she looked, how she spoke . . . a little child, after all. An unprotected youth . . . a victim of nonchalant political hatred . . . youth, open to any influence, pernicious or good . . . answering either with the honest enthusiasm of youth.

Suddenly the music stopped and the crowd, hundreds of voices, began to sing. It was a vigorous song. It was not concerned with the murdered girl and her small coffin. In the whole crowd there was not a single soul to whom Dasha was unique, never to be replaced, never to be forgotten. She was nothing more than one more comrade lost on the way towards the future. Their song was more of a call to battle and victory than a lament of bereavement. The small body in the coffin was a spent erg in the huge machine of the communist organisation, a thing to be instantly, almost mechanically, replaced.

To the sounds of that bright song, the funeral procession moved down the street, further and further, carrying Dasha away and forever.

. . . *Our country is splendid and happy,*
. . . *Adorned with rivers and lakes . . .*

Sealed by that song, the memory of Dasha remained in Mr. Rind's heart as the pathetic symbol of parentless childhood.

Lida had followed Dasha's coffin too. Educated apart from political quarrels, she mourned Dasha as a human being. She wept. She did not know whose guilt it was, and where was the truth after all.

The cemetery was far and the way was long. In the cold wind, tired from tears and emotion, Lida decided to rest for a while at the convent, which was situated midway to her home.

When she told Mother Abbess the story of her Acquaintance with Dasha, the latter instantly ordered the chorus to the church to have a funeral service for the eternal peace of that dead child's soul.

Several older nuns tried to dissuade Mother Abbess.

"Pray, Mother Abbess, consider this: the girl was an atheist, an active foe of Christ, she never prayed herself. ..."

"Mothers," the Abbess insisted, "that is exactly the reason why we should pray for her. Some of you are widows, suppose she was your own child . . . taken from you by a government decree and educated as a comfnunist. . . . What would you feel for her then? How can we judge her? As far as deeds go, she had done nothing in the way of crime. Even her death in self-sacrifice shows she had been selected from above—to be given that best possible end. ..."

Still some of the nuns grudged it, and after the service, in the Abbess's cell, they surrounded her and asked her to tell them something about the Revolution in Russia, evidently to counteract the feeling of sorrow for Dasha.

Mother Abbess talked willingly.

"Revolution?" she said. "It was like this. Our convent was big, and famous, and rich. As anywhere else, the people there—nuns—were all kinds, from the best saints to the worst sinners. The rumours of revolution were frightening. Our Mother Abbess was, certainly, a saint. When the decree came that nuns had to be dismissed, she held a long church service and then declared that those who wanted to leave might go in peace. Many nuns left, some hesitantly, with tears, the others gaily, with songs. The latter were met by the new order with mirth and were very fashionable brides in the town for several days," she added mournfully.

"Well," she went on, "I was young then, young and

strong. Nights I spent praying that God would send me to a martyr's end. Only our Mother Abbess reproached me for my ambition. She did not want us to think that way and to rush towards dangers. She said, 'God Himself has selected His best servants for that glorious end, and to presume to be one of them is certainly a sin.'⁵ Times grew harder, more and more nuns left, until we were just a handful, cold and hungry, for our property was gradually taken from us. One day a Red commissar came with a warrant: he wanted jewellery and gold and silver. He and his soldiers spent several days at the convent. Mother Abbess gave them separate quarters and asked one favour—let nuns themselves strip the jewellery and golden frames from icons, let no soldiers' hands touch them. 'Leave us the icons, take everything else/ she said. They were gay, but quite friendly, and when Mother Abbess remonstrated about their laughter, or their jokes, they would wink at each other, but instantly keep quiet. They even smoked in the garden, granting her prayer not to do that inside the church. When they left, two more nuns went away with them.

"This wounded Mother Abbess deeply. She counted us—we were only fourteen now—and said: 'Sisters, maybe some of you want to leave too? Do it now. It is hard to see those yield to temptation who have moved half of their way to heaven.' We all wept and cried: 'No, Mother, we won't go' . . . and where would we have gone? Life's terrors surrounded everybody so closely that all the human lots on earth seemed loathsome, all except the peace of soul one had in the convent." And she began to cry quietly, and the nuns all wept too.

"Mother Abbess."⁵⁵ It was Mother Thais who spoke. "Your words, so far, all imply that the communists behaved quietly . . . was it not true that some terrible things happened in your convent, which had been so famous and saintly for years—and was then polluted . . . ?"⁵⁶

Mother Abbess raised her head and her eyes shone with a new, vigorous light:

"It's true. We suffered hunger, persecution . . . everything. But this is just what we have to forgive and forget. I have done it, I hope, and I have nothing more to tell you about the Revolution. Go in peace."

30

THERE WERE quite unexpected changes in the Platov family.

Glafira decided to marry Umehara-San. The sooner, the better. Her *pros* and *cons* were clear. To begin with the *cons*, she loved Mr. Wren. She did not care for Mr. Umehara. To marry a Japanese was wrong and even, perhaps, a sin. Her *pros* were fewer ; strictly speaking, there was only one : worldly goods. Mr. Umehara showed every sign of deep respect for relatives. He would accept *all* the Platovs. They would live in his big apartment, with more food, more clothing, more warmth. She would be able to give medical treatment to Father, perhaps, even a complete rest for a while, many things to Mother, schools for the boys. . . . Thinking about all that welfare coming from Umehara-San, she felt almost tender towards him. Especially in the abstract—when he was not near—he seemed almost acceptable. She planned to find a job for herself too. Umehara-San, being the husband, would provide her with a situation somewhere. Imagine having steady work and a regular salary ! Thus she planned, her teeth clenched, bracing herself for a struggle.

Mr. Umehara was a young Japanese gentleman. Spiritually he belonged nowhere. Educated abroad, he did not believe any more in the obscure ancient myths which constituted the foundation of the Japanese outlook on the universe and one's place in it. They were beautiful legends for him, nothing more. He looked for more sober and sound principles. But Western culture was too alien and not too friendly. Thus he felt lonely between the two cultures. Divorced from one, he became only a stepson of the other. He put on European clothes, but he did not enjoy them. He liked European literature, but could not stand the Europeans' music. He liked their social life, but could not fit himself properly into it.

As usual with men when they feel uncertain and lonely in this cold world, he decided to marry. Mr. Umehara was very willing to marry Glafira. Although she did not know it, Glafira had a peculiar fascination to a Japanese eye. Her oval face with its long and narrow eyes, her white skin translucent with a

pink hue, her hair black and eyebrows very long, thin, and narrow, her slightly stooping slenderness—all were familiar to Mr. Umehara in separate items as the ancient attributes of an Oriental beauty. But Glafira had more than that : her almond-shaped eyes were of a deep, perfect blue—Royal blue, the blue of a Persian turquoise. Mr. Umehara could not resist them, could not see them and remain unmoved. He fell in love.

He made known his feelings in a blunt manner and with blatant speech. Glafira felt offended at first. The second time she laughed. Then she spoke about her family situation. Umehara-San echoed willingly her plans. Born and raised on the parental authority, on the clan esteem, he accepted the situation as something quite normal. Yes, he would join the Greek Orthodox Church. Yes, he would willingly be baptised, be married in church. Yes, he would take on all the Platov family. Of course, he would respect Glafira's parents. He had been so long an orphan, he said, that to have a big family would be a happiness.

The sad event of Dasha's death had outlined the young generation's future as hopeless. But there was something else. One more thing happened and it was desolate too. Vladimir, to whom Glafira was tied with the deep feeling of understanding and friendship, wrote her a desperate letter. It had been decided between them to have no secrets, and he wrote her usually at the general-delivery address, so that the family need not hear the news if it was sad. It was sad. Vladimir had lost his job. He could not send the usual forty dollars for their rent. More, he had nothing to eat for the next month and asked Glafira to send him—if possible—ten dollars. There was nobody with ten dollars in Glafira's sight, except, of course, Umehara-San.

The fact that Mr. Wren had been seen so often with the Belle of the Town cut off Glafira's other dream, and life now seemed clearly to offer only Mr. Umehara-San, his apartment, his teeth, his love.

Gloomily she mended Grisha's trousers, looking through them at the lamplight. They had been Father's for too long a time to be able to serve Grisha well and truly.

Lida and Galina whispered in another corner of the room. They talked about funerals. Kostik had a cold and a high temperature. Mushka was not allowed to approach him. -Colds were dangerous to her on account of her tonsils, to remove

which the Platovs had no money. Mjp. Platov had kidney trouble and sat bent, saying nothing, looking at his knees. Grisha was polishing Lida's shoes and dreaming what he would do if he had one milliori dollars.

Glafira embraced them all in one glance. She had no strength to start a "celestial travelling" that evening. She knew her voice would break and she would simply whimper.

Mme. Platova, seeing her family sunk in gloom, tried a last remedy.

"Children," she said, "I think I shall start bread, to-morrow we shall have fritters with tea."

Fritters were always good news. You have them browned, sizzling from the frying-pan into your dish. You have them in the morning, and they give so much warmth with which to start gaily a wintry, bleak day. Mme. Platova knew her family needed fritters now.

Glafira was now mending Father's socks. She was unusually quiet and more than usually concerned with socks. There were whole spaces lacking. Yes, the work was absorbing, still . . . heavy, yes, heavy was her heart. . . , *There will be no forty dollars this month) and Vladimir, poor Volodia, Volik> Vova—what will he do now. . . ? He looked to me for help. Umehara-San. . . . Seizo Umehara. . . . To-morrow I will go to his office. . . . I will smile, he will invite me to the cinema or something and when he starts his talk about love and proposes . . . This time I will not stop him, but will encourage him. I will say "yes" . . . and then bargain—hard on every point—of how, where, when—he will help my family. . . .* And she began to sew with such vehemence that Kostik said hoarsely :

"What are you doing to that poor sock? Mending it or tearing it to pieces?"

But Glafira is in no mood for jokes or quarrels. To-morrow she will start her play of being in love . . . to-morrow, but, to-day she is still free to *hate*. . . . And she tore her thread and bit it with her teeth, instead of cutting it with scissors. It was not *the thread* she was biting, it was *life* she was biting at and gnawing with those white, young, strong teeth of hers.

But the next morning was not bright either, and the Platovs ate their fritters (this time fried in *butter*) and drank tea without their usual zest.

That evening Glafira was all gloomy determination.

If Mr. Umehara t' my only chance, I must not wait until some other girl marries him. She borrowed Lida's dress and stockings. She combed her hair fashionably over her forehead. She lied to her mother, who would not allow her to go out alone with Mr. Umehara at night. She kissed Mother's cheek, and in order to give herself more determination she reread Vladimir's letter :

I am so ashamed to ask your help, Glasha darling, but I have nobody else. To pawn my violin would be the end. To come to you I have no money for a ticket. I hope I shall find another job. This is temporary. It will pass. I write you the truth, as I promised. In my eyes you are a gallant girl, always courageous, always gay, always self-sacrificing, the merry genius of our family . . . and I feel as if I am killing you. . . .

That gave her energy enough. She went to meet Mr. Umehara-San in the hall of the hotel, where he invited her for dinner. It was Glafira's first dinner at a restaurant.

With a set face, careful of Lida's good dress and best stockings, Glafira sat at the table revengefully eating the best dinner she had ever eaten. There was a soup, *and* salad, *and* meat, *and* everything, everything. With every bite she was thinking about her people. How they would enjoy such a dinner, all together, at home ! If only she could take home some of it, everybody could have a part in this splendour.

The dining-room was big and rather impressive. The orchestra played good music, the lights were bright ... oh, how one could enjoy it all, if only . . .

Mr. Umehara started talking about his love over dessert, calling Glafira alternately Miss Fuji-no-Hana (Miss Wistaria) and Miss Ume-Ko (Miss Plum Tree). His small, rather round eyes rolled quickly behind his glasses, and his young teeth, richly patched with gold, sparkled between his dark blue lips. With despair Glafira felt that he was impossible as the hero of romance, impossible. Mr. Umehara had his own aroma too. Not something completely disgusting, yet absolutely unacceptable. Was it due to a special soap, or a special tobacco—or both or neither ? Was it, perhaps, only his skin, or his hair ? The scent was strong, nauseatingly sweet and actually fusty. . . . Still he was a *bridegroom*, and Glafira listened to him, wildly

eating her second helping of ice cream (she never had so much of it before) and desperately trying to be cynical and feel that *it paid*, for it did not, no, it did not. . . .

Umehara-San was speaking about his love in Japanese style, that is, with all the poetry of hyperbole and simile, and with frequent references to Fujiyama. He would drop a quite natural and outrageously physiological remark, which could be, perhaps, all right in Japan, where sex and physics are easily discussed at dessert. But it was unbearably offensive to Glafira, for all Russian girls, whoever they might be, wherever born or educated, start their lives in romantic moods, full of poetical reverie and expectations.

Glafira put her spoon aside and her lips trembled.

When I am dying, she was thinking, passionately, *when I shall struggle for life, thinking life is so beautiful, so gentle, I have only to remember this evening . . . this humiliation . . . it will kill my love of life instantly.*

Seeing she left some ice cream, Mr. Umehara made a frank remark about her digestion. He meant it in a friendly way. She was dear to him. Then, without pausing, he continued picturesque talk of his love.

Tears sparkled in Glafira's eyes. Her cheeks were aflame.

Oh, she was thinking, *now I understand how one can kill one's husband. Just stab him and turn twice—no, three times!—the dagger in his chest . . . then burn the body . . .*

In a sudden flash of insight, she saw clearly herself and the situation. *What am I doing here?* she thought. *Oh, humiliation! But Mother? Vladimir? The family? All right!* she cried within herself. All right! Let them die! Let us all die! *There are things impossible to do . . . I shall better steal. . . .* And stealing seemed to her a quite gentle and easy prospect.

"Which day shall we marry?" Umehara-San asked.

"It is no use," she whispered in despair, and tears, rolled down her cheeks. "It is no use. . . ."

She could not finish the sentence. She met Mr. Umehara's astonished eyes, but she could not speak any more. She bent her head, and her shoulders began to tremble.

"Good-evening!" somebody said behind her, and although the voice seemed coming from a great distance she instantly knew whose it was. She rose. She turned her face in the direction of the voice and her eyes, sparkling with tears, met Mr. Wren.

"George!" she whispered. And there was nothing to add to that.

"Glafira," he said, giving only a slight bow to Mr. Umehara, "you know *what*? It has begun to snow and I have a sleigh outside—let's take a drive—in good old Russian style."

The emotion of joy was so strong in Glafira that she shivered, and for a moment all was dark in her eyes. Mr. Wren took her arm and said politely to Mr. Umehara:

"I am *sorry*, Mr. Umehara. There are only *two* places in the sleigh. Russian style, you know."

And he led Glafira out of the dining-room.

I must not think. . . . I must not think. . . . Glafira was telling herself. *Why did he ask me . . . ? Why is he holding me so tightly . . . ? / must not think . . . only to feel now . . . to remember it all my life . . . when it is over . . . to know I loved and we were once out . . . together . . . in the night . . . and he put me in the sleigh . . . and he was covering me . . . with a fur blanket . . . all this is mine . . . it is all that life gives me as happiness . . . to remember forever. . . .*

The night was made of light wind and falling snow. All sounds were deafened in the softness of the falling flakes and became only sighs and whispers. There was almost no light, no warmth, except those in human hearts. It was a night of secrecy, accomplice to those who were in love. It covered, it hid them from the rest of creation. One could not speak on such a night. The snow fell on eyes, on lips to cool the words into not being spoken. It was a night unreal, unusual, unique. One cannot have two of them in a whole life long.

She and he. The sleigh. The wind, the movement. His arm round her waist. Her head on his shoulder. His eyes on her lips, her hand in his sleeve. And the snow, falling down, lovingly, lovingly—small white flowers, fresh and slow. . . .

A distant dim image of her family passed before Glafira's mind.

If it were not for them, I could die now, this evening . . . / could . . . from happiness . . . it is easy . . . just disconnect something'—mind from emotion and will—and leave them free—unhook the hook. . . .

But she was not dead, for she saw the snow . . . and she felt George's arm, but nothing else, nothing else existed in the universe . . . only that arm linking her strongly to real life . . . and that snow.

Suddenly George bent and kissed her on her lips.

She did not answer. . . . She did not make a slightest movement in response.

"Glafira," George said, "I have to tell you something. It is serious."

"No ... do not tell me anything. ..."

"I must! But I do not think it is exactly right here . . . and the cabman would listen. . . . Let us go somewhere. . . . Let us go back to that restaurant. We shall find there a quiet corner and talk. ..."

When they came there, no Umehara-San was in view, and they both completely forgot about him.

The return to lights brought Glafira back to reality, and she was thinking : *This very evening . . . at that table over there, I was so terribly offended and unhappy. There is nothing left of it now. I am drowned in happiness.*

"Glafira," George said softly, "I liked you very much the first moment I saw you. But I am not a man to follow my first impressions . . . I decided to wait for a while, to see more of you and other girls too. . . . The terrible events of the last few days made me realise—how *really short, how really shaky* are our chances for life and happiness. And I want to appeal to you. Let us marry. I love you. Would you like to have a home, work, children. . . . ? Do not think I am hard or exacting, no, but I must tell you I should like to have my home an old-fashioned home, *permanent*, with no lies, no divorces. And I give my word to be loyal, too."

Glafira had watched the movements of his mouth as he spoke and now she looked up into his eyes.

"What do you expect me to say in answer ?" she said, and laughed—and everything in life became simple, easy, gay, and happy.

They left the restaurant. Glafira was very eager to share her happiness first with Vladimir. She asked George to lend her some money to send a telegram. She remembered the words of Vladimir's letter :

"I am so ashamed ... as if I am killing you. . . ." And she wrote back : "As the mdrine said, if you want to kill me, take another flowerpot. The happiest letter follows."

31

LIDA'S last days at Haibin were filled to the utmost. Glafira's engagement made all the Platovs happy to tears. The Russian ritual of giving parental blessing was performed on the second day after the engagement.

Mr. and Mrs. Platov—pale and grave—stood in the corner, under icons, and Glafira kneeling before them received their blessing with the icon of Our Lady of Kazan. George knelt too. Not that he was much of a believer in traditions, but Glafira said it was the custom and he must, so he did.

Then the parents kissed the engaged couple—and George became a "son" of the Platov family. Only after that rite could the discussion of "details" follow. One of the "details" was Mr. Wren's offer to take *all* the Platovs to Australia. At that Mrs. Platov rose up, kissed him once more, shed some tears, said he was a saint, but stated firmly that *all* Platovs would not go, for one has to have some decency when accepting help. Going to Australia was then discussed and finally it was decided that Grisha and Kostik would go. The boys could have their normal conditions of life, healthy work, regular schooling.

George immediately began to collect all kinds of papers for the marriage and the trip to Australia, and that "celestial travelling" began to revolve slowly and to clothe itself in the raiments of reality.

Grisha and Kostik felt bewildered. Here was luck! Grisha started reading seriously about Australia. What kind of country was it? How did people usually make careers there, for he needed a brilliant career, in order to dazzle Lida and win her heart? The difference in years could not be a hindrance. He felt he would grow quickly and be a strong character before long. And she would always be that: an exquisite, fragile girl. They were a well-matched couple in his eyes.

Lida felt happy too. The fact that there were still no letters from Jimmy was withstood much more easily by now. She was ready to go to Tientsin and her mail would not be sent to Harbin then. Perhaps there were letters, laid neatly in her box at home waiting. Why not? On this earth where everything,

everything might happen, is it such a miracle to find letters waiting for one?

Her last concert was a brilliant success. She found herself the object of wonder and envy of so many other Russian girls—she seemed to be the happy one, the lucky one. Having such a voice and talent, such a teacher—all free, and also a bridegroom in America, where every girl—every one!—has a permanent, and lacquers her nails, and eats chocolate and just gorges with orange juice—all that was Lida's, all open to her. . . .

Lida felt even a bit shy of all the privileges Nature and life bestowed upon her, and to have complained or grumbled would have seemed an unforgivable crime.

She stood in the hall of the club after her last concert, surrounded by friends and admirers who wished to say good-bye. Flowers, which are so expensive for the poor people in the winter, were given to Lida. Glafira, with George, made a background for Lida's triumph, waiting to take her home. The Belle of the Town, with Mr. Capella and the florist as escorts, approached Lida, smiled at her, but looking over Lida's head darted a look of quick hot reproach at Mr. Wren. Perhaps she would have been glad to go to Australia too. But Mr. Wren was so wrapped in his own happiness that he utterly misunderstood the Belle's glance (oh, so carefully planned and for three days practised before the mirror), and thinking the Belle meant congratulations he answered with a hearty grin.

Miss Clark cried a loud approval of Lida, her looks, her dress, her voice, and her general "cuteness." She was ready to turn away and to rush again on her usual pursuit of happiness, but her friends were approaching and Miss Clark cried once more :

"Is not she lovely?" as if Lida were an inanimate thing. Then suddenly seeing Lida's brooch, the only one Lida had, which had been given to her by Mis. Brown, Miss Clark cried again in rapture :

"Is not her brooch just *cute* ? Is it not *divine* ?"

With an almost unconscious gesture, a hereditary movement coming to Lida from generations of her ancestors who were rich, and to whom giving things away was a natural action, Lida unpinned her brooch and offered it to Miss Clark.

"Will you kindly take it as a souvenir from me?"

And Miss Clark, with the no less natural gesture of one who

was accustomed to take things for herself, took the brooch, crying :

" Oh, I must not ! I simply must not. . . ." But she clutched at it, for she liked pretty jewels.

" Thank you," she said, turning her back on Lida. " Good-bye," and she walked away. But somewhere in her memory she carried away that gentle vision of Lida, with her clear eyes and her lovely smile, and her hand outstretched with her single jewel, gallantly offered to the one who was all covered with jewellery.

The next morning Lida and Mme. Manuilova left for Tientsin. The Platov family was laughing and crying at the railway station, Mr. Wren being helpful with tickets, Glafira illuminating everything with her eyes. The departure left nothing more to wish.

Lida held a box of chocolates sent by Mr. Rind, who was not yet fully recovered and planned to stay a little longer in Harbin, at the Pitchers'.

The train moved out of the station and cut off a whole period of Lida's life.

PART II

I

THOSE WEEKS of life at Harbin, their speed, novelty, excitement, turmoil, the sudden passage from one emotion to another, had engulfed the real Lida, leaving no time to laugh at things, weep over them, and then forget them, dismissed forever.

Now she was going home, to Mother, to that room in the attic, which was the true centre of her universe and life. She was looking forward to resting her brain and her emotions. She needed Mother. She would bring her all that she had seen and felt. A layer of visions wrapped around her former self. ' Out of all that tumult rose a gigantic doubt : had human hfe any logic, any justice, any explanatory truth ?

What is my place in all that ? she thought as the train moved steadily towards Tientsin. / decided about my destiny : I want to marry Jimmy. I would be satisfied with only that. But is that sufficient for life ? There must be a spiritual base to it. What is my religion ? My political credo ? Social duty ? Or am I an egoist, limited and narrow, and can live without all that, just give me Jimmy ? Even loving music so much, what am I doing about my artistic career ? Some people say I should better go to Russia and have a real schooling in Moscow. Can I go ? Do I want to go ? If I love art so much, shouldn't I think long before choosing Jimmy and love, instead of Moscow and the school ?

Her thoughts gently slid into their habitual channel, and again she was thinking not of her future, but of her love.

Who is Jimmy ? Why do I cling to that image which he is, or seems to be, seems to me only, perhaps, to nobody else ? Is he exactly the same as I see him ? Colours don't really exist but everybody sees them. So, perhaps, there is no Jimmy either, but another boy, alien to me and my heart—arid I would die for love of him and I stretch my imploring arms to him, but he grins, in answer. He does not recognise me and says: " Who is that girl, there over the Pacific ? What does she want of me?" . . . Do girls first make a lovable image of a lovable boy, then apply it to somebody they meet and then blindly believe it must fit? . . . We believe fervently, torturing ourselves, torturing those whom we love—all this to make fit the impossible pattern of an unexisting vision ? What

is love in reality? What is there in real life prepared to answer my thirst of it? Suppose there is nothing, only a cold wall of stone, which is a masculine heart, and suppose men just cannot love in the way we want, and we thrust and thrust our hearts and bodies against the wall, until bleeding—then old, irrevocably broken, we see that our beloved never existed, never even had been near, that no man ever understood what we wanted from him, and all the time stood there, sad and disappointed too—and dreams, which in reality were not connecting but dividing, lay sliarply cutting and painful to both. And then somebody says: " They loved each other before, now they do not " And then we take to children, or church, or music—to anything, just not to die on the spot from the sheer realisation that our love—so sweet, so simple, so stupid—existed not in the broad world, but in one's single throbbing heart—and the world goes well without that our flame. Am I alone in loving thus, or do all girls feel that way? Was I expected to love, or did I build it all myself and is it vain to expect an answer to it—those letters of love? Mine bring no answer, but I send and send them—and they go and go—through mountains, over seas, they arrive at last—are read—and nothing—oh, nothing—no answer, they hit the wall, they break. I die, I am dying. . . . Oh, in what words must one tell a man one loves him, to make him believe, and love, and answer . . . ? Why cannot I love Leon, who is more handsome, more grown-up, in any sense more brilliant than Jimmy? Can a heart be so blind, or can it be so clairvoyant that a chance glimpse of one's eyes singles out—forever—the one, the unique, whom one would love for life? Is there such a thing as foresight of heart, logic of love? If so, why do not all people follow it? If no, from where then comes my faith in happiness possible only with Jimmy? Can one disregard realities' and take for guidance a sheer illusion?

Twilight filled the car. Twilight has the magic of accentuating one's mood. Things grow smaller. One's heart sinks deeper and sadness seems even sadder then.

Mme. Manuilova sat opposite, her face sallow from fatigue, her eyes half-shut.

Suddenly Lida shivered all over.

What a face she has! Why, I never thought she was like that, so terribly, terribly tired and sad.

And a feeling of shame filled her.

How little we people care for each other! How little I have been interested in her! I was eager about my music, my singing, but was I ever interested in her? Attentive? Tender?

She was smitten with the poignant realisation of that.

Why has she such a face? Why is she so sad?

Lightly, cautiously, she moved her hand and tenderly touched Mme. Manuilova's fingers. The latter opened her eyes. They were distant, void of any relation to reality.

"Evening ..." Lida said slowly, "the evening"—and she moved her head towards the window.

"Oh . . ." Mme. Manuilova said low, and looked towards the window. Then she moved her head away, as if the sight of the evening were painful to her.

/ must not, Lida thought, / must not disturb her.

Some things have a peculiar power of bringing pain. Hidden at daylight, they fearlessly creep forth in' darkness. For Lida those steel clicks of the wheels of the railway car became unbearable. She put her face close to the window-pane and seeing above a small single star, in the whole of the sky, she thought :

/ must fight my sorrow. I will look at that star and think of my love.

And she sat there all the time trying to see letters—two letters—lying quietly in the corner of her box, laid there by Mother, waiting for her.

They came to Tientsin in the evening.

The town seemed smaller, the lights fewer. Only the cinemas flared forth with their flippant neon show, inviting all to have a look at life as it was for another people in another country. Nobody's dogs, attracted by the smell of food coming from the houses of human beings, stood wearily where the scents seemed sharper, musing, if they could muse, about the injustice of distribution of food in no proportion to hunger. But hunger is duller towards evening, as pain is duller before death. Let those sleep who have not eaten.

Everything made for sadness. But her house almost stepped forth from the row to meet Lida, and the cook flung the door open. The Countess with her quiet smile, Leon with his polite bow, Dog with his carefully restrained greetings, and Mother . . . Mother running downstairs to kiss Lida. And the room in the attic, so much shrunken as if with age. . . .

No, there were no letters. . . .

Mother, quick with a remedy, said :

"We have a long nice letter from Mrs. Parrish. Dima has written too. But his letter is sealed and addressed to you. What could it be about? He even wrote 'confidential' across the envelope. Look at the spelling."

It read "comfydental," and Lida smiled.

"You read your letter, and I will bring in tea. We shall have a nice evening together."

"No, Mother, I will bring the tea. The staircase is too tiring for you. ..."

In the kitchen, which looked uninviting because too clean and empty, Cook was sitting at the table, reading. A book lay before him, a Chinese book in a paper cover, with pages thin and light, transparent almost. Cook made no movements, he never turned pages. He sat motionlessly, his old eyes looking intently at the same lines.

What an odd manner of reading, Lida thought. She felt reluctant to interrupt, still her sorrow weighed heavy, she longed for a human word, whatever it might be, just not to be alone in the world, while boiling tea.

"Cook, what are you reading?" she asked.

"This." He showed the book with a slight movement of his head.

"What is it about?"

"This: the five Heavenly Virtues are, Justice, Magnanimity, Politeness, Understanding, Faithful Execution of Duty."

He quoted the celestial virtues in their Chinese names. Lida did not understand and felt no interest.

"Cook," she said, and her voice broke.

He turned his head at that sound and gave her a strangely lucid glance.

"Cook . . . when your heart . . . aches, what do you usually do?"

"I tell nobody."

It was easier in the attic room. Mother poured tea, and Lida opened Dima's letter. The first sentence of that confidential letter made her laugh:

"Dear Lida, how is Dog?"

She laughed and kissed the letter.

Something clicked in the mechanism of life, and Lida was switched in, where she belonged—into the room of the attic, at the same place, to the same hopes and anxiety, as if there had been no change.

Her spirit of vagrancy rose and fell. She looked at Dog, a demure symbol of tamed wilderness. She looked around the room and sighed: a Penelope, ready to undo her tapestry.

2

THIS was in England.

Mrs. Parrish was sitting at the window with her work. But she was not knitting, and she did not look through the window either. She sat quite forgetful of her surroundings, entirely mindless of the present moment. Her thoughts wandered among the darkening shadows of the future. In thoughts she stumbled upon one terror, then another, and there seemed to be no issue, no doors to open through which to step out of dangers, and perils. The country was full of the rumours of the inevitable European war.

Meantime Nature, heedless of human sorrows, careless of their intention, was bringing to a glorious close one of her quiet days.

An opalescent wintry landscape, of pastel colours, of pearly lights, velvety to touch, could charm any seeing eye. The setting sun looked around once more, saw that all was good, and smiled her last tender smile : " Good-bye ! Sleep well ! See you all to-morrow." That smile poured a purple light, liquid, almost alive, and for a fleeting moment all became sublime and divine. Then the light grew heavier, it became a veil, a shadow, then quickly began to turn into darkness.

Mrs. Parrish lit the lamp. This was tea-time.

Upstairs, in his small and cosy room, Dima was combing his hair before a looking-glass. He had poured some lotion on it but the hair stood up. It was obstinate hair.

Dima had become Mrs. Pamsh's adopted child. He was about ten years old now. Although not very strong, he looked healthy and full of vitality. A funny long wrinkle between his eyebrows was proof that he had his own cares and hidden pre-occupations. What boy has not ? Especially at ten, especially when war is steadily crawling towards one's country and the grown-up people, for the first time, do not make it a secret, but take children into their confidence and discuss the possibilities, and look for co-operation and rely on one's courage and help. Children are even promised gas-masks and encouraged to wear them.

This was England. To a Russian boy it had seemed at first a cold country. For a child fondled and petted in a Russian family, it had seemed a cool place. Apparently nobody ever kissed one in England. One could not count on being called those funny nicknames and given—in secret—a piece of something between meals. No. Meals were good and regular here, always the same, with mutton on Wednesdays, and fish on Fridays. People were good but self-restrained. Everybody belonged to himself. Well, one has to adapt somehow, since one has promised to be a good boy and never to give cause to suspect one had come to England from an uncivilised country or an indifferent family. Of course, there are moments when one's heart beats an emotional tune—well, then one could think of a gas-mask and get distracted. . . . There are means.

The hair lay almost horizontal under the weight of lotion. The nails were almost as clean as they should be.

Dima went downstairs for tea.

"Mrs. Parrish," he said, "you know what? May I have my photo taken wearing my gas-mask? I should like to send it to Mother and Lida."

"Dima," Mrs. Parrish said, "do not say 'you know what?' Yes, you may have that photo. I shall see to that."

Dima liked having tea. This was the leisurely time of the day.

"I had a letter from Tientsin . . ." Mrs. Parrish said slowly. "Your people are anxious about you. Your aunt has written to your friends Irina and Harry in the U.S.A. They are willing to take you to live with Irina on their farm. But the letter says the final decision depends on you. Do you want to go to America or would you like to remain here?"

"To go to America? Of course, I'd like to go! Very, very much. Mrs. Parrish, is not that wonderful!" (He pronounced it ^{cc}woe-underfull.)

"Well, then I shall start preparations. ..."

"Mrs. Parrish! Do you remember their wedding day? They wore crowns, and we all had ice cream because they were married. . . . Will Harry live at the farm too?"

"No. I do not think so. He is a soldier. He belongs to the army."

• "Again I shall be the only *man* in the house."

He said it half-proudly, half-regretfully.

"When do we go?"

"*Tou* are going, Dima. I remain here."

"I . . . alone?"

"We shall find people who will take care of you on the trip. Irina will meet you. . . ."

"Butjow, Mrs. Parrish?"

"I am not going."

"Why?"

"This is my country. I belong here. I must not leave it when it is threatened with trials. . . ."

"You think you will help England?"

"I hope."

"Mrs. Parrish . . ." he even grew paler . . . "but it is almost my country too. Perhaps, it is not honest for me to leave the country either. . . ."

"You are only a small boy."

"But I am all the time growing. . . . Suppose they should need me too . . . and find me gone. . . ."

"Dima, as I said, the decision must be yours. . . . Do not make it in haste. . . . Remember all I have told you about the war. We may be bombarded from the air, invaded by land, poisoned with gases, burnt in fires. . . ."

"I do not know which is better," Dima said wistfully, "but then we might fight back too. Dick, the butcher's son, said boys must organise gangs and kill those Germans who will fall out from the airplanes . . . only Tommy said it would be savage . . . suppose they count on being taken prisoners. There must be always a *law*. . . . Tommy said Anglo-Saxons are famous for their fair play, and we have to go on the same . . . Oh, he knows many things, he is twelve . . . he will be a great man!" Dima said with admiration. "I think I will support his opinion."

"Dima," Mrs. Parrish said, "you think it all over quietly. Do not hurry. Take your time, days, weeks. . . . Then I shall write the answer to your aunt."

"You know what—sorry!—I know what . . . I have made my final decision: I remain here. I do not want to leave you, Mrs. Parrish, I should like to fight for you and to protect you and your home."

Mrs. Parrish looked at him.

" Still I shall wait several days before I write to your family. . . . "

" I feel I cannot leave you." Dima wanted to add " because I have learned to love you," but he did not. Nobody ever said things like that in his new home, and gradually he had acquired the habit. Still, there was one more thing to make clear.

" Mrs. Parrish, I must tell you—honestly—if I were given a choice between here and Tientsin " (he felt too shy to put it bluntly " between you and aunt ") "I would not think much. I should like to go to China . . . always . . . always . . . but between you or Irina—tven with Harry—I remain with you, for " (again he wanted to add " I love you more " and checked himself in time), " for you are very kind to me and all of us. . . . " (He too frequently said " us," meaning the Family.)

This was his time to go. He thanked politely for tea and left the room.

Mrs. Parrish switched off the lamp and sat for a while in darkness. Her thoughts curled cosily around one point—the boy remained with her. Willingly.

In her attachment to that child she had come to the point where Dima was her most precious possession in this world. A woman of a possessive character, she shared the doom of such souls—she was always deserted by those she learned to cherish. She was met by mankind without enthusiasm. Even a baker, a butcher, a postman, who would shout greetings and news at the other people's doors, only murmured an incoherent " how do " at hers. She had to invite people into her life, otherwise they would not notice her. Here, at last, was a child not in a hurry to run away and to leave her behind. . . . She ranked next after his aunt, whom he called " Mother." The boy even planned to fight for her in case of a war.

And she sat in darkness and warmed herself at the small, tender fire of a child's affection.

Dima, meanwhile, went to his room.

He planned to write a letter to Mother and Lida. He wrote letters with difficulty. He began to forget Russian, but speaking and writing English all the time was tiresome. He was gradually losing the fluent facility with which he used to express his thoughts. His letters left him always dissatisfied. He *tried* to tell so much and so well, and saw it written curtly and awkwardly.

Dima wished to write about a "plan." It was his own invention. So far it had been kept a secret. Only to Mother and Lida he wished to write some hints on the system, which comprised the happiness of the children of the coming generations.

A worthy disciple and son of the Russian culture, Dima conceived plans only on the great, universal scale. This one was growing almost into an obsession. It touched the realms of international law and concerned children.

In his plan Dima invited humanity to take better care of children. In case of wars Dima offered to bring *all* the children, of *all* the fighting nations, to one and the same place, to a big island. He planned to give them all the same care, food, clothing, education. Nobody would dare to attack the island, for who would like to kill one's own child too? Meanwhile, the children, growing together, would learn to like each other and, perhaps, would never promote the idea of fighting wars among themselves in the future.

But this was so difficult to write about. It was long. And then he had to take precautions to make it confidential.

He took a sheet of paper. Looking at it, he suddenly saw a vision of his previous life in Tientsin. They had a boardinghouse, full of people, of life, of movement, of misery, but of joy too.

Always something happened. Things were always discussed. Children were petted. Nice words would wake one in the mornings. Songs would be sung in the evenings. One could ask any question. . . . Of course, they were desperately poor, but poverty is not so hard when one is living in big groups.

He was feeling tears in his eyes. Therefore, in order to give himself no time for sentiments, he busily began to write :

" Dear Lida, how is Dog ? "

Meanwhile he thought:

I must think more about my plan and only then write about it. To-morrow I shall go to see Tommy and ask what he thinks about the international situation . . . it will help me.

3

LIFE became for Lida what it had been before : a hope,

She had received no letters.

Letters. The birds of love. In the morning they leave their nest, a hot, a throbbing heart, and fly forth, into the unknown. Days and nights they soar all over the world in search of the heart for which they are intended. Some reach the goal, but many are shot in flight, while they still soar, or die in the cold winds, or rain, or snow. These fall down, small stones, to be trodden upon and forgotten.

Still she was reluctant to make the waiting and anxiety her only occupation and tried to find something in the way of a job. Of course, it was hopeless. She talked to Mme. Manuilova, who promised to ask Mrs. Brown. ,

Mrs. Brown was not a person whom one could see when one liked. One could see the face of the sun whenever one wishes but not that of Mrs. Brown. It meant waiting, anxiety, and hope again.

Meanwhile Lida started crying. She had established her own ritual for it. She liked to be alone, at twilight, undisturbed. After a good fit of tears, she felt mentally dull, physically exhausted, yet somehow relieved.

Once, upon his return home late in the evening, Leon heard strange sounds. It sounded like a child quietly moaning somewhere. He listened for a while. The sounds came from behind the door leading to the attic's stairs. He stood listening for a while longer and then cautiously opened the door. On the steps of a dark and narrow passage Lida was sleeping, exhausted with tears. Her tender face was resting on her bent arm. He saw it in profile. Under the uncertain light from the hall, Lida, reclining on the dusty steps, was a pathetic sight of forlornness. The muscles of her face moved at intervals and she gave out convulsive sighs, which bore witness to how much, how long, and how deeply she had sobbed.

For a while he stood in silence. Then he knelt before Lida, on the dusty steps, and touched her shoulder.

- "Lida," he said low.

She was up, suddenly in a nervous jerk.

"What? What happened?"

She saw Leon. She stretched both her arms to him and embracing him in search of help and consolation, she put her head on his shoulder and began to sob.

He smoothed her blonde hair with a slow movement of his hand and said low :

"Tell me, what is it about?"

He knew. But he was loath to pronounce the words he had learned to hate : "letters" and "Jimmy."

She said them.

"Leon," she said, "I cannot bear it any longer. Believe me, something happened to Jimmy. I must know. . . . The mail from U.S.A. is coming." If he had not written, something was wrong with him.

And again she clung to him, as a child would to one's mother, and wept.

"Lida," Leon tried to help her with the calm chivalry of a noble Spaniard, "if you feel so badly, let me help you. . . . I will find out what happened. . . ."

"You can? You say you can? How?"

Instantly she was all life, hope, and impatience.

He took both her hands and held them tightly.

"Listen, Lida, I promise. It will still take several days, but we shall know. . . ."

"But *how*? Oh, Leon, how will you do that?"

"There are ways. If only I had known you felt so badly, I would have done it earlier. . . . Tell me his address. There must be a Spanish Consul somewhere there. I will send a telegram and ask him to find that out for me."

"He would?"

"He will. And he will send us a telegram."

"Oh, Leon!" Lida gave a deep sigh, and suddenly all exhausted of emotion she sat, in a lump, tired and lifeless. Then again a fit of energy lifted her.

As was her custom during those days, Lida had been standing at the window waiting for the messenger. She stood there now every single moment when she was free, on the watch for her fate.

The telegram was businesslike. Jimmy had been badly hurt in an accident. He was in the hospital. There was hope for his

complete recovery. But the situation was grave. More details were promised in a letter to follow.

Lida read it. She began to read fast, with her heart high in her throat and eyes dilated, then she read slower and slower. . . . No. . . . She began from the beginning, then again from the beginning—and slowly, in a wrapping movement, the realisation of what it meant formed in her mind. The world began to topple down silently, to fall into dust, crumbling without a single sound. All, all that was life turned into ashes, and then into nothingness. She was alone, as if hanging in an utter void, in a quietly darkening vacuum, deserted even by the darkening light, in the emptiness of an eternity. When she understood every last word there was no light any more. Lida saw nothing.

She was in darkness. With the helpless gesture of one blind, she moved her arms around, trying to clutch at something. There was no feeling inside her. Inside was the same void which was outside.

Leon was at home. He had heard Lida rush downstairs and then out of doors. In the window he saw her taking the telegram and rushing into the house. He began to listen. The silence astonished him. He expected Lida to sing or to cry. Silence seemed a bad omen. He went hastily into the hall.

He saw Lida standing in the middle of the room and veering slowly with outstretched arms. The telegram was on the floor. Her face frightened him. He approached and asked :

" May I help you, Lida ? "

She moved her face in the direction of the voice.

Then suddenly she gave out a cry. It was only one sound. " Oh ! " she cried—and that short cry had nothing of Lida's voice in it.

Leon took her in his arms, brought her into the next room, which was his, and helped her into an arm-chair.

She lay quietly.

This was the beginning of Lida's three weeks of nervous illness. Hours of quietness, near to lethargy, would be interrupted by fits of activity. She would cry, explain that she must go to Berkeley, implore every one to help her, to buy her a ticket, to get her visas ; she would write letters, telegrams—all concluded with a fit of sobbing and the state near to a coma again.

She grew very pale and thin. She had constant dizziness and unusual difficulties in her sight when all seemed blurred,

colourless, without depth, and she saw only flat contours of people and things. She had hemorrhages, her nose bleeding for hours, and a long listless weakness to follow. She needed constant care and attention.

While Mother tried to give her all the help and comfort at home, Leon proved to be most efficient in trying to get news from Berkeley.

"Leave all that to me," he would say; "believe me, Lida, I shall do everything by myself, in order to get the most detailed and quickest news."

The question of going to Jimmy was pushed away—although gently—as childish. To go where? To whom? How? To get visas would take *months*, to say nothing about money for tickets, waiting for a free place on the liner, for many foreigners were leaving China and cabins were taken for months ahead. The letter, finally received, was from Jimmy's mother. It was short and definite: the boy was not to be disturbed with anything. His state required the utmost care. When he was well enough to read letters, his mail would be given to him. Meanwhile Lida had to wait.

Leon spent hours in the room, writing what Lida asked him to write, answering the same questions about Jimmy, or just sitting quietly when Lida had one of her spells of lifeless quietness.

One thing more aggravated the situation. Knowing when the accident happened made it clear that Jimmy had not written a single line a month before it had taken place. This period of silence, previous to the accident, seemed inexplicable.

Mother and the Countess decided to let Lida alone for a while, not to press any admonition or advice upon her.

Visitors came, of course, to make the burden easier or heavier. Mme. Manuilova was severe.

"Get up and start to work. Do not squander youth and energy in deploring things which did not happen. The really great things are but few: arts, religion, science. Take up one. Believe me, there is no better happiness than an attachment to higher ideals. . . ."

But Lida listened with a wandering look. . . .

Mme. Manuilova grew almost angry.

"Do not look for that commonest fate of a girl: to find one's happiness only in men's arms. You who can sing and, perhaps, write music. . . . Remember my words: when youjr

life is spent, you will, perhaps, regret many things—that you loved, that you married, that you had or had not a child, but you will never regret that you sang well. . . ."

Lida tried to look politely attentive, but said nothing in answer.

"Well," tried Mme. Manuilova again, "I have seen Mrs. Brown.⁴ She, perhaps, will find a job for you, . . . With your lessons and your work your life will be full,"

Mme. Klimova came grandly to "share," full of reproaches for Lida. Of course, she offered her sympathy, but still she just had to tell Lida what she really thought.

She confessed she had been shocked by the extent of Lida's grief. She found it unbecoming for a girl of a good family, even indecent, even a thing to be speculatively wondered at. *What* was Jimmy to Lida, after all? A husband? No. A lover? No. A bridegroom? Not exactly. For nobody ever heard that Jimmy's parents had made any move to meet Lida's family and her friends. Then why this shocking despair? If even there were an engagement, she never saw such exhibition of despair over a broken engagement from well-educated girls with some of self-esteem. Love? But—oh dearest!—love is attractive only in books. Would any mother honestly wish to have a Shakespearian Juliet as her daughter—with a lover actually in her room, when she was only about fourteen? No, in good society love is not allowed girls, they leave it to lower classes. "I was always sorry for that poor Mme. Capulet with her Juliet. Be reasonable," she went on, "leave love alone." Great lovers' look only ridiculous in this era of refrigerators and cold storage. Listen to me: get up . . . look round. You have, perhaps, still a chance to be a countess. *A countess!!*" she said once more, and even clasped her hands. "And you, crazy with that 'epistolary' love of yours. It smells eighteenth-century, a 'love in letters.' In your case, even the letters did not come, were not at all written. And having no pride you go on loving. Forget that childishness. Do not keep the Pacific Ocean busy with your letters. . . ."

4

LIDA'S CONVALESCENCE dated from the visit of Mother Abbess.

After having called on all the convents Mother Abbess was proceeding to Shanghai "to die in peace," as she put it.

Painfully she climbed the stairs and all out of breath took a chair at Lida's bedside.

"Poor little bird," she said and shook her head in her high black hood. "Love! What woman would not understand your heart, my dear child. Fifty years ago, I was only eighteen then, I dreamt of love too. . . . I remember it even now. . . . And in a convent one does not hear much about love. One sees no men. But I dreamt . . . if only a young man should happen near me, be he ugly, or foolish, or lame or a hunchback . . . if he only came along and said he loved me, I would break my religious vows and run after him. But great was the mercy of Our Lady. . . . She protected me. . . . Nobody came along . . ." she heavily sighed and made a sign of the cross over herself . . . "thank Our Lady!"

This confession was so unexpected, so utterly unbecoming and out of place, that Mother Thais—petrified—could not make a single movement to interfere and to interrupt. She only flushed darkly and apoplectically. When she recovered herself—"Mother Abbess," she groaned, "you told us a nice joke!"

"A joke!" Mother Abbess cried with indignation. "Listen to her! We are speaking about love, the greatest power of Nature, and she calls it *a joke*! It might have been a 'joke' to some people, then, but not to a young nun shut in a monastery and tied with vows. One must be a quite insane youth to think about love jokingly."

And after a dead silence in the room she added again: "A nun *must* tell the truth, you know."

Then returning to Lida and her sorrow, Mother Abbess patted the girl tenderly on the shoulder and said:

"You sing well, dear child. Go on singing. Come to the church and sing. Our Lady likes good singing, she will listen to you."

The Countess invited them all down to tea, but Mother'

Abbess said she would come later. It was evident she wanted to be alone with Lida.

"Do not listen to foolish people," she whispered to the girl. "Go on your own way. I know a secret and I will tell it to you. It is a very old truth, nevertheless it always works."

And bending closer she asked :

"Have you faith in your heart ? Faith in happiness ? "

"Oh," Lida said slowly, "when now I look into my heart ... I refuse to believe all is over. . . . No. I feel Jimmy cannot be taken from me ... or forget me."

"Then everything will be all right. You will have a happy life with him."

"How do you know, Mother Abbess ? "

"Here is the secret. If in all the simplicity of a heart, with a pure childish faith one wants something and keeps wanting, and asking for it, and believing, in spite of whatever happens around, never admitting any doubts, just going on believing—one always gets one's heart's desire."

"Always?"

"Always, without a single exception. That is how miracles come into existence."

"But, Mother Abbess, why then do people get only a few miracles of happiness ? "

"They want *many* things at once. Contradictory[^] and complicated wishes exclude each other's fulfilment. As if you would wish to marry Jimmy, but to have him rich and winning a title, and being a genius, and having famous friends, and this, and that . . . no, you are longing just for his heart, as it is. You will have it, if you believe."

"Mother Abbess," Lida said almost gaily, "you know, in my heart ... all this time I never doubted we should be happy . . . not a moment," and she smiled. "I rather *posed* with my sorrow, it seems. I feel, we shall be happy. If I did not believe, well, I should die that very moment. Why, I think I cried just because I was afraid of my assurance, of my invincible belief in happiness. . . . Just *paying* something to that accident. ..."

"Well, then you are all right, girl."

Joy is a tonic and Lida was now sitting up in bed.

"Well, well, it is like that," Mother Abbess went on :
"the mind brings forth an idea. One likes it. One keeps

meditating ... it gets clearer and brighter and it charms the heart. And the heart begins to long for it. That longing wraps the thoughts, makes them weightier. . . . And one is continuing to believe and to long for the fulfilment. . . . And things begin to materialise from the abstract, to become a part of one's life, to be realised in the first steps, in the smallest details. Then one day it comes wholly to existence and people cry 'a miracle.' ... It is always the same way, only do not stop thinking, and longing for it and believing . . . and praying, of course," she added hastily.

Lida pushed her feet into slippers.

" Well," Mother Abbess said suddenly in a changed voice, quite matter-of-fact now. " Is *this* your room? "

" N-no."

" Ah ! I knew they gave you only *one in the attic*. Whose is it then? "

" Leon's."

" Well, and where does he live ? "

" I ... I do not know."

" Hm. . . . And how long have you been here ? "

" Two . . . no, three weeks. ..."

" Hm . . . about time to say thank you for it."

" Mother Abbess," Lida cried, " I am so much better . . . I can go to the attic and ..."

" Of course. And do not forget to tell them ' Excuse me for the trouble.' ... Ah? "

" Oh, Mother Abbess ... I ..."

" You are *not* ill after all. . . . Let other people have their rooms then. ..."

" I will go now."

" About time, my dear."

When they appeared in the Diaz living-room, people were bewildered. It was Lida's first appearance.

" Now give us tea, please," Mother Abbess asked the Countess.

Mother Thais, who wore a hair shirt next to her body, who never broke any fasting, and proceeded in life with the decorum of a wholly righteous nun, looked mournful. She knew she would never be able to do that, to influence people so quickly and so efficiendy. Why? Perhaps because all Jier reward was waiting (or her there, in the future life.

Although Lida was "cured," she never recovered a perfect sight. She always had a certain difficulty in fixing distance and small spots and dots of dark were always dancing before her eyes. Those spots were the shadows of letters of the telegram, she thought. This brought changes in her manner of looking at things. If she wanted to see something or somebody better she would approach very near and, lifting her face up, would look with a quaint wistful glance. It became her peculiar trait, that new manner of looking.

She quietly discussed with Mother the line of her future behaviour towards Jimmy. It was agreed upon that Lida would send a letter twice a month, not oftener. The rest was left up to fate and Jimmy's own initiative. Once more Lida's life became a *hope*.

5

IT WAS a morning in early May.

The sky was clear, the air was pure. A slight breeze came from the sea, whispering something and hurrying away towards the hills with the same news.

That was the day of Leon's departure to Spain. He was leaving alone, ahead of his family, who were to follow later.

His last day was dedicated to Lida and a series of pleasures had to take place : a long morning drive in a taxi, Dinner in the restaurant, a show at the cinema.

One cannot have a very long drive at Tientsin. The complicated laws of concessions, the military zones in the town, the Japanese arsenals, the poverty-stricken Chinese areas, and especially the absence of good roads of considerable length, made any drive a movement in time, rather than in space.

Leon and Lida just sat in a taxi moving at leisure in the directions of least resistance and fewest number of sentinels.

From time to time the taxi would be stopped and the chauffeur would enter a long discussion with the sentinels as to the real motives of the passengers' drive and the possible harm they could bring upon the existent order. If the intercourse threatened to be very long, Lida and Leon left the chauffeur

to carry the burden of diplomacy alone—he was paid by the hour, anyway. They would walk a little, or Leon would buy a souvenir for Lida in memory of that particular place.

Still there were many things worth seeing.

It was a great holiday in the Japanese Concession, for instance. It was the birthday of all boys.

At every one of the Japanese houses high poles had been erected and images of fish displayed on banners. The banners were made of cotton and gaily painted. They fluttered in the air, swollen with the moving breeze. The fish seemed alive, with their protruding eyes and finely-painted scales.

The number of banners of fish corresponded to the quantity of sons in the family, and their size was kept in proportion to the age of the boys. The biggest fish had to be fastened highest, the rest of them also placed in the accepted hierarchy of human relations. The image of the fish always represented a carp. It had been chosen centuries ago as a symbol of indomitable courage.

The Japanese are mostly fishermen. They know fish well. In their conception, a carp is the bravest and noblest of all fish. Cut *ujj* alive, on a kitchen table, it would lie fearlessly and motionlessly under the knife opening its bowels, looking straight into the cook's eyes.

In all the kingdom of animals, in the Japanese conception, the carp shows best how one has to meet death. A samurai of a fish. Our men of science seem to know nothing of that. In a dictionary, opposite the word "carp" is written "a cyprinoid physostomous fish." Who would guess what a superfish is hidden behind that dry definition?

Japan needs her boys brave, healthy, indomitable—to be soldiers, to know how to fight and how to die, emulating the carp—looking straight into that cook's eyes, who cuts human lives off.

But life in the Chinese part of the town was mostly funeral processions. Those two widely different worlds were separated by a white line painted across the pavement. That thin layer of white symbolised the impregnable will of millions of peoples to die, rather than surrender.

The same lines of white divided the other places of the town too: the French Concession from the English, the English from the German. It remained a line, if those two were, or made

believe they were, friendly. It rose as a wall of barbed wire, and sandbags, if the pretension had been cast off.

One had to encircle, perhaps, a half of the globe to find so many omens about the future of humanity. But Leon and Lida were heedless of omens.

Lida felt, if not happy, then excited. Leon was taking with him a letter for Jimmy. He promised to send it by air mail from the most convenient point, with instructions that an answer could be sent the same way. With luck, one could exchange letters with the U.S.A. in a short period of two or three weeks. Suppose Jimmy should write . . . !

They had a good dinner in a restaurant. They talked about love, not theirs, but in general. Lida tried not to notice the profundity of drama that kept crawling into the conversation.

"The world is full of women," she tried to console Leon.

"Not many of them are very lovable," he answered.

"What is your objection? Looks?"

"No. But I could never love a girl if she were vulgar, greedy, flippant. I could not love a girl without a feeling for music. . . ."

"Dear, dear!" Lida laughed. "I hope you will still find somebody answering the description."

The picture at the cinema was not impressive at all. Even the actors and actresses were not good-looking, which was a rather grave fault. The cinema, being a conventional representation of life, would be more enjoyable if it kept on giving illusions, rather than life in flat.

And then they had to say good-bye.

For a moment Lida felt a poignant feeling of guilt.

"Leon," she said, "I have behaved so abominably towards you that I hope you do not love me any more."

"But I do."

"How could you know?"

"I look at you and light seems brighter. You smile—and there is no sorrow in the world. I touch your hand—and there is no sadness, only joy. You talk to me—and . . ."

"Oh," Lida interrupted, "I see. But I hope you will soon marry and have a family and be happy."

He was silent.

"Will you?"

"I think I shall, in time. I shall marry, I shall have a

family, I shall be happy. Only my love will be different from this one. A first love is like youth, unforgettable. One continues to live, after it is gone. One can be contented and happy. Still, it would be never the same as youth. One would feel always sorry and never forget it completely. And how do you feel about your life?"

"I?" Lida said. "I belong to my fate. You know, sometimes one feels wronged in sharing. Sometimes it seems others' lots are so much richer. But then if Fate should ask one, would you like to be the Queen of France? one is at first dazzled, eager to jump into it. Then one wonders and finally one finds one's own life so full of gentleness, of meaning, that one refuses to change it for something else. My fate and myself are one. We cannot be torn and each part fitted into another setting. I shall bring myself into any setting, and think the same, and wish the same, and dream the same, and my setting, accordingly, will turn the same again."

At the moment of parting Lida said gently :

"Leon, forgive me if I have made you unhappy."

He gallantly kissed her hand.

"You make me only happy, whatever you do to me. Love, whatever its course, is a happy experience. I am thankful to you for that. Even when you refused me, you made me happy. If you would marry me after I regained my fortune I would be happy with you, still the idea that you have chosen me when rich would put you in a less brilliant light. Now I have lost you, but I shall keep my belief in women and their pride and their devotion. Seeing you so loyal to a man who does not repay you with the same attention ..."

"Do not speak so about Jimmy, or we shall quarrel. . . ."

They laughed and with smiles said their good-byes.

The next week Lida was packing too. In accordance with Mme. Manuilova's programme, she was going to Shanghai to sing there. She packed her three dresses, the same she had worn at Harbin, and made a list of those whom she had to see in Shanghai. Her list was short : Mother Abbess, Mme. Militza—a fortuneteller—and Vladimir Platov. She wrote down the addresses : the convent, the fortuneteller's office, and the "Black Glove" cabaret, where Vladimir now played the violin at nights.

6

MME. MILITZA'S LIFE in Shanghai had been ill-starred. The small annuity she had, when broken into twelve monthly parts, became so meagre that it hardly could pay for the rent and Mme. Militza's coffee.

If she fancied something else, she had to provide the extra money herself. But how ?

There are many different ways of earning money. All of them are well known and constantly practised in Shanghai. Still the bulk of the population lives on charity or credit. Even wars are financed by those two means. In that otherwise cynical city the way of paying money is romantic : It is based on an invincible belief in human honour. One signs the chit with one's name, that is all. It seems unbelievable, still it is a fact. Hence the bizarreness of surroundings. People who do not hope to have one hundred dollars cash quietly sign chits for a thousand. People without any financial standing or any kind of work or salaries eat, dance, gamble, have servants, marry, divorce, die. Only they have to do it all in Shanghai, under the strict observance of their creditors. They cannot travel. They are chained to the place by their debts.

But Mme. Militza, in need of money, followed the trodden path : she resumed her former profession.

On the entrance door of her apartment she fixed a black wooden frame with a removable sheet of cardboard on which was printed :

MME. MILITZA
SCIENTIFIC FORTUNETELLER

Nothing more. Simple and dignified. Not a hint of her glorious past, of that fame in the Far East, Rumania, Bessarabia, Siberia. Confidently she waited for customers. They came. At first they were many, then fewer and fewer. In bigger towns people are not eager to know very much about the future. Then other things began to happen.

One morning she opened her door to slip the printed card

into the signboard to open business for the day. But there *was* a card in the frame. It ran :

MME. MILITZA

Scientific mis-fortune teller

Quietly she took it out and put hers in. In the evening when she came to take it out, her card had been replaced by one which ran :

MME. MILITZA

Swine-typic fortuneteller

There must be a certain limit, a certain decency, even in offences. Whatever Mme. Militza's physical defects, there was nothing akin to a swine in her. An owl, perhaps. But a pig? Never. She felt wounded. Who would not? What is philosophy when one is angry? Still she took the outrage with the dignity proper to a philosopher: as something due from the world of barbarians. With a perfect exterior tranquillity she destroyed that alien cardboard. Next day when she came from market the signboard ran :

MME. MILITZA

A scientific torture seller

and the next day :

MME. MILITIA

Scientific fortune yeller »

Now it *was* an insult, that obscure hint. The word "militia" had specific significance for Mme. Militza's memory. She had been born in Bessarabia where "militia" meant "police." She had an obscure aversion to any kind of encounter with the police, a caution common among all soothsayers, whatever might be their laic profession in this noisy world. Still she took even that offence stoically. She only increased her watchfulness in order to find out who the offenders might be. They were schoolboys.

The boys of Shanghai are a different specimen of human

child. To begin the description : they are all paupers. The rich foreigners of Shanghai usually have no children. On the rare occasions when they do, the babies lead a secluded life among yellow servants, rarely seen in their parents' quarters. They rarely can speak any language except the Chinese dialects of their amahs. At the school age they are exported to the parents' native country for education. Thus a regular Shanghai boy of ten to fourteen is a pauper, a proletarian with no class feeling, a person with a deplorable past, blameworthy behaviour, sarcastic mind, trenchant speech, philandering manners. He knows something of life's adversities, of blind luck, and even blinder unluck, about injustice, humiliation, hunger, and even about that misery of adults—loneliness of soul and despair of spirits. He is a game chased by police, missionary philanthropists, social workers and spiritual advisers of any kind. He lives on the alert. He stations himself in ambush. His accomplishments are many. He knows how to meet a drunken father, and how to treat an irritable mother ; how to take care of an elder sister, of a younger brother, to waylay a landlord in rage, an aunt in tears, a neighbour with a mania for universal peace and quiet; how to pet a dog, to kill a cat, to cheat a pedlar, to mystify a passer-by, to win in cards, to count small change, to play false a teacher ; how to cry, to swear, to lie, to run ; how to give an oath and how to break it, and many other things. He faces an omnipresent danger, and his persistent will to live and to remain free is worthy of meditation. He knows war, flood, epidemics, explosions at the arsenals, fires, bombardments—and he is never really afraid and never looks for places where spiritual help and guidance are distributed. If brought thither, he sits before those friends of humanity, but knowing life—if not in theory, then in practice—he either sleeps or grins during the most passionate exhortations, for a Shanghai boy is a materialist. He has a practical mind. He would appreciate a good sandwich, or twenty cents cash, but never a lofty quotation or spiritual advices. He feels above that.

Some of the boys have no families at all. Some are of obscure origin. Money is sent to these by collateral channels from other countries, with no return addresses, and the name of the sender is either Mrs. Smith or Mr. Jones. These boys live as boarders either at schools or in other families, never properly cared for, always exploited—and at last, from everywhere excluded. Then they live here and there—nowhere, helped by the other boys, who

provide them temporary shelters, because the tight bonds of fraternity tie all those boys into a compact unit. The place where they find each other and form a caste is the school.

Among the schools of Shanghai the Roman Catholic schools for poor children play the chief role in the life of Shanghai boys. Those schools are the cheapest and—which sounds unbelievable—boys are *never* beaten there or expelled from them. This keeps them a permanent unit. A child excluded from everywhere because of his own or his parents' conduct, or both, enters this last shelter—a Roman Catholic school—as something due to him, as if having an incontestable right to be there.

The boys form there a kind of spiritual fraternity with an adamant moral code of their own, a peculiar code and in some points even noble, severe, and lofty. One can, according to it, deceive a teacher, but never another boy. There is no power to make one boy betray another.

The boys—as a whole—face the world as their willing enemy. They are given to suspicion. There is not much confidence towards outsiders among them.

Their first enemies are teachers, then the citizens of the town, of course the police, and—at last—humanity as a whole.

Their feelings towards teachers are most peculiar. In the lowest grades it is suspicion, hostility, even hatred. Then it turns into a kind of interest, curiosity, and some timid steps towards mutual acquaintance. Then it is a kind of reluctant appreciation, even esteem, and in some rare cases it grows into a most sincere gratitude, friendship, devotion.

The methods of education are old and often all wrong. The achievements are rather strange if one takes into consideration the means of the school : those graduating from it usually know two or three languages, are interested in life, in books, their minds alert, their ways efficient.

It was such boys that had become Mme. Mihtza's foes. There could be no other motive for that hostility except the ancient and never-explained hatred between boys and prophets.

As the boys had a kind of inner organisation, the leaders gave daily orders *what* to do and *where*. Every day going to school or coming back, the boys had plenty to do of their own and also of things carried on in the plan of their common activities. There were houses on which they spied from pure, disinterested motives, suspecting crimes or mysteries going on

there. They were busy with giving messages, dealing in commerce. To change Mme. Militza's signboard became one of the manifold daily duties of the boys living in her neighbourhood.

When Mme. Militza spied on the truth, she soberly weighed her chances and understood that forces were not equal. Being masterly in the occult arts is nothing as a means to daunt a boy. And Mme. Militza behaved as a practical philosopher. She scorned them as adversaries and despised them as prey. Even if the chase were quick and the capture certain, she had her dignity to maintain, which was rather hard for one a-running. She just stoically tried to keep on her door :

MME. MILITZA
SCIENTIFIC FORTUNETELLER

That was her answer to the savagery. Whatever the other people did, Mme. Militza preserved her dignity among the sordid facts of everyday existence.

Accordingly, those names she was being called . . . well, from the philosophical point of view they could be accepted as the unconscious homage of awe from the ignorant masses.

7

WHEN LIDA, all eagerness to see an old friend of the family, for Mme. Militza used to live with them in Tientsin, mounted three crooked steps and faced the door upholstered in black oilskin, her eyes fell on the signboard and she read :

MME. MILITZA
Liar-thief-ique Fortune-trailer

She stepped back, first with amazement, then with indignation. Mme. Militza would not possibly display such a misleading statement of her profession. The scent of a hidden foe lingered in the air. Big, uneven letters written thickly in purple ink had nothing in common with Mme. Militza's thin and cobwebby yarn of letters.

Lida rang the bell. She heard unhurried steps and Mme. Militza solemnly appeared in the door frame.

She had not changed. She was the same. Mme. Militza was not subject to the spiteful influences of time, and space, and climate, as were the rest of mankind. Her insulation from the tragedies of doubts, victories, and defeats of her era, her detachment from the fleeting fallacies and prejudices of the twentieth barbarous century, her aloofness from any personal intrigue, career, and ambition, kept her high above the level of what we-call daily life. Although obviously real to the point of being tangible, she pronouncedly did not look quite like a mortal. A tinge of quamtness hovered over every one of her words, mimics, and movements. Black—as usual—was predominant in her person and attire. But hers was a peculiar black, not dull, dead, and quiet, but a shimmering black, with a wink in it, with a mystery, a promise.

She did not embrace Lida, nor kiss her. She did not hurry her visitor into greetings, smiles, and an exchange of news. No, she bowed ceremoniously, offered her a chair, and proceeded with the preparation of coffee.

The absence of many ordinary things manifested that Mme. Militza was jointly an aristocrat and a philosopher in taste, preferring space and silence to the vulgarity of encumbrance and noise. Her setting—from her apparel to her cuisine—proved the same, all except her hairdress, which remained a complicated system of black locks, ringlets, and tassels, but this was too artistic to be approached and measured with the common values applied to ladies' attire. Yes, Mme. Militza remained herself, regardless of the mundane tragedy going on around her. She was not the one to be involved. Mankind was free to do its worst, without sanction of her alliance.

Only when coffee was ready and the hostess and Lida could share its fragrant stream gurgling from the snout of an earthenware coffee-pot did Mme. Militza find it timely to indulge in the polite art of colloquial hospitality—all the time busy with coffee, for Mme. Militza was a great adept of it. She would scorn arguments in behalf of any other beverage, be that the ascetic poverty of water, the lascivious wine, the infantile cocoa, or the cheap sophistication of tea. Some say, coffee is not good for the heart. Well, all the best things in this world are not good for one's heart. A philosopher never bemoans the inevitable payment. .

When a pleasant personal touch had been introduced into conversation, Lida asked about "affairs," meaning business. Mme. Militza answered that her high price of one dollar per fate kept the common populace away. She hinted that perhaps the gruesome glory of a true prophet had something to do with the absence of clientele too. Thus gently the fact was stated: fortunetelling at Shanghai had not met with broad popular consumption.

The news that Lida had come to sing in concerts made Mme. Militza press her lips cunningly and nod her head in emphasis. She solemnly confessed that having been informed about Lida's imminent arrival she had thrown the cards for Lida and a rare fate had been revealed. Lida had to live and die in glory. She could count on a long happy life.

Lida jumped.

"Married?"

"Yes."

"To whom? Jimmy?"

Mme. Militza scorned the naivety of the question. She said what was in the cards.

"To a blond foreigner. In a foreign country. Three children. Long struggle, great glory. Always having heart's desires fulfilled"

"What else?"

That was all. Lida had an impulse to embrace Mme. Militza, to kiss her, but it seemed absolutely infeasible.

When Lida gave her the free concert tickets she had brought as a present, Mme. Militza took them with a bow, read them thoroughly, bowed again, and said with royal dignity that Mme. Militza knew how "to return a compliment." Here she looked very enigmatic and lofty, as if ready at any instant to vanish in smoke and send a gift from there.

Lida was shaken by the prophecy, for she never had had any reason to doubt Mme. Militza's talents. A marriage to a blond foreigner could mean only Jimmy. All moved she sat silently with tears in her eyes.

The visit could not be prolonged, for Lida had to be at the hotel with Mme. Manuilova and rest and practise for to-morrow's concert.

Lida had scarcely taken ten steps along the street when a boy bumped into her from around the corner. It was a Shanghai?

boy, one of the fraternity. A cardboard fell from his hand to the pavement. The card bore an inscription :

MME. MILITZA CAGLIOSTRO (EX-WIFE)

Siren-tific Voo-Doo Fairy-Teller

In an instant the boy jumped away, across the street, and—on the run—cried :

" Got many news from the witch ? "

" I am not accustomed to be shouted at across the street," Lida cried too, although with dignity. " Come back here . . . of course, if you are not *afraid* . . . "

" *Afraid?* " the boy cried, hot with anger, and immediately stepped forth from the shadow of the awning of a window. " *Afraid of whom?* " and invincible courage rang metallic in his voice.

" *Of me,*" Lida said pointedly, and asked : " Why did you shout ? What do you want to know ? "

" What did that hag foretell you ? A plague ? A pest ? Shipwrecks ? Fire ? "

" *Me?*" Lida said with haughtiness. " *My life ends in glory.*"

" *What* kind of a glory ? A ceremonial funeral ? " the boy asked mockingly.

Several other boys stepped forth—out of the doors, from around the corners, from nowhere.

" Real glory . . ." Lida said with reserved pride. " I am a singer."

" I see." The tallest boy whistled and stepped forth. " You miaow well. . . ."

" *Miaow?*" Lida cried indignantly. " One hardly can miaow throughout an opera ! "

" Opera ? She sings in operas ? What kind of a voice do you have ? " And the boys approached Lida with interest, forming an eager group around her. " Which opera can you sing ? "

" Oh, several," Lida said vaguely.

" You are a *liar*" a smallish boy cried aggressively—and he stamped his foot towards her, as if ready for an attack.

" I ? " Lida was red with wrath. " You . . . take away *that* foot . . . you are losing your *sock* . . . I ? Have you seen

the newspapers to-day?" And she quickly produced one from her handbag. "See? *Who is that?*"

The tallest boy snatched the paper, the others looked at it eagerly over his arms. He read aloud :

" 'A young, talented, and charming singer. We feel honoured and proud . . . ' "

" Who is ^c *we* ' ? " the youngest, visibly a sceptic, asked.

" We , . . they meant Russians," said Lida modestly.

" I won't ..." the sceptic said with scorn.

" Shut up," the tallest ordered and went on reading : " ' The brilliant pupil of once world-famous artist and teacher Mme. Manuilova, who predicts a glorious career . . . ' "

He looked at Lida with a short fugitive glance and read again :

" ' We are happy to state that in spite of the tragic grandeur of our Russian decadence, as a cultural class, we still bring forth young artists, before the wondering eyes of the world. . . . Welcome, Russian youth, charm, modesty ! Greetings to you, a Russian child. We are happy to tears to have such children...' "

" See ? " Lida asked modestly.

" Wait a moment," the tallest boy said. He unfolded the paper further and, moving his eyes from the portrait there to Lida's readily exposed face, looked with a critical investigating eye, then said curtly :

" All correct. It is she."

" Want some free tickets ? I have three still left," Lida said magnanimously.

" Me ? Give me ? Me too ? " eager voices arose.

" Stop it," the tallest boy said with dignity. He folded the paper and offering it to Lida bowed ceremoniously.

" Thank you, Madam. Honoured to meet you, Madam."

That kind of behaviour was unusual, and the other boys looked at him with amazement.

"But tickets?" one asked.

" The school will give us several free ones. The rest we shall *buy*" He was grand in this new role and the boys looked at him with the uncertain looks of wondering appraisal.

" Madam," he said, " we must not detain you . . . from your great responsibilities. ..."

" But suppose she sings *badly*" the sceptic ventured again.

" Not much hope for *that*, child," Lida said sweetly.

" Well, I play the violin, I am an artist too. What of that ? " cried the boy who had dropped the cardboard.

" An *artist* ? " Lida said as if in hesitation. " Well ... if you play those ignominious tricks with the cardboard ... I rather doubt . . . you cannot be a *real* artist/" she said with a genuine indecision : " an artist would hardly . . . "

" And *why*, pray ? "

" Why ? " several other boys cried too,

" You see—such a behaviour is *stupid* ... it can keep busy only an imbecile. . . . But an *artist* ? No. You see, an artist is noble."

Here a chorus of voices arose again :

" But Militza said to my aunt "... " But the witch said to my sister " . . . " Always heaps of evils. ..."

" Have you ever thought about professional honesty ? Is it not her duty to tell the truth, whatever it might be ? " Lida objected. " I think she is a noble woman. I am sure she never tried to pay you back. Did she ? "

The boys tried to argue the point. At Lida said feebly that she had no more time. She made a sign to a rickshaw coolie and with a polite smile bade the boys good-bye.

Curious, almost admiring eyes followed her dignified departure.

Next morning when Mme. Militza looked at her signboard it ran :

MME. MILITZA
SCIENTIFIC FORTUNETELLER

The same the next morning.' Then the next and th^ next. She never tried to find out the reasons for that sudden cessation of hostilities. She was not interested. Barbarians—at war or at peace—could have only her scorn.

S

LIDA'S next visit was to Vladimir Platov.

She had been in eager correspondence with Glafira, now happily married and busy with preparations for departure. The Wrens were taking with them both boys—Grisha and Kostik—and there was no end to tears, joys, fears, and promises. Yet, despite the fullness of her emotional life, Glafira had many certain misgivings about Vladimir. She felt he was not altogether frank, and there was all the time something suspicious in his letters. Glafira felt he was changing somehow and not at all happy. The Wrens were to go to Australia from Dairen. They could not afford going to Shanghai, this being troublesome as to visas and expenses. Thus Glafira implored Lida to see Vladimir during her visit to Shanghai, and write her the truth about him. To Vladimir Lida was to tell about the Platovs' happiness, as one who had seen it with her own eyes.

Now Lida was on that errand.

She had written to Vladimir about her visit, but did not specify the day and hour.

At three o'clock she was walking down a long corridor, in a house with rooms to rent, looking for Vladimir's number.

From afar she heard a loud, young, and boisterous woman's voice, laughter, movements, things falling—and masculine remonstrating answers.

The sounds came from behind Vladimir's door. Hesitatingly Lida knocked. She had to do it twice before the door opened.

Vladimir, tall and handsome, recognised his visitor at once—Glafira had written about Lida many times—and smiled a shy but hearty welcome. Behind him a girl in Chinese pyjamas was pirouetting in the small room. With her toe she tried to knock down a picture from the wall. The girl was blonde, svelte, full of grace and gaiety. Her shining and rolled blonde hair danced too.

Seeing Lida, she rushed to her too and cried :

" Come, come in ! "

" Lara ! Larissa ! " Vladimir tried to calm the girl and to introduce her to Lida.

" Idea ! " cried Larissa. " I've got an idea ! Listen, Volodka ! "

She snatched Lida by the hands and turning her round in a brisk movement she sang :

" Idea ! Idea ! "

Then she stopped, out of breath, her red lips opened for a deep gulp of air, and said :

" Lida, lend me your suit. Give it to me now, now. . . . We are almost the same size." And she began to unbutton the jacket and tear it from Lida's shoulders.

" Larissa ! " Vladimir cried. " Please, what are you doing ? "

" Get out, get out ! " Larissa cried. She pushed him out of the room, slammed the door, and locked it. Then, in exhaustion, she fell down on the sofa and began in a calmer tone :

" Lida—dear—sympathise ! We want to marry and ... "

" Who ? . . . To marry . . . ? "

" Why *who* ? I and Vladimir. . . . Have you an argument to bring against it ? "

" I ? No." Lida was at a loss.

" You have no natural children from him ? "

Lida's face showed how shocked she was.

" Now, now," Larissa said soothingly, " be a good innocent Cinderella's godmother. You are not invited to understand things. Just sympathise. ... "

She lit a cigarette.

" Before our marriage, we have to go and see the priest, *in person*. In Shanghai our priests make it a condition. We must go . . . and I have nothing to wear. Lend me, therefore, your suit."

" But you can wear anything, going to see a priest."

" Baby, you make me laugh. Anything, except *nothing*. Listen, I am a dancer—*prima* at the Black Glove—and consequently my wardrobe is chiefly black gloves. ... "

" Why not wear them too ? " Lida said in amazement.

" Kid, you make me sob and have indigestion : black gloves, as a *principal*, almost *single* item of my attire. ... "

" What ? " Lida gasped.

" Well, can you imagine a *prima* at the Black Glove wearing a three-piece tweed suit ? With an overcoat on top of that ? " •

Lida was silent.

" All I have in my wardrobe, *except* gloves, are these pyjamas,

one nightgown, and six dresses, *professional* dresses for dancing . . . none of those are proper to stride down the street by daylight in. . . ."

"But how," Lida said, "how do you usually walk in the town during days?"

"Angel, your words stab me deep in my back . . . I do not walk *days* . . . I sleep . . . I walk out only at night. . . ."

"But . . . but this is not life I" Lida cried.

"It is mostly *not* . . . the greater part of it is dancing."⁵⁵

A sudden pity took possession of Lida.

"How long since you have been out in the days? You have not seen the sun? People? Children. . . s?"

"Granny, mind your artificial jaw and don't mention babies," Larissa said. "Lend me the suit and we go now. Wait for us. I will not be long, I must sleep some. To-night is my big act. I must be fit or the elephant might drop me."

"Elephant?"

"Yes, my partner . . . he raises me up in his left palm . . . I must mind my balance."

"Well," Lida said, "if I lend you the suit, what will I wear in the meanwhile?"

Larissa jumped up, look from the hook Vladimir's old and patched bathrobe, and gave it to Lida.

With what eager pleasure she put on the suit!

"Give me your slip too . . . homesick for some lingerie . . . and the blouse. . . . Oh, my I It is grand to wear a suit!"⁵

She smoothed her hair, unlocked the door, and calling Vladimir caught his arm and dragged him away. In vain he tried to make his apologies to Lida.

Lida was left alone in the small, poor room, wearing a long checkered bathrobe.

She stood for a while, lost in bewilderment. Then she put the room in order and sat on the sofa. She was nervous. Suppose they should be late. It was the day of her concert. How could she leave, wearing a bathrobe? But in one hour's time they were back. Larissa burst the door open and rushed in, all indignation.

"Imagine, the priest did not give any definite answer. He said he will think whether to marry us or not. . . ."

Vladimir looked rather perplexed.

" Well," he said, " Lara, you should not have given the answers in the way you did. ..."

" Meaning what? " She was aggressive. " Oh," she cried in a sudden wrath, " those old and wise men ! People should be killed the moment they cannot fall in love any more. For just then they try to be busy with laws, religions, traditions. Or they start wars, or persecutions. Why, people in love need not much, they just want to be left alone. . . . Oh, I am tired of life and people."

" Can't you have a rest ? " Lida said low,

" Rest means hunger. Hunger means death. Have you ever learned the table of multiplication in your grammar school?"

" Lara," said Lida again, " what can I do for you ? "

" Go away and take Vladimir for a walk. I must sleep this very moment. ... I have not slept since yesterday evening."

Vladimir and Lida at first felt very embarrassed. But Lida began to talk about Glafira's happiness, about the Platovs' life, about George, and suddenly Vladimir became one of the Platovs.

" And they had fritters?"

" Yes," Lida said, " fried in *butter*."

" Oh boy ! George was there ? "

" He came daily."

" And he had supper with all of them ? "

" Daily. And he always brings things to eat. At first Mushka liked canned pineapple so much that she kept the cans—four of them—under her pillow."

" And who brings in the fuel? Mother must not . . . her back aches. . . ."

" Grisha does . . . oh, listen ! George said Grisha will have a horse, a real horse."

" Oh," Vladimir whistled, " George must be a great man. So Glafira is happy ? What is she like now ? "

⁴ Oh ... she is like a waltz of Strauss ... all joy. ..."

" How I should like to be there ... " Vladimir said wistfully.

" Gould not you go?"

" No. Impossible. There would be no work there . . . and then the Japanese would snatch me into their army ' • . I won't."

They stood at the corner of Lida's hotel.

" And have they still those ' celestial travellings ' ? "

" Almost daily," Lida laughed, " and George travels with them too."

" And Father reads *Paradise Lost* ? "

" Yes . . . and says his toes are swollen."

" And threatens to go to the Soviet Consulate for visas ? "

" Often."

They laughed. Then Vladimir sighed.

" Thank you, for telling me all that,"

9

THE TWO CONCERTS Lida gave at Shanghai were most successful.

She had a precious quality, rare in actresses : she was not nervous. Right after her first appearance she acquired a correct mood in which to meet the audience—she forgot about herself. She gave her whole soul to music, never thinking how *she* looked, or whether she was admired, or not. That lack of selfconsciousness, her simplicity and naturalness, made her very attractive. She looked her usual self, naive and modest.

The Russian public in Shanghai was more exacting than elsewhere. The spirit of criticism and suspicion was natural to people who had behind them about twenty years of continuous disillusionments. There was some professional envy too, for Shanghai was subject to overproduction of international artists, mostly unsuccessful and naturally malevolent to any new fame. But Lida's unassuming attitude carried the day even with those.

The most intriguing figure of the audience was that of Mme. Militza. She would come half an hour before the beginning and spectacularly proceed to her place in the first row.

On this solemn occasion she wore a huge black dress, of a burdensome weight, adorned with a lace pelerine of unheaid-of thickness, crocheted of something akin to tarred rope. A huge brooch in the image of a fleshy heart added about a pound of extra weight to this gala dress, all the items of which belonged to Mme. Militza's trousseau.

And there she remained in the solemn pose of a Pythia, and her rare applause sounded fanfares. She comprised the

geometrical centre of the audience, and also its point of gravitation. Although all in black, she conveyed a sense of picturesqueness. She attracted all the eyes, giving none of her casual glances in return.

The other feature among the audience was the boys of Shanghai. Their personnel was different at each concert, except the tallest boy, who attended both.

After the meeting with Lida, at the corner of Mme. Militza's abode, clouds of suspicion arose in the minds of the boys concerning their leader's sobriety of senses. With the keen eye to the fluctuations of his personal value in the hearts of his subjects peculiar to all great leaders, the tallest boy understood where the danger lay. He had to reaffirm himself once more as one alien to any human weakness. His love for Lida—for love it was—he had to disguise under the masquerade of mass admiration for a talent.

He reasserted his authority of being a wit on the next day, at the lesson of geometry. Having good mathematical brains he was given always the theorems and problems with the assignment to find the solution by himself and then to explain it to the class. He always did it successfully, which made him dear to the hearts of monks, for Catholic monks love science.

Father Andrew, indefinitely old but still jovial, always felt sleepy on Wednesdays and Fridays after his luncheons of fish. They say fish is not good for people after sixty. For those after seventy it certainly is not. To sleep it through was the only way to have the end of it.

Father Andrew gave to the tallest boy a theorem. Seeing that his inscriptions were perfectly correct, he yawned, crossed his heart, and bade the boy recite the solution to the class in a most detailed way. Then he sank peacefully into a nap.

The tallest boy, while pointing out his drawing, formulas, and inscriptions, in the order that was required by the problem, was reciting meanwhile in the expressionless voice of a pupil at his daily task :

" Father Andrew, here is a rectangular triangle. A.B.G. Are you well asleep, old barrel ? Then let us build a square on the hypotenuse of the triangle, for you are a shameless glutton as to fish. Let us call it B.C.M.N.—you, poor wretch of a gormandiser, for, I am sure, you had Some wine with your fish. Let us build another square on this cathetus, for your wine \vas

red, old sinner, I see it in the colour of your cheeks. Why not call that square A.B.P.R. ? Why not ? Are you well asleep by now ? For I will risk calling you more names. In spite of all, I like you, old man. I even shall build for you a third square, for we do not believe, after all, that you really pretended to be a saint. . . ."

And so on. When, at last, he felt it was enough :

" Father Andrew ! " he cried into the monk's hairy ear. " I have finished."

" I see, I see." Father Andrew instantly opened his small merry eyes. The fish had been slept through. " I see," he said with more dignity. " I followed. . . . You did it well. I give you a full mark."

A trick like that instantly re-established one in the esteem of one's classmates. Still, going to two concerts in succession—twice actually buying the ticket—was unprecedented. The tallest boy had to put it on patriotic grounds. He was a Russian too. Let all the Russian boys support a new talent, alone abroad. This seemed an adequate explanation, to a certain degree.

The boys came with one of their tutor monks. The face of an old Catholic monk is a great study for an artist. Profound individual traits are rare to-day, when the speed of life makes faces shallow and the look of the eyes mostly meaningless. Facial expressiveness belongs to people who live in spiritual aloofness.

Thus the Shanghai boys would march in under the guidance of a perfect Savonarola, or a Cardinal Richelieu, and under the subguidance of the tallest boy. Under the latter's inquisitorial eye, they had to applaud to exhaustion and make a line, afterwards, at the door to see Lida's glorious departure in a rickshaw—all the time clapping with all their might. Savonarola would sit or stand meanwhile, deep in theological schemes, perhaps never noticing there was a concert. The tallest boy would feel that nobody ever had loved like him, and would try to convert his love and despair into a full-blown patriotic demonstration.

Many psychological phenomena and events were interwoven in the making of Lida's success. There was one feature worthy of being mentioned, for it greatly influenced Lida herself.

Mme. Manuilova had arranged that, after covering Lida's travel expenses, the rest of the money for the concerts should go to the Russian charity institutions of Shanghai, whose boards under-

took all the trouble of organising. When several ladies came, as deputies, and thanked Lida warmly, she was very much moved.

The idea of "giving" arose in all its grandeur before Lida's eyes. She had never thought of life from that point of view. She who had never had ten dollars all for herself now gave two hundred to the poor.

With wonder she thought now of how easily she had accepted things from others, never looking deeply into motives. A vision of all the human active kindness going on in the world, like fresh underground waters, mostly invisible, but nourishing so much of life, charmed Lida's mind. So *that* was the force which kept so much of suffering humanity from utter despair and perils. Amidst the turmoils of this life, externally so materialistic and egoistic, one can always meet a kind soul, an outstretched hand with help and encouragement. Not the strict laws of governments, nor a mathematical approach of statistics, nor the noisy and so often built on vanity philanthropical organisations, nor anonymous help sent through the church—but an individual approach of a kind and modest heart saves humanity from an utter disillusionment in the possibilities of brotherhood.

The visible pattern of human relations—races, riches, educational standards—will always *divide* people, but there has always been, there is, there always will be, an inner pattern as well, uniting them in a whole. This is based on emotion, on a mysterious feeling of the brotherhood of all living souls, on pity, on love. *Jimmy and I*, Lida was thinking, *Dima and Mother, Peter and Dima—we love each other for good, whatever happens, wherever we live, whenever we die. And those links are stronger and more determining in one's fate than all the outward relations. They are the hardest to break—the last to betray.*

And who is linked with whom? Only touch Dima in England—and we are in despair here. Jimmy is happy—and I enjoy my life in China.

- *The more one forms of those links, the more stable one feels in this life.*

Lida understood now why Mother worked at the hospital for that ridiculous salary, which could not buy even daily bread, why she would not look for easier work with bigger pay. Although nations, governments, and societies are painstakingly looking for better ways—in wars, collisions, competitions, and the like—the way lies open to individuals. One is free to be kind, to be noble, even to be a saint—everywhere, always. There are no

obstacles which can prevent one from being good, and they can never be invented.

This new understanding of life filled Lida's heart with warmth and happiness. A great peace entered her mind.

This cannot be taken from me, this my new happiness And she shut her eyes to be alone with it for a while. // *makes my way in life so much clearer for me. With this I can be myself and live everywhere, in any land, or country, under any sky, with any people. I shall try to take less space, less of things for myself, and learn to give more of joy and help to others around me, whoever they might be.*

With a sigh of relief she realised that her new discovery would keep her alive, whatever happened in her personal life. The new truth was bigger than one's personal fate. The new truth—the love of humanity and life—was life itself and gave vitality and happiness in proportion to its development in one. Love for Jimmy, for the family, enthusiasm for the arts, were only different—and smaller—expressions of that fundamental love.

10

LIDA was late with her third call in Shanghai, for Mother Abbess died several days before Lida's arrival.

All she could do was attend the solemn post-funeral services daily performed in the convent with severe splendour. Lida, as well as all the others who had known Mother Abbess in person, had a feeling of irreparable loss. She had belonged to the old life, and such characters could hardly be formed amidst the constant changes of modern existence. Her genuine unshattered faith in God, in saints, in miracles, along with her love for humanity and an active kindness, had made the late Mother Abbess a link between the two worlds of here and hereafter. Her simplicity and naturalness made that other world seem easily approachable, miracles real, and life wholly acceptable. Now that link was broken, and a feeling of having been left orphaned entered many a heart.

Remembering Mother Abbess's words of faith in happiness, Lida daily examined her own heart, and always found her belief not impaired! It seemed as if life put Lida's patience to a trial in order to frighten her, but Lida kept on being not afraid.

On the eve of her departure from Shanghai, Lida went to the convent for the last time. She looked at the fresh tomb and her heart refused to admit that the whole of Mother Abbess's being was there. It had been too broad, too buoyant of life and kindness to be secluded in that small, limited space. A clear sober mind refuses to admit the final and total death of a soul, while its shell, those cells and atoms, are kept permanently existing.

While Lida was walking back to the hotel, her face pale from tears and fatigue, she suddenly caught sight of Miss Clark entering a taxi. A thought, quick as a lightning, identified Miss Clark, and Lida remembered the latter's casual words in Harbin about returning to the U.S.A., to her native town of San Francisco.

"Miss Clark ! Miss Clark ! " Lida cried and ran after the taxi.

Miss Clark heard her call. She tapped the chauffeur's shoulder and sat waiting for Lida.

"Miss Clark ! " Lida cried, all out of breath. She leaned over the door of the taxi : " Are you going to America ? "

Only now did Miss Clark recognise Lida, and her pathetic tear-stained face moved her.

"Yes," she said gently. " I am leavii% to-morrow for San Francisco."

"Miss Clark ! It is *so near* to Berkeley ! " And Lida began to cry.

"Darling ! What is the matter with you ? Oh, dear child, do not cry. . . ."

"It is so near ... so near to Berkeley. . . ." Lida could not say anything-else.

"Jump into the car," Miss Clark invited her. " We shall go to my hotel and you will tell me what ails you so much."

At the hotel she let Lida wash her face, ordered tea, made her visitor and herself comfortable, and then with greedy attention listened to Lida's love story.

Miss Clark was an American from the U.S.A. Whatever their complicated national traits, Americans have, at least, one in common : they like people. Nowhere in civilized countries, are people so much liked as in the U.S.A. A real misanthrope there is usually a cargo only recently brought in from the other parts of the civilized world. A native mis-

anthrope goes to the cinema at least once a week, he whistles swing, and chews gum—and all these habits have a pernicious and deteriorating influence on hatred towards mankind. Especially chewing. It quickly changes hot passions into a homely readiness to let everybody live and enjoy.

Miss Clark took Lida's sorrow straight to heart, as if it were her own.

"Every girl must have the boy she wants," she said decidedly, and began to organise help. She had the practical sense and the efficiency of an American woman. To a trembling Lida she promised to take all the trouble upon herself, asking the latter only to follow her instructions. With a calendar in her hands she said on which day she would be in San Francisco, on which in Berkeley, what time was allotted for visitors in the hospitals, on what day Lida would have the message. She fixed all this in terms of hours, miles, telephones, and the like, not in terms of fate, destiny, occasions and hazards, as Lida was accustomed to plan. She promised to make the situation definite and clear. In case Jimmy wanted to see Lida, Miss Clark promised her help with visas, money, tickets, and support in finding work in the U.S.A. Happily Miss Clark was rich.

"You might be my father's secretary, until you could earn money singing on the radio/" she decided.

Then she said Lida must start with her make-up. On Lida's words that she had never used it and never had had the implements, Miss Clark almost groaned. She presented Lida with an assortment and "made" Lida's face personally.

With that queer new face, all radiant with colours and joy, Lida kissed her good-bye.

When Lida and Mme. Manuilova left Shanghai, a spectacular group of friends and admirers came to see them off.

There was Mme. Militza with her "return of compliments." She presented Lida with a small parcel from which a strong smell of coffee emanated. There stood several ladies with a box of candies, several nuns with a "prosfora," and three of the Shanghai boys with a bouquet. These were the deputies from the Shanghai boys. Not that the rest of them would scruple to commit a transgression on a grand scale and abstain from school in a body, leaving the monks alone for a morning of meditation—no, the boys would err and face the penalty; but in a book of etiquette, procured for that special occasion, there was much

written about sending deputies. The book dated back to 1904, but there had been no newer editions.

Under the title of how to treat a celebrity (of female sex) on the event of her departure, several items were presented for the admirer's consideration.

1. Give her a dinner, a supper, etc. . . . [Out of the question.]
2. Take her for a drive. [But not in a *hired* equipage, therefore, again, out of the question.]
3. Present her with jewellery. [Diamonds, emeralds, or a string of pearls. They meant "real." Out of the question.]
4. A bouquet. [Sounds reasonable.]

The combination of a bouquet and three deputies seemed an elegant feature, and a subscription list was immediately circulated with the tallest boy's signature and order to give unsparingly all individual cash. When the lots for deputies were drawn, the three boys least interested in Lida won the honour, leaving behind several of those whose hearts were gnawed with love. One of life's usual practical jokes.

The boys made a picturesque group, one of them holding the bouquet in his outstretched hand, the two others standing at his sides as guards of honour. When they saw Lida they marched straight up to her, but the chief deputy suddenly grew shy and his hand feebly drooped, the ribbons of the bouquet sweeping the asphalt. Then one of the guards kicked him from behind with a whistling whisper :

" You do not even know *how*."

He snatched the bouquet and, slightly bending his right knee, with a generous and flourishing gesture of his hand he offered it to Lida. He knew this was the right way, for he had seen *The Three Musketeers* on the screen and copied it precisely.

The comic side of it was wasted on Lida, for she had seen the same version of *The Three Musketeers* and behaved accordingly as a gracious Queen of France.

She accepted the homage, made a slight bow, smiled a royal smile, and proceeded whither her fate summoned her.

Later she saw a letter attached to the bouquet. " To our Greatest Russian Singer" ran the address, and a long list

of names followed, evidently the names of those who had given their mites in cash for the flowers.

Lida's eyes ran over the names with indifference. Suddenly she gave a start and the mist of tears filled her eyes. In small letters, with an almost visible emotion, had been written "eternally your Jimmy."

"We shall recognise each other under any change," she whispered—the immortal words of Goethe.

11

COMING BACK to Tientsin proved to be eventful. Owing to the haphazards of the China-Japanese war, there was no direct communication between Tientsin and Shanghai by railway. Mme. Manuilova and Lida decided to go to Tsingtao on a steamer, take a railway train there, change in Tsi-nan-fu—and from there proceed to Tientsin. The day of their arrival was the tragic fourteenth of June of 1939 when the Japanese announced a blockade of the English and French Concessions at Tientsin. The blockade was announced at seven o'clock in the morning, and the train came in at eight, just one hour later.

Although the threat of the blockade had hung over the town for months, nobody was prepared for it. And anyway how one was to prepare for a blockade nobody knew.

When Lida and Mme. Manuilova left the railway station, an awesome sight met them.

All the place before the station, the square, the streets, were literally packed with people, whose daily business summoned them to the other parts of the town. The usual way to the French and English Concessions went through the draw-bridge, and now that bridge was raised. Thousands of people, hundreds of rickshaws, cars, horse, trucks—all was a compact mass. The noise was deafening. The frightened horses neighed and pawed. Honks of motors, cries of the injured people, voices of frightened women and children, made a formidable chorus.

There seemed to be no possible way out of that crowd and it was dangerous to remain in it. A sudden panic could arise at any moment, for nobody knew exactly what had happened and what could be expected at the end of it.

To make the situation worse, the constant pressure of people pushed crowds nearer and nearer to the banks of Hei-ho River, which was deep enough for big steamers to pass. All the buildings around, the shops and houses, closed their windows and doors in the fear of invasion.

Lida was frightened. She did not know what was going on in the town, and how it was with Mother. Mme. Manuilova, broken with fatigue, looked for help. A Chinaman talked to them and for one dollar promised to lead them out of the crowd. As their baggage was left in the railway station, they could go.

Tearing through the crowd remained for Lida a frightening memory. In nightmares—afterwards—it recurred to her, with fever and pain only.

They locked hands and the Chinaman moved first, the women followed dragging each other, stepping on people, falling down, bruising themselves, climbing over cars and chariots. They moved and cried, as the others did, under the threats and curses of those whom they hurt.

When they were at last out of the crowd, they suddenly felt so weak that they could not move any farther. Their clothes were in disorder and torn. They sat on the pavement to rest. The people there, standing in small separate groups, could not give any information on what had been happening in the town.

A rickshawman took them both in one vehicle and for five dollars promised to bring them home in a circuitous route, for there was one more place through which they could get home by land. They had to go through the Japanese Concession, along the Asahi Road, to the French border. When they reached the goal, they saw there no less of a crowd and the same deafening noise and tumult. Again nobody knew what was the matter, and the most terrible suggestions were whispered here and there. Japanese policemen singled out all the Europeans and told them to go to the police post. The small barrack was filled with people who were being searched. Some had to take *off* even shirts and footwear. Many were offended. Some were beaten. Our travellers, being ladies, met more consideration. They were not searched at all, only asked to show their papers and answer numberless questions.

These questions were typically those offered by Japanese police to Russian refugees :

When were you born ? Old style ? New style ? Who was

your father? What did he do in 1965? In 1914? In 1918? In 1921? What did your mother do at the same time? Do you like communism? Why "yes"? Why "no"? Do you approve the New Order in Asia? Tell why (giving twenty reasons).

Then there were easier questions about one's present activities.

"Do you store communist literature? Do you lead propaganda against the New Order? Are you a member of some secret societies, especially communist?" It took hours to write all that. At three o'clock Mme. Manuilova and Lida finished, signed, and were free to go home.

The sight of the English Concession quiet behind its wires was in striking contrast. Lida entered the house with a fast-beating heart. She was met with the usual silent courtesy by the Diazes, and Mother came running down when she heard Lida's voice.

Only then was Lida told what happened in Tientsin. It was the famous blockade, which brought no glory to Japan, nor success to her army, nothing, except more suffering to the people the least guilty in the Sino-Japanese conflict.

But the room in the attic "An island all to oneself! Oh, the quietness of a home! And then Mother's mysterious smile and her eyes squinting towards the small triangular table, in the corner, under the icons, under the light of the *lampada*.

What *could* be there?

There lay a postcard. From Jimmy. The first after months of waiting. Unmistakably his hand, his handwriting. Only several words—but . . . what words! They could imply so much. . . . He was better. . . . He would write!

She studied the postcard all evening long. It had been mailed before the letter sent with Leon could reach Jimmy. It had been sent before Miss Clark could have come to the Berkeley hospital. It was written by Jimmy willingly, spontaneously, without being urged to write. He just remembered about Lida and wrote her. And he promised to write again.

She had to cry—hours—from happiness. Fatigue? Blockade? Tientsin could have been heavily bombarded that night without Lida's hearing the sounds.

12

THAT small card of Jimmy's was a messenger of great changes. News and events began to throng into Lida's life, as if they had been forcibly kept somewhere, away from her, but then broke the dam and poured down in plentitude.

The most important were Jimmy's letters. One week after her arrival home, Lida had the letter in answer to the message taken away by Leon ; then came a telegram acknowledging Miss Clark's arrival and interference ; then a letter from Miss Clark herself, and then constantly, with every mail, came letters, often in twos—from Jimmy and Miss Clark, sometimes written jointly, for Miss Clark instantly took up the business phase of Lida's love story.

Jimmy's first letter brought enlightenment on the reasons why Jimmy had stopped writing one month before the accident.

Leon was the cause. In her simplicity Lida had written about Leon in warm, laudatory tones, for she really admired him. She wrote Jimmy that Leon was strikingly handsome, noble, polite, generous. Then she wrote that the Diaz family was the one she admired most in the world. They offered a room free and never consented to take a penny for it, although Mother was earning some money. They always tried to help, but in an unobtrusive way. Lida was invited to play their piano at any time. Then came the news the Diazes were restored to almost a half of their property. Leon became rich, and Lida gloated over his luck. Then another letter told about Leon's love and his proposal. Here Jimmy stopped answering Lida's letters.

If Lida were guilty, her guilt must be excused. In her life, poor in pleasures, with not much of joy and almost no young friends, Leon, of course, was a splendid apparition. They lived in the same house. Almost every pleasure or gift Lida had came from him or his family. No wonder half the news in her letters was about Leon.

But Jimmy ? In the simplicity of his heart he saw himself as a potential hindrance to Lida's brilliant future. With Leon she would be rich and follow her vocation. With him ?

Jimmy saw before himself years of struggle. He had to go through college with only half his maintenance provided by parents. The other half he had to earn himself. Not that his family was very poor, but his parents were subject to the common American prejudice that children must earn, and the sooner the better. After college Jimmy could, perhaps, have means to marry and support his wife, but not to pay for Lida's voice training in a good school.

Not that he doubted Lida's heart. Her letters never showed any change of tone towards him, but he thought he had to give her the chance of a freer choice. It was a choice for life, and he would not like to hear her lamenting her lot afterwards. He could not write all that plainly. He understood the nobleness of Lida's nature. If given to understand that Jimmy was stepping aside only because he was not the luckier part, she would never leave him. He did not like to base his marriage on her pity or her future regrets. Thus he decided not to write for a while, or to write casually, until Leon would leave for Spain and Lida would decide this way or the other. Should Leon go alone—Lida would belong to Jimmy. Then the accident came, and afraid of remaining an invalid, Jimmy felt ashamed to offer himself—a burden, perhaps, for life—to a girl who could have so much of a future. Therefore he asked his mother to write for him, and he waited and counted days and hours, when he could have the news, whether Leon has gone and what has been the parting between him and Lida.

That letter brought by Leon's own efforts had come quicker than Jimmy had expected.

Lida's announcement that she was happy Leon was going, for he could bring her message to Jimmy in the quickest way, put an end to the trial.

Since only love letters were written and sent by the two, both sides diligently used the obsolete and naive dictionary of love.

But what is a language, what are words? Moving in a constant noise of a multitude of them, we still have but few and always the same to designate the cardinal life's events: "The child is born"; "I love you"; "We are mortal."

One has to believe that there was once a Golden Age, when mankind lived with greater creative powers and clearer logic. They observed the infinite range of events and were able

to create names for them, like Life, Love, Beauty. And those ancient giants, the patriarchs of words, lived thousands of years meeting no rivals. One never could give either synonyms or definitions to those ancient leviathans of a language. The following generations could create verbal pygmies and gnomes only ; invented only commoners, like "pretty," or vulgarians, like "cute." Ages came and passed away, but when one is in love no complicated or refined expression would state the fact as plainly and nobly as the obsolete "I love you," which Lida and Jimmy wrote to each other.

Other news followed quickly. Miss Clark took upon herself the trouble of visas and money. Jimmy came out of the hospital. Irina offered her home for the honeymoon. Lida was promised work on the radio after her arrival, and Miss Clark hoped a scholarship for voice training could be obtained too.

Every letter was definite, practical, like a new brick, heavy, cemented, adding to a solid building of happiness.

Meanwhile the blockade at Tientsin continued. Loud-speakers, were established at crossroads and roared in Chinese explaining that all the evils in the world came from the British quarters. Surrounded by wire, padded with sandbags on the borders, the concessions were locked out from the rest of the country. Only five places were fixed as gates opened to communication. Numerous Japanese officials, soldiers, and policemen were attached to those places day and night. Only those who had "passes" were allowed to go through gates. After being sanctioned by the Japanese officials, those curious documents were distributed by the consulates. Meanwhile there were thousands of people whose daily business was at one place while they lived in another. There were doctors hurrying to their patients, teachers to their pupils, priests—to churches, vendors—to consumers.

The foreign concessions of Tientsin did not grow their fruit or vegetables ; dairies were not allowed there either ; in short, all that the people there needed in the way of their daily food, clothing, building materials, labour—came from the outside. Now thousands of those workers were standing crowded at the wires of the borders urging, requesting, imploring. All were searched. Many were insulted. Some were beaten.

One could never guess whom the Japanese officials would beat and why, since they had outgrown their timidity towards the

person of a white man. Their long experience with the unprotected masses of Russian refugees gave them audacity in using force, instead of argument. Now they tried the same with other nationalities, and applied the methods of unprovoked insults and beating to the English, Americans, French, always successful and never punished. Even society ladies were beaten, only because they wanted to get home after a party in their own Country Club.

If the officials of the victims protested, the Japanese readily answered : " Sorry."

Whatever the personal offences, the question of food supply became the most important. The Japanese officials taxed outrageously every truckload of victuals. Their routine of collecting taxes being slow, milk grew sour before it could be brought to the concession, vegetables and meat and fish quickly spoiled under the hot summer sun. •

The uncertainty, rumours, anxiety, the lack of food and exorbitant prices, the fewer opportunities of earning one's living, made life harder with every coming day.

At that terrible time Lida and Mother found themselves well braced with good news from Jimmy, invigorated with the coming change in Lida's life, busy with her plans and preparations, and—in addition—with two new financial assets. The latter were thanks to the Diaz family, who left them the apartment paid until March, 1940. As it was only August, 1939, Mother could let rooms for months and have the money for herself. The rooms on the English Concession were always in high demand. Cook asked and was granted permission to live in his quarters, until he could find another place. With joint efforts Mother, Lida, and Cook tried to perform the cleaning of the house before letting the new people in. One could see Lida in every window frame in turn, washing the glass panes and singing at the top of her voice Russian folk songs. Informed that Lida was going to America, Mme. Manuilova changed the course of lessons, teaching Lida to sing Russian songs in order to prepare her to earn money in the new country.

The second financial asset was the piano left to Lida as a present from the Diazes. It was decided that the piano would be sold and thus cover Lida's fare to the U.S.A. It would spare her the humiliation of starting her happiness on credit.

Quickly and simply all the obstacles to happiness were

giving in, one after the other, and a new life began to shine for Lida.

Mother and Lida decided to remain in the attic room. They were accustomed to it. It had been a silent witness to so many events and thoughts that they were unwilling to part with it.

Now long hours Lida and Mother spent in talking about the future.

"Mother," Lida would say, "the moment I shall be able to earn, I shall send for you. Promise to come?"

"Of course I shall."

"Then we shall take Dima and live all together. Again a big family. ..."

Or: "Yes," Lida would say, "Mother Abbess was right. Faith brings to things all the attributes of reality. They have to come into existence."

But many a hard day Lida had to live through before she left for the U.S.A.

13

MOTHER had a vague feeling that somebody was following her. At the corner she looked around. The street was its usual self: passers-by strolled in all directions, mostly Chinese workers, craftsmen, boys on errands, vendors. The beggars were sitting in groups on the pavement. Small Chinese children, completely naked, with tiny pigtales standing erect on the tops of their heads, ran across the street looking for a charitable foreign soul who would throw a penny of alms.

Two steps behind her a Chinaman stopped too. He tried to resettle his load from one shoulder to the other. Mother looked at him closely.

He was a poorly clad man, evidently of the wandering artisans' class, for he had been carrying a heavy box with carpenter's tools and glass panes.

When Mother walked into the narrow back street she felt certain that the Chinaman was treading upon her heels. She usually came home that way, crossing the back yard, in order not to disturb people with the opening of the entrance door for her.

Once in that yard, with her hand on the latch, she felt that the knob of the door was held from the outside and then turned slowly. Somebody was trying to enter the yard too.

She stepped back. The wicket opened and the Chinaman walked in, carefully closing the door behind.

Mother had moved hardly a step in the direction of the house when she was softly called :

" Madam ! Madam ! Wait a minute ! "

She turned and looked at the Chinaman.

" I am coming to your house for that broken window in the attic."

The mention of the attic implied that the visitor knew her whereabouts. The fact that there was no broken window glass in her room made it all the more suspicious. She answered curdy :

" We have no broken window-panes in the house."

" But you have, madam. Just that small piece in the corner. Look up ! "

Mother looked up to the attic windows and to her amazement she saw that the corner of a window-pane was broken, evidently fallen out, for there was a hole in the frame.

Once more she looked at the Chinaman. There was nothing unusual either in his appearance or in the clothes he wore. Except for his fugitive airs, there was nothing peculiar in his deportment either. She looked at his hands. They were the hands of a hard-working man, dry, bruised and swollen in the knuckles, with callouses and scars.

" How did you know I needed a glass man ? "

" The younger madam told me."

" What did she say exactly ? "

" She said : ' Go to our house, we have a window-pane broken in the attic.' But I always worked for you, madam, years and years. . . ."

This could not be true. Mother was sure she had never heard that voice with its outlandish tinge. That Lida invited him could hardly be true either, for Lida had left the house early in the morning when the window was whole, and had not been home since.

The visitor's eyes stopped their searching circulation. He looked now straight at Mother and said :

" The window *must* be mended to-day. Many bad things

might happen through negligence. It would not be wise to leave it broken."

"Well," Mother said finally, "mend it, only your price must not be exorbitant."

"Just the same . . . you always paid me for a piece of work. Years I have worked in your house. . . ."

She told the Chinaman to follow her upstairs.

To her astonishment, once in the room, the visitor really began to mend the window, and did it quickly and skilfully. He cut out a piece of glass, inserted it into the pane, and fastened all with some putty.

"Ready," he said. Then he stepped back, and admiring his own handiwork exclaimed: "Is not that a nice piece of workmanship?"

"How much for it?"

"No money now . . . later. . . ."

And he was ready to leave.

Suddenly Mother noticed an envelope on the window sill. It was a Chinese letter. A small stone lay on it, as a paper-weight.

"You have forgotten . . ." she began.

"Me? I never forget things. . . ."

"But that letter?"

"It is not mine."

"Well," Mother said firmly, "take it away. It is not mine either."

"I see it is not yours. Being neither yours nor mine—why should we worry? Let it lie there. Somebody brought it in, another person will take it away. . . . We must not interfere . . . that is another people's business. We just keep not interested. . . . It does not concern us at all. . . ."

And he was ready to go.

"Wait," Mother said, "I do not like it."

"Nobody likes it, madam. Still neither you nor I must touch that letter. It is not ours. To-day you be patient, to-morrow you be patient. . . . Somebody must be interested in that letter and eager to get it. Who knows what the addressee has to tell you . . .?"

And he was gone.

Mother looked at the letter, but did not even touch it. She could not read Chinese characters. She only saw that

the letter had not been mailed, for there were no signs of stamps or seeds.

It was disquieting. Lida had no explanations to give, for she had seen neither the window broken nor the Chinese artisan who mended it.

At twilight, when they were sitting at the table with their usual tea for supper, they heard voices downstairs and then heavy and slow steps mounting the stairs up to their attic.

"Somebody to see us," Lida whispered. The unusual cautiousness of those steps gave evidence that the visitor was new to the place and careful as to his surroundings. They heard a hand sliding along the wall and touching the frame of the door before knocking at it. The sound of that single knock was abrupt and heavy.

Lida suddenly felt afraid and clutched at Mother's hand.

"Come in," Mother said and rose up.

The door opened slowly and a tall heavy man cautiously stepped into the room. He gave a quick, piercing glance around and then said in Russian :

"How do you do ?" and remained motionless at the door. In the small space of the room, with a ceiling low and slanting, the man seemed a giant. Both Mother and Lida felt instantly something alien in him, in spite of his pure Russian speech.

For a while the women and the visitor stood thus, each on guard, trying to take in the details of the situation. Although there seemed to be nothing peculiar in the visitor's appearance and clothing, he was—unmistakably—a stranger, somebody coming from a great distance, from under another sky.

There were minute details which made him an unusual figure. The coarse cutting of his clothes, the fabric a bit too heavy, his boots a little too high, his head too closely shaven, the collar, the buttons—all were different. His deportment was different too. A great physical strength combined with an always tense attention and a peculiar cautiousness were characteristic of him. He stood, outwardly quiet, but one felt he was ready for a sudden assault, whichever side it could come from. He looked only once at his hostesses, but they felt that he memorised their faces forever, as if he had made a quick and accurate snapshot and would keep it thenceforth in his brain.

My goodness! A Bolshevik! Mother thought, and said aloud :

"What do you want here, *Comrade*?"

He did not answer at once, but put his fingers into his breast pocket and took out a note.

Mother stepped forth, hiding Lida behind, and asked:

"Please, who are you?"

"It is not important," the visitor said slowly, "take me for a messenger. . . . I brought you a letter."

"A letter? From whom?"

"From your nephew, Peter."

"Peter!" Lida cried. "From Peter? Is he alive?"

And suddenly her face was all covered with hot tears, for only then did she realise how anxious she had been about Peter, ever since he had left for Soviet Russia.

Mother held her hand out for the letter, and her hand trembled. Lida saw and felt too how much of pretence there had always been in Mother's usual outward quietness.

"Lida," she said, "the lamp. . . ."

She held the letter. It bore no envelope, no inscription. Inside, on the single sheet, they read:

"Love and best wishes to all, Peter." That was all.

The handwriting was undeniably his.

For a moment they forgot about the room, the visitor, the life. Lida put her head on Mother's shoulder and shut her eyes.

"Thank God," she whispered. Mother silently said a prayer. Then she rose and bowed slightly to the visitor.

"Thank you."

The visitor stood quietly looming over everything in the room.

He is tired, Mother suddenly perceived through her quick insight. *He must be trembly tired*.

"Sit down, *Comrade*," she invited him to the table. "Have some tea with us."

"Have you seen Peter yourself?" Lida asked. "When? Where is he now? Did he send a message in words too?"

"He could not write much. He asked me to tell you all about him and answer all your questions."

"Please, take a cup of tea first," Mother invited, and Lida offered him a plate with a lone sandwich, her own supper.

"With tomatoes and cucumbers," she said radiantly.

The visitor drank the tea and ate the sandwich, all in the

same peculiar manner—slowly and with caution. When he was through, the hostesses began their inquiry.

He told them in brief the whole of Peter's story.

After having crossed the border of the Soviet Russia, Peter declared himself to the officials. As he had brought on him neither a passport nor any other document, nor permission to come to Soviets, he had been instantly taken under arrest and—finally—put to a trial. The verdict was two years of prison at forced labour.

⁶⁷ "A prison!" Lida cried indignantly. "What for?"

"For nothing. What other treatment did you expect for him, citizen?" the visitor asked with a genuine astonishment. "Peter belonged to a class hostile to the Revolution, he had been for years a refugee, he came from Manchuria which belonged to Japan, our potential enemy. That country is full of spies. . . . Did you expect the Soviet Government to welcome any wanderer of here and there, across the border, just in those places where we are building a line of towns and fortresses . . .? His sentence was mild. Capital punishment is sometimes applied. . . ."

"But if he said . . ."

"Can one believe *words*, nowadays?"

"How did he feel in prison and at forced labour? Where is he now?" Mother asked low.

"He proved to be a lucky one. Of course, the prison was hard, and the forced labour almost finished him. He said that many a time he thought that had been his last day. . . ."

"Was he ill?" Mother asked.

"Of course. Cold and hungry to boot." The man said it simply, as if those conditions were quite natural and had to go along with life itself. "He was almost a finished man, when amnesty came. . . . The twentieth anniversary of the Red Army. A lucky fellow, he got under it—his time of penalty was shortened by half—and now he is a free and legalised citizen."

Mother crossed herself.

"Where is he now?"

"Peter lives with some relatives in a town on the Volga River. He earns his living as a teacher of English. In the evenings he attends a school, preparing for the Technological Institute. He hopes to pass his examinations there next fall."

Again Mother crossed herself.

" How does he feel now ? How does he look ? " Lida asked.

" He is rather thin, perhaps still nervous, but otherwise all right."

" Thank you, Comrade," Mother said.

" There is one thing more/" the visitor said. " Peter said his advice to you would be to come to the Soviet Union too."

" Peter said that ? " Lida cried.

" He put it this way. He cannot promise or guarantee anything. Poverty, hard work, even persecution are most sure for newcomers there. He especially laid stress on the fact that no personal security could be expected by anybody. Still he felt that the difference between a hard life abroad and a hard life at home is not too great. He meant the hardships he had seen here from the Japanese. . . . At home, he said, he could find more sense in life, more eagerness to live. This he said as his own opinion. The final decision must be yours."

" We are only two women left here," Mother said. " The question of returning home has lost its poignancy. . . ."

" That is your own business. Peter only said, in case you would like to return home, I had to explain the legal proceedings. . . ."

Mother and Lida looked at each other.

" No, we do not intend . . ."

" Your own business. . . ." And he rose.

" One word more," Mother asked. She was silent for a while, as if gathering the needed strength. " Tell me frankly, as one Russian to another, how is the general situation there now ? Is life better ? Are you, yourself, quite satisfied with communism ? You are a communist, that is why I am asking about it. I pray you to give me your honest opinion."

The visitor did not answer at once. He stood for a while with his head bent, tapping the table with the tips of his fingers, and this unnecessary movement was strange in one whose deportment was based on the rational economy of strength.

" Well," he said at last. " Pre-Revolution times were not good, ours are not perfect either. Still truth is on our side. We are building for the future, a new life for our children. Our task is hard, it implies many hardships and no less errors. We accepted it and are ready to pay any price."

Mother said nothing to that.

" Will you meet Peter again ? " Lida asked.

" No. Not soon, in any case. But I shall send him a message about you."

" Oh, tell him . . ." Lida began . . . " tell him ... we are . . . we were so happy to hear from him. . . ."

" Are you ... his close friend ? " Mother said.

" I hardly would say so. No. We just lived in the same yard. He knew I was coming to China. He asked me to see you. He worried. . . . The rumours about the situation here were rather exaggerated."

" Thank you," Mother said once more.

There were so many words she would like to send Peter, but facing the messenger she could not pronounce them. They would sound childish, too tender, perhaps, too sentimental. The ties of blood and the memories of childhood are counting for nothing in face of communism Therefore she said :

" Tell him we are healthy, we have work, we earn enough. . . ."

⁶⁶ " I will," the visitor said curtly.

" And I shall pray he never sees the prison again," Lida said earnestly.

" We have a new proverb in Russia," the visitor said—" ' good communists are made in prisons,' " and he laughed, and the women laughed too. They laughed not at the words of the proverb, but at a sudden feeling of friendliness, which—in spite of all—united them for a brief moment, united them in the realisation that they were one people, the children of the same country.

" Now let me ask you for *my* message," the man said.

" Message for you ? "

" Yes. It must be a letter with four Chinese characters. . . ."

" We have one . . . but . . ." Mother said.

" Now, citizen, play fair : a message for a message."

Mother gave him the letter left by the Chinese carpenter. He looked at the characters on the envelope, smiled and said :

" This same. Honestly. Thanks."

And he was gone.

14

ON SUNDAY, the twentieth of August, in the evening, Lida was in their small garden. It was full of flowers' Early in spring the Countess had planted them and—unlike the other years—all grew and bloomed in joy and profusion.

The high bushes of *Nicotiana* stood along the fence, their big, rare flowers full of fragrance. Light seemed to be emanating from their petals and stand in a tender vibratory halo around the flowers.

The twilight was quickly wrapping the world. Lida lingered in the garden admiringly, she had never seen that kind of *Nicotiana*.

Why, she thought, they are almost as big as magnolias . . . and as heavy . . . and as fragrant. Can they be nicotines, or has the Countess mixed the names? Why, even their shape is quite different. . . .

Suddenly she heard cries: "Water! Water!" They sounded first only as wondering and amazement. Lida, who often paid only half of her attention to reality, did not comprehend their meaning. She only moved her shoulders, as if it were a tiresome fly, and remained standing before the row of bushes, admiring them.

"Water! Water!" Cries arose from all sides. Now anxiety and fear rang in them.

Suddenly Lida felt something stealthily crawling around her feet. Looking down she saw water. It appeared furtively. Not that it poured from a certain direction, no, it rose from below. Lida, who had forgotten rumours of the coming flood, could not place the phenomenon in her mind, she just stood there and looked down.

It was not the kind of water she was accustomed to see. This was dark and thick and sticky. When her feet were in it up to the ankles, Lida ran to the porch and the flopping sounds seemed to run after her. Standing on the steps, she saw the water slowly rising. Dog came from somewhere. He clung to Lida's feet, gave out several growls, and shivered all over, his bristle standing up and moving.

Lida slowly went into the house. Dog refused to come in.

Mother was at the hospital. She was alone. It was dark in the hall.

Leaning against the door she tried to overcome the creeping sensation of alarm.

The house was full of small, stealthy sounds. They went all round, like sighs, or whispers, or slight movements. Lida could not discern what they might be. She lit the lamps and shrank from what she saw. The hall was full of living beings ; mice rushed here and there on the floor ; centipedes slid in zigzags across the walls ; cornices and corners were alive with rustling cockroaches ; lizards seemed glued to the doors' frames.

Who are they ? Lida thought meaninglessly. *Where did they come from ?*

They were all running away and upwards, from the flood. Awed by the light of the lamp, they began to move on, with better speed.

The idea that all that hidden, mysterious life had kept somewhere near all the time, invisible and silent, was frightening.

Lida rushed upstairs.

To spend the night alone in the house seemed unbearable. She did not know what to do. Looking out of the window she saw that the water was rising. It seemed dangerous to venture out. Voices and cries came from everywhere. Night seemed in haste to come, and the darkness moved onwards quicker than usual.

Lida tried to calm herself. In any case, her attic room was the safest place. The disaster was not very big, perhaps, and only their part of the town was being flooded. It would be wisest to wait until morning.

She called Dog, but he seemed to have disappeared and did not come. Lida prayed, then took Jimmy's letters and read them slowly, one after the other.

Suddenly the sounds of sirens cut the air and their voices were a certain signal of disaster. It was for many the voice of death.

What must I do ?

Lida would have rushed out to help—but how? One has to have a boat first of all.

Sounds were coming from downstairs. She rushed down. The floor of the hall was hidden under water.

But how ? Lida thought. Where does it come from ? The doors are locked.

With an effort she opened the entrance door. There was Cook with two big parcels. His low quarters were flooded.

Cook was calm and efficient.

" We must move things upstairs," he said, " to the second floor."

" There are only few things," Lida said—"just a chair or table here and there."

" But this "—Cook pointed at the piano.

The piano was already standing in water. Lida grew cold with apprehension.

" Let us take it . . . upstairs . . ."

But of course she could not. She pushed and pushed, but it did not even move. The idea of bringing it upstairs seemed vain. Meantime Cook measured the piano with a tape, then the doors, and declared that it could not be moved anyway, it was too big.

While Cook was busy moving things Lida sat on the steps looking at the piano. From time to time she would wade in water and try to push it again, but soon would give it up and again sit motionlessly.

She had to move from one step to another, for the water was all the time rising.

At midnight, the electricity went out, and a thick menacing darkness filled the world. Groping the way, Lida went to her room in the attic, shut the door, and sat at the window until the morning came.

The night was unusually dark with not a single star in it. It was full of sounds. They were different, those of peoples and animals, but all expressing the same things—*anxiety and fear. . . .*

Cries of the drowning cattle, coming from afar, seemed unbearable. The howl of dogs was dreadful. In the concessions it was quieter. All the houses were at least two-storied, and packing upstairs was the natural way to safety.

But Lida thought about the low Chinese huts on the outskirts of the town, about farms and small houses of the poor.

Morning came—and there was no more earth in view. Houses had become islands.

With the first rays of dawn, life arose as a cry for help and

safety. One could move only in boats, because a car would not be even seen from under water.

With their usual calm and inventive initiative, the Chinese began to build boats from everything available, and charged twenty dollars for a ride.

When Lida went downstairs she saw a black island in the waters of the hall—it was her piano. Its keyboard was under water. It was spoiled, dead as a piano, and as Lida's financial asset too.

But there was not much time to brood over the loss for with the rising sun lodgers came, or, better, swam to the house.

Mother's friends knew that she now had an apartment all for herself and several of them, whose living space was in the basements or on the first floors, came to live in the second floor of the apartment. Naturally, nobody asked permission, and the question of money was never raised. Thus the family's second financial asset was gone.

Mme. Klimova came first. She was driven in a small boat into the hall and anchored at the staircase, which had since become a haven. Dishevelled, her dress and slippers wet, Mme. Klimova increased the moisture with her abundant and now quite sincere tears. She threatened she would at once curse with bell, book, and candle the very day of her own birth, for she had lost all her belongings. The impatient Chinese pilot demanded his fare, of which she could provide only a half.

The quarrel arose. But seeing that time and a boat were money, the pilot neatly spat into the water and departed from the hall in his boat. Here Mme. Klimova dried her tears and said she came to take a room for herself before somebody else could arrive and make the best choice, for people were always like that, greedy for the best morsel of everything.

Then Mother was driven in on a kind of raft made of a door, on which the staff of the hospital was being removed after their night duty. Seeing that Lida was well, Mother crossed herself and began her activities.

She instantly sent Cook on the same raft to call at Mme. Klimova's place and ask the General and Alia to come immediately. Knowing Alia was desperately ill, she arranged for her the best room. Other friends began to arrive and she found places for all. Only in the afternoon did they remember about food and begin to think over the complicated problems of

living. There was no electricity, no telephone, no fresh water, no food, and almost no means of communication, for nobody in the house had cash ready for the fares, and the boats were not handy either.

The old General took the post of a commander and gaily organised works for the common welfare. Men tore away doors and made rafts. Cook drove in a zinc bathtub, not only in the yard, but also to market. Only there was no market on that day and on many to follow.

Life began on the third day only, when a fresh water supply was offered to the population and the news of it was cried from house to house in several languages at once. Then the Jewish bakery, happily not flooded, offered bread at its own expense and claimed volunteers for free delivery to those who could not move themselves. Then a market was opened in the yard of a French Club, situated high—and those who had much money could buy some food.

The fact that the Japanese refused to remove the blockade seemed a wanton cruelty. The borders, the wire, could not be seen now, still Japanese soldiers with bayonets, sitting in boats, did their best to harass the population which tried to get food.

But in spite of all the terrors of heat, thirst, hunger, bad smells, corpses in the street waters, in spite of pains and sufferings going around, there were a few who tried to save the rest from despair and utter disillusionment.

15

BECAUSE of the flood, when she had been transferred to new quarters, Alia received proper, although belated and quite ineffective, treatment. Her fatal illness had failed to attract much of Mme. Klimova's care and attention earlier.

Now Alia lay in her bed, looking utterly exhausted, with constant pains in her throat, with a whisper instead of a voice, sweating and shivering, coughing all the day long, with her eyes too bright, her skin too dark. And there Mme. Klimova was all aflutter because of this or that political happening, usually of world importance and none of her concern, always efficient when out of the house and terribly tired upon returning home.

Alia did not permit herself an expression of her distress. Seeing her thus quiet, Mme. Klimova would dismiss the whole illness with a casual remark that "it happens."

As to the General with Maps, he possessed one peculiar trait common to many valiant heroes: he was brave only on a battlefield. At home he was of less consequence than last winter's snow. His refined strategic plans broke against a single glance of Mme. Klimova's protruding eyes. When he tried to bring Alla's health into conversation, Mme. Klimova asked him to remember that ladies with weak hearts cannot stand unpleasant topics.

Mr. Ngnuiahma had left Tientsin months ago. Money orders in Alla's name came from him at irregular intervals. The sum was never a round figure, but always ended with some odd cents. The total seemed to have been scraped from all the pockets of the poor man. Mr. Ngnuiahma was never mentioned in the house.

But mother lovingly took Alia under her care. The doctor was immediately invited to call and she herself with the help of the new lodgers kept a constant vigil over the patient. Lida was excluded. She was allowed to enter Alla's room once a day and sing low, if Alia was willing. Something the latter enjoyed.

Mme. Klimova seemed only happy to be removed entirely from the nursing of her daughter, being no specialist in it, as Mother, for instance, was, and being afraid to upset Alia with

her own grief about the loss of her property and the privations because of the flood.

But Alia herself seemed to need nobody and nothing. Why should she ?

There were times—oh, long ago—when she had had many desires, dreams, wishes, and plans. She was one of those who could be seen standing, spellbound, before the window glasses of luxurious stores, who were dreaming about jewels, who coveted big apartments, deep mirrors, thick carpets, rich furs, fashionable dresses—and never had in possession things other than trivial, cheap, and vulgar. Now it was late for things too. She had almost no flesh to be adorned, as she had almost no soul to be saved.

This state of utter loneliness and forlornness frightened Lida. It was a sight quite new to her, new and appalling. She never imagined there could be a family like that one. It was the most awful aspect of life she had ever seen. To die—Lida could accept that ; but to die in such spiritual alienation seemed terrible. Mother was no less grieved. She surrounded Alia with constant, silent, and unobtrusive care. Every time the patient opened her eyes she would see a woman's face looking at her with a smile and ready with help. There were not many things which could be done to alleviate Alla's physical sufferings. In spite of the terrible damp heat, the windows were shut, and even every slit in them glued with paper, because a terrible smell came from outside. In the filthy street waters corpses of people and animals were constantly floating on the surface. They were dragged to the Hei-ho River and then the current took them farther, towards the sea. The air was nauseating. Food was scarce, and water tepid. There was no ice. The doctor said that Alla's days were but few, and there would be no further harm in anything which could gratify her wishes.

Once Alia opened her eyes and whispered. It was her first wish expressed : she wanted tea with lemon.

But lemons were the things one could not buy at Tientsin.

At intervals Alia would open her eyes and whisper huskily :

" Please, tea with lemon."

And after a while, she would ask for it again. In fact she could not swallow at all. Mother only moistened Alla's lips with water, that was all Alia had in the way of food and drink.

Her wish for lemon was one of those imaginary wishes dying people sometimes have. It was distressing to refuse.

"Mother," Lida said, "I know what to do. I shall go to Mrs. Brown and ask her."

When Lida was ready to leave, Mother suddenly said :

"There is one thing more ... we cannot feed Dog. I wonder whether Mrs. Brown would like to take him."

After a silence, short but full of meaning, Lida said hastily :

"Oh, yes ... let us . . ."

Dog heard them but he made no movement. In fact all the three of them, Mother, Lida, and Dog—the Family—tried not to look at each other. Dog was the strongest of the three. He was the first to lace the situation and strode towards the door. He resembled his old self only as much as a glove resembles the hand from which it has been taken off—still he remained a bulldog, from head to heels.

Lida's whispered invitation to follow he answered with scornful obedience.

Mrs. Brown was busy.

The news about the flood found her in a resort. While other prosperous people tried to leave Tientsin, Mrs. Brown rushed back to organise relief.

Mrs. Brown arranged help on the most generous scale, opening all the available space of her own and some other houses. Cinemas and even schools were given as living-room for the Chinese. In two days, with the help of other ladies, members of her clubs, she housed ten thousand Chinese refugees. She worked all day long with a determined and mournful expression on her face. This was an English Concession. As far as she was alive, she felt it her duty to keep it going in the way of law, order, and justice.

When Lida came with the request of one lemon, she was immediately brought in, for in this time of emergency Mrs. Brown was visible and available at any hour of the day.

The lemon was immediately granted.

Bracing herself for her second request, Lida said :

"Mrs. Brown, here is a dog. He is English. He belonged to an English lady. He eats much. We cannot keep him. Will you kindly take him? He is a very . . . very noble animal. . . ." And her voice fell to a whisper.

• Mrs. Brown looked down at him, in quick anger. But

Dog's eyes met hers with such a mournful, sardonic expression, there was in them such a final understanding of and verdict on life and mankind, that a cool mutual esteem arose instantly between the two and Mrs. Brown said curtly :

" Leave him here. I will take him."

Dog said nothing.

He only drew his neck tighter between his shoulders. He had found—at last—a congenial master, with few words and less nonsense. Though silent, they would be two understanding friends, for Dog was in the animal kingdom what Mrs. Brown was among mankind.

When Alia opened her eyes and saw a glass of tea and lemon she smiled. That was her last smile, for she was dying.

She felt as if a link were unlocked somewhere, and she—Alia—were disconnected with the rest of the world. Her life was switched off from the common stream of the physical cosmic life. Hers, like a waif's, was thrown out of the stream on to the shore ; like a shaving, it was pared off and blown away. The link was broken and she instantly fell within a different, wondrous sphere where no usual laws of life acted, with no space to be chained to, no time to be dragged with, no matter to weight upon one.

She had a vision. Her last vision. The very last illusion—or disillusionment—of life.

The room grew dim, wavered, and slowly moved away, as if the scenery had been skilfully and noiselessly changed for another act of the eternal play, and Alia found herself lying on the ground, on a soft grass, under high trees, in a beautiful garden.

There was no movement of any kind—neither among the leaves nor amidst the blades of grass.

How very peaceful and silent . . . Alia thought, only her thought was not in her head but somewhere near her heart, which alone—of all her body—she still felt as something warm and palpitating . . . but all the time slowing its beating. That her heart seemed the only moving, the lone *alive* actor in the whole of the new play.

How still . . . Alia thought. . . *It is because those cherry-trees are in blossom.*

I always thought, she mused slowly, there was a peculiar silence when one was under the blooming cherry-trees, if they were many. . . .

Especially, she went on thinking, especially if it be on a cloudy spring day . . . not many clouds, just one . . . but it covers the sun . . . altogether. . . . And—perhaps—there is no sun . . . never was . . . illusion . . . disillusion . . . just one of many . . . one has . . . one is bound to have, when living. . . .

Let me look at what I am leaving behind, she thought and (it seemed to her) she lifted her head and looked backwards, from among the tree-trunks, straining her eyes, for a mist rose from the earth and slowly filled the air.

There lay a lonesome-looking country. A winding path led to a decayed hut. The wayside grass, the waned straw of the thatched roof, swayed dismally although there was no wind.

Nobody ever will live there . . . Alia thought, and she looked at the wild withering grass which grew between the cobblestones. It was all covered with numberless lustreless dewdrops.

Mist, mist ... I see ... I am leaving nobody behind. . . .

She shivered and quietly, with a sweet relief, lay again upon the soft grass, under the cherry-trees.

The white petals began to fall down. First one, or two . . . then many—oh, many of them . . . cool . . . fragrant . . . but they grew cooler and cooler, then colder and colder. . . .

Somebody is waiting for me ... I know . . . Alia thought, *only I cannot see . . . because of petals,* for they were so many, falling insistently down, they formed a moving wall—tender, fluffy, fragrant, but cold. . . .

The falling cherry petals, turned into snow—fluffy too—but colder with no fragrance any more. They were dry and dead.

Alia shivered. The shiver came in jerks, in fits, each trying to tear Alia from her heart. Her heart grew cooler. It began to freeze too.

It was essential to keep to it as strongly as possible, as close as possible, as long as possible . . . only it grew smaller and smaller, in spite of all, in spite of all . . . but this was no more important, nothing was important, nor weighed, nor mattered—nothing at all . . . for—this was the end of the world. . . .

Somebody pressed her eyes with a gentle but determined hand, and that last touch came from a very long distance.

Doctor got up. He went to the washstand and slowly, carefully washed his hands.

Then he looked at his watch—and swore—he was late for the operation.

Mother read pray el's on the Exit of Soul. Mme. Klimova sobbed in her room.

16

FUNERALS ! How many times has every one of us watched them as a detached spectator ! At Tientsin one could see almost any possible variety.

Russian funerals with a crucifix ahead and a crowd of people wailing behind, with the chief mourners stumbling in despair and supported by friends—and all this grief so deep, so ii esh, so sharp, so sincere, as if death were something hitherto unknown.

Polite and good-mannered Protestant funerals with low-voiced gentlemen following the coffin, all so calm and dignified that one never can be sure who is the chief mourner and who is the undertaker—good form and self-control seeming to be the only things that matter.

Impassioned Catholic funerals with a black cross, this woeful symbol of human life, towering above, all the ceremony permeated with such feverish faith that the life beyond seems almost tangible, and the angels appear almost palpable.

Hebrew funerals, all black and woeful, performed in a great haste, all on the run, as if the only wish were to dispose of the body quickly and then to indulge in uninterrupted and luxurious expressions of sorrow.

Mohammedan funerals which are not like funerals at all, for if the deceased is but a woman, she simply does not count in the after life, and if a man, he instantly enters a cosy eternity and is offered the things he covets most, so there is no special reason for sorrow.

Leisurely Adventist funerals, where all the attendants display a matter-of-fact mood, as if nothing of importance had taken place. In two or three years there will be a final and complete change in the cosmos, so it makes litde difference whether one is alive or dead for that little interval.

Japanese funerals with the big wreaths of artificial flowers,

always the same, for they are rented and afterwards brought back to the pawnshop, with mourners simpering at everybody and everybody smiling back at them.

Chinese funerals, which have a thousand degrees of luxury, according to the rank of the deceased. There may be a pauper's coffin carried swinging between the two poles, as well as the pompous procession with thousands of hired mourners chanting a heart-rending chorus—sometimes with the addition of several modern brass bands, and a huge image of a dragon dominating it all.

Then there are funerals of the people who have no religion, and therefore have nothing carried before or behind them—no faith, no symbols—as if the deceased were but pleased to get rid of Hie all at once and forever.

And there are also funerals with a red star as a symbol—communist funerals accompanied by music, everything just like a club party, where people following the coffin never interrupt their discussion of the current political problems. For, really, what has happened? A dead comrade is only a working unit dropped from the ranks. They put "minus one" in the scheme, and waste no time over a broken item.

But Alla's funeral was like none of these. Fate, that had obstinately deprived Alia of many pleasures of life, now refused her even the traditional accessory of death.

The cemetery was under water. There was no place for Alla's grave and after a short conference with the officials it was decided to give Alia a sea burial: to sew the body into sackcloth and to throw it into the Hei-ho River.

But even this simplified rite required some cash money and an appeal had to be addressed to the inhabitants of the house. As nobody had much Cook offered his mite of three dollars.

When she took his money, Mother noticed that Cook had a fever. His face was all shrunken and his eyes dim. To her question he answered that he felt a little sickly.

Cook had spent the recent days out of the house. In the morning he would depart in the zinc bathtub skilfully paddling with a coal shovel, and return only in the afternoon. He slept on the floor near the attic room and was heard groaning all night long. Now on Mother's insistent inquiry, he admitted that he really felt ill. He refused to remain at home and have some

medicine, saying that his new job could not wait or be postponed. His new means of earning money was quite extraordinary.

Afraid of an epidemic, the officials of the town had declared anti-cholera injections obligatory for all. For the poorest Chinese, population they were free. Everybody had to carry a certificate showing he had been injected. Police spent their days on rounds in their boats verifying certificates. In case someone had none, he was immediately conveyed to the first medical post, somewhere in a boat at a corner of the street, and there given compulsory injections.

Suddenly rumours arose that the Japanese were mixing with the serum some poisonous stuff which would bring the Chinese population to a slow and painful death. In a town like Tientsin one is apt to believe anything. In a country which has seen so much Japanese cruelty, any rumours have credit. The frightened Chinese population tried to escape that suspicious compulsory treatment, seeing no reason why Japan should grow so careful about Chinese health. But those who had jobs had to show to their bosses the injection certificates. This was where Cook came in. Unafraid of foreign ways and medicine because he had lived near them for years, Cook would sail from one medical post to the other, receive free injections and the certificate. Then he sold the certificates to those Chinese who would rather refrain from being personally injected.

Being told this confidentially, Mother grew pale.

"Cook," she cried, "how could you! It is very harmful. It might endanger your life! Go to the Russian hospital. I shall write to the doctor. He will keep it all secret and try to help you."

"Madam," Cook said, "this earning will last only one month or two. I will see the Russian doctor afterwards."

"Cook," Mother said, "understand: it is dangerous, poisonous."

"Madam," Cook said, "all is poisonous in our lives. Water we drink, air we inhale. This poison pays. The others—no."

"I will not take your three dollars," Mother said. "This must make you understand how anxious I am about your health."

But there was no more time to spend on Cook, for Allans funeral had to be performed quickly.

The priest sailed into the hall in a boat and the funeral

service was held in Alla's room. Lida and the General sang as a chorus, and Lida wept and the General's voice grew suddenly tremulous. This childish treble of his basso voice never left the poor General, and his career of a soloist in the sporadic concerts of the Cossacks' choruses was henceforth closed.

When Alla's body was being sewn into the sackcloth Mother sent Lida away. She did it all alone, for Mme. Klimova lay in a fit of despair in her room and kept actually cursing the day of her birth, and the other women were either afraid or repelled with the task.

Lida was sitting meanwhile on the steps and looked down into the waters of the hall. The piano was a corpse now and the shoals of tiny fish quickly plied around its legs.

This filthy water, that sultry day, that nauseating smell, Alla's death, filled Lida's soul with despair.

OA, she thought, *if I had not Mother with me now I would not be alive . . . no, whatever the hope for the future . . . I would not be able to stand all this and remain sane.*

The old General brought the bag with Alla's body downstairs and put it into the boat which waited in the hall. Only Mother, the General, and two Chinamen with oars composed the funeral cortege. Mme. Klimova could not stand it, and Lida was forbidden to go. She remained sitting on the staircase and, crying, from time to time thrust her head against the banister. It hurt, but instantly substituted for the mental despair a realisation of the physical one, which meant alleviation.

Meanwhile Alla's body was brought to the broad water space which was the Hei-ho River. Mother crossed it and then the General, crying like a child, threw the body into the river. Mother crossed and crossed the place where it disappeared. And the river, heedless of its new load, was driving it farther and farther, towards the sea, towards the ocean, towards the islands, where Alia had danced the lugubrious dances of her life.

17

OF all the towns in the world Tientsin was, perhaps, the most self-restrained in its reaction to the declaration of the new war which acquired the title of the Second World War. The third of September found the town with less water, but no less misery. Water had been partly pumped out with the special machinery brought aboard special steamers from Shanghai, but human misery grew and left a harvest sorrowful to the eye.

Still there is always another side to everything. The fearless people are usually those who have seen many dangers. The charitable people are usually those who have suffered themselves. The gayest people are usually those who are accustomed to shed their tears alone at night and have not a drop left towards morning. The most vital people are usually those who live among perils. The inhabitants of Tientsin were well-trained people, hardy and sturdy.

Why should they worry about the declaration of a war? The Russians have lived at war among themselves and the rest of the world for many years now. Some were born to it and had never seen it stopped. Then Chinese wars, mostly undeclared, became a part of their lives. The Japanese, evidently, liked being in trouble with wars. The other nations in Tientsin, although representing local financial powers, were but a minority in number, and seemed so engrossed in the commercial aspects of war that a new one could be looked at, perhaps, as an asset, not a liability. In short, everybody was so busy with his own business that the heroic part of the World War, its ideology, so to say, was fully wasted upon Tientsin, which rushed to gnaw at its possible economical effects.

Thus only minor changes appeared in view because of the war. The Russians, noisiest part of the population, were quick with the conclusion that to whomever the glory, things were bound to become worse for them. Let the credulous souls hope for better. There is no lock or law for hopes. As to themselves, they were not naive any more.

The General's reaction was, perhaps, the most remarkable. During the flood he had lost all his maps and could not buy

them anew. Unexpectedly he turned into a radio maniac. Having none of his own, he ran over the town—walking, sailing, wading—to ask permission to listen in somebody else's house.

He was a funny listener. He clenched his fists and smiled satirically and laughed sardonically. He rebuked vainglorious boasts, angrily shouting at the radio, he pointed at the geographical and historical mistakes of the radio man, he called him an "ignoramus," a "perfidio," a "profaner," and beat his fist against the wall. He poured tears over strategic blunders and gnashed his teeth in the anticipation of victory.

Mme. Klimova was one of the very few who looked forward to a great personal advantage coming from the European collision.

"Now, now," she choked with excitement, "Germany will move to the Ural Mountains from the west . . . Japan will move to the Ural Mountains from the east, the communists will be crushed and our allies will restore the monarchy to us...."

And she would sit for a while silent, as if considering all this coming glory.

"But *who* will be our Tsar?" And she grew fussy. There was none she could wholeheartedly recommend. But this again seemed a minor care, for high situations are rarely lacking candidates, and dismissing this question she would indulge in the vision of her own, her personal glory to come. She foresaw Russia restored to the very old order, and the General given a high post at the court. Too old for battles, he could be a master of ceremonies at the court. She dreamed about the splendour of the regimental reunions, parades, and balls. She saw herself being met with public addresses of welcome. And every day it was a better, a newer version of the glory to come.

Mother was busy with her immediate problems: with more illness and work in the hospital, with Cook ill at home, with sixteen non-paying lodgers in the house often quarrelling among themselves, and with the constant anxiety about the obtaining of food.

Lida watched the flood level in the hall, now much lower; the ugly corpse of the piano bulging out of the water; the walls, once ivory in colour, now greenish, greyish, blistered, and peeling their plasters. She looked round, and tried to imagine that joy and happiness could rise from all that pain and destruction. The mailman's boat appearing in the hall seemed unreal,

and Jimmy's letters coming to all that misery from another world seemed more miraculous than anything else she had ever heard about.

But even for the happier nations in Tientsin, war quickly acquired the aspect of imminent importance, and Mr. and Mrs. Brown's opinions were looked forward to. Mr. Brown said nothing, or almost nothing, in his circle, and one instantly knew that the situation was grave to the utmost. Mrs. Brown said morbidly : " Germany will have all she deserves," and in Mrs. Brown's clubs all knew that Britain would win.

The war did not really begin for Mr. Brown until the King of England spoke on the radio.

With the first sounds of His Majesty's voice, Mr. Brown rose up, erect, to his full height. And it suddenly became evident that he was a tall man.

In that pose of deepest attention, which implied a noble devotion and a blind obedience to duty, Mr. Brown accepted the King's address to his subjects on the declaration of war.

When the speech came to the conclusion—which was the human appeal, simple and dignified, of a King to his people—a transformation screwed up Mr. Brown's body. Every atom of Mr. Brown's flesh became iron, and every nerve—steel ; his will, his strength, his abilities, were twisted into a tough rope, and all finally gravitated and focused on one point—defence of the Empire. Thus an old English gentleman met the war.

Nothing else in the world could do this for Mr. Brown. Neither his own danger of death, nor his wife's. If even the earth, as a planet, were threatened with a collision and destruction, he would observe and undergo it as a detached onlooker. But not the British Empire. For him she was all. She meant order, organisation, duty, honesty, pride. The reason, the sequel, the motivation.

The King now had a renascent Mr. Brown. Indomitable. Uncompromising, Irrevocable. One who will never be a slave, even to Mr. Hitler, the expert at making slaves out of free people.

Miss Grouse, who was enjoying a prolonged summer vacation at Tsingtao, was shaken by the declaration of war and immediately rushed forth to do her bit.

The first thing she did was to change her stand on birth control. Millions of years ago this world was created by God

in joy and love. Since then the stars and planets moved, the oceans stormed, trees grew in blossom and not a single spring forgot her flowers. Then mankind started its story. Egypt lived in the mist of mystery and died holding her secrets fast to her mummified breasts. Rome rose and fell. Civilisations clashed. The sciences bloomed, the arts soared.

Then Miss Grouse was born. She looked round. She disliked. She disapproved. And she began to teach birth control.

But now—the declaration of war made her realise that somebody must protect the lives of birth-control advocates and so she started to preach the *increase* of propagation. For this reversal of her credo, Miss Grouse had again absolutely nothing to reproach herself: increasing or decreasing the population was not her sin, but speaking of it became her glory. Her science, as with many other modern sciences, could serve opposite goals equally well and prove and support the contradictory inferences by the means of the same information. Thus Miss Grouse, who had previously impeached China for her 14,500,000 babies per year, surely the cause of her poverty and evils, now enthusiastically declared that exactly in the number of those babies lay all the hope for the Chinese victory and survival. Both she and her friends were charmed by the novelty of Miss Grouse's outlook. That was the only change in Miss Grouse. She sheltered herself once more behind her usual screen of hypocrisy, *talking* where people needed each other *to act*) admonishing the sins, instead of helping the virtues, advising sacrifices, never trying to make one.

Hypocrisy ! The sin of the powerful, the vice of the mighty. The most abominable of all the capital sins, for it pays in worldly goods, and fame, and esteem. The most repulsive, for it prospers best and blooms brighter on the fields damp with the blood of real martyrs. A dignified shelter, a peaceful retreat of vicious souls, hypocrisy comes in as a sign of the degeneration of virtue, as a parasite, to poison the core of life.

But the clothes of hypocrisy wear out in time. They become transparent, and the hypocrite walks the streets naked under the grinning glances of his neighbours.

In spite of her ardour, Miss Grouse was never taken seriously, and the babies of the world, born or unborn, never felt any obligation to her and her preaching.

18

MR. RIND returned to Tientsin in October. He was on his way home to the U.S.A.

When he looked down from the window of his room in the hotel he thought that Tientsin had changed much. There was nothing new as far as the buildings were concerned, except the decrepitude of the lower parts of all the walls, showing clearly where the water line had been during the flood. The difference was in the Chinese citizens. Their number in the concessions seemed to have increased enormously.

He had seen many crowded towns, but none of them looked like Tientsin on that morning. Crowds on the streets are usually liquid, they move. Here people seemed fixed to the pavements. That was their life space. They slept there in the nights and sat on it in the days, afraid to lose it if they moved away. They seemed to be waiting for somebody to come or something to happen.

It was a pallid picture. The setting was a blistering grey. The colour scheme of the clothing was blue, or had been blue, for under the influences of life and weather the basic tint of Chinese blue changed to all possible degradations of grey, or even black. Only children were touched here and there with a red spot of a ribbon or a tassel.

Mr. Rind thought that a stroll in the morning would give him an interesting study of this new aspect of the town. Just to wander leisurely along the streets. The hotel porter was greatly disappointed when he learned that Mr. Rind wanted no taxi. He got 10 per cent from the chauffeur and did not like to see his money slide away so easily. He murmured something about a break in tradition, for the Americans are widely known as people with an innate affection for machinery.

Suspecting the worst, that Mr. Rind could not afford the fare, he smiled a compassionate understanding and offered to call a rickshaw. When Mr. Rind declined that also, the porter looked really wounded, even though he could afford to be almost disinterested, as he got only two coppers per head from the rickshaw men.

The rickshaw men stood with their vehicles in line, several blocks along the streets. The view of a gentleman merely walking on his feet seemed offensive in a town where rickshaws are cheap and many. Some suspected that Mr. Rind was a choosy soul. They rushed after him, each crying out the outstanding qualities of his vehicle and tapping the cushions of it, which give out instant whiffs of dust. Mr. Rind was in a hurry to get away, but he dragged after him all the traffic of the rickshaws and moved thus in a cloud of clamours which ran the gamut from cordial invitation to bitter reproach.

This spoiled the stroll. Only when several blocks farther on the rickshaws fell back could Mr. Rind see where he had been.

The inscriptions on the corner bore French names. He was in the French Concession. He was looking for a certain street and number and decided to ask for information.

The policemen in the concessions are Chinese, of a rather peculiar breed, unusually tall and stout and almost too powerful-looking to be mortals, let alone Chinese.

With benign smiles these idols in policemen's attire stand on their posts, free to admiration. In the summertime they stand under huge umbrellas and are less in view but more stylish, which is also something.

Mr. Rind approached one of those gentlemen and articulated the French name of the street he was in search of.

The policeman was taken aback. Mr. Rind had committed a serious breach of etiquette. Policemen do not speak languages. In a town where every cook or boy on errand does, they would not. It was not the style.

In the Chinese scheme of valuation, a policeman is an important gentleman, and has to be approached on an equal footing—bowed and spoken to in Chinese. As for the information, the idea was preposterous. To ask *him* when there were so many rickshaw men around. . . . He looked at Mr. Rind, his dignity on stilts, and said nothing. When Mr. Rind repeated the question he only nodded his head in an angry negative. He was an ornament, and Mr. Rind had taken him for a man.

Having repeated his experience at three more posts with three more policemen, all with the same results, Mr. Rind gave up.

He was not the same jolly fellow who had left the hotel twenty minutes ago, for the landscape was making him sad.

The crowded streets were full of beggars. Dishevelled women surrounded by children were sitting on pavements. They all wore rags.

Chinese children are peculiarly attractive. There is nothing of the dullness in them which sometimes characterises the expression of the older faces. They are alert, full of curiosity and restrained vitality. Seeing so many of them, so poor and in such misery, Mr. Rind felt sympathetic. Through an insight which is peculiar to the Chinese, the children instantly knew how he felt and began to follow him in quest of alms.

There are some oddities in beggarhood as a social standing in China. Only owing to tenacity, for which the Chinese are famous, could it survive there as a profession, for an average Chinese *would not* give alms. This ancient attitude is based on the principle that it might be unwise to interfere with the gods' plans in making one needy.

Gods, perhaps, have their own reasons for liking or disliking people.

But with the coming of foreigners the languishing profession enjoyed a revival, though the donor is still never considered a sane person. By instinct even beggars know how inefficient this philanthropic movement is when considered from a practical point of view.

This profession has its rules, and Mr. Rind soon ran into the worst of them. A Chinese beggar will never pursue a man who is not a potential giver. He has his always keen professional flair. Some people can move freely around the town, while others are assaulted by beggars.

When Mr. Rind, followed by no less than twenty children, turned around, smiled, and threw them a handful of coppers, he sealed his doom in China. He became the one who "shows his easy money."³⁵ Since that day wherever he went he was pursued by the crowds of beggars. They would stay on the watch for him at the hotel and all along his way. If he entered a shop or a house, they would wait. If he sat on a bench in the park they would patiently stay around. If he talked to somebody, they would politely keep their distance, ready to follow him at his first movement.

At his appearance on the street mother beggars would cry: "Here he is, the One-who-shows-his-easy-money. Quick! Run after, you, lazy ones." And the children would run, some-

times ahead, then aside, or behind, giving him no free space to put his foot down. If—exhausted—he would take a rickshaw, they would run after that. Being not scientifically trained as rickshaw men are the children would fall from the line, until a certain one remained and, running, all out of breath, livid in face, breathing on Mr. Rind his misery, he would present a view of one on the brink of a fatal collapse. 'When Mr. Rind, aghast at the idea that the child might die on the run, for it certainly could, would at last throw the alms, the child would catch it and fall down on the ground for rest, never saying thank you, for it felt it had earned the money by hard work.

Alms once given, a Chinese beggar takes it as a mutual understanding and a pledge of constant support in the future. The donor henceforth belongs to him. The life of the benefactor is spoiled. A naive one thinks that a change of quarters will help but his notorious fame follows him. Wherever he goes, in the morning when he wakes, he will see all his beggars with their relatives at his gates, for they changed their quarters also, trying to keep near to the source of livelihood. Even going to another town does not help, for the message will follow one, and a fresh bunch of beggars will greet one at the entrance to his new abode. Mr. Rind did not know all that during his first sojourn at Tientsin, for beggars were not allowed in the concessions at that time.

Now followed by what he thought was a whole village of beggars, he looked helplessly around in search of a taxi.

He was rescued by Mrs. Brown, driven in her splendid car. She might freely cross any place crowded with beggars, for none of them ever would dream of asking her for alms. There was not a year when Mrs. Brown with her clubs had given less than twenty thousand local dollars for the poor of Tientsin, and some odd hundreds were always given by Mrs. Brown personally, but she would never give a single copper as alms, being a woman of principles.

They had not seen each other since Mr. Rind's return to Tientsin and Mr. Rind had a question to ask. He wanted to know about Nikitka, whom the Pitchers had sent to school in Tientsin.

At the mention of this name Mrs. Brown's face grew mournful and she said that the boy disappeared, and police could not discover his whereabouts.

" But how did it happen ? " Mr. Rind was in alarm and eager to know.

" Nothing of importance happened. The boy was caught in cheating at school, put under punishment, and after it he disappeared."

" Was that punishment severe ? "

Mrs. Brown looked at him with an unfriendly wonder.

" Mr. Rind," she said with dignity, " the punishment was the same as it is throughout the world in the English public schools, inflicted often on much better children, from much better families. Do not forget, this was just a beggar's boy. "

19

THE TRUTH about Nikitka was this : he became a truant. Of course, it was not Mrs. Pitcher's unskilful handling alone that brought him to that, but her influence was the impetus.

In his own family, stricken by poverty and misery, he had successfully adapted himself. He was a gay child, accepting life as something necessarily full of blows, but trying to bear adversity with gaiety and courage.

Mrs. Pitcher's unexpected arrival, her interference, her good food and comfortable house, showed Nikitka a new aspect of life. The fact that he got there without his personal merits or efforts made him believe in good luck, that idol of vagabonds, gamblers, thieves, and beggars. The change was not for the better.

His routine was this. At eight o'clock every morning he had to go as an apprentice to a workshop to learn the trade of book-binding. He had to be back at the Pitches' at twelve-thirty. Half an hour was given for washing, combing, brushing—and at one o'clock he was given his luncheon (separately, in a big room arranged especially for Nikitka in the basement). At one-thirty Mrs. Pitcher gave him lessons in another small room in their quarters. At three o'clock they both went down to the basement room and Nikitka had to demonstrate to Mrs. Pitcher all he had been taught that day at the workshop, and they tried together to bind Mr. Pitcher's detective novels. This was also the time to be " company," and Nikitka had to talk.

Then Nikitka had twenty-five minutes to rest and put himself in order and at five-fifteen he had his dinner, now in the small room, with Mrs. Pitcher present to teach him manners. After that Nikitka had to bow, say "thank you," "good-bye," and go home loaded with lessons to learn and good advice to remember. His "salary" was three dollars per month, new clothilg "extra." A wrist-watch had been promised him if he were very punctual at all times.

He was punctual, especially where meals were concerned. To tell the honest truth, food was the thing which Nikitka liked the most of all in Mis. Pitcher's arrangements. To her astonishment (for she thought that poor people liked to be dirty) Nikitka developed from the start not only the habit of cleanliness, but even a kind of fastidiousness, where his appearance was concerned, and Mrs. Pitcher had no fears on this score.

As to the rest, Nikitka was rather vague, absent-minded, and not too eager to get educated at a great speed.

Mr. Pitcher sanctioned the whole affair with his "of course," but so far had not even seen the boy.

The work of binding books did not answer either the temperamental inclinations of a boy full of energy and movements, or his idea of utility, for Nikitka knew nothing about the value of books,

Mrs. Pitcher's lack of vitality made her an indifferent teacher. Her lifeless lessons took any interest out of science, which is ingrained naturally in a normal child's brains. Nikitka was allowed to talk only when asked, not when he wanted to ask something by himself.

The pictures of crime in Mr. Pitcher's detective stories turned his mind toward adventures. The cinema did the rest. Nikitka began to long for broader horizons and stronger thrills.

The idea of being sent to Tientsin to an English school seemed another stroke of good luck. Nikitka's mother wept from happiness, imagining her boy's future as perhaps that of a clerk in the bank, with a hundred dollars of wages per month. With tears and blessings, she let her son go.

At Tientsin Nikitka was placed in a Russian family, as a boarder, and in the English school, as a pupil.

The family was a couple of old people, sad and dry, who had forgotten long ago what boyhood meant and grudged every para word or movement around them.

In the school Nikitka found himself in the lowest grade, for he knew no English. He had to sit and learn among children far younger, almost babies. This excluded him from all comradeship, and his ignorance in the language humiliated him at a time when he had begun to look upon himself as a chosen soul, high above the usual level.

The English children in the Far East are snobs. Belonging mostly to that part of the middle-classes which have not much cultural background, they are educated on a wrong principle : the omnipotence of money. All the external privileges procured for them by previous generations of fearless seamen, clever politicians, and cunning merchants, they accept as their due, feeling no mutual obligation to anybody. Left to amahs for education, they are petted and spoiled beyond all measure. Surrounded by servants, they never do a single stroke of work, and their energy weighs heavily upon them. They turn into sulky tyrants at the age of six.

On Nikitka's every timid approach with a new English word :

" I beg your pardon . . ." the little snob would say and turn his back upon the boy. Never, not even once, had Nikitka been spoken to by his classmates. The teacher, an old maid, thought this situation quite normal.

Now Nikitka was a Russian, which means that whatever the world situation, the idea of human equality and brotherhood is inborn, a part of one's soul. Nikitka could bear the worst in the way of offence when it was inflicted on equal grounds. A chilly world of scorn and aloofness was a novelty which wounded him deeply, and he learned to hate all the pupils and teachers in the English school.

Study was not a pleasure either. English methods with their preponderance of mechanical memorising in spelling and Bible text seemed loathsome to Russian brains, the first quality of which is an inquisitive and constructive imagination. The thing a Russian pupil wants is explanation, not what an English school gives : accomplished facts, to be taken and memorised.

Then came a disaster. Nikitka was caught in cheating.

In Russian schools cheating is a punishable sin, of course, but never with such righteous feelings as in the English, owing to the difference of the histories of those schools.

The ancient Russian schools, founded on religious education,

knew nothing of cheating. It came into being when education became laic and foreigners became teachers. The new science seemed a heresy and was met with hostility. It seemed strange and unholy. It was taught with humiliating admonitions by the haughty foreign teachers. It was inflicted by the government and made compulsory. Cheating came in not as an easiest way to pass examinations, but for the sake of foul play against the teachers. A boy, otherwise quite honest, would readily cheat his German tutor, teaching him the Latin grammar which he explained in an uncomprehensible Russian. Cheating was practised not so much for profit in marks, but as a deed of audacity and wits. Since then there was even a tradition of cheating in many schools, although the education became national. The truth was that cheating took *more* time and efforts than the honest preparation of lessons, because Russian boys are usually clever and quick to learn.

The solemn Anglo-Saxon attitude toward it seems too grandiose for Russian brains. Cheating is a shameful, but still a minor, offence in a Russian school, while it is a capital sin to an Anglo-Saxon.

Nikitka tried to cheat, was caught, and punishment had to be inflicted upon him. He listened to the verdict with bewilderment, for corporal punishment is never practised in the Russian schools.

If his teacher had beaten him on the spot or had he been assaulted by the whole class, Nikitka would have accepted it as his due, borne it stoically, and forgotten about it on the next day. But the idea of an ordered, scientifically inflicted punishment was beyond his comprehension. He could understand the infliction of wounds on impulse, but his mind refused to accept it as a deliberately planned humiliation. It was more than simple, hot human cruelty. A cold, studied cruelty was more than he could imagine mankind capable of.

Still he came at the appointed time—to be punished. The pupils in rows, girls screaming from excitement, the director with a rod—and he publicly humiliated and beaten—and the school bell ringing a toll in slow, solemn sounds, to bring the news of his humiliation outside, beyond the school's walls, to make it known . . . no, that was more than Nikitka could bear.

After the punishment, he fastened up his pants and went straight out, away from Tientsin. He left it for good.

He started the migratory phase of his life. In despair, in loneliness and humiliation, he kept his will, fed it and lured it by the novelty of going elsewhere, to unfamiliar places, just to see where that road led, what came next beyond that corner. The passion for roving closed him in, and streets and highways became his kingdom.

Later in Shanghai, Mr. Rind saw the boy once more. Nikitka was standing at a corner, leaning against the wall. He looked taller, thinner, paler. His shiny hair was dull now and tangled, and stood in a shapeless lump over his brow. The gay expression had left his face, and his dimmed eyes looked wistfully, but at nothing in particular.

"Nikitka!" Mr. Rind cried.

The word came to the boy like a blow. Not for a long time had anybody called him by his name. He looked around. He met Mr. Rind's eyes and recognised him. He made a brisk movement to rush toward him. . . . But then he halted, wavered for an instant, then turned back and ran away, down the street. . . .

20

EVERYBODY was invited to Lida's farewell party, provided one was a Russian and was willing to come. The house, now free from water, could accommodate all. Much of genuine good will was displayed toward Lida. It was sweet to think that luck and happiness did occur in the Russian quarters too. Was not that an encouragement to go on patiently hoping for better?

On a quiet afternoon, late in October, the party was held. Elderly people spoke about politics. The very old ones kept to a mood of reminiscences of the life of long ago, in Russia. Some played cards and mah-jongg. The younger people danced, sang, played guitars, mandolins, everything available.

The General, now without maps, orated, addressing nobody in particular :

"Times of escapism and comfort are gone! All will be busy. All will fight. Man, woman, child. Martial law everywhere! Military service compulsory for everybody! Fight! The courageous will win the universe!"

" Let us postpone the war talk until to-morrow," somebody said from the other corner of the room. " To-day let us enjoy this party."

" We have no more ' to-morrows ' to postpone to," the General cried. " The peace of ' to-morrow ' is all spent in advance. With every hour the future victory is becoming harder, costlier—whoever might win. No, gentlemen, throw away cards ! Young man—away with dancing. To guns ! "

" Well," the priest said, " you do not sound like a Christian at all."

" I do not know what I *do not* sound like, I know what I *do sound*," the General said with a slight note of offence in his voice. " I sound the law of necessity, of common sense. I speak in the name of urgency. Right or wrong, guilty or innocent, we all have come to, that—the only answer to the situation is to fight—actually, I mean, 'with a gun in hands—fight for one's life, belief, food, shelter, survival. Afterwards one will see what was right. ..."

" Wait ! " cried an old man. " Nonsense. Fight to-day, see reasons to-morrow. Shame on you, General ! "

" Shame ? But that is the usual way with wars. Nobody knew exactly what one would win with victory. Look at the examples. ... " And he was ready to give the history of humanity in wars.

They interrupted him.

" Say something effective in the conclusion—and away with your speech ! "

" Well," the General cried, " I have fought wars on the right side as well as on the wrong—now let me say this : *neither might, nor might wins—but patience, persistence, and courage* "

" Those military men ! " a gentleman said with reproach. " Are they not blind to realities of life, to progress, to ideas, to . . . "

" Ha ! " the General cried. " Let me tell you, sir, my civilian colleague, you who are at the top of life and activities, you, men of science, social workers, politicians, missionaries, visionaries, prophets, traders, bankers—all of you, of course, know the truth and the realities of life. But why-then do your activities always bring you into a mess ? Then you call the *army*, those ' *blind*' men, sir ! Those men with will, courage, discipline, order, obedience, and you say : ' Now, please, *you go and fight* for us ! '

And you—oh, hypocrites !—you even have no decency to back us wholeheartedly. . . . Once the war is won, you push us back into barracks, on pensions, and exclude us from office. A new crop of diplomats and traders and visionaries and missionaries begin to reap the harvest and sow the new seeds of disorders. . . . Really," he added naively, " I do not know why we always readily answer your call. . . ."

All laughed.

In the old women's corner a wrinkled lady drank her tea with gusto, saying to Lida, who waited on her :

" Go, my darling, to America and write me what it looks like. Is it true that even the poor have cars there ? "

" And would you like to go there, Olga Alcxeevna ? "

" I ? No. Enough of moving for me. All my life I have been on the move, running from disasters—and here I am . . . no. Now only Death is chasing me. Let her come for me to my own kitchen."

" The centre of our activities must be not our own life, but that of our children," an elderly gentleman said. " Planning for ourselves we are dragging future into past. Planning for them we build future on the basis of the past—which is reasonable and solid. Whatever we plan or start, our *children's* activities bring to achievement."

" What then do we owe our children ? "

" What ? Just love, affection, good will when they are small. Tolerance and understanding afterwards. Constant care and attention all the life long. In short, we must make our children the central interest and duty of our lives."

" Lida ! Lida ! " young people cried. " Sing for us now ! "

" I am glad," Mme. Klimova said, " that Lida's love is coming to something, at last' . . . even if there are only a few letters . . . I refuse to call it an interesting case of love. . . ."

" But real love is always like that . . . uneventful. Based on devotion, it knows no changes . . ."

" But where is romanticism, adventure ? " Mme. Klimova insisted.

" All the great things are natural and simple, the same in essence : birth, love, death. . . . Simplicity is the core of love. Romantic or yampiric or gothic cases are only fashionable varieties. . . . Lida has, so to say, a classic love."

And a young man said :

" Girls still fall in love—thank goodness ! Whatever happens with the civilisations one still can be loved, have mothers and fathers, wives and sons."

" Yes, *hungry* children," somebody said bitterly.

" Well, is not that a good stimulus to living earnestly, without spleen and boredom . . ."

" Ah, well, enough of talking, let us all sing."

Mr. Rind was also one of the party and enjoyed attention from every one. Mme. Manuilova had arranged that Lida should travel in his care to the U.S A and that had come as a great relief to Mother. But Mme. Manuilova was the only one of the party who felt sad and disappointed. Although no words were spoken, she realised that Lida's decision to go to America put an end to her artistic career.

The passers-by slowed their pace nearing the house. Songs, cries, laughter, kept a constant group of curious Chinese before the house.

" What is going on in there, in that house ? " a passer-by would ask.

" Russian people giving a party."

" Really," the foreigner would say and shrug his shoulders.

21

SAYING GOOD-BYE to Mother seemed unreal. Her promise to come to America sounded like something promised in the next millennium. Travelling in a motor-boat to Tang-ku was a fearful adventure. Looking into the distance of an empty grey sea seemed a dream. Being afraid of meeting Japanese war-boats added the acuteness of anxiety. Should the Japanese officials controlling the sea near Tientsin ask for her papers and see that Lida had no permission from the Japanese Consulate sanctioning her departure, they might put her under arrest. The delay would ruin all the arrangements for passage on the American liner. All those emotions and dangers made the hours spent in the motor-boat assume the semblance of a nightmare.

It all ended in the afternoon when the motor-boat stopped in the open sea, near Tang-ku, and Lida, as it was agreed upon,

was taken aboard a small English liner going to Shanghai, where they were to board the boat for the U.S.A. Mr. Rind smiling down from the deck, while she was climbing the ladder cheered her very much.

Only there, standing on the deck and feeling the liner's engines begin to move, did Lida understand and believe in what was happening : she was going away. She was leaving behind her mother, China, her Russian friends, part of her life. The puffs of smoke melting in the air would not reach the shore. No more material ties were left.

Suddenly she knew she was leaving for good, that never again would she return to those strands and people again.

And in spite of bright hopes looming ahead, she dwelt on the past. She remembered it chiefly as an emotional experience. And it seemed so dear, so gentle, so unique, so hers—that tears stood in her eyes for the love of it. She could not tear herself from it. It talked to her now in a more comprehensive language : she saw it as a school for life, full of hardships, privations, and misery, yet a perfect school for the future.

Only in Shanghai did she feel cut off from Tientsin entirely. She had to spend two days there waiting for the American liner. While Mr. Rind put up at a hotel, Lida stayed at Mme. Militza's apartment.

The only other person Lida saw was Vladimir Platov. The Pjatovs had not had letters from their son and were anxious. Not long ago Mme. Platova had written to one of her school-mates, a widow living in Shanghai, asking that lady to see Vladimir. She received a cordial answer at once—and then nothing more, neither from Vladimir, nor from the friend. The Platovs were full of misgivings.

Lida was asked to find Vladimir, to see him and to send back truthful news about him. Lida promised and now she made her call.

She found the address.

JVO, *it cannot be here*, she thought

On the door was written :

HELEN:

Manicure, Pedicure, Beauty

Come in

JVO, iV *cannot be here*, Lida thought again. But the number was right. She rang the bell. A woman opened the door. She was one of the most unpleasant women Lida had ever seen. She was rather short and rather fat. Her wrinkled lace was thickly powdered and spotted with *maquillage*, but the original purple complexion managed to show through all the artifices. Her grey hair was curled in Botticelli curls, cherubic. She wore a bright green dress and her purple neck coming out of her decollete was awful to see. She looked like a rotten prune offered on a fresh lettuce leaf.

"May I see Mr. Platov?" Lida asked, not noticing that she had omitted any greeting.

"Who are you?"

"^c I have a message from his parents."

The woman smiled and Lida thought there could be nothing uglier than a faded woman in a bright green dress.

"Then you are Lida :- We had a letter about your arrival. Come in. . . Come in, darling."

"Is Mr. Platov at home?"

"No, he is not."

"Will you kindly tell me when I could find him at home?"

"I am afraid it is difficult to say. But you can see me, instead. I am his wife."

"Wife . . . ?" And Lida feebly sank in a chair, without being invited.

"Yes, darling *wife*. Helen Platov. We were married the other day," and the woman giggled.

Lida tried to stand up, but could not.

"We were waiting for you, I and Volodia. . . . We received his parents' letters, but have not as yet answered them. Now you will help to break the news to his family. Old-fashioned people are often prejudiced against a difference in ages and other things. . . ."

"Excuse me." Lida tried to make the situation clearer. "The Platovs were afraid that Vladimir felt unhappy after . . . Larissa had left Shanghai, and he stopped writing home. They were anxious. They asked a lady, here, Mme. Platova's school friend, to meet the boy and to take care of him . . ."

"I am *the lady*. . . 'His mother's school friend,' if you insist on that title."

"Then why have you not written . . . ?" Lida felt she had lost the logic of the conversation.

"Oh dear, you know his mother. . . . She always was a bit dumb, backward and old-fashioned. We did not want her interference with our plans and happiness. . . . We decided to ask you . . ."

"Oh, I do not know. . . ." Lida was rising now. "I have not much time . . . I . . ."

"But you *promised* them. You *have* to write something. Why not write the truth? Let me tell you how it all happened, the beginning of the romance, then you shall see. . . . It was divine, simply divine. . . . Whatever they say, a woman was created for love, for being loved . . ."

But Lida was not eager to support this doctrine, even though it was also hers. She rose to leave.

A moment of anger flew over Helen's face, but she quickly replaced it with a sly and servile smile.

"You can write that we were married *in church*, that we *love* each other and are *happy* . . . *and* we plan to go and live with the Platovs for a while, just for a change. . . . Vladimir being out of work . . ."

"Out of work?"

"Yes. I work for both of us, and I feel tired too. Vladimir helped his parents for so long, now, I think, they would feel happy to do something in return . . ."

"Yes," Lida said low, "I will write . . ."

"Now I see you are a darling girl," and she patted Lida with her puffy hand. Lida disliked the touch of those short fingers with the peeling ruby nails.

"And what will you write about me?" Helen asked simperingly.

"You?"

"Yes, my looks. How do you find me? Of course, I am not stylish, by modern standards. But have you heard about Rembrandt? Am I not one of his women? He painted only women with luxurious bodies, none of those with protruding bones. . . ."

Lida shuddered and took a step toward the door.

"Do not be afraid. . . ." Then suddenly the woman changed. All the artifice was gone—and she stood there, terrible in the stark reality of her real self: a miserable, middle-aged

woman, greedy, mean, and revengeful. With complete frankness, she said :

" You cannot stand me. You find me disgusting. Yes, you do, and I do not blame you. I would feel the same too—in *your place*. But listen to my story. Better stay here and listen—it will teach you things which nobody else will tell you."

She almost pushed Lida back into the chair and sat heavily in the opposite one. Her face looked dark, as if all the purple had been washed away in a single sweep. Her eyes grew sombre and her voice brisk and rough.

" I was a fool too," she began, " a young and innocent fool, with faith, with tenderness, with dreams . . . I was given into marriage to an elderly gentleman, only because he was rich, and my family impoverished. My husband was a low, petty, ambitious soul. . . . A coward . . . A libertine too. . . . For twenty years I was his devoted slave, his faithful wife. I could have died from aversion, but I kept going on. . . . Why? I could not commit suicide, for I was religious. I could not divorce him—we were married in church. I could not leave him—we belonged to society. I did not have lovers, for I was brought up to respect established morals. We had no children. I had no friends, for my husband was jealous . . . but I was young, I suffered terribly. . . . Then my husband died. And he left me old, lonely, not very healthy—and poor. In an instant all the friends disappeared. Neither church nor society was any more interested in me, in my morals and in the salvation of my soul. I was left alone. Now—for myself—I began to observe life. And you know *what* I have found? "

She screamed her last words. She stood up and screamed in her wrath. There was nothing repulsive or ridiculous in the woman now, or, perhaps, she was repulsive, but only in the way an open wound on a living body could be.

" I found out that *all* people are sinners. All. That there are only two sorts of people : those who sin and admit it, and those who sin and deny it. The last are the cause of all the misery and despair in this world. They prevaricate the truth of human nature . . . I found out that exactly those who were my ardent teachers in morals were the worst sinners themselves. . . ."

Suddenly she grew quiet. She looked at Lida's frightened face.

" I tell all this to you," she said gently, " because I like you. There is something so lovable in your face. . . . I thought : *Here, at last, I see an innocent girl . . .* and I pitied you. Take my warning. . . . There are only three things in the world : health, love, money. Try to get them, while you are young, and *keep* them, keep them, whatever the price. . . . Laugh at public opinion . . . spit on proverbs. . . . If a moment of sadness comes upon you, think : all the other women are just like me, only they have chosen to be hypocrites in addition. . . ."

Lida rose. She was trembling. She put her hand on Helen's arm and said softly :

" Thank you. I see your point. . . . only . . . I do not think you are altogether right . . . I have only to remember my mother . . . my Granny . . . my teacher . . . Mother Abbess . . . Vladimir's mother . . ."

Helen made a convulsive movement. She tore the door open and said :

" Get out ! Quickly I "

22

WHEN the American liner was almost ready to leave the harbour of Shanghai a lone passenger appeared on the embankment and the gangway was once more thrown down for him. He slowly mounted the flat steps and appeared on the deck.

It was Professor Kremenetz. He wore his usual attire, but to those who were accustomed to his looks there seemed to be even a tinge of elegance in his shabbiness. It came out of the indifference which made him fail to notice what he or anybody else was wearing in the way of clothes.

" Your baggage, sir ? "

"No baggage."

" No baggage, sir ? " Even the steward was taken aback. A passenger going from China to Mexico, with a first-class cabin all to himself and not a single parcel with him.

The secret of the first-class cabin was simple. Having performed a certain valuable work in translation from the Sanskrit Professor Kremenetz was offered as fee a passage to any place

he would name. He named Mexico. A first-class cabin seemed proper to his rank as a rare specialist in science.

Professor Kremenetz felt, as usual, perfectly at ease. He stood on the deck, his hands in his pockets, and considered a financial stroke : could not they exchange his cabin for a third-class place—and restore the difference in cash ? For cash was what he badly needed.

He greeted Mr. Rind as if that liner were exactly the place they had fixed for their next meeting.

" Going home ? "

" Yes, and you ? "

" To Mexico."

" Got a position in Mexico ? "

" No, just because I have never been there."

The liner passed slowly by the Chinese part of Shanghai. Destroyed by the Japanese bombardment two years before, it had not been rebuilt. The broken walls, the heaps of bricks, of stones, of dust and ashes, denounced the merciless cruelty of the invasion. The high, upright chimneys seemed to rear up as witnesses, to give evidence of what they had seen and to cry aloud their misery.

" The invaders must not leave behind traces like those," Professor Kremenetz said quietly. " It is too eloquent. . . . They should plant trees, plough the soil—otherwise how can one forget and forgive ? "

But this belonged to the past. Mr. Rind's thoughts were projected toward the future.

" Well, well," he said. " What about the European war ? Isn't it awful ? "

" Awful? Why? "

" I mean the war."

" War is natural to human behaviour. One will never see a day when all the villains reform. Wars have happened before."

" But now . . . all those terrible mechanised weapons."

" Well, people are better equipped to meet them now."

Mr. Rind saw that he could not have a good war talk with Professor Kremenetz. And in silence they looked at the rolling waves.

" Vice or virtue aside, it is good to be a human being," Professor Kremenetz said in the afternoon, and he stretched himself on a deck chair.

" But is it not rather disconcerting . . . ? "

" What ? "

" Wars, tyrannies . . . " ' "

" Well, there are vital motives to such deeds . . . I am nobody's judge or teacher. . . . Could never assume to be. I enjoy life as it is. Speaking as an observer, I should say—the chief thing is to be born. Once alive—the world lies before one waiting to be taken. If one is careless about means, one suffers in the end "

Mr. Rind pushed his chair nearer to the professor's and, lowering his voice, said :

" There is a thing I should like to ask you, with your permission. . . . You are a Russian. Having a nationality implies a duty at this moment of troubled world history How do you feel ? "

Professor Kremenetz looked at Mr. Rind and his gaze grew unusually sad. (Again Mr. Rind had that uneasy feeling that Professor Kremenetz always knew what he would ask him.)

" What is Russia ? What is the meaning of being a Russian ? " he said slowly. " What is a Russian soul in its essence ? If you have chanced to read Vladimir Soloviev, our best and, perhaps, single original philosopher, you know the meaning. He wrote that the eternal Russian problem consists in an attempt to *combine* idealism and realism, and through this achievement to establish an everlasting harmony in life and human relations. Hence all our Russian longings for a peace within oneself, our dreams of brotherhood, our insistence on approaching everything on ethical grounds. Hence our Ibst achievements and our worst errors. I, personally, find this Russian problem an impossible one. Therefore, I refrain from taking a part in it, on whichever side of the problem I happen to find myself. I step back. But being a Russian, I cannot find much charm in any other kind of life, for, as with most of us, I am indifferent to my personal fame, or riches. A Russian is above flattery and below self-satisfaction. I could only accept an idealised life. A Russian cannot even love without idolising his bride. A Russian girl is almost ridiculous in her devotion. A Russian heart is the pathetic heart of a child rushing for an illusion, hurting himself and others—still refusing to take reality as it is. I have common sense, yet I have no wish to accept common living, on its purely

materialistic plan. I am an errant gentleman, a leaf torn off from its branch. I am of no consequence to anything."

" You blame your people ? "

" I ? No. Never. We are the unhappiest in the world, perhaps. Still we live the most beautiful lives upon this earth, with more illusions, pathos, and passion. A Russian is a dreamer fighting with reality . . . even if beaten, still his life was worth while living. We leave to the average man the worldly goods, to common sense—the trade and money, we live upon a fantastic plan of beauty and belief."

" But objectively speaking . . ."

" There is no such thing as an objective speaker," Professor Kremenetz said, and yawned.

23

JAPAN rose out of the morning mist.

She displayed herself as a beauty. The rising sun lifted up her nightly evils, and she awakened slowly amid her still and translucent waters. She appeared as a hundred tiny islands. Some of them were only ciaggy rock, weather-beaten, breakers-gnawed, encircled with a narrow ribbon of froth and foam. Others were fringed with pine trees, the trunks, the branches, and the twigs deformed by the contrary winds. All of those islands seemed purely ornamental, uninhabitable, mysterious and weird. Their stone seemed too light for a hard substance, and the islets, thus composed, did not stay deadly quiet, but floated or waded in their waters. The colours were too artificial to be natural. Their blue was an over-elegant blue, their green an unprecedented green, the white was clearer and emptier than a white usually is meant to be. All the same, the sight was fascinating.

Fishing boats, with blown sails, glided toward the open sea for their daily fish. Sea gulls, lean and long, took their graceful morning flight, broken with brisk dives.

But it was the voice of the inanimate things that spoke to one's feelings. The inanimate things in Japan seem all alive, full of significance, while the living ones often look dull, tired, and utterly void of expression.

"Japan !" Lida cried with admiration. *And I used to hate even thy name !* she thought.

She went ashore with Mr. Rind and Professor Kremenetz. The formalities, as usual with Japanese, were long, dull, and nonsensical.

Walking along the street Lida wondered even more.

" Can these amiable people be the same as those ferocious soldiers fighting in China ? Can they belong to the same family ? "

In mass they were not a handsome race. They looked rather debilitated, of poor growth, thick-skinned, coarse-haired. An overstrained and underfed race. The women looked tired, indifferent to everything, behind their conventional glittering smiles. They clopped along the streets in their wooden footwear, bent, as if carrying invisible burdens. Life seemed no less burdensome for the men too. Although outwardly blank, their faces proved to be anything except happy.

Accustomed to a variety of handsome types of yellow men in China, Lida was rather shocked by the commonness of the Japanese looks. They did not fit their picturesque setting.

Our travellers went to a park full of children in uniform. It was the holiday of a big school.

Professor Kremenetz, to whom no language seemed to be an obstacle, mixed with the schoolboys and spoke to them in Japanese. Children of any race usually liked Professor Kremenetz. Ugliness always appeals to children. In several minutes he was in an eager conversation with the schoolboys.

They showed him a textbook and, looking at the map, Professor Kremenetz asked questions about Japan. He was amazed at the detailed knowledge of the boys. But when he asked where Paris and London were, none of the boys could answer at once. They were about twelve years old and still seemed to know next to nothing about all countries except Japan. They called the rest of the world just " savage " countries, those of perverse morals and barbaric customs.

They proudly explained to Professor Kremenetz that the gods had intended to create only Japan, and formed her lovingly as a string of precious jewels. All the rest of the world, those big shapeless lumps, came into existence from the residues thrown away. The gods were not interested in those left-overs and just let them be.

Professor Kremenetz started a talk about machinery. The boys were eager to show off their knowledge. One of them opened his copybook and showed a draft of a steam engine in sections and details

" Who discovered the power of steam ? " Professor Kremenetz asked Nobody knew.

" The people of Nippon always knew about it," one boy said decisively.

Professor Kremenetz's further inquiry proved that the boys knew none of the names of the greatest men of science of the world.

" Well," one of the boys said, evidently tired of questions about inventors, " they all were Japanese and lived long ago."

And one smaller boy hastened upon Professor Kremenetz a pair of round curious eyes and asked :

" Have they electricity in Europe ? "

When Professor Kremenetz asked the boys what they would like to be when grown-up, all answered in a ready chorus of eager voices '

" Soldiers ! "

Their reasons were diverse.

" Because it is honourable ! " a boy said with studied dignity, and he looked pathetic, holding high and erect his round head, which was too big for his frail body.

" To revenge China . . . for they attacked us dishonestly, they are much more numerous than we. . . ." And a sombre fire flickered in the eyes otherwise so akin to fresh wild berries.

" To glorify my native country ! " And the boy who had been interested in the electricity of Europe stamped his tiny foot in a worn and torn canvas shoe.

When Professor Kremenetz joined Lida and Mr. Rind sitting on the bench of the noisy park he told them about his conversation.

" One more experiment now," and he began to talk to a grey-haired smallish gentleman who sat on the other end of the bench. The man wore a dark cotton kimono, which could give no warmth to his body. His face tense and mouth half open, he read a paper with an absorbed attention.

It was an editorial on the current Sino-Japanese conflict. A conversation started, he showed Professor Kremenetz a

picture—one of those processions of hired beggars in subjugated provinces of China—and explained how glad the oppressed Chinese are to have Japanese interference, how welcome are their soldiers in China, how Chinese masses cling to Japan, looking up to her for deliverance, and freedom, and happy life. He spoke with a set, firm belief. He seemed to be an honest man and a loyal citizen.

When Professor Kremenetz touched the question of taxes, the old gentleman put on his official mask, an expressionless Japanese grin.

"However hard the trial, one is happy to sacrifice for our country's glory and for the well-being of the rest of the mankind also."

"One proof more,"⁵ Professor Kremenetz said, returning to Lida and Mr. Rind, "the world cannot be at peace until some uniformity of civilisation can be worked out. Let it be founded on religion, on science, on anything, only humanity must have some cardinal points in common, from which to start mutual co-operation. . . ."

"But, Professor Kremenetz," Lida said, "before, we have not had such a system, still there have been long periods of peace."

"Before, one could live apart. But even then, any close intercourse with people of different cultures invariably brought on collisions and wars. Now, when distance cannot separate peoples any longer, people cannot possibly live peacefully together with so much wilful distortion of truth, misunderstanding, and ill-feeling among themselves."

They were crossing a market.

The glaring colours of useless things were a vivid reproach to modern industry. However cheap the materials, however cheap the labour—who really needs those thousands of celluloid rings, of paper ribbons, of endless banners to forgotten causes, of pins which do not clasp, of blotting paper which does not imbibe the ink, of perfume with unpleasant scent, of hard, unmelting soap, of harmful sandy toothpowder, of awful barbaric jewellery and toys?

But in places where people gave a free hand to nature, Japan arose again as a beauty, a fairyland.

"What a pity," Lida said, "they took at all to civilisation. Nothing is won by that."

They went back on board in the afternoon and left Japan in the early hours of the evening.

A small group of people stood on the embankment of Yokohama. A group of vendors were packing their cheap unwanted souvenirs into parcels. Here and there a lonely human figure stood perched against a wall or strolled aimlessly to and fro. This poverty of life and animation was strangely disconcerting to the eye. This was the harbour of the capital and one could expect a quicker pulse of civilian life in a place like that. But all the best strength of Japanese energy was being spent far away, on the fields of China.

Then Fujiyama rose from among the clouds, really splendid, really majestic, really unique. And its noble beauty again seemed in discordance with an impoverished, saddened, and overburdened race crouching at its foot.

24

OF ALL OCEANS the Pacific is, perhaps, the traveller's favourite. It takes plenty of time to cross it. One has the keen sensation of a lull in one's existence, with almost nothing to see, or to meet, or to expect. There is a peculiar feeling of being cut off from all lands and all countries, and, for a while, seeing them from afar, in a perspective of mist and smaller proportion. Those rolling waves seem to wash away so much of tiredness, of spite, of bitterness, to clean so many spots and stains of memory, soothing wounds and healing scars.

Lida felt deeply this fascination of travelling across an ocean. It was a welcome pause before stepping over the threshold of a new life.

For hours she would stand alone looking and looking at the horizon where sky and waters joined and locked out the rest of the world. There was something almost awe-inspiring in the sudden disappearance from the world of the dust of small things, of petty feelings and cares. It was like a Sabbath, a stoppage of all activities in the name of repose. Even her hot impatience to come quicker to America left her for a while, and she felt only the soothing quietness of rolling waves, and the monotony of foiling days and nights. Time meant nothing in a setting like

this. Hours were of a greater length, and life did not seem to be measured by time. One had eternity laid open before one's eyes.

Professor Kremenetz achieved successfully the exchange of his cabin and had, evidently, some cash, for he could be seen playing cards, constantly doomed to be a loser.

Mr. Rind was not pacified by the tranquil setting. He was one of those to whom oceans means only grey water and the cheapest way of transportation. With every day he felt nearer and nearer home and the thought of his duties and responsibilities grew steadily in his mind. He was the one to listen to the radio, to discuss news, to wonder and ponder over the war's possible course.

Whenever he found Professor Kremenetz not engaged, he would accost him with questions. The latter's spiritual detachment from current events gave him, in Mr. Rind's eyes, a freer command of unerring opinions and deeper insight.

Professor Kremenetz was standing at the rail with his back to the moonlight, and his silhouette seemed heavier and uglier than ever.

"In my own experience I have noticed that it is not the healthiest who live longer and struggle better, nor the richest who enjoy life the most, nor the cleverest or best educated who impose laws. The world belongs to those who are the best adaptable to current dangers, to those with the hardest will to live and quickest insight into things to come . . . to those who do not scatter their efforts and their brains in the vain, transitory gains of a day, but achieve a method of the unification of purposes. The secret of success always is in the application of one's whole strength and abilities to one goal. . . . This is apt to bring on miracles. . . ."

"So you think it will be a long war?" asked Mr. Rind.

"Long? It will last—in one way or another, on the surface or underground—as long as mankind lasts. . . . It is there and always was and will ever be . . . with the same outcome. Of course, it changes its aspects, but the truth is we always fight. Open war is only its most expressive phase . . ."

"Well, if you feel like that . . ."

They were silent for a while, ready to go to their cabins. Suddenly Professor Kremenetz made a gesture embracing the scene and said :

" At any time, under my conditions, life can still be enjoyed. Whatever happens, life retains its charm. The possibilities of enjoying it are always open. With intellectual freedom and some leisure one can have the best of it, notwithstanding whatever goes on around him."

But a nervous expectancy and tension took possession of all the passengers, except Professor Kremenetz perhaps, on the eve of their arrival in the U.S.A.

To emerge out of Asia into another world, to land on the shores of America, was an unusual experience. One had to be ready to meet a new life. One had to push some images and thoughts into the past, to bring others forth ; there had to be a rearrangement of a mental kind. People began to move too much. Passengers traversed the decks backward and forward, with disordered steps. As to Lida, her heart refused to work at its usual rate, and beat in havoc.

She saw the shores of America with unbelieving eyes. So it existed. . . . All the time she had been pining, languishing for this country, it had been here, majestically resting in this same place, lulled by this blue sea.

She was to be met by Jimmy at Seattle. Mr. Rind was to see Lida safely ashore—personally—and to bring her with Jimmy to Miss Clark, who was to wait for Lida in a hotel. He kept one eye on Lida.

She could never remember exactly how they landed. That noise of voices, whistles, chains, never really penetrated to her consciousness. Those two hours were lost from her existence.

She remembered only that she was told to come, and she moved, and her legs were so heavy, as if she dragged all the world with her. And the air was heavy too, as if she were moving against water, in the bottom of a sea.

Then she saw Jimmy. He stood there. He was real. A thin, a pale, a grinning boy, just he, but very real, finally brought back to life.

Everything grew suddenly silent. It was a sacred moment of cosmic quiet. The world stopped still to give Lida time to come to herself.

And then miracles came to life. Jimmy ran to meet her. He did it so simply, as any other boy would do, just ran and cried her name aloud, and smiled, and waved his hat. If he had flown on sparkling wings it could not have been more

miraculous, so touching, so divinely simple, *so real*, *so hers*, so completely given to her in possession.

Even Mr. Rind seemed impressed by the fact that the legendary Jimmy had a physical shape after all.

Mr. Rind hurried them to a taxi to go to the hotel and see Miss Clark. But who was a Miss Clark? They sent him on ahead. They wanted to go by themselves, on foot.

They stood at the corner and she looked around with fascinated eyes. There were no crowds of beggars, no groups of police, no barbed wire, no soldiers with bayonets ready against the disarmed. People seemed so healthy, and gay. She was sure none of them had been beaten or humiliated that day. Suddenly she cried, "Look! Look!"

Jimmy could not understand at first.

"Oranges!" she cried and pointed at a mountain of them, in a grocery-store window. Only here, in America, could one see that vision of opulence: oranges in mountains.

Jimmy took Lida's arm, led her into the store, and proudly bought her two dozen oranges.

He carried the parcel in one hand and led Lida through crowds with the other. They had to cross the street. Seeing the speed of the traffic she gasped.

"Are you afraid?" he asked.

She hit up her face and, looking at him, laughed gaily. It was not because of the traffic that she laughed. She thought Jimmy asked her about life.

Yes, life has its terrors. But given the wings of faith, one can be stronger than anything life can show.

Thunder and lightning, earthquakes and wars—let them all come one by one, or all together—one can face them, face them and light—in blood, in sweat, in tears—yet tear them to pieces, gnaw them with one's teeth, grind them to dust, and then sit on the top of it and laugh a little.

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