

*Through  
the Storm*

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# THROUGH THE STORM

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THE AMAZING SUMMER  
THE LONG ALERT  
THE INTERPRETER  
THE BATTLE WITHIN

# THROUGH THE STORM

*A NOVEL*

By

PHILIP GIBBS

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## PART I

### FRANCE

#### I

BEING a neutral at that time in a World War Edward Hambledon did not feel perturbed for his own personal safety when the Germans reached the Channel ports and had an open road to Paris. As an American, with an American passport, his life and liberty were not endangered.

But things were getting uncomfortable, and for many of his friends and all France terrifying. Terror struck them suddenly. Paris had remained extraordinarily confident and calm even after the enemy had smashed through the French lines opposite Sedan and when their armoured divisions were driving to Boulogne.

“It was worse in 1914,” said an elderly man looking after a bookstall on the left bank of the Seine. “Weygand will strike at the psychological moment, as Foch did on the Marne. It is an easier job to cut through that column and join hands with the English. We wait for Weygand, who will strike at the right moment.”

“Doubtless that will happen,” answered Edward Hambledon of Boston, Massachusetts, who had been two years in Paris as a student of painting and spoke French with an American accent.

In his own mind he was not sure that it would happen. Bill Smart, of the American Embassy, had given him the low-down about the military situation when they had walked through the Tuileries Gardens under a sky full of stars and in the beauty of a perfect night—so beautiful that Hambledon with an artist’s eye felt its enchantment, with the emerald green grass flooded by moonlight, and the long wings of the Louvre in a black shadow world, and the statues of nymphs gleaming white where they stood. Paris, thought this young American, had never been so wonderfully beautiful as in these days and nights when the fate of France hung in the balance.

Bill Smart had told him that Weygand had gone *gaga* and sat in his headquarters with his head in his hands, incapable of action. The French army was demoralized from top to bottom. There was no decisive command. There was no stopping the massed fury and terror of German tanks and dive-

bombers. It was beyond human resistance. And the French army and nation, said Bill Smart, had been betrayed for years by corrupt politicians—a stinking and almost incredible corruption—as now they were betrayed by incompetent generals, among whom were Fascist traitors. “France is sunk,” said Bill Smart. “Within a week we shall hear the tramp of German boots in Paris. It fills me with horror.”

But Paris had remained strangely and heroically calm waiting for Weygand, until, suddenly, terror took hold of everyone. It was as though everyone knew by some mental telepathy that Weygand would not attack, and that defeat was inevitable, and that Paris would soon be in the hands of the enemy.

To Edward Hambleton the first sign of panic came when the concierge and his wife came into his studio on the Boulevard St. Germain at a fantastically early hour in the morning when he was in his dressing-gown before shaving. “M’sieur,” said Jean Meunier the concierge, “excuse us. But we are leaving Paris. It is none too soon.”

Edward’s hand strayed automatically to his cigarette-case on the little table within reach of his pillow and he lit a *petit caporal*. “More bad news?” he asked.

The concierge, a grizzled veteran of the last war—he had fought at Verdun—raised his wrinkled hands with a gesture of despair.

“They will be here in Paris,” he said. “Those *sales Boches*! Paris is without defence. *Cré’ nom de Dieu!*” His body was convulsed by a kind of strangled sob and he turned his head for a moment as though to hide tears.

“It is because of Yvonne that we go,” said Madame Meunier. “She is eighteen. We dare not let her stay in Paris until the Germans come. We have to abandon everything. We can take nothing. Perhaps death for all of us would be the best.”

Jean Meunier turned to her angrily. “Do not talk such words, Marie. We must think only of Yvonne.”

“There is nothing but agony before us,” cried Madame Meunier. She clasped her hands together and flinging them with her body against the wall of Edward’s studio wept convulsively.

From the kitchen below stairs came a young voice. “*Maman!*”

It was Yvonne, who had often posed for Hambleton in this studio.

He went over to Madame Meunier for whom he had respect and affection, though she had a sharp tongue and had been angry with him many times for rousing her husband in the small hours of the morning when he had come back from late parties. But she had mothered him when he had

had the *grippe*, and sewn on his buttons, and swept out his studio, and given him motherly advice about bad women and other perils lying in wait for young men in Paris, and especially, she thought, for young Americans.

He put his arms about her. "Courage!" he said. "Courage, Madame. All is not lost yet, I hope."

"For us it is all lost," she answered more calmly, wiping her eyes with her black apron. She held his hands tight. "For you it does not matter," she said. "You are an American. The Americans are very lucky. They are far from Hitler and all his devils."

"Where are you going, and how will you go?" asked Hambledon. "I should like to be of help to you."

It was Jean Meunier who answered, "We are taking the train to Tours, if we can fight our way on to it. My wife has a brother there. He will give us house room in his baker's shop."

He turned to his wife and gripped her arm. "It is time we went, Marie. We have only an hour for the train."

Edward felt in his pocket-book and pulled out a wad of notes which he held out to the concierge. "This may help you, old man."

"No, no, m'sieur," said the concierge. But his hands closed round the notes. "A thousand thanks," he said, "and good luck. Now, Marie——"

Madame Meunier clasped Edward's hands in her own.

"Adieu!" she said. "Remember us now and then. We shall think of you often, if we are not killed by the Germans."

She kissed the back of his right hand and then followed her husband out of the room. A few moments later Yvonne came to say good-bye. She had been weeping and her eyes were still wet.

She flung her arms round Edward's neck. "Adieu!" she cried with a sob. "It is terrible, all this."

He felt her young body against his. "Good luck, my dear," he said. "Keep safe."

She had made love to him now and then and at other times had been very cheeky with him. Once she had told him that he would never be a good painter. He painted atrociously, she said, being an American. No American could be a good artist, because Americans had no souls but only dollars.

Now she wept in his arms and spoke despairingly.

"I shall not be safe. German soldiers will see to that. We shall, of course, all starve to death in any case. It will not be amusing, this life under the Germans."

Hambledon helped this family to get away with their bags and bundles. He drove them to the Gare du Midi, and helped to carry their luggage to the platform. The station was besieged by refugees, all struggling to get away. There was no excitement or outward emotion, but a kind of quiet desperation. Children sat among the baggage, some of them white-faced and frightened, but others unconscious of the terror advancing on Paris and happy with their toys. Their mothers looked haggard and anxious but none wept.

Edward Hambledon watched this scene and the faces of these Parisians. During his two years in Paris he had not limited his experience to the rowdy set of would-be artists and intellectual charlatans and *poseurs* at the Dôme and Rotonde, or to mixed parties of Americans in Montparnasse and Fontainebleau. He had sat at the *zinc*, in cheap little *bistros* round about les Halles getting into friendly conversation with broad-shouldered porters from the markets and young, thin-faced mechanics from garages, and soldiers on leave with their girls.

He had made friends with small shopkeepers from whom he bought his bread and coffee and socks and canvases. He had found them all friendly and intelligent folk, cynical about their politicians—a dirty crowd, they thought, with the exception of Heriot and Blum and a few others. They had been against the war before it came.

“Anything is better than war,” said most of them. “France cannot fight another war after all the slaughter and ruin of the last.”

When the war came the porters of les Halles took it sullenly.

“England has dragged us in,” they said. “It is, of course, the same old war in defence of Capitalism. Our sons will again be the victims of international financiers and of those who play power politics.”

During the long period of the ‘phoney’ war as Hambledon’s friends called it—for more than half a year there was no serious fighting—some of them had lowered their voices and spoken words which made Edward raise his eyebrows slightly and have an inward doubt about French will-power to defend their liberties.

“We must make an arrangement with those Germans. Cannot we find some way of peace before the slaughter begins?”

Now the slaughter had begun, and French weakness had been revealed, and the Maginot line—which was only half a line—had been turned and ignored by the invading hordes, now pouring in a tide of metal through the French lines, blasting their way on to the heart of France. Paris was being

abandoned by its citizens, by all those who could get away somehow and anyhow.

“One can’t imagine this ever happening in New York or Boston,” thought Edward Hambleton. “We are lucky in our geographical position. Nothing will ever hit us like this.”

## II

HAVING said good-bye again to the Meunier family, Edward drove back to his studio and found the telephone ringing.

A girl’s voice spoke to him when he lifted the receiver. She spoke in French with a perfect accent, though she was Russian. He answered her in French, at which sometimes she had laughed because of his American intonation.

“It’s nice to hear your voice again, Olga. You used to ring me up like this before you broke my heart.”

He heard her give a faint laugh and a little sigh. “Oh, it has healed again, dear Edouard. There are so many pretty girls who are fond of you.”

“I’m not particularly fond of them,” answered Edward. “I fell in love with you. Have you forgotten?”

He spoke lightly with a smile in his voice, though she had broken his heart, or he thought she had, when she told him she was going to live with Paul Simon because he played Chopin so exquisitely, and because he needed her more than Edward, being so delicate and sad and tortured.

“I shall always remember our friendship with affection,” said the voice on the telephone, that Russian girl’s voice which had been sweet music to Edward’s ears when he was deeply in love with her.

“It is because of our friendship, dear Edouard, that I want to see you this morning. I want to see you now, in a few minutes. It is because of Paul. I am frightened about him.”

“Yes, I suppose he’s scared,” said Edward Hambleton.

There was another faint sigh on the telephone.

“He remembers that he has a Jewish ancestry. The Germans do not like people with Jewish ancestry even though they have music in their souls. Paul is in great danger. I want to see you about him. I want to ask your help, Edouard. I will be with you in ten minutes if you will wait.”

“Certainly I will wait,” answered Edward. “But I don’t pull any strings, and everybody is rushing away from Paris.”

“It is terrible,” cried Olga. “I weep for France. Paris is panic-stricken today. I can see fear in the people’s eyes. They look like hunted animals, with the hunters very near. . . . In less than ten minutes, Edouard, I will come to you.”

In less than ten minutes he heard her tap at his studio.

He saw that she was paler than usual, though her skin had always been rather white, and with her high cheek-bones and her black hair looped over her ears—little shell-like ears which sometimes he had kissed—she looked like one of Leonardo’s women.

“It is kind of you to let me come,” she said.

“You used to come here many times,” he reminded her.

She smiled faintly and looked round his studio with a lingering glance.

“Yes. We had merry times in this room—such gay parties when we all talked such a lot of nonsense. I shall always remember.”

“I think of the times when you were here alone with me,” said Edward.

She nodded and smiled at him.

“I let you make love to me, Edouard. You were so young and so American. You knew nothing about love. I felt very old because of your young mind and your innocence. I thought it was good for you to love me in a boyish way without any harm in it. Afterwards, you would have a little experience.”

“Yes,” said Edward with a touch of bitterness, though he laughed. “To you I was just an American schoolboy, very ignorant of life and hardly adolescent. A nice boy to take you out to dinner and drive you to the Bois and send you flowers in the American way.”

She looked at him with her dark eyes deeply set under her white forehead.

“Don’t think of me unkindly, Edouard. I was very frank with you and very honest. I told you about my lovers—Paul Simon and others. I always laughed when you asked me to marry you. I said I did not snatch babies from their cradles. Do you remember? You cannot accuse me of cheating you. I wanted to be kind to you. I was very glad to let you love me. In any case, all that is in the past, dear Edouard. Let us cherish these memories because they belong to the time of happiness before this war came with all its misery and terror. Are not the Germans advancing on Paris? Shall we not hear the tramp of their boots in a few days, or a few hours?”

She gave a shudder, and looked across the room as though seeing beyond its walls to a horror creeping nearer.

“The Germans in Paris!” she exclaimed in a kind of whisper. “It is unbelievable. Why has it happened like this? Why has France allowed herself to be defeated so soon? Is there not still time to turn the tide?”

“Not a chance,” answered Hambleton. “The Germans are too strong. The French are too weak. Hitler has massed all the metal in the world against them.”

Olga turned to Edward and spoke in a quick urgent way:

“I waste time talking while Paul’s life is in danger. There is hardly time to escape. It is why I came here. I want you to find a way of escape for Paul. He is of Jewish parentage. They will put him in a concentration camp where he will die. Or they will shoot him, so that he dies even quicker. It is only you who can help him to escape.”

“How?” asked Edward. For just one second he wondered whether it was up to him to help Paul Simon to escape. That thin, delicate, ill-dressed, poverty-stricken fellow had stolen Olga from him. His long transparent hands had made music which had a magic for her. An American, fresh from Harvard, very young and very callow, had no chance against this consumptive-looking Jew with a lock of black hair over his forehead, and tired eyes. Only for a second this thought came to him. A mean thought.

“Can you get him an American *visa*?” she asked. “If he could get to the United States it would be very wonderful. It would be heaven for him instead of hell. Edouard, because you loved me. . . .”

“What about you?” he asked. “What are you going to do?”

She shrugged her shoulders. “I am a fatalist. I have already been a refugee once. I know the meaning of hunger and lice and a flight from terror. As long as Paul is safe. . . . It may be easier for him to go alone.”

“It’s not going to be easy,” answered Hambleton. “The American Embassy is besieged by would-be emigrants. But I’ll do my best for you, Olga; and for Paul Simon, who took you away from me.”

“He is very ill,” she told him. “He tries to hide his terror. I must go back to him. You will let me know, Edouard?”

He promised to let her know.

Before going she looked round the studio again and her eyes rested on a study he had made of her head.

“It is good, that,” she said. “It is alive. It is, perhaps, the best thing you have done.”

She did not like many of his other things. Like Yvonne Meunier she thought the American mind was not instinctively in tune with the soul of art. Besides, he was too rich, she thought, to be a good painter. Most of her friends who had talent lived in garrets, ate at cheap restaurants, could hardly afford to buy their canvases and paints, and did not wash very much so that they had the odour of poverty which is the aroma upon which art best thrives. Edward's flow of dollars from a wealthy father in Massachusetts put him in the amateur class, so once she had told him, making him angry.

She turned away from his painting of her head and took his hands and leaned forward and kissed him.

"It is perhaps for the last time," she said. "In any case, it is the last time that I shall come to this room with all its pleasant memories. You will do your best to get Paul away, Edouard, my dear?"

"I will do my best," he answered.

She went away and for a little while he stood quite still thinking about her. He had found her so dainty, and exquisite, and amusing, and wise. She had talked about everything in life with Russian candour, shirking nothing. He had found it exciting and sometimes alarming, this utter frankness of thought and speech. He must have seemed very raw when he first met her in Paris and came to know her. That was in Fontainebleau, where for a time he was a student in the American school of art. Then he had met her in the apartment of Lucile Printemps. Paul Simon had played for them and Edward had seen how spell-bound Olga was by the music. Odd people dropped in to Lucile's apartment—a French novelist, François Denain, who talked bitter stuff about the political corruption of France; a Czech sculptor who looked half-starved and unwashed, but had a touch of genius when he handled his clay; Nancy Stanton, the fashion-writer, who belonged to the rotten set which haunted the Dôme and the Rotonde drinking too many high-balls and throwing overboard all conventions and moralities. Other types dropped in and there had been plenty of talk, most of it in French, and some of it amusing and stimulating to a young man from Massachusetts. He had fallen for the Russian girl, Olga Zhukova.

She had been amused by his boyish love-making, and his shyness, and his free way with dollars. Presently she had let him kiss her. She had reached up to put her fingers through his fair hair. They had walked hand-in-hand through the Bois. Once he had held her in his arms in the shadow of the Louvre under the stars of a Paris night in June.

It was his introduction to love which had ended miserably for him when she went to live with Paul Simon, because, she said, he needed her, being ill



and lonely and unhappy. . . . All that was now a memory. The Germans were on their way to Paris. It would soon be the end of Paris and the end of his adventure in that city of enchantment and intellectual liberty.

### III

THERE was no doubt about the exodus from Paris. Not only was the Gare du Midi besieged by crowds in flight but there was a long tide of cars heading southward from Paris and heavily laden with baggage of all kinds, including perambulators and mattresses and household chattels.

Hambledon crossed this traffic jam in the Rue de Rivoli where it flowed into the Place de la Concorde. A hand came through the window of an old Citroën and a woman's voice spoke to him.

"Aren't you quitting Paris, Edward? I'm just crazy with fear."

It was one of his American friends, Susan Zimmermann, who had been doing fashion drawings for American magazines.

Ernie Zimmermann, her husband, who was news editor of the Paris edition of the *New York Journal*, was driving the Citroën and looked intent on the job while the traffic was held up. Susan was half-buried in baggage, which included a canary in a gold cage which she held on her lap.

She had been one of the hard drinkers at the Dôme where her shrill rasping voice had screamed across the little tables. At the outbreak of war she had stayed on, though most of the American women booked passages home and disappeared from their old haunts. She was one of the few left in a desert of empty chairs outside the Dôme. Now she was making a get-away while there was still time.

Hambledon raised his right hand to her and spoke a few words. "I'll meet you sometime in New York, Susan."

The traffic swirled on past the refuge where he stood with the memory of a frightened woman holding a canary in its cage.

The Government offices on the other side of the Hôtel Crillon were being evacuated. Orderlies were bringing out wooden cases and loading them on to military trucks. French naval officers and officials stood about talking in low tones. A line of cars was waiting to take them away.

"The Government is packing up," thought Edward, glancing at them. "Perhaps that has caused the exodus. The Parisians know that Paris is being abandoned."

A dirty old man, with a long scraggy neck above a ragged shirt without a collar, made a sudden demonstration. He raised a clenched fist and shouted out hoarsely:

“We are betrayed. Cowards and traitors! It is you who have caused our downfall. It is always the same. The soldiers of France are betrayed by their filthy politicians. Now you are in flight to save your skins while the people are abandoned.”

A gendarme seized him by the arm and led him away, still shouting.

A woman on the kerbstone turned to Edward and spoke in a low voice.

“It is true, all the same, what he says. We have been betrayed.”

Hambledon walked to the American Embassy, with its garden going down to the Champs-Élysées. Round by the main entrance there were groups of Americans and a few French women, married perhaps to Americans, and some Jewish-looking people. Edward shouldered his way through them and went up the steps. The hall porter knew him, and when he asked for Mr. Smart shook his head and laughed.

“I guess you’ll have to wait, Mr. Hambledon. Mr. Smart has many friends in Paris and they all want to know the best way back to the United States.”

He added a few words in a whisper. “It won’t be long before the Germans are here. Terrible news is coming in.”

“What’s the latest?” asked Hambledon.

The porter shook his head. “A lot of rumours,” he answered. “Better ask Mr. Smart. Maybe it will all be in the papers tomorrow.”

Edward sat in the ante-chamber to William Ryan Smart’s room and smoked seven cigarettes while he waited for others to get in first. He knew some of them slightly. They were some of Smart’s fashionable friends—several pretty young women, beautifully dressed in the latest Paris models, with rouged lips and finger-nails, though France was sinking into the abyss and the Germans would soon be in Paris. They, too, smoked cigarettes nervously, and crossed and uncrossed their legs, showing their knees, restlessly. One of them was the American wife of a French politician—something in the French Air Ministry. She was sitting nearest to Edward and spoke to him in a low voice.

“Have you heard the news about Leopold? He has surrendered.”

Hambledon was startled.

“Say, is that true?”

“My husband told me,” she answered. “It is shameful. And the English are in retreat. They are trying to reach the coast before they are cut off. That, too, is a treachery.”

Edward shrugged his shoulders.

“After a Belgian surrender that’s all they can do, maybe. Still, it’s not amusing, all that.”

“The end of France is near,” said this lady, glancing both ways to see whether she was overheard. “My husband has a *crise de nerfs*. . . .”

“Trying to get back to the United States?” asked Edward.

She nodded.

“I have had enough of France. I have been behind the scenes of political life. I’ve seen its corruption, its intrigues, its sinks of iniquity. When they know the awful truth the French people will cry: ‘We have been betrayed.’ I could have told them that a long time ago. As the American wife of a French politician I feel unclean. If I can get back to Virginia . . .”

Mr. William Ryan Smart’s secretary opened his door and said: “Madame Lajeunesse.”

It was this lady who had been sitting next to Edward. She rose, nodded to Edward, and went into the next room. She ignored Edward when she came out, and went away with a worried look and deeper lines about her eyes and mouth.

“Mr. Hambledon,” said the secretary presently after the seventh cigarette. Edward Hambledon had an eighth out of Mr. Smart’s case.

“I can’t say I’m enjoying myself,” said that gentleman. “No, sir! It’s just hell. All these people think I can work miracles. That’s not my line of business. I’m no miracle-maker.”

“Has Leopold thrown his hand in?” asked Edward.

Smart nodded. “How did you hear? Not that it matters. The papers will have it tomorrow.”

He threw his cigarette into the fireplace and groaned.

“I don’t care a damn about these Americans stranded in Paris,” he said. “But I agonize over the fate of France. France is my spiritual home. It gives me a shudder down the spine when I think of those grim Germans marching to the Arc de Triomphe.”

“Too frightful,” answered Edward, who loved Paris no less than William Ryan Smart, and had been closer to its heart among its poor citizens.

He came abruptly to the purpose of his visit.

“You say you can’t work miracles. Well, I guess you’ll have to work one for me.”

“Nothing doing, buddy,” said Smart firmly.

“I’m asking you for an American *visa* for Paul Simon,” said Hambleton. “He’s a Jew and doesn’t care for concentration camps.”

“Paul Simon? That sick-looking guy who plays Chopin like an angel and has the face of John the Baptist?”

“You’ve said it.”

“Olga Zhukova went to share his squalor, didn’t she?”

Edward nodded.

“That’s why I’m asking you to put a rubber stamp on his passport. It’s for her sake, and it’s the least I can do.”

William Ryan Smart looked at Edward with a grin.

“Darned generous of you, buddy,” he said. “Olga led you up the garden path and then let you down. Everybody knew, of course, and was sorry for a nice fresh American boy, as innocent as a spring chicken.”

Edward looked annoyed and answered curtly:

“Oh, to hell with everybody. Olga and I remain good friends. Anything you can do about it?”

Smart thought within himself.

“I’ll have a word with the Ambassador. He’s sympathetic towards Jews.”

“Thanks a lot,” said Edward.

“Better give me the address of Paul Simon’s bug-infested garret,” said Smart. “Of course, I can’t make any promise.”

He held out his left hand, nearest to the heart, in the French style, and Edward gripped it for a moment. William Ryan Smart was a good friend and a regular fellow.

“That’s fine,” said Hambleton, leaving the room of a hard-pressed young man who yet had time to think of the tragedy of France and bled at the heart for Paris.

#### IV

EDWARD HAMBLEDON had dinner next night in the Père Jean up the rue Montmartre. It was an old haunt of his to which he had gone before the war

as an escape from the crowd in Montparnasse, which sickened him now and then because of its noise and insincerity.

Here in the Père Jean he had made friends with the *patron* and his wife, and with their son Bertrand, now in the Army, and with Suzanne, the little waitress, and with Pierre the *garçon* who had married her just before the war when he was called up and put into the Maginot Line as a gunner in one of its steel turrets. Edward had played cards with the *patron* and his wife when most of the customers had gone, and had taught them Gin Rummy and other American card games, letting them win now and then. And in this cheap eating-place with its sanded floor and little tables with cloths of blue and white check he had made friends with the habitués who fed here most evenings.

At the outbreak of war some of them had been called up for military service, like the waiter Pierre. There was a young mechanic from a neighbouring garage with whom Edward had talked politics and from whom he had learned the psychology—rather violent—of the extreme left. He turned up now and again in uniform, being the driver of a General's car at Army headquarters.

Then there was a Russian taxi-driver who had escaped from the Reds with the remnants of Wrangel's army in the Crimea. Like all Russians he liked to talk, and go on talking, and crossed swords good-humouredly on political issues with the garage hand. Now and again he brought in a pretty Russian girl who worked as a sempstress with a dress-making staff of a Grand Duchess in the Place Vendôme. This taxi-driver had dropped his Russian name and called himself Gaston. "My Russian life," he said, "is now nothing but a dream. I am a Parisian. I belong to Paris. I am Gaston Leblanc."

When Hambledon stepped into this place that evening the little restaurant was deserted, except for two of the habitués. One was a little old man who said he was an Englishman and had the English name of Robinson, though he spoke the *argot* of Paris and had lived there all his working life as a newspaper man. He had been on many Paris editions of English and American papers, being sacked from most of them because of an incurable passion for absinthe. From time to time he disappeared, and it was generally understood that he lay in some miserable garret with his absinthe fiend.

Madame Marchand, the wife of the *patron*, passed this off in a delicate way. "M'sieur Robinson has been taken ill again. We shall not see him for a week or two perhaps."

When he reappeared he resumed his normal habits of life, among which was his evening meal at the Père Jean, followed by an unending game of Patience, always at the same table, while he smoked innumerable *Petits Bleus*. He was there that night, playing with his well-thumbed packs of cards, as though nothing threatened Paris or his own way of life.

The other man dining that night at the Père Jean was Louis Duval, who had been a garage hand and now drove a General on the headquarters staff.

As Edward stopped at his table for a moment he raised his head which was low over a bowl of soup and said, "Still here, young fellow?"

His tunic was undone at the neck and there was the white dust of country roads on his bronzed face.

"How goes it, old man?" asked Hambledon.

Louis Duval shrugged his shoulders and laughed without mirth.

"How goes it? It goes fast in the wrong direction. The French army cannot hold a line anywhere. The troops are demoralized for lack of orders, and perhaps for other reasons, such as meeting the fugitives on the roads, and among them their own women and little ones. My General is dining with his mistress tonight. At G.H.Q. the Generals and staff officers have lost touch with the armies. Nothing works. Not even the telephones. They sit stupefied, those Generals and staff officers. But my own General who, of course, should be shot with all the others, dines tonight with his mistress in Paris. She is, very likely, a German spy."

He bent his head again over his bowl of soup.

The elderly Englishman looked up from his cards and nodded to Edward, putting a new cigarette into his holder with a trembling hand due to absinthe.

"Delighted to see you tonight, Hambledon," he said in French. "We are somewhat low in spirit. Being old and sinful I have no fear for my own life. It is always better to be dead. But I grieve for the fate of Paris my second and kindest mother."

He uttered a frightful oath against Hitler, and then returned to his game of cards which he dealt out in five rows.

Edward went to the counter behind which sat Madame Marchand—a plump little woman of middle age with well-combed hair looped over her ears.

"Any news of Bertrand?" asked Edward, holding one of her hands for a moment.

She put her other hand on Edward's and clasped it tight. He could feel a tremor pass through her and there was agony in her eyes. She had worked only for young Bertrand to give him a good education, to set him on a good career which was to have been the law.

"No word comes," she answered. "It is six weeks since we had his last postcard written from the Maginot Line."

The *patron*, her man, looked up from an evening paper and thrust his leaden-rimmed glasses to the top of his forehead.

"It is probable that Bertrand is alive and unhurt," he said. "The Germans have not attacked the Maginot line, which, as Bertrand has told us, so often, is impregnable."

Duval with the dust of country roads on his tanned skin spoke from his table.

"The Maginot line is now a farce! The Germans ignore it and attack where it does not exist. It is only half a line. The French people have been deluded about it by their Generals and their politicians and by the daily lies in a paid Press. The Maginot line is an illusion behind which we felt secure, when there was no security, because of corruption everywhere and unreadiness for war. Daladier was reluctant to declare war but he yielded to the English Chamberlain. It was, of course, the suicide of France."

Marchand, the *patron*, spoke with sarcasm. "You say these things now, Duval. I remember that once you said other things. You were a follower of Leon Blum and his forty hours week—forty hours when Germany was working day and night to forge the weapons which have now blasted us."

Duval answered sullenly:

"Leon Blum was our only honest man. He may have made a few mistakes. . . ."

Madame Marchand gave an impatient cry.

"Can you still talk politics when we wait for the Germans to enter Paris—when my only son may be dead with so many others—and when Suzanne here is weeping her heart out because her man has been killed in action?"

"That is true," said Marchand. "This is no time for argument."

"Is it true about Pierre?" asked Edward, still standing at the counter.

Madame Marchand nodded.

"One of his friends passed through Paris yesterday in a hospital train. He sent word to Suzanne in a scribbled note by one of the porters who used to come here with Gaston. Pierre was killed at his side."

"I am sorry," said Edward Hambledon, in a low voice.

At that moment Suzanne came into the room from the kitchen where she had been fetching a dish of tripe for Duval. Her face was very white and blotched by much weeping.

“I am sorry, Suzanne,” said Edward.

She pushed the tripe in front of Duval and for a moment her eyes, which once had been so merry, looked like those of a stricken animal. A sob shook her body, but she answered bravely:

“He died for France at a time when most French soldiers are running away.”

Duval stared at her sombrely.

“It is all they can do,” he said harshly. “They receive no orders. Their battalion officers hear nothing from the high command. No reinforcements arrive. Isolated units fight until they are over-run by German tanks, who drive deep into the heart of France while those poor devils up there do not know where the front is, or what positions they have to defend. All they can do is to fall back. It is not running away. It is falling back to positions already far behind the German advance with its tanks and flame-throwers and dive-bombers. Against all that we are powerless. All the same, I am sorry about Pierre. He and I were good comrades.”

Suzanne answered him coldly.

“In a little while we shall all be dead. It makes no difference. This life is unendurable.”

“It will be unendurable under the Germans,” said Madame Marchand. “But I must stay in Paris until we hear from Bertrand.”

Suzanne gave a shrill mirthless laugh.

“In a little while there will be German soldiers seated at these tables. They will ask me to bring them beer. They will make love to me, and then I will throw the beer in their faces and then they will kill me. That is quite an amusing thought!”

Mr. Robinson looked up from his cards and spoke quietly.

“You are too much in terror of the Germans. They are poor dumb beasts, really. Many of them will be well-behaved in Paris. The officers will be correct and try to be civilized. Some of them, no doubt, will have good manners. I have been to Germany now and then.”

“Hush!” said Madame Marchand, suddenly. “I hear heavy footsteps.”

The *patron* looked up from his paper and listened. Suzanne stopped with a greasy plate in her hand. Duval looked up from his tripe. Old Robinson held a card poised in his trembling hand.



Some time ago the sound of footsteps coming down the rue Montmartre would not have been alarming. There would have been many feet passing ceaselessly, as *midinettes*, soldiers, workmen, sempstresses, and the frequenters of cabarets and the night life of Paris passed on their way. But tonight there was a sinister silence in this quarter, as in other parts of Paris. The streets were empty.

The footsteps passed the Père Jean.

“*Agents de police*,” said Duval.

“It is too soon yet for the others,” said the old Englishman, Mr. Robinson. “We are all rather nervous.”

The door of the restaurant opened presently as other steps approached and then stopped. Gaston, who once had a Russian name, came in with his pretty girl who helped to make frocks all day in the Place Vendôme.

He nodded to the *patron* and his wife, hung his peaked cap on a peg, and drew out a chair from one of the small tables.

“It is still necessary to eat,” he said. “The human animal is like that.”

The Russian girl, whom he called Lydia, glanced at herself in one of the mirrors, took off a little hat, and smoothed down her hair. She had sharp cheek-bones and a low broad forehead and heavily rouged lips which accentuated the whiteness of her skin.

“Perhaps it is the last time we shall eat here,” she said. “In any case, there may be nothing to eat. The Germans have big appetites. They will take everything.”

When Suzanne came up with the bill of fare the Russian girl spoke to her in a whisper.

“It is terrible about Pierre. Gaston has told me. I weep for you.”

She took hold of the girl’s left hand and raised it to her lips. Suzanne’s face became red for a moment and then very white.

“It is, no doubt, kind of you,” she said in a sullen voice, “but it won’t bring back my man. He is dead. . . . He is lucky. I have an idea that it is best to be dead.”

Lydia shook her head and made a little grimace.

“I am fond of life. With all its cruelties life is still precious.”

“Tripe or Vienna steak, *mademoiselle*?” asked Susanne. Lydia chose Vienna steak. Gaston preferred tripe.

“I will have a Dubonnet before eating,” he said. He looked over at Edward, who had taken his place at his usual table.

“You stay in Paris?” he asked. “Most of your countrymen have left; and yet, as neutrals, they will not be touched.”

“I shan’t go yet,” answered Edward. “I want to see what is going to happen.”

Gaston’s lips twisted with a smile, but he answered dryly. “It will not be amusing. Once, when I was a Russian . . .”

“Do not get back to that old dream, Gaston,” said Lydia, impatiently.

There was silence in the Pèrre Jean. A few other people came in. One of them was a Chinese student who nodded and smiled to the company as though everything was merry and bright, though his words in queer French were not funny.

“I am very sorry. My heart drips blood. I have a love for Paris.”

He gave a shrill little laugh and took a chair at Edward’s table. “You permit?” he asked.

A slim dark-eyed young woman slipped in and sat down alone. She was a dancer at the *Folies Bergères*.

Not long afterwards two other customers arrived. They were Paul Simon and Olga.

It was Olga who saw Edward first. Her eyes roved round the little restaurant until she saw him and raised her gloved hand. She came up to his table and spoke in a low voice.

“I hoped to find you here. Have you good news for Paul?”

“Not yet,” said Edward; “but Bill Smart is going to have a word with the Ambassador. He will let me know.”

“A thousand thanks to you, Edouard.”

“I am grateful,” he said. “Olga has told me about your kindness. I live in a nightmare. I am a slave of fear. It is because of my Jewish blood and racial memories of pogroms and massacres. When they come they will find out that I have Jewish ancestry. They will have no mercy. But I am ashamed of being so much afraid.”

Edward released his thin white long-fingered hand and saw the fear in Paul Simon’s eyes.

“Poor devil!” he thought. “He looks like a hunted animal.”

“Shall we eat with you, Edouard?” asked Olga.

“Why not,” answered Edward. He glanced at the little Chinese, who sprang up and smiled.

“I go to another table. As Confucius said, ‘The stranger must not linger at the hearthside of friends.’ ”

“It is good of you,” said Olga in her charming way.

Paul Simon gave a deep quivering sigh and spoke in a tragic voice.

“Paris is a ghost city tonight. It is a desert. It seems to be waiting for its supreme moment of tragedy.”

“I am afraid that is going to happen,” said Edward. “Unless a miracle prevents it.”

His eyes rested on the face of this man who had cut him out with Olga. It was a striking face, very thin and fine, with a light brown beard and moustache and pale blue eyes, infinitely sad. He had seen the agony of the Jews in Germany and had fled to escape it. Perhaps this racial persecution was always in his subconsciousness; but poverty and ill-health and the torment of genius, hard to get recognized, formed some part of his melancholy. William Ryan Smart had said that he had the face of John the Baptist, but there was not enough fire in him for that.

“I wonder what Olga found in him beyond the need for pity,” thought Edward, and glancing towards her he saw that she had noticed his scrutiny of Simon. She coloured up slightly and smiled faintly. She had, of course, worshipped his gift for music.

“Life,” she said, “is inexplicable.”

Perhaps that was in answer to his unspoken thought.

There were spells of silence in the Père Jean until an argument broke out between Duval—who had driven a General’s car—and Gaston the taxi-driver.

“It is you people with foolish ideas about Communism who have brought about the ruin of France,” said Gaston. “You wanted higher wages for less work, and thought the State should provide a comfortable life for all. Meanwhile, Germany was arming and Hitler prepared for the domination of Europe, and after that new worlds to conquer.”

Duval uttered an oath and laughed harshly.

“You are a white Russian, Gaston, disguised as a French taxi-driver. You have the mentality of your disgusting Grand Dukes and your parasitical aristocrats. Shall I tell you what is going to happen later on? It is because I am a Communist that I know.”

“Tell me,” said Gaston carelessly. “It is, of course, some fairy-tale. The Left in France has always believed in the fairy-tale of Russian Communism,

as though it were a beautiful democracy inspired by the spirit of liberty and human benevolence.”

“I will tell you,” said Duval. “The Russians and not the Germans will win this war. In the end, after her first victories, Germany will be rolled back by Stalin’s Red Armies. France will join hands with her Russian comrades. The workers of Europe will join together to form a United States of free Soviet Republics.”

Gaston shrugged his shoulders and answered contemptuously:

“Another fairy-tale! A bad dream!”

Lydia put her hand on his arm as though to check his angry speech.

“I have an idea that Duval may be right,” she said. “I hear strange things from Moscow. An American journalist I know who has just come back. . . .”

Gaston looked at her as though she were a child talking nonsense.

“These American journalists spend three days in Paris and then write a book about France,” he said. “Is that not so?”

He looked over at the young American but Hambleton did not answer. At that moment the walls of the Père Jean shook, and the floor-boards trembled, and a blast of air seemed to be forcing its way against the windows. There was a heavy reverberating noise like the sound of gunfire, and other explosions followed by crashes of masonry.

“They are coming! They are here!” cried Madame Marchand. She put her hands to her ears and shut her eyes.

There was another violent explosion. Suzanne dropped a pile of plates.

“No, no!” shouted Duval. “It is an air raid. They are bombing the outskirts of Paris.”

Mr. Robinson’s cards were blown off the table.

Paul Simon had stood up at the first sound of explosion. His face was dead white, and his long thin hands trembled as he touched the table with his finger-tips. “Is this death?” he asked quietly.

“Not yet, I guess,” said Edward reassuringly. “They’re some way off, I should say.”

Olga rose and put her arm round Paul Simon.

“Courage, my dear,” she said in a low voice. “Let us not be afraid of death.”

Seven bombs fell. The Père Jean shook seven times, as though a giant fist were hammering at its walls.

Overhead there was the drone of planes. Paul Simon took a dirty handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his forehead on which there was a cold sweat.

“You give me courage,” he said. “I owe everything to you, Olga—everything in life. I want to tell you that once again.”

“I like you to tell me,” said Olga. “You have told me a thousand times.” She listened intently and then spoke again. “It’s quiet now. Let us go home. I will put you to bed.”

“No, no!” said Simon. “I am all right. It is only my nerves. They are a little frayed perhaps.”

Suzanne stood in the middle of the floor where she had dropped a pile of plates. Suddenly she cried out angrily.

“It is senseless, all this! This war is abominable! Why do we not stop all wars? Why should all our men be slaughtered? Is it not time that men and women in all countries should say ‘We will not make war on each other? We do not want to kill each other. We will not fight in any kind of war.’ Have we not enough intelligence for that?”

Nobody answered this outburst for a moment or two. It was Duval in his uniform who answered her.

“One day we shall have that intelligence. That is, when all the workers of the world unite in comradeship.”

Suzanne began to sob and, without stooping to pick up the broken plates, went quickly into the kitchen.

“Poor child!” said Olga.

“There is truth in what she said,” remarked Gaston. “Why does not mankind use its intelligence to prevent these wars?”

Mr. Robinson answered him, after picking up his cards which had been flung to the floor. “They have no intelligence, my friend. Surely you do not believe in human intelligence?”

The young woman who danced at the *Folies Bergères* spoke for the first time.

“Humanity is disgusting. Man is a filthy animal.”

The Chinese student giggled and spoke across the room.

“It has been said by Confucius that man is partly animal and partly spirit. There is no barrier to his spiritual progress if he treads his animal nature beneath his heels.”

He laughed happily at this piece of wisdom and then gave a long-drawn sigh.

“It is very silent outside,” said the *patron*. “In the rue Montmartre it’s as quiet as death.”

“It’s the death of Paris,” said his wife.

Gaston rose to go with the Russian girl. He shook hands with the *patron* and his wife and then with Edward and Duval.

“I am taking Lydia to the south,” he said. “It is our last night in Paris for some time. But one day we shall come back. Paris will not die.”

“I go too,” said Duval. “My General has ordered me for eleven o’clock. He will have had four hours with his pretty slut. I expect I shall be driving him to Bordeaux. The French army is abandoned. The Generals are in flight. Who will pay for this treason?”

## V

A LITTLE later Olga rose to go back with Paul Simon. “I will walk with you,” said Edward Hambledon. They walked into the deserted streets of Paris. Here and there stood *agents de police*. In the dimness of the black-out a few people passed like ghosts. Now and again a car heavily-laden flashed by. Under an archway a soldier embraced a girl, love being stronger than despair. Abandoned cats prowled miserably among the débris of packing-cases in the courtyards.

“Once I have seen Paris gay,” said Olga. “Tonight it is a tomb.”

As they walked across the Tuileries Gardens to the left bank of the Seine she put her hand on Edward’s arm.

“Do you mind?” she asked.

“I like it,” he told her. “It reminds me of happier days.”

Paul Simon walked ahead of them with nervous steps. He had taken off his hat to feel the cool air on his forehead. Suddenly he stopped and turned round to face them and spoke to Edward.

“Olga tells me that you are being kind and helpful,” he said. “It is generous of you, my friend.”

“That’s quite all right,” answered Edward.

“I thank you a thousand times,” said Simon. “But I wish to tell you something.”

Olga questioned him curiously.

“What is it, Paul? What do you wish to tell Edouard?”

“It is this,” said Paul Simon. “I will not leave France without you, Olga. I am not very brave, that is true, but I am not without a sense of honour. If our American friend here can obtain *visas* for you as well as for me that will be excellent. But I will not leave you here alone. That would be infamous after all your care of me. I would rather die in a concentration camp.”

Olga gave a little cry.

“I will not let you die in a concentration camp. You must go without me, Paul. We are not married. I cannot come as your wife. The Americans are severe about such things. I have been told that many times. Is it not true, Edouard?”

Edward nodded.

“It is one of our hypocrisies. We are not as virtuous as all that, but make a fetish of the marriage laws even if they are made in Hollywood.”

“Is it not possible to get a *visa* for Olga?” asked Paul Simon. “Separately, I mean. We will marry when we get to the United States.”

“There are so many would-be refugees,” answered Edward. “And time is running short, I’m afraid.”

Olga spoke to Paul Simon emotionally.

“Paul, my dear, you must go without me. You will play Chopin in New York and Chicago and I shall be happy knowing you are safe. In any case, I must stay in France. My mother and father are living near Nice. I will join them. I cannot desert them. It was they who carried me away from Russia in the time of Revolution.”

“I will not go without you,” said Paul Simon, stubbornly.

Olga gave a little cry again.

“Oh, Paul my dear, do not be obstinate. Have I not given you my love? Do you not owe me something?”

“I owe you everything,” answered Simon. “You have sacrificed yourself for me. Now you wish to sacrifice yourself again. In any case, how can I do without you? In America I shall be a lost soul without you.”

Olga pleaded with him as though he were a spoiled child.

“Try to be a little reasonable. Is it quite impossible for you to be a little reasonable, Paul? Do you not understand that if you stay in France you will die in a concentration camp? Will that make me happy, do you think? Shall I get any comfort because you stay?”

Paul Simon was silent. Edward watched him as he stood there in the Tuileries Gardens clenching an old felt hat so that the moonlight, very bright

and glamorous, revealed his thin delicate face and touched his hair and pointed beard.

“It is not certain that I shall get the *visa*,” he said presently. “Everything is uncertain.”

Two people passed them—a young man and woman of the working classes. They spoke in low tones, but their words were audible.

“When the Germans come I shall go into hiding,” said the man.

“You are mad,” said the woman’s voice. “You cannot hide for years.”

She began to sob quietly and the man put his arm about her as they passed.

“It is the devil who has caught us all,” he said.

Edward walked with Olga and Paul to the entrance of the little courtyard on the Île de France not far from Notre-Dame where Paul had a room.

“Come in for a little while,” said Olga.

“No,” said Edward. “I must get back. We may hear something tomorrow.”

Paul Simon gripped his hand.

“I am not ungrateful,” he said. “You are very kind to a poor dog of a Jew.”

“*Au revoir, cher Edouard*,” said Olga.

When he took her hand she lifted up her face to this tall American, and then put her arm round his neck and laid her cheek against his for a moment. Her cheek was wet and her tears were on his lips when he kissed her.

## VI

CHAS HUNT, who represented an American journal in Paris, thrust his head out of a taxi-cab in the Boulevard St. Michel and hailed Edward Hambleton, who was reading the headlines of the *Petit Parisien*.

*Surrender of the Belgians. British Retreat to Dunkirk.*

“Hullo, Edward!”

“Good morning,” answered Edward, curtly. He had heard that grim news before. Now it was officially confirmed.

The taxi-cab slowed down at the kerbstone and Chas Hunt spoke again with a kind of urgency.



“Say, Edward, I’ve hired this Jehu to push out from Paris and get as near as he dare to the Front. Care to take a chance and come along? We may see something of the real thing—anyhow, the back-wash of it.”

“Why don’t you drive your own car?” asked Edward, giving himself time to think out this offer.

Chas Hunt laughed without amusement.

“Somebody pinched it yesterday. Probably it’s being driven to Nice or Bordeaux by some hound of hell.”

“I’ll come with you,” said Edward.

“Fine!” exclaimed Chas Hunt, a hard-boiled newspaper man, once of Kansas City, tall, lean-jawed, and steely-eyed. “I like a guy of quick decision. Come inside this bone-rattling box of tricks.”

He called to the taxi-driver:

*“En avant!”*

The driver was a middle-aged man with a grey moustache and a three-days’ growth of stubble on his chin. He looked haggard and nervous.

“*Messieurs,*” he said, turning in his seat, “I do not guarantee anything. If you wish to risk your lives that is no concern of mine, you understand?”

“Perfectly, old man,” answered Chas Hunt. “But we do not wish to get killed or taken prisoner. That also is understood.”

He spoke French like Edward, fluently, but with an American intonation not to be disguised.

“For myself it does not matter,” said the driver. He didn’t give a curse about death, he said. He explained that he had a daughter with a new-born babe in Dieppe. He might find her on the road with other refugees if he pushed up that way. That is why he had consented to go.

“Well, now that we thoroughly understand each other shall we make a start?” asked Chas Hunt impatiently.

They drove through the outer suburbs which became miserable and squalid, with rows of dilapidated houses and small shops and rubbish heaps. Few people were about and those looked gloomy and frightened.

Presently the taxi left Paris behind, taking the road from Evreux to Pontoise. It passed through a pleasant countryside with meadows bordered by willow trees and ditches tangled with wild flowers. Here and there were glimpses of small châteaux with mansard roofs half-hidden beyond avenues of tall trees. They passed through villages silent and deserted as though the inhabitants had all fled.

Edward stared out of the cab at the passing scene, very lovely in the fresh foliage of Spring. French poets of the sixteenth century had put these wild flowers in their sonnets. They had made love to the ladies of France in parklands like these. Edward knew this part of the road getting near to Pontoise. He had driven Olga out here one afternoon and she had made a daisy chain and crowned him as he lay at her feet in a quiet meadow.

The driver of this Paris taxi seemed to be moved by this pastoral beauty. He turned in his seat and spoke to Edward over his shoulder.

“The beauty of France!” he exclaimed in a tragic voice. “It is horrible, *M’sieur*, that the Germans will soon be all over this countryside.”

“I agree,” said Edward with sympathy.

Chas Hunt was not observing the loveliness of Nature. He had some other thought in his mind, to which presently he gave expression.

“Where is the French army? Where, in God’s name, are the troops and guns who ought to be here defending Paris? This is the straight road to Paris and there are no defences, that I can see.”

“Paris will not be defended,” said the taxi-driver. “We have already lost the war. There is no hope for us.”

Chas Hunt turned to Edward with a kind of stupefaction in his eyes and spoke in English.

“They’ve just packed up. God knows what has happened to them. It’s a moral *débâcle*.”

“They’ve been betrayed by their leaders,” answered Edward. “I guess when that happens the rank and file lose heart.”

Farther along the road the two friends saw a group of about fifteen soldiers. They were sitting on a bank above the road in a listless hang-dog way. A young lieutenant was standing up, and stared at the taxi as it approached.

“I’m going to speak to those guys,” said Chas Hunt. He told the taxi-driver to stop and got out. Edward followed him and saw him touch his felt hat to the young lieutenant who raised his hand to his steel helmet.

“What is the situation?” asked Chas Hunt in his fluent French with a strong American accent.

The young lieutenant, who was a good-looking man, though unshaven for several days, shrugged his shoulders slightly as he answered.

“There is no situation. It is chaos. The English are fighting in Dieppe to cover the retreat of their army to Dunkirk.”

“Where is the French army?” asked Hunt.

The lieutenant looked at him somberly.

“They, too, are cut off in the north.”

“But here?” asked Hunt. “Why is Paris left undefended? Why are there no troops or guns across this road?”

“I have not the honour of being in the headquarters of General Weygand,” answered the young officer coldly.

“It is incredible!” exclaimed Hunt.

The lieutenant spoke suddenly with extreme bitterness and passion.

“Certainly it is incredible! Those who were killed at Verdun and in other fields of France must turn in their graves when they think of all that sacrifice, the sacrifice of two million comrades, wasted by what now happens. We allowed the Germans to get strong again. Our politicians sank into corruption. Like pigs they wallowed in their filth. They did not provide the weapons. Some of our Generals were politicians also, and many of our men are Communists. They have not the will to fight. Those who have the will to fight do not get any orders. I have been left for two days without an order, and stay here with an anti-aircraft gun not knowing what to do or where to go.”

“*Mon lieutenant*,” said one of the men, standing up from his seat on the bank. “I can tell you what to do and where to go. These gentlemen have a taxi-cab. They will take us back to Paris. We can sit on each others’ laps and even on the roof. I have a woman in Paris. I wish to see her again.”

“Shut your beak,” said the French lieutenant sternly.

Another man rose from the bank.

“I am a married man,” he said. “I do not wish to be taken prisoner when those swine spill all over the countryside. We are abandoned. It is useless to stay here. I agree with Jean Bernard that Paris is better than this green grass. From Paris one may get a train somewhere.”

“Shut your beaks,” said the young lieutenant. “You have my orders to stay.”

Another man rose and spat in the grass before speaking.

“You are a child, *mon lieutenant*,” he said harshly. “We older men have more sense in our heads. We also have wives and children. We no longer obey your orders, *mon lieutenant*. We do not care a curse for them.”

“If you go I will have you shot as a deserter,” said the young lieutenant.

The man, who was a bull-necked, broad-shouldered fellow, laughed gruffly.

“All that is over,” he said. “The French armies do not exist. The German tanks have driven deep and there are no lines. It is not desertion to escape being captured. It is common sense.”

“It is the best idea,” said one of the others. They rose and talked among themselves.

The young lieutenant turned his back on the men and spoke to the two Americans.

“Where are you gentlemen going? They are bombing the villages beyond Pontoise, and the roads are choked with refugees.”

As he spoke there was the noise of heavy explosions, perhaps three kilometres away.

“I should like to get a bit farther on,” said Chas Hunt. “As a newspaper man. . . .”

The taxi-driver spoke to the young officer.

“*M’sieur*, you say there are refugees on the roads. It is possible that my daughter is among them. She had a little flower-shop in Dieppe.”

“My poor fellow!” said the young lieutenant, “it is like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay. There are swarms of refugees on the roads. A long column passed yesterday, ten kilometres long. Another has already passed this morning taking the road southwards. It is a distressing sight, all those women and children and the old people.”

A sudden mist of tears came into the eyes of the taxi-driver and he smudged them away with the back of his hand.

“Would that I had been killed at Verdun,” he said in a broken voice. “They were lucky who were killed in the last war!”

“Would you care to come with us, *mon lieutenant*?” asked Chas Hunt. “We could give you a lift back even as far as Paris.”

The young officer looked at him uncertainly and then glanced at his men who were talking together in low voices.

“I shall be glad to come with you a little way,” he said. “Perhaps as far as Pontoise. As a matter of fact I belong to this region. My family has a little château fifteen kilometres farther back towards Paris, away from the main road. I am anxious about them, you understand. They may have gone, of course. The last time I saw my father he talked of sending them to our farmhouse near Tours, though he had decided to stay and wait events.”

He introduced himself as Armand de Rollencourt.

He spoke a few words to one of his men and then came back to the taxi.

“Step in, lieutenant,” said Chas Hunt.

## VII

IT was some miles beyond Pontoise when they met another tide of refugees and had to pull on to the grass by the side of the road. It was a long tide of farmcarts with slow-moving horses and covered wagons and tradesmen's carts, and rusty bicycles ridden by young boys, and a long trail of village folk on foot. They were of all ages. Very old women were perched among their chattels and mattresses piled high on the farmcarts. They wore their Sunday black and little black bonnets, and their old wrinkled faces—the grandmothers of France—were whitened by the dust of the road. Young women of sturdy peasant stock trudged along carrying their babies, with older children holding their hands or skirts. Old men who had ploughed the fields of France walked with heavy feet. Some of them had bundles on their shoulders. Others were trundling wheelbarrows heaped up with baggage and oddly-shaped bundles. Some of them walked hand-in-hand with small children. They were all dusty, hot and footsore, and sweat trickled down their faces, and the white dust of the roads made their eyes look darker. They had tragic eyes filled with anguish because of the flight from their homes and their belongings with the enemy on their heels.

“This is the saddest side of war,” said Armand de Rollencourt. “These poor people! They are like frightened sheep with the wolves behind them.”

The taxi-driver stood on the edge of the road staring at these people hungrily. He was searching for his daughter among them. Several times he went over to speak to them and Edward heard his words.

“I am looking for my daughter, Odette. You know her perhaps? Madame André. She has a little flower-shop in Dieppe.”

No one had seen her.

The long column, stretching back for several kilometres, came to a halt. Some of the farm-horses were overtired and could plod on no farther without a rest. Some of the refugees left the road and lay down upon the grass at its side—long grass tangled with wild flowers. Some of them fell asleep instantly, having walked for several days and nights without rest. Babies were squealing. Young mothers sitting on the grass held them to their breasts and fed them. Young girls, more smartly dressed than the peasant women, combed their hair in the sun and used their handkerchiefs to wipe the dust off their faces.

Armand de Rollencourt gave a cry of astonishment and spoke to one of these girls.

“Madeleine! Good God! Why are you here? It is terrible to see you here like this.”

She had been sitting down on the grass but sprang up at the sound of his voice and the sight of him.

“Oh, Armand! Certainly it is terrible. I was staying with Aunt Claire in Dieppe. We did not think the Germans would come so quickly. There was an English officer who was billeted with my aunt. He said the enemy would never get to the coast. My aunt refused to come. She has now been caught by the Germans.”

It was ten minutes later when the taxi-driver suddenly made a rush across the road. He gave a loud cry.

“Odette! My poor daughter! My beautiful Odette!”

By some miracle he had found his daughter in this crowd—a slim girl with neatly braided hair and a little white collar round the neck of her black frock. She carried a new-born babe in her arms. At the sight of her father she ran a little way and then clung to him.

Edward Hambleton spoke in a low voice to Chas Hunt.

“I’m darned sorry for all these people.”

“It makes me want to burst into tears,” answered Hunt. “I’m a hard-boiled newspaper man, but I still have bowels of compassion.”

He did not burst into tears. He stared up at the sky, cloudlessly blue, and was interested, intensely interested, in a black speck coming nearer. In another second or two it looked like a black hawk in the blue dome.

“I don’t like the look of that,” said Hunt. “It’s an enemy plane.”

The head of the column had begun to get on the move again. Old cart-horses strained in their shafts and plodded on with their heavy loads. Some of the boys had mounted their bicycles. Old men stooped to their wheelbarrows.

The distant hum in the sky like a homing bee became a louder drone. Some of those who had been lying on the grass sprang to their feet and looked upwards. Everybody was staring at that black hawk. An old man, with a thin bare neck showing his Adam’s apple, raised a clenched fist at it and shouted a French oath.

Suddenly the black hawk flew low. There was the roar of its engines and a rush of wind over the heads of the crowd. Many flung themselves down on the road and grass. Distinct from the roar of the low-flying plane there was another sound like nails being hammered into a coffin by some demon carpenter. It was the rat-tat-tat of a machine-gun.

Chas Hunt had flung himself on to the grass with the others, but Hambleton stood still. For some reason, inexplicable to himself, he was unable to move and seemed to have been turned to stone. His soul had been turned to stone, it seemed. He saw a woman fall dead, face forwards, with her arms outspread. He saw a boy on a bicycle lurch sideways and then fall with his face in the white dust, and scarlet blood coming from a hole in his head making a pool in the road. He saw a baby drop from its mother's arms as she staggered for a moment and fell over its body. He saw an old woman on the top of a wagon pitch forward and roll off into the road where she lay still. He saw a young girl neatly dressed—she had been standing within a yard of him, staring up at the German plane—fall over a sleeping man and lie across his body until he sat up with a jerk and pushed her away. All that passed before Edward's eyes and entered his soul and burnt it with an unforgettable memory in just one second or two. During that second or two there had been no noise or panic in the crowd of refugees. Now they began screaming and running. Old men raised their fists to the sky and cursed the human being up there with black wings beneath him, now hardly visible beyond them as he flew farther towards Paris.

“Assassin! Bandit! . . . Foul pig! . . . Murderer of children!”

Edward regained the movement of his limbs and mind. He ran towards the girl who had fallen across the body of the sleeping man and stooped down and lifted her up a little in his arms. His hands were wet with her blood. She lay limp and heavy in his arms.

“Dead,” said the man who had been sleeping. “I woke up to find her dead across my legs. I was astonished.”

A white-haired man came from behind a cart and put an arm across his eyes after staring at the girl whom Edward now laid upon the grass as gently as he could. She lay with her face upwards to the blue sky with her eyes open. Tall buttercups touched her white cheeks. Other men and women came to stand round her, crying out words of pity and horror.

A tall grey-haired woman, dressed in black went over to the man who had covered his eyes with his arm and put a thin brown hand on his shoulder and spoke to him.

“She is perhaps better dead, Jean. She has been spared many things.”

The white-haired man dropped his arm and turned towards the woman and put his forehead against her thin breast and wept.

Chas Hunt came back to Edward. His eyes seemed on fire with a blazing anger.

“That son of Satan!” he said. “That deliberate murderer of women and children. I shall never forget this. I shall make a song of hate about it.”

The French lieutenant, Armand de Rollencourt, came to speak to Edward, whom he seemed to regard as the man who had hired the taxi-cab.

“Is it possible,” he asked politely, “that you should give a lift to a demoiselle who cannot walk any farther? She feels faint and ill. She happens to be a cousin of mine.”

Edward glanced at Chas Hunt and asked: “Why not?”

“With pleasure,” said Hunt to the lieutenant.

The young officer said: “A thousand thanks,” and added a few words on his own behalf. “If you could take me back as far as my men . . .”

“That’s understood,” answered Hunt.

The taxi-driver came up and spoke in a trembling voice and his hand quivered like a man who had been shell-shocked.

“This is a world of devils. God, if there is any God, has forsaken France.”

“Are you hurt, old man?” asked Hunt.

“I am unhurt,” said the man. “It is only my heart that bleeds. It is for my little Louise. She lies dead in her mother’s arms. She was shot by that assassin of the sky. My poor Odette, whom I found by a miracle, weeps for her little one.”

Hambledon did not speak at that moment. He was thinking about this scene and what it meant.

“This is total war,” he thought. “That man is right. The devil has been let loose on France. These Nazis are without mercy and without pity. They have been educated in brutality and all cruelty. If they win it will be a hell on earth. And they are winning. Nothing can stop them. The German Devil is victorious. Where then is the God of whom this taxi-driver speaks? Perhaps it’s a fairy-tale.”

He looked about him and saw the sweet and lovely countryside, with green meadows through which a little river wandered with willows overhanging its banks, and wild flowers gleaming gold and silver in the tall grass by the roadside. Was this also a fairy-tale—an illusion of beauty? Anyhow, it was all spoilt by what had happened and what was going to happen. The refugees were on the move again. The farmcarts with their creaking wheels raised the white dust again as the old horses paced forward. The dead girl in the grass had been carried away and put into one of the



carts. The dead babies had been put with the baggage and the bundles, or lay on the laps of the weeping mothers.

## VIII

ONE of them did not weep. It was Odette, the driver's daughter. She came, carrying her dead child clasped to her breast. Her dark eyes were deep set in a white face. Edward never forgot the look in those eyes. The Madonna might have looked like that when she stood before the Cross.

He sat opposite this girl and her dead baby for many kilometres along the roads of France. Armand de Rollencourt sat in front, next to the driver. The girl called Madeleine was next to Odette and presently fell asleep with her head on the other girl's shoulder. Chas Hunt and Edward were on the two turn-up seats with their backs to the driver.

"This is certainly going to be a slow business," said Hunt. "Unless we can escape down a side road we shan't get back tonight."

Edward nodded and said: "I guess that's so."

It was a long journey back. The Paris taxi-cab was trapped in the column of refugees and had to keep to the pace of the old farm-horses for a long distance. Every now and then the refugees halted for a rest of fifteen minutes or so. Owing to the heat of the afternoon and the dust they raised they became parched with thirst, and many lay down in the grass of wayside meadows to drink from the little meandering stream, making cups of their hands.

Edward followed their example and washed his hands in the stream. He had wiped them on his handkerchief, but they were still stained with the blood of a dead girl.

No other black demon of the sky came to harry them and there was no noise about them but the creaking of cart-wheels and the quiet thud of horses' hooves, and the twitter of birds in the bushes.

They did not talk to each other, these fugitives from terror. They were silent. It was a silence of physical weariness and agony of mind.

Not much was said inside the cab.

Once Chas Hunt spoke to Edward. "We must try to get down a side road. I don't care to spend the night in this cab."

For several kilometres there was no side road.

One of the halts was near the turn of the road where the two Americans had met the young lieutenant. He jumped down from his seat next to the driver and climbed on to the bank above the road. Edward watched him standing there motionless for a long minute. He came back and spoke through the open window.

“My men have gone. They have left the gun. They are deserters and cowards. It is this cowardice which dooms us to defeat.”

He spoke with extreme bitterness and anger.

“Perhaps it was suicide to stay,” said Hunt.

The girl called Madeleine had awakened. Edward saw her sit up and look at him with a kind of puzzled surprise as though wondering how she found herself in this cab with a stranger. Then she straightened herself up and wiped the dust off her lips with a tiny handkerchief. She had finely-cut features and brown eyes with long lashes like the etching of a girl’s head by Helleu. She spoke for the first time.

“What are you going to do, Armand? Where are we going in this cab?”

The lieutenant stared at her as though he was utterly uncertain.

“What can I do?” he asked. “What can any of us do?”

He was silent for a moment and then spoke again.

“We are all refugees. I am a lieutenant in the French Army which is in retreat. God alone knows how far they have retreated. It is perhaps best to get back to Paris. Someone there may tell me where to go.”

“I doubt it,” said Hunt. “Paris is abandoned by all the Ministries. You will have to go as far as Bordeaux, *mon lieutenant*.”

“Bordeaux!” echoed Armand de Rollencourt. “It is a long march from here.” He gave a little, quiet, bitter laugh.

“What about me?” asked Madeleine. “Papa and Mamma may have left Paris.”

She looked across at Edward. “What do you think, *M’sieur*? Is Paris quite deserted?”

Hambledon smiled at her.

“There are perhaps a million people left in Paris, but everybody is leaving who can leave. People with cars or people with a little money to keep them alive.”

“What then shall I do if my parents have gone?” asked the girl.

“It is necessary to find out,” said the lieutenant. “I am in the same situation, Madeleine. My father may still be at the château. He was very

obstinate in his wish to stay there. I do not know whether my mother and sisters have gone. I know nothing.”

He turned to Hambledon and Hunt and hesitated before speaking. Hunt guessed his thought. “We’ll drop you at your château,” he said. “How many kilometres from here?”

“Fifteen,” answered the lieutenant. “It would be a great relief to me to find my parents, or to know if they have gone.”

Hunt changed places with him and took the seat next to the driver. This time there was a long halt before the column moved again.

The lieutenant gave a groan. “We stay here all night!” he exclaimed.

The sun was beginning to sink below a line of tall poplars. The trees were black against bars of crimson and gold. Up above in the blue there were flame-tipped feathers.

Odette spoke to Edward. All this time she had sat quite silent, nursing her dead baby, so motionless and so white that she might have been dead also.

“I wish to speak to my father.”

Hambledon turned sideways and told the taxi-driver. He got off his seat and opened the door of his cab.

“What is it, my poor Odette?”

“It is time to bury my baby. This place is as good as any other if there is time.”

“It would be best,” agreed the father. “Certainly it would be best to bury the child. I will make a little grave.”

“Let me help you,” said Edward.

He got out of the cab and held Odette’s arm as she stepped down, still clasping the dead baby.

The others followed her.

The taxi-driver went over to one of the farmcarts and in a few moments came back with a spade.

“I will dig the grave,” said Edward. “Your daughter needs you.”

“A thousand thanks, *m’sieur*,” said the taxi-driver.

Hambledon walked a little distance from the road and chose a spot close to a silver birch whose fresh leaves were like little green flames. His thoughts were busy as he dug a hole after cutting through the long grass.

“Good God!” he thought, “this is like a fantastic dream. Perhaps I am dreaming that I am digging a grave for a dead baby in France, killed out of

the blue by a German machine-gun bullet. It's darned unreal. The odd thing is that I don't feel any emotion. I ought to have a sense of horror, but I haven't. I only have a sense of pity for that young mother, and a dull sort of astonishment that life should be like this. It's war against civilians. Bloody murder out of a blue sky against women and babies. Death in the sunshine with birds singing in the bushes and exquisite beauty in these fields of France. Here am I digging a grave—an American from Massachusetts digging a grave in a French meadow with hundreds of refugees watching me. Just a dream maybe, like most other things in life. I wonder if this hole is deep enough."

Such thoughts passed through his head as he drove his spade into the earth. Drops of sweat trickled down his face and he wiped them away with the back of his hand.

"A thousand thanks, *m'sieur*," said the taxi-driver again. "Come, Odette. Let me take the little one."

"I will do it," said the girl.

She kneeled down and laid the child in the grave as though putting it to bed, very tenderly.

Some of the women who had gathered near began to weep. An old man raised his fist to the sky and cursed the Germans. Odette did not weep when Edward took his spade again and put earth over the little body until the hole was filled up. Then suddenly she gave a cry and fell into her father's arms, weeping bitterly. A number of women closed round her, crying out words of comfort and pity.

Edward looked down at his work and then walked away for a few yards and picked some wild flowers in the long grass and came back to the little grave and laid them on it.

"Nicely done, Hambledon," said Chas Hunt standing behind him.

They went back to the car. The column began to move again.

## IX

It was late and dark when the taxi-cab stopped outside an old gateway with wrought-iron gates between two stone pillars surmounted by heraldic griffins, just visible in the pale luminance of a clear sky in which a crescent moon was rising.

Odette's father had tried to escape from the main column of refugees by turning into a side road, but this was also choked by farmcarts and every kind of vehicle crawling down a narrower road. Now at last the taxi-cab had reached the château where the French lieutenant thought he might find his people.

He sprang down and opened the iron gates and then came back to speak through the window of the cab.

"Whatever happens," he said, "we must all spend the night here. It is impossible to get as far as Paris during the hours of darkness."

"That is true," agreed the taxi-driver, "and my daughter needs a rest."

"I guess we all need a rest," said Chas Hunt, whose bones were aching. Madeleine had sat for a long time with her arm round Odette, whose head was on her shoulder. She, too, must have felt cramped and aching.

"The house is half a mile up the drive," said Armand. "Drive carefully for there is a ditch on one side."

They drove without lights, but the luminance of the sky was enough to give a whiteness to the winding road bordered by tall poplars. The faint light revealed the outlines of the château at the end of the drive, with its mansard roof and dormer windows flanked by two small towers with pointed turrets. It was a small château and looked old.

Lieutenant Armand de Rollencourt sprang up the steps and tugged at an iron bed-handle. The clanging of a bell inside sounded through the silence. There was no answer to that summons.

Edward and his fellow travellers had followed the lieutenant up the steps.

"They have gone," he said. "Undoubtedly, my father must have decided to go with the others."

He pushed against the oak door at the top of the steps and found it was unlocked and a little ajar.

"Well, we can get in," he said. "That is something. When you have come in I will turn up the lights."

He shut the door after them when they stepped into the darkness of a hall which lighted up when he touched a switch. The floor was stone-flagged, and on one side was a big open fireplace below a heavily carved chimney-piece. Round the walls below a high-timbered roof with black cross-beams were the heads of stags and boars and other hunting trophies, mangy and dust covered. The room was littered with papers and cardboard boxes. On a wooden settle by the fireplace was a leather trunk half filled with women's

clothes, which spilt over to the floor where a silk frock lay under two high-heeled shoes. A wooden packing-case stood in the centre of the hall stuffed with other clothes shoved in untidily.

“They have left in a hurry,” said the lieutenant. “They have had to leave many things behind. No doubt they have gone to our farm.”

He strode further down the hall and switched on more light. At the far end was a broad staircase with heavily carved banisters. He went up a few stairs and shouted out, as though not quite sure that the house was deserted in spite of his last words.

“Papa! . . . Maman! . . . Lucile! . . . Marie-Louise! . . . Pierre! . . .”

He turned and spoke to his guests.

“This is an empty château. We are alone here.”

He went upstairs to a gallery from which several rooms opened. Most of the doors were open and he went inside, turning up lights, and then, after a glance, switching them out again. In one room he stayed for a few minutes and came out carrying some papers. Perhaps he had been into his own bedroom.

“Pardon me,” he said, coming downstairs. “You are all hungry. I must try to find you some food. If you will come into the salon. . . .”

He opened a door from the hall and lighted up a big room furnished as a drawing-room, stiffly, in the French style with gilt-backed chairs, and Empire writing-tables and couches. On the walls were some modern portraits—one of this young lieutenant in his uniform, looking very gallant and debonair.

“Perhaps one of you gentlemen would come and forage with me,” he suggested.

He looked at Edward, who followed him down a narrow passage leading out of the hall to an immense kitchen with larders and pantries beyond.

“This is an interesting old château,” said Edward. “It looks quite ancient.”

“Partly of the sixteenth century,” answered the young lieutenant. “My father has spent a lot of money on it. My sister and I are devoted to it. We were brought up here as children. We have played hide-and-seek in all its rooms. Our beautiful mother also adores this place though it is very rustic and shabby. For me it is haunted by the spirit of our youth . . . in days of happiness—before this atrocious war.”

He was silent for a moment and then gave a slight groan.

“Now all that is past. In a few days . . . or a few hours . . . the Germans will be here. They will ransack the house. They will turn over my mother’s clothes and private letters and family photographs. They will kick my father’s books about. They will swill beer in this kitchen, and lie with their muddy boots on beds and sofas. In the winter they will tear down the panelling to make fires. They will behave like brutes and barbarians in this old chateau of France where I first saw the light of day.”

He spoke with extreme bitterness which amounted to mental agony.

“All very lamentable,” said Edward. “*Effroyable.*”

Armand de Rollencourt nodded and spoke more calmly.

“It is the fate of France which I think about most. One could bear one’s personal losses, but what is going to happen to France? I cannot think. I dare not think. It is too frightful. But why do I talk so much while you are hungry? I am lacking in hospitality. I forget my manners.”

He went into a larder and peered about and then gave a little cry.

“A leg of mutton! Some cold potatoes! That is something. If I could find some bread and perhaps a bottle of wine. . . .”

There was no bread, but he found a tin of biscuits and two bottles of wine, heavily cobwebbed, which he brought from the cellars.

Edward carried them into the salon, and presently the lieutenant followed with some knives and forks and a pile of plates upon which Edward noticed a family crest. It was the griffin which surmounted the two stone pillars at the gate.

“You must be famished, Madeleine,” said Armand to the girl with brown eyes and long lashes. As Edward knew afterwards, she was Madeleine Delaroche and a cousin of Armand.

“I am as hungry as a starved dog,” she said with a smile. “One must eat, whatever happens.”

“Where is our taxi-driver and his daughter?” asked Armand glancing round.

“I put Odette to bed,” answered Madeleine Delaroche. “In the little room where I used to sleep. Her father is sitting by her side holding her hand. She is very unwell.”

“Poor creature!” said Armand.

They had a picnic meal in the salon with its gilt-backed chairs. Armand poured out the wine, having fetched more glasses. It was good French Burgundy—Moulin-a-Vent.

Madeleine Delaroche raised her glass and spoke in a low voice.

“*Vive la France!*”

“Our poor France!” answered Armand with a faint groan.

Edward sipped his wine in honour of this toast. In spite of defeat France would live. Not Hitler nor all his legions could kill the soul of France. He had read French poetry. He was steeped in its spirit. He loved the French people, though he knew the corruption of their politicians and the little meannesses of the *bourgeoisie*.

After they had eaten Armand went out of the salon. Madeleine spoke to Edward and Chas Hunt.

“My cousin Armand is very charming. Do you not agree?”

They agreed.

“His father was a General in the last war,” she told them. “He is a very noble old man and a great patriot. He is too old to have command in this war, alas! He will be broken-hearted by all this tragedy of defeat.”

She looked at Edward and asked a question as she leaned forward in her chair with one arm on her knee and her little chin cupped in her hand.

“Do you think we are near the end? Do you think we shall have to surrender to those devils? I would not dare ask Armand.”

Even Edward was shocked by that word surrender. His thoughts had not travelled as far as that. He could not bring himself to believe that France would raise the White Flag.

“That is a terrible idea, *mademoiselle*,” he answered. “I hope that will not happen.”

“Those old men, Weygand and Pétain,” said Madeleine Delaroche. “They are, I think, *gaga*. They did not prepare for this war. The President Lebrun slept and did nothing. Many of our Generals were politicians and Fascists. They ignored General de Gaulle, who wrote a book on mechanized warfare. They have given him only a subordinate command. We are very weak in the tanks and armoured cars which he advocated so strongly. Our air force is almost negligible compared with the enemy’s.”

She was a pretty girl of twenty or so, in a short frock which showed her knees when she sat. It was strange to hear such words from her lips. Chas Hunt seemed to think so. He smiled at her before he answered.

“What you say is, I am afraid, very true, *Mademoiselle*. But how do you know these things? You speak like a military expert.”

She smiled back at him with a flutter of her long lashes.

“Perhaps I speak like a parrot. My father is a Colonel, now retired. He was for a time military critic for *Le Temps*. I have read his articles. I have



listened to his long tirades—which I thought very tiresome and coloured by his prejudice. Now, alas, I know they were true.”

She accepted a cigarette which Chas Hunt offered her from his case. After putting Odette to bed upstairs she had washed the white dust from her face and hands and arms, and brushed her brown hair. She had more than a touch of elegance and grace and looked at home in this salon of a château in France.

“What is that?” she asked suddenly. “It is a queer noise.”

Edward had heard that queer noise. It sounded to him like the strangled cry of a man in some fear or agony. He rose from his chair and walked across the hall. He had an idea that the cry came from Armand de Rollencourt and from a room across the hall on the other side of the salon.

Its door was shut, but Edward opened it and saw Armand in a book-lined room with heavy curtains over the windows and a tiger-skin rug on the floor. The lieutenant was standing motionless with his back to the door. He was staring at something on the floor near a big writing-desk. It was the body of an old man in a General’s uniform with many decorations. He lay crumpled up sideways with one arm sprawled across the tiger skin which was stained by a patch of blackish red.

Suddenly the lieutenant gave a hard sob and went down on his knees and kissed the forehead of the old man and wept.

Hambledon bent down and put his hand on the lieutenant’s shoulder.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “Shall I go?”

“Don’t go,” answered Armand. “I beg of you not to go.”

He stood up again, grasping Edward’s arm.

“My father has shot himself. He put on his old uniform and all the decorations he had won in the last war. He could not bear the thought that France should be vanquished—after all the sacrifice of the last war—after the victory which he helped to gain last time. He stayed behind to kill himself. He preferred death.”

He turned and spoke sharply, in a low voice.

“Shut that door. Do not let the others come in. Stay with me a little while, my friend.”

Hambledon shut the door and turned the key and stood while a lieutenant of France went down on his knees again by his dead father.

It was a fantastic night in the château de Rollencourt. Edward Hambledon looked back upon it sometimes as a nightmare of war which he had dreamed in another life.

Chas Hunt was all for pushing on to Paris. He was anxious to send a dispatch to his New York paper, perhaps the last he would be able to send before Paris was occupied by the enemy, but this idea was made impossible when the taxi-driver came downstairs with the news that Odette was very sick and in no state to continue the journey.

“In any case,” he said, “it is mad to try and reach Paris by night. The refugees will be camped on the roads. We couldn’t go a kilometre from here without getting stuck. My poor Odette may feel stronger in the morning.”

Chas Hunt said “Hell!” under his breath to Edward.

Madeleine Delaroche went upstairs to look after Odette, and Armand, who had come out of his father’s study, gave another reason for not leaving the château that night.

“I must bury my father. I cannot leave him without burial until the Germans come. It would be a dishonour.”

Edward had a secret and startling thought.

“Have I become the grave-digger of France—the second time today?”

He was relieved when Armand turned to the taxi-driver and spoke a few words to him.

“You will help me dig my father’s grave? Is that asking too much, my friend?”

“At your service, *mon lieutenant*,” answered the man, whose name was now known to them as Jean Meudon.

“Gentlemen,” said Armand, addressing the two Americans, “this is a tragic affair. I deeply regret to ask your aid in such a painful episode. But my father is a heavy man. Perhaps you would be good enough to help carry him when I and our friend here have dug a grave in the park?”

“You can count on us, lieutenant,” said Hunt.

It was a strange scene in the moonlight by the open grave which, an hour later, had been dug by Armand de Rollencourt and Jean Meudon.

Hambledon and Hunt helped to carry out the General’s body wrapped in the tiger-skin rug. Certainly he was a heavy man and Hambledon found himself breathing hard by the time he reached the grave.

“Let us take a rest for a moment,” said Armand. “Then we will lower him.”

A slim figure came out of the darkness by the château. It was Madeleine Delaroche, who came to stand by the grave of her uncle.

“Now, gentlemen,” said Armand.

As they laid the General in his last resting-place the earth shook. Somewhere not far away there were heavy explosions and suddenly flames leapt into the sky followed by clouds of smoke which became rosy in the light of the flames.

“They are bombing Pontoise, or thereabouts,” said Armand in a low voice.

“It is not amusing,” said Madeleine Delarochette.

She clutched Edward’s arm.

“It’s all right,” he said, reassuringly.

“It will frighten my daughter,” said Jean Meudon. “We had better hurry up this business.”

He began to throw the earth into the grave.

Armand stood still and made the sign of the Cross on his forehead and breast. He had put a lantern by the edge of the grave, and its glimmer of light sparkled on the buttons of his tunic.

Hunt spoke in English to Hambledon, when they stepped back a few paces by some bushes waiting for Armand de Rollencourt, by whose side Madeleine now stood, weeping silently.

“I’m not darned sure that this isn’t a dream, Hambledon.”

“I’ll say it’s dream-like,” answered Edward. “But it’s a bad dream, Chas.”

“I’m getting nervous about being away from Paris so long,” said Hunt, still speaking in a low voice. “I’ll be in Queer Street with my paper if I’m not there when the Germans walk in.”

It was Hambledon who was first startled by a movement in the bushes behind him. It was like an animal moving there. He swung round and saw something dark coming out of the bushes. It was a man wearing a blue béret over a blue shirt tucked into corduroy trousers. He was powdered from head to foot in the white dust of the roads. He spoke in a hoarse whisper.

“Are you English?”

“American,” answered Edward, whispering back because of Armand and Madeleine standing by the grave. “Who are you?”

“My name is Hardy. I was taken prisoner near Dieppe. I gave them the slip. I’m a captain in the Rifle Brigade.”

“How did you get here?” asked Hambledon.

“I’ve been walking with the refugees. My leg gave out. I was wounded by a machine-gun bullet and it’s not too good.”

“Better get into the château,” whispered Edward. “We can’t talk here.”

“No, I’m sorry,” said the English officer. “Do you mind if I grab your arm?”

He gripped Hambledon’s arm and walked painfully towards the château.

“I don’t know if I can make those steps,” he said, fifty paces farther on.

“We’ll help you,” said Hunt.

The two Americans put their arms round the wounded man and carried him up the steps, and then into the house and into the salon where they laid him down on a couch.

“This is marvellous!” said the English officer looking round the room. “Very civilized. Very charming. After Dieppe. . . .” He gave a faint laugh as though amused by a fantastic contrast.

He was a man under thirty, perhaps, with a clean-cut English face and blue eyes which did not go well with his disguise as a French peasant.

“How did you get those clothes, captain?” asked Hambledon.

“From one of the refugees. He undid his bundle and I changed behind a hedge. He was a grand fellow. I take back all my prejudice against the French after walking with those refugees until this leg of mine gave me hell.”

Armand de Rollencourt came into the salon with Madeleine and was astonished to see a man dressed as a peasant on his Empire couch talking English to the two Americans.

“Who is this?” he asked.

Captain Hardy tried to rise, but it was too painful. It was Hambledon who introduced them.

“An escaped English Captain, *mon lieutenant*. Badly wounded near Dieppe.”

De Rollencourt prevented him from standing up and was excited to meet an escaped officer of the British Army.

“It is an honour to have you here,” he said. “I hope your wound is not too painful.”

He spoke other words very courteously.

“First of all I must bring you some refreshment, *mon capitaine*. A thousand pardons for not thinking of that immediately. After that we will attend to your wound.”

“It is very good of you, sir,” answered Captain Christopher Hardy in excellent French. “But I’m sorry to give you any trouble. You have had

enough already.”

“You have been fighting for France,” answered the lieutenant. “You are one of our comrades.”

While Captain Hardy was eating the last meat on a leg of mutton and drinking a glass of French Burgundy something happened which startled them all. Madeleine Delaroche had just poured out a second glass of wine for the wounded officer when everything in the room shook and trembled. Some cut-glass candelabra tinkled, and a vase on the carved chimney-piece fell off and smashed to bits. Hambleton felt his chair shaking beneath him and the white panelled walls of the salon creaked and all the room vibrated.

“*O mon Dieu!*” exclaimed Armand, rising from his chair and listening intently. He listened, as they all listened, to a grinding, crunching, lumbering sound of heavy machines moving up the avenue of the park and shaking the earth.

It was Captain Hardy who knew the meaning of it first.

“German tanks.”

He rose from the couch holding on to its back. “What are we going to do about it?” he asked. “Is there anywhere to hide? I should hate to be taken prisoner again.”

A very bright light came into the room through the shuttered windows. It was as though a searchlight had been turned upon them.

Armand thought quickly.

“They will have seen our lights. There must be somebody here when they come. Madeleine?”

Her face was dead white, but she answered quietly, “I will stay, Armand.”

“These two American gentlemen,” said Armand. “They are not in danger, perhaps.”

“That’s all right with us,” said Hambleton.

“The captain and I will hide ourselves,” said Armand. “They may not stay long. There are some good cellars here, *mon capitaine*. I regret your wound will give you pain. Take my arm.”

There was a louder sound of grinding machines and the scrunch of heavy monsters nearer to the château. A harsh voice rasped out, clearly audible. “*Achtung! Geh’ herum!*”

“*Mon Dieu!*” said Madeleine in a fainting whisper.

Armand’s face blanched at the sound of German.

“The horror has arrived,” he said in a low voice.

He turned quickly to the two Americans and held out his hand to Edward.

“I thank you,” he said. “I shall never forget your kindness in these painful hours.”

“We shall meet again,” said Hambleton. “Before the end comes we Americans will be fighting in France.”

It was an astonishing thing to say then. The words slipped from him without thought, but he remembered them afterwards and wondered at his own prophecy when the Germans were driving towards Paris, when the British were standing on Dunkirk sands, when England stood alone against Hitler with all his power. It was as though he had seen something far in the future of this war, and got ahead of time.

Armand went quickly to Madeleine, his cousin, and held her for a moment in his arms and kissed her. Then he bent down and helped Captain Hardy to get up.

“Put your arm round my shoulder,” he said. Very slowly and painfully Hardy walked out of the room with this aid, and those three who were left heard his dragging steps.

Someone had tugged at the iron chain outside which rang the big bell in the hall. It rang noisily, with its iron tongue striking the bronze with deep resonance.

“I’ll go,” said Hambleton.

He saw Madeleine standing there in the salon with a face of dead whiteness. Hunt was also standing and looked uneasy.

Edward Hambleton did not feel at ease during those moments when he strode across the hall floor to open the big oak door. He could feel that his heart was thumping. It was not with any fear exactly, though it was on the cards that a German thug might shoot the man who opened the door to them, but there was something very sinister in this summons by the enemy. It was a moment of high drama which had a tense effect upon him.

The bell clanged again impatiently and was still reverberating when Hambleton pulled back a chain and bolt and opened the door, letting a flood of light into the darkness of the drive and its open space in front of the château. He had a moment’s glimpse of German tanks, perhaps twenty, in a mass of metal below the steps. Men were jumping down from them—grim-looking robots in steel helmets low on the neck. Immediately in front of him on the flagged terrace above the steps were half a dozen figures. One of them spoke in French.

“We regret to disturb you at this time of night, but we wish to stay here before we go further towards Paris. You will doubtless excuse us.”

It was the voice of a young man and he spoke good French, though with the heavy German r, and seemed remarkably polite.

Hambledon saw that he was the tallest of these figures who stood outside the door.

“I am not the owner of this château,” answered Hambledon. “The family is away except for one young lady, who is a relative.”

“*Très bien*,” answered the tall young man. “Then our visit will not be alarming. In any case, there is no cause for alarm. We are, I hope, civilized.”

“I hope so,” answered Edward, dryly.

His heart had ceased thumping. He felt that the tension had slackened.

Some of the other figures on the step began to speak in German. Two of them thrust past Edward and entered the hall. The others stopped talking when the tallest among them rasped out some commands to the men below the terrace who had jumped out of their tanks. Then he turned to Edward and spoke in French again.

“We are a little fatigued. The heat and dust of the roads is terrible. It will be pleasant to have a short respite in this old château of France which looks quite romantic.”

He entered the hall, followed by the others who had waited for him, and took off his steel helmet. By the light of the hall Edward saw that he was a young man with short fair hair and a sunburnt face with deep-set blue eyes.

He gave a quick glance round the hall and smiled as he spoke.

“Very romantic! Certainly mediæval. Once no doubt the home of French knights, and fair ladies like Marguerite de Valois.”

Edward did not answer this romantic sentiment. He was aware that the other officers—they were certainly officers—were staring at him. Perhaps they saw that he was not French and may have suspected that he was English.

He had left the door of the salon open and the tall young man strode into it and then halted at the sight of Madeleine who stood there with her dead-white face. He clicked his heels and bowed to her stiffly and then spoke reassuring words.

“I regret this intrusion, *mademoiselle*. There is no cause for alarm. We wish to behave in the most correct way possible. Permit me to introduce myself. Graf Kurt von Eupen.”

Madeleine Delaroche did not answer and did not move. She looked as though she stood there dead. For a moment Graf von Eupen looked at her with an uneasy smile as though embarrassed by this silence and lack of acknowledgment. Then he saw Hunt, and clicked his heels again and repeated his name.

Hunt nodded coldly.

“I am an American,” he said.

The tall young German looked surprised, and answered, “An American? That is interesting. How do you come to be in this château?”

“We came here with this young lady, and a young mother who lies upstairs very ill because her child was killed by one of your airmen who fired on the refugees.”

For a moment the young German looked disconcerted.

“That is regrettable,” he said. “War is very terrible, is it not?”

“You make it against women and children,” said Hunt harshly. “In Holland, in Poland. Now here in France.”

Graf von Eupen raised his hands slightly.

“It is total war,” he answered. “There is no distinction between soldiers and civilians. It is the most merciful way of making war because it ends more quickly. The losses are less in the long run.”

“It is devilish,” said Hunt breathing hard and staring at this young German fiercely.

“We carry out the orders of our Führer,” said the German officer. “Under his leadership this war will be a short one. Complete victory is within our reach and he will establish a new order in Europe.”

He turned towards Edward politely.

“Are you also an American?” he asked.

“I am,” answered Edward.

“Perhaps you will permit me to see your passports. As a matter of form.”

He examined the passports carefully and handed them back.

“Perfectly in order.”

The other German officers were examining the pictures on the walls and some china in the cabinets. They talked to each other quietly and seemed subdued by the elegance of this room in contrast to their own dust-powdered uniforms and greasy faces. They were young men, not much past boyhood, and one of them made a joke at which the others laughed.



“We should like to wash ourselves,” said Graf von Eupen addressing Edward. “Are there any facilities for that?”

Madeleine spoke for the first time. She did not look at the German officer but at Edward.

“There is a wash-place behind the kitchen. You will direct them, *m’sieur?*”

Hambledon showed them the way to the kitchen and to the wash-place beyond. Then he came back to the salon, from which he could hear gusts of laughter and guttural shouts from the German tank crews outside the château.

“This is a horrible experience,” said Madeleine. “I nearly fainted when those men came in. What shall we do now? I am very anxious about Armand.”

“We must prevent them from going down into the cellars,” said Hambledon. “They may go and look for wine. That fellow von Eupen said they would be glad to drink some French wine.”

“Better bring it up before they go down,” said Hunt.

Madeleine volunteered to act as guide.

“I will help you find it. I will come down with you.”

“We shall need a light,” said Edward.

He lit two candles from a mantelshelf and gave one to Madeleine, in whose hand it wavered as she led the way to some stone stairs at the end of the hall. They were very close to the German officers in the wash-room. They could hear them talking and laughing. There was the splash of water in the basins and one of them was singing.

Edward stumbled for a moment on the stone steps leading down to the cellars and Madeleine whispered an exclamation of fear.

Hunt followed by the light of their candles which seemed lost in the darkness when they went further down.

It was cold and dark down there in the cellar and there was a smell of dampness and mildew.

“We shall need a dozen bottles at least,” said Hambledon. He found the wine bins and took out the bottles. It was Burgundy of an old vintage by the feel of the cobwebs round them.

Madeleine called out in a low voice “Armand! . . . Armand! . . .”

A door creaked and opened an inch and then wider. Armand de Rollencourt came through the door.

“What has happened?” he asked. “Why have you come down here?”

It was Madeleine who explained in a whispered conversation.

“I must get out of uniform,” said Armand presently. “Madeleine, you will find some old suits of mine in the wardrobe in my room upstairs. Bring me down the oldest you can find.”

“Where is the English captain?” asked Hunt.

Armand pointed to the other door.

“I’ve hidden him under some straw. His leg hurts him horribly, I fear.”

“I will go up with the wine,” said Hambledon.

“Come on, Hunt. We must get some glasses.”

They reached the salon again before the officers had finished washing, but only a second or two before.

They came striding across the hall in their heavy boots and entered the salon when the two Americans were arranging the glasses on one of the tables. They looked younger and fresher now that they had cleaned themselves up. It was Graf von Eupen who first saw the bottles of wine.

“This is admirable,” he said. “A thousand thanks.”

He turned and spoke in German to his brother officers, who laughed. Some of them sat down on the gilt-backed chairs and lit cigars and cigarettes.

“We will leave you now,” said Edward. “My friend and I will get some sleep.”

“By all means,” answered the Panzer officer. “We will try not to disturb you.”

But it was three hours past midnight before there was any quietude in the salon. Edward Hambledon, sitting on a chest in a bedroom upstairs, listened to their laughter and noise. Every now and then they sang German soldier songs, harmonizing them rather well. One of them kept making a speech, interrupted by loud laughter and shouts. Once a table crashed over and there was a sound of breaking glass. Some of them were getting drunk on good French wine. The salon door opened now and then and one of the German officers strode across the hall to the wash-place, his heavy boots thumping across the stone-flagged floor. A reek of cigars came up to the bedrooms.

In a room near to the one where Edward sat listening intently there was the sound of a woman weeping incessantly.

Edward sat in darkness except for a glimmer through the windows. Once there was a tap at the door which startled him.

“Who is there?” he asked sharply.

He thought it might be one of those drunken boys searching for a bed. But it was Madeleine Delaroché. She stood inside his door, shading a candle with her hand.

“I want to get some clothes for Armand,” she said.

Through the open door, which afterwards she closed very quietly, there came the sound of that weeping, mingled with the laughter and singing of the Germans downstairs.

“Odette weeps her heart out for the dead child,” said Madeleine.

With Edward’s help she found a suit of clothes for Armand and one of his shirts.

“If I meet one of those *Boches*,” she said, “it will be abominable. He will want to know why I am carrying a civilian suit. I must creep down while they are still drinking.”

She crept down presently. Hambledon stood at his door watching and listening. He saw her puff out the candle beginning to light up the hall which she crossed like a ghost. Suddenly one of the Germans left the salon again. Madeleine was standing motionless in the darkness at the top of the cellar steps.

In the next room Odette was moaning.

Dawn came with the first gleam of light through the bedroom windows. It was the end of a strange night in the life of an American.

## X

EDWARD HAMBLEDON did some thinking in that bedroom before and after the approach of dawn. Part of his thinking went across the Atlantic to his home in Massachusetts. They would be wondering what was happening to him—his father and mother, and his sister Penny (short for Penelope) and his brother Tiny, so-called because he stood six-foot-two in his socks. Edward hadn’t written for nearly a couple of months, being a bad letter-writer, but he had had a cable from his father saying: “Better come home.” Penny’s last scrawl, written in a train, had told him that the family had gone back to Lakeside Farm after the winter in Boston. She was looking forward to some riding again and heaps of bathing. Mother was busy, as usual, with lots of committees, and had been attending a course of lectures on the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner, which seemed to give her much inward satisfaction, though Penny herself couldn’t make head or tail of it. Father

was worrying over the world situation which he didn't seem to like, and they were all shocked by the horrors in Poland and Holland. Tiny had announced at breakfast that he was a complete pacifist and isolationist, and she had pulled his hair at talking such nonsense so early in the morning. The Arkwrights were giving a dance for Susan's twenty-first birthday. The silver birches in the woods round Lakeside Farm were clothed in green again. The men were mowing the golf-course, which looked fine. In a postscript she added casually that she had become engaged, but not very seriously, to Spike Brandon.

That letter in a girl's scrawl had come into his mind in Armand de Rollencourt's bedroom while a young mother was weeping and moaning in a room nearby, and when German officers were drinking downstairs and singing old soldier songs in a château of France.

The silver birches. . . . It was curious that his mind should travel as far as those woods with bare rocks jutting out of the soil by Assawampsett Lake three thousand miles away from this bedroom. His father had bought the place for a wad of dollars when they were kids. They had had a grand time there, growing up, and having great adventures during holidays from the town house in Boston. Afterwards at Harvard he had been a half-baked intellectual writing bad poetry, a devotee of T. S. Eliot and other modernists. He had fallen in love with beauty and made a religion of it. He had been scornful of the vulgar herd, as he called the ordinary folk about him. He had hated ugliness, and cruelty, and dollar-hunters, and loud-mouthed politicians, and patriotic boloney. He had abhorred the idea of war and had been all for Chamberlain's policy of appeasement and his trips to Munich. Funny, all that! Now he had been caught up in the tide of World War II. He had dug a grave for a little French corpse. He had stood by the graveside of a French General buried in his own park. Downstairs were German officers getting drunk. A bit of a contrast to family life in Massachusetts and peace in the U.S.A.!

His mind jerked back from this day-dream to the realities of his present situation. He was mixed up with a strange bunch of refugees from terror. He admired the spirit of that girl Madeleine. She had almost killed that German officer by the look in her eyes. That wounded Englishman was a good type, with charming manners and a good humour in spite of pain. Armand de Rollencourt was also a good type in his own line, but without the English sense of humour. Anyhow, he couldn't be humorous with Germans in his family château and his father not yet cold in his grave.

Then there was Jean Meudon, the taxi-driver, and that poor girl Odette. He couldn't let them down. He would have to see them through this episode,

and help to find a way of escape for them. That wouldn't be easy as far as Armand and the English captain were concerned.

Hunt came into his room when dawn was breaking. He had found a bed elsewhere but said he hadn't slept a wink.

"What's the set-up downstairs?" asked Hambledon.

"The Germans are asleep," answered Hunt. "We had better get busy before they wake up."

Edward nodded.

"That's my idea. What about the French lieutenant and the English captain? Do you think they can make a get-away?"

This question was answered by Armand de Rollencourt. He came into the room stealthily and closed the door with careful quietude.

"Gentlemen," he said, "there is no time to waste. We must get away now. It is, at least, necessary for me and the English officer who is an escaped prisoner of war. Our only chance is dependent upon your kindness again. If you will take us as far as Paris in your taxi-cab. . . ."

It was impossible to take them as far as Paris in the taxi-cab. That was made plain by Jean Meudon when he came down into the cellar, where a rendezvous had been arranged.

"We are completely in the basket," he said gruffly. "These swine have taken my petrol. I have just met one of the German 'non.-coms.'. He is up already and prowling about. When he saw me looking at my cab he laughed and said something in his barbarous speech which sounds like the gibbering of an orang-outang. He laughed again when I swore at him and showed me his revolver. It was a hint which I did not ignore. For my poor Odette's sake I wish to keep alive."

Armand de Rollencourt was speechless for a moment. He raised his hands with a gesture of despair.

"That makes it very difficult."

Presently the wounded English officer staggered up from a pile of straw on which he had been lying.

"You must go without me," he said. "I'm a handicap. I will crawl into the woods and do the best I can."

"No, no," said Armand, hastily. "We are comrades. We will not abandon you, my friend."

"I doubt whether I can walk more than a few yards," said Captain Hardy. "You must look after yourselves. I hate making a nuisance of myself. In fact I refuse to do so, and I'm an obstinate fellow!"

Armand shook his head.

“There is only one thing to do. We must join the crowd of refugees on the roads. We shall be lost among them. We will put you on one of their farmcarts. But we must get away before the *réveillé*; that is to say, before another half-hour has passed.”

“There is already a German pig prowling about,” he was reminded by Jean Meudon. “And the sentries are all round the tanks and at the gates.”

“We will take a field path through the park,” said Armand. “Jean Meudon, you will fetch your daughter. You agree to this plan, gentlemen?”

He looked at Hambledon and Hunt, who agreed. There was no other way than walking, now that the taxi-cab was out of action.

Jean Meudon was gloomy.

“I regret leaving my cab. It is a humiliation and an outrage. It belonged to me, this taxi-cab. It has been part of my life.”

There were tears in his eyes. It was as though he were parting from a woman he loved.

“*C'est la guerre*,” said Armand de Rollencourt, putting a hand on his shoulder for a moment.

In the pale light of dawn there was a strange little procession along a field path which led away from the Château de Rollencourt through its park. They had left the château by a back way through some outhouses and the dairy, and then across an open paddock screened by poplar trees. The four men—Armand and Jean Meudon, Hambledon and Hunt—took turns in carrying Captain Hardy on a hurdle which they used as a stretcher. Madeleine Delaroche walked with Odette, who looked desperately ill after her tragic night, but walked with courage.

A bugle rang out in the park. It was the *réveillé* to the German Panzer unit.

Birds were twittering in the bushes. The grass was wet with dew and spangled with the silver and gold of wild flowers. The sun was rising in a glory of pale gold.

Armand de Rollencourt looked back at the old château when he reached an iron gate leading on to a winding road.

“The house of my family!” he exclaimed in a tragic voice. “In the hands of the enemy!”

Hambledon tried to be of comfort.

“One day you will go back. Life always moves in circles.”

“Not always,” answered Armand. “There is death.”

Half a mile down the road they came in touch with another column of refugees. They joined them and walked with them when Captain Hardy had been lifted on to one of the farmcarts, after some whispered words to a sturdy old man who owned it.

“An English officer. An escaped prisoner of war. You will take the risk?”

“Willingly. It is a question of honour, is it not?”

It was a long way to Paris.

## XI

THIS walk to Paris was not amusing, but for Edward Hambledon an experience worth having, perhaps, because it brought him nearer to the French people in their suffering and in their courage. These old men and women, these young mothers and children—with a few young men among them who had not been called up for military service because they were producing food from the soil—were footsore and dirty, and apprehensive of the unknown future and the immediate present, but they were marvellously patient, on the whole, with a quiet resignation and fortitude.

Hambledon moved about among them, trying to be helpful to some of those who needed help.

“Hang on to my arm, madame,” he said to an elderly woman who looked exhausted.

“My spirit is strong, but my old feet are weak,” she told him.

“Can’t you get a place on one of these farmcarts?” he asked her.

She shook her head.

“They are for the old women—poor old grandmothers—and for young mothers with their babes. One of them is my daughter. She has a child only three weeks old.”

She spoke to him about the war.

“God asked too much of us. We suffered too much last time. My man was killed on the Somme in ’17, and three of my brothers elsewhere. One of them at Souchez in ’15. He was a young one. Another at Verdun, where so many died. Another on the Chemin des Dames.”

She looked up at Hambledon while she clung to his arm.

“You are English?”

“American.”

“American? You arrived late last time. Two years late.”

“We came in at the end,” answered Edward. “It will be the same this time.”

“You will have to come in,” said the elderly woman, who spoke in good French with only a touch of dialect. “This is a war against the Devil and his spirit of evil threatening the soul of humanity. The Americans are against that, from what I have heard. They must come in one day.”

They camped by the wayside several times a day and those who had brought food with them, on the carts or on wheelbarrows, or in bags strapped to their backs, shared it with others less provided. They shared it with Hambledon and his companions.

“A little wine, *M’sieur l’Americain?*” asked one old fellow. “It is not bad. It was in my cellar for the last ten years.”

He poured out a mugful for Edward and held it out in his skinny hand.

“Drink to the death of Hitler,” he said, with an old man’s cackle of laughter. “That bandit. That assassin. That invader of other people’s countries.”

Edward took one sip and then, when the old man was not looking, carried it over to the cart where Captain Hardy was lying on a bundle of mattresses. Edward climbed on to one of the shafts and handed him the mug of wine.

“This will make you feel good,” he said. “Strong peasant wine.”

“Devilish good of you, old man,” said Captain Hardy. “I’m as thirsty as a brick-kiln. Think I must have been a bit feverish. I found myself singing nursery rhymes. ‘Three Blind Mice’ and ‘Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush.’”

A young woman, sitting with her back to a wheel of the cart, spoke to Edward about him.

“Your English friend will get into trouble if the Germans catch up with us. He has been talking incessantly in his own tongue and singing funny little songs in a loud voice. They tell me he has escaped from the *Boches* after fighting in Dieppe. Is that true?”

“Quite true,” answered Edward; “but not a story to tell everyone.”

The girl laughed and shook her head.

“We shan’t give him away. We are not friends of Herr Hitler. Come and sit down and eat some of this bread and ham. You look as if you need it.”

Edward needed it. He was as hungry as a tiger, having had no breakfast. But he hated to take the food of these refugees.



“Can you spare a small piece,” he asked. “It’s very generous of you.”

“No, it isn’t generous,” the girl contradicted him quickly. “We are not selfish pigs, you know. We are glad to share with our fellow-travellers. Perhaps there are some who hide their stuff. That’s because of their fear of the future and because human nature is not angelic, especially among peasants.”

Obviously she was not of peasant stock. She was neatly dressed in a black frock, cut low so that it showed her white neck round which was a string of sham pearls. She had been riding a bicycle which now lay on the grass close by.

“I was a schoolmistress in Dieppe,” she told him. “I forget whether that was a month ago or a hundred years.”

“I guess it wasn’t a hundred years,” answered Edward, munching a ham sandwich of considerable size and quality. “At least, you have not aged very much if it is as long as that.”

She turned her head sideways and smiled at him.

“Thank you for the compliment, Mr. Englishman.”

He did not trouble to tell her that he was an American.

“Where are you going now?” he asked. “What’s your plan for the future?”

She raised both hands, long thin hands, as he noticed with an artist’s eye.

“The future? That is all in darkness. Perhaps, in trying to escape, we are walking towards death. The Germans will swarm everywhere, like vermin, if France has to surrender.”

“France hasn’t surrendered yet,” said Edward.

“We do not deceive ourselves,” she told him. “Even these peasants do not deceive themselves. We know that our armies were betrayed, even before this war began. Not enough tanks, not enough aeroplanes, not enough anything. We cannot stand against the weight of Hitler’s fury. Is not that the truth?”

“I’m afraid so.”

“I go to Tours to find my mother and father,” she told him. “From Paris it may still be possible to get to Tours. But unless I find my sister in Paris, which is unlikely, I shall not have enough money to go to Tours. That would create a serious situation.”

She gave a little uneasy laugh at the prospect of this situation.

“Very unpleasant,” agreed Edward.

Presently, after a further talk with her, he put his hand to his breast-pocket and drew out a black note-case.

“Would you allow me to give you the fare to Tours?” he asked. “In return for your ham sandwich, which was worth far more than that.”

She looked at him sharply.

“Are you serious? Why should you give me this money?”

He answered her lightly.

“Just because I should hate you to get into that serious situation.”

She looked displeased and suspicious.

“It is my affair,” she told him. “Thank you, all the same.”

He laughed at her proud refusal of his offer.

“What’s the good of money unless one is helpful?” he asked.

She looked at him curiously as though he were something very unusual as a specimen of humanity.

“You must be very rich,” she said. “Are you a millionaire or a saint?”

“Neither,” he answered with another laugh. “But I have a bit of spare cash now and then. Just now I can spare enough to pay your fare to Tours, and save you from what may be a very unpleasant experience. Alone in Paris with the Germans arriving. Not amusing, *mademoiselle!*”

She agreed that it would not be amusing, but she refused to accept his offer unless he would take from her a little silver watch which she wore on her wrist.

“It goes now and again,” she told him. “At the moment it is not going, but it will go if you sleep with it under your pillow—when you have a pillow.”

It was a cheap little watch, but Hambleton accepted the exchange.

“I’ll keep it as a souvenir,” he said. “Here’s the fare to Tours.”

“No!” she cried with a vexed laugh. “It is five times the fare.”

“You will need a little extra for food and so on. Besides, this is a very valuable little watch. It’s worth an awful lot.”

“A hundred and fifty francs when it was new,” she assured him with strict honesty. She accepted that amount and then thanked him.

“Doubtless you are a millionaire and a saint,” she said. “The combination is excellent. In any case, a thousand thanks.”

She waved an *au revoir* to him when the column of refugees moved on again—the long-moving tide of carts and tired homeless people who had

abandoned everything except a few belongings rather than live under German rule.

Some of the children who walked by their mothers were whimpering because of their weary little feet, though others trudged along sturdily. Edward relieved one of the mothers of a small boy whom she had been carrying pick-a-back, and hoisted him on his shoulder and strode along with him to the next stage. After that he carried a little girl who fell asleep on his shoulder.

“You are very kind,” said Madeleine Delaroché, walking beside him for a while. “Armand and I are grateful to you for this kindness to our poor refugees. They talk among themselves about you. They say that American is a good friend of France. We shall not forget him.”

“I’m a friend of France all right,” answered Edward with a sideways smile at this girl whose courage he admired. She was taking this long tramp bravely and spoke cheerfully to the peasants about her, making little jokes to keep up their spirit.

“I’ve lost sight of my fellow-American,” said Edward presently. “What’s happened to him?”

“He’s leading an old farmhouse which doesn’t want to go a step farther.”

At night they bivouacked in fields along the roadside. Here and there a lantern gleamed through the translucent darkness of this night in early summer. It was warm and the air was scented with wild flowers and haystacks. The villages through which they had passed were all deserted except for a few old women who peered through their doorways and lean cats which prowled about the feet of the passers-by.

On the third night they were only ten kilometres from Paris. This fact dominated the thoughts of Chas Hunt who was burning to get back.

“Paris tomorrow!” he exclaimed. “Jeepers Creepers! It seems a year since we left it.”

“What then?” asked Madeleine, who understood his English, or some of it, though she spoke in French.

The party which had set out from the Château de Rollencourt had reassembled on a patch of grass by the roadside. Captain Hardy seemed in less pain after his rest on the farmcart, from which he had been helped down by Edward for a picnic meal with the others provided by the refugees. Jean Meudon had joined them with his daughter. Armand sat on the grass with his knees up and Madeleine leaned against him, using his knees for a back.

Hardy answered her with a laugh.

“A difficult question for some of us! I shall have to get some expert to look at my leg before I go much farther.”

“I must get as far as a farm near Tours,” said Armand. “My family is certainly there. My cousin Madeleine will come with me.”

He hesitated for a moment and gave an invitation.

“My family would be glad to shelter you, *mon capitaine*, until there is a chance of escape.”

Hardy look at him doubtfully.

“I couldn’t put them to such a risk,” he said; “but it is a noble offer.”

“It is meant seriously,” said Armand.

“And it is an excellent idea,” added Madeleine, with a friendly smile at this English officer, who was not particularly attractive at that time with his unshaven face and rough clothes.

Later that evening, after their meal, Armand and Madeleine wandered away to talk to some of the refugees. Chas Hunt went to sit with a family group with whom he had made friends, and by some magic of his own made them laugh now and then. Odette was nursing a sleeping child and perhaps found some unconscious consolation for the loss of her own babe. Her father had gone off to talk with a friend he had found among the others. Hambledon was along with Christopher Hardy on the patch of grass where they had had their meal. He heard Hardy give a slight groan after he had lain for some time with his eyes shut.

“Leg hurting?” asked Edward.

Hardy sat up and laughed uneasily.

“Unpleasant thoughts,” he answered.

“Secret ones?”

Hardy shook his head and smiled.

“Nothing like that. No bite of conscience or pang of love. I’ve been thinking of what’s going to happen to England. What’s going to happen to my father and mother who live in South Kensington. What’s going to happen in the sunny fields of Kent if Hitler sends his hordes that way. I wish to God I knew what was happening, and what’s going to happen.”

“Can’t England take care of herself?” asked Edward. “Haven’t you command of the sea? Isn’t that good enough for your historic little island?”

Captain Hardy looked at him gravely though with a gleam of humour.

“My historic little island,” he answered, “has lost that security which gave us a great advantage since William the Conqueror and 1066. The aeroplane has changed all that. From the French coast, where the Germans

are now crouched ready for the next spring, I reckon it's about seven and a half minutes by air to the cliffs of Dover, and the Germans have swarms of planes against which we can put up only a small air force of brave boys with wings on their breasts, all of whom, no doubt, will die like little gentlemen."

He seemed to be speaking to himself when he uttered his next words.

"I wonder if those fellows got away. I don't see how they could get away."

"What fellows?" asked Hambleton.

Hardy raised his hand slightly and answered gloomily.

"The B.E.F. . . . Nine divisions of our best, hoofing it to Dunkirk while we were trying to hold the Germans away from the last line of escape. They are all we have in trained men. We have no other guns than theirs, no other tanks—and a pretty poor lot they were!—no other rifles and no other ammunition. If they haven't got away from Dunkirk—and where are the ships coming from?—there will be only untrained men standing on the coast-line of England and Scotland with sticks and stones to keep back the greatest military-power in the world."

Hambleton raised his eyebrows.

"I didn't know it was as bad as that. Why did you go to war when you were so weak? I thought the British Empire was the mightiest combination on earth."

Hardy laughed again, but mirthlessly.

"Our statesmen put up a colossal bluff," he said. "Behind our façade of Empire we are weak and rotten. We guaranteed Poland and Roumania without strength enough to guarantee the beach at Brighton or the pier at Bournemouth. We had no army. We had let down the navy. Our Labour laddies in the House of Commons had for years preached pacifism until they shouted that we must stand up to the dictators. Old man Chamberlain—the man with the umbrella—made an eleventh hour attempt to prevent this war, and then weakened to the pressure from Left and Right, and declared war with nothing to fight it with, except nine divisions against the German two hundred and fifty for a start. Then our dear old generals, with last war's mentality and the unshaken belief that nine British divisions could get the German army on the run, put their whole bag of tricks—including all our pretty little guns and all our inefficient tanks, and all our brave boys—into a man-trap whose jaws were very strong and sharp. By what madness we were sent into Belgium God alone knows. Did we think the *brave Belges* could hold back the whole German army? Did we think a few French divisions up there could stand against the massed metal of those German robots? The

inevitable happened, as I knew it would, not being a mental defective. Now we're in the soup. For the first time since the Norman Conquest our historic little island, as you call it so truly, is in danger of defeat, destruction and enslavement. Nothing can stop that except a miracle of God, and at the moment God seems to be pro-German."

Hambleton uttered the word "Gee!" and then spoke again. "I'm hoping for a miracle. I don't know England, but I do know what it has given to the world in law and liberty and inexhaustible genius. I wouldn't like to see it go under. No sir!"

Hardy grinned at him.

"Thanks for those kind words," he said. "It's nice of an American to say them."

"Many Americans think the same," said Hambleton.

Hardy was silent and Hambleton watched his face—a clean-cut, young-looking face, in spite of its growth of beard. He sat with his hands drooping between his knees. Suddenly he raised his head and looked at Edward with an intense inner light in his blue eyes.

"Somehow I must get back to England," he said. "Whatever the risk, I must get back. I want to be with my own people. I want to die with them, if we have to die—in South Kensington or the Brompton road."

Armand and Madeleine came back. Chas Hunt slouched over from his family party by the wheels of a farmcart.

"Time we turned in," he said, yawning. "I'm dog-tired. I'll say I am."

Madeleine Delaroche was staring up at the sky and listening to a droning noise up there.

"They are coming again!" she said in a low voice. "Those black demons."

Darkness was creeping into the sky after a long and beautiful twilight and a golden sunset which had flung long shadows across the fields from the tall poplars bordering them. Stars were twinkling and a sickle moon was up. Seven black birds were visible up there. They made a wide circle and then dropped like hawks above a village less than half a kilometre away through which the refugees had passed. The camp, which had been settling down to sleep, suddenly stirred like an ant heap overturned by a spade. A woman shrieked as the first bomb fell on a little deserted village. There were cries of terror, and some of the refugees started running and threw themselves upon the earth. Only a few bombs were dropped before the black bats passed and there was quietude again.

“What is the use of it?” asked Hunt. “What do they think they gain by smashing a small hamlet whose people have fled?”

“It is a policy of terror,” answered Armand. “It has no military purpose. It is to destroy civilian morale.”

From the groups of refugees came shouts and curses. Children were crying. Elderly men held the heads of horses who had been frightened and were restless in their shafts.

“Assassins! . . . Bandits! . . . Killers of women and little ones!”

Presently they slept under the stars.

## XII

THE main column of refugees did not enter Paris but took to the roads going south. Before parting with them there were handclasps and cries of “Bonne chance, comrades!”

“Poor devils!” said Chas Hunt. “What’s going to happen to them? I guess that’s an unanswerable question. God alone knows.”

A small group trudged into Paris. Among them were the two Americans, Armand and Madeleine, Jean Meudon with his daughter Odette, and Captain Christopher Hardy, escaped prisoner of war, who dragged one leg but found it less painful after his rest on the farmcart.

Jean Meudon and Odette said farewell at the end of the rue Lafayette.

Meudon grasped Hambledon’s hand first and spoke a few words of thanks.

“You dug the little one’s grave,” he said. “We shall never forget that kindness, *m’sieur*.”

Odette wept a little on parting. It seemed to bring back her agony of grief for the dead child. She kissed Madeleine and then turned away sobbing.

Chas Hunt was the next to break away. This was near the Place de l’Opéra where they had sat down outside the Café de la Paix. The men were unshaven and unwashed, and plastered with dust. Edward glanced at his companions who looked like typical refugees, and he felt the stubble on his own chin. Often he had sat here with parties of Americans, drinking cocktails and watching the passing traffic of Parisian life. Here he had sat with Olga during his time of passion for her. She had smoked Russian

cigarettes over her cup of coffee and had teased him because of his American accent. Now, here he was, feeling as dirty as he looked, in a Paris awaiting the entry of its enemy. It was more deserted since he had left it. Few people passed, and none stopped to sit outside the Café de la Paix. Chas Hunt hailed a taxi-cab which was passing slowly and kept it waiting by the kerbstone while he said good-bye.

“I guess we’ll meet again,” he said in a casual way. “I must go and collect the latest news. Thanks a lot, Rollencourt. See you soon, Edward.”

He raised a hand in salute, climbed into the cab, and was driven away to his newspaper office, not knowing whether it still functioned in a city which seemed dead.

The Café de la Paix still served coffee, for which Edward paid.

He spoke to the waiter who flicked his napkin over the table.

“What’s the news?”

The waiter who, was an elderly, sad-eyed man, shrugged his shoulders slightly.

“Nothing good! The Germans are across the Seine. Everybody has left Paris. Everybody who can. Even the prostitutes and the good-for-nothings.”

“What about the English?” asked Hardy. “Are they still at Dunkirk?”

The waiter stared at him for a moment and then answered gruffly:

“They got away. The English are very good at getting away and leaving other people in the lurch.”

Hardy ignored this insult.

“By the Lord,” he said, speaking to Edward, “if they got away it was a miracle.”

It was only later that he heard of the miracle of the little ships—the old packet-boats and pleasure-yachts, and river steamers and every kind of craft, which had gone over to Dunkirk sands to take off those masses of men waiting patiently for their turn while German bombers flew overhead dropping high explosives in the sand dunes.

“It will be England’s turn next,” said the waiter grimly. “After the Germans have finished with us! . . .”

There were four people left at the little table outside the Café de la Paix. They were Edward, Armand de Rollencourt, Madeleine Delaroche and Kit Hardy, as Edward called him later.

“What are your plans?” asked Edward presently. “What can I do for you, if anything?”



“It is possible that there is still a train running to Tours,” answered Armand. “After a little rest, Madeleine and I will try to get there somehow.”

“And you?” asked Edward, looking at Hardy.

Hardy answered cheerfully but doubtfully:

“My problem is a bit difficult. I shall have to lie doggo. If the Germans march into Paris tonight it won’t be too easy to get away. The fact is, my leg is very troublesome.”

“I have a perfectly good car,” said Edward. “It might help things if I drove you all down to Tours.”

“That sounds like a miracle!” exclaimed Madeleine.

“It would save a great deal of fatigue,” said Armand, in his formal way.

“That’s fine,” said Edward. “We’ll do the trip together.”

Suddenly he rose from his chair and said: “Excuse me a moment.”

A friend of his was passing the Café de la Paix. It was William Ryan Smart of the American Embassy.

“Hullo, Bill!” shouted Hambleton.

Smart turned sharply and stared at him.

“Gosh!” he exclaimed. “You look like a refugee, and a lousy one at that.”

“It’s exactly what I am,” said Edward. “But I’m going to have a bath and a shave. When are the Germans expected?”

“Within a few hours,” answered Smart. “I’ve been left behind to clear up the mess.”

After other remarks he remembered something.

“By the way, I was able to help your Jew friend, Paul Simon. He has all the necessary papers.”

“Thanks a lot!” Hambleton was grateful for the service.

“Olga is going with him,” said Smart. “They were married in a hurry. She did it for the sake of that anæmic Jew who said he wouldn’t go without her. I gave them the tip and fixed it up. One of my little miracles!”

“Holy snakes!” exclaimed Edward, very much startled.

For a moment he felt stricken because Olga had married Paul Simon. But his life had become like a dream anyhow, a kind of waking nightmare in which there was no touch with the realities.

“Rapid work!” he said, after that moment of shock.

“I’ll say it was a good idea. A great brain behind it.”

William Ryan Smart nodded.

“Not much time to spare, old boy! See you later, maybe. I shouldn’t advise you to stay in Paris.”

He raised his hand and strode away—a young man in a hurry.

Hambledon returned to his companions.

“Better come to my studio,” he said. “We mustn’t get separated. We can all shake down and get a wash there and perhaps something to eat if I open a few cans.”

He picked up another taxi-cab and drove to the Boulevard St. Germain, 27 bis, with his three newly-found friends who needed his help and were glad to have it.

### XIII

IT was impossible for Hambledon to leave Paris. Hardy was suffering intense pain because of his wound and that evening became delirious again.

“It’s a bad business,” said Edward. “I’ll have to get a doctor—if that’s possible.”

Hardy was lying on Edward’s bed and spoke rambling words after flinging one arm over the bedside.

“It’s all right, mother. . . . I shall come back all right. . . . I have a hunch about it. . . . I’m going to live to a ripe old age with my children and children’s children. . . . Now, for goodness’ sake, don’t cry.”

“Impossible to move him in this state,” said Edward.

Armand and Madeleine were distressed. After some hesitation Armand decided that it would be best for them to take a train to Tours if that were still possible.

“No, no!” cried Madeleine. “It would be a dishonour. The English captain is our comrade. He has fought in France. He is an escaped prisoner of war. How can we leave him?”

“I also am in danger of becoming a prisoner of war,” answered Armand. But he turned doubtfully to Hambledon and asked his advice.

“What do you think, my friend? Should we be dishonourable in trying to get to Tours? We would await you there.”

“That’s common sense,” answered Edward. “It may be days before the captain is well enough to move.”

Madeleine yielded reluctantly, and that evening Armand and his cousin took their chance of getting places on a train to Tours.

Before going Armand spoke some emotional words to Edward.

“I look forward to seeing you again, my dear friend, if you will allow me to call you that. My heart is full of gratitude for your noble kindness and your splendid comradeship.”

Hambledon laughed at this high praise and coloured up a little.

“I have done nothing, *mon lieutenant*.”

Armand gripped his arms with both hands.

“You have done everything! Madeleine and I watched you with the refugees—with the old people and the little children. You were wonderful in your help and sympathy. You carried that crippled boy for many kilometres. You encouraged the young mothers. You made them even laugh. And to me you rendered a service which I shall never forget. You helped to carry my father to his grave. When the Germans came it was your coolness and courage which dealt with them. Madeleine and I thank you in the name of France.”

Hambledon was embarrassed by all this and refused to take it seriously.

“My dear fellow, you make me blush. I behaved like any decent American, I hope.”

“We owe much to you,” said Madeleine, simply. Simply, also, she gave him her cheek to kiss.

“We are friends,” she told him. “In a short time it is possible to make a great friendship, is it not?”

She went over to Christopher Hardy and put her hand on his forehead.

“He has a high temperature,” she said. “I am full of pity for him.”

Hambledon was left alone with the sick man. He was talking to himself again.

“One can’t dodge these things in time of war. . . . Old Man Death has no pity for the young uns. . . . It’s damn funny really when you come to think of it. . . . Play cricket one day. . . . Blue hell the next. . . . It makes me laugh.”

He laughed quietly to himself in a queer, happy way, as though it were a good joke.

He spoke in what Edward imagined to be the Oxford accent, sounding a little affected to his American ear, though there could be no affectation in this delirious speech. Much of what he babbled was incomprehensible, but parts of it seemed to be addressed to his men in the recent fighting.

“We’ve got to stick it, you fellows. . . . We’ve got to hold on while the way is still open to Dunkirk. . . . Our lives won’t be wasted if we can keep that way open for the other crowd. . . . All that’s left to defend our homes . . . and our own women . . . Sergeant! For God’s sake tell the men to stick it out. Never mind the dead. . . . Give the Jerries hell.”

After that outburst he spoke more quietly and laughed again.

“My idea of paradise is fishing in a trout stream. Throw your fly, Peter. Artful beggars, aren’t they? See that fellow in the shadow of the tree? Oh very wily, indeed.”

He laughed again with great good humour.

“That guy is in a bad way,” said Hambledon to himself. “I’ll say he is!”

He spent a lot of time looking up doctors in the telephone directory and then trying to get an answer from them.

Now and again a frightened voice answered, probably the concierge or some servant.

“Who is that?”

“Is the doctor at home?”

“There is no one here. Doctor Martin has left Paris.”

“Hell,” said Edward in perfectly good American.

At last he found one. It was Dr. Longeau in the Avenue des Champs-Élysées. He spoke abruptly.

“Why do you want me? Is it serious?”

“Very serious,” answered Hambledon. “A question of life or death.”

“I’m just about to leave Paris,” said the doctor. He hesitated for a moment, and then said: “I will come at once.”

He was a young man, very grave and nervous because of the state of Paris and his own private anxieties.

When he saw Christopher Hardy and heard his delirious talk he guessed at once that he was a British officer.

“An escaped prisoner of war?” he asked.

Edward nodded. “I’m telling you that in confidence, Doctor.”

The doctor looked at him sombrely.

“It is very dangerous to hide a prisoner of war. You also are English?”

“American.”

“I do not want to get into more trouble than I have already,” said the doctor. “I wish to get away before the Germans come.”

Hambledon looked him squarely in the eyes.

“You are a doctor. You know your duty.”

Dr. Longeau was not too pleased at this reminder.

“You ask me to take a grave risk, *m’sieur*.”

He decided to take the risk after glancing at his wrist-watch, and felt Hardy’s pulse and put his hand into this officer’s shirt to feel the beat of his heart.

“He has a wound in the leg,” said Edward.

“I shall have to cut away his trouser. Lend me a knife or a pair of scissors.”

After cutting away the cloth he uttered an exclamation of horror.

“This is in a dreadful state. Filthy and neglected.”

Hardy had bandaged himself with strips torn from a khaki shirt, now clotted with blood and sticking to the wound.

“*Cré Nom de Dieu!*” said the doctor in a voice of dismay. “I must do something at least to clean up this mess. Some warm water and linen, if you please.”

Hambledon tore up one of his own shirts and produced the warm water. Hardy groaned heavily when his rags were removed and several times called out the name of Christ.

“It’s all right, old man,” said Edward. “It’s all right.”

“Have you any disinfectant?” asked the doctor. “There is danger here of gangrene. The wound is in a bad state. He ought to be taken to a hospital without delay.”

“That would give him away,” answered Edward. “Can’t you operate here and now?”

“Quite impossible! My clinic is closed. My instruments are packed up. I leave Paris in half an hour.”

But he washed and bandaged the wound, after giving Hardy a morphia injection which relieved his agony.

“That is something. But I advise you to get him to a hospital at the earliest possible moment.”

“How much do I owe you?” asked Edward, when the doctor had washed his hands at the kitchen sink.

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

“It is not a case for a fee. In time of war . . .”

“Thanks a lot,” said Edward.

Hardy lay in a stupefied sleep for several hours. When he awakened he seemed more at ease and was no longer delirious.

He stared at Edward who was standing by his bedside.

“I seem to know your face,” he said, “but I can’t place it. . . . Oh yes. I remember. . . . The road to Paris . . . the refugees. . . . I say, I’m afraid I’m giving you a hell of a lot of trouble, old man.”

It was next morning that the Germans entered Paris.

#### XIV

HAMBLEDON stood by the side of Chas Hunt and two or three other American newspaper men outside the Hôtel Crillon in the Place de la Concorde. He had left Hardy alone in his studio, still under the effect of morphia and sleeping quietly. Hunt had given him a telephone call and said: “They’re coming. . . . They’re already in the outskirts. . . . Meet me outside the Crillon.”

Their coming was heralded by an earth tremor made by armoured cars. Bodies of German motor-cyclists rode ahead. They were followed by the armoured cars, Staff cars, and then by German troops in lorries. With their steel helmets low on the neck they looked a grim legion, inhuman in their expressionless faces, on which there was no exaltation of victory, no sign of curiosity, no gleam of intelligence. They might have been soldiers made of metal.

Few French people were there to see them and to suffer the first agony of their presence in Paris, this humiliation of defeat, this surrender of a city which to all Frenchmen is the centre of civilization.

“They look like a bunch of robots,” said Chas Hunt.

Another newspaper man spoke in a low voice.

“It turns my blood cold.”

Several military cars, long and grey with little pennants fluttering in front and English ‘tin hats’ on their bonnets, stopped outside the Crillon, and a number of high officers jumped out. An Army General with a thin tight-lipped face stood in the centre of a group of officers who saluted and clicked heels to him. He rasped out a few words and strode into the hotel followed by a few others. Those who were left outside suddenly became human and

more easy in their attitude, lighting up cigars and talking to each other. Some of them glanced sideways at the group of American newspaper men, and presently an officer in the black uniform of the S.S. came to them and spoke, after saluting. He spoke in French.

“You are journalists?”

“American newspaper men,” answered Chas Hunt coldly.

The S.S. officer spoke in English and smiled.

“I guessed that. You will have great news for your papers, gentlemen. This is an historic day.”

No one answered him.

“I will not ask to see your passports,” said the officer. “There will be plenty of time for all that later.”

“When the Gestapo arrives?”

It was Hunt who asked this question in an unfriendly voice.

The S.S. officer smiled again.

“They have arrived. Everything is organized, of course. That is our German way. Good day, gentlemen. *Heil* Hitler.”

He turned on his heel and joined the others.

An endless column of tanks and field-guns and armoured cars passed through Paris and flowed, like a stream of metal, up the Avenue des Champs-Élysées. Paris was in the hands of the enemy.

Hunt spoke to Hambledon.

“Come round to the office, Edward. We’ll get some news over the radio. I want to hear what’s happening in England. They must be feeling like hell about it. . . . All my English friends.”

In the newspaper office on the first floor of a building in the Avenue de l’Opéra there was a great clicking of typewriters.

Hunt spoke to one of his colleagues who sat in his shirt-sleeves with a cigar in his mouth, typing rapidly.

“What’s the latest, Johnnie?”

His friend was a young man who might have stepped off the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post*. He shifted his cigar slightly and stopped typing.

“The Germans are smashing through the Champagne. The Reynaud Cabinet is expected to resign and Pétain will take over the Government. It’s a preliminary to asking for peace terms. England is preparing to be invaded. That is to say, the bottom’s falling out of everything. Meanwhile, the

Germans have taken over the Paris radio. I will say those guys don't lose much time."

Hunt turned on the radio in his own room. He switched on to the Paris station, now in German control.

A voice spoke in French with a slight German accent and announced that Herr somebody—Edward did not catch the name—would play a selection from Chopin. He played one of Chopin's melodies.

It was exquisite music, but the two Americans did not find it beautiful.

"It gives me a shiver down the spine," said Hunt.

Edward gave a little laugh.

"Queer people!" he exclaimed. "They like to think they're civilized. They must have put that pianist in an armoured car specially for this stunt. They think out everything in advance. I'll say they do."

Edward rose suddenly.

"I can't stay, Chas. I must get back to my wounded Captain. How am I going to get him out of Paris?"

"If you don't do it damn quick you won't," answered Hunt.

Edward nodded.

"I guess it's tonight or never and he's a very sick man."

He went back to his studio where Hardy still slept.

It was at dawn next morning that Edward set out in his car with Christopher Hardy and took the road to Tours. Hardy had had a restless night but was able to stagger up and get into the car.

"How are you feeling?" asked Edward, when he had helped him on to the back seat.

"Weak on the pins but otherwise all right," answered Hardy cheerfully. "That cup of coffee you made has pulled me together wonderfully. I'm sorry to be such a damn nuisance. Very rough on you, old man; but I'm vastly grateful."

"No need for that," answered Edward. "Have a cigarette."

He tossed Hardy a packet of Camels and said: "If we're challenged you'd better lie doggo and speak your excellent French if any German questions you. I'll say I picked you up on the road among the refugees."

They were challenged at the Porte Maillot.

A harsh voice shouted out "Halt".



A German guard was here and an officer came up to the car and spoke in French.

*“Votre Passeport. . . Votre carte d’identité.”*

“American,” said Edward.

He took out his pocket-book and handed the officer his passport.

The officer examined, it carefully.

“I have no instructions about Americans,” he said. “I will let you pass. Who is that man with you?”

“A poor devil of a refugee,” answered Edward. “I picked him up on the road. He has a bad leg.”

“One cannot deal with the refugees,” said the German officer. “They are like vermin on the roads. The French authorities ought to have stopped them. There is no order in France. One cannot fight a war when all the roads are choked by civilians. May I offer you a cigar?”

He held out his case with a friendly gesture.

“No, thanks,” said Edward, “but I only smoke cigarettes.”

The officer laughed.

“Then you do not smoke.”

He spoke a word or two in German to his men, who made room for the car to pass.

It was a minute or two before Hardy spoke from the back of the car.

“Marvellous,” he said. “I broke into a cold sweat when we were challenged.”

“I’ll say I had an uneasy moment,” answered Edward.

On the road to Tours Hardy was talkative from time to time. His mind was fixed upon England and its state of peril.

“With France out of the war,” he said, “we’re alone, and damned weak.”

“You still have a strip of sea round you,” said Edward. “Britannia rules the waves, doesn’t she?”

“They may come by air,” said Hardy. “Parachutists and airborne troops. God! I wish I could get to England before it happens.”

He spoke of his family. His father was a solicitor. He had won the M.C. in the last war—on the Somme. He was a bit of a pacifist, having been through the last show when all his pals had been killed. He had been a fervent supporter of the League of Nations. All his dreams and ideals had gone down into the mud because of Hitler.

“My mother,” said Hardy presently, “is the best woman in the world.”

“All mothers are,” answered Edward.

Hardy laughed.

“But mine is exceptional. Extraordinarily intelligent. Wonderfully well poised. Never fusses or frets. She has the spirituality of an angel.”

“That’s fine,” answered Edward, with his eye on the road.

“Before I joined up in this war,” said Hardy presently, “I was one of our little idealists. I suppose it was my father’s influence partly. I was all for international co-operation and collective security. That failed, and was shown to be an illusion when we didn’t take drastic action against Mussolini for his attack on Abyssinia. That led Hitler to think he could get away with anything, and Mussolini to come in on his side now that France is collapsing. We have made many ghastly mistakes ever since the last war. Now all hell is let loose, and we share part of the guilt.”

“I have to include my own country,” answered Edward. “We quitted the League of Nations and left the baby on the door-step. Wasn’t that the beginning of failure?”

“I agree,” said Hardy. “It’s good of an American to say so.”

Edward laughed.

“Some Americans are pretty critical of their own Government. I’m one of the critics. I think one cause of World War II was the high tariff wall we put up against European goods. That caused the economic blizzard and German inflation and general poverty. Out of that Hitler arrived. That’s how I read it.”

So they talked on the road to Tours where presently they caught up again with a mass of refugees stretching for miles ahead.

“Now what are we going to do?” asked Edward. “If we hug this road we shall be a week or more on the way to Tours.”

Ahead of them was the usual slow-moving tide of farmcarts, handcarts, wheelbarrows, bicycles, ancient motor-cars, and foot-sloggers. Babies wailed, wheels screeched. Hairy old horses plodded on, led by old men and women and young girls.

“Better take a chance and plunge into the side roads,” said Edward.

He escaped the refugees by turning into narrow country roads which twisted and turned into small French hamlets and sometimes led them into fields and farmyards. The car lurched and bumped on these rough tracks and several times Hardy groaned heavily because of his wound, but laughed courageously when Edward said: “Sorry, captain!”

“Don’t you mind me,” said Hardy. “Every mile you make increases my chance of escape and brings me nearer to England.”

An hour later Edward said “Hell!” with great annoyance. Once again he had driven into a farmyard at the end of a winding lane. An elderly man in a blue béret and labourer’s clothes was astonished to see a powerful car come into his yard. It was as though he thought the Germans had arrived.

“I am making for Tours,” said Edward, in French. “I am trying to avoid the main roads because of the refugees. I am an American. My friend here is English.”

The farmer looked relieved and the suspicious fear left his eyes.

“Everybody is on the way to Tours,” he said. “Hundreds of thousands of refugees. Come into my farmhouse, gentlemen. I still have a little wine and my wife will make some coffee for you.”

It was a good invitation. Both Edward and Hardy were in need of refreshment. The farmer’s wife greeted them in a friendly way, but had tears in her eyes when she spoke of the state of France.

“They will be here soon, those bandits,” she said. “No part of France will escape from them. They will swarm over us like locusts.”

Later she wept a little when she told them that her eldest son had been killed near Sedan and that the other was missing behind the mystery of the war in Champagne from which no news came except the tale of disaster.

“One day,” said Edward, “France will rise again. These black days will pass.”

“Never,” said the farmer. “France is at the end of her history as a great nation. We cannot suffer two wars like this. All our young men are being killed. Our best blood is drained to the dregs.”

There was a girl standing at the back of the kitchen. She cried out angrily.

“Father, how dare you say such things? They are untrue. They are abominable. This gentleman has told you the truth. France will rise again. Nothing can kill the soul of France.”

“Perhaps you are right,” said the farmer. “I speak in the hour of despair. Another glass of wine, *messieurs*?”

They drank another glass of wine, and when they left the farmer shook hands with them and his grip was hard.

“You are friends of France,” he said. “That is enough.”

Into the narrow roads they went again. Edward steered by the sun, taking a southerly course, twisting and turning, and often getting into mere cart-

tracks so that he had to hark back again. Hardy became feverish again and was obviously suffering great pain. But whenever he spoke it was with forced cheerfulness and encouragement to his American friend.

“I’m all right. Carry on, old man. We shall soon be there.”

Soon was an optimistic word. It was not until early the following day, having driven all night, that Edward drove through Tours, where an army of refugees was encamped in the streets. They came to an old place, half farmhouse and half château, ten kilometres or so beyond.

He had been directed to this place by Armand de Rollencourt, who came running down a flight of stone steps as the car drove up.

“You are here!” he cried. “It is wonderful. We had a terrible journey from Paris. Madeleine is now in bed.”

A tall young girl stood at the top of the steps. Edward watched her as she came down. To his painter’s eye she looked like the portrait of herself by Vigée Lebrun.

She held out her hand to Edward when he got out of his seat and stood by the car.

“This is my sister, Lucile,” said Armand.

“My brother has spoken very much about you,” she said. “My mother and I wish to thank you.”

“I have done nothing,” said Edward. “This is my friend, Captain Hardy.”

Hardy had managed to get out of the car with the help of Armand. He looked ill and exhausted, but he pulled off his old *béret* as he took Lucile’s hand.

“I’m afraid I’m a dangerous guest,” he told her in his very good French. “I must get away as soon as possible.”

“Not too soon,” said Lucile. “We are going to nurse you.”

“Then I shall never want to go,” answered Hardy.

Lucile laughed and shook her head.

“Oh, I’m not such a good nurse as all that.”

They both laughed rather shyly.

“My mother is anxious to welcome you,” said Armand.

He led the way into the house and then into a room comfortably furnished with chintz-covered chairs and one or two small tables, with a piano by an open window looking out to a farmyard and, beyond that, to the old roofs of a French village with a little church and market-place, and an old inn called *Le Cheval Blanc*. It was the village of Grancourt Notre-Dame.

In the room was a lady dressed in black. At first sight she looked too young to be the mother of Armand and Lucile, though there were little lines about her eyes and mouth and a few silver threads in her black hair.

“My mother,” said Armand, with a note of tenderness and devotion in his voice.

Madame de Rollencourt held out her hand to Edward—a thin transparent hand which was, he noticed, cold to his touch.

“I am very glad you have come,” she said. “Armand has told me of your great kindness and friendship.”

She guessed, and it was not difficult to guess, that he was the tall young American of whom her son had spoken, and then she turned to Christopher Hardy and greeted him charmingly.

“You are the English officer who escaped. You must rest here and get well. I hope your wound is less painful, *mon capitaine*.”

“Oh, it is not too bad,” answered Hardy. “But I must get away before I bring trouble here.”

“You speak French beautifully,” said Madame de Rollencourt, as though astonished that any English officer should speak French so well. She did not seem to be afraid of any trouble he might bring.

“The enemy is still a long way from Tours. There is a little time for us to think things out. We won’t let them take you again. Somehow we must arrange that.”

“No, indeed!” cried Lucile. “We won’t let you be recaptured, *m’sieur*. You will be safe with us here even if we have to hide you away.”

“Nothing is safe,” said Armand, gloomily. “In a few days they may be here. . . . But we must get our English friend to bed. He looks very ill.”

Christopher Hardy looked very faint. He swayed a little until he grabbed the back of a chintz-covered chair.

“Excuse me,” he said. “I feel rather stupid.”

Edward was quick to hold him and prevent a fall.

“Help me to carry him upstairs,” said Armand. “We must get a doctor instantly.”

“I will take my bicycle,” said Lucile. “I will dash down to Dr. Moineau.”

She went quickly out of the room, while Edward stooped to put his arms round Christopher Hardy who was in a state of collapse.

Armand and Hambleton staggered up some broad stairs to a barely-furnished room, where they laid him down on a four-poster bed.

“The journey was too much for him, maybe,” said Edward. “I’m getting scared.”

Madame de Rollencourt had come into the room noiselessly.

She put her hand on Hardy’s forehead.

“Poor young man!” she said in a low voice. “He has a high fever. We must wait for Dr. Moineau.”

They waited by Hardy’s bedside for Lucile to bring back the doctor.

Hardy was talking to himself incoherently.

It was the first scene in this old farmhouse which afterwards Edward Hambledon came to know with an intimate knowledge, touched by wonderment that by the oddest chance of Fate he should be living here, dangerously, with two women sharing a secret drama with him. He came to know every crack and creak in the floor-boards. He came to know every house in the village, every cobblestone in the market-place, and the path which led to the wood where nightingales sang, and the chalk quarry beyond where he went with Lucile, and the road to Tours, and the ten-acre field where at night, later in history, agents of De Gaulle landed from the sky bringing secret cargoes. He had once belonged to Massachusetts where his family worried about him. Now, during this fantastic and dream-like period of his life, he belonged, body and soul, to this remote hamlet in France, very quiet but not inactive during a World War.

## XV

DR. MOINEAU, who was an old man now retired from a hospital in Tours, took a serious view of Hardy’s leg. Gangrene had set in, he said. The wound had been terribly neglected. The leg would have to come off if the young man’s life was to be saved. He would have to be taken to hospital without delay.

“But, my dear doctor,” said Armand, who was very distressed at this verdict, “if we take him to the hospital we may hand him over to the enemy, who will undoubtedly enter Tours before long. We have not hidden from you that he is an English officer.”

The little old doctor shrugged his shoulders.

“Better for him to be a prisoner of war than a dead man.”

“That is very true,” said Lucile, who was present at this conference in the sitting-room of the old farmhouse, with her mother and Edward. “But it would be better still if he remained alive and free.”

“You ask too much, my dear,” answered the old doctor.

Lucile did not agree with that.

“He might pass as a Frenchman. He speaks excellent French.”

“He must have his papers,” said Armand, doubtfully.

“A French *carte d’identité*. How is that possible?”

It was that question and the answer to it which was the beginning of an organization in which Hambledon found himself deeply involved in course of time. It began in this village of Grancourt Notre-Dame. It spread in an underground way to Tours and other towns. It had many agents, among whom were Lucile de Rollencourt, Madeleine Delaroche, Dr. Moineau, the village priest, and Edward himself.

The little old doctor pushed back the black silk cap which covered his bald head.

“That is not beyond possibility,” he said, with the cunning look of an old peasant.

“Pierre Prunier, who was my gardener and handy-man, died last night from *angina pectoris*, which exempted him from military service. He will not need his *carte d’identité* and other papers. They will not be demanded by St. Peter at the gate of Heaven. St. Peter will say: ‘Pass, Pierre Prunier, good gardener and honest man.’ His *carte d’identité* and other papers will serve very well for this English officer while he is in hospital. If the Boches arrive they will suspect nothing.”

There was a moment’s silence in the room, and then Lucile gave a little laugh.

“Brilliant!” she exclaimed. “It’s a magnificent idea, dear doctor. And it is most convenient that Pierre Prunier died last night.”

“It’s dangerous,” said Armand thoughtfully. “But one must take the risk.”

“My little idea seems to meet with approval,” said the doctor with a chuckle. “So I am not such an old fool after all. Eh?”

It was with the papers of Pierre Prunier that Captain Christopher Hardy was taken that afternoon to the hospital in Tours ten kilometres away. He was taken in a farmcart in which straw had been laid by Edward and Lucile. Dr. Moineau sat in it with the wounded man, who was now unconscious. It would be necessary, he said, to have a word with the house surgeon and the

matron. They were friends of his and he could trust them. It was necessary to trust them and perhaps others like the village *curé* who had known Pierre Prunier. They were good patriots. They would not betray him.

Hambledon stood on the wheel of the cart to take a last look at Christopher Hardy before his leg was amputated. He felt a sense of comradeship with this young fellow whom he had known such a short time. In spite of the wound in his leg, which must have caused him horrible pain, he had been gay and gallant. He had charming manners and was a good type.

That was Lucile's opinion also.

"He is charming, your English officer," she said. "It will be terrible for him to lose a leg."

"Very bad luck," said Edward.

Lucile walked back with him silently to the house until at the gate of the farmyard she turned to him and spoke a few words.

"There is much in that idea of Dr. Moineau," she said thoughtfully. "Dead men's papers. We might extend that plan to others who are trying to escape."

"Are there enough dead men to go round?" asked Edward with a laugh.

He regretted that jest when she answered in tragic words.

"Thousands of our soldiers have been killed. There is no lack of dead in France. You helped to bury my own father."

"Forgive me," said Edward. "I was clumsy."

"No, no!" she exclaimed. "I do not reproach you. I know that you are a friend of France."

"Always," he assured her. "Here's my hand on it, lady."

He was glad to have her hand in his for a moment—a beautiful hand which one day he would like to paint or draw. He liked the look of her standing there in the gateway of the old farmhouse. That was a good background—the old house with its mansard roof and stone walls and mullioned windows. She might have been a lady of France when Du Bellay was writing his sonnets.

Her eyelashes quivered a little and she smiled at him.

"Why do you look at me so intently?" she asked. "Have I straws in my hair after packing up the cart?"

"I'm a painter," he told her. "I would like to do a sketch of you one day, just here at this gate."

A faint colour crept below her skin, and she laughed.



"I have never had my portrait painted. I should dislike to spoil a good canvas."

"You wouldn't," he assured her, "but I might."

A few evenings later a small group of people were in the sitting-room of this old farmhouse in the village of Grancourt Notre-Dame listening to the radio which Armand had switched on to the German-controlled Paris station.

"It is, of course, all lies," he said.

Madeleine Delaroche had come over from Tours on her bicycle and was much distressed to hear that Captain Hardy had had his leg amputated and was in a grave state.

"It is too terrible!" she cried. "He is all that one thinks of the best type of the English officer and gentleman, *sans peur et sans reproche*."

Dr. Moineau had brought the news about Hardy.

"The operation has been successful," he said; "but his condition is not too good. They are anxious about him."

Another visitor had come to spend the evening with Madame de Rollencourt. It was the village *curé*, Gaston Berger, who had fought in the last war as a sergeant of artillery and was now a man past sixty with a lean face and humorous mouth and dark eyes which were lit by an inner flame. He was one of those who knew that Hardy had been registered at the hospital under the name of Pierre Prunier.

"We are conspirators!" he said with a laugh, after taking the hand of Madame de Rollencourt and holding it against his heart for a moment as though he loved her and was full of pity for her.

"If the Germans find out we shall all be put into a concentration camp—at least, the doctor and myself. But I am prepared to take the risk."

"We are all ready to take the risk," said Lucile. "Many risks to help those who have fought against our enemy."

The priest looked at her with a smile.

"You have courage, *mademoiselle*! It was not the women of France—or our young girls—who failed in courage or loyalty. It was the old men who failed—our political leaders in that cesspool of Paris."

"Listen," said Armand urgently.

They listened intently to some words spoken over the radio. Edward Hambledon listened, but his eyes roved to the faces about him. It was as

though those words over the microphone had stricken them with horror like a sentence of death upon those they loved.

They heard an old man's voice, very sad and tremulous. It was the voice of Marshal Pétain.

"People of France, it is with a heavy heart that I say we must cease to fight. . . . I have asked for terms of peace. . . . France will not accept shameful terms. . . . France will preserve her dignity, courage, and faith in the future."

Armand was the first to break a tragic silence.

"We have surrendered. . . . Oh my God!"

"It is terrible," said Madame de Rollencourt in a low voice. Edward noticed that her long thin hands plucked at her black dress. She sat very still even when she wept, unconscious of the tears which trickled down her pale face.

Lucile sprang up and cried out in a loud voice:

"It is shameful! Our armies are betrayed. That old man has betrayed us all. We could have fought on. I will fight on. I have not surrendered."

Edward looked at this girl. She flung back her head as though in defiance of the whole German *Wehrmacht*. Then suddenly she broke down and flung herself on to a chintz-covered sofa and wept with passion.

"That girl has the spirit of Jeanne d'Arc," thought Edward. "All the tradition of France is in her blood. I'm darned sorry for her. This surrender of France is terrible for a girl like that, with her pride and courage. It is terrible for all of them. I ought not to be here. It's like watching the martyrdom of a people, as a mere onlooker."

These thoughts passed through his mind in a tick of time.

"Calm yourself, Lucile," said Madame de Rollencourt, rising from her own chair and sitting on the edge of the sofa with her own wet cheek against Lucile's. "Let us at least follow Marshal Pétain's call to dignity and courage and faith in the future. You say you have not surrendered. Be brave then, my dearest."

Madeleine Delaroche had crossed the room to Lucile and bent down to put an arm about her. But then she stood up straight and Edward, watching her, saw that there were little flames in her eyes.

"I am with Lucile," she said. "I, too, refuse to surrender. I mean in mind and soul. I will do everything against the Germans. We women must put up a moral resistance against them and do everything in our power to weaken them and humiliate them. We must work secretly for the day of liberation."

It was the old doctor who asked a question with a kind of despair:

“How will it come, that day of liberation? I see only enslavement ahead. Who will fight for us? England? England will never fight for us, and is she not our hereditary enemy? In any case is not England doomed also? Where is their army? Where is their strength? When Hitler invades them they will be defenceless. It is perhaps the end of European civilization. Hitler and his devils have all of us at their mercy. It makes me a little sceptical of God. Where, then, is God? Why has He abandoned us? Why has He allowed Evil to prevail? Tell me that, *mon père*. Difficult to answer, eh?”

The priest had been sitting with bowed head at the news of Pétain’s surrender, or rather his request for terms of peace. He had only glanced silently at Lucile with sympathy in his eyes when she flung herself down and wept. He had listened to Madeleine with a tragic smile. But now he turned to the doctor and spoke half-humorously and half-angrily, and his dark eyes glowed with their inner light.

“You are a foolish old sceptic, doctor, as I have always known you to be. You blame these things upon the good God. Do you not understand that men have to pay the price of sin and folly? France has to pay the price of much sin and innumerable follies. We have wallowed in corruption since the last war—our politicians, our industrialists, our parties on the Left and on the Right, greedy for their own power, forgetful of France. We have opened the gates to the enemy. Should we be surprised or blame *le bon Dieu* when the enemy walks in? You are a good doctor, my dear old friend. You and I have played many games of chess together. I know your humanity, and your love of those who suffer and need your help, which you give without payment. But as a theologian you are unqualified and as a philosopher you are very limited in knowledge. France will have to suffer this agony in order to be purged of a thousand poisons which have crept into her political and social life. France will have to be crucified in order to regain her soul and reveal her renaissance. You say we have no one to fight for us. One day we will fight for ourselves. I am impressed by our young ladies here. They are so young and we are so old. But did they not both say something which is a promise—that France will rise again. ‘I refuse to surrender,’ said Mademoiselle Lucile—our beautiful Lucile. ‘I have not surrendered,’ said Mademoiselle Madeleine. She spoke of moral resistance. She is right. That must be our attitude and resolve. It is what I shall tell my faithful little flock—not too faithful some of them, like you, my old friend—and it is to those words that I shall dedicate myself. Moral resistance to German tyranny. Moral resistance to their evil philosophy. Moral resistance to their secret police and the cruelties they will impose upon us. I go even further with

these two young ladies. If I can hinder the enemy in any Christian way by helping their victims to escape, by a secret work of rescue, by encouraging ultimate resistance and liberation even by force of arms.—Was I not a soldier of the last war?—I will do so at any cost and any risk, even if the end of it is death. There are many others in this village of Grancourt who will work with me. I know them. I can trust them—old Jean Marchand the postman, Paul Longeau in the Reine Jeanne, Bertrand Gaspard, my sexton, and other men here who fought with me at Verdun. And you, my dear doctor, I number you among them. Have you not already helped one poor fellow to escape—that young Englishman who now lies in hospital with the *carte d'identité* of Pierre Prunier?"

Dr. Moineau had listened to this eloquence without interruption but with little gestures and grimaces, and once or twice a short harsh laugh.

"This is a sermon," he answered. "That is why I avoid High Mass on Sunday. I don't like being preached at by a fellow who went to school with me and whose shins I used to kick. . . . All the same, Gaston, I agree with you. You can count on me for any dirty work against the Boches."

"We have surrendered," said Armand, in a low tremulous voice. "Oh my God! . . . Oh my God!"

He rose from his chair and walked stiffly out of the room.

Edward also rose and went up to his room and sat on the side of a bedstead, thinking things out.

"I wonder if I ought to quit France," he thought. "Wouldn't it be more sensible to get away while the going's good, and enjoy the peace of Massachusetts where my family must be wondering what in hell I'm doing?"

He thought that out for a long time. But these thoughts urged him to postpone that journey. "I feel at home in France," he thought. "I like the French people. I'd be glad to stay with them a bit in their time of trouble. I might help a few of them to escape the clutches of the enemy. And I'm darned interested in all this. It's history in the making. It's an almighty drama of which I've only seen the prelude. I don't see why I should hurry back to peace and plenty with no definite purpose in life except a game of golf and a swim in Assawampsett Lake, and chit-chat at cocktail parties in Boston and New York. Besides, Mademoiselle Lucile de Rollencourt has something about her which is very unusual, and I want to do a study of her head."

He lit a Camel cigarette—one of his last—as he sat on the edge of the bedstead in an old French farmhouse, three thousand miles away from his

home in Massachusetts.

## XVI

DURING these days and nights they hung on to the wireless news, sometimes from Radio Paris but often from the B.B.C. in London which Edward interpreted. A hundred times Armand, who knew no English, asked the question: "What are they saying? . . . What does it mean?"

Strange things were spoken by the voices of these English announcers. Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister, had offered a solemn union with France. The two countries would pool their resources. There would be a common citizenship, if France would keep up the struggle against the enemy of both peoples.

"Astonishing idea," said Armand. "I do not understand it."

"It's too late, anyhow," answered Edward.

It was too late. Marshal Pétain, who was head of the French Government after the resignation of Reynaud and his Cabinet, was negotiating terms of Peace with Hitler. They were almost completed, according to the Paris radio, though here and there fighting still went on.

Another voice reached this old farmhouse in France from England. It was a voice speaking in French, vibrant, strong, resolute. It was a call to all Frenchmen from a man named de Gaulle.

*"I tell you that France is not lost. France is not alone—not alone—not alone. She has a vast Empire behind her. She can unite with the British Empire which holds the seas. She can utilize to the full, as England is doing, the vast industrial resources of the United States. . . . Whatever happens the flame of French resistance must not, and shall not, be extinguished. . . . France will never surrender her fleet. I, General de Gaulle, now in London, invite all Frenchmen who arrive in England, or who can escape to this country, to get in touch with me."*

He made a stirring and moving appeal for active and enduring resistance until the liberty of France was restored.

Armand de Rollencourt listened to those words with profound emotion.

“That is the leadership we want,” he said. “Thank God there is still a Frenchman who upholds our pride and spirit. We must rally round him. We will make an army of resistance under his command. I must go to England. I must join him. He gives us new hope.”

“Who is he?” asked Edward. “I don’t know much about him.”

Armand was astonished at this ignorance.

“If they had listened to General de Gaulle we should not have lost this war. For years he has been the advocate of mechanized warfare. Tanks, more tanks, and still more tanks. Infantry moving rapidly in motor vehicles. Guns on tractors. A mobile army heavily armoured against guns and shell fire. He wrote a book on this subject—a masterpiece. The Germans adopted his ideas. They have won the war because of them. But de Gaulle was ignored by our High Command. He was given a subordinate position. His genius was thrown away by those *gaga* old men whose minds have not moved since the last war. I must go to England. I must enlist in his army of resistance.”

He strode across the room as though already on his way to England.

There was a dreadful hour when the news came of the capitulation and that theatrical scene which Hitler had staged in the very railway coach at Compiègne which Foch had used in 1918 when Germany surrendered. He had made certain concessions. The occupation of France was to be only partial. There was to be an unoccupied region under French control. It was in return for a pledge given by Pétain, a pledge of French collaboration with Germany in the economic sphere.

That word *collaboration* was like poison to Armand and his family.

“Shameful!” he cried in a harsh voice. “It is an acceptance of economic slavery. Collaboration with the Boches? Never.”

“It is dishonour,” said Lucile. “We should be dishonoured for ever.”

Madame de Rollencourt had another thought which was not comforting.

“According to the terms,” she said, “we are just inside the occupied region. We shall have the Germans here.”

Armand looked at her and for a moment his face was ashen grey.

“That is a ghastly thought,” he said. “Yes, you are right, *maman*. The line will be drawn south of us. We have no luck.”

Edward saw Lucile grow pale, but she laughed nervously.

“When they come,” she said, “it will not be amusing. I can think of nothing more horrible.”

“We must behave with dignity,” said her mother. “Nothing they can do to us must make us lose that. Let us show them that we have an old tradition of pride and self-respect.”

Lucile laughed again.

“I shall never have your wonderful dignity, *maman*. I belong to another generation. Our manners are not so good.”

She raised her hands—those hands which Edward thought beautiful—and the laughter faded out of her eyes.

“Why do I talk nonsense at this time? In my heart I am weeping. France has surrendered. We are in the hands of the enemy. It will be a long agony for all of us.”

She turned to Edward, who had been silent during this time of tragic news.

“This is not amusing for you, *m’sieur*,” she said. “Let us go for a little walk and forget our miseries because the sun still shines and the sky is blue over France.”

“I should like to,” answered Edward. “It’s a good day for a walk.”

It was a pleasant walk he had with Lucile de Rollencourt. They went through the village of Grancourt Notre-Dame with its old houses, red-roofed, and a little market-place. Everyone knew her and gave her a greeting. Old men doffed their berets and said “*Bonjour, mademoiselle*.” A few women in the market-place smiled at her, and she raised her hand and smiled back, and now and then stopped to talk with one of them. The *curé* met them and raised his black felt hat.

“Sad news, Lucile,” he said. “But General de Gaulle has spoken brave and noble words.”

He spoke a few words to Edward.

“We are glad to have an American in this village of Grancourt. We have not forgotten their aid in the last war. Your men will be here again before this one ends.”

“That’s a hope,” said Edward. “But we shall be late again.”

“We are going to walk away from tragic thoughts,” said Lucile. “For an hour or so we are going to pretend that life is as beautiful as God wishes it to be in the loveliness He has made for us. Is that a good Christian thought, M’sieur le Curé?”

She spoke in a smiling way, though half an hour ago she had wept in her heart.

“I give that thought my blessing,” said the *curé*. “I would like to come with you and show our friend the charm of our countryside, but I have to visit Madame Monnet who is in a bad state because her son was killed at Sédan. A pleasant *promenade*, my children.”

He raised his black felt hat and passed on.

“I will take you to the Bois des Fées on the little hill over there,” said Lucile. “In the distance you will see the roofs and towers of Tours. The view from the little wood is enchanting.”

“It has an enchanting name,” said Edward. “I hope we see some fairies.”

They did not see any fairies but Edward Hambleton had a sense of enchantment, on this June day, with a hill-top view of Tours with its towers and roofs faintly pencilled against the blue sky, far away, over a lovely landscape where the crops were growing high for that year’s harvest. Down below were village spires half-hidden by the full foliage of June, and long straight roads lined with tall poplars. Sweet sounds came up to them—a church bell ringing, the clink of an anvil, a cuckoo calling. Sunlight glinted through the wood, the Bois des Fées, and spangled the carpet of last year’s leaves. Tall foxgloves grew in the ditches, and Lucile picked some honeysuckle from a thicket.

“It all seems steeped in peace,” she said. “There are no horrors visible. Beauty still lives in France.”

“Let’s forget all the tragedy,” said Edward. “I’d like to sit down on this bank and talk of beauty and pleasant things.”

“That will be difficult,” answered Lucile. “Unpleasant things keep crowding into one’s mind. But I shall be glad to sit down and watch the sunlight and the shadows passing across those fields.”

They sat down on the bank and Lucile gathered some flowers from the grass by her side and put them to her lips.

“They are very sweet,” she said. “They are the little jewels of God. Our Lord loved the lilies of the field.”

“Tell me their names,” answered Edward.

She told him the old French names and he tried to remember them. *La colletterte de la Vierge*. . . . *Le chèvre-feuille*. . . . *La marguerite*. . . . *L’eglantine*. . . .

“They come into our old songs and poetry,” she told him. “I remember some nursery rhymes about them.”

“Let me hear them,” said Edward.



She had a good memory for those nursery rhymes and he liked to hear them because there was music in her voice and her diction was exquisite, he thought.

“One day I must learn to speak French without an American accent,” he said. “It must sound horrible to you.”

“Not in the least horrible,” she told him, “but just a little amusing. It’s mostly the intonation. You know all the words and are very fluent. If you like I will cure that accent. You have a good ear, *m’sieur*.”

“I’d like to be taught, *mademoiselle*,” he told her.

“Say this little chanson after me,” she suggested.

*Fais dodo Colas mon p’tit frère  
Fais dodo t’auras du lolo.  
Maman est en haut qui fait du gâteau,  
Papa est en bas qui fait du chocolat.  
Fais dodo Colas mon p’tit frère  
Fais dodo t’auras du lolo.”*

He had his first lesson and did not resent her laughter when his American intonation kept coming through.

“Tell me about your family,” she said presently. “I want to know more about you. At present you have a background of mystery.”

He told her about his home in Massachusetts, and gave her character studies of his father and mother, and that tall brother whom they called Tiny, and Penny his sister who was mad on horses, and the great lake of Assawampsett where, in the days before the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers, Red Indians had the great loneliness to themselves so that even now one felt their unseen presence in the silent woods.

“Why do you stay in France?” she asked. “Why don’t you go back to this beautiful home where there is peace beyond the reach of Hitler?”

“I’m in no hurry to go,” he answered. “France has caught hold of me somehow, and I can’t tear myself away just yet. I’m an observer of world history. Besides, I want to paint you one day. I can’t go before I’ve done that.”

She turned to smile at him and for the second time when he had spoken of painting her a little colour crept into her cheeks.

“Then you must hurry,” she said. “You must paint me before the Germans come.” She glanced at a little wrist-watch and gave a cry.

“Can it be possible? Six o’clock! We must go back, or *maman* will be anxious.”

“It has been a golden hour,” said Edward. “We must have more like it as an escape from tragic stuff.”

“It has been very agreeable,” said Lucile, demurely. “For a little while I have forgotten the surrender of France.”

They walked back through the wood of the fairies.

## XVII

CAPTAIN CHRISTOPHER HARDY, whom Edward learned to call Kit, was brought back in an ambulance from the hospital in Tours where Edward had visited him several times. There had been no trouble about that, and it was an open secret with the matron and nurses that ‘Pierre Prunier’ was an escaped English officer who had been wounded near Dieppe in the fighting up north.

He had had another visitor. It was Madeleine Delaroche, who had brought him fruit, flowers, and books. He was still very weak when he came back to Grancourt Notre-Dame and lay upstairs in a small bedroom looking out to the farmyard and the fields, but he made a joke now and then about the loss of his leg and had not lost his sense of humour when it was lopped off.

One thing worried him. He revealed it to Edward, who sat by his bedside one afternoon after fixing up a small wireless which he had bought for him in Tours at an extravagant price.

“My night nurse was an angel,” he said, “but very anti-British. She knew perfectly well that I was English, but she didn’t disguise her belief that the retreat to Dunkirk was a betrayal of France, and that we had dragged France into the war and then let her down. She wasn’t the only one. Most of the patients in my ward talked like that. I had to keep quiet as I was posing as Pierre Prunier, but I didn’t like it, my dear Hambleton. The blood of my undistinguished ancestors was at boiling-point sometimes.”

Edward nodded.

“I’ve heard a lot of that, mostly in the cafés of Tours after paying you my visits. They’re all cursing the English as the main cause of their defeat. I guess it’s natural to want a whipping-boy to cover their own humiliation.

There was quite a scene in the Café des Valois when the news came that the British Fleet had sunk French battleships at Mers el Kebir.”

“Well,” exclaimed Hardy, “it doesn’t sound too good—turning our guns on our own Allies.”

“They made pretty good offers to Admiral Darlan,” said Edward. “He could join the British Navy or go to a neutral port. Our friend Armand says the English were perfectly justified. They mean to carry on the war alone, and the surrender of the French fleet to the enemy wouldn’t help things. De Gaulle takes the same view, according to his broadcast speeches.”

Hardy groaned again.

“Now that I have lost my leg I’m on the scrap-heap as a fighting man. I’m utterly useless now in England or anywhere else. I feel very low in spirit, my dear Hambledon, in spite of my little efforts to make a joke now and then.”

He cheered up again because of a speech he heard that evening on his wireless set, which he could tune in to the B.B.C. It was a speech by Winston Churchill to the British people.

*“We have the honour to be alone. . . . We will fight on the hills and in the valleys. . . .”*

“Great stuff!” said Hardy, raising himself in bed a little. “It’s like listening to Bill Shakespeare, Nelson, and the younger Pitt. Thank God for Winston, whom I used to detest as a political charlatan. He speaks with the voice of the real old England. I’m thrilled to my marrow-bones.”

Edward laughed.

“I’ll say he’s a spell-binder. I am American but I come of English stock, and that guy Churchill makes me want to remember it.”

“Put it there, old man,” said Hardy, taking his right hand from under the coverlet and holding it out to Edward Hambledon.

Edward shook hands with him, but not with a hard grip. Hardy was still weak after his operation and loss of blood. But he looked young and even boyish now that he was shaved. It was Edward who shaved him every morning with a safety razor borrowed from Armand de Rollencourt. In a pair of blue silk pyjamas, also borrowed from this French officer, he was ready to receive visitors after eleven o’clock, and he was not left in solitude.

Madame de Rollencourt came to tidy his room and rearrange his pillows and always blushed a little when he took her hand and put it to his lips, half-seriously and half in fun.

“You are spoiling me,” he told her. “It is worth losing my leg to have so much kindness.”

“You do not pay attention to anything I say,” replied Madame de Rollencourt. “Have I not told you that it’s very naughty to smoke so many cigarettes in your present state of health?”

“On the contrary,” answered Hardy, “they soothe my nerves and sustain my morale. Pass me that little packet, *chère madame*.”

She laughed, and passed him a packet of *Petits Caporals* which Madeleine had bought for him in Tours.

“You are incorrigible, *mon capitaine*,” said Madame de Rollencourt, smoothing down his silk coverlet.

“And you are too good,” he told her. “That’s what worries me more than anything. What is going to happen to you all if the Boches come and find you harbouring an English officer?”

Madame de Rollencourt hid from him a little anxiety in her eyes. She had discussed this matter with Armand and Edward Hambledon. There was certainly a grave danger. She could not disguise that from herself. For Lucile’s sake, especially, she was anxious.

“We shall have to pass you off as our gardener,” she answered. “You will have to put on your dirty old clothes again and give up shaving for three mornings a week. That will annoy Madeleine Delaroche, who likes to see you beautiful and debonair.”

Hardy laughed and coloured up slightly.

“Mademoiselle Delaroche is charming,” he said. “But I don’t deserve so much attention.”

Mademoiselle Delaroche appeared on the scene again that afternoon. She brought a bouquet of deep red roses and three razor-blades which she had bought in Tours, and *L’île des Pingouins* by Anatole France.

“How goes it, *mon capitaine*?” she asked, standing by his bed.

“Marvellously!” he told her. “As soon as I get my artificial leg I shall be hopping about like a cock robin. Meanwhile, I shall have to get about on crutches.”

There was one member of the household who never came to his room. It was Lucile’s aunt, Mademoiselle Duchesne. This pale-faced lady in black did not approve of harbouring an English officer. She did not approve of the English. She had made a little scene in the drawing-room downstairs when the news had come that the British Fleet had fired at Darlan’s ships in the harbour of Mers el Kebir.

“Did I not tell you?” she cried, “the English are our enemies. They are worse than the Germans, because they pretend to be our friends. They are essentially treacherous. They have no sense of honour or of decency. Always they have betrayed us.”

Armand rebuked her severely.

“My dear aunt, you are talking nonsense, as you do every time you speak about these things. England is supporting General de Gaulle and receiving all who can escape from France. It is only with the aid of Britain and her great Empire that France will regain her liberty.”

“You are mad, Armand!” said Mademoiselle Duchesne. “Your mother is mad! Lucile is mad! I find this situation intolerable. When the Germans arrive we shall all be shot because of that Englishman upstairs. Is he not well enough to leave us? Does he not know that he is endangering us all? Has he any sense of honour beyond that of his countrymen? Obviously it is not so.”

“You are absurd, my dear Marie-Claire,” said Madame de Rollencourt. “Do you expect him to walk away on one leg? The poor boy is very weak. Apart from your dislike of the English it is surely necessary to remember that you are a Christian, and a good Catholic.”

“I am a good Frenchwoman,” answered Mademoiselle Duchesne, tightening her lips. “The English are our hereditary enemies. I hope I have some of the spirit of Jeanne d’Arc, who chased them out of France.”

Armand, her nephew, laughed harshly.

“It was we who burnt her as a witch,” he said. “In any case, my dear aunt, you are as much unlike Jeanne d’Arc as anyone in the world. She had a sense of humour.”

Mademoiselle Duchesne revealed her anger by a sudden flash of colour.

“You insult me, Armand. You are all unkind to me. You all hate me.”

Lucile went swiftly across the room and put her arm round her aunt’s shoulder, and kissed her pale cheek.

“That is very untrue, dear Aunt,” she said.

“I had no intention of insulting you,” said Armand. “I was only stating an historical fact.”

He laughed uneasily when Mademoiselle Duchesne burst into tears and left the room.

## XVIII

ARMAND de Rollencourt was the first to leave the farmhouse of Grancourt Notre-Dame. He had made up his mind to join the army of liberation under General de Gaulle in England, and he was aware that the quicker he went the better his chance of escape. By the terms of the armistice and the line drawn between occupied and unoccupied France the village of Grancourt was fifteen kilometres on the wrong side of the line. Already German soldiers and S.S. men had appeared in neighbouring towns and villages to guard the boundary between the two zones. At any moment they might come to Grancourt Notre-Dame and take up quarters in the farmhouse.

“I must go,” said Armand, one night. “I must go at dawn tomorrow. I shall make for the Pyrénées and get through Spain and Portugal. There is already a system. I hear from friends in Tours—François Doumergue—that the system is already well organized. They arrange the necessary visas. They have the rubber stamps and the passport forms printed on a secret press. With a little luck and a little bribery one may pass the frontier. Already many young Frenchmen have reached England that way. François Doumergue is their agent in Tours. He is linked up with others in Paris, Bordeaux, Marseilles, and elsewhere. It is their response to the appeal of de Gaulle.”

“I know François Doumergue,” said Lucile. “He once was foolish enough to fall in love with me. That was when he was sixteen and I was fourteen.”

She laughed at this remembrance of a boy and girl love-affair, and then added serious words:

“I should like to be of use to his system.”

“He needs an American who can move freely about France without suspicion,” answered Armand. “He wishes to meet our good friend here.”

Hambleton raised his eyebrows and smiled.

“A risky job, I guess.”

Armand de Rollencourt nodded.

“Not without risk,” he agreed.

He looked into Hambleton’s eyes and smiled as though assured that this American would not shirk the risk.

“He would be grateful if you would call on him one day and have a talk,” he added. “He is editor of *La Gazette de Tours*. You will find him a charming young man, though very delicate and unfit for military service.”

“I shall be glad to meet him,” answered Edward.

That night Armand said farewell to Kit Hardy.

"I'm leaving at dawn," he said. "I hope to be in England before many weeks have passed."

For a moment Hardy was upset by emotion.

"Oh Christ!" he said, as a kind of prayer. "If only I could come with you. I would give my right arm as well as my right leg."

"You will follow on," answered Armand, much moved by this cry of anguish. "As soon as you are able to move about, my friend."

"I lie here like a useless log," said Hardy, deeply distressed.

For a moment there were tears in his eyes or something very like them. For a moment he put his head under the bed-clothes like a boy ashamed of tears.

Armand patted his shoulder and spoke in a kindly voice:

"My dear fellow, I know how you feel. I shall feel like that when I am in exile from France."

Presently Hardy flung back the bed-clothes and sat up.

"Give my love to England," he said. "Tell my family that I hang on to the English broadcasts for every scrap of news and that I think of them always. Tell them that I think the R.A.F. is beyond words splendid and wonderful, and that one day I'm going to join it with a wooden leg."

"I will deliver your letters," said Armand, who seemed sure of getting to England.

The letters were already written. They were already in Armand's breast-pocket.

"My mother will be delighted to meet you," said Hardy. "I am green with envy of you, old man. Tell her that I am grateful to your own mother, who risks her life for my sake."

He held out his left hand in the French style and Armand gripped it for a moment and then swung on his heel and left the room.

With Edward that night he spoke a few serious words.

"I feel that I am leaving my best friend behind. I am less anxious about my mother and sister knowing that you are here to protect them for a while. I have perfect faith in you, my friend, both in your kindness and in your courage."

"I will try not to disappoint you," said Edward lightly, shy of French emotionalism.

“I am cycling to Tours,” said Armand. “I shall set out before the light of day. I have to pass the barriers between the two zones. I shall only get my *sauf conduit* when I reach Tours, where François Doumergue has one waiting for me. I shall have to dodge the patrols; but I know every hedge in this countryside and I shall get through all right.”

“Take care of yourself,” said Edward.

“*Mon cher Edouard,*” said Armand. “I will not say *Adieu*, but *Au revoir*. One day we shall meet again.”

He held out his arms, embraced Edward warmly, and kissed him on both cheeks.

“Say, you make me blush!” said Edward. “We don’t do that in the United States. No, sir!”

Armand laughed and raised his hand.

“*Bonne chance, mon ami.*”

He went away from Edward’s room. It was late at night, but Madame de Rollencourt and Lucile were still sitting up to see the last of Armand. The murmur of their voices came up to Hambleton’s room where he sat reading a book. Presently they were silent. Edward heard bolts being drawn in the hall and felt a little draught come under his own door as the front door was opened. It was not yet dawn, but Armand was setting out on his adventure.

A few minutes later footsteps passed Edward’s room. A woman was weeping. It was Madame de Rollencourt, that gracious lady.

A girl’s voice spoke aloud. It was Lucile.

“*Courage, maman!*”

## XIX

THE GERMANS came to Granville.

The Rollencourts’ old gardener-farmhand, Gaston, was first to bring the news.

“They have arrived!” he said, standing in the doorway of the breakfast-room at eight o’clock one morning.

There was no need to ask who ‘they’ were.

Madame de Rollencourt, who was pouring out coffee, spilt some and put the pot down with an unsteady hand.



Lucile, who was in a blue silk dressing-gown, looked at Edward across the table and he saw the distress in her eyes.

Mademoiselle Duchesne was the first to speak.

“It was, of course, inevitable.”

She also looked at Edward and spoke to him coldly.

“Our lives are in danger, *m’sieur*, so long as that English officer is upstairs. When do you take him away? Perhaps it is too late even now. In that case you are responsible for what happens.”

Madame de Rollencourt answered her sharply.

“I am responsible, Marie-Claire. This is my house. Our English friend is my guest.”

Mademoiselle Duchesne looked at her sister angrily, and little lines deepened about her eyes and mouth.

“I am, of course, a pauper. You do not let me forget. I live on your charity, Louise. But as your sister I have a right to speak, and I now remind you that it is a crime punishable by death to harbour English prisoners of war who have escaped. Do you not think of Lucile? Do you wish to be shot against your garden wall? Are you utterly careless of *my* life?”

Madame de Rollencourt continued to pour out the coffee, though her hand still trembled slightly, as Edward noticed.

“We have thought it all out,” she answered. “Captain Hardy has already been moved to the cottage next to that of Gaston. His papers are in perfect order. He is now Pierre Prunier. Please remember that.”

“It is idiotic,” cried Mademoiselle Duchesne in a shrill voice. “Everyone here knows that he is not Pierre Prunier. Gaston knows; his wife knows. The two maids know—Suzanne and Nanette. Their families know. Do you think that secret can be kept from the Germans? In any case will they not suspect a man who has lost his leg and looks like an Englishman and speaks with a foreign accent? How did this man lose his leg? they will ask.”

“We have our answer ready,” answered Madame de Rollencourt. “It was the result of a German bomb which fell in Grancourt.”

Lucile spoke to her aunt good-naturedly, but Edward noticed that her hand was also shaky when she passed him a roll of bread.

“You see, Aunt Marie-Claire, that we have thought out everything. Or rather, we have had the good advice of our friend *Monsieur* Hambledon, who is very intelligent.”

Her eyes smiled across the table to Edward.

“I thank you, lady,” he said, returning her smile, though at the back of his mind there was a sense of uneasiness because ‘they’ had arrived in Grancourt Notre-Dame.

According to Gaston, who had departed before the family altercation, there were only about a dozen of them who had come with two officers in a military truck. The men had gone into the Reine Jeanne and were drinking French beer. They had smiled at the inhabitants and seemed civil enough. They were like young peasant boys, tanned by the sun and blue-eyed.

It was in the afternoon that the farmhouse was visited by the two German officers. One of the maids—Nanette—came into the drawing-room to announce them. She was white to the lips and could hardly speak.

“Two Germans. . . . Officers. . . . They wish to speak with Madame.”

Coffee had been served, and Edward was there with Madame de Rollencourt and Lucile.

“Must I see them?” asked Madame de Rollencourt in a low voice to Edward.

“I think so,” he answered.

“Ask them to come in, Nanette,” said Madame de Rollencourt.

Two young men entered the drawing-room and bowed as they stood inside the door. Edward’s eyes were fixed upon them with such a scrutiny that he could have drawn their portraits afterwards, at least in caricature. One was a tall, thin young man with a student’s face, not typically German, but dark, with deep-set eyes behind horn-rimmed glasses, and a lean, sharp-featured face. The other was more Teutonic, with fair hair, cut very short, and blue eyes.

“Pardon us for this intrusion, *mesdames*,” said the dark young man in very good French. He seemed nervous and embarrassed. The fair young man glanced round the room with a smile and his eyes came to rest on Lucile for more than an instant.

Madame de Rollencourt and Lucile had risen from their chairs, so that Edward stood up also, though he had intended to remain seated.

“What is it you wish, gentlemen?” asked Madame de Rollencourt with cold dignity.

“You will excuse us, I hope,” said the dark young man, “but we have orders to occupy the village of Grancourt Notre-Dame, which is not far from the border between Occupied and Unoccupied France, as doubtless you know. My friend and I belong to the Boundary Commission. It will be our

duty to maintain the regulations laid down regarding the prohibition of traffic and intercourse between the two zones.”

“Yes?” asked Madame de Rollencourt, as though she were not interested in all this and did not see how it applied to her.

“Doubtless we shall be here for some length of time,” said the dark young man. For a moment he smiled and then added a few words which were not amusing.

“That may depend perhaps on the duration of the war.”

“Yes?” asked Madame de Rollencourt.

“My orders,” said the young German, “are to secure billets for myself and my brother officer in this farmhouse. I should regret if that gives you any annoyance as an intrusion upon your private life.”

Madame de Rollencourt answered him in her glacial voice.

“It is, of course, an intrusion which I have no power to resist.”

The dark young man flushed slightly and then spoke politely with a faint smile.

“We shall behave very correctly, madame, I assure you. We have very simple needs. Perhaps you will be able to provide breakfast and an evening meal and two small rooms upstairs. You will permit us to see your bedrooms for two moments?”

“When you like,” answered the lady.

The young man bowed stiffly.

“Permit me to introduce myself and my brother officer.”

“Is that necessary?” asked Madame de Rollencourt.

The dark young man flushed again and then smiled.

“It may be convenient to know our names. I am Lieutenant Helmuth Winter, at your service. My friend here is Lieutenant Karl Schwarzwald.”

The fair young man gave the Nazi salute and said “*Heil Hitler!*” and his blue eyes rested upon Lucile again as though he thought her a pretty creature. She ignored his glance, though she was conscious of it.

Lieutenant Helmuth Winter had looked at Edward once or twice.

“May I have the honour?” he asked.

“I am an American,” said Edward. “Edward E. Hambleton of Massachusetts. I am a guest in this house and a painter by profession. I have, of course, my American passport.”

“I do not doubt it,” answered Helmuth Winter. “I, too, am interested in painting. I studied in Munich before the war.”

Karl Schwarzwald turned to Edward and spoke in English.

"I have been to Boston and New York. My father is a newspaper proprietor in Frankfurt. He wished me to study American methods. I put in six months on a New York evening paper. I sure had a great time. Yes, sir!"

"Fine," said Edward. "It's a pity you left it to fight this war."

Karl Schwarzwald was not aware of the irony.

"I was a hundred per cent Nazi. I was glad to come back and fight for the Fatherland. So far it has been a good war."

"For you," answered Edward grimly.

"For us," said the young German, "it has been a walk-over. Hitler, of course, is the greatest genius on earth and perhaps for all time. After we have smashed the English, in a few weeks, the war will end and there will be a happy peace with a new Order in Europe."

Lieutenant Winter spoke a few words to him in German and then turned to Edward.

"Madame has been good enough to say that you will take us upstairs to see the bedrooms."

Hambledon nodded, and said curtly: "This way."

"A charming old house," said Winter, as they walked upstairs. "As a painter I am in favour of the picturesque."

He desired to be very friendly.

## XX

CHRISTOPHER HARDY, in a peasant cot at the corner of a paddock, had news every day of what was happening in the farmhouse and the outer world. The two Germans were out after an early breakfast until dinner, and during that period of absence he received visits from Hambledon, Lucile, and Madame de Rollencourt, who came over separately to cheer him up and enquire about his health. His bodily condition was improving, according to the verdict of Dr. Moineau, who came over to see him frequently, always addressing him by the name of Pierre Prunier and then giving an old man's chuckle of amusement. Hardy's secret anguish, which at times he found intolerable—it was when the Blitz began over England—was worse than the pain he suffered after amputation. Except to Hambledon he did not reveal this mental agony, and was always merry and bright with his other visitors, and

especially with Madeleine Delaroché who was now living at the farmhouse, having decided to remain in Occupied France as soon as the two zones were divided by a strict barrier. The reason she gave to her parents, who opposed this decision angrily, was that she felt it her duty to remain with Lucile and bear the suffering of German occupation. It was a reason which Lucile doubted, with smiling eyes.

“My dear Madeleine,” she said, “we are delighted to have you here, but you have some impelling motive beyond your affection for me. May I suggest that the motive dwells in the old cottage at the corner of the paddock where an English captain lies with one leg?”

Madeleine blushed deeply, laughed nervously, and smacked Lucile’s hand.

“That is idiotic! Have I not pledged myself to work with you in the resistance movement proclaimed by General de Gaulle? How can I do anything for that if I live in Unoccupied France? I want to work with you against the Germans. I want to starve with you. I want to suffer all the indignities of being under German rule.”

“Certainly you are very noble,” answered Lucile, smiling at her again. “But I should not talk about these things too loudly—Aunt Marie-Claire is always listening—and Pierre Prunier, poor man, will be wondering why you are so late this afternoon.”

“You talk like a vicious old woman,” answered Madeleine, with pretended indignation. Then she laughed, kissed Lucile’s cheek, and announced that she was going for a walk.

She walked to the peasant cot at the corner of the paddock, where Christopher Hardy was waiting for her with a glance at an old clock which ticked asthmatically in the corner of the room.

They played games together like a boy and girl. There was a French version of Snap which amused them very much and caused Madeleine to squeal with laughter, because of Hardy’s talented imitation of cocks crowing, and pigs grunting, and donkeys hee-haw-ing, with other farmyard animals. Madeleine taught him an elaborate version of Patience, and he accused her of cheating when she substituted one card for another because things wouldn’t work out according to plan.

“*Il faut faire une petite supposition,*” she answered on those occasions.

“Tell me about the two Boches,” he asked from time to time. “How are they behaving? Has that young blond beast made abominable overtures to Nanette or Suzanne?”

Madeleine had nothing good to say of Karl Schwarzwald.

“He is intolerable! I find his eyes always following me about. If I look at him by accident he smiles with a mixture of boldness and shyness.”

“I can’t help being sorry for the young swine,” said Hardy. “You are a very attractive young lady. All Germans are romantic when they are not torturing Jews or shooting hostages. He is, no doubt, desperately in love with you. That is very natural.”

“I find it disgusting,” answered Madeleine. “God be praised, I have never given him a civil word. When I pass him on the stairs and he stands on one side with exaggerated courtesy I pass him like a ghost.”

“What about the other one?” asked Hardy. “Hambleton tells me that he is intellectual and very anxious to be friendly.”

“He is a better type,” admitted Madeleine. “For a German he is not entirely horrible.”

Hardy laughed at this qualified praise.

“Some of them are fairly decent,” he said. “If they could get rid of Hitler and free themselves from the spell he is putting upon them I’ve no doubt most of them would be quite sensible. I found them so when I had a holiday in Germany before the war.”

“That is the English point of view!” cried Madeleine. “It is why we have this second war. You English have no sense of hatred for the Germans. You forget all their crimes. You think that they may be melted by kindness and converted by reason. You think that, naturally, they are like other people. We French know that this is wrong. The Germans have different shaped heads. They were never really touched by Latin civilization. They remain the outer barbarians—the Vandals and the Goths.”

They had a little argument about this, fierce on the part of Madeleine until he made her laugh.

“Are we quarrelling, by any chance? If so, I surrender.”

He held up both hands and said: “*Kamerad!*”

One evening, many weeks later, he asked her with a glint in his eyes whether she would do him a particular favour which would greatly improve his moral well-being.

“Is it something ridiculous?” asked Madeleine suspiciously, because of that glint in his eyes. “What is it you wish me to do?”

Hardy answered with sham diffidence.

“I don’t know whether this little favour is in accordance with French tradition. Perhaps I had better not mention it.”

“Tell me!” pleaded Madeleine. “In any case I must go before ten minutes have passed. I am like Cinderella at the ball. Only I have to flee before seven o’clock when those two Boches come back.”

“It’s just a kiss I want,” said Hardy. “It wouldn’t take long and it would do me a power of good.”

Madeleine listened to his request with her head turned away from him, and a little smile about her lips, and a flush of colour creeping up from her neck.

“Is it in accordance with English tradition?” she asked.

“It is,” he assured her. “But I am anxious about French habits and customs.”

“Such things are not unknown in France,” answered Madeleine. “Young women have been known to kiss young men. Young men have not entirely neglected the impulse of love and nature. In fact I may say French literature is rather candid about that.”

Hardy laughed at the nonsense they were both talking and held out his arms as he lay there in bed with only one leg beneath the sheets.

She went down on her knees by the bedside and lowered her head and let him kiss her on her lips, and inside her ears, and on her closed eyes, and under her chin. They were very nice kisses for an Englishman, she thought.

She fled from him as the clock gave a kind of shudder and then struck seven times.

## XXI

HARDY was in touch with the outer world by means of a little box installed in his room by Hambledon. Over the microphone he listened to the B.B.C. and did not like what he heard during those autumn months when he still stayed in hiding, unable to move from his truckle-bed.

He agonized because of the Blitz over England, agonized over the destruction of ancient shrines and the slaughter of civilians, but marvelled at the courage and endurance of his own people. There were times when he laughed at the description of life in the shelters and the unbeatable sense of humour of those who had been bombed out of their homes and shops.

“It’s miraculous, Edward, old man,” he said to Hambledon one day.

“What is?” asked Edward. “I’m not sure that I believe in miracles, and I’m not sure that I don’t!”

“The spirit of the English people,” said Hardy. “It’s supernatural. It’s more than human nature ought to be asked to stand; but, by God, they’re standing it—the Cockneys—God bless ’em—my crowd, and the people of Coventry, and Birmingham, and Portsmouth, and all the other cities which these swine are bombing to dust and ashes.”

“It’s pretty wonderful,” agreed Hambledon. “I wonder if my people could stand up to it as well. I’m not sure about that.”

Every time some historical place had been hit, and was revealed later by the censorship, Hardy groaned in mental anguish.

“The Guildhall . . . how frightful! . . . Temple Church. . . . Damn and blast them! . . . St. Paul’s. . . . Oh God! Oh God!”

Hambledon tried to comfort him.

“Those ancient monuments can be rebuilt. I’m more sorry for the massacre of the innocents.”

One afternoon Hardy sat up in bed and spoke earnestly.

“This war against civilians is worse than anything in history. What are we going to do about it, Hambledon?”

“Meaning you and me?” asked Hambledon, with his quiet smile.

“Meaning all of us,” answered Hardy. “Meaning humanity as a whole. The bombing aeroplane is destroying all moralities. We’re fighting a war without pity on women and children, without regard for all the things that have been built up by centuries of civilization. We’re going down into a black abyss of scientific barbarism. Shall we ever climb out again or will the next war be worse than this, or the end of this war worse than the beginning? Isn’t it the suicide of civilization?”

“I’ll say it is,” answered Hambledon. “On the other hand, we’ve got to smash this evil spirit let loose by Hitler. He can’t be allowed to get away with it.”

“Not on your life!” said Hardy. “But it’s a horrible dilemma. It’s a competition in mass murder. We shall have to use the enemy’s methods and go one better in order to beat him. I see that. For one bomb he sends over now we shall send over a hundred one day if he gives us time. Every German city will be a mass of rubble. And so far have I departed from my beautiful little ideals that I gloat over the thought of that day coming.”

He asked an abrupt question.



“Are you Americans coming in with your men as well as your machines?”

“You bet we are,” answered Hambledon. “It’s going to work out that way. Roosevelt is leading us forward to that goal. But it takes time. We shall be more than a bit late again.”

On another afternoon he found Hardy restless in mind and body.

“Ned,” he said, “you must get me out of this. I must get back to England before I go *gaga*. I lie here like a stuck pig.”

“Doesn’t Madeleine relieve your boredom?” asked Hambledon with a smile.

Hardy gave a laugh.

“She does! I’m devoted to her. She makes this place a paradise, but I feel guilty about it. While other men are dying I’m having a love idyll. While English people are being slaughtered in mean streets I lie here with love in idleness. Not too good, old man!”

Hambledon laughed at this sense of guilt.

“I shouldn’t quarrel with your luck. You’ve paid for it. You’ve lost one good leg in the service of your country. Isn’t that enough?”

Hardy was doubtful about that.

## XXII

As an American and a student of human nature Hambledon did not avoid all conversation with the two Germans billeted in the farmhouse. Lucile reproached him for getting on too friendly terms with them and was not convinced by his argument that it was interesting to study German psychology, and that, anyhow, it might be useful later on if he disarmed their suspicions and gained their goodwill.

“Helmuth Winter,” he told her, “is a good type. I like him.”

“No German is a good type,” said Lucile, “and it is very wrong of you to like him.”

“He is a civilized human being,” said Hambledon. “He has no real allegiance to the Nazi creed. He hates war. He is an artist with an artist’s outlook on life.”

“Nevertheless,” answered Lucile, “he obeys Hitler, and is an enemy of France and all civilized nations.”

Hambledon smiled into her eyes.

“I don’t expect you to be tolerant, and I don’t want you to accuse me of being pro-German, but it’s fair to say on behalf of one German that he has a deep admiration for French civilization—its history and literature—and has no enmity whatever against the French people.”

“He tells you so,” answered Lucile with cold scepticism. “It is just German propaganda dictated by that wretch Goebbels to deceive and weaken us into cowardly collaboration.”

Edward laughed and shook his head.

“I believe in his sincerity. He takes a risk in talking to me as he does.”

“*Edouard!*” cried Lucile in a troubled voice, “do not make friends with our enemies.”

It was difficult to be unfriendly with Helmuth Winter. He had a certain charm of manner. One evening he had tapped at Edward’s door and asked him whether he would care to see some water-colour sketches he had done of the French countryside.

“I certainly would,” answered Edward.

The sketches were excellent and Edward admired his technique. They talked for a while about art and the young German officer expressed his admiration for the French impressionists.

Presently he gave a little sigh.

“This war spoils all that!” he exclaimed. “It is the enemy of all art.”

Edward agreed whole-heartedly.

“Why did you people make this war?” he asked with his American candour.

Helmuth Winter raised his hands slightly.

“The German people did not make it. The Führer assured them a thousand times that he stood for peace. They believed him.”

“But they followed him when he made war,” answered Edward.

The German lieutenant shrugged his shoulders slightly.

“All people obey the call when their country goes to war. Reason is dethroned. My country right or wrong! Before the war I was in Munich. I was there when the English Chamberlain came with his umbrella. Thousands of Germans, thousands of mothers and fathers came out to cheer him as a messenger of peace. German women lay down on the railway lines to prevent the troop trains taking away their sons to the front. There are many Germans in concentration camps because they spoke against war.”

“Now they rejoice in German victories,” answered Edward. “They think Hitler is a miracle worker. Don’t they worship him?”

Helmuth Winter lowered his voice.

“There are many who do not rejoice even in German victories. There is a saying among them: ‘*Wir siegen uns tod.*’ We are winning ourselves to death. There are no cheers when the troops march through Berlin or Munich. Only the young idiots stuffed with the Nazi creed—the preposterous nonsense of *Mein Kampf*—the poisonous philosophy of Rosenberg—make a god of Hitler and follow him blindly, even if death is at the end of the road. I am not one of those. I believe in peace; I believe in beauty. I look upon this war as a devilish evil, though we are not alone to blame for it. Hitler was born out of German misery after Versailles, and the unpayable reparations which destroyed the mark, and caused a tide of unemployment. As a boy I remember those days. My parents nearly went mad.”

He went on talking in a monologue.

“This war, of course is the failure of Christianity and of human comradeship. The Christian churches line themselves up with their nation’s interests. This war and the last were a denial of Christ’s teaching. Germany is not alone in its violation of the Christian spirit. In the past as well as now. The present and all its horrors have been born out of the past.”

He laughed suddenly and apologized.

“Forgive me for talking like this. It is very boring for you.”

“I’m interested,” answered Edward. “I agree with you to some extent.”

“Karl Schwarzwald,” said Winter with a smile, “would denounce me as a traitor if he heard me say these things. He is a simple boy and his head is stuffed with Nazi ideas about the *Herrenvolk* and German destiny to world power. We cannot talk reasonably together.”

Before Edward left his room he expressed his thanks for the conversation.

“I have an intellectual hunger for a little intelligent talk. It is very difficult to break down the hostility of the French people. They answer in monosyllables. When I go into a café in Tours they do not even look at me. Even Karl Schwarzwald finds that intolerable. In Munich, when he entered a café, the girls’ eyes brightened because of his youth and good looks. Now the French girls turn their eyes away or change their chairs if he sits near them. It is very trying for a young man with self-conceit and an adolescent desire for female companionship!”

Lieutenant Winter smiled at this psycho-analysis of his brother officer. Then he changed the subject abruptly.

“One day I should much like to see some of your own work.”

“I will show you some sketches I have done of Mademoiselle de Rollencourt,” said Edward.

“That would be a great favour,” answered the German officer warmly. “A thousand thanks.”

It was on another evening, later in history, that he gave a piece of news to Edward which was also perhaps a friendly warning.

“I hear that some S.S. men are arriving tomorrow to check up on all persons in the village of Grancourt Notre-Dame. No doubt they will come here and will wish to see everyone’s *carte d’identité* and other papers.”

“That’s all right with me,” answered Edward calmly.

Helmuth Winter nodded and smiled in a friendly way.

“Oh, of course. But I thought you might like to know.”

It was useful to know, mainly because of Christopher Hardy, who was now walking around on crutches brought over by Dr. Moineau in his dilapidated little car, for which he could still obtain a certain amount of ‘juice’, as he called it. But in the clothes he was now wearing he would not pass as a peasant. He went about in one of Armand’s sky-blue polo shirts and in a pair of flannel trousers. Certainly he would not pass as Pierre Prunier the gardener.

Then there was the question of his *carte d’identité*. Would that pass the careful examination of S.S. men? Hambleton had tinkered about with it considerably. With Lucile’s camera he had taken a photograph of Hardy, unshaven after four days, and had substituted this for the face of Pierre Prunier, a typical French peasant with a much-lined face. The trouble had been about the rubber stamp which had covered a corner of the photograph. It had been necessary to reproduce that missing part and Edward had spent several days of careful artistry on that delicate job. He had drawn the stamp on a piece of linoleum and cut it out with a razor edge. After many failures he had succeeded fairly well. Lucile had declared it to be a masterpiece, and he was almost satisfied. There was only one little bit which was not a hundred per cent perfect. It was where his razor had slipped in cutting the linoleum. It had blurred the green ink slightly.

Before the S.S. men arrived Hardy—thanks to the tip from Helmuth Winter—had put on a ragged shirt and a pair of old weather-stained trousers. He had omitted to shave that morning and had smudged his face with a touch of grease.

“*Qui êtes vous?*” asked one of the S.S. men in a harsh German accent.

*“Pierre Prunier, jardinier.”*

*“Votre carte d’identité.”*

Hardy produced his faked card. The S.S. man examined it minutely and then handed it back.

*“Ça va.”*

Edward’s careful work had passed. It was all right. His own American passport had been handed back politely and the S.S. man had spoken a few words in English.

“We have no quarrel with the Americans.”

“That is good.”

“May I ask why are you staying here?”

“I am a friend of the family.”

“I understand.”

He smiled and glanced towards Lucile, who was in the sitting-room during this interrogation of the family and servants. His smile and glance clearly meant that he saw a good reason for Edward staying with this French family.

*“A votre service!”*

He saluted smartly in the Fascist style.

*“Heil Hitler!”*

“Good afternoon,” answered Edward, with fair civility.

They waited until the two S.S. men were well away and then laughed.

“It was marvellous!” cried Lucile. “Your artist’s work deceived them utterly. What one can do once, one can do twice, and a hundred times! We must set up a factory for false passports.”

“Hush!” said Madame de Rollencourt, who had been very nervous when the S.S. men had arrived.

Mademoiselle Duchesne came into the room which she had left only a few moments before.

“Why do you say ‘Hush’?” she asked suspiciously. “Are you talking secrets which you do not wish me to hear?”

“Which I do not wish the servants to hear,” answered Madame de Rollencourt, quietly. “It was something about our gardener, Pierre Prunier.”

Mademoiselle Duchesne crossed herself.

“God have mercy on us!” she cried. “Our lives are not safe for a moment as long as that man stays here. You are all mad. I have said so before. Now

Madeleine has fallen in love with him and stays with him alone in his bedroom. It is abominable.”

It was Lucile who answered angrily.

“Madeleine has been helping to nurse him. Do you find that abominable?”

She did, and Edward Hambleton, who in most of his human contacts was tolerant and good-natured, spoke harsh words in his secret mind.

“I would like to strangle that female! She’s as sour as a quince.”

### XXIII

THE BOIS des Fées—the Fairy wood—looked down upon the boundary line between Occupied and Unoccupied France with a view of the broad road lined with poplars where there was the German barrier at which all traffic was stopped, and a hundred yards farther on the French barrier. By avoiding the road, and after a careful watch for German patrols, it was not too difficult to get into Unoccupied France and the city of Tours by field-paths and thickets. Edward Hambleton came to know every yard of this way, and it amused him to dodge the German guards and get across the line. In any case his American passport and a *sauf-conduit* provided for him by François Doumergue would get him out of trouble if he happened to meet it, but he preferred the secret way in order to avert suspicion if he went through the two barriers on frequent journeys. By that way he had gone to see François Doumergue, who was anxious to meet a helpful American.

This young man, who had escaped military service because of tuberculosis, had a printing and publishing establishment in Tours, and it was in this office that Edward met him. He was a thin, dark young man who looked as if a puff of wind would blow him away because of his slight and delicate build. But inside his frail body there was the flame of an ardent spirit and a courage which was prepared to risk all things for France.

He shook hands warmly with Edward and locked his door before beginning his conversation.

“Armand has spoken to me about you,” he said. “I have been deeply anxious to get in touch with you.”

“What do you want me to do?” asked Edward. “Something pretty dangerous, I guess.”

François Doumergue laughed and shook his head.

“Not too dangerous—with reasonable care—but very helpful to General de Gaulle and those who will never tolerate the surrender by Vichy and those traitors who have betrayed France.”

“Tell me,” said Edward. “I’m not really keen if it leads to a white wall and a firing squad.”

François Doumergue smiled and flicked off the ash of his cigarette.

“Oh well, that may happen to some of us, but it’s very unlikely in your case. Behind you is the power of the United States, which looks after its citizens. Let me explain a little.”

He explained quite a lot. Friends of his in Paris and elsewhere were organizing the way of escape for men of military age and fighting spirit. They were collecting passports from dead soldiers which would need a little alteration and a change of photographs. They would like to get hold of Vichy passports for reproduction.

“I have a very good printing press,” he said with a smile, “and some very skilful compositors. We could reproduce quite perfectly any passports and other official documents permitting individuals to leave France for North Africa and Portugal. But we must first get those documents.”

Hambledon smiled, with that slow smile which twisted his lips and lit up his eyes.

“Not so easy,” he remarked.

“There is always a way,” answered Doumergue with quiet confidence.

Another part of the plan was to keep in touch with friends who could raise money. Escape was sometimes a costly affair for young men who had no funds of their own.

“Correspondence is forbidden between the two zones,” he explained. “And, in any case, written letters are subject to examination by the Gestapo and the Vichy police. I have here the addresses of two or three people in Vichy and Paris with whom I wish to communicate urgently. If you would be good enough to hand them a few documents and bring back their answers it would be a great service. Another matter! I understand from Armand that Madame de Rollencourt and Mademoiselle Lucile are willing to harbour escaped prisoners of war and others for a night or two now and then and to guide them across the boundary by way of the Bois des Fées.”

“There are two Germans in Madame de Rollencourt’s house,” answered Edward. “Isn’t that like walking into a trap?”

“They wouldn’t enter the house itself,” answered Doumergue. “They would go to the cottage now inhabited by Pierre Prunier and then make their

way to the Bois des Fées. They would need food and guidance.”

Hambledon stared down at the polished floor-boards under his feet. Presently he raised his head and spoke gravely:

“I’m prepared to take a bit of a risk,” he said. “It might be amusing; but I don’t agree with endangering the life of a young girl like Mademoiselle de Rollencourt. I’m against that.”

François Doumergue was not against that.

“She is eager to take the risk,” he said. “She is not alone among French women and young girls who are ready and eager to join the secret ranks behind General de Gaulle. But we will take every care that Mademoiselle Lucile will not come to any harm. The risk is very slight, I think. It will be less when your friend Captain Hardy gets away from Grancourt. Madame and Mademoiselle de Rollencourt have not shirked that danger in which I understand you acquiesced.”

Edward nodded.

“He had a leg lopped off. He couldn’t get away. But I agree—the sooner the better.”

“It is one reason why I wish to see you,” explained Doumergue.

“We have arranged for his passage from Marseilles to North Africa. We have very good relations in Marseilles. They are in close touch with the owners of merchant ships who are still getting across the Mediterranean. Is it possible for your friend to leave by next Friday?”

“He will make it possible,” answered Edward. “If he has to walk all the way.”

Doumergue smiled. “He won’t have to walk. We shall send him down by train. A young lady will go with him. For the time being she will be his sister. We have already made out her papers accordingly.”

“Fine work!” exclaimed Edward, with enthusiasm for efficiency.

“He should come to the Bois des Fées at dawn on Friday,” said Doumergue. “With care he may get across the boundary when the guard changes. Doubtless you will see to that.”

“I certainly will.”

Before he left the printing office he made a half-promise.

“I may take a trip to Vichy and Paris. If so, I’ll get in touch with your friends.”

“A thousand thanks, my dear sir. You are a good friend of France. Armand told me so, and you have a generous heart. That also he told me.”

Hambledon answered modestly with a good-natured laugh.



“A kind heart but a soft head.”

That evening he conveyed the news to Christopher Hardy, who was in the cottage reading a French novel, with his crutches propped up against a chair.

Edward grinned at him.

“Care to go to England?” he asked, casually.

Hardy looked up from his book with a quizzical smile.

“Trying to pull my leg?”

“Next Friday morning at dawn,” said Edward. “It’s all arranged, via Marseilles and North Africa.”

“A fairy-tale?” asked Hardy, incredulously, and yet excited.

“God’s own truth,” answered Hardy. “How do you feel about it, Kit?”

Christopher Hardy did not tell him all that he felt about it. He did not tell him that he was torn in half by this news. In half his brain and half his heart his thoughts leapt towards England, to be among his own folk again, to see his father and mother, to share the ordeal of war with them, to get going again, somehow. In half his brain and half his heart he hated to leave this cottage because of a girl who had given him her love and made it paradise for him. Madeleine and he had had happy hours here, laughing a lot because he made her laugh, playing childish games because in spirit they were still very young, arguing, quarrelling, and making love ardently and without boredom on either side. It would be hard to say good-bye to Madeleine.

She found it hard to say good-bye to him. She came down to the cottage in the darkness of that Thursday evening before he went at dawn next morning. He heard her at the door—the four little taps they had arranged as their secret code—and hobbled across the room to let her in. She stood there in a raincoat with a hood which came over her head. She was carrying a lantern which she shaded with her hand.

“*Christophe!*” she whispered. “This is our last night. It is terrible.”

“I feel like death about it,” he told her, “and yet I know it’s not death. I shall see you again. I shall come back.”

He led her into the room and took off her raincoat and flung it to the floor and then put his arms about her.

“My very dear Madeleine! My well beloved! My fairy from the Bois des Fées. How can I leave you?”

His French was very perfect now. He had learnt a lot from Madeleine.

“I shall die without you, *Christophe,*” she answered with a sob.

“No! No! Time will pass like a flash of lightning. I’ll come back on wings. I shall learn to fly. One leg is as good as two in the air.”

“I shall be an old woman before you come back,” said Madeleine, in a despairing voice. “This war is going on for years and years. Hitler is now winning in Russia. How can we ever beat Germany?”

“We shall beat them,” answered Hardy. “England always wins the last battle. Somehow, by some kind of miracle, we shall beat them in the end.”

“*Christophe mon chéri!*” cried Madeleine.

He held her very close in his arms. He kissed her with the passion of a man who says good-bye to love.

“Do not go!” cried Madeleine. “Stay here always. Is not my love enough for you? Is England more to you than I am?”

Christopher Hardy groaned with the agony of this temptation. Why should he go? He had lost a limb for England. He had done his bit. Why not stay with his love?

“I must go,” he told her after that inward struggle. “If I stayed much longer I should be discovered and bring grave trouble upon you all. I must get back to England and share the sufferings of my own people.”

“Then I shall never see you again,” cried Madeleine. “You will be bombed to death in London, or drowned before you get there. I shall be left alone to weep out my eyes.”

Hardy laughed at her, but with an ache in his heart.

“I was born under a lucky star,” he told her. “That star brought me here. It will bring me here again. Let me kiss you once more, little Madeleine.”

But he did not kiss her that time. He held her in a hard grip and listened intently.

“Someone is coming down the path,” he said. “It’s a man. But Edward never comes as late as this and is going to meet me at dawn.”

He held her tight and pushed her into the little kitchen as both of them heard a cough and then a knock at the door at the end of a stick.

“Be very quiet,” whispered Hardy. “Do not move.”

He went to the door and opened it.

“*Qui va là?*”

It was the figure of a man in German uniform. It was Karl Schwarzwald, whom he had seen several times while he was working in the garden.

“It is raining like the devil,” said Schwarzwald in his harsh French. “I will come in until the storm is passed.”

Without your leave or by your leave he strode into the cottage and took out his handkerchief to wipe the rain from his tunic.

"I did not take my cape this morning," he said. "It was a foolish mistake."

"The autumn rains begin," said Hardy.

Schwarzwald nodded and glanced round the room. He saw the novel which Hardy had been reading, and picked it up.

"You read the novels of Marcel Proust?" he asked. "As a gardener you choose difficult books!"

"No, no!" answered Hardy, detecting a note of suspicion. "It was one of the young ladies of the house who left it here by mistake. I do not read novels by Marcel Proust or anyone else. I have my work to do."

Schwarzwald smiled and lit a cigarette which he took from a silver case.

"I thought it strange," he admitted. He sat down in Hardy's arm-chair with its horsehair seat and curved arms. Then he yawned loudly.

"It is very boring, this life," he said. "I die of boredom. You call it *le cafard*, do you not? It is a dreadful malady."

"I have suffered from it," said Hardy. "After my leg was amputated."

Schwarzwald stretched out his two legs and gave another yawn.

"A pretty girl would help matters," he said. "But there are no pretty girls except those two at the house who are very proud and cold. I understand, of course. It is because I am German and therefore in their minds an enemy. All the same it is unpleasant."

Hardy did not feel called upon to answer this. He was thinking of Madeleine only a yard or so away in the darkness of the kitchen.

Schwarzwald talked for a few minutes about the weather and the countryside. He seemed to talk more to hear his own voice than to hold conversation with Pierre Prunier. Suddenly he rose and went to a deal table where Hardy kept his tobacco pouch, long since empty.

"I like that," said Schwarzwald. "It is what I want. How much will you take for it?"

"I do not sell it," answered Hardy.

It had been given to him by his father.

Schwarzwald examined it, and saw a name printed on it.

Christopher Hardy.

"How did you come by it?" he asked. "That is an English name." He looked at this young man who called himself Pierre Prunier, and there was

suspicion in his eyes again.

“It belonged to an English soldier in the last war,” said Hardy. “He gave it to my father on the battlefields of the Somme. That is why I keep it.”

“So?”

Schwarzwald seemed to accept this story, but several times Hardy was aware of his eyes staring at him.

It was half an hour before he went away when the rain ceased. To Hardy it had seemed like four hours. He waited until he heard Schwarzwald’s heavy tread down the tiled path and then went to the kitchen and whispered:

“Madeleine! You are there?”

She drew a deep breath, and came into the light, blinking.

“That was a horrible experience! It seemed to last for ever. There was a moment when I wanted to sneeze.”

Hardy laughed and held up his hands.

“Thank God you didn’t. That young swine is already suspicious. He has gone away with a query in his mind which beyond doubt he will pass on to the German police. It is time I left Grancourt Notre-Dame.”

“*Christophe!*” cried Madeleine. “Do not go. Or, if you go, tell me a thousand times that you will keep me in your heart as I shall keep you.”

He told her so, not a thousand times for lack of time. She wept and he kissed her wet eyes. It was a night of love too short before the dawn which glimmered through the windows.

“It is time, my dearest,” said Hardy.

Footsteps sounded down the tiled path.

Hambleton had come to fetch him.

## XXIV

VICHY. . . . THE tragedy of France had changed its character out of all likeness to its past as a health resort and social rendezvous for French and English visitors who had drunk its water, gambled in its casino, attended the Russian ballet, played tennis—if they were young and vigorous—shot clay pigeons, and lingered long over lunches in luxury hotels or in white villas looking on to flower gardens. No English lords were here now with their ladies. No French politicians came here with their mistresses as an escape from the lobbies of the *Chambre des Deputés*—though some of them were

here with their mistresses as an escape from the consequences of German victory. The French Government, under Marshal Pétain, had taken over the hotels and the villas. Crowds of minor officials with their families had surged into this place built for delight, and now the dwelling-place of defeat, despair, humiliation, and enforced collaboration with an enemy who had the whip-hand, and the power and will to use it, ruthlessly if need be.

In the cafés and restaurants there was interminable argument in low voices by men uneasy in their consciences or deep in treachery. Among them were secret agents in the pay of Germany, police spies, lickspittles of Laval, who kept closely in touch with the German overlords and played a traitor's game against the old Marshal, who, in the opinion of many Frenchmen, did his best for France with dignity and tact.

To the followers of de Gaulle and to all those who believed that France had been betrayed by the terms of surrender Vichy was the infamous name, the place of shame, the headquarters of cowardice and treachery. They spoke the word Vichy with a passionate contempt. "The men of Vichy" were to them synonymous with all that was vile. Pétain they could only pardon—if at all—by a shrug of the shoulders and the words: "He is *gaga*. He is a poor old man in his dotage." The name of Laval, that little man with a greasy complexion and the soul of a Judas, as they described him, activated their endocrine glands and turned them green with suppressed rage.

To Vichy came Edward Hambleton one day, and people turned now and then to look furtively at this tall loose-limbed young American—so obviously an American—who glanced about him with a slight smile about his lips as though amused to find himself here. Perhaps they envied him his look of carelessness and detachment. There was nothing morbid in his eyes. He was not haggard and self-tortured like so many here. He strode through the streets with his head up and that little smile about his lips.

"*Un bon type!*" said a French lady to her husband as he passed. A good type she thought, and certainly an American.

He lunched with Chas Hunt in a little restaurant which seemed to have been appropriated by American journalists.

"Tell me about the set-up here," said Edward. "Has old Pétain any power? Does he think he has any pull with the Boches? Why does the United States back this Vichy puppet-show by keeping its representatives here? Pretty futile, isn't it?"

Hunt had been astonished to see Edward walk into his office. He was inquisitive as to Edward's recent history since that adventure they had had

on the roads of Normandy. So far Hambleton had not enlightened him much. Now he was asking difficult questions.

“I came here with a lot of prejudice,” said Hunt. “Now I’m watching things with an open mind and it’s darned interesting.”

Edward laughed over his cigarette.

“Don’t tell me you are a faithful follower of Laval. That sewer rat! You can’t make me believe that, Chas.”

Chas didn’t want him to believe it.

“I’d like to see him guillotined in the Place de la Concorde—one day he will be. But old Pétain is different. He has the respect of most Frenchmen and he’s playing a crafty game with Hitler, who is afraid of pushing him too far. Pétain has two trump cards in his hand and Hitler knows it.”

“What are they?” asked Edward, with deep scepticism.

“The French Fleet and North Africa. Pétain has the allegiance of those in North Africa. It would be bad for Hitler if they went over to the other side. Same with the Fleet which Hitler’s hands itch to grab.”

“I’m for de Gaulle,” said Edward, squarely. “I’m for the French policy of resistance. That’s in the heroic tradition of France.”

Chas Hunt looked at him in a scrutinizing way.

“Say, Edward,” he said, “don’t forget you’re an American citizen. Don’t put your head into a noose by getting mixed up with this sabotage stuff, or any part of the underground movement. It’s too damn dangerous.”

“We’ll talk about that later,” said Edward. “This place is too public and there’s an ugly-looking guy at the next table who is trying to hear what we’re talking about.”

“Better come to my office,” suggested Hunt.

In Hunt’s office—which had once been a *pension* for English tourists—Hambleton brought him up to date with news of Armand de Rollencourt and Christopher Hardy, with whom they had shared that adventure on the roads. He also described life in the farmhouse at Grancourt with Madeleine Delaroche, and Armand’s mother and sister, and the two Germans who were billeted on them.

Chas Hunt seemed to be amused.

“I guess you’re pretty deep in love with one of those women, and I guess that the girl you love is a hundred per cent pro de Gaulle and is dragging you into the net. Am I wrong?”

“Dead wrong,” answered Hambleton, with conscienceless insincerity.

“Liar!” answered Hunt. “I can see the truth in your eyes, buddy—that soft look of romantic love.”

Edward waved all this away.

“Cut it out,” he said. “I’ve come here to talk reasonably, and to ask you to lend a hand in a good work.”

“Tell me the worst,” said Hunt. “How many bucks?”

“Not a nickel,” answered Edward. “I’ve come here to get a few papers which will help the escape of British soldiers still in France and young Frenchmen in hiding from the Gestapo.”

“What sort of papers?” asked Hunt cautiously.

“*Cartes d’identité* with the Vichy stamp. I will provide the photos. *Sauf-conduits*, also stamped by the Vichy police. The signatures of Laval and Pétain. Exit permits to Spain with authority to proceed on business affairs.”

Chas Hunt laughed loudly.

“How in hell do you think you’re going to get them?”

“It’s easy,” said Edward. “It’s all arranged. There’s a very friendly guy in a subordinate position here. He sits in an outer room of Pétain’s headquarters. He used to be a French newspaper man and one of your pals.”

Chas Hunt stubbed out the end of a Camel cigarette.

“How do you know?” he asked. “What’s his name?”

Edward lowered his voice and gave the name, at which Hunt raised his eyebrows with astonishment.

“What, that fellow? He used to dine with me at Fouquet’s now and then.”

Edward nodded.

“All I ask you to do is to go and see him and say that your American friend has arrived from Grancourt Notre-Dame and would much like to have lunch with him tomorrow at your private apartment. If you could arrange that little lunch, Chas, I’ll stand you an excellent dinner in Paris as soon as this war is over. And it will be over all the sooner if you can do this favour for me.”

“Now, look here,” said Hunt.

He was just a bit scared about that lunch in his private rooms. He didn’t want to get mixed up in any dirty work, well, any work which could be held against him by French police or German agents. He was not reassured by Edward’s easy-going assertion that there was nothing to it. No possible suspicion could be aroused by an American newspaper man entertaining an official attached to Marshal Pétain. But Hunt was touched when Edward

reminded him of many poor devils who were waiting for a chance of escape which might be denied them if Hunt refused this little service.

“Well, that’s O.K. with me,” he said at last. “I’ll do it, but against my better judgment. And if you’ll take a bit of advice from me, buddy, you’ll go back pretty damn quick to your mother in Massachusetts. You’re just asking for trouble, and the kind of trouble that leads to a white wall and a firing squad.”

“Nothing like that, I hope,” said Edward.

The luncheon party in Hunt’s rooms was entirely without drama of any obvious or alarming kind, though Hunt was nervous, and at the back of his mind Hambleton was amused by a sense of playing a part behind the scenes of French history. A very small part in a very great drama.

The French official, who had been a newspaper man in Paris—the editor of a political review of high standing—was suave and conversational. He discussed French literature, the charm of Vichy before the war, and the difficulty of understanding American politics, and especially the methods of electing a president.

Before leaving he turned to Hambleton with a question:

“Do I understand that you are going to Paris?”

“I have an idea of doing so,” answered Edward.

“In that case may I entrust you with some family papers which have a slight importance?”

“Certainly,” answered Edward, “with pleasure.”

“They’re addressed to a cousin of mine who would be most glad to meet you. In the Avenue Victor Hugo. He is a most intelligent fellow, but nothing would budge him from Paris, not even the Germans.”

He handed Edward a big envelope filled with papers.

“You will take care of them?”

“You can rely on that.”

“A thousand thanks. It has been a great pleasure to meet you.”

He departed with a charming smile.

“Gosh!” exclaimed Chas Hunt, striding about the room and looking ruffled. “All this is very dangerous.”

“I guess he delivered the goods,” answered Edward. “That’s the value of having a friend at Court.”

“If those papers are found on you,” said Hunt warningly, “not even your American citizenship will get you out of the hoosegow.”



“It’ll be bad luck if anybody searches me on the way to Paris,” said Edward, light-heartedly. “Well, thanks a lot, Hunt.”

“Ned Hambledon,” said Hunt, putting his hand on Edward’s shoulder, “you’re a brave man, but this isn’t your line of business. Get back to Massachusetts, laddy. The Gestapo have nasty forms of torture.”

“Oh, I’m going back one day,” answered Edward. “See you in New York, some time.”

## XXV

PARIS again.

Edward Hambledon paced down its familiar streets with a sense of tragedy strong within him. He felt very lonely, though many people had returned and the city was not so deserted as when he had left it. But all his friends, or nearly all, had gone, and in their place German officers and men were in possession. He saw a German guard, headed by a military band, marching towards the Arc de Triomphe. German officers were sitting outside Fouquet’s, up the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, though it was autumn weather now. They passed through the swing-doors of the Café de la Paix. They stared into the shop windows along the Boulevard des Italiens and the Rue Royale and the Avenue de l’Opéra. There was a coming and going of military cars outside the Hôtel Crillon. The Parisians passed them as though they did not exist, never glancing at them. Only in the lowest haunts of Montmartre was there any association between German soldiers and French women. Edward did not penetrate into those quarters, but in the Rue Montmartre, up which he walked to the Père Jean one evening, he saw little French sluts in the embrace of German soldiers, some of whom were drunk. Not a pleasant sight. Hambledon turned his head away from them and felt sick.

He went into the Père Jean, where he found the *patron* and his wife and the girl Suzanne, and the old Englishman, Robinson, who had come in as usual for his coffee and game of Patience. It seemed a year since he had seen them and he was touched by their greeting as though he were their long-lost son.

“*Monsieur Edouard!*” cried Madame Marchand. “*Quel plaisir de vous revoir!*”

The *patron* held his hand in an iron grip, and Suzanne gave a cry of astonishment at the sight of him. A few mechanics and taxi-drivers were having their evening meal and there were two *midinettes* and a solitary well-dressed girl reading a novel at one of the small tables.

“How goes it in Paris?” asked Edward presently.

Madame Marchand raised her hands.

“We exist. That is all!”

“And the Germans? How are they behaving?”

It was the *patron* who answered.

“On the whole they are correct. On the whole they behave well. There are, of course, drunken orgies in dirty places. But certainly, as a rule, they are correct. One must say that.”

Suzanne gave a shrill and bitter laugh.

“I wish to be sick when I hear that word ‘correct’. They have destroyed France, but they are ‘correct’. They rob the pictures out of the Louvre, but they are ‘correct’. They seize all the food in France and if one German is killed in a back street they shoot ten Frenchmen, but they are ‘correct’.”

“The authorities are ruthless,” admitted the *patron*; “but the rank and file and the officers conduct themselves reasonably well. They pay for what they buy. That is something. They are polite, which is also something.”

Suzanne laughed again harshly and with a shrill voice.

“It is the German character. They killed my man, but they would like me to love them. They do not understand because I am as cold as ice and do not look at them. They have the instinct of bandits and assassins. After their dirty work they wish to amuse themselves and be happy with their victims.”

Some of the people in the restaurant joined in this argument. Old Robinson, looking up from his Patience cards, made an observation of a dark nature.

“The Germans want to be loved. They smash their way through Europe in a spirit of loving-kindness.”

One of the *midinettes* had something to say.

“I serve, as you know, outside the Magazins du Louvre. German soldiers speak to me in bad French. They are annoyed when I refuse to smile at their clumsy and disgusting flirtations. Other girls are not unfriendly. They have no loyalty. They have no decency. They ought to have all their clothes torn off and their hair cut off.”

One of the mechanics laughed harshly.

“That is what will happen to them one day. When General de Gaulle comes back with an Army of Liberation.”

“When will that be, my friend?” asked another of the mechanics. “In ten years or in twenty? The Germans have us under their heels. They are masters of Europe. For my part I think old Pétain is right. A little collaboration is necessary. The Germans are not all bad. Some of them are almost human. We have to make the best of a bad business.”

Suzanne answered him fiercely:

“That is to say you will lick your chains. Play the dirty coward.”

“I have only one life,” said the mechanic, “and I believe in the brotherhood of man.”

Suzanne gave her shrill laugh again.

“Then you’ll believe anything!”

The argument continued and boiled up hotly and then subsided when two German soldiers came in. They were non-commissioned officers and saluted the company before sitting at a small table and staring at the menu. They looked uncomfortable in the dead silence of this restaurant. Suzanne ignored them until Madame Marchand whispered to her. Then she went to the table with tight lips and a pallid face and misery in her eyes.

One of the Germans spoke a little French.

“*S’il vous plait, mademoiselle.*”

He ordered a plate of tripe, and smiled at Suzanne in a friendly way, but the smile faded from his lips because of her white hostile face and the hatred in her eyes.

Edward went to his studio. There was a new concierge who did not know him but let him in when he showed his keys and explained his previous occupation.

His rooms smelt damp. His books and canvases were filmed with dust. The window curtains were drawn as he had left them at dawn when he went away with Kit Hardy.

Three or four letters lay on the mat inside his door. They bore American stamps. Letters from home. They must have been delivered after the German entry of Paris.

The concierge had come upstairs with him as though not quite certain that he was the rightful occupant of these rooms.

“Are you staying here?” he asked.

“Only a night or two.”

“The German police will want your *carte d’identité* and other papers. We have to report every inhabitant. They keep a sharp eye on everyone.”

“Without doubt,” answered Edward.

The concierge went downstairs again and Edward opened his letters and read them.

His people were worried about him.

*My dear Edward (wrote his father), your mother and I are expecting you back any day now. We hope very much that you will get out of France without difficulty or danger. The situation there seems desperate as I write. The French débâcle is mysterious and lamentable and everybody here fears that England cannot stand up alone against an all-powerful Germany. This is a distressing thought and I confess that it keeps me awake at night. England’s downfall would be a great disaster to civilization. All the same, I earnestly hope that we shall not be dragged into this war by Mr. Roosevelt, whose foreign policy and latest utterances are highly dangerous and likely to involve us in this European conflict from which we should keep well away. My friends of the Tavern Club are mainly of this opinion, and their dislike of Mr. Roosevelt is deepening into something like passionate hostility. . . . Penny is having a good time and has done a lot of riding this summer. We do not see eye to eye on world affairs or domestic politics. She is fanatical in her adoration of Mr. Roosevelt and thinks we ought to jump into this war at England’s side. We argue but don’t quarrel, she being a very good comrade of mine, bless her pretty face. She goes to too many cocktail parties with her beau Spike Brandon who, in my opinion, which I keep secret, is not worthy to tie up her shoelaces.*

There was a postscript.

*We are really anxious about you. If you need any money send me a cable.*

Hambledon read through the other letters. His sister Penny was also worried.

*For goodness’ sake come back, Edward. Don’t get caught by the Blond Beast. Don’t stay in Paris when the German Luftwaffe is*

*overhead. Take care of yourself and get out of France while the going is good. . . . I have been having a lovely summer. . . .*

There was a narrative of swimming, boating, riding, and a round of parties.

His brother Tiny scrawled a line.

*Why in hell don't you come back before you get caught in the furnace fires? One doesn't walk between two express trains heading for a collision. If Roosevelt drags us into this war, and he's heading that way, I shall become a passive resister for conscience' sake, and also to save my skin, which at the moment is very bronzed after sunbathing and swimming. I don't want to die fighting England's wars. No, sir! I cherish my young life and all the things that differentiate intelligent man from his gorilla ancestry. I hope to get my last play put on as a try-out in Chicago. It's good. It's a flaming indictment of war, but not without humour and an irony which will be above the heads of those dumb-bells who like the leg shows in Broadway. However, I'll tell you all about that when you arrive. Don't linger as an onlooker of hell's kitchen. We're getting a bit scared about you, knowing your romantic tendencies.*

Hambleton read these letters with a smile about his lips, which faded out when he dropped them to the floor and went into a brown study in that studio which for him was haunted with ghosts of a world which had gone. Olga. Many pretty girls. French and American friends. Odette, the daughter of the concierge. The ghost of himself new to Paris, mad keen on his painting, curious about life, ardent in his first love, a gay fellow laughing a lot, singing in his bath, shouting to Odette while she was dusting in the next room.

Those letters from home were a reminder of another way of life—the American way of life which was pretty good. Swimming, boating, riding by the lake of Assawampsett. What could be better? Over there was peace and plenty. Over there, as though in another planet, there was no menace of war, no realization of war. Penny went to her cocktail parties and had a good time. Of course they were interested in this European war, but only as flaring headlines and dramatic news which made the papers interesting, but instantly forgotten when local politics or the daily excitements of domestic life thrust them away for more personal interest. It would be the sensible thing to go back, even though he would go back to a purposeless life. More

reasonable to go back. Should he go back and quit this drama in France after seeing the first act? Why in hell did he want to stay and let himself get entangled in this underground stuff which wasn't without risk? Why did he know perfectly well inside himself that he would go back to an old farmhouse near Tours?

What was drawing him back? To help in the escape of French prisoners of war who wished to fight for de Gaulle? Yes. That wasn't a bad motive. The idea interested him and there was a touch of drama in it, a bit of risk which he was ready to take for a good cause. He was all for de Gaulle. But that was not the chief pull back. If he were dead honest with himself—and he wanted to be dead honest—it was Lucile who pulled him back and kept him from any boat which might be sailing for New York. She had taken the place of Olga, though in a different way. He loved the look of her—her little dark head, the grace of her body, her play of expression, the gestures of her fine delicate hands—beautifully modelled they were—and her sensitive mouth. But it was her spirit which put a spell on him, her intelligence, her character. She had courage beyond that of most women. She was ready to face death for the sake of France. She had been charming to him. They had spoken no word of love, but he loved her, not with passion as he had loved Olga, but with respect and devotion. It was she, Lucile de Rollencourt, who called him back into the danger zone where as an American he had no business, strictly speaking, as an outsider.

He met certain people in Paris. The cousin of the Vichy official, a former school friend of Lucile's who was the daughter of a French General; a French naval man on the retired list; a publisher of prints and etchings; a former member of the staff on the *Echo de Paris*.

They seemed to be pretty far forward in organizing an underground movement of resistance and had made a chain of friends across France to help the escape of young Frenchmen eager to fight for de Gaulle. They were all expecting a visit from Edward Hambleton by some secret message which had reached them.

“We shall be ready in a few days to send some of our men to Grancourt Notre-Dame,” said Marguerite Germain, who had been to school with Lucile.

“They are now in hiding with our friends at various stages of the route. The Bois des Fées is the last link of our chain in Occupied France. Give my dearest love to Lucile, who stands at this critical post.”

She was in her apartment in the Avenue Foch. It was elegantly furnished and there were some good modern pictures on the walls. She was dressed in

a simple black frock, cut low at the neck.

“This is only the beginning of French resistance,” she said. “One day it will spread throughout France and gather strength. We have many devoted friends already willing to take every risk.”

She held out her hand to Hambledon.

“You are one of us,” she told him. “We are deeply grateful for your help.”

Hambledon took his leave. That last phrase—“You are one of us”—remained in his mind. Yes, if he went back to Grancourt Notre-Dame he would be in this business—up to the neck.

He went back to Grancourt Notre-Dame.

## PART II

### AMERICA

#### I

ANTHONY HAMBLEDON, brother of Edward, who had lost himself somewhere in France, stood on the wooden platform of an old windmill in Lakeside, Massachusetts, and gazed at the beauty of the world about him and did not seem to like it. He groaned heavily like a man in anguish and uttered the words "Oh, God!" as though praying for relief from life.

He stood six-foot-three in his bare feet, and was a fine figure of a young man upon whom the sun of Massachusetts shone warmly in that early morning of a September day. He stood there almost naked, having just sprung out of bed where he had spent a restless night, flung off his pyjamas, and put on a pair of white linen shorts. His body was richly tanned at the end of a hot summer. His face and neck were deeply coloured, as brown as those of a Red Indian—one of those Redskins who in former days had possessed this land with its lakes and woods, a great solitude in which they were lonely.

Anthony Hambleton, called Tiny by his family and friends, had taken possession of this old windmill, long disused, as his own sanctuary and hide-away. Not even his sister Penny, who dared most things, ventured to come in here without first giving a Coo-ee! and asking permission to enter. Otherwise there was a row about it. Here in a circular room he had his books, writing-table, and bed, with a small cooking stove upon which he could make a meal at any time of the day or night. In winter he could keep himself warm by another stove fed by wood which he could get near at hand from the dead branches of silver birches. In this study, as he called it, he could escape from family discussions, week-end guests in his father's house a quarter of a mile away, and be entirely alone with himself and his thoughts.

Here he had written his one successful play and sixteen unsuccessful plays, mostly unproduced. Here lately—that is to say for six months or more—he had worried himself by secret brooding and disturbed nights because of increasing passion for a certain lady who happened to be the wife of



another man and very loyal to her marriage vows, though kind, friendly, and humorous to Anthony Hambleton who, as very well she knew, adored her body and mind. That was Cynthia Birch from London, England, a refugee from the German Blitz because of her small daughter aged four.

Tiny Hambleton had been thinking of her during the night when he ought to have been sleeping. She had disturbed his mind a lot by telling him that she had made up her mind to go back to England. She had laughed with her usual humour when he had asked what in hell he was going to do without her for intelligent conversation, sympathetic aid, and understanding friendship.

“You don’t need me as much as all that,” she told him. “You won’t miss me after the first week. I’m only one of your bad habits, like cigarette smoking. You like to argue with me, and try how far you can go in anti-British prejudice before you get me angry. I must say it has been very good to see so much of you, but I’ve wasted your time, Tiny, and created scandal in your family. Anyhow, I must get back to England. I can’t stand this exile any longer.”

That is what she had told him when he was alone with her last night. He had argued with her and pleaded with her, and walked up and down her room like a tiger, and then he tried to kiss her after telling her that he loved her like hell. That had been a mistake. She had pushed him away with both hands and her face had become very white for a moment, and she had told him to go. He had gone and slammed the door behind him. No wonder he hadn’t slept very well.

Standing there on his wooden platform like a figure in bronze he stared at the loveliness of the world about him with a heavy frown which made a tuck in his forehead. Below him, a few hundred yards away, were the paddocks with their white rails, and the jumps which Penny took when she did her morning rides. Beyond them was the golf-course which his father had laid out at great expense before the depression of ’29 which had curtailed his income. Beyond was the lake of Assawampsett, like molten metal under the morning sun, already beginning to burn. It had burnt the golf-course brown, except on the greens which were kept watered. Woods, mostly of silver birch, stretched as far as the eye could see beyond the lake, with a clearing here and there showing the fields with thin soil through which bare gleaming rocks cropped up, as all over this State of Massachusetts. There had been times when Tiny Hambleton had thought all this beautiful. Even as a small boy, released from school in Boston for long stretches here, he had thought this place a paradise. He had had grand times here, swimming, boating, riding, sitting on the old rocks, reading about Red

Indians, playing Red Indian games in the woods. Now this morning it all seemed hateful because of that scene last night with Cynthia.

A Coo-ee! came up to him. Penny came riding through the paddocks, taking one of the jumps on her young mare with the white socks. She wore a yellow polo shirt and a pair of white shorts. Her arms and legs were as brown as his, and her blue eyes were set in a tanned face below her mop of straw-coloured hair.

She sang out to him:

“ ‘Morning, Tiny! Come over to breakfast. There’s a letter from Edward—the first since five months. Anyhow, he’s still alive, but very mysterious. Mother is crazy at having heard from him at last.”

Tiny Hambledon answered her from his wooden platform.

“He’s probably caught by some demoiselle if I know anything about our kid brother. I’ll be along soon.”

“And, Tiny,” called out Penelope Hambledon, from the back of her brown mare, “I want you to come to lunch today for a special reason.”

“What’s that?” asked her brother, suspiciously.

She laughed before answering.

“We have a very nice guest. A young English naval officer from the battleship *Rodney*. I met him in Boston.”

“Oh, hell!” said Tiny.

“He’s very charming. Terribly good looking. You’ll like him.”

“I’m darned sure I won’t,” answered this very tall young man, who looked down upon his sister from the high platform of his windmill. “I don’t like English affectation, and I don’t want to be patronized as though I belonged to an inferior race. I’ve had that before. It gets my goat.”

“Dick Arkwright isn’t like that!” cried Penelope. “He thinks we’re all wonderful. He’s crazy about Boston and American food and the American way of life. . . . So come to lunch, Tiny, there’s a dear.”

Her brown mare with the white socks was getting restless and danced sideways.

“Steady, Bess. Steady, old girl!”

She waved a hand, turned her mare, and shot off across the brown grass towards the parental house, visible beyond the golf-course, with its slate roof and brown walls based upon primeval rock, cropping up from the soil and making its foundations.

Before putting on a blue shirt and going over to breakfast with the family, Tiny Hambledon strode into his circular room, dialled a number on

his telephone, heard a woman's voice answer, and said: "That you, Cynthia?"

"Who else could it be?" she asked with a laugh. "How do you feel this morning, Tiny?"

"A wreck," he told her. "I didn't get a wink last night. I lay cursing myself and suffering the tortures of a damned soul."

She laughed again, and he liked to hear that English laugh.

"Indigestion?" she asked. "Pork pies or something?"

"Conscience, lady," he answered. "I behaved like a primitive man. I want to lie down at your feet. I want to grovel. Anyhow, I want you to forgive me."

"Oh, there's nothing to forgive!" she told him. "I've been so glad of your friendship. Don't let's spoil it—especially now when I'm going away pretty soon."

Anthony Hambleton groaned slightly before he answered.

"Say, you make me want to burst into tears. The thought of your going away just makes me suicidal. I've been in seventh heaven every time I've come to see you."

"Come again!" she answered with that little low laugh. "Come this evening, Tiny. Read me out the last act of your new play."

"Do you mean it?" he asked anxiously. "Have you really forgiven me for trying to kiss you last night? And then my rage when you wouldn't?"

"All is forgiven!" she told him lightly. "As long as you don't do it again. Nine o'clock?"

"Nine o'clock though the heavens fall," he answered. He wanted to say other things, but she had put up the receiver after saying: "That's good."

He felt better after that telephone conversation. He felt strong enough in spirit to shave himself. The dark misery of wakeful hours in the night had passed. Anyhow, he wanted breakfast. Even hopeless lovers are hungry in the morning.

## II

THE arrival in Massachusetts of Cynthia Birch and her little daughter Tessa was pleasant and emotional for those who first met her, and were anxious, in the American way, to offer her all kinds of kindness and hospitality.

The Blitz over England in 1940 had horrified them, and the heroism of the English people in standing up to it—"London can take it!"—"Coventry can take it!"—stirred their admiration in a very profound way. The ladies of Boston and other American cities organized "Aid For Britain" and "Bundles for Britain" and gave their time as well as their money—heaps of it—in providing clothes and comforts and medical supplies for those who had lost their homes, and were victims of this atrocious form of war.

The mothers of Britain were invited to bring their children to the United States, and the only restrictions to this wide-open offer were the guarantee of financial sponsors required by the American Government, and the sinking of ships by German U-boats—terrifying in their toll of life.

Mrs. Hambledon had been one of those who gave her guarantee that an English mother and child should not become a burden to the United States, although the British Government was niggardly in its permission for English money to be brought out and exchanged for American dollars. Well-to-do people in England who parted from their children could not provide for them, and had to rely upon the generosity of Americans who were willing to receive them.

Mrs. Hambledon was delighted to receive Cynthia Birch and her little daughter—in spite of some opposition from members of her family. A letter had come from Cynthia's father, Mr. Henry Ottershaw, with whom they had made friends on a Mediterranean cruise. He had explained the need of a guarantee, and the urgent anxiety of himself and his son-in-law regarding Cynthia and her child.

"Send a cable at once," said Mrs. Hambledon, in her brisk masterful way.

"Of course we shall be terribly glad to guarantee the poor dears. I wish we could guarantee all the mothers and children of England."

Mr. Edward Hambledon, senior, looked up from his *New York Times* and smiled at his wife across the breakfast-table.

"I'd hate to cramp your enthusiasm," he said, "but is it quite wise? This English girl and her baby might be rather a tie on us, don't you think? And I'm not sure that I can afford to add to my household expenses, with income-tax mounting, and the high cost of living getting higher every month—mainly because of Mr. Roosevelt and his lavish hand with public money, and his pandering to revolutionary Labour."

"You're talking nonsense, Edward," answered Mrs. Hambledon. "My heart bleeds for those bombed-out people in England. If I had to go without bread and butter I wouldn't refuse shelter to any of them."

“Bravo, Mother!” cried Penelope, who had just drunk her morning glass of orange juice. “We ought to have been in this war long ago. The English people are fighting our war and saving our skins. The least we can do is to open a way of escape for some of their women and children.”

That tall fellow, Tiny, who happened to have come in to breakfast from his mill-house, grinned at his sister and ranged himself by the side of his father.

“That kind of talk makes me tired, Penny, my child. England wants us to pull her chestnuts out of the fire again. English propaganda is trying its best to lure us into another world war, in which personally I’m not interested. As for having that English girl here, I think it would be a great mistake. You know what they are like—all affectation and snootiness. Take it from me she would spoil the charm of this simple home life, and once here we couldn’t get rid of the lass. We should have her on our hands year after year. Frightful prospect.”

“You’re without a soul and without a conscience,” answered Penny. “Pass me that mess of pottage, buddy.”

Mrs. Hambledon had her own way. She always had her own way, being a lady of character, with courage enough to revolt against the Back Bay traditions of Boston which belonged to a ruling and reactionary caste. The guarantee was cabled to England. An old frame cottage at the end of the estate on the shore of Lake Assawampsett was swept and garnished for the arrival of the young English mother and her little girl. Jake, the hired man, colour-washed the ceilings and repaired the boiler. Mrs. Hambledon bought new chintz coverings for the chairs in Boston. She carried over from her own house several nice etchings and collected editions of poems by Tennyson, Wordsworth, and Shelley with the latest copy of *Vogue* and some old numbers of *Harper’s Magazine*. For the little girl she provided some dolls and comic animals—bought at great expense—from Schwarz in Boston.

Mrs. Hambledon’s eldest and long-legged son was coerced to go with Penny to meet the refugees on their arrival at La Guardia airfield outside New York. His plea that he was engaged on the last scene of an epoch-making play left his mother cold.

“That will wait,” she said firmly. “It’s less important than meeting Cynthia Birch, and I can’t go myself as I’m presiding at the General Committee of Bundles for Britain.”

“Hell!” said Tiny under his breath, but he accepted the inevitable, and drove his Packard at a furious rate to New York, secretly amused because

even Penny, who was very fearless, looked a bit scared now and then and warned him about traffic cops.

The Clipper arrived out of the blue at the appointed tick of time. From it descended several film stars, whose faces were familiar to Penny, half a dozen elderly men who might have been British diplomats, two newspaper correspondents, various foreigners of unguessable nationality, who had doubtless escaped from the clutches of the Gestapo in the occupied countries of Europe, and a number of young mothers with their children—refugees from the Blitz over Britain—by way of Lisbon.

Among them were Cynthia Birch and little Tessa.

Penny spotted her first.

“I believe that’s Cynthia. How English looking and how adorable!”

“Think so?” asked Tiny, staring grumpily at the girl pointed out by his sister. “That wild-eyed wench with the flat chest and the long legs? She hasn’t combed her hair lately, maybe.”

So he spoke, but to himself he thought other things. He thought this girl with tousled fair hair and blue eyes rather far apart—tall and slim and long-legged, in a shabby blue frock which left her brown arms bare to the shoulders—looked like a wood nymph who had come to New York from some English forest. There was an untamed look in her eyes, he thought. A wood nymph would have eyes like that, a little wild and a little wondering. She had a thin face revealing her cheek-bones, and a pointed chin and a mouth without lipstick. A little girl clutched her hand, while in her other arm she carried a golliwog and a teddy bear.

Penny was the first to greet Cynthia with effusive affection and real emotion.

“How wonderful that you’ve come! I do hope you’re going to be happy in the United States after all you’ve been through. I’m Penelope Hambleton. They call me Penny. This is my big brother Anthony. We call him Tiny. And this is little Tessa! How terribly sweet she is! Did she like the trip in the Clipper?”

“Not much,” answered Cynthia. “She was sick a good deal.”

“Yes, I was sick over everybody,” said Tessa, as though proud of this achievement.

When Cynthia gave her hand to Tiny she looked up into his eyes in a frank, unshy way.

“You’re a long way up!” she said, with a slight smile.

“Yes, I have to stoop to my friends,” he told her.

On the way through New York—where they had tea at the Plaza—she was rather silent, and Penny did most of the chattering. But she made one or two remarks which interested Tiny.

“I feel that I have come to another planet.”

“It’s a friendly part of the planet,” said Penelope reassuringly. “Everyone will try to make you happy here. And you’ll love Boston and the country round about. It’s very English, I believe.”

“Do you ever think about the war in Europe?” asked Cynthia. “It must be difficult for your minds to reach as far as that. I mean, all these people here in the New York streets. It can’t mean very much to them, except as newspaper headlines.”

“That girl has a lot of sense in her head,” thought Tiny, over his steering-wheel. “She talks straight. She doesn’t gush like most English girls I’ve met.”

He could see her face reflected in the mirror on his car, and when they were held up by traffic blocks he saw her gazing up at the skyscrapers, towering high above them.

Once he spoke to her over his shoulder.

“What do you think of little old New York? Not much like London?”

He heard her laugh before answering.

“Not a bit like London! Wonderful—and frightening.”

“Frightening? Do you mean it scares you?”

“It might be a city in Mars,” she answered. “It doesn’t belong to our old-fashioned civilization.”

“It sure doesn’t!” he agreed.

She made one other remark about New York several blocks farther on.

“It’s a good thing you’re outside Hitler’s bombing range. Those skyscrapers would make quite a mess if they were hit.”

“Lady,” said Tiny Hambledon, “that’s one of the good reasons why the United States should keep neutral in this war, in spite of Mr. Roosevelt’s bias towards plunging us all into hell fire. I don’t mind telling you that I’m a hundred per cent Isolationist. I hope that doesn’t shock your English sensibilities?”

He saw her smile as he looked into the mirror, and their eyes met in the reflection of that bit of glass.

“You’ll have to come in one day,” she answered. “You won’t be able to keep out.”

Penny greeted this remark with enthusiasm.

“That’s my own conviction. Tiny and I have the most terrible arguments about it. He poses as a pacifist.”

“Sure I’m a man of peace,” said Tiny. “If I were a Christian I should quote the words of Christ.”

Further conversation on this subject was interrupted by little Tessa.

“When are we going to have tea, Mummy? I’m getting hungry, and so is Golliwog.”

They had tea at the Plaza, where Tiny made friends with Tessa by creating a very good rabbit out of a table napkin, and otherwise entertaining her, while Penny was putting Cynthia Birch wise to the social set-up in Lakeside where the cottage awaited her.

“It all sounds very pleasant,” said Cynthia. “It’s all very kind of everybody.”

“This girl,” thought Tiny, “keeps her dignity, although she’s a refugee who’s going to live on the charity of my family. She doesn’t wallow in gratitude. Thank God she doesn’t gush. She’s one of Shakespeare’s young women. She might have stepped out of the woodland scenes in *As You Like It!* She’s not unattractive.”

His first impressions of Cynthia Birch were fairly favourable.

### III

THE social set in this corner of Massachusetts gave the friendliest welcome to young Mrs. Birch and her child among other refugees from England to whom they had guaranteed shelter and support. The Hambleton family and their friends heaped kindness upon her, and invited her to their charming homes scattered around the lake of Assawampsett, to which Taunton was the nearest town, with Boston forty miles away. They invited her to luncheon parties, tea parties—it was in compliment to the English national habit that they provided orange pekoe tea—cocktail parties, and dinner parties. Mrs. Hawley Hunt, mother of Chas Hunt, a newspaper man now in Vichy, was a devotee of music and came several times to Cynthia’s cottage to carry her off to Boston for a symphony concert. She was a little hurt when Cynthia made excuses for not going, because of Tessa, whom she could not leave alone.



“Oh, that’s easy!” cried Mrs. Hawley Hunt, who was the kindest-hearted lady. “I will send round Paula, my Portuguese maid. She’s very good with children.”

But there were many times, not only with Mrs. Hawley Hunt, but with Penny Hambleton and others, when Cynthia had to excuse herself from social engagements because Tessa had sprung a temperature—the sharp fluctuations of the Massachusetts climate were hard on English children—or because Tessa had a slight chill, or a touch of acidosis, and in any case wept bitterly if left too long with strangers, however kind, without her mummy. It was disappointing to the Wakefields of Taunton, who had invited a party of young people to meet her. It was disappointing to the Zimmermanns, who had a summer country house not far from that of the Hambletons. They had asked her repeatedly to play croquet with a bunch of boys and girls from Boston who came down for week-ends. At the fourth time of asking, Mrs. Zimmermann showed some slight resentment.

“That child can’t always be sick!” she remarked, when a little note came from Cynthia. “Maybe young Mrs. Birch doesn’t like our American ways.”

“That sure may be so,” answered Mr. Zimmermann. “She struck me as being a very haughty young woman, and as cold as ice, like so many English. Well, it won’t hurt us. I ain’t worrying, Momma.”

She was the subject of frequent conversation at the Hambletons. Penny fell in love with her straight away and never let a morning pass, unless she were in Boston or New York, without riding round to Maple Cottage with some little gift of fruit or flowers or a box of candies for Tessa. Dismounting from her brown mare with the white socks she would utter a Red Indian cry, and call out in a high-pitched voice:

“ ‘Morning, Cynthia! How’s Tessa? How’s life?’ ”

Cynthia’s head would appear out of the bedroom window.

“Hullo, Penny! Sorry I can’t come down. I’m just giving Tessa her bath.”

She always had a gipsy look, with bare legs and feet in sandals and shabby frocks which no American girl would have worn; or she would appear from behind the house where she had been hanging out Tessa’s frocks to dry after washing them in the kitchen.

“Come in for a few minutes. Do you mind if I turn on the wireless? I haven’t heard the morning news.”

Penny noticed that she was hungry for the day’s news and clung to the radio. Often when she came round to the Hambletons for an hour in the evening after putting Tessa to bed, the radio was switched on, but it seemed

to stimulate general conversation, and everybody started talking, except Cynthia. Tiny, who liked watching her face, saw how she was listening intently to news from Europe, ignoring the talk which swirled around her. Once when news was rather worse than usual—the British were having a bad time in North Africa and had been beaten back into Egypt—he saw that her eyes became wet for a moment until she blinked away her tears.

“That girl takes the war hard,” thought Tiny. “And her heart’s over there in Europe. She finds this an exile, and I guess that all this chatter is very trying to her. We’re not interested in her war, as she said, except as exciting stuff for newspaper headlines.”

His father was very courteous to her in his old-fashioned way, and rather liked her at first.

“An intelligent young woman,” he remarked once or twice. “Not that I agree with her point of view, of course. But I don’t blame her for it. I’ll say it’s natural!”

He had drawn her out one evening when several friends had come in to meet her.

“I suppose England can take care of this war, Mrs. Birch?” he said, during a pause in the general conversation.

She looked at him in her frank, wide-eyed way, as though she did not understand.

“Take care of it?”

“I mean England will be able to build up her strength in man-power and win the last battles as she always does?”

His friends—they were the Wakefields and the Hunts—listened for her answer. They seemed interested.

Cynthia was slow in answering—she was thinking it out, and perhaps wondering how frank she ought to be among these Americans.

“I don’t think we can beat the Germans,” she said, “with our own man-power. We haven’t much of a population, even including the Dominions. You see, the Navy and Air Force take a lot of our men. Then we have to keep the factories going. We can’t raise a big army on the Continental scale.”

Mr. John J. Wakefield, a big man with a big clean-shaven face, took a cigar from his mouth and answered her good-humouredly.

“That’s a frank answer, Mrs. Birch, and I guess it’s true.”

Mr. Robert Hawley Hunt, the well-known lawyer in Boston, had a few remarks to make. Because of the great heat on this September evening he

had taken off his jacket, and was sitting in a white silk shirt and a pair of linen trousers.

“Some of your British propagandists over here are hinting that Great Britain can only win the war with the aid of American man-power. Not that they say it straight out, but reading between the lines, or behind their masks, that’s what they mean. Now it would be a good thing for the English people to know the dead-line limit in the American mind.”

Mr. Hambleton looked over to his friend and gave a laugh.

“Do you happen to know it, Bob? That’s more than most of us do. Some pretty confused thinking goes on in these United States. We’re hopelessly divided about almost everything.”

Mr. Robert Hawley Hunt seemed sure of his ground.

“Now, I’m telling you. Take any American mind you like. Take any American mother, and I’ll bet you’ll find one conviction, and that’s unshakable.”

“I’ll be glad to know,” answered Mr. Hambleton, with humorous scepticism.

“I’m telling you, Ted. It’s just this: We’re willing to give all aid to Britain, for whom we have a great admiration because of her courageous resistance to Nazi might. Yes, sir! as far as supplying her with the munitions of war. We’d be sorry to see England go down, because of her great contributions to civilization, including Shakespeare and all that. But there’s not an American father or mother in this country, as far as I know them, and I know them pretty well, who will allow their boys to be sent overseas this time to fight in that hell’s brew called Europe. All aid to Britain, but no Expeditionary Force. And if you’ll like to take the opinion of this small group I’ll be glad. Mrs. Hambleton, I put it to you.”

Mrs. Hambleton, who was president and chairwoman of many committees for “Aid to Britain” and “Bundles for Britain”, became thoughtful. She was a good-looking lady, with fair hair turning a little grey. She had a look of vitality and efficiency, fully borne out by her social and political activities. She answered after a slight hesitation.

“I bleed at the heart for dear old England and all the suffering which she has to endure in this frightful war. I feel I want to give all my money and all my work to relieve the sufferings of their heroic people. But I don’t want our boys to die on European battlefields as so many of their fathers did—in vain.”

Mr. Robert Hawley Hunt smiled and nodded.

“You’ve said it, Mrs. Hambleton. And now you, Mrs. Wakefield.”

Mrs. Wakefield was very strongly against American youth being sacrificed in Europe. She had no patience with Mr. Roosevelt, who, in the most crafty and unconstitutional way, was trying to get the American people involved in the struggle. Step by step he was luring them on to that doom. Of course she loved England, and could almost scream when she read of the bombing of civilians. She had stayed several times in London at Brown's Hotel.

"And what about you, Tiny, my boy?" asked Mr. Robert Hawley Hunt. "As one of the young men who would be asked to fight, how do you feel about it?"

Tiny Hambleton, sitting in a low chair with his long legs outstretched, gave an uneasy laugh.

"Oh, leave me out of it! I'm against war, anyhow. I don't think this war ought to have happened."

Mr. Hunt turned to Cynthia with a smile.

"You see, Mrs. Birch, this is a cross-section of American opinion. So you mustn't look for millions of American boys to weigh down the scales in man-power. We learnt a few things last time. We helped to win the war but we got no gratitude. We were called Uncle Shylock when we asked for payment of war debts."

"Leave that out, Bob," said Mr. Hambleton. "It's another subject, and some of us think we were in the wrong in demanding payment which could only be made in goods we refused to receive and wouldn't allow to come in."

He turned to Cynthia with his friendly smile.

"What have you to say to all this?" he asked. "Whatever you say won't give any offence. This is Liberty Hall. We believe in free speech."

Cynthia saw the eyes of these friendly people watching her. She saw that long-limbed young man called Tiny looking at her curiously. She often found his eyes regarding her as though she were a strange kind of animal and rather amusing to him.

"I don't see any logic in your point of view," she answered, in her clear English voice.

She noticed that Penny had just come in. She was wearing an evening frock as though she had been to a dance or was going to one. That answer Cynthia had made seemed to cause a moment's silence. It was broken by Mr. Robert Hunt.

“Say, that’s a hard one! No logic? What’s wrong with the American logic, lady?”

“It seems to me,” said Cynthia Birch, “that it’s a bit illogical—isn’t it?—to provide mountains of munitions for Great Britain without sending your young men to use them. Shouldn’t they fight with us for civilization—which is as much your concern as ours? Why should we do all the fighting and dying for a civilization which you wish us to defend and which we haven’t the strength to defend unless you stand by our side?”

These quiet words seemed to come into this pleasant drawing-room in Massachusetts like a whiff of gas. At least, they seemed to have a stunning effect for a moment. No answer came until the silence was interrupted by a clapping of hands from the doorway in which Penny had been standing listening to Cynthia.

“That’s wonderful!” she cried. “Well done, Cynthia! That’s exactly what I believe to the innermost cockles of my heart. We ought to be in this war, side by side with the British Armies, Navy, and Air Force. I’m terribly sure we’re just lying back behind the shield of the British battleships.”

Tiny gave a good-humoured laugh and jeered at his sister.

“Great stuff, Penny! Since you’ve known that naval guy on H.M.S. *Rodney* you’ve been singing *Britannia Rules the Waves* all over Massachusetts. I’d like to know what young Brandon thinks about it. I thought I was going to be best man at your wedding.”

Penny flung a cushion at her brother’s head, but he caught it deftly.

Cynthia Birch left early because of Tessa.

“Oh, I must go,” she said, in answer to protestations from Mrs. Hambleton, and Penny’s offer to go and sit with Tessa in case she woke up.

Some comments were passed on her by the Hambletons’ friends.

“A very odd young woman!” said Robert Hawley Hunt. “I confess she scares me. As cold as a polar she-bear. Very critical, I’d say, of our American way of life.”

Mrs. Hunt gave a shrill little laugh.

“Her clothes are deplorable! That frock looked as if it had been in the rag-bag. And fancy coming to an evening party without any stockings. Lack of manners, I call it.”

“I guess she has a brain somewhere,” remarked Mr. Wakefield. “She put the English case rather well. It gave me a knock when she challenged our logic, though I utterly disagree with everything she said. Still, I must say I admired her frankness. She spoke straight and meant what she said.”

“I’m getting to like her,” said Mr. Hambleton with his usual good nature. “She’s dead honest, and a very good mother.”

Penny expressed her own opinion with enthusiasm.

“I think she’s marvellous. She’s terribly sweet to me, and I like her spirit. It’s the spirit of England. She’s as English as Stratford-on-Avon.”

“Yes, that’s what makes her difficult,” said Mr. Hunt with a dry smile.

Tiny, sitting back in his chair with his long legs outstretched, did not pass any opinion upon Cynthia Birch.

#### IV

CYNTHIA was one of many hundreds of young mothers who had come with their children to the United States when the British Isles were threatened by invasion after the fall of France, and, if they were late in going, as she was, already experiencing the horrors of bombardment from the air. It was the German Blitz over London which had forced her to go, for little Tessa’s sake, against all her instincts and all her spirit. She was broken down at last in her refusal to go by the haggard anxiety of her husband—his nerves were in rags and tatters after the first bombs had fallen—and by the endless pleadings of her own father and mother, backed up by her brother and sister.

It began in the flat at Knightsbridge, their private paradise before the war, and now a place of argument and tears and agony because of those black demons overhead.

She remembered a scene when Gerald had come back one evening looking worn out, but with a kind of secret satisfaction in his eyes.

“It’s all fixed,” he told her. “I’ve got your exit permit, and the papers for your trip on the Clipper from Lisbon to New York. You’ll have to go round and see the American Consul with Tessa.”

“I’m not going,” she had answered. “I’ve told you a thousand times, Gerald. Why can’t you leave me in peace?”

He stared at her with anger and then laughed in a queer, harsh way.

“Cynthia, you’re absurd! You’re mad! In peace? Listen! Is that peace?”

The siren was howling the alert. Its rising and falling note was like a banshee, and blood-curdling to frightened souls as Gerald was frightened, not for his own sake, though he hated it, but his wife and child.

“I shan’t go to the American Consul,” she told him firmly. “I want to stay in England. I want to stay with you. I don’t believe in running away.”

Gerald threw up his hands. His thin, delicate-looking face became paler. Little lines appeared about his mouth and eyes.

“You’re an unnatural mother,” he cried. “Cynthia, my darling, we’ve had this out so often. For God’s sake don’t let us go through it all over again. Don’t you want to save Tessa’s life? Do you want me to see you both torn to pieces by flying steel, or buried under an avalanche of masonry? Hark at these devils now!”

Cynthia listened and saw Gerald listening intently. All his nerves were racked. She could see fear in his eyes. Somewhere in London there were heavy bangs and crashes. The floor-boards under their blue carpet trembled with a kind of earthquake tremor.

“It’s a long way off,” she said quietly. “Somewhere in the East End.”

He came and put his arms about her.

“Cynthia, dearest heart, answer my question. Do you want to see Tessa killed? I know your own courage. I wish I had a share of it, but for Tessa’s sake and for my peace of mind I implore you to take this chance of escape. In a few days it may be too late.”

She unloosed his arms about her and went towards the mantelpiece with wet eyes and a queer sharp pain in her heart. She would have to yield, she supposed. Everybody was trying to push her out of England. They were talking about duty and self-sacrifice and motherly love and all that. They seemed to think that Tessa was the only person in the world.

She turned round to him, she remembered, and spoke in a cold voice:

“I suppose I’ll have to go. You’re all so terrified about Tessa. You don’t care a damn about me. Tessa’s life is not more valuable than all the millions of children who will have to stay in England. Why shouldn’t she take her chance with them? If she gets killed she won’t be the only one. Don’t you realize, Gerald, that if I go it will be a long divorce between you and me? The war is going to last for years. How am I going to endure the exile? Didn’t you and I swear to stay by each other for better or worse until death do us part? I shall fall in love with somebody else—I warn you! Some kinky-haired American. That’s the price you’ll have to pay for getting rid of me. We shall never see each other again. Still, I suppose I’ll have to go.”

It was not in her character to talk like that. Generally she kept pretty sane and level-headed. Tonight she felt a little mad. She hated the idea of leaving England. She wanted to stay with this nervous, terror-stricken husband who adored her and to whom she had given her body and soul.

That night had been a bad one in London. Gerald had insisted upon her going down with him to the basement. Most of the people from the other flats in this big block of flats had gone down—young women in dressing-gowns over their pyjamas, and bare feet in loose slippers, young husbands and wives like Gerald and Cynthia with sleepy children wrapped up in blankets; elderly women who spoke with forced gaiety in high strident voices; a famous poet, tall and silent and melancholy; a few officers in uniform; an old Admiral on the retired list—cherubic-looking in his dressing-gown, with ruffled hair; one of the Talks Directors on the B.B.C. They sat around on the floor, or stood against the walls smoking cigarettes, chatting cheerfully, refusing to show the white feather, though every now and again they felt that earth tremor and heard heavy explosions.

“A great nuisance, these things!” said one of the elderly men. “What good does Hitler think it does him?”

“Most annoying,” agreed one of the elderly ladies. “I resent being forced out of my bed.”

“I confess it frightens me very much,” said one of the officers in uniform who did not look at all scared. “I’m entirely unheroic. I should like to be in a very deep shelter sixty feet below the ground.”

“To hell with Hitler!” said one of the young wives, who was smoking a cigarette through a long holder. “I wish we had a drink down here.”

“I’ll go and fetch you one,” volunteered a young man in a blue silk dressing-gown with golden dragons emblazoned upon it.

“No, no, don’t risk your young life for a spot of alcohol. I can hold out till the All Clear.”

Cynthia nodded to one or two of these people and passed a few words with them.

“They are going to stay in England,” she thought. “I’m being sent into exile. I want to share the risks with them. If they are going to be killed I’d liked to be killed with them. But I wouldn’t like Tessa to be killed—dear little Tessa who doesn’t know anything about all this. I was a fool to talk like that to Gerald. It wasn’t quite true. I should break my heart if anything happened to Tessa.”

Gerald was talking to a group of friends. He was talking quite cheerfully and without that look of haggard anxiety. He was like that among people. It was only when he was alone with her that he revealed his fears.

There were more dull crashes. After one of them the basement floor of solid cement seemed to rise a little and then subside.

“It’s all hell in London tonight,” said one of the officers.



She nodded and answered him.

“I’d like to have a look at it. Come up on the roof with me.”

Captain Baskerville raised his eyebrows and smiled.

“A bit risky, isn’t it? Still, if you feel like it——”

They went together to the top floor by lift and then up an iron ladder to the flat roof—from which there was a wonderful view of London, beautiful and terrible that night. The sky was rose-coloured, its whole dome filled with pulsating light. Above many fires, north and east and south, it was blood-red with a seething moving red into which tongues of flame leapt up. Great buildings were blazing fiercely and sending up showers of sparks and scarlet-coloured smoke. Eastwards, there was a dome high above all other buildings, touched by a crimson glow, and looking engulfed in fire. It was the dome of St. Paul’s.

“It’s a hellish sight,” said Captain Baskerville in a low voice. “It makes me shudder. London! Who would believe it in this twentieth century of so-called civilization?”

“I’m glad I came up,” said Cynthia. “One ought to see this thing.”

She leaned with her elbows on a stone parapet, her chin on her clasped hands, staring at this inferno which was London. She had been born here. She had played with her toys in Kensington Gardens. As a young girl she had been to the Tower of London and many times to St. Paul’s. She and Gerald, and a group of friends, had dined and laughed and talked nonsense in many little restaurants from Sloane Square to Soho. She had danced in the Café de Paris. She had said her prayers in Old Chelsea Church. She had walked with Gerald through the Middle Temple Gardens. London was in her spirit and in her bones. Now, below her, London was on fire and its people were being killed amidst the ruins. She gave a hard dry sob and put her hands over her eyes for a moment.

“Let’s go down,” she said after that. “Gerald will miss me and think I’m dead.”

It was in the autumn that she flew to Lisbon with Tessa and said good-bye in her heart to England, hating to go.

Gerald had pulled strings. There had been innumerable delays, during which she had fled to the country with Tessa, staying at her father’s house outside the village of Cranleigh. Night after night she heard the German bombers on their way to London, and while Tessa was asleep went into the garden to watch the searchlights peering about the sky and trying to catch one of those black-winged demons in their long fingers of light. Guns were firing from the outer defences of London, somewhere about Epsom and

Reigate and Newlands Corner. She could see the flash of their shell-bursts glittering like star-dust. Far away—forty miles away—the sky was glowing crimson where new fires were started and more ruin was being made. Thousands of people would be in the shelters, leading that queer underground life to which civilization had come. Many more—old maids, like her aunts, Millicent and Betty—would be sitting under their stairs in little houses in the London suburbs, afraid and yet heroic.

Under the stairs, poor dears, in little houses which fell into heaps of rubble and splintered wood under high-explosive shells.

Her father stood by her side sometimes in the garden when she went out to look at the searchlights. He spoke gravely and sometimes bitterly. “All this is an outrage against Christian civilization. . . . We’re being led back to the jungle. . . . Science has betrayed humanity. I would kill all the scientists. . . . This ought never to have happened. We all share the guilt. . . . If we had been wiser Hitler would never have arrived. . . . I shall be glad, old girl, when you and Tessa are winging your way to the United States, out of all this to a land of peace.”

“I would rather stay, Father,” answered Cynthia.

One night in the garden she had a fright. Many German bombs had fallen round about in this countryside, mostly on heaths and commons. They had been released by German pilots chased by our fighters and discarding their loads anywhere. Several times this old country house had been shaken by explosions. Its old timbers had quivered. Once when she was playing billiards with her father the table rose, the balls ran about, and there were seven bangs—a stick of bombs—less than half a mile away.

“Unpleasantly close,” said her father. “It spoilt my break.”

But that night in the garden, less than half a mile away, something happened. It seemed to be just over their heads. It was a screaming bomb. It gave a kind of gobbling shriek like some laughing devil as it spiralled down.

Cynthia felt her father clutch her. He dragged her down into some rhododendron bushes where they fell together in a huddle.

“Sorry, old girl!” he said, after the bomb had exploded only a field away.

She picked herself up, with a torn dress and many scratches, and then laughed.

“I thought I was dead that time, Daddy. A near miss!”

Another sound startled her. Through an open window under one of the gables came a child’s screams.

“Oh, poor mite!” cried Cynthia, making a rush for the house. It was Tessa, frightened for the first time by the noise of war.

That was a week before she left England.

Gerald broke down the night before she went. They both wept. This war was tearing them apart, perhaps for years. They might never see each other again, or if they saw each other again they might both be changed. In any case this love of theirs was now a torture to them because of this sword cutting them in half.

“Thank God you and Tessa will be safe when you’re once across the Atlantic,” said Gerald, with his arms about her. “No war over there! No bombs. No black-out . . .”

“Why should I leave you here?” cried Cynthia. “It’s idiotic. I shan’t go. I shall tear up all those tickets. You’re not fit to be left alone. You’re C3 and need a nurse. You’re always in a state of nerves. I shall stay and take care of you. Oh, my darling, let me stay and be with you whatever happens!”

Gerald was unfit for any branch of military service because of a delicate physique, but strong enough to carry on as a barrister in the Middle Temple. She saw his pale face as he took off his hat and waved to her when she carried Tessa into the aeroplane bound for Lisbon. He had kissed Tessa a hundred times that morning. It was hardest for him to part from Tessa, whom he worshipped.

Presently, as the engines roared, and the plane taxied round the aerodrome and rose above the earth, Gerald became a black dot among a lot of other black dots on the edge of a flat field.

“When shall we see Daddy again?” asked Tessa. “Tomorrow?”

“Oh, quite soon I hope,” said Cynthia brightly.

## V

CYNTHIA was not ungrateful to these American friends who heaped her with kindness in Massachusetts. The Hambledons, the Hunts, the Wakefields, the Zimmermanns, and many others were all very nice and generous. She came to have a special liking and admiration for Penny, so vital, so high-spirited, and so flamingly pro-English. It was good to see her riding towards the cottage on her brown mare with the white socks, as graceful as a young Amazon and as pretty as a picture. Mr. and Mrs. Hambledon were kindness itself. But as the months passed and then a winter—the hard winter of

Massachusetts—dropping to twenty below zero, and then another spring and another summer, she knew perfectly well that she was not making good among these people. They had a query in their minds about her. She had been dropped by the Zimmermanns, who never invited her now, and did not come round to the cottage, as once they did, with books and magazines and other gifts. She tried to think how she could have offended them. Perhaps she had been too abrupt in her expressions of opinion. Perhaps now and then she had been critical of little things in the American way of life which mostly she admired—the frightful amount of advertising on the radio which interrupted the news of war in Europe with its death and agony to recommend a hair tonic, or a brand of cigars, or a new flavour in chewing gum with false and sickening emotion. She had made fun of that one evening. It hadn't gone down too well. The Americans, she found, were very sensitive about any kind of criticism from any English person. They regarded it as English 'edge' or English snobbishness, though they were highly critical of themselves. But that was not the only cause of her being a social disappointment to them. She was too careless, of course, about her clothes. She hated dressing up in smart frocks, and in any case she hadn't brought over smart frocks. She went about like a gipsy, with bare legs. They didn't mind that, perhaps, during the day, but they expected her to turn up decently clad at their evening parties. Perhaps she had been careless about that, having rushed round after putting Tessa to bed, and arriving late for the same reason, with untidy hair—it refused to be tidy—and her little black frock over which Tessa had been sick so that it had left a stain.

Penny and Mrs. Hambleton had given her some frocks, but somehow she didn't feel happy in them, and didn't have time to put them on as often as she ought to have done. Little things like that. Many little things all adding up. Hot words in defence of British rule in India, of which she knew very little, except what she had heard from her father; a refusal to admit that English slums were worse than New York slums which she had never seen; that argument about American duty to defend civilization by the side of Great Britain. A remark that English villages were more beautiful than American villages, or small towns, which was true, she thought. She didn't want to criticize but she had to defend England when it was attacked, even finding herself defending Mr. Chamberlain's policy of appeasement at Munich. That didn't go down well either. But there was something more than this, more irritating to these American friends, because they thought that she didn't like them, and didn't like the American way of life, which was untrue. It was her resistance to the social whirl, her refusal of innumerable invitations, excuses too often repeated because she could not

join their cocktail parties, or their expeditions in search of amusement as far as Boston. How could she join them? Tessa needed constant attention, being delicate and not yet hardened to this climate of extremes. A Portuguese girl, Paula, came in for a few hours each day and sometimes would sit with Tessa in the evenings, but this old eighteenth-century frame-house, not fitted up with labour-saving gadgets, necessitated a lot of cleaning. There was the furnace to be stoked—a hellish business in winter and almost one man’s job. There was the washing to be done—Tessa’s little clothes. She had to go shopping in Taunton three times a week as nothing was delivered. It was all very difficult and all very tiring. But in any case—she had to be fair—she shirked too much social stuff. She wanted to be alone a good deal, with her own thoughts. She had always been the cat that walked alone. Gerald had accused her of that. She wanted to read every scrap about the war in the *New York Times*. She wanted to hear the news over the radio, though it tore her heart out because it was nearly all bad. She wanted to read fairy-tales to Tessa and draw little pictures for her. She wanted to read her own books. She wanted to walk alone among the silver birches by the lake when Paula was playing with Tessa. She had always been bewildered and worried in a crowd of people, and the Americans like to get together too much, she thought. They were always getting together. They wanted her to come in with them. Even before breakfast the telephone-bell started ringing.

“Is that Mrs. Birch? Oh, good morning, Mrs. Birch! How’s Tessa? We’re making up a little party for a symphony concert in Boston. Some British naval officers from the *Rodney* are coming. Do join us, won’t you? We’ll fetch you in the car. Now don’t say no!”

She said ‘No’, not always, but perhaps too often, to invitations of this kind. They didn’t seem to understand how busy she was. They didn’t understand that she liked solitude.

Well, she had quite a lot of it in the winter. The Hambledons, the Wakefields, and the Hunts went back to their houses in Boston, only coming back for Christmas and occasional week-ends. The countryside was deep in snow, and the great lake of Assawampsett, to which her cottage garden went down, was covered with ice a foot deep. Village boys skated on it and their shouts and laughter were good company in this white solitude which she preferred to the Hambledons’ big house on Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, where she and Tessa stayed for several weeks. Then she had to take her place at big dinner-parties, and go to Symphony concerts and leave Tessa in the care of Mrs. Hambledon’s maids. It was jolly in a way. There were plenty of young people, all very vivacious, all getting engaged, or breaking-off engagements, or getting married. But she was not good at dinner-table

conversation and became rather tired of the constant and passionate discussion about President Roosevelt whose name was anathema to some of these women—they called him ‘That Man’—and an almost God-like hero to the rebels against Republican tradition. But in her secret mind she was always in exile. She was always a refugee. Her heart was in England. Her spirit fled to it half-way through a dinner-table conversation so that she dropped into silence and became deeply absentminded. What was she doing here anyway at this table, laden with rich food, while in England her own folk were on short rations—two ounces of butter a week, one and twopence worth of meat a week—about two chops—just a drip of milk, according to Gerald. Gerald wrote, every week, long letters full of detail, sometimes snipped out by the censor, and often a long time in coming because of the U-boats, or the erratic delivery by air mail. The Middle Temple Hall was down. Chelsea Old Church had been blasted into rubble. St. Peter’s, Eaton Square, where they were married, had been badly hit. His brother Frank had been killed in Lybia. He had had a bad dose of influenza. Everybody was down with it. The war wasn’t going too well. The Germans were committing every kind of atrocity in Poland. London was getting shabby and battered, though they were tidying up the ruins. He had gone for a walk up Bond Street. Most of its shops were boarded up. Round St. Paul’s it was like a scene in Ypres.

“I don’t believe you heard what I was saying, Mrs. Birch!” remarked a young Harvard professor who was sitting next to her, and had been telling her a long story which was probably amusing.

“I’m so sorry,” she told him. “My thoughts were wandering.”

They thought she was suffering from English coldness and languid boredom. She was only suffering from the sense of exile. She was only tortured by it.

Winter jumped into Spring suddenly and brilliantly. Spring gave a warm clasp to Summer hot in its embrace, burning hot on the Hambledons’ golf-course, and down by the lake which shone like burnished metal. The first Hambledon to appear from Boston was that very tall young man, Tiny, who took up his quarters in the old mill-house. He had become a friend of hers. For some reason he seemed to like her company, and certainly she liked his. He was restful in a way, and helpful as a handy-man, and very sweet to Tessa. He could endure long silences if neither of them were inclined to talk, and had a habit of stretching himself at great length on the floor in front of her fireplace with his eyes closed. He was keen on music, and tuned up an old piano in the cottage so that she could play to him. During the winter he had come over from Boston for week-ends, and at Christmas had spent a month in his mill-house absorbed in a new play, but finding time, good-

naturedly, to come over and give her a hand in stoking the old furnace—that black devil of a thing which had to be raked out each morning—raising suffocating clouds of white dust, and then heaped up with coal lest they should perish with cold. He did some tobogganing with them, and she trusted his strength and skill, even with Tessa, hurtling down a steep hill.

Now in the Spring, before the family had come, he came striding down to the cottage after lunch and after his morning's work, and suggested a picnic tea in the woods up by the Big Stone upon which in the old days Red Indians had carved totem signs, and sat in Red Indian silence staring out across the waters of the great lake. They walked through silver birches, whose broken branches, snapped off by winter's frost, lay strewn across the track. Tiny carried Tessa shoulder high with a kettle in his other hand. He was good at making a wood fire under the shelter of the Big Stone. He was amusing in his quiet, grave way, and pleasant company because he didn't talk too much, too often.

But he could talk. Sometimes after those silences, stretched out on the carpet, he would sit up and give tongue. He talked sometimes about his 'kid brother', Edward, who had gone and lost himself in France.

"He's playing some queer game over there. He used to be in love with a Russian girl called Olga. In some of his letters to me, not meant for family reading, he indulged in romantic lunacy about her. Then he seems to have cooled off. Lately, in the rare letters which come from him, he speaks of a girl called Lucile de Rollencourt, but rather guardedly. He seems to be living in an old farmhouse with her family. But he moves about France and gets back to Paris sometimes. Now and then he cables for quite a stiff number of bucks, which worries my father, though he can well afford to send them. I have an idea that he's up to his neck in the French underground movement. Maybe he's asking to get shot against a white wall. Silly, I call it."

"Why?" asked Cynthia.

"He's a perfectly good American. Why risk one's life for those lousy French?"

"Are they lousy?"

"Lousy in a metaphorical sense, dear lady. Essentially corrupt. Rotten. That's to say, lousy."

He had never been to France, she understood.

Sometimes he talked about war. In fact, that was a theme which cropped up frequently. He hated war. He had written a play about it. It was now running on Broadway, ridiculing the whole damn business of war, and the way in which the peoples let themselves be fooled by politicians playing

power-politics, and appealing to their patriotism, and doping them with false old slogans which made suckers of the mob, who became the victims and the gun-fodder.

“We ought to get rid of patriotism. Didn’t your Dr. Johnson say it was the last refuge of the scoundrel? Didn’t your Nurse Cavell say, on the eve of her execution, ‘Patriotism is not enough’?”

“Wouldn’t you fight for the United States?” asked Cynthia.

“No, sir!” answered Tiny, that young giant of America.

“It’s the business of our leaders to keep the United States out of war. That’s what they’re there for. Nobody is going to attack us. We’re three thousand miles away from European quarrels and vendettas. Let us keep three thousand miles away. We’ve built up a pretty good civilization, haven’t we? Lots of black spots in it, a hell of a lot of iniquity, graft, and corruption in high places and low, cruelties and intolerances here and there, gangsters and gunmen here and there. Yes, I know all that; but, broadly speaking, we people have liberty, a high standard of living, and a decent chance of education. That is to say, we’re getting civilized. We’re leading the way in putting the good things of life in reach of the ordinary fellow and the girl in the coffee-shop. We’re reaching out, some of us, to art and beauty. It’s no longer the prerogative of Europe. Our builders have imagination and audacity and play with steel. We have some pretty good writers, turning out fine stuff, some of ’em. We can do without Europe. We’re raising our standards and groping forward to something mighty big and something mighty fine. Our flowering time, I guess. Why not, when we have every strain of every race, and opportunity for any guy who has a touch of genius? We’re a kindly folk, seems to me. We don’t want to go murdering on the big scale. Our emigrants came here to find peace. Is that swindling Messiah who calls himself Roosevelt going to spoil it all by leading us back to the European battlefields? He’s playing up for it. Well, he won’t get me, lady. I’m telling you.”

That was quite a long monologue for a strong silent man.

“You’re talking stuff and nonsense,” she told him.

“I’m talking God’s own truth,” he assured her.

They had long arguments on this subject, a kind of continuous duel of debate which cropped up at odd times, but was not too prolonged at any one sitting.

He thought England had made a mess of things. British statesmen had fallen between two stools. Either they should have re-armed when Germany re-armed, or they should not have declared war when they were too weak to



fight it. They had guaranteed Poland and other little nations—bloody-minded little nations—when they couldn't have guaranteed the life of a louse in a peasant's shirt.

"It was midsummer madness when old Chamberlain revoked," said Tiny Hambledon. "He ought to have refused to go to war to appease the clamour of Labour members who had voted against armaments."

"Hitler would have turned on us," said Cynthia. "He would have crushed all Europe and then turned upon our little island. Don't you see that, big man?"

The big man didn't see it.

"According to extracts from *Mein Kampf*—I can't say I've read more than that, and don't want to—he expresses an admiration for the British Empire. You could have made a deal with him."

"Never!" said Cynthia. "He's out for world domination. One day he'll want the United States or Latin America. Then you'll have to fight him."

"I'm not going to fight anybody," answered Tiny Hambledon. "I shall learn German. If the Germans come here I shall talk to them politely. They'll soon lose themselves in our Melting Pot. They make very good settlers."

"Haven't you any pride, Mr. Hambledon, sir?" asked Cynthia. "Have you a coward's heart? Are you afraid to die?"

"Sure I am," he answered frankly, "and sure I haven't any false pride. I'm a follower of Jesus Christ, though no good Christian. I believe in passive resistance, which was the strength of the Christian martyrs who captured the world with it. If they had taken to the sword they would have perished by the sword."

Cynthia smiled at him for this argument about the early Christians. Often he spoke in a way which would have shocked any English church-goer. Presently she answered seriously:

"I agree with you about war, Tiny. Who doesn't—at least in England? We went to the ultimate limits of honour to avoid war, but we couldn't let the other peoples get trampled down and made into slaves. We had to fight Hitler and his gangsters or lose our soul. One has to fight devilry."

Tiny shook his head and waved her argument away with one of his big hands.

"One becomes a devil oneself when one starts fighting. It's only a competition in mass murder. More and bigger bombs. You kill my children and I'll kill yours, and also your mothers and sisters, and aunts and cousins. You destroy my cities and I'll blast yours off the face of the earth. What a

game! What a beautiful ideal for civilized humanity! To hell with it! Play something, Cynthia. Play *Drink to me only with thine eyes*, and some of the old songs.”

He read out some of his plays to her, and she found them interesting, but rather queer, with a grim and satirical spirit. The one about war was having a success on Broadway.

Once she asked him an abrupt question in her straight, candid way.

“Why do you spend so much time with me? Why do you read out your work as if my opinion mattered at all?”

He was rather staggered by that frankness of enquiry. He looked at her and laughed uneasily before answering.

“Lady, I like you! I have a respect for your intelligence. I find I can discuss things with you in a reasonable way—quite impossible with the crowd in Boston or even in New York. You don’t get all het up if you don’t agree with me, as mostly you don’t. And in any case——” he hesitated, and did not finish that sentence.

“Yes?” she asked.

“In any case,” he said, “I’m a sentimental cuss. I want a woman’s friendship. I’d be glad to think I’ve found it.”

She fluttered her eyelids and smiled at him a little shyly.

“You’ve found it all right,” she said. “But don’t make it sentimental. I hate sentimentality.”

“What you say goes with me,” he answered.

## VI

NEWS about Edward, who had lost himself in France, came to his family from two sources. One was by way of Chas Hunt—that newspaper man who had been in Paris and lately in Vichy. He came over in the Clipper from Lisbon on a brief visit to New York, Boston, and Washington, and after a week-end with his parents came over to Lakeside Farm to spend a night with the Hambledons and put them wise to Edward’s situation and behaviour. In his letters home he had alluded several times to Edward, but very cautiously and guardedly. Letters from Vichy to the United States passed through German censorship.

Mr. and Mrs. Hambleton were anxious to see him, being deeply worried about this son of theirs who had been so long away from them. He had not gone out of their hearts. It was for his father, especially, a secret grief. He and Edward had always been the best of friends with paternal weakness on one side and a good-natured affection on the other. Mr. Hambleton had followed his son's career at school with pride. He had given him too much pocket-money, and later, when Edward had gone to Harvard, made him a pretty generous allowance, enabling the boy to run expensive cars, to furnish his rooms luxuriously, and to give gay parties at the cost of 'the old man', as he called his father. Mr. Hambleton talked about him in the Tavern Club of Boston—that haunt of staunch Republicans and leading citizens of Boston.

"My son Edward is an expensive young fellow. Costs me a wad of dollars. In my time I had to do it with strict economy. I guess you did too, old friend."

"You bet I had to. But our sons just let it rip. Maybe it's our fault. We spoil 'em!"

Edward had developed a passion for art. It was an odd thing that both Mr. Hambleton's sons had been born with the artistic impulse. Neither of them would dream of going into the business of shingles and linoleum which had built up their home and given them a good time. That was a disappointment, but Mr. Hambleton didn't kick when Tiny took to writing plays after a preliminary apprenticeship on the *Boston Transcript*, and when Edward announced his intention of studying art in Paris he found a certain pleasure in bucking about it to his cronies in the Tavern Club.

"My son Edward is studying art in Paris, you know. Doing remarkably well! He's had three pictures accepted by the Autumn Salon."

"Say, that's pretty good. And I hear that your other son is producing a play on Broadway. You're sure a talented family, Hambleton. Can't think where they get it from! It doesn't go with shingles and linoleum. I guess your wife has artistic ancestors. Genius will out, don't they say? Shakespeare, wasn't it?"

But Edward had been away too long. His father yearned for him. He often dreamed about him as a boy, swimming and boating on the lake, or riding on his first pony at Lakeside Farm. Once he woke up calling: "Edward! . . . Edward, my boy!"

Chas Hunt came over to Lakeside Farm on a hot day in June. He wore a thin linen suit, but found that too hot and discarded it for bathing trunks lent by Tiny. Penny was there, having just emerged from the lake and exhibiting her very well-formed body in a red bathing-suit which clung to her. Tiny sat

about bare to the waist and as brown as old leather. Gin and lime-juice went very well with the weather and the scene.

Chas Hunt looked about him and laughed.

“A very pleasant contrast to things on the other side!” he remarked. “I’ll say you’re deep in peace over here. It’s wonderful to see the lights of New York. It’s wonderful to sit here, three thousand miles away from the Germans. I’ll say the American people have a lot of luck.”

“I’m not so sure it’s going to last,” said Mr. Hambleton thoughtfully. “That man Roosevelt is doing his best to——”

“Now, Father!” cried Penny, “don’t spoil a good afternoon by raising a political argument. Don’t make me mad with you about Mr. Roosevelt, for whom I say my prayers.”

“Tell us about Edward,” said Mr. Hambleton, after smiling at this outrageous daughter whom he loved very much.

He had been very patient with Chas Hunt’s description of his trip in the Clipper. For half an hour or more he had deferred that plea: ‘Tell us about Edward.’

Chas Hunt stirred the ice in his gin and lime-juice.

“I don’t know how much I ought to tell you,” he said, “it’s darned dangerous.”

“We want to know,” said Mr. Hambleton, looking anxious. “Needless to say, Chas, it won’t go any further than this family.”

Chas nodded.

“I’m sure of that. Well, I don’t mind telling you that Edward is playing a risky game. Mind you, I warned him about it. I said: ‘Edward, old son, if you’ll take my advice you’ll quit France and get back to your own country before you’re caught out. It’s not healthy in a German concentration camp. It’s not amusing to face a firing squad.’ That’s what I told him, Mrs. Hambleton. I’d like you to know.”

Mrs. Hambleton’s face paled slightly, and there was distress in her eyes.

“I don’t know that I like knowing it,” she answered. “It makes me scared about him.”

“Tell us, Chas,” said Mr. Hunt quietly.

“We’re dying to know,” said Penny, clasping her bare knees.

“Well then, it’s like this: Your Edward is caught up in the French underground movement of resistance. He’s one of the agents in a secret chain working for the escape of prisoners of war and young Frenchmen trying to get to England to join General de Gaulle. He’s a faker of passports.

He forges rubber stamps of Vichy. He repaints photographs, putting on beards and taking them off. He draws caricatures for the underground Press. He travels about France on his American papers as a liaison officer between the secret groups. He lives with a family on the border line between the Occupied and Unoccupied zones. They receive the refugees and pass them on to friends in the unoccupied region. He's up to his neck in all that, and wants to drag me into it; but I'm not having any. No, sir!"

"We guessed something of the sort," remarked Tiny. "I've long thought that my kid brother was quite crazy. Now I know."

"I'm proud of him!" cried Penny excitedly. "I think he's wonderful. I have a hero for a brother."

"You have a damn fool for a brother," said Tiny angrily. "And he has a damn little fool for a sister."

"It's very alarming," said Mrs. Hambleton gravely.

"There's nothing we can do about it, I'm afraid," said Mr. Hambleton, looking very worried.

Chas Hunt had other details to tell. He described his adventure with Edward before the Germans entered Paris, and their meeting with a young French officer named Armand de Rollencourt. That had been the beginning of the trouble. It was this officer who had invited Edward to drive to his old farmhouse near Tours with an English captain who had been wounded and couldn't walk. Armand de Rollencourt had a sister called Lucile. It was quite obvious from one or two things let drop by Edward that he was pretty far gone in love with her. She was one of those French girls who hated the Vichy Government and was ready to risk death for de Gaulle.

"I guess she's right," said Penny.

Chas Hunt thought she was wrong. Partly wrong at least. There were a lot of traitors and scoundrels at Vichy. But in his view old Pétain was playing a game of cat and mouse with Hitler. At least, he was holding on to the French Fleet and keeping his North African Empire out of German control. In his judgment the United States were wise in keeping touch with Vichy. One day it might be valuable, this liaison.

"What in hell have we to do with all that?" asked Tiny, who lay at full length in the sun with his hands clasped under his head. "Let's keep out of it."

"Let's get back to Edward," suggested Mrs. Hambleton. "I thought he was in love with a girl called Olga. A Russian girl in Paris. She seemed very charming, according to what he wrote about her."

Chas Hunt laughed, and then remembered something.

“Jeepers Creepers! I nearly forgot to tell you about that. That girl Olga—I know her well—is coming to Boston next week, if she’s still travelling around with a Jewish guy who plays the piano like Paderewski. Paul Simon. She chucked Edward in order to cherish this sick genius. Married him, I believe. He’s a master at Chopin. He used to play to us when I threw a party in my apartment in Paris. He used to ravish our souls.”

“Sure you have a soul, buddy?” asked Tiny. “Does a newspaper man find any use for a soul?”

Chas Hunt took this irony good-humouredly.

“If newspaper men had had the running of this world,” he said, “it would be a pretty good place. We’re the fellows who know.”

He talked a lot more about Edward. It was all very alarming to Edward’s father and mother.

## VII

IT was with Chas Hunt that they went to hear Paul Simon in Boston—Tiny and Penny with their father and mother.

Tiny found the seat in the concert hall uncomfortable for his long legs, but forgot that discomfort when he listened to a pianist who played Chopin with a miraculous touch. A queer-looking guy, he thought, as Simon came on to the platform in a shiny black suit rather too short in the sleeves, and with hair which wanted cutting. He looked ill and emaciated, and was a good advertisement for starving France, though he had left Paris before it began to starve. Distinctly a Jew, thought Tiny Hambleton, but with a fine delicate face like a Jewish scholar or prophet. He took no notice at all of the applause which greeted him, mostly from an audience of women. Perhaps some of them had heard him before, but the blurb on the programme had told them that he was recognized as the finest exponent of Chopin’s genius in Europe. In fact his agents went further than that, and claimed that he was possessed with the soul of Chopin, and that he had the true touch of the Master himself.

“How do they know?” thought Tiny. “These publicity hounds are quite shameless.”

Chas Hunt whispered to him:

“You’ll be surprised! That fellow is marvellous. But he starved to death in Paris.”

“He looks like it,” answered Tiny.

Certainly he played well. Tiny, who was a devotee of music, had to admit that. Penny was rapturous. The audience of women seemed to fall under a magic spell, broken only when he left the platform after an hour and a half with one short interval.

“Isn’t he too terribly wonderful?” exclaimed a woman’s voice behind Tiny’s chair. “It was almost unbearably beautiful.”

Chas Hunt spoke to his friends.

“I’ll see if I can get him along. Maybe I’ll be able to bring him to tea at the Ritz Carlton with Olga. You’ll like Olga. She’s a sweet thing.”

“Edward loved her,” said Penny. “I’m dying to see her.”

“A romantic fellow, Edward,” remarked Tiny. “Women seemed to fall for him, whereas they find me repulsive. How do you account for that?”

“You scare them,” said Penny. “They can’t reach up to you.”

Chas Hunt brought Simon and Olga to the Ritz Carlton, much against the will of Simon, who shirked American parties. He only yielded because of his gratitude to Edward for great kindness in time of danger.

Mrs. Hambleton greeted Olga warmly.

“You knew my son Edward,” she said. “It brings him closer to me, meeting you like this. He often used to write about you. I think you helped him over a difficult time.”

“It’s nice of you to say that,” answered Olga, with a little smile and a flush of shyness. “We were very good friends.”

Paul Simon added a few words.

“It was due to him that we were able to escape from France and come over here. We are both very grateful to him.”

“Tell me more about his life in Paris,” said Mrs. Hambleton.

Olga laughed and glanced at Tiny.

“Oh, I mustn’t tell tales out of school! He gave very nice parties. He spent quite a lot of money for an art student. He was very generous.”

With the gift for languages of all Russians, she had learned to speak English remarkably well with a Russian accent.

Later Penny talked to Paul Simon.

“How do you like the United States?”

Simon hesitated before answering and then smiled at her.

“Do you forgive me if I tell the truth?”

“It’s the truth I want,” answered Penny bravely.

“I am terrified,” he said in a low voice. “New York fills me with terror. So many people—all rushing about. The high buildings reaching to the sky. The desperate chase of the crowds for something which they do not find. Chicago is even worse. Everywhere the women frighten me. They come to hear me play. They swarm around me. They shake my hand until I think I shall not play again. Then my conscience hurts me for being here. I feel guilty.”

“I can’t understand that!” answered Penny. “I’ll be glad to know.”

“My race is tortured in Europe,” said Simon. “They are starving. They are like hunted animals. All over Europe there is suffering and torture. But here there is no understanding of all that. There is no experience of that. There is too much food, too much money, too much happiness, while Europe suffers. I earn money for the first time. I go from one luxury hotel to another. There are flowers sent to my room. I am suffocated by kindness. People ask for my autograph. The Press wishes to take my photograph. In every city new photographs. I am in danger of becoming famous as an acrobat on the piano. And all the time in my new luxury I think of Jews being massacred and tortured. My heart is in exile for Paris where the Germans march about. All the time, even when I play, I am haunted by the terror in Europe—the agony—the despair.”

“Well, it’s nice to have you here,” said Penny brightly. “If I were you I wouldn’t quarrel with your good fortune in escaping from all that.”

“I am glad for Olga’s sake,” he said. “She likes beautiful flowers. She does not hate your luxury hotels. She is not afraid of your crowds, and your tall skyscrapers. She is almost a little happy.”

“Not more than that?” asked Penny.

Paul Simon smiled again. She wondered if he ever laughed, and decided that he didn’t.

“Russians are never quite happy,” he told her. “They are sensitive to the tragedy of life and the conflict in their own souls. Olga, also, is an exile.”

“The United States are full of exiles,” remarked Penny. “That’s our speciality. We’re the world’s sanctuary. Some people call it the Melting Pot, but some people take a long time to melt.”

While this conversation was in progress Tiny had a chance of private conversation with Olga. His father and mother had been called away a few minutes by some friends in the lounge of the Ritz Carlton.

Olga made the first opening.

“*Edouard* often talked of you. He had an admiration for you.”



“Good for him,” answered Tiny. “Tell me, why did you turn down his ardent young love?”

Olga’s face flushed slightly, but she laughed.

“Is that a fair question?”

“It’s a straight one,” said Tiny. “I talk straight.”

“I will answer it very truthfully,” said Olga. “He was a charming young lover. We had charming hours together. I shall always cherish them in remembrance. But he was so young and I am so old.”

“Not very old, I guess,” answered Tiny, looking at her.

“In my mind. A thousand years old in my mind. I am a Russian. We Russian women of my class are very sophisticated. *Edouard* had the mind of an innocent boy just having the first adventure of life.”

“Not so darned innocent as all that,” replied Tiny, with deep scepticism. “Besides, what’s the matter with innocence?”

Olga gave a little laugh again.

“It is very charming. I wished to keep him innocent. I let him love me to keep him away from the little sluts in Paris—so many little sluts—who wanted to catch hold of him for his money. They would have spoilt him. They would have made him unhappy and dragged him down.”

“I can’t quite follow all that,” said Tiny. “It seems to me that you led him on and then dropped him. Not that I’m blaming you. But I’d like to know. I’m a writer of plays. I study human situations. What gets me is why you left Edward for this Jewish genius to whom Penny is talking quite a lot and, I guess, making him suffer quite a lot.”

Olga laughed again. It was the third time he had made her laugh.

“You are making me suffer quite a lot,” she told him. “I should be angry with you if you were not *Edouard’s* brother.”

“Don’t take offence, lady,” said Tiny. “I’m a searcher after truth. Tell me, won’t you? It’s darned interesting.”

“I will tell you,” she said. “I believe in truth. I am a Russian. We Russians do not hide behind masks. And it is because I am a Russian that I went to Paul Simon instead of giving myself to a charming young man who loved me very much with a boy’s love, like Romeo loved Juliet. We Russians have a passion for self-sacrifice and self-torture. There is a difficult name for it which I have forgotten.”

“Masochism,” said Tiny.

Olga nodded.

“That is it. I knew that Paul needed me. He is, of course, a genius, and genius needs nursing. It is so sensitive. It is so unable to take care of itself. Paul called to me with a cry for help and I answered it. How could I refuse? He was like a poor wounded creature with hounds and devils hunting him because he is a Jew. I had great pity for him. You see? Or do you not see?”

“I see,” answered Tiny. “And I think it was very noble of you, and darned silly. Thanks a lot for telling me. I’m not surprised that Ted fell in love with you.”

“It is generous of you to say so,” she told him.

Paul Simon rose to go, looking more tired than when he had arrived, and Olga went with him after a promise that she and Simon would come for a week-end to Lakeside Farm.

## VIII

ON the following day, which was Sunday, Cynthia Birch went over after supper to the Hambledons. Chas Hunt was still there and Tiny suggested that she might like to meet him as he had come so recently from Europe. Penny had telephoned to her that morning with the same invitation.

“Now, don’t be unsociable,” said Penny down the telephone. “We’ll turn on the nine o’clock news for you. We won’t worry you with pencil and paper games or intelligence tests—which you always win. Now, do come, Cynthia. Paula can look after Tessa.”

That was true. It was difficult to refuse, though she had hoped for a quiet evening alone with a book she wanted to read. Gerald had sent it to her. It was Somerset Maugham’s new novel.

The Hambledons received her with their usual kindness though she knew she did not pass the smiling scrutiny of Mrs. Hambledon. She had forgotten to put on any stockings, and wore her old slippers. It had been so hot all day. What did it matter anyhow?

“Glad to see you, Mrs. Birch,” said Mr. Hambledon with his good-humoured smile. “How’s little Tessa? Let me introduce our friend Chas Hunt. Just arrived from France.”

“Glad to meet you, Mrs. Birch,” said Chas Hunt, taking her hand. “I dare say you find the heat of Massachusetts as trying as I do. I’ll say it’s warm!”

Iced drinks were served round by Penny. Chas Hunt got going on the state of France, and the Vichy Government and old Pétain, and the life of the

French people in the Unoccupied Zone. Food was getting scarce, but there was nothing like starvation yet. The French farmers had had a good harvest. Of course, in the Occupied Zone it was far worse. There Germans commandeered a lot of food, but even there, as far as he could make out, the peasants hid enough for their families. He gave many details about life in France, some of them amusing, and some tragic. It was all very interesting. But at one minute to nine Cynthia looked at her wrist-watch. She didn't want to miss the nine o'clock news.

Tiny, who had kept his eyes on her, grinned and asked a question: "Must we?"

Without waiting for an answer he slouched across the room—this big cool room with its open windows looking across the golf-course to the lake of Assawampsett—and switched on the radio. He knew that Cynthia Birch hungered for news almost morbidly.

The others went on talking until suddenly something startled them. Perhaps it was Chas Hunt's break in his monologue, and his sudden exclamation:

"Jeepers Creepers!"

The American radio commentator and news man was giving out portentous words—on this twenty-second of June.

"At three o'clock this morning the Germans invaded Russia along a vast front reaching from the Baltic to the Black Sea. . . . Hitler has issued a proclamation to the German nation saying that after being condemned for a month to keep silence he can now speak openly. He asserts that Russia was contemplating an attack on Germany in violation of their pact of friendship. The German radio propagandists are telling the German people that great battles lie ahead. 'Down with Stalin! Down with the Jews and the exploiters!'"

Chas Hunt stood up from his chair, knocking over his glass without noticing it. He was excited.

"Hitler has gone mad," he said. "Did I say gone mad? He ought to have been put into an asylum years ago. This is a proof of it."

Cynthia also stood up from her chair. Tiny Hambleton watched her curiously, wondering why she had a look on her face like Joan of Arc listening to the voices.

"It's good luck for England," she said. "He can't turn all his strength against us now."

“Will the Russians be able to put up any resistance?” asked Mr. Hambledon. “They didn’t make much of a show in World War I.”

Chas Hunt thought they were better prepared than most people knew. One of his colleagues in Moscow had passed through France and Hunt had had a talk with him. He said that Russia had been forging a tremendous war machine, and training a vast army behind a screen of secrecy. There was a new spirit in Russia. They would fight to the death against this German invasion. That’s what his friend had said, and he was a fellow of sound judgment.

Cynthia was listening again to the radio.

“Mr. Churchill,” said the speaker, “has just broadcast to the British people. The following is a summary which has just reached us.”

“Shall we listen?” asked Cynthia, as a hint to those who were talking.

“Oh God!” said Tiny Hambledon in a low voice. “How long, Oh Lord, how long?”

But with the others he listened.

“Mr. Churchill says that he gave Stalin warning of the German attack, and he hopes that it did not fall unheeded. He withdraws nothing that he ever said against Communism, but all that fades away before the spectacle which is now unfolding. . . .”

“I see the Russian soldiers,” said Mr. Churchill, “standing on the threshold of their nation’s land, guarding the fields their fathers have tilled from time immemorial. . . . I see the ten thousand villages of Russia, where the means of existence are wrung so hardly from the soil, but where there are still primordial human joys, where maidens laugh and children play. . . . But now I have to declare the policy of His Majesty’s Government, and I feel it is a decision in which the great Dominions will in due course concur. But we must speak it now, without a day’s delay. We have but one aim and one single irrevocable purpose. We are resolved to destroy Hitler and every vestige of the Nazi régime. From this nothing will turn us—nothing. We will never parley, we will never negotiate, with Hitler or any of his gang. Any man or State who fights against Nazism will have our aid. Any man or State who marches with Hitler is our foe. . . . It follows, therefore, that we shall give whatever help we can to Russia and the Russian people. . . . We have already offered to the Government of Soviet Russia any technical or economic assistance which is in our power.”

“Well, it’s great news,” said Mrs. Hambledon.

“England no longer stands alone.” Cynthia spoke with suppressed emotion. “It was too much for us alone.”

“That man, Churchill,” said Chas Hunt, “is a great guy. I’ll say that England is lucky in having him.”

Tiny Hambledon seemed to be suffering some unfavourable reaction to Mr. Churchill’s speech.

“Cripes!” he said. “It makes me laugh.”

“What makes you laugh?” asked Cynthia, smiling over to him.

Tiny raised his long legs and clasped his knees.

“The darned hypocrisy of it all,” he answered. “I thought little old England was fighting for liberty and democracy. That’s what I’ve always been told. That’s what Mr. Roosevelt keeps on telling us. That’s what all those lousy correspondents keep on putting over the radio. ‘This war is in defence of the world’s liberty and future civilization,’ says Winston Churchill in noble words, which melt the heart of the American public as well as his own.”

“What’s wrong with that?” asked Cynthia, with a challenging look at this long-limbed young man.

“Why, dammit,” he answered angrily, “that noble fellow Churchill now gives his blessing and offers all aid to the greatest enemy of liberty and democracy on God’s earth, not excepting Adolf Hitler. Stalin is the autocrat of the autocrats. All his people are robots under his iron tyranny. There’s no more difference between a Communist and a Nazi than between one louse and another. They’re just as ruthless. One has its Gestapo and the other its Ogpu. Both have their tortures. Both subordinate the liberty of the individual to the interest of the State. That is to say, both peoples are slaves to the ruffians at the top. The individual soul ain’t worth a dime. Now Russia becomes the noble Ally of that liberty-loving people, the English, who like other people to fight their battles and do a hell of a lot of propaganda over here with the same idea—which won’t come off this time. No, sir!”

Cynthia looked him in the eyes and her face flushed.

“I’m English,” she said. “I don’t like to hear England insulted.”

She rose from her chair and moved towards the door.

For a moment there was silence and then Penny made a rush at her.

“No, Cynthia, don’t go! Tiny has gone crazy. He’s perfectly crazy when he talks about the war. He makes me mad.”

“That’s all right,” said Cynthia. “But I must be going anyhow.”

She insisted upon going.

“Now you’ve offended a beautiful lady,” said Chas Hunt, with a laugh at Tiny Hambledon.

That tall young man answered the laugh uneasily.

"I guess I hurt her feelings. I'm sorry."

He flung a lighted cigarette into the fireplace.

"I ought to have left out that bit about England," he said. "The blood went to my head over Churchill's speech."

"What was wrong with it?" asked Chas Hunt. "None of us like Russian Communism, but this attack on Russia is a godsend to England, and personally I'm all for little old England. They've shown that they have guts. The way they've stood up to the Blitz is one of the heroic chapters of mankind. And they wouldn't show the white flag after Dunkirk when France collapsed, and when they had just nothing except their old tradition, and a Home Guard without rifles, and a bunch of boys in the Air Force who knocked hell out of the *Luftwaffe*."

"And the Royal Navy," added Penny, "hunting down the U-boats, and keeping the freedom of the seas for us as well as themselves."

Tiny Hambleton laughed again, but without good humour.

"That's all right. I've nothing against England except a secret conviction that she'll get us into this war somehow. And I'm against war. I'm against the whole bloody business of war. It's uncivilized. It's just old-fashioned murder on the grand scale. I want to keep out of it. I want this country to keep out of it. I believe in art, and music, and education, and the right of the individual to do what he damn well likes without being rounded up for gun-fodder."

"Buddy," said Penny, "you talk like a long-haired high-brow in Greenwich village. What you say is just lousy. And you've offended Cynthia Birch so that she won't speak to you again."

"Oh, hell!" said Tiny. He kicked a hassock out of his way and strode out of the room with a dark look in his eyes.

"There's something in what he says," said Mr. Hambleton, who had not interrupted this family argument. "I'm getting scared about Mr. Roosevelt's foreign policy. Step by step—this Lease-Lend business—he's drifting towards intervention in the European War. I have two sons. I don't want them to spill their blood in foreign fields. Edward has gone already. I've lost him, haven't I?"

"Now then, Pop," said Penny, "don't shed tears over Edward. He's the only member of the family who shows a spark of heroism. We ought to be fighting by England's side. We're just behaving like selfish cowards, cheering on England from the side lines."

“Penny,” cried Mrs. Hambledon, “you’re very wild. Don’t speak so wildly.”

“Don’t be so Bostonian, Mother,” answered Penny.

Chas Hunt gave a loud and good-natured laugh.

“Say, this is quite an exciting evening. I’m having an interesting time. I’ll say I am. What about another spot of gin and lime?”

It was a very warm evening.

## IX

PENELOPE HAMBLEDON was not a wild young woman, but she was certainly not Bostonian as she had accused her mother of being, unjustly as it happened, because Mrs. Hambledon had revolted from the Back Bay tradition of ultra-conservatism, and was considered to be almost ‘Red’ in her political opinions.

But Penelope was in what she called a ‘jam’. It was due to an historical incident in naval history. H.M.S. *Rodney* of the British Navy had put into Boston harbour for repairs after being knocked about in action against a German pocket-battleship. The Bostonians had offered unbounded hospitality to the officers and men, although a certain amount of fighting occurred between American seamen and British Jack Tars according to ancient tradition. They were entertained lavishly at public banquets and private dinner-tables. It was at a private dinner-party in the Boston house of Mr. and Mrs. Wakefield that Penny first met Richard Arkwright of the *Rodney*, whom she found almost too emotionally attractive. He had very blue eyes and very fair hair, and his face, she thought, was beautiful and heroic like one of King Arthur’s knights—Lancelot, or Gawaine, in Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*, which she had read as a college girl.

They sat next to each other at Mr. Wakefield’s table.

“Are you being well treated in the United States?” she enquired.

His blue eyes smiled at her. She noticed how deeply blue they were.

“Rather! I should say we are. You’re giving us a wonderful time. We can’t compete with American hospitality.”

“How do you like Boston?”

He liked it enormously. Parts of it reminded him of Kensington where he had been born. Only there was more of it. He thought it a fine city.

“Something happened here once,” he said, “which strained relations between England and America. Wasn’t there a Boston tea-party? I seem to remember.”

“Your memory is not at fault,” she told him, answering his smile. “It was a regrettable incident. It led to war between us.”

“Yes,” said this naval lieutenant, who had camouflaged his knowledge of history. “You gave us an awful licking. I seem to remember that.”

“Does it still rankle?” asked Penny, with a light laugh.

“Not in the least,” he assured her. “There’s a statue to George Washington outside our National Gallery. It was a kind of Civil War really. Washington was a typical English country gentleman. The American colonists of that time were all of British or Scottish or Irish stock. Isn’t that so?”

“I guess you’re right,” said Penny. “Have you ever read a book called *Oliver Wiswell*? It gives the Tory point of view. Anyhow, it was a long way back. We’ve forgotten the Ancient Grudge. We had a few prejudices left before the beginning of this war, but now most of us are very proud if we have a drop of English blood in us. England has been terribly heroic.”

“It’s nice of you to say so,” said Richard Arkwright of the *Rodney*.

“We ought to be in this war with you,” said Penny. “It’s our war as well as yours. I mean, that it ought to be if we believe in liberty and democracy, as we mostly do.”

He glanced sideways at her, and she saw a glint of humour in his blue eyes.

“You’re the first American I’ve heard say such a thing,” he told her. “I’m jolly glad to hear it.”

He put down his knife and fork for a moment and spoke in a low voice which had a kind of thrill in it.

“If you were in with us we could finish off this fellow Hitler pretty quick. We’re a bit overstrained at the moment. You’ve no idea of the pull on the poor old British Navy, to say nothing of the Merchant Service, which is doing grand work without glory and on damn bad pay. I could tell you something about that.”

“Tell me,” asked Penny. “I’d just be thrilled to hear it.”

She was thrilled by some of the stories he told her about the hunting down of U-boats and the fight put up by the little ships against torpedo attacks, dive-bombers, surface-raiders, and magnetic mines. Some of the



convoys to Malta had gone through hell fire, but some of them had got there—and did it again.

Presently he checked himself and laughed shyly.

“I say, I’ve been boring you no end! And it sounds as though I were bucking about the British Navy! Sorry!”

“You’ve been giving me a good time,” Penny told him with a kind of adoration in her eyes. “I’ll remember every word of it. I could go on listening for ever.”

Richard Arkwright laughed, and looked at her again sideways.

“I wouldn’t make you suffer as much as that,” he said. “I’m not really a great talker, except when I get going about the Navy and the Merchant Service.”

He had to turn to his neighbour at table, whom he had neglected shamefully because of his interest in this American girl who was as pretty as a peach, he thought, and very vital. He would much like to meet her again. He liked her style and he liked the poise of her head, and the humour in her eyes, and the spirit behind them.

She gave him the chance of meeting her again before the meal ended.

“I’d like my family to meet you,” she said. “Is there any chance of your being able to spend a week-end with us in a little old house by a big lake, forty miles from Boston? I could take you out in a car, or you could come by train to Taunton, and hire a car from there.”

“It’s frightfully kind of you,” he answered. “I’d like it awfully.”

“We have a golf-course at the garden gate,” said Penny, hoping it would tempt him. “And if you’re keen on riding I’d be glad to ride with you and show you a bit of Massachusetts.”

“I say, that sounds splendid!” he answered. “You’re sure your people wouldn’t think I was butting in?”

“They’d be crazy to have you as a guest.”

He went for a week-end and enjoyed himself a good deal it seemed. Out of uniform, in a blue jacket and grey flannel trousers, he looked less heroic in Penny’s eyes and more boyish. He played a very good game of golf, she noticed, though not as good as her own. They went riding together through the woods, and then tied up the horses and sat together on the Big Stone overlooking the lake.

“Tell me about England,” said Penny, as they sat there in the warm sunlight. “Tell me about the Blitz over London, and how the people live in the shelters, and what is the secret of their wonderful courage.”

He hadn't seen much of the Blitz except at Portsmouth where it had been fairly hot. But one night on leave in London he had struck it badly. It was one of the worst nights and he expected to be killed at any moment. He could hear houses and great blocks of flats crashing all round. That was when he had been dining with his Aunt Susan and his cousin Phœbe in the Langham Hotel just opposite the B.B.C.

"I was scared stiff," he told her; "but of course I had to look brave, being in uniform, and in the company of my Aunt Susan—who never turned a hair."

"I don't believe you were a little bit scared," cried Penny, laughing at him. "You can't make me believe that. No, sir!"

"Absolutely true," he told her. "An action at sea was nothing to it. I quaked in every limb."

She refused to believe that he quaked in any part of his body. She had noticed before, she said, that British soldiers and sailors always underestimated their own courage. She had once met a V.C. in Boston, and he had blushed like a schoolgirl when she asked him to tell her how he had won that decoration.

Richard Arkwright laughed at this scepticism.

"You've no idea," he told her. "It's no joke sitting under high-explosive bombs, and hearing the neighbourhood crashing into rubble and ruin. But what beats me is the way the Londoners stuck it at its worst. That night a crowd of old ladies and gentlemen assembled in the lounge of the Langham. They were the old types, now disappearing—old dames of the Edwardian era, old buffers who remembered the Boer War. There they sat with all hell raging round them, talking in quiet voices and behaving very politely to each other. 'Wouldn't you like this footstool, my dear? I'm afraid you're in a draught, old girl.' I watched them with wonderment. And afterwards I went out into the streets and saw the air raid people at work, and the fire-fighters, and the police, and did my best to lend a hand."

"I thought you said you were afraid," interjected Penny.

"Scared stiff!" said Arkwright again. "But those fellows on top had thinned out, or paid a visit to another part of London. There was a policeman who ought to have got two V.C.s. . . ."

He told a good story about a London policeman. He also told a story about a young woman driving an ambulance through blazing hell, and another about a hospital nurse he had met that night.

"Those are the real people," he said, with deep enthusiasm. "That's the crowd that's winning this war on the Home Front. By God! I take my hat off

to them!”

Penny’s eyes were wet now and then because of this heroism of the common people.

“I wish I were English!” she cried. “I wish I could have a chance of being over there, instead of living in a land of peace and plenty, with luxury all round me.”

“It’s better over here,” answered Arkwright. “This is the Garden of Eden. I shall be sorry to leave it.”

“We’re spared too much,” said Penny. “We want a good hard knock to shake us out of our self-complacency. We wallow in material comfort. Everybody over here is fighting for more money, more fun, more everything. The radio advertisements are always teasing us to think we want something else and can’t be happy till we get it. And when we get it we aren’t happy. We want something else. We’re building up a mass-produced civilization. The pioneer spirit is gone from us. We’re getting soft. Look at me! What do I do that’s any good to anybody? I’m just one of the social set of Boston. Miss Hambleton, daughter of Mr. Edward Hambleton of Commonwealth Avenue. A charming débutante. In the marriage market. Oh, it makes me sick! Why can’t I be an ambulance girl driving through hell fire?”

Arkwright laughed quietly at this outburst.

“You wouldn’t like it,” he said. “And I don’t think hell fire is necessary for the development of the human soul. War is a nasty mistake. It’s very unpleasant, I assure you. If I were an American I would keep out of it—though speaking as an Englishman I should be glad if you came in.”

“Gosh!” cried Penny. “I’ll go crazy if we don’t come in one day. We’re disgracing ourselves. We’re leaving you to do all the fighting and dying, while we think we’re doing fine by Lease-Lend and turning out munitions for other men to use.”

She was very much unlike her brother Tiny, who had a different outlook. In her views she was not typical of American girls. She was Penelope Hambleton, and perhaps a throw-back to some other Penelope in Shakespeare’s England. She was, thought Richard Arkwright of H.M.S. *Rodney*, the most charming girl he had met in Boston. It was a great treat to stay for a week-end with her family.

It was a great treat for Penny to have him for other week-ends. But it put her in ‘a bit of a jam’, as she called it. For, after several week-ends riding, swimming, playing golf, and walking in the woods with Richard Arkwright of *Rodney*, she knew that he was the man she wanted, if he wanted her. But,

meanwhile, she was engaged to a young professor of Harvard, who was seriously in love with her. That was very awkward, she thought. It put her in the hell of a jam.

## X

LIEUTENANT RICHARD ARKWRIGHT of *Rodney*, now doing repairs in Boston docks, was astonished at the warmth of American hospitality, but having a good head on his shoulders, was aware that this personal friendliness did not rule out an underlying criticism of England and the English. Sometimes it made him laugh and sometimes it made him angry, though he tried to keep his temper, and mostly did, having a sense of humour and an easy-going nature not quick to take offence.

Criticism was hardly the word for it in the neighbourhood of the Docks. Fighting took place most nights between British and American seamen.

“What’s it all about?” he asked his men. “Why can’t you keep the peace with these Yanks? Do you go about asking for trouble?”

He had an answer from one of the petty officers.

“It’s the Yanks who ask for it. As soon as they see our lads they stop chewing gum, spit on the floor, and make personal remarks about our mothers. That is to say they call us sons of bitches. If that isn’t asking for it, I don’t know what is. Well, they get it straight in the jaw, and then the scrap begins.”

“A bit of prejudice on both sides, perhaps,” suggested Arkwright.

“Quite likely,” agreed the petty officer; “but our lads don’t like some of the questions put to them in an ugly sort of way. Why the hell does the British Army always get licked? Why the hell did we retreat from Dunkirk and Norway, and every other place, when we met a few Germans? Why didn’t we pay our debts after the last war? Why did England always expect Americans to pull her chestnuts out of the fire? Why the hell didn’t we do our own fighting? Our men get vexed, sir.”

Arkwright laughed at this mild way of putting it.

“Very crude stuff!” he said. “There seems to be a traditional hostility on both sides—a hang-over from ancient history.”

“Funny thing is,” said the petty officer thoughtfully, “that there’s a kind of friendliness at the back of it. They’re just curious to see how much our men will take. I can’t help feeling that they have an admiration for us in

spite of all their ugly words. Get 'em on the side and they're good-humoured fellows and anxious to know things."

"What kind of things?" asked Arkwright.

The petty officer said they wanted to know how Londoners lived under the German bombs. What kind of life was it anyhow for the women and children? What kind of food did they get? What did they do when their homes were knocked out? Why were they so darned heroic? What was the war about, anyway?

"Very intelligent questions," remarked Arkwright, "and damned difficult to answer, Johnson. Now tell your men to go easy with their fists. All the officers are getting worried about this continual scrapping. It doesn't give *Rodney* a good name. It doesn't make for Anglo-American friendship. It's you petty officers who have most influence with the men. Do your best, Johnson."

"Very good, sir. But I don't promise any results. It's become a habit. There was something like a pitched battle last night. Bloody noses on both sides. Of course, we got the best of it as usual. Some of those Yanks were sorry for themselves."

Arkwright laughed again.

"I believe you enjoy it. Damn silly, I call it. Here we are in a friendly country which is pouring out hospitality . . ."

All that was crude stuff, as he said. It was less crude within his own experience, but the criticism crept out here and there and sometimes he was aware of a kind of covert hostility. In the lower ranks he had come across it among taxi-drivers in New York. Pretty crude also, but interesting. One of them had put him down at the Plaza and then started talking.

"British Navy, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, they're doing all right, but we ain't so fond of the British people."

"I'm sorry about that," said Arkwright with a laugh. "What's your grievance?"

"They didn't pay the debt in the last war, and they're trying to get us into this one. Well, we ain't coming into this one. No gratitude last time. Called us Uncle Shylock when we asked for our money."

Arkwright searched his brain for the right answer. He wasn't strong on that.

"We could only pay if you bought our goods," he said; "and you could not take them. It was something like that."

“Not good enough,” said the taxi-driver. “Now I’m telling you. I’ve a son getting on for nineteen. Doing well in a drug store. There’s millions of boys like him. We ain’t going to let them go overseas to bleed to death in some field in Europe because England is at war with Germany again. What’s that got to do with us? And why didn’t England keep Hitler from re-arming when there was time enough? Why should we clear up your dirty mess again? Once was too much.”

“That’s all right,” answered Arkwright cheerfully. “We’re not asking you to send your boys overseas, though we should like to see them come.”

The taxi-driver held out his hand.

“No offence meant,” he said; “but it’s best to talk straight if one talks.”

“I agree with you,” said Arkwright.

“And now I’ve had my say I’ll say one thing more. Your civilians have guts. I’ll say they have!”

That was the ‘low-down’ from the man in the street. Higher up in the social scale they saw it differently.

Some of the officers of H.M.S. *Rodney* were entertained by the Faculty of Columbia University. One of them, speaking across the luncheon-table, was troubled, it seemed, about India.

“Why doesn’t your Government give India its freedom? Wouldn’t it come into line with your fight for Liberty and Democracy?”

Richard Arkwright had met that one before. Not having been to India he could not answer with any air of infallibility.

“Haven’t we offered them practically self-government?” he asked.

“Not enough to satisfy Mr. Ghandi,” answered the professor, pleasantly but ironically.

“That crafty old gentleman is not easily satisfied,” answered Arkwright with a laugh.

“I don’t want to be critical,” said the professor, proceeding to be critical, “but from the American angle it seems strange that Great Britain, which has led the fight for freedom so often, should still keep her Colonies tied to the strings of Whitehall, and exploit four hundred million Indians—and Heaven knows how many natives of Africa—by taxation which keeps them below the bread-line, and in miserable social conditions, while the British aristocracy keeps rich on the proceeds.”

The naval lieutenant laughed again.

“I don’t profess to know much about these things,” he said; “but I don’t think your facts are quite right somehow. The British Government doesn’t

get any revenue out of India. They have their own budget, you know. As for the Colonies, and I suppose you include the Dominions, they broke away from Whitehall a long time ago. I've been to Australia. They have a complete independence and keep rubbing it into any visiting Englishman. Allegiance to the King and a common tradition is the only tie which binds them to the Mother country. Hasn't this war proved that it's still a pretty strong tie?"

The professor, who was a thin man with a sallow complexion, looked unconvinced, and smiled in a superior way, as though humouring a young boy.

"Viewed from the American angle," he said, "Great Britain, for which we all have a romantic affection, has still a long way to go before becoming truly democratic. All this King stuff strikes us as very old-fashioned. It's bound to cause social distinctions and political inequality."

"Think so?" asked Arkwright, good-humouredly.

After that luncheon one of the younger professors came up to him and spoke in a low voice.

"I'm sorry you had to listen to that thin-lipped son of a . . . who sat opposite you. Very hard on you, lieutenant, and darned discourteous to a distinguished guest."

"Not at all," answered Arkwright. "I could take it!"

It was harder to cope with hospitality than with criticism, but he stood up to it with great cheerfulness, and a resilient physique. Some of his friends of H.M.S. *Rodney* were beginning to weaken.

"If this goes on much longer," said Jack Tanner, a fellow-lieutenant, "I shall be unfaithful to my wife, develop cirrhosis of the liver, and be incapable of doing my duty to King and country. Gosh! How many Old-fashioneded did I drink yesterday? I reckoned up to six and then lost count in a hazy dream of smart girls, friendly guys, and endless vistas of glad hands all reaching out to shake my paw. Still, I must say it's a great experience. I wouldn't have missed it for the world."

He was sharing a double bedroom at the Plaza with Richard Arkwright. Breakfast had just been brought in on trolleys by a waiter who spoke broken English with an American accent. Jack Tanner tipped the man a quarter, waited until he was gone, lifted various silver covers, and then laughed.

"It's like a giddy fairy-tale," he said. "Warm little rolls, hot buns, orange juice in ice, oatmeal with creamy milk, bacon and tomatoes, fruit, marmalade, and pints of coffee. Is there a war on here? The answer is in the negative. These people don't know what war is. They wallow in luxury.

There are no ruins in New York, Boston, or Chicago. There's no blinking black-out on this side of the world. Three thousand miles away, and it's a hell of a long way, European people, including some islanders called the English, emerge from underground shelters wondering if their homes still have their roofs and windows, and line up in queues for food which isn't there. Perhaps, while we're eating this American breakfast, our mothers and aunties are being dragged out from heaps of rubble and saying in the heroic British way as described by newspaper correspondents: 'I could do with a nice cup of tea, dearie.' ”

“What's the moral of all that?” asked Arkwright, grinning at this talkative fellow-officer who had come back to the Plaza in the early hours of the morning looking very sorry for himself, but now as bright as new paint.

“There's no moral, duckie,” answered Tanner, pouring out his coffee. “It's merely a matter of Geography. Gosh! I met a girl yesterday who nearly swept me off my young feet. Adorable! Firing off wisecracks like a Bren gun. Oh, very merry and bright! I took her to lunch at a Howard Johnson near Boston. I hadn't the heart to tell her that I'm a married man and shortly to become a father.”

Arkwright did not feel much like breakfast, but swallowed some black coffee and dallied with a warm roll. He had lunched with a party at the Waldorf, where he had had to make a speech and blurted out a lot of damn nonsense which seemed to go down pretty well, judging from the applause afterwards. It didn't matter what he said, really, as long as he wore the uniform of the Royal Navy. He had been driven off to another party at a women's club—hundreds of women. He had felt a bit bewildered after shaking hands with most of them and listening to their sympathy for England. They all seemed to be working for 'Bundles for Britain'. He'd had to make another speech. He had dined at a house on Fifth Avenue, where there was an English butler who whispered into his ear, when passing round the port:

“The Navy's doing grand work, sir. Best of luck.”

He had nearly been knocked out before dinner by taking two cocktails. He had refused an Old-fashioned, which was mostly rye whisky. After dinner he had been called upon to make a little speech. The host had risen—Arkwright couldn't remember his name—and said, very solemnly: “Ladies and gentlemen, we have here tonight an officer of the heroic British Navy. We bid him welcome with admiration in our hearts for the gallant fight against the powers of darkness and evil. We wish to assure him that there are no Isolationists at this table. We feel it is an honour to have him with us. I will ask him to say a few words.”



Arkwright was no glib after-dinner speaker. He found himself blushing at these times like a schoolboy. He stuttered absurdly, got tangled up in his sentences, laughed in an idiotic way, fingered his tie, shifted about on his feet, made a perfect ass of himself. Still, they were all very good-natured, and didn't seem to expect anything else. The shyer he was the better they liked it. They applauded him as if he had been an orator like Winston. For some reason they had laughed loudly when, after his speech, he addressed his host politely and asked a simple question:

“What exactly is an Isolationist, sir?”

His host—he remembered now that he was a Judge of the Supreme Court—smiled through his gold-rimmed glasses and answered the question as though delivering judgment on some case of national importance. The company at the dinner-table listened to him with smiling respect.

“An Isolationist, my dear sir, is a brand of American—and there are many thousands of them—who by environment, lack of education, and blinkered eyes, is incapable of seeing that The United States cannot live in a vacuum—that is to say, cannot cut themselves off from the rest of humanity, and be indifferent to the fate of civilization, with any hope of retaining their own prosperity or their own security. Let us be fair. Let us admit that the old tradition of this country has been of Isolation as far as possible from European entanglements and wars. Since our War of Independence all our great statesmen have endeavoured to avoid such interference with American prosperity and peace. In the past that policy was reasonable, and founded upon wisdom. There was no threat to our own sovereign power, or the liberties of our people. There was no menace to the civilized world, with whom we traded for mutual benefit. But something happened which changed the conditions of life and altered the meaning of Geography. It was the advance of science. It was particularly, perhaps, the invention of the internal combustion engine. It was the speeding up of man's *tempo*, leading to the annihilation of distance. The aeroplane, the fast destroyer, the U-boat, the dive-bomber, have smashed many things, and among them time and space. We at this table—an intelligent company, sir—realize that the traditional policy of Isolation is no longer possible for the United States. It broke down in the last war. It has broken down again. We cannot, and do not, remain indifferent to what is happening across the Atlantic, because the Atlantic is now a narrow strip of water crossed by the Clipper in a few hours. We know that Great Britain is the foremost bastion of civilization guarding our own shores against the furious assault of evil powers, openly proclaiming their ambitions of world conquest and their hatred of human liberties. We watch all this with deep anxiety. We offer all aid to Britain—

this side of sending our boys across, which may not be necessary this time. Your own great leader, Mr. Churchill, sir, has said: 'Give us the tools and we will finish the job.' We are giving you the tools. But there are groups of men in this country who refuse to see the changes that have happened to humanity, who look back upon a past that is dead, who, like ostriches, keep their heads in the sand, who believe that their own self-interest overrides their duty to the civilized world, and who, in short, remain deeply and doggedly entrenched in ignorance and narrow-mindedness. Those are the Isolationists, hostile to Mr. Roosevelt because he has the wider vision, hostile to England because England needs our help, hostile to all ideals of liberty and humanity because they are fearful that those ideals may interfere with their own business and local politics and pettifogging ambitions. In their hostility they are abusive, and regardless of both truth and decency."

This speech was received with applause by the company at dinner where young Arkwright of *Rodney* was the guest of honour.

"Say, Judge," said an elderly man with humorous eyebrows above a lean mobile face, "that was a swell summing-up!"

"I'll say it was!" said a younger man. "That puts the Isolationists in their right place—which is in the mud."

"I hope I've been fair," said the Judge, blandly.

"Yes, sir! And too darned generous to those snakes in the grass."

So that was one point of view directly opposed to the criticism of England heard elsewhere. It was all a little bewildering to a young naval officer, who kept his ears and his eyes open. It was difficult to sort out into a definite pattern. It was also rather a strain on the nerves and body—all these parties, all these cocktails, all these speeches, all the new faces and new names to remember in the heat of New York, in its rushing traffic, in its swirling crowds of ant-like humans, hurrying to do something somewhere.

Arkwright with his friend, Jack Tanner, had cricked their necks looking up at the tall skyscrapers, staggered by the beauty of New York nights where those high shafts, partly shrouded in the velvety darkness of the night sky, glimmered with a thousand lights from thousands of windows, above which, among the stars, there were flood-lit towers like Gothic cathedrals, white and dream-like.

"Marvellous!" said Lieutenant Tanner. "Like the wild dream of a crazy architect after twelve Old-fashionedes. Gosh, it's mad! But it's the most beautiful thing I've seen."

"Thank goodness I'm spending the week-end in the country," said Arkwright.

“Nice girl there?” asked Tanner suspiciously.

“Nice people,” answered Arkwright. But his mind jumped from New York to a lakeside farm, where he rode with Penelope Hambledon through woods of silver birches under a cloudless blue sky. Penny, they called her. She was very vital and refreshing. There was something very captivating about her, he thought.

## XI

SOME months later, Cynthia Birch had been listening to the nine o'clock news when she heard footsteps scrunching down the gravel path, and knew that it was Tiny Hambledon because of the long lazy stride.

The news was not good on the Russian front. In fact, it seemed to be calamitous. From Hitler's headquarters there was a review of the Russian war up to date. It said that the break-through of the Stalin line took place at three different points south of Lake Peipus, towards Smolensk, and south of the Pripet marshes. The roads to Leningrad and Moscow were open; 35,000 prisoners had been taken with Ostrov and Pskof. General von Rundstedt was having an even more sensational victory. He had fought through to the gates of Kiev and taken 150,000 prisoners. Round Smolensk, during the great battles, no less than 310,000 prisoners had been captured. The Berlin military spokesman said that all told 3,000,000 Russians had been killed since the beginning of the war on the Eastern Front.

Cynthia gave a heavy sigh, and then switched off the radio when the front door-bell rang. For a moment she did not answer, and stood in her sitting-room with a little line on her forehead above her nose. It seemed to express uncertainty and worry. Then she went out of the room and said: “Hullo!”

The front door was open, and Tiny stood there in a white shirt tucked into his trousers. He filled up the doorway.

“May I come in?” he asked.

“Why not?”

He took that as an invitation and sloped inside and followed her into the sitting-room.

“How's Tessa?”

“Sleeping peacefully. Pour yourself out a drink.”

“I will, lady. It’s warm, isn’t it? In another month or two it will be cold. Hard to believe!”

He hadn’t seen her since she had walked out of his father’s house when he had said something critical about England. He had had to go to New York to see his agent about one of his plays.

“Been busy today?” he asked.

She interpreted that as a comment upon her untidiness. She had a patched old frock above her bare legs with her feet in sandals. Tessa had been playing with her hair, which was a bit tousled.

“Sorry if I look like a tramp,” she said.

“You look like a wood-nymph,” he told her. “You always do. That’s how I think of you.”

“I’ve never met a wood-nymph,” answered Cynthia in her truthful and matter-of-fact way; “but I’m certain that if I did she wouldn’t look like me. That’s a bit of play-acting, Tiny. Can’t you be natural?”

“I want to be as natural as hell,” he answered.

He poured out two drinks of lime juice with a touch of gin and plenty of iced water, and handed her one before taking a seat in a low arm-chair with some of its horsehair stuffing coming through the cover. Then he stretched out his long legs, and looked over to her with a smile.

“Have you forgiven me?” he asked. “I seem to remember I wanted you to forgive me something.”

“I’m not sure that I have,” she told him frankly. “You insulted England the last time we met. I can’t pass that, you know.”

He did not answer at once. He lit a Camel cigarette, and put his match in a flower-pot, and drew in a gulp of smoke and let it out through his nostrils.

“Now, look here,” he said, after that time for thought. “I want to put myself straight with you. I’ve nothing against England, only I have a kind of hunch that we’re going to get into this war with you, and you know what I think about that.”

She laughed in a vexed way.

“Don’t let’s go into that all over again. Haven’t we exhausted the argument? You want to keep out of this war because you think war is a denial of civilized ideas, and because you want to go on writing plays, and because you want to live to a ripe old age surrounded by your children and children’s children.”

He laughed good-humouredly.

“That’s a fair interpretation of my philosophy,” he agreed. “I haven’t talked to you in vain. You’re an understanding lady.”

“It’s a selfish philosophy,” she told him. “I don’t admire your views.”

He pondered over that, raised his eyebrows slightly, dropped them again, and sunk deeper into his chair.

“I’m an idealist,” he asserted. “That sounds sloppy, but it’s the truth and I’m not play-acting. I can’t reconcile this war, or any others, with the higher intelligence. It’s a denial of intelligence. As soon as war starts a nation loses its reason, its morality and its sense of decency. They become gibbering maniacs lusting for the blood of their enemy, and the enemy of today is the friend of tomorrow, and the friend of yesterday is the enemy of today. Look at Russia. We were all cursing Russian Communism. Now we have fallen in love with Father Stalin—the next best thing to Santa Claus. There’s no sense in it. There’s only madness, murder, death, entrails, blood, filth. I’m against extending the zone of war. Self-interest? Yes, I want to be happy. But self-interest merges into sympathy with other folk. I want them to be happy. I want them to have the chance of a good life. I want to save them from being sacrificed on the altar of patriotism, reeking with the blood of millions of young victims offered up by bald-headed bastards who call themselves statesmen, or Führers or Duces.”

“Tell that to Hitler,” answered Cynthia. “Tell that to Mussolini. Do you think they’ll stop fighting because of your beautiful idealism?”

Tiny Hambleton shook his head.

“They wouldn’t. When once the gates of Janus are opened you can’t shut them again until the gods decide. But that’s not the point of my beautiful idealism. I didn’t invent it. Jesus Christ invented it. If it had been the common belief of humanity, or of the so-called civilized powers some time back—say from the Armistice after the last war—there wouldn’t have been a Führer and there wouldn’t have been a Duce, and there wouldn’t have been a Second World War.”

“It’s too hot to argue,” said Cynthia. “And I believe I’ve heard all that before, Tiny.”

“Maybe you have,” he admitted humbly. “Maybe I repeat myself; maybe I’m one of the world’s bores.”

“Give me a Camel cigarette,” she asked.

He handed her a cigarette and lit it for her. Outside, beyond the garden of this old frame-house, there was a shrill chorus of bull-frogs. The air was still and warm. A patch of dark-blue sky showed through the open window.

“Play something,” he said. “A bit of Chopin.”

She shook her head.

“It’s too hot.”

“Talk to me,” he said. “I’ll be mum.”

“It’s too hot,” she said again.

Five minutes later she made a remark.

“Russia is going badly. The Germans seem to be winning over there.”

“Yep,” said Tiny. “Chas Hunt was wrong.”

Another five minutes passed and she spoke again.

“The bombing seems to have stopped in England. Only a few scattered raids.”

Tiny nodded.

“I’m glad.”

She rose presently and walked to the open window and looked out into the garden where the grass was now brown and burned like the scorched earth in Russia. Tiny turned in his chair and watched her. She looked slim and graceful there standing by the window. He wanted to put his arms round her. He wanted to kiss her hungrily. She would be so small in his arms, his long orang-outang arms.

“Tiny,” she said, coming back to her place, “I want to go back to England. I want to take Tessa back. Now that the bombing has stopped——”

He was silent for five seconds.

“I’d hate you to go back,” he said. “Why do you want to go back? Isn’t this a good spot? Hasn’t everybody been kind to you?”

She nodded and pushed back her tousled hair.

“Wonderfully kind!” she said. “But it has been a long exile from England. I want to see my people again. I want to take Tessa back to her own country. Her father wants her. He agonizes because we’re so long away. He needs me.”

“They may start bombing again,” said Tiny, hoping for the best.

“It’s better to risk it,” she answered. “And I believe they’re too busy in Russia now.”

“After they’ve defeated Russia they’ll turn on England again,” said Tiny, speaking like a prophet. “That’s their plan.”

She looked into his eyes, as though wondering whether he spoke the truth. Perhaps she hadn’t thought of that possibility, which was very horrible.

“I couldn’t stay here for another year or two,” she said bluntly. “I want to go back. I don’t fit in here.”

“Now why do you say that?” he asked. “Isn’t Penny crazy about you? Don’t we make you feel at home?”

“You’re all kind,” she agreed. “I shall be grateful to you, always. But I know I don’t fit in. You’re all so gregarious, Tiny. And I’m the Cat that Walked Alone. I’ve offended quite a lot of people round here by not accepting their invitations to parties and things. They don’t like it. They think it’s English frigidity and all that. And I don’t put on the right clothes. And I go about looking like a tramp. And I blurt out things which they resent as a criticism on the American way of life, though it isn’t really.”

Tiny Hambleton could not deny these things. He only shrugged his shoulders and tried to pass them off.

“All that doesn’t matter. I know what you mean by our gregariousness. I suffer from it myself and try to escape. I’ve found an escape here. Say, Cynthia, if you go I’ll be a lost soul. It’s no use telling you I love you. You’ve known that a long time, and I hope I’ve behaved pretty well about it.”

“You’ve been a dear,” she told him. “I’m sorry, Tiny. But you know how it is. I’ve a perfectly good husband in England. I want to go back to him.”

“Must you?” he asked. “I wish to Christ you hadn’t a perfectly good husband in England. That’s not a blasphemy. That’s a prayer from a tortured soul.”

“I want you to help me to get back,” said Cynthia. “It takes such a time. Exit permits and all that. Places on the Clipper which can’t be got without priority. Perhaps your father could do something about it. I feel helpless so far away from New York and Washington. Can you give me a helping hand, Tiny? It would be very generous of you.”

Tiny let his hands drop between his knees and looked up at her with a twisted smile.

“You’re asking me to do something which is going to be darned awful painful to me. But of course I’ll do it, right away. As you say, it will take some time. Something like three months, I guess.”

There was a ring on the telephone.

“I expect that’s Penny,” said Cynthia. “Wanting me to come up tomorrow.”

“Oh, these gregarious Americans!” exclaimed Tiny.

The telephone was in the passage outside the sitting-room. Cynthia went to it, leaving the door open. Tiny could hear what she said.

“Cable from London, England. Yes, I’ll take it. Yes, Mrs. Birch speaking now.”

She stopped speaking. She was listening without repeating the words of the cable. Presently she spoke again.

“That’s all right.”

She dropped the telephone receiver with a little crash. She was very quiet there in the passage, until she gave a cry. Something was wrong with her. Tiny stood up listening and then in three strides was outside the door of the sitting-room. He saw that Cynthia’s face was very white. He saw that her body was shaken by a hard sob. She swayed a little as she took a step forward. He put an arm round her.

“What’s the matter?” he asked. “Has anything gone wrong? Something bad?”

She could not speak for a little while.

Something had gone wrong in England. Gerald, her husband, had been killed by enemy action. He had been killed during a visit to Liverpool by one of those hit-and-run raids which had followed the great Blitz over England. It was very bad luck to have survived the Blitz and then been killed by a million-to-one chance. Very bad luck for Cynthia, who had made up her mind to go back.

She wept in Tiny’s arms, and then pulled herself together and said: “Sorry!”

“That’s all right,” said Tiny. “That’s all right, little girl. That’s all right.”

He couldn’t think of anything else to say. There was nothing he could say which would be of any comfort. Presently he made her a cup of cocoa. He stayed with her late that night, hating to leave her alone with her grief. But there was nothing to say. They said hardly anything.

“I’m sorry,” he said, when he left her.

“Thanks,” she answered. “Thanks for everything, Tiny.”

“That’s all right,” he said again. “That’s all right.”

But it was all wrong. In his own room that night he clenched his fists and groaned loudly.

“It’s all wrong!” he said. “That bloody war over there. The war in the air with those demons dropping bombs on civilians, not caring a curse whom they kill. God damn Hitler! God damn all this evil which has been let loose on the world!”



THE summer in Massachusetts merged into a golden Fall. The woods along the Mohawk Trail were hung with tapestry of scarlet and gold, and breaking into flames of colour, startling and beautiful above the little torrents and the grey rocks cropping up everywhere from the thin soil and the sunburnt grass. American families motored along this trail to Manchester, with its white wooden houses and avenue of tall trees, to gaze at this miracle of colour, that blood-red foliage, not giving a thought—why should they?—to the spreading of the same colour over European battlefields, especially in Russia on the road from Smolensk. They stayed at road-houses where the food was good and the company pleasant. Now and again they talked about the European war and the menace to Moscow. They agreed that Russia was putting up a big fight before the inevitable defeat. They were sorry for England, but hoped she could ‘take care’ of the war with their own manpower. No American expeditionary force this time—though Mr. Roosevelt was playing with fire. There was a bit of trouble with Japan. Japanese envoys were in conference at Washington. Mr. Roosevelt was taking a firm line. The Japs would climb down, of course. It was only a game of Oriental blackmail. Well, it had been a good summer. It was a lovely Fall.

Then, suddenly, the thermometer dropped twenty degrees. It was winter in Massachusetts. The first snow fell, covering the countryside with an ermine mantle. Soon there would be ski-ing and tobogganing. Thank the Lord for central heating!

The Hambledon family returned to their Boston house on Commonwealth, except for week-ends, and except for Tiny, who stayed on at the old mill because he said he wanted to work in peace and quiet.

Mr. Hambledon, who had made a lot of money for a family who wanted a lot—he had given them a good time and a good education—had switched off from the mass-production of shingles and linoleum to the making of aeroplane parts under Government contract.

This meant frequent journeys to Washington, which he preferred to do by train rather than by the air service from Providence. It was more restful, he thought. It gave him time to think a bit and read a bit—he was behind-hand with the latest books—and there were always a few fellows on the train with whom he could talk if he wanted to. Quite a few of them belonged to the Tavern Club in Boston, all making this journey to Washington because of Government contracts.

It gave him time to think a bit. Perhaps that was a mistake. Thinking made him worry, and produced little goblins of fear and anxiety to sit on his

shoulder and whisper in his ears.

What was Edward doing? He missed Edward terribly. They had been good friends, liking the same books, liking the same jokes, with an easy understanding between them. He had been devoted to Edward and proud of him. He was so good-natured and unselfish. He was so good-looking and debonair. He had been so affectionate with his father—rather different from Tiny, who was moody and satirical and a difficult fellow in many ways, though dead straight and loyal to all of them. Nothing wrong with Tiny, except that he was over-critical of life and harsh in his judgments. But Edward was more charming and more open. Now Edward had disappeared into the blue, or rather into the dark mystery of Occupied France, doing dangerous and secret work there. His letters were few and far between and told them nothing or next to nothing of his private life. Recently a cable had come from him asking for a dollar credit to be placed to his account in the Bank of France to the tune of 15,000 bucks. Quite a sum.

On these train journeys to Washington the little goblins in Mr. Hambleton's secret brain gibbered at him about Mr. Roosevelt's foreign policy. "He's dragging us in. He's dragging us in. He's dragging us in." That refrain kept time to the rattle of the train. The President had now decided to arm American merchant ships and let them sail to anywhere in the world that a ship may go. He had given orders to shoot at sight if attacked by submarines or surface-craft. Very dangerous! How long would it be before they were attacked by German U-boats? How long before they had a naval clash with Germany? How long before a declaration of war?

Mr. Hambleton was anxious about Tiny, because his son had a horror of war and was quite right to have it. He also had a horror of war, having seen something of the last as a lieutenant of infantry at Château Thierry and elsewhere. He hadn't done much fighting, being mostly at base headquarters, but he had seen enough of it to make him know the real thing—the stench of dead bodies and bits of bodies—once hearty young American boys; the wreckage, the litter, the filth of war; the noise of guns and exploding shells, and the chatter of machine-gun fire sweeping cross-roads, bracketing highways, concentrating barrage fire on woods crowded with American troops. He remembered the futility of it all—the disillusionment of home-coming, and the slump in idealism. Was all that going to happen again? Would that long son of his with his splendid body, bronzed by the American summer, have to walk one day into that storm of flying steel which would tear his flesh to bits, or blind those keen eyes which regarded the world with smiling irony? It would be hard luck on Tiny, who hated war. It would be harder luck on his mother, who adored this big

son and like himself stifled fears that war was coming nearer and that its shadow was creeping close. She stifled those secret fears by hard work on 'Bundles for Britain' and other committees for social welfare, and was gay and brisk at her dinner-table, poor dear, but had wakeful nights now and then because of this fear in her mind.

Some of those fellows in the train were not too encouraging. One of them—Bill Zeidlitz of the Tavern Club—talked very gloomily to him on the journey one day.

"We're all living in a fool's paradise. The American people—this poor dumb public of ours—don't realize that the President has made up his mind to come into this war and to fight with Great Britain. They don't know that all this vague idealism about liberty and civilization just means that. 'Regardless of their doom the little victims play.' I've forgotten the name of the guy who wrote that, but it's a true picture of these United States in the year of grace 1941. That shoot-at-sight order means that we're in a naval war already. Soon we'll be in the land war, sending over our boys as fast as they can be clothed and equipped. My Bill is doing fine at Harvard. I'll hate to see him drafted for the hell's kitchen in Europe."

Mr. Hambleton sighed and then tried to speak cheerfully.

"Don't you get worrying, Bill. Don't meet troubles half-way. I don't think the worst is going to happen, unless I have a sleepless night and keep company with blue devils. You know how it is when one can't sleep. All one's anxieties come creeping up like legions of little devils."

Mr. Zeidlitz smiled and gave a nod.

"Well do I know, Ted! That's been happening to me lately. It's because of young Bill. He's the apple of my eye. If anything happened to him——"

"Don't you worry," answered Mr. Hambleton. "It's no use worrying."

That night when he went to bed in the Metropolitan Club at Washington those legions of little devils came creeping up to his pillow and kept him awake for several hours.

### XIII

RICHARD ARKWRIGHT spent his last week-end at Lakeside Farm towards the end of that November.

Mrs. Hambleton and Penny brought him down from Boston by car, Penny putting on speed with a sure mastery of her Cadillac car, and alarming

a gallant officer of the British Navy by doing one stretch at over eighty.

“A bit too fast?” he asked.

She laughed and said: “Scared?”

“Terrified.”

Snow-ploughs had done a good job on the roads. In the fields and on the low-lying hills snow lay thick and dazzling in its whiteness under a clear blue sky. Assawampsett was frozen hard. The cold air was a sharp tonic after overheated rooms in New York and Boston.

“We’ll have to get the toboggans out,” said Penny, “or would you rather do some ski-ing?”

He was game for both, though it was his first attempt on skis.

They had the world to themselves—this world of whiteness and solitude and silence, where the woods were very still and where every tree was bare with a streak of snow down its trunk and every branch and twig was pencilled with white.

Above Lakeside Farm there was rising ground. The snow was deep enough to cover the outcrop of grey rocks. Penny carried her skis up a steep hill. She had put on a pair of loose trousers and a white woollen pullover and a white fur cap pulled over her ears. Arkwright was in a rig-out belonging to Tiny, which Penny had grabbed out of his wardrobe.

“It’s a bit difficult at first,” she warned him. “You get all tangled up. You won’t know which is a leg or which is an arm. Fall easy.”

“It sounds dangerous to me,” said Arkwright; “but I’ll have a go at it. It’s marvellous up here. Gosh! It’s wonderful!”

He had several goes at it, after watching Penny swoop down the hill with her arms outspread, and her body in a half-crouch. She gave a Red Indian yell and she went like a flying thing, and then came struggling up again with the skis over her shoulder, breathless, with colour whipped into her cheeks and sparkling eyes.

“Great fun,” she cried, beating her breast to bring back her breath. “Have a try.”

He had a try, and didn’t do badly for the first fifty yards. Then, of course, he took a toss and became a hopeless tangle of legs, arms, and skis, sending up a whirl of snow. Penny heard his yells of dismay and he heard her screams of laughter. For the onlooker there is nothing more comical. She swooped down to his rescue, and sorted him out and helped him to stand on his skis again.

“You were doing fine,” she said. “Swell stuff, until you lost your balance! It’s all a question of confidence and poise. Lean forward. Keep your arms out to get your balance. I’ll come down with you next time.”

They started together.

“Now!” shouted Penny. “Yip! Atta boy! Oi! Oi! Oi!”

He had a sense of balance for about seven seconds. In those seven seconds he went quite a way.

“Cripes!” cried Penny. “You’re a wonder!”

He began to wobble. He was losing his confidence and his poise.

“Wow!” he shouted. He gave a drunken stagger, plunged into a snowdrift and became a jig-saw puzzle of skis and legs and arms. He had cut across Penny’s path, and she fell in a heap on top of him, raising a flurry of snow.

“Sorry!” shouted Arkwright, struggling to find the whereabouts of his arms and legs. “I’m most awfully sorry.”

Penny was not in the least sorry. She crawled off him, stood up on her skis and laughed across this white wilderness.

At the end of three hours Richard Arkwright of *Rodney* was beginning to get on rather well. Anyhow, he had had a grand time, as he told Penny when they shouldered skis and trudged home to change before dinner, where they were joined by Tiny, who was in one of his taciturn moods.

Taciturn, until he became talkative with his back to a log fire later in the evening.

At least he was civil in his answers to some questions put to him by Lieutenant Arkwright. One of them had to do with Japan.

“Do you think you’re going to have trouble with the Japs?”

“What kind of trouble?” asked Tiny.

“War,” said Arkwright.

Tiny Hambleton laughed loudly.

“Say, what’s put that idea into your head? Do you think those little monkeys would make war against the United States?”

Arkwright answered his laugh with a good-natured smile.

“One would hardly think so,” he agreed, in a non-committal way. “But I’m told they’re getting rather provocative in Washington. They’ve made a hell of a mess in China, and they don’t disguise their ambitions in the Pacific. We’re getting worried about Malaya. We’ve enough to do in the Atlantic and Mediterranean just now.”

Tiny shrugged his shoulders.

“The Japs are trying a bit of Oriental blackmail. The President is calling their bluff. That’s all there is to it.”

Arkwright wasn’t quite sure.

“I wonder why they’re buying such a mass of scrap-iron. You’re selling them mountains of it collected by all their agents over here. American merchant ships are laden down with it.”

Tiny Hambleton raised his eyebrows.

“That’s new to me,” he said. “But there’s nothing in it. Business as usual, and all that filth. Let’s have a game of gin-rummy.”

“Great idea, buddy!” said Penny.

They gambled for a couple of hours. Penny won and raked in six dollars.

Tiny had recovered his good humour.

“Sorry you have to go back to the war zone,” he said to Arkwright. “Very unpleasant for you, laddy.”

Arkwright smiled, and was not dismayed by the idea.

“I’ve had a great time here. Of course I’ll be sorry to leave, but I’ll be glad to have another knock at the German Navy, such as it is.”

Tiny looked at him with quizzical eyes.

“You’re the stuff that heroes are made of,” he said. “The good old bulldog breed and all that. The Nelson touch and so forth. I’m against it. It’s time we forgot it—Mussolini’s shining bayonets. Hitler’s Siegfried stuff in shining armour, England’s national song of triumph, *Britannia Rules the Waves*. This braggart patriotism. This worship of the old heroic myths. Why the hell can’t the world get civilized and drop all this old-fashioned nonsense which belonged to the Middle Ages? Hasn’t humanity enough intelligence to see that unless they drop it they’re all going to get destroyed by the machine they’ve created? The machinery of death and destruction. Can’t we move on a step to a more scientific co-operation for the general well-being?”

“I’m afraid not.” Arkwright shook his head, with a good-natured grin. “There are too many thugs about. When they arm themselves to the teeth and pile up high explosives one has to do something about it. We can’t let Hitler get away with it.”

Tiny strode up and down the room until he banged his head against a beam, which seemed to quieten him after an unseemly oath.

“Now, buddy,” he said to Arkwright, “that’s beginning at the wrong end. There shouldn’t have been a Hitler. I’m not going to throw any stones at little old England, because these United States are just as much to blame. We

made an unholy mess of the last peace. We betrayed the League of Nations. There was no link-up between the democracies including a democratic régime in Germany. We ought to have seen to it—all of us—that the common peoples of the world had a better chance and a stronger control over their own lives. The common people are on the side of peace. They want to be left alone. It's about time the brotherhood of man replaced the grisly story of the martyrdom of man."

"I agree," said young Arkwright. "But the common folk are led astray by their leaders who may be out for power and world domination."

"God damn it!" shouted Tiny. "That's my point. We must strengthen and educate democracy so that it tears the guts out of those who make power politics. You'll never do it as long as you worship the old heroic myths of national tradition—*Dulce et decorum est pro patria*—far better live for your country and make it a sweet kind of civilization instead of a stinking morgue in which the best of youth is laid out."

"Tiny!" cried Penny, "you're spoiling Richard's week-end. And you're talking boloney as usual. You're one of the starry-eyed idealists who don't see life as it is. And I'm all for the old tradition. When I look at Richard I think of Nelson and all the glory of the British Navy."

"When you look at Richard," answered Tiny, "you go pop-eyed with sentimental adoration because he wears a uniform with brass buttons. God help us! The women are worse than men. We can't do anything about it. Humanity refuses to use its intelligence. Cripes! Let's have a drink."

He had a drink and then sloped off, saying that he had letters to write. Penny knew in her heart that he was crossing the road to go and see Cynthia Birch, poor girl, whose husband had been killed in an air raid.

She spoke to Arkwright about Cynthia. He had met her several times and she had asked him a hundred questions about England. Once he had gone with Penny to her cottage and she had questioned him again about English life and food, clothing coupons, and all the little details of London life since she had left it. They had discovered a few mutual friends. "I want to go back," she told him. "I find this a frightful exile. Everybody is very kind, but I'm still a refugee. I was a fool to come here. Perhaps Gerald wouldn't have been killed if I had been with him. He wouldn't have gone to Liverpool."

"I'm terribly sorry for Cynthia," said Penny when Tiny had left.

Arkwright nodded.

"Very bad luck on her. I mean, the death of her husband when the air raids were almost over."

They were silent for a few moments. A queer kind of shyness came over them now that Tiny had left them alone. It was Penny who broke the silence.

“I’m sorry you’re going, Richard. It’s been nice having you here.”

“It’s been nice for me,” he told her.

They were silent again for a little while, until Arkwright spoke.

“Penny, it’s been marvellous knowing you like this. I mean, it was wonderful luck meeting you in Boston.”

“Luck for me,” she told him. “But now you’ll sail away and maybe I shan’t see you again, and maybe you’ll forget me, when you get as far as Portsmouth.”

“Not a likelihood!” he told her. “I’ll never forget you, Penny. You mean all America to me. All that’s lovely and kind.”

“There’ll be three thousand miles between us,” she said. “I can’t swim as far as that, or I’d come across.”

“After this war,” said Arkwright, “I’ll come back, if I may.”

“They’ll let you come,” she answered. “But after this war is a terrible long time. How many years? Can’t you get the *Rodney* knocked about a bit and put in for repairs in Boston again?”

“Great idea!” he said with a laugh. Then he became serious, very deeply serious, and extraordinarily shy for one of His Majesty’s naval lieutenants.

“Penny, I’d like to say something, but it seems, well, awfully difficult somehow. I mean, I want to get something off my chest. I mean, I just want to blurt out something, and don’t quite know how you’d like it. You might think it damned cheek. I haven’t known you very long, as time goes. I mean, you haven’t known me very long. But aren’t we—well—putting it in the form of a question, so to speak—aren’t we terribly in love with each other? I mean, I’m terribly in love with you and I’d like to think you cared a bit for me, Penny. Any luck?”

“All the luck in God’s world,” she told him. “Richard, it’s wonderful, this love of ours. What are we going to do about it?”

He did something then. He took her in his arms and she put her hands up to his head and drew his face close to hers. It was a good beginning.

That night she told him about young Professor Brandon to whom she was, well, half-engaged. Arkwright was slightly upset, but she reassured him.

“He just goes,” she told him. “I just smudge him out.”

“Poor devil, I’m sorry for him!” said Arkwright. “He’s being smudged out of paradise.”



“No paradise for us yet,” cried Penny. “There’ll be three thousand miles between us, Richard. Three thousand miles of dirty water infested by U-boats and floating mines and surface-raiders. We shall have to wait a long time for Seventh Heaven, and all the time you’ll be in danger while I twiddle my thumbs and weep for my lover.”

“I can’t see you twiddling your thumbs,” said Arkwright, who had her face very close against his. “You’re the most vital girl I know.”

“I’m going to be pretty active,” she agreed. “I’m going to move heaven and earth and the great grey sea to get over to little old England. You’ll see me in London before long serving in a canteen, or driving an ambulance under the bombs and among the ruins.”

“I should be terrified,” said Arkwright. “*Rodney* is a nice safe ship compared to that.”

“Well, that’s what I’m going to do,” said Penny very firmly. “After I’ve smudged out a Harvard professor, that’s what I’m going to arrange. Will you be glad to see me?”

“God!” cried Lieutenant Arkwright, as a kind of prayer. “That would be marvellous.”

It was a pity that he had to leave her on the following morning at a very early hour.

## XIV

CYNTHIA BIRCH, who was not herself gregarious, decided that little Tessa was too much alone. There were no children in the near neighbourhood to play with her, and she was too young to go to school. It was one reason why Cynthia was anxious and resolved to return to England, however long it took to get exit permits and all the papers required by the United States Government for the transfer of one mother and child across the Atlantic. A Portuguese visa was needed. That meant weeks and even months of delay. The British Air Ministry had to be approached to ensure a passage from Lisbon to England. The mystical word ‘priority’ created an intangible difficulty.

A lack of companionship for Tessa was only one reason for this desperate urge to return. In a way she had been happy in Massachusetts. At least she had had no excuse for unhappiness in her conditions of life and habitation. She had come to like her little frame-house on the edge of the big

lake. She loved the woods in its neighbourhood, those winding tracks through the silver birches which shed their branches during winter gales, and the big grey rocks thrusting up from the thin soil, and the little sandy coves down by the water's edge where Tessa paddled and made her sand castles. Something of the gipsy in her had responded to this loneliness and this wildness. She had not wilted in the heat of summer which had bronzed her bare legs and arms. Winter she feared, though it had its days of ecstasy when the snow was dazzling under a blue sky. But it was no joke when the thermometer touched zero or made sudden jumps of twenty degrees in a couple of hours. And for all her love of loneliness there were winter months when there was just a little too much of it. That was when the Hambledons and the Wakefields and most of the others went back to their town houses in Boston. She might have gone with them—they gave her the offer—but she hated staying in other people's houses and always felt shy and uneasy. That was ridiculous, she knew; but she was made like that. They had tried to give her a good time. They had given her good times. She had no complaints to make on that score. She would be eternally grateful to them—these kind, generous, friendly people. But underneath the surface of daily life in her mind she had been desperately unhappy. It was like being on another planet while England was in danger, suffering hideous ordeals, struggling for life against great odds. She was too English to be able to watch all that from a distance in tranquillity of mind. She envied the young women of her own age who were in the thick of it, doing service jobs, taking part in this drama of courage and work and endurance. Why should she be out of it all? For Tessa's sake? Yes; that was the reason for her coming. But thousands—hundreds of thousands—millions—of English children had stayed to take the risks. Why should Tessa be saved more than any other child? She remembered saying that to Gerald.

This exile from England had got her down. She had agonized over the retreats, the failures, the set-backs to the fighting forces. Being so far away from England made them seem worse. American sympathy, with here and there a hint of surprise, made them seem worse.

She had missed Gerald, though at first it had been a relief to get away from him, as she had realized with a sense of self-reproach. He had been so nervy, so rattled, so terrified even, for her sake and Tessa's, after the first bombs fell. Even before the war he had been very nervous and highly strung, so he had always been difficult. But they had remained in love with each other. The parting had been like a surgical operation. It was as though her heart had been cut in half. She had got over that. The wound had healed, but every time she had had one of his letters she felt the pain of it again. She

had to weep over them, though she was not given to easy crying. He was so lonely. He was so utterly miserable without her and Tessa, though he tried to conceal this by a forced cheerfulness. He had been bad at writing letters, perhaps because of the censorship which made him keep back so many things she wanted to know. He didn't answer her questions, perhaps because of the time it took for their letters to cross. He had never revealed himself with any depth of feeling or candour. His letters had just recorded little facts about dining with this person, or meeting the other. Aunt Jane was looking well. He had been to stay the week-end with her father and mother. They were very well and cheerful. They sent their love of course. . . . Disappointing letters from a husband to his wife, though she had kissed them when they came. He had written much better letters to Tessa, filled with little humorous sketches and rhymes he had made up. He had loved Tessa with a kind of passion. He had made a great act of self-sacrifice—a supreme one—in sending her to America. Now he was dead. He would never see Tessa again. She could not believe it, or rather she could not make it real to herself. It seemed impossible that she would never see Gerald again, that he would never kiss her again, that he would never hold her in his arms again. It was like being told that she was dead when she was walking about and eating and talking. When she went back to England Gerald would not come to meet her. He was no longer in England. That was true, but she could not make it feel true. After her first anguish a kind of incredulity happened in her mind. She was like a young wife whose husband has been reported missing, believed dead. One day he would come back. She felt like that about Gerald. He had gone—missing. They told her he had been killed in Liverpool. She knew it was true, but by some odd freak of the mind he seemed only to be missing. She believed in personal survival after death in a non-intellectual way, and as a faith taught to her in childhood. But this was different. She could not bring herself to understand that Gerald was dead. She just couldn't realize it. It was a kind of mental resistance to the stark and terrible truth, though many times she tried to make it real to herself, and said, over and over again: "Gerald is dead. . . . Gerald is dead. . . ."

"I'm going potty," she thought once. "Of course he's dead. Why don't you weep about it? How can you go on playing with Tessa as if nothing had happened? Why do you still get hungry and want to eat when Gerald is dead?" She accused herself of being unnatural and hard-hearted and utterly callous, not knowing that life puts up a defence against the torture of grief.

She was worried about Tiny Hambleton. She had been worried about him for quite a time. Now and again she had seen something in his eyes which had scared her. Now and again there was something in his voice

which put her on her guard. She had made a condition about their friendship, which had been a boon to her because she liked him very much and enjoyed his company. It was not to be sentimental. He had agreed to that. He had told her he was not a sentimentalist. But lately—for six months or more—he had not kept his contract, or at last he had shown signs of being sentimental. One evening he had tried to kiss her. When he had taken her hand to say good night he had pulled her towards him and tried to kiss her. It might have been all right. She did not regard a kiss as a crime. But it was dangerous. It scared her. He didn't make a fuss when she pushed him away with a laugh and said: "None of that, Tiny."

Then, on another evening, he had blurted out things which she was sorry to hear him say. He took for granted that she knew he loved her. "It's no damn use pretending I don't," he told her. All she could say was: "I'm sorry, Tiny. It's my fault. I ought not to have let you come here so much. Don't let it spoil our friendship."

"That's O.K. with me," he had answered. "It's not going to spoil our friendship. I'm going to be a good boy. Don't get scared."

He had behaved wonderfully well. In spite of his big height and his big bones and his violent way of speech sometimes—especially when he talked about war—he was extraordinarily kind and gentle and almost womanly in his sympathy. He had been with her that evening when the news of Gerald came. He had put his arm round her when she was swaying about like a drunken woman. He had sat up with her most of the night. He had fetched Penny back from Boston to look after her a bit. He had come round constantly to rake out the furnace and do little things in the house and play with Tessa, who adored him. He had been a staunch friend in time of trouble. He had even made a special journey to Washington to hurry up her exit permit, though he hated the idea of her going. Now one evening of this December he became sentimental again and rather worried her.

They were sitting on each side of the big hearth where he had made up a blazing fire. She was reading the *New York Times*, which had arrived by the afternoon post. Now and again she read out a line or two.

"A Cairo correspondent says that the British have knocked out a third of Rommel's tanks on the Egyptian frontier."

"I hope it's true, lady," said Tiny, with his usual scepticism.

"The Moscow offensive approaches its climax. The fate of the city will be decided in the next few days. The Russian radio is exhorting the troops in stirring words: 'You must hold on.' 'You must fight to the last.' 'The enemy shall not pass to Moscow!'"

“Words won’t save Moscow,” said Tiny. “Words. . . . Words. . . . Words. . . . Oh Lord, they make me tired, as they did Hamlet.”

Cynthia had turned to another page of the *New York Times*. She gave a cry of excitement.

“Tiny, listen to this! The Tobruk garrison has been relieved. Isn’t that splendid? They’ve been holding out for seven months. And here’s another bit of good news. Gondar has surrendered. It’s the last Italian stronghold in Abyssinia. Our men have finished that job.”

Tiny Hambledon laughed quietly.

“How English you are!” he exclaimed. “The dear old British Empire and all that.”

Cynthia looked at him and smiled.

“Yes, I’m English all right. Don’t get insulting again.”

Hambledon looked at her curiously with a kind of humorous vexation and then said something quietly.

“I’ve another bit of news for you. I’ve been keeping it back. Your exit permit has come through.”

“Oh!” cried Cynthia. “Why didn’t you tell me before?”

She looked excited, and stared past him as though seeing something a long way off.

“I hated to tell you,” he answered. “If you make use of it I shall lose a lot. The spirit will go out of this place. It will leave me stricken.”

“You’ll soon forget me,” said Cynthia. “You’ll get absorbed in another play.”

He rose from his chair and stood looking down upon her with a half-smile on his lips and a dog-like look in his eyes.

“Say, Cynthia,” he said, “need you use that exit permit? Won’t you change your mind? Stay on here and let me come and keep house for you. We could get married in Boston and have a Christmas honeymoon. I’d be a happy man, and I don’t believe you would be unhappy with me. I’d give you a good time. I would make you laugh a lot. I’d keep you away from crowds and parties. You and I and Tessa would enjoy each other’s company and need none other. See what I mean? Cut out that trip to England until after the war. Stay here and love me a little as I love you a lot. What do you say?”

She said nothing for a moment or two. She slipped out of her chair and went swiftly across the room to the piano and then stood with her back to it looking down on the polished floor.

“Well?” asked Tiny.

“I was hoping you wouldn’t talk like that,” she said. “Didn’t you promise not to?”

“Not for always,” he answered. “I’ve kept a hold on my tongue long enough. I’ve behaved like a little gentleman, haven’t I?”

“Like a big gentleman,” she told him, with a nervous laugh. “You’ve been awfully good to me, Tiny.”

He nodded.

“I know I have. And I’m surprised at my own self-control. I’ve suffered agonies of desire without whining to you. I’ve wanted to kiss you and then didn’t because you didn’t like it. Cripes, yes! I’ve behaved like a fine old English gentleman, all of the ancient style. Self-control. Reserve. No passion allowed. Nothing to upset a lady. That was when you had a husband. Oh, I know the moral code all right. No love-making to a married woman. It isn’t done! It’s very naughty! But now it’s different. I have a right to tell you I love you, and I’m telling you. There’s nothing to stop our getting married in God’s law or man’s.”

“Don’t you believe in loyalty to the dead?” asked Cynthia. “Do you think because Gerald is dead I can fling myself into another man’s arms before his body is cold in the grave?”

“Why not?” he asked. “Death is death. Life is life. That’s the law of Nature.”

“No!” she cried. “No! Tiny, my dear, let me have my little loyalties.”

His head dropped. His big hands hung at his side.

“That’s O.K. with me,” he said. “England and Gerald’s ghost. . . . They’re too strong for me. I’ll have to let you go. But one day I’ll come after you.”

“Thanks,” she said. “Thanks awfully.”

He laughed good-humouredly in spite of his dejection.

“Gosh! How English you are!” he told her.

## XV

It was early next evening before supper that he came again. She heard him kicking the snow off his shoes at the front door. She heard him open the door and call out to her.

“Cynthia! . . . May I come in?”

There was something urgent in his voice. Something had happened to him, she thought. He had something big to tell her. Perhaps a message had come from Washington about her place on the Clipper. She might have to start at once.

She had been reading out a fairy-tale to Tessa.

“You’ll have to tuck down,” she said. “Tiny wants to talk to me.”

“Oh, dear!” cried Tessa, “I wanted to know what happened to the little green man.”

“Tomorrow,” said Cynthia. “When you wake up in the morning. Be good!”

She kissed Tessa good night and went downstairs to the sitting-room.

“Any news?” she asked. “Anything exciting?”

He was standing there with his back to the log fire. There was an extraordinary look on his face. He looked as though some great shock had happened to him, half-stunning him. His face was white beneath its tan.

“Something frightful has happened,” he said. “Something unbelievable.”

She felt her own face go pale. An icy finger seemed to touch her spine.

“To England?” she asked. “Have they invaded us?”

“I’ve been all wrong,” he said, in a low voice. “This makes a fool of me and everybody. It alters everything.”

“Tell me!” she cried. “What has happened?”

“Those little yellow monkeys!” he cried harshly. “Those treacherous, little slant-eyed rats!”

“Who?” she asked. “What?”

Hambledon told her the incredible thing.

“The Japs have attacked us at Pearl Harbour. They’ve smashed up a lot of our battleships from the air. It’s war for us as well as for you. We’re all in it now. Oh God! Oh God!”

Cynthia stared at him. He had been saying something which sounded fantastic. He looked stricken and enraged.

“What does it mean?” she asked. “I don’t understand. Does it mean \_\_\_\_\_”

“It means another chapter of hell,” he told her. “It means that your war is our war now. It’s a World War and we’re all in it. Japs and Germans against civilization—I guess that’s what it means.”

She stared at him again, as though not yet understanding.

“Does it mean that you will be on our side? That you’re coming in with us?”

“You’ve said it,” he answered. “That’s what it means. Everything that I’ve said was wrong. We’re in this bloody business up to the neck. American isolation was an illusion. We were all blind. We were all asleep. They were asleep, I guess, at Pearl Harbour. We’ve taken a hard knock. Maybe we needed it. All my hatred of war, all my pacifist ideas, all my lovely idealism was nothing but mud. Humanity has gone lousy. There’s no sanctuary of peace or civilization. We’re back in the jungle—all of us. Every man of fighting age will be lagged. ‘No escape, laddy. You’re for it! Step up, buddy. Did you say you don’t believe in war? We’ll show you! An artist with a faith in beauty and a dislike of blood and guts? You make me laugh, buddy! There’s a tommy-gun. Learn how to use it before a little yellow-eyed monkey knocks the life out of you.’ ”

He seemed to be talking to himself. His lips were twisted into a mirthless smile.

“I’m sorry for you,” said Cynthia. “But I’m glad for myself. England won’t be alone now. We shall be sure of victory if we have American manpower on our side.”

“Yep, it’s luck for you,” he said. “It’s God’s own luck.”

He spoke with a kind of bitterness, as though resenting this luck for Britain. Then he raised both his clenched fists.

“We’ll have to hammer hell out of those yellow monkeys,” he said fiercely. “And first of all we’ll have to finish off Hitler.”

Suddenly he dropped into a chair and started laughing in a queer harsh way.

“Why do you laugh?” asked Cynthia.

“I’m laughing at one of life’s little ironies,” he answered. “It’s so darned funny! I’m becoming bloody-minded all because the Japs have attacked us without a declaration of war. Before that happened—was it a lifetime ago, or an hour ago?—I was one of the world’s idealists. That is to say, I took a superior attitude over the war in Europe. It seemed to me that it was all senseless—another vendetta, or the same old vendetta—between groups who hadn’t the intelligence or morality to quit fighting and murdering each other. Maybe I was right—an hour ago or a lifetime ago. Maybe idealism and pacifism are the only sanity. Maybe I’ve joined the lunatics because now I want to smudge the Japs off the earth, and take Hitler’s Germany in my stride. But that’s how I feel. I’ll be in uniform next time I see you—if there’s any next time. That play of mine in Broadway will have to be withdrawn.



It's a satire on war. It's old-fashioned and out of date, since a lifetime ago or an hour ago. 'War, ladies and gentlemen, is inevitable. It brings out the noblest virtues. It's the job for which babies are born into this world.' 'Kiss your girl good-bye, buddy. You're going to die and rot in a jungle. You're going to be a little hero, buddy. So keep smiling until you're blown to bits. Tiny Hambleton, that long big man, is going to be a soldier, buddy. He's going to join the army or the navy or the air force. He's going to eat all his words. He's going to repudiate all his ideals. He's going to be a hero like the rest of you. Step up there, step up, damn you.' "

To Cynthia he seemed a little mad, and she told him so.

"Yes," he answered, "I am mad. We're all mad. The world is a vast lunatic asylum."

Presently he spoke more calmly and more reasonably.

"I see now that one can't adopt the passive resistance idea. If one's attacked by wild beasts one has to do something about it."

"Wasn't it the same with England?" she asked. "We didn't want war. We didn't ask for it, as far as I know. We had to do something about Hitler."

"Maybe you're right," he said. "But it knocks me edgewise. My plays will have to go into the garbage can. They were stuffed full of ideals which haven't worked. Maybe the ideals are all right, but one just can't live up to them in this stage of human evolution. We're still gorillas and orang-outangs."

"No," said Cynthia, "I can't pass that. Those boys in the R.A.F. are like young knights. Richard Arkwright of *Rodney* is not the gorilla type."

"Well, they have to do the duty work of war," said Tiny, "after being taught to wash behind their ears like little gentlemen. I'm going to get into this war. I can't escape it if I wanted to now. But nothing is going to shake my conviction that war is a repudiation of civilized ideas, even if there's no alternative. 'War is hell', as one of our soldiers remarked in a moment of thoughtfulness. I'm booked for hell, and I know it. But I'm not shirking it."

That was how young Hambleton—the long one—reacted to the news of Pearl Harbour.

His fellow-countrymen reacted in much the same way, though with less volubility. They were stunned at first. That attack out of the blue, without a declaration of war, took their breath away by the first shock. Then anger followed. Then a sense of humiliation, because they had been so blind to the menace. At Pearl Harbour—the most tragic episode in American history—those who should have been on guard were caught asleep. Then a cold resolve to see this thing through, this ugly thing, this grim job. There was no

flag-wagging. No cheering crowds marched down Fifth Avenue or any main street. There was no boasting. There were no sham heroics. They knew they had taken on something bigger than ever before in their history. The Isolationists faded out. Those words, 'No Expeditionary Force this time', which had been spoken by so many American fathers and mothers, were heard no more. There would be Expeditionary Forces in every part of the world, wherever the enemy stood to fight—and the enemy included Hitler and Nazi Germany, who were in the plot of world domination with those across the Pacific. They had an instant realization that Germany must be defeated first. There was no argument about it. They accepted that instinctively and soberly, though with a grim and terrible resolve to exact vengeance for Pearl Harbour and all that followed—the swarming of the Japanese into the Pacific Islands, the capture of the Philippines, the threat to Australia, and the British disaster at Singapore, which in the American mind was worse than Pearl Harbour in its appalling incompetence. One man upheld them, steadied them, and led them through these dark days. It was a man wheeled to his desk in the White House, Washington. The words he spoke from time to time to a listening nation had a serene confidence in future victory and a kind of prophetic faith in its moral purpose. His programme of production for the weapons of war to carry out this purpose were staggering even to his own people who had been educated in mass-production. With iron resolution he harnessed the tremendous power of American industry to the chariots of war. The immediate disasters did not daunt him. His voice rang out across the world with a strange cheerfulness, as that of a man who sees the end even at the beginning, without a shadow of doubt in his mind. By that end he held out a hope for humanity after the sacrifice and the blood. Other enemies besides the Japanese and the Germans would be defeated. They would defeat hunger and want and ignorance and the enslavement of men. It was a war for the liberties of the common man everywhere. So he promised in those early days.

This man had been much hated by some of his own people, those who believed in their right to get rich, and to get power without interference, those who clung to the old tradition of American individualism without State control; those who fastened upon this man's failures and weaknesses and political lapses, and would not see his greatness and his vision. They had choked at his name and called him 'That man'. Now even many of these acknowledged his supremacy of leadership in this ordeal of war, and he held the nation spell-bound by his words, which did not fail in action as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, enlisted, trained, and soon to be flung on every fighting front. The whole available man-power of the United

States was enrolled to create the greatest war machine, the most formidable engine of attack, ever known in world history. Across the vast continent factories were already in production. Millions of workers were toiling at the moving belts, and at the furnaces and benches—where the American skyline had been changed by these workshops and chimneys, and moving cranes and the gantries of shipyards. The President's programme of production was being fulfilled faster than anyone had believed was possible. In his study there in the White House, Washington, this man, crippled from the waist down but with a radiant personality, with a ruddy face and blue eyes, quickly lighted by humour, which was never far from his mind, worked with serenity and a cheery smiling confidence in ultimate victory whatever disasters might be met on the way and however much the cost in blood and tears. Beyond the blood and tears he saw, or thought he saw, a better kind of world for those to follow.

The first estimate for the American armed forces was seven and a half million. They were drafted according to age groups. Shop assistants left their counters in New York and Chicago and the great cities from the Eastern seaboard to the Pacific coast. Salesmen of soft goods, young fellows in drug stores, garage hands, clerks, schoolmasters and professors, farm boys in Texas and Kentucky and the prairies of the West, the sons of Big Businesses and State bureaucracy, the sons of the little shopkeepers and the one-man business, the crowds from the campus of American Universities, the film stars from Hollywood, the champions of baseball, the younger writers, artists, poets, playwrights from Greenwich village or Connecticut and Maine—every type, every class of American life was drafted into the war machine and in due course put on some kind of uniform. So it had happened two years before in Great Britain.

One long-legged ant in this upturned ant-heap was Anthony Hambleton, known as Tiny. He was in uniform when he said good-bye to Cynthia Birch in the Spring which followed the tragedy of Pearl Harbour. She was flying back to England by way of Lisbon, with her little daughter Tessa.

He said good-bye to her on La Guardia airfield.

"I'll be seeing you again one day," he said. "Maybe in England. Who knows?"

"I shall be glad to see you," she told him. "Lots of luck, Tiny."

He carried Tessa shoulder high to the gate beyond which there was a big white bird with widespread wings—the American Clipper.

"Happy landing!" he said presently, when it was time for Cynthia and Tessa to pass through that gate.

“Tiny,” said Cynthia, “thanks for everything! You know what I mean.”  
She held up her face to him for a kiss. It was their first kiss.

“Thanks a lot,” he said. “I’ll be seeing you—in this world or the next.”

“This world!” she told him with a laugh. “I’ll wait for your coming.  
Send me a line now and then. . . . Good-bye, Tiny.”

## PART III

### ENGLAND

#### I

A PAGE was turned over in the Book of Fate. It seemed, and seems still to those who have a mystical turn of mind, as though an Unseen Hand had turned that page, quietly. Until then everything had gone in favour of the man who had unchained the forces of evil and flung a fury of flame and flying steel and all his engines of destruction across the frontiers of peace. He believed that Providence or Destiny—he even mentioned God—was on his side, and that his intuitions, infallible so far, were guided by those mysterious powers, benevolent to his grand design for the conquest of the world, for the extermination of the Jews, for a New Order of enslaved nations under the control of his *Herrenvolk*. It had looked like that when his armies were crashing through Europe under the cover of his *Luftwaffe*, and when his enemies revealed their weakness. France had collapsed under his hammer strokes. The British Isles, left alone, almost disarmed after Dunkirk, negligible in man-power on the scale of continental armies, could do nothing beyond sending a few divisions here and there—Norway, Crete, North Africa—ill-equipped and badly led. They were laughable, those British, thought the new Man of Destiny. Rommel had them on the run. Egypt was within his grasp. Even at sea, where their only strength lay, his U-boats were sinking all their merchant ships. Their daily loss of tonnage was very cheering to him, like a pick-me-up over the breakfast-table at Berchtesgarden. He would starve them of supplies and food, and cut their traffic overseas upon which they were utterly dependent. He could afford to let them wait a bit, those British islanders who dared to challenge him and thought they had won the war before it had begun. They could wait a bit before he destroyed them. Now that Japan had joined the Axis—another triumph of world diplomacy—their Empire was beginning to crack. There was no force behind it. They had held it only by bluff. India and Australia were doomed. Their own doom was written in the Book. He was almost sorry for them. There was a time when he had had a kind of admiration for them. If they had made an alliance with him, or at least kept quiet, he might have spared them, except that he hated their arrogance and self-

complacency, and democratic inefficiency, and their sentimentality about Jews and the liberties of small nations. They could wait while he dealt with the Slavs. It was, he thought, necessary to smash Russia, always a potential menace to the German folk, because of their mass of man-power and their vast territory. Geographically Germany could go into Russia forty times. They had too much good earth, those Russians. He would take the Ukraine for his grain fields. The old Pan-Slav challenge to Pan-German destiny had been the main cause of the last war. It was a racial duel, ordained by the early distribution of mankind. It would have to be settled once for all. He would settle it. He was settling it now with his armies at the gates of Moscow and across the Volga at Stalingrad. The Russians had fought harder than the Man of Destiny had anticipated. With the cunning of the Slav race they had hidden their strength. They were like vermin, those Russians. He had flung his armies at them on a thousand-mile front regardless of cost. He believed in his *Blitzkrieg*. The German armies on the East Front had killed vast numbers of Russians, taken vast numbers of prisoners, destroyed everything which the Russians in retreat had left undestroyed, and there were still more millions to kill and more millions to capture. There had been disappointing checks. German losses were not negligible. There were murmurings in Germany because of the losses. He would have to reassure his own folk and get Himmler to deal with those who were too open in criticism. "We shall take Stalingrad," he told them in Berlin. In his own mind this man who believed that Destiny—he mentioned God—was in partnership with his intuitions, had no doubt of final victory.

Then the page was turned.

The British Eighth Army in Egypt smashed through Rommel's 'impregnable' positions at El Alamein and forced him to retreat. Day after day, week after week, month after month, those 'Desert Rats' of the Eighth Army followed him up, biting his heels. The German propagandists were bewildered. What could they say about this unbelievable thing? Had not Rommel promised them Egypt when he was last in Berlin? Did German armies under the inspired leadership of Hitler ever retreat after always advancing? That could not be. He was, they said, advancing victoriously—westwards.

Something had gone wrong in Russia. Stalingrad was not taken according to Hitler's promise. On the contrary, the Russians by some devilish craft had encircled the whole of the German Sixth Army under General Paulus and had utterly destroyed it. When Paulus himself was captured, not using the pistol or poison which lay at his hand, he could not answer the question put with irony: Where is your Army? It was dead or

captured. The Russians began to move westwards. Like a slow-moving tide—one day to become a raging, surging, overwhelming tide, incredibly fast—the Russian mass of men and machines turned and moved westwards with the enemy refusing to retreat by orders of the Führer until their strongholds were surrounded and destroyed by that enveloping and creeping tide. The German soldiers, under orders from Hitler to hold on whatever the cost, did not surrender much. They fought till they died, most of them, and the Russians did not spare them.

The page was turned for the British people by the victory in North Africa and by the first actions of their American allies in that part of the world. They had kept in touch with Vichy through their Admiral Leahy, against public opinion in their own country and in England. By doing so they had been able to send many consuls to the North African coast, all collecting very useful information about harbours and defences. Now they sent emissaries to North Africa to meet, very secretly, certain agents of France who were in touch with that French Admiral Darlan, whose ships had been sunk by the British Navy off Oran when he refused to join them with his fleet or take it to neutral ports. He had hated England for that ultimatum and its result. Something changed in his mind. He knew perhaps that Hitler had lost his patience with Pétain and intended to lay hands on the French fleet. He knew that in North Africa there was a change of mind after the British chase of Rommel's desert army. The coming of the Americans into the war had made a difference. There was an old tradition of friendship between France and the United States. Now it held out a promise that France might be liberated. Darlan gave orders for his Fleet to leave French ports. The French Colonial Army was willing to collaborate in the struggle against Hitler's Germany. It was the beginning of a new chapter which should have begun before. The Germans had lost Africa. The Mediterranean would never be an Italian lake. Mussolini knew that his own doom was approaching.

In England the air seemed more easy to breathe. The faith in ultimate victory which was merely mystical at first—due to an unbeaten tradition and long centuries of security, and something of steel in the character of the people—was now renewed. With American man-power and American production of war weapons victory was not only possible—it was certain. In any case the Russians were winning the war—weren't they?—by destroying the German legions on the East Front. Astonishing, those Russians! Who would have thought it? Who would have guessed? They were regardless of death. They fought over piles of corpses. They killed Germans as though

they were locusts. They took few prisoners. Behind the lines their guerillas smashed up German lines and did deadly sabotage, though when they were caught they were shot in batches. The stench of death reeked across Russia but did not reach the English meadow lands, the winding lanes, the flower gardens, and the parks, or the mean streets in big cities.

But this new faith in victory, which had come with certainty, had not arrived out of the blue without effort and without sacrifice. They had worked for it—the women as well as the men—in long days of labour, very tiring, and putting a strain on bodies and nerves, a strain just this side of snapping. They, too, had been under enemy fire, those young wives and girls whose husbands and brothers and boys had gone away mostly in the Services. They had gone through the Blitz—nine months of it. They had heard the drone of German bombers night after night, and the barrage of their own guns. They had seen the sky above their own houses blood-red with the leaping of many flames. They had stood amidst the ruins of their own houses. Relatives and children and friends had been buried beneath the rubble, killed or mutilated. In many cities they had stood on the edge of the common graves where many had been buried. They had crawled into Morrison shelters in their little parlours and had gone down nightly below ground, coming up with the daylight to find their homes destroyed. Old women, in little houses no stronger than a pack of cards under high-explosive fire, had sat under their stairs during those nights of nine months while the ruins in London and other cities spread from street to street making new gaps and new rubble heaps, quickly tidied up. They had endured all that for this faith in final victory.

After so much agony, for it was agony, it was strange how cheerful they were now, these people of the British Isles, when the tide of war changed in their favour. The long ordeal of disaster did not seem to have left any marks on their faces or in their spirit, except to very watchful eyes. They were still capable of excited optimism when the newspaper headlines carried good tidings.

THE YANKS ARE COMING. . . . ITALY SURRENDERS. . . .  
INVASION SOON.

The picture had changed. The Unseen Hand had turned over a black page of history. It was our turn now.



## II

‘THE YANKS are coming.’ . . . One of them was that long-limbed American, Anthony Hambleton. It had taken him a long time to get to England. For a year he had been in training with Sherman tanks in various parts of the United States. Some of his friends were already in North Africa, and afterwards in Sicily, before he was ordered Overseas with his armoured division. Some of them were already dead before he stepped ashore on British soil. They had been killed pretty quickly in jungle warfare against the Japs.

“I guess I’ll be killed somewhere in Europe,” he said to himself. “This armoured division is going to be just in time for the invasion of France, which seems to be the next move in the game, with a lot of publicity in advance. I’d rather be killed in France than in a snake-infested jungle with little yellow men playing hide-and-seek in stinking swamps.”

He had made up his mind that he was going to be killed. That was curious, because all his buddies thought the other fellows were going to be killed.

He was a first-class Tank officer. That was the report put in writing by the Tank Commander. Certainly he was a good soldier. In fact he had most of the qualities needed in Tanks or any other fighting unit. The men liked him. He put himself on the level with them in ordinary conversation, though he barked at them when they needed it. He made them laugh and his grim humour seemed to their taste. His own crew had something like adoration for him, partly because of his height and his physical strength and partly because he was a friendly guy, standing by them if they found a bit of trouble, and taking an interest in their home life and private affairs. His fellow-officers thought well of him and called him Tiny before he knew their names, but they found him a bit aloof now and then. They, too, regarded him as a humorist, especially when he gave tongue now and then to utterances about life and civilization and war and Christian morality. They repeated his saying that man was a lousy animal whose morals were worse than those of the anthropoids. He caused a great roar of laughter at mess one evening when he told a brigade-major that the Sherman Tank was one of Satan’s chariots designed for the destruction of the civilized ideal. They found him equally funny when he said that the bombing of cities couldn’t be reconciled with the message of the New Testament, and that Americans and English and Germans and all the so-called Christian countries should either give up bombing or give up Christianity. He thought it would be easier to

give up Christianity and indulge in blood lust and all forms of destructive warfare unhampered by the need of hypocrisy.

“I wish you wouldn’t be so darned ironical, Hambleton,” said the brigade-major after joining in the laughter. “Some people might believe you wanted to be taken seriously.”

“I do,” said Hambleton, with his charming smile. “None of these guys believe that I mean anything that happens to pass my lips. They think I’m just kidding.”

“You’re a champion at that game, buddy,” said one of his fellow-officers. “But I will say that you make me laugh. Tiny the Tiger talking Pacifism and Christian forgiveness would be a good turn for Charlie Macarthy. It’s as good as a pantomime.”

Well, he let it pass at that, except to one or two private cronies who had a philosophical turn of mind and a detestation of war, perhaps because they had a dislike of death. In his own mind all through his period of training, which had seemed interminable, there had been a secret conflict in his mind between the idiocy of war—‘Idiot’s Delight’—and the supreme necessity of giving a beating to the Germans and the Japs.

He was interested, amused and angered, by this irreconcilable dilemma in his own mentality. He would kill Germans or Japs, if he came close enough to them with his Sherman tank, without mercy. He might, he thought, enjoy the job with primitive blood-lust like the other fellows in his crew, who looked forward to a day when they would get their guns going and smash their way through the enemy’s lines like modern Juggernauts. They would drive over living bodies or dead, over pill-boxes and gun emplacements, into enemy towns. They would give ’em hell all right, and he, Tiny Hambleton, would see red like the rest of them. But always at the back of his mind was the conviction that all this was cave-man stuff which never should have happened in a world calling itself civilized, and that it was a degradation of human intelligence, and an outrageous interference with the moral purpose of life. It ought never to have happened, he thought, after the lesson of the last war. The world’s statesmen and politicians and so-called leaders—‘a bunch of crooks’, he called them—ought to have prevented the advent of Hitler. They ought to have stopped supplies to Japan—all that scrap-iron and steel and other minerals which the Japs had bought in the open market. The boys who were dying and going to die—Tiny Hambleton would be in their company—had been betrayed and sent to the shambles by these blind leaders of the blind—the poor dumb mob who couldn’t be expected to know anything about international affairs until they smelt burning and heard the hoofs of the Four Horsemen. That was what

made Hambleton angry. That was what made him bitter, though he was reputed to be a humorist, and as a test thereof was able to laugh at himself in private as a bloodthirsty pacifist and a most illogical guy who believed in Christianity though a blasphemer, and in human pity and brotherhood though he would enjoy the job of killing Germans or Japs. Perhaps he was not alone in that secret conflict of the soul. Now and again he met a fellow who revealed a similar kind of bewilderment between idealism and the need of mass slaughter, including the bombing of populated cities, crowded with women and children. But it did not bother them excessively. It did not interfere with them playing poker after days of hard training, or getting drunk on joyous occasions, or going off with girls to relieve boredom. They chipped Tiny Hambleton because he put his nose into a book of poetry or history instead of playing poker, and because he remained unnaturally sober on festive occasions, and ignored the allurements of merry little sluts who crowded round the camps.

“You’re too darned austere, Hambleton,” said Spike Selden, one of his fellow-officers. “If you weren’t such a humorist I should say you were the last of the Puritans. All the girls give you glad eyes, but you walk past them with a chaste smile.”

“It’s because I’m a humorist that I see the silly side of that kind of stuff,” answered Hambleton. “You fellows haven’t grown up. You haven’t learnt the first thing. It makes me laugh.”

It was this queer fellow with an inner conflict in his mind, and a whimsical smile on his lips, and a dark irony of speech which sometimes perplexed his friends, who arrived one day at the old-fashioned watering-place of Weymouth in England, with a column of Sherman tanks, American trucks, jeeps, mobile guns, bulldozers, anti-tank guns and other instruments of mechanized warfare. They had landed at Liverpool, where he had his first view of England, in pouring rain, with an icy wind blowing. It seemed to him a God-forsaken city, especially when he stared at the effects of frequent bombing raids—empty spaces between blocks of buildings neatly tidied up but leaving bare scarred walls and half-destroyed houses and shops with their windows boarded up.

The English people, he thought here in Liverpool, looked haggard, nerve-strained, shabby and unattractive.

“They’ve been through the hell of an ordeal,” he thought. “I can’t think how they stood up to it.”

It was a north-east wind, more than the ordeal of war which gave them a pinched and cheerless look. In other towns before he reached Weymouth he

had to revise his impressions. The English with whom he talked now and then—policemen, shopkeepers, country-folk on the roadsides, people in pubs—were remarkably cheerful. They seemed to have complete certainty in an early victory. They told horrifying stories about the Blitz over England with a kind of pleasurable reminiscence, as though they had found it quite amusing, or at least found it so in retrospect, laughing at their narrow escapes. On the whole they were very friendly to the Americans, he found. Their English accent amused him. He wasn't used to it yet. It still sounded affected, especially when it was spoken by young officers and girls of good class. Everything seemed very small, the fields, the railway engines, the little houses. On his way down to Weymouth he had glimpses of old-fashioned England as he had read of it and imagined it—thatched cottages, Norman churches, village greens, old inns with panelled rooms and black beams. The landscape everywhere was like a park, he thought, it was all very neat and tidy. Everything was on a miniature scale compared with the vastness of the United States—Texas and Kentucky with their far horizons.

"These people," he said to Spike Selden, "have spread over a lot of the earth's surface from this little island. I guess they had to push out or tread on each other's toes."

"They're a great people, buddy," said Spike Selden. "It's their heroic spirit which always wins the last battle. I'm going to hunt up my ancestors and shed a few tears over their tombstones."

Hambledon grinned.

"They'll turn in their graves," he said. "Your ugly mug and American accent will horrify their ghosts. And they thought George Washington was a traitor. . . . I'm keen to go to London. I want to see Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's, and take a walk up Fleet Street with the ghost of Dr. Johnson."

"Sort of thing you would," said Spike Selden, jeeringly.

"I have a sister in London," said Hambledon. "Penny. You remember Penny, don't you?"

"I certainly do," said Selden. "I lost my heart to her when we rode together in your father's woods. Did she marry that young Harvard professor, Brandon, or some such name?"

Tiny Hambledon laughed before answering.

"No, she smudged him out. Fell for a British naval officer. She's been in London some time with the American Red Cross."

He had another reason for going to London. Within reach of London was Cynthia Birch, who had escaped from the status of a refugee in Massachusetts. He was very keen to see her again.

### III

PENELOPE HAMBLEDON was excited by the news that her brother Tiny was in England. She was even more excited when she had a wire from him one morning a month or two later, telling her that he had seven days' leave and hoped to see her for at least seven minutes, H.M.S. *Rodney* permitting.

"Gosh!" cried Penny, who had come out of a tiny bathroom in a flat she shared with a friend in a big block of flats not far from Sloane Square and a few yards less from Knightsbridge. It was a block of flats in Chesham Place.

Her friend was Susy Guggenheim, once of Chicago, much photographed as one of the richest débutantes of that city of mass-production, slaughter yards, vast stores, luxurious hotels, and dangerous squalor in back streets.

"Good tidings?" asked Susy Guggenheim, who was also in a dressing-gown of flowered silk and was about to have breakfast, produced by a waiter in a service flat who cast an unemotional eye at her tousled bed and feminine garments scattered on the chairs.

"Tiny's coming!" cried Penny. "That big brother of mine. You met him once at Lakeside Farm."

Susy Guggenheim smiled with her dark eyes before rejecting the morning haddock and restraining its odour by replacing the silver cover.

"Can I forget him?" she asked. "A giant Adonis upon whom I cast languishing eyes and all my sex appeal without avail? He was not interested. He was a strong silent man who made no effort at all to entertain his sister's guest."

Penny smiled at this portrait sketch of her big brother.

"Yes, that's Tiny," she agreed. "You struck him in one of his silent moods. He was probably thinking out a new play. Why don't you eat your breakfast, duckie? Have your amorous and poignant passions taken away your appetite?"

Susy Guggenheim had rejected all food in favour of a Camel cigarette and a cup of milkless coffee.

"There was a noisy bunch at the club last night," she said. "Bob Barker kept filling up my glass with gin. It was all very silly, but what else can one do in this besieged city where boredom and bad weather creep into the inner recesses of one's soul?"

"I'm not bored," declared Penny. "I find every minute thrilling. I still go about with insatiable interest and find everything wonderful."

"What do you find wonderful?" asked Susy languidly.

Penny's eyes sparkled as though remembering many wonders.

"The people," she said. "I talk to everyone, and they're all wonderful—policemen, charwomen, shopkeepers, A.T.S. and Wrens, Frenchmen and Poles, Army officers and men, naval officers just back from the Atlantic or the Mediterranean. I like poking about the little back streets. I make expeditions to the East End, where they suffered so terribly. I like walking in the parks even when there's an east wind blowing. I go down to Surrey and Sussex and see the beauty of rural England. And I've made lots of nice friends in English homes. What's the matter with all that?"

Susy Guggenheim laughed and then sighed.

"You have a pure and innocent heart, Penny. You're a throw-back to the time of 'Little Men and Little Women'. Give me a night club in Chicago with a nigger band playing the Blues in a dim light and a kinky-haired boy on the other side of the table making love over a highball through the fumes of cigarette smoke. I find London frightful—like a plague-stricken city. I haven't seen a well-dressed girl since I landed in England. I haven't met an Englishman with any intelligence. These officer boys are too young and innocent for my ultra sophistication. Chicago knocks spots off London as a centre of culture and intellectual adventure. Take me back to Chicago, dearie!"

Penny laughed over her breakfast, which she attacked with great gusto and hearty appetite.

"Susy, you're a sham! You're one of our little idealists or you wouldn't be here. You wouldn't have poured so much dough out of the Guggenheim millions into the American Red Cross unless you had wanted to serve humanity and risk your young beauty in London air raids."

Susy Guggenheim smiled and shrugged her shoulders.

"That was the idea," she admitted. "That's what I came for. But there haven't been any air raids since I arrived, and my young beauty is becoming raddled by too many cigarettes, too much alcohol, and too much boredom."

"Try a little love," suggested Penny brightly. "Fall in love with a beautiful Englishman, or even a beautiful American. I thought you were having a good time with Bill Harker."

"He has a good time with too many others," said Susy. "I'm not a sharer."

"What about Lee Christiansen?" asked Penny. "He's very lovely to look at."

Susy raised both hands.

“Beautiful but dumb!”

“Well then, I can’t help you,” said Penny. “You must save yourself, my dear. I’m having a very happy time.”

She had had a very happy time during the last two days especially. Richard Arkwright of *Rodney* had come down to London again for a spot of leave and they had some very pleasant hours together over a luncheon-table at the Queen’s in Sloane Square, over a tea-table in Stewart’s at the corner of Bond Street, over a dinner-table at Durrant’s in George Street, Manchester Square, where Richard was putting up for the night. They did a lot in between those meal-times. Other people would not have thought they were having a very exciting time, but to Penny it was very thrilling and lovely. They walked in St. James’s Park and leaned over the bridge across the lake watching the ducks and looking towards Whitehall with its cupolas and turrets vaguely white and dream-like through a thin mist.

“London in war-time!” said Penny. “Isn’t it thrilling? How lucky I am to be here!”

“We’re lucky to have you here,” answered Richard. “And you look marvellous in that uniform.”

The uniform of the American Red Cross was very smart indeed, with a grey-blue overcoat lined with scarlet silk and a cap worthy of a Field-Marshal. Penny wore it with style.

They stood for a few minutes in Westminster Abbey during an afternoon service and Penny was thrilled again. She found a place at the corner of a pew and said a little prayer while Richard stood by her side glancing round at this place of ancient ghosts—all the great ghosts of English history. Shafts of light came through the clerestory windows, but it was dim down the long highway of the nave beyond the tall pillars where they stood, and below the pointed arches of Plantagenet England. A number of American soldiers were there, and every now and then there was the click of a steel helmet.

When they came out Penny had a mystical light in her eyes.

“It’s too wonderful!” she exclaimed. “I wanted to weep. All that England means is in there—all its history and all its spirit. And now American soldiers are there, come over to fight by the side of the British—though once we fought against each other.”

Richard smiled at her emotionalism but approved of it.

“Did you say a little prayer for me?” he asked.

“You bet I did! I said: ‘Dear God, keep Richard safe in this war, and, dear God, bless the British Navy, and Army and Air Force and the American soldiers who have come over to fight against evil powers. And give me a

chance of sharing, by one little deed, the heroism of these people in London, England.’ ”

Richard laughed in his quiet way.

“A very nice prayer,” he said; “and I thank you kindly on behalf of London, England, and myself.”

They walked in Hyde Park by the edge of the Serpentine. It was winter weather, cold and damp and cheerless, but these two people in war-time were warmed by the fire of the spirit within them and walked hand-in-hand as though through summer glades. Other lovers were there—American soldiers with English girls, young girls in uniform with young men in battle-dress.

“Some of your girls are very naughty,” said Penny. “They fling themselves at the American buddies. I get shocked sometimes at the things I see.”

Richard laughed again.

“Your men have too much money,” he said. “And they think every English girl is fair game. That’s the fault of war. It loosens all restraints and the moral code. When death is round the corner one grabs at anything one can get out of life. Isn’t it like that?”

“You’re not a grabber, Richard,” said Penny. “You keep to your code, don’t you?”

“I’m not in favour of promiscuity,” he told her. “I try to keep the little old flag flying. But then I’m shy with women.”

“You’re shy with me,” she said, “and I like your shyness.”

“All the same,” said Richard of *Rodney*, “I think we might have a little kiss behind that tree. It’s a nice friendly tree.”

It was Penny who was shy then.

“I don’t think we’d better risk it,” she told him. “I’m in uniform. I have to be very careful when I’m in uniform.”

But she allowed him one quick kiss behind the friendly tree on the north side of Hyde Park.

He went off to Euston that night on his way hack to the North of Scotland. It was all very thrilling to Penelope Hambleton.



SHE met her brother Tiny at Waterloo Station the day after his wire came. She was waiting at the barrier watching the seething crowd with smiling eyes. She liked to be in a crowd like this in war-time England. She had a sense of its drama and historical significance.

“It’s a lot different from Lakeside Farm,” she thought.

There was certainly quite a difference between this scene at Waterloo station and an American farmstead on the Lake of Assawampsett. She watched a team of British bluejackets pushing railway trucks laden with kit through the barrier of a train going to Portsmouth.

“Mind your body, lady!” said one of them, winking at her.

“I’m minding it,” she told him, causing a laugh among the others.

She liked their faces, clean cut and very young, but with the look of men who have faced danger and death, she thought. Throngs of Ats and Waafs and Wrens were pushing around, all very cheerful and all very neat with little curls below their forage-caps. They hadn’t lost their femininity in blue or khaki uniform. They had all used a touch of lipstick.

She saw Tiny before he came through the barrier. He was a head taller than most of his fellow-passengers. She sang out to him when he passed the woman ticket-collector.

“Hully, Tiny! Coo-ee!”

He was looking fine, she thought, hard and strong and fit. He walked with a long stride and a strong back. At the sound of her greeting he saw her in the crowd and raised his hand. She saw that he also raised his eyebrows and his face was creased with a smile.

“Jeepers Creepers!” he exclaimed. “You look like a Field-Marshal.”

“I feel like one,” she told him. “On top of the world.”

He held her arms and kissed her and then looked round at the crowd about him.

“So this is London!” he said good-humouredly. “Well, you must take me to see the ruins, and the underground shelters, and all the sights of the town. I’ve been living in a Georgian watering-place which hasn’t changed since King George III sent his red-coats to wop his naughty Colonials and took a licking. Now it’s swarming with American troops with American traffic cops at the cross-roads. And where do we go now?”

They went to Durrant’s Hotel, where she had fixed him up with a room.

“A quaint old-fashioned place,” she told him, “much frequented by old ducks of the British aristocracy and now by American officers from Base Headquarters.”

They had lunch there and saw some of the old ducks—who had their tables reserved for them with bottles of mineral water. They were white-headed old ladies walking with the aid of ebony sticks and very ancient gentlemen a bit weak in the knees, with bushy eyebrows and flat feet.

“Dukes and Duchesses?” enquired Tiny, “or only Earls and Viscounts? They look like contemporaries of George III. Do they still call us Colonials?”

“They have the spirit of the British lion with its tail up,” said Penny. “The waiter tells me that they stayed here all through the Great Blitz, and wouldn’t budge for all the fires of hell and Hitler.”

“Very rash of them,” said Tiny. “Their great-grandchildren ought to have taken ’em away. Tell me, how you’re living? How do you find life in London?”

She gave him an enthusiastic report of life in London. She was driving a darling old General around. She found it great fun. Of course she knew crowds of American officers. They all wanted to give her a good time when she was off duty.

“I hope you keep your virtue?” said Tiny. “Very difficult, I should say.”

She laughed at this brotherly candour.

“Easy for me,” she told him. “I’m engaged to a British naval officer with a high moral standard. We’re going to get married as soon as the war is over.”

“When’s that?” asked Tiny. “This year, next year, now, never?”

“We’re having bets about it,” she said. “I have odds of twenty to one that the war in Europe will be over at the end of 1944.”

“Cripes!” he exclaimed. “That’s a hell of a long time. Plenty of time for me to get killed. When’s the Invasion?”

Penny pursed her lips as though keeping back a dark secret.

“Not just yet,” she told him.

“Good! It may give me time to find out the meaning of God, and life, and death. Do you believe in immortality?”

“I do,” said Penny, firmly. “And I’m sure you do, buddy. Otherwise there’s no sense in things.”

“That’s just it,” he answered. “I can’t find any sense in things. Do you think it would cause a riot in this hotel if I asked for some more potatoes? I’m a big man and I want nourishing.”

It was grand having him with her, thought Penny. They had been great comrades always. There were a thousand things she wanted to ask him. She

asked some of them when he came to her flat and some of them when they drove together in taxis to see the ruins round St. Paul's, and other views of much-blitzed London—he thought all this had been much exaggerated—and Buckingham Palace and Westminster Abbey, and other historical buildings which were necessary for an American to see in the first twenty-four hours. She asked one question in the courtyard of St. James's Palace, where there was a change of guard with much stamping of feet and many convulsive jerks—to the amusement of Hambleton, who uttered cynical comments.

“Very bad for those fellows' spines,” he said; “and there'll never be any sense in people's heads as long as they think this kind of thing is impressive. It's just Ju-ju stuff.”

“What's happening to Edward?” asked Penelope. “We never hear from him now. Not for months. I'm afraid he's in trouble.”

“I'll bet he is,” said Tiny. “Unless all troubles have ceased for him after a brief episode with a German firing squad. Well, in that case he may have solved many mysteries if there's any consciousness after death, as you seem inclined to think.”

“He's not dead,” said Penny. “I should have known it.”

Tiny looked at his sister curiously and laughed.

“You seem to know almost everything,” he said, “or you kid yourself that you do. Take me away from this ancient hostelry. Let's go and get a drink somewhere.”

They had a drink in a Service Club, crowded with American officers, in a quiet street of Mayfair.

“Ever hear of Cynthia Birch?” asked Tiny, in a casual way.

Penny gave him a sharp look and then laughed.

“I've been to her country home in Surrey. It's very sweet. And Tessa is adorable.”

“Good! I'd like to see Tessa again,” said Tiny. “I must make a pilgrimage down there if you'll tell me how to work it.”

“Cynthia will be glad to see you again,” said Penny.

Tiny's face became mask-like.

“Think so?” he asked. “It's a long time since she was in Massachusetts. Say, these chairs are not very good for my long legs. I'll take one of those lounges. Have another cigarette, sister?”

He shut up like a clam at any mention of Cynthia.

An American officer came and put a hand on his shoulder as he lay stretched out in one of the deep arm-chairs.

“Hullo, Hambledon. Still growing?”

“In wisdom and knowledge,” said Tiny. “That’s my sister, Penny. She’s a Field-Marshal. Come and join us, if you feel like it.”

Wherever they went there was always someone they knew—old school-fellows, Harvard men, Bostonians, New Yorkers, Tiny’s friends of the stage and screen. Penny’s fellow-débutantes. They all wore the same kind of uniform.

“The American Invasion of England,” remarked Tiny. “If I were English I should be scared of it. It’s worse than the Norman Conquest, which altered their way of speech and changed their social set-up. We’ve taken over these little isles. Do you think we’ll ever let go of ’em?”

“You can have them, buddy,” said his friend with a laugh. “My ignoble soul is deep in the heart of Texas. That’s where I’m going when this European quarrel is over. Yes, sir!”

## V

CYNTHIA BIRCH who had not made good in the United States because she could not keep pace with its social activities had returned to her father’s house. It was a little Queen Anne house with a good garden and a bit of land round it, outside the village of Cranleigh. At her first coming—it seemed a long time ago now—she had felt great happiness in being in England again. She remembered her exile when she had agonized at being so far away from her own people during their time of suffering and endless bad news. That had spoilt an experience which had had no hardship in it and might have been very happy. Indeed she had had happy hours by the great lake and in the woods and in the old frame-built cottage with its maplewood furniture, but always there had been that ache in her heart and that nostalgia for England, fighting for its life.

Very quickly she slipped back into English life, though at first she missed the American accent and was aware of subtle differences in psychology and the social way of life. There was not the same sparkle and vitality in her English friends compared with the Americans she had known. When Penny came into a room there was something electrical about her. There was not the same verbal play of wit, not the same intensity of expression as among those who gathered on the Hambledons’ lawn or in their sitting-room. There was not the same deliberate and well-thought-out

code of hospitality and kindness. Her American friends had sent round flowers and magazines and books. When she stayed with them in Boston her bedroom had been filled with flowers, and by her bedside were three of the latest best-selling novels, and on the writing-desk note-paper and envelopes, and stamps to post any letters she might write. There was not the same kind of democratic approach. "How-ya-goin, Mrs. Birch?" had asked the Hambletons' hired man when she met him on the golf-course. "Nice day, Mrs. Birch, and how's the little gal?" had asked the man in the drug store at Taunton where she did her shopping in Penny's car. "How's Tessa coming along?" asked the baker on the road near Lakeside Farm. "Fine and dandy I hope. I once had a little girl of my own like that. Now she's the mother of a boy at High School.—Makes one think, don't it? Gosh, I'll say it does!"

There was none of that kind of thing in Cranleigh. The lady in the bookshop raised her eyebrows slightly when she first went in, gave a little smile and said: "Been away, haven't you?"

"Oh, how do you do?" asked a lady who stepped from a bus at the corner of the green. "Your father told me you were coming back. So glad! The news is good, isn't it?"

They were not all quite so restrained as that. Some of her friends were fairly hearty. One of them in slacks and a pullover hailed her on the green.

"Hullo, Cynthia! How did you like Yankeeland? Have you come back with an American accent? Atta boy! and all that. How's Tessa?"

"Tessa's all right," answered Cynthia. "Tell me about life in a Surrey village."

The girl, who was Patricia Merton, laughed and said it would take a long time to tell her.

"You'll find it out soon enough," she said. "Lots of lonely young wives with their husbands away at the war and some of them killed. Lots of people living in other people's houses with the inevitable strain of tempers on both sides. Evacuated brats shouting on the village green. The last representatives of the country gentry washing up their own dishes and making their own beds, and bribing old cups of tea to do a bit of cleaning now and then. Endless queues outside the shops in neighbouring towns, a squash in the buses, and a general conspiracy of faith in the early ending of this blasted war which is getting us all down though we pretend it isn't. Not enough fats. Too long a strain. Had enough?"

She laughed, waved her hand, and made a dash for the bus which was about to start.

There was not the same gregariousness, though perhaps it was creeping in by way of the village hall and the Women's Institute. People did not call at odd hours. They did no telephoning at breakfast time with urgent invitations to Howard Johnston restaurants, or to picnic parties, or cocktail parties, or Symphony concerts, or pen-and-pencil games in winter evenings. They entrenched themselves in their own private lives in the same old way, apart from war work which had lagged most of them and made a break-up of the old social castes, to some extent. Well, she liked the old way best, having a horror of gregariousness.

Upon first coming to England she still had that queer feeling that her husband might turn up at any moment, though she knew he was dead. Most husbands of young wives were away somewhere. Hers had gone away for ever; but sometimes when the bell rang in her father's house or the drawing-room door opened, she would look up from her book or a bit of sewing, expecting to see Gerald. Then gradually he faded out. There was nothing left of him but some snapshot photos and letters which she could not bring herself to read again, and a safety razor and some rusty blades which he had left in this house after a week-end there. She was aware at last that he was dead, and once in London at the realization of it she found herself weeping. It was in the courtyard of a block of flats in Knightsbridge. She had gone in there to look up at the window of the little flat they had had until she had left England. It had not been damaged by the air raids. Someone else was living there. Someone was watering the geraniums on the window-sill—perhaps another young wife. Suddenly Cynthia's body was shaken by sobs. It was very silly of her, she thought, especially as she was making herself ridiculous in public.

A tall young woman came out of the swing-doors into the courtyard and passed her with a long stride. Then she came back and spoke to Cynthia.

"Can I help you at all?"

"It's all right," said Cynthia. "I'm only making an ass of myself."

"Sorry!" said the tall girl.

She hesitated for a moment, and then spoke again.

"This war is frightful, isn't it? My brother was killed a month ago in North Africa. I haven't cried for him yet, but I suppose I ought to. Death becomes too much of a commonplace, doesn't it? Well, sorry!"

She went away and Cynthia pulled herself together. It was the last time she wept for Gerald. He took his place among the dead—so many of them. Most of the boys she had known in the R.A.F. were dead already, and others whom she did not know were out every night now in bombing raids over

Germany. A thousand of them had gone over Cologne in the biggest raid ever. A few nights later a thousand went over Bremen. She reckoned their losses were about five per cent, though sometimes as heavy as ten per cent. "Thirty of our bombing planes failed to return," said the B.B.C. "Forty-four of our bombing planes failed to return." She made little sums in arithmetic, multiplying these figures by seven to get the number of the boys killed. At night she lay awake listening to the heavy drone overhead, sometimes going on for more than an hour.

"They're out again," she thought. "They'll soon be over the target area. The flak will come up at them. They're marvellous!"

The noise of that droning worried her father. He was one of those—just a few perhaps—who seemed uneasy in his mind about the morality of this intensive bombing of German cities.

He spoke to her about it several times—once in the garden when they were staring up at the sky on a clear night and watching little lights on the big four-engined bombers which streaked through the sky.

"I hate this method of warfare," he said in a low voice. "We're bound to kill a lot of civilians—women and children."

"They killed a lot of ours, Father," answered Cynthia. "They go on killing them. Didn't you read about that school in the North of England yesterday? It was in the *Daily Telegraph*."

"I know," said Mr. Ottershaw. "I read it with horror. But that makes me hate the idea that our boys are doing the same thing in Germany."

"Not intentionally," said Cynthia. "They go for definite targets to smash up the German war-machine."

"We've blasted Berlin," said Mr. Ottershaw. "Residential quarters according to the newspapers. Because the Germans do these things is no reason why we should get down to their level. It's utterly impossible to reconcile it with Christian morality or with civilized principles."

"We're fighting the powers of evil," said Cynthia. "We're fighting for the liberties of the world. Unless the Germans are smashed life won't be worth living for anyone."

"Is Russia—our beautiful ally—fighting for the world's liberties?" asked Mr. Ottershaw with a faint laugh. "From what I've read Stalin is as great a Dictator as Hitler. The Ogpu seems to be the same thing as the Gestapo. They've harked back to torture, haven't they? How can we pretend that we're fighting with God on our side when Russia, the godless State, is our main source of hope in ultimate victory?"

Cynthia refused to accept that argument.

“It’s the Russian people’s war,” she answered. “They’re fighting with marvellous heroism. I was thrilled over their stand at Stalingrad.”

“Well, I find it all very bewildering,” said Mr. Ottershaw. “But it’s getting chilly, Cynthia. Let’s go in. I wish those bombers wouldn’t make such an infernal drone overhead. It gets on my nerves.”

Cynthia laughed and raised her hand in the semi-darkness of the garden.

“Good luck to them!” she cried. “May they all come back safely after smashing up German war factories and plants. I wish I were up there with them. I wish I could do something better than a half-time job for prisoners of war.”

She had taken that job soon after her return to England, working in the mornings when Tessa was at school. She envied girl friends of hers who were doing radio-location and other active work in the Services.

“You’re a queer girl, Cynthia,” said her mother one day. “I never know what’s going on in your mind.”

Her mother’s mind was an open book. She believed that England was fighting a Christian Crusade; that Mr. Churchill was divinely inspired; that the Germans ought to be exterminated because of their atrocities; and that Stalin was a man of deep human benevolence and very lovable qualities. She regretted that she had no son whom she could give to her country. She had to make do with various nephews in the fighting forces and was proud that three of them had already been killed in action. She toiled on a great number of committees, working for the Red Cross and Women’s Institutes. She was one of the collectors for war savings and tramped about the village, untiringly, with her book of stamps for savings certificates. She was always cheerful and with a faith in victory never more than two months ahead even in the darkest days.

“Don’t worry about my mind, Mother,” answered Cynthia with a laugh. “I’m just one of the brooding type.”

Her mother was sewing some garment for the Red Cross. Her needle flicked in and out with rapid little strokes.

“I wish you would marry again, my dear,” she said presently. “I’m sorry for you. You’re so lonely and you seem so purposeless. I wish you would go about more and meet some nice young men.”

Cynthia laughed quietly.

“Mother, how absurd you are! All the nice young men are away in the war, or busy training themselves for future events. I’m not lonely in my mind. I have Tessa, haven’t I? And you and father. And I have my books and music, and I love walking, and I like to think things out. I’m very good



company with myself. For goodness' sake don't invite any young men down here with a view to matrimony."

Mrs. Ottershaw sighed.

"I wonder you didn't meet someone in America," she said. "I mean, some nice young American of good standing—if there is such a thing!"

Cynthia laughed again.

"There are millions of them, Mother! I met quite a few."

She remembered one she had met. Tiny Hambleton. She had never mentioned his name to her mother, though she often thought of him, and sometimes, but not often, wrote to him. He was in England now. She had had a note from him only a few days ago saying that he wanted to see her. He was coming down one day next week.

"By the way," she said to her mother, "there's a young American officer coming to see me next Thursday—not with a view to matrimony. I suppose we can put him up for the night? He's a brother of Penny Hambleton whom you liked so much."

"Oh, by all means," said Mrs. Ottershaw. "I'll get the spare room ready."

## VI

CYNTHIA met Tiny Hambleton at the bus stop on the Common. He came out last, after some mothers and children. It was the first time she had seen him in uniform and he looked even taller than before, and had a straight back instead of stooping as he used to do. He did not see her at once and gazed round at the scene before him, this village green, with its cricket pitch, and the little old houses round it, and the background of low-lying hills with just a glint of green as the first sign of Spring. It seemed to amuse him. He had a smile about his lips.

"Hullo, Tiny!" said Cynthia.

His eyes focused on her and he raised his hand in salute and spoke with a kind of shyness.

"Well now, it's wonderful seeing you again. And you're looking fine. How's Tessa?"

"She remembers you," said Cynthia. "She calls you the giant man."

Tiny Hambleton laughed and then looked down at Cynthia.

"You're looking fine," he said again. "You haven't changed."

“Meaning my style of dress?” she asked, with a smile.

She had come to meet him in an old blue frock above bare legs in sandals. It was a frock she had worn in Massachusetts.

“Meaning your wood-nymph look,” he told her, “and everything that I remember about you. I’m glad you haven’t changed. It would have given me a shock if you had taken to dressing like a smart lady of the town.”

“Oh, they’ve all come down to my level!” answered Cynthia. “No stockings, slacks and shorts, any old thing. It saves a lot of trouble and a lot of coupons. What do you think of England?”

Tiny Hambleton gave an enigmatical smile.

“That’s very American!” he told her. “‘What do you think of New York?’ before the visitor has left the docks. Now what I think of England would take a whole book to write. And it wouldn’t make any difference to the English. They don’t care a nickel what any foreigner thinks of them. They know what they think of themselves. They have their own values.”

He looked round the green again and away to the low-lying hills, and then back to the cricket pitch which was being rolled by two elderly men.

“Very old English!” he commented. “Hasn’t changed since William the Conqueror, or perhaps one of the later Georges. Did they play cricket in the reign of George Four?”

“In top-hats,” said Cynthia. “I believe the game started in a village of your own name. Perhaps that’s where your people came from.”

“I’d like to think so,” he answered. “At least, Penny would like to think so. She’s full of romance and English tradition.”

He looked at her again with a smile lighting up his eyes and said some words, which he had said before, as though they were quite new.

“You’re looking fine. I’ll say you are. You haven’t changed.”

“Have *you* changed?” she asked, laughing at this repetition. “I don’t mean in your looks but in your mind. Two years—is it as much as that?—may have made some difference.”

“Lady,” answered Tiny, “my mind has been put on the rack by the innumerable questions I have failed to answer.”

“What kind of questions?”

They were on their way now to her father’s house on the other side of the Common. She kept pace with his long lazy stride.

“About life and death, and hereafter, if any,” he told her, with a sideways look and a smile twisting his lips.

“Oh, they’ll keep till after lunch,” she answered lightly.

“They certainly will,” he agreed. “And till after dinner and then some. I’m crazy to see little Tessa again. She and I were real buddies.”

Tessa was waiting at the gate for them with a wire-haired terrier.

She looked self-conscious and demure, twisting a loose ankle above a little white sock and brown sandal.

“Well, well, well!” cried Tiny. “If little Tessa hasn’t grown as tall as Alice when she ate the cake! Say, Tessa, do you remember the giant who used to go tobogganing with you in the winter and rowing you on the lake in the summer?”

“Yes,” said Tessa.

“You do? Well, that’s fine! And if you don’t give me a kiss I’ll burst into tears.”

Tessa smiled.

“That would be silly for a soldier. Soldiers don’t burst into tears.”

“Jeepers creepers!” exclaimed Tiny. “I forgot that. Soldiers are always supposed to be gay and gallant while shells are banging round them. No bursting into tears, sergeant! All against Army discipline, you know. Keep smiling there!”

He lifted up Tessa to the level of his face.

“If you don’t kiss me,” he said, “I’ll burst into tears and disgrace my uniform.”

Tessa kissed him on the cheek and then put her arms round his neck and hugged him.

“Why, that makes me feel as though I’d come back to the old home,” said Tiny, much touched by this demonstration. “If one of those camera men took a snapshot of this he could sell it for many dollars to the *Saturday Evening Post*. American doughboy returns home to his chee-ild!”

He planted Tessa again and took her hand.

“How do you like being back in England?” he asked.

“I would rather be back in America,” she told him.

Tiny raised his eyebrows and looked quizzingly at Cynthia.

“You shock me, child. Why do you say that?”

“There was the lake,” said Tessa. “It was more fun.”

“To Tessa,” said Cynthia, “that time in the United States is like a fairy-tale.”

“And to you, maybe,” he suggested, “only a grim reminiscence.”

Cynthia shook her head.

“Nothing like that! Here are Father and Mother. They’ll be glad to meet you. They love Penny.”

“It’s kind of you to let me come,” said Tiny, taking Mrs. Ottershaw’s hand. “My sister Penny has given me a good character, I hope, however much she had to hide.”

“She adores you,” answered Mrs. Ottershaw, “and we’re enchanted with your sister, aren’t we, Daddy?”

Mr. Ottershaw had fallen for Penny. He had found her very intelligent and vivacious. Whenever she had come down she had livened them up.

Tiny Hambleton was a tall man for a little old house with beams overhead. In spite of constant warnings he gave his head several knocks and went about with a permanent stoop, much to the delight of Tessa.

“These old houses are very good as show pieces,” he said, banging his head again, “but for real comfort I’m in favour of modern architecture. That’s one of my criticisms of England. You English folk decline to be modernized except in patches of the worst style. You refuse to be modernized in your minds, and cling on to mediævalism and the Feudal System. I regard Dukes and Duchesses as out of date. Forgive this vulgar American view-point!”

“We like to hear it,” said Mr. Ottershaw with good-natured tolerance.

During that week-end Cynthia tried to avoid being alone with this guest. She felt shy of him as for the first few minutes he had looked shy of her. He had changed, though she didn’t tell him. He looked older and slightly haggard, as though worn by some inner conflict of the mind. He was harder physically, though not in character, as she saw by the tenderness in his eyes when he looked at her, and by his charming way with Tessa. He still loved her, it seemed. She could not doubt that after the first few minutes. That was what made her shy of him so that she avoided being alone with him. But they were alone together on Sunday evening when Tessa had been put to bed and her father and mother had gone to church. It was chilly weather in this early spring and she had lighted a fire and knelt by it with a pair of bellows while he sat in a deep arm-chair, hunched forward with his hands between his legs.

“This reminds me of our evenings in Massachusetts,” he said. “I look back to them as Seventh Heaven. It was before I was lagged for this war. It was when I still indulged in high idealism and pacifist illusions.”

“Have you abandoned high idealism?” she asked, smiling at him.

“It has abandoned me,” he told her. “It didn’t work. The idealists have had to get down to the job of killing Japs and Germans.”

“Necessary work,” said Cynthia.

He nodded.

“Inevitable, when once the show started, but a dirty job. Butchers’ work with the most scientific apparatus for slaughter on both sides. Meanwhile, civilization lowers its flag and abandons its moralities. Bound to, of course. No use now for the arts. No use for painting, or sculpture, or the poet’s pen. No striving for beauty. No mercy or pity or charity. No truth-telling if it interferes with propaganda for the stiffening of resistance. On both sides. Just a slump into hatred and cruelty and blood lust. On both sides. That’s where we are now—after thinking we were civilized.”

“You and my father say the same thing,” said Cynthia. “You’re like two bewildered babes. But we’ve got to go through with it. Besides, it isn’t all hatred and cruelty—here in England anyhow. It’s mostly sacrifice in a thousand little ways for ordinary civilians, and in big ways for our flying and fighting men. Isn’t heroism worth something? Haven’t our people risen to spiritual heights during this war—almost beyond what one thought was possible? They haven’t been dragged down. They’ve been ennobled, Tiny.”

“In a way,” he admitted grudgingly. “I see that side of things over here. When I look at the ruins in your cities and watch the people’s cheerfulness as they go about their jobs, I say to myself: ‘By God! These people have guts all right. They’ve stood up to all this hell without breaking. They’ve earned a kind of glory.’ But it’s all wrong. It ought never to have happened. And it will happen again unless we get it into our heads that it’s all wrong—this worship of courage, this belief that a just war calls out the most heroic qualities of man and is therefore good. It’ll happen again unless we poor boobs, duped by the crooks who lead us, and by old slogans and spell-words, don’t realize that a just war—who’s going to decide that?—is as murderous as an unjust war, and that we’ve reached the stage of scientific achievement when the instruments which man has invented will destroy him if he uses them. Because next time they’re going to make this war look like a tea-party in a Surrey garden.”

Cynthia stared at him and there was a touch of fear in her eyes.

“There mustn’t be a ‘next time’, Tiny!”

Hambleton laughed and raised his hands slightly.

“They said that last time, didn’t they? Supposing we get vexed with Russia—or Russia, who looks like winning first—gets vexed with us, will our little propagandists turn their paper pellets against the tyranny of the Soviet State, the atrocities of the Ogpu, the threat of world domination by Stalin & Co., or the successor of Stalin & Co.? Will British and American

love of liberty for other people get mad about Russian oppression in the Baltic States or the Balkans, and insist upon liberating these countries by intensive bombing of their cities and turning their land into new battlefields? The future Winston Churchill will rally up the old British patriotism—the jolly old spirit of the bulldog breed. There will be a lot of new heroes and a lot of more dead, and the women will weep—or not weep—for the children blasted in their cradles in another inevitable war. And the Archbishop of Canterbury and all the Bishops will bless the Union Jack and rely upon God to come down on the right side—which is, of course, theirs. Isn't that how it goes?"

Cynthia laughed as she used to when listening to him in Massachusetts when he talked to the warmth of a log fire in the sitting-room of the old wooden house.

"You haven't changed much after all," she told him. "They're the same ideas about which we used to argue."

"I've changed," he told her. "You've no idea what a different kind of guy I am. I'm not thinking on those lines now. That's all old junk which just litters the back kitchen of my mind. It tumbled out just now when I opened the cupboard. I've been thinking beyond all that."

"Yes?"

He did not answer, but smiled with his lips as he stared into the flickering flames of the fire she had lit for him. It was several minutes before he spoke again, asking an abrupt question.

"Do you believe in immortality? Personal survival after death?"

It was the same question he had asked his sister Penny one afternoon in a casual way as though asking whether she used a certain brand of toothpaste. But to Cynthia he put the question with more intensity.

"I suppose I do," she answered. "In fact, I'm sure I do."

"Any evidence?" he asked. "I'm trying to get evidence."

She glanced towards him and saw that his eyes were serious though his lips were still smiling.

"By spooks?" she enquired. "Evidence by way of mediums and ectoplasm and materialization?"

He turned his head and looked at her as though wondering how she had guessed.

"I've been through that phase," he said. "I've read a lot of that stuff—pretty low class and utterly unconvincing, if not downright fraudulent, as most of it is. But there's something left when one has discarded most of it. I

rather think there's a good case for clairvoyance—seeing things past, present, and future. There's a certain amount of evidence that some people have these powers. I've been having a go at your man Dunne, who dreamed things in advance of time, and tried to explain it by elementary mathematics and explains a hell of a lot too much. I mean his mathematical equations are very unsatisfying to a mind like mine. But I've been reading William James's book on *Varieties of Religious Experience*, and a lot of other stuff of the same kind by top dogs on the philosophy of religion."

"Did it get you anywhere?" asked Cynthia.

Tiny Hambleton looked at her again with a kind of shyness.

"Not very far yet. I haven't got as far as faith in God. Who is God? What is God? Why this extraordinary universe, this expanding universe of Eddington and Jeans, with its unaccountable myriads of whirling fireballs? And what is life, when now we know that the ultimate unit of matter is just electrical energy? Why this pattern and this illusion? What is the mind of man? Is it part of the universal consciousness as old Aristotle made out? And if so, what is universal consciousness? Is that God? Man in the mass is a lousy animal anyhow. He hasn't got very far along the stage of evolution, and this war has put him back a bit. If man is made in the likeness of God, then all I can say is that God must be ashamed of that resemblance."

Cynthia shook her head and answered seriously.

"You're too hard on man," said Cynthia. "*Tout savoir c'est tout pardonner*. God must know our weaknesses and temptations and ignorance. I can't answer any of your questions, Tiny. Who can? But didn't Christ rise again? Isn't that enough for you—I mean as far as immortality is concerned."

"I'd like to have more evidence," answered Tiny.

"It seems to me pretty good," said Cynthia. "The Apostles died because they believed it. They wouldn't have died after beatings and torture for something they knew to be a lie."

"Lady," said Tiny, as though her words had impressed him, "that's not a bad point. There may be something in it, if the Gospel stories aren't all faked by later writers."

"Read them again," advised Cynthia. "To me they ring true."

They were silent for some time. It had been an odd talk between two people who had not met for a long time. Tiny had talked strange stuff to a woman he had once loved with passion and self-torture.

It was Cynthia who broke this spell of silence.

“I wish I could help you, Tiny. Why are you so keen to know what is going to happen after death. Can’t you wait?”

“I’m going to be killed in this war,” he said. “I’d rather like to know if I shall just be blotted out for ever, or if some part of me—my conscious mind—will go on somewhere and somehow.”

Cynthia stared at him with a startled intensity.

“Tiny! You ought not to talk like that. How do you know you are going to be killed?”

“I know,” he said. “I have a hunch. There’s something inside me which tells me so.”

“Rubbish!” cried Cynthia. “Tiny, I’m ashamed of you. No one ought to speak like that—even if he thought it.”

“Why not?” he asked. “In time of war we all have to face the idea of death. I wanted to tell you for a certain reason.”

“What reason?” she asked angrily, though in her mind she felt pitiful.

“If I hadn’t this hunch,” he said, “I should have come here today and asked you whether you had got over the death of Gerald long enough to let me love you. If you could have brought yourself to love me you might have let me take charge of you and Tessa for keeps, just as I asked you in Massachusetts. But now it’s different. There won’t be any keeps. D’you see what I mean?”

“Tiny! For goodness’ sake!” cried Cynthia. “Have you gone crazy or something?”

“No,” he answered. “I’m very sane. I want to play fair. I want to be the perfect little gentleman again.”

“You’re talking like a fool,” she cried angrily. “All this muck about being killed. No Englishman would talk like that. He would be ashamed.”

“I know,” he agreed, with a laugh. “Never say die! That’s the English motto. There are lots of Americans that way, too. I’m disgracing the Stars and Stripes as well as the jolly old Union Jack. Sorry! But then I’ve always been crazy. Don’t you remember?”

Cynthia’s face coloured up. Her eyes became wet. Suddenly she held out her hands to him.

“Come and kiss me!” she cried. “Get that morbid thought out of your mind, Tiny. You’re not going to be killed. I have that amount of clairvoyance. You’re going to live through this war. You’re going to look after me and Tessa for keeps!”

“Is that so?”



He looked at her in a bewildered way. He got out of his chair slowly and came over to her and put his arms about her and kissed her wet eyes.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm sure sorry. And I'm just too crazy for words. And I love you with a great hunger in my heart. And if you say I'm going to see this war through, maybe I'll believe it. Who knows, anyhow? And I'll be a good boy and go to church every Sunday, and believe that God has a personal affection for the British Lion, and the American Eagle, and the Russian Bear. I'm prepared to believe anything you tell me. I'm ready to do anything you want me to do. I'm going to be a terribly good lover."

She had to push him away and pull herself together when she heard her father and mother come into the front hall.

## VII

PENNY dined with her brother on most evenings when he was in town, and he liked to go to a different restaurant every night in order to study London types in war-time. That was his old instinct as a dramatist and his eye for character parts.

"London is like a stage play," he told her in one little restaurant called The Green Cockatoo, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Sloane Square. "Or it might be a film drama produced by Sam Goldwin regardless of expense—stucco-fronted houses of the Victorian era, ruined churches artfully reproduced, piles of rubble and timber which once were English mansions or blocks of flats, and a full caste of English types, mostly in uniform, with American soldiers—too many of them—de Gaullist officers, Polish officers, the Royal Navy, the R.A.F., girls in khaki with little coils of hair under their cock-eyed caps, and a few moth-like old ladies who have defied all the bombs and stand to attention—even when alone—if the B.B.C. plays 'God Save the King'."

"You haven't missed much since you've been in London," said Penny with an approving smile. "I mean, you see everything with those hawk-like eyes of yours."

Tiny smiled at this tribute to his powers of observation.

"There's a touch of unreality about it," he said. "It almost seems overdramatized. It's as if this war were being fought for the film industry and radio news. Take this restaurant. If I were to write a play about England in war-time—which God forbid—I should have a scene like this. Every play

for the next fifteen years will have a scene like this. That baby boy of the Royal Navy, standing treat to a girl with a frock well above her knees, and a doll's face with blue eyes which open and shut; that English officer, tanned by desert warfare, with an empty sleeve showing that he has lost an arm, with an adoring young wife who is cutting up his meat; that de Gaullist Frenchman, with a *képi* on the peg above his head, talking amorously to a French girl who once, I guess, was *première danseuse* in that ballet at Nice; those two khaki-clad wenches excited by the attentions, strictly dishonourable, of two American guys—one of whom by the way was at Harvard with me. It's a perfect stage setting, including the two waitresses who are probably the daughters of duchesses; and the lady behind the cash desk who is probably the duchess herself, trying to keep up the old castle by running this dive."

Penny laughed with affectionate amusement.

"Tiny, you're ridiculous! You see everything in caricature."

"Maybe that's the only way to look at life," he answered.

He seemed interested in two men at the table next to his. One was a young Englishman in civilian clothes who seemed to have a stiff leg or perhaps an artificial limb which he put out straight beyond the table. The other was a French officer in blue with wings on his breast. They were talking in low voices, careful lest anyone should hear, and furtively studying the folded section of a large-scale map.

Tiny spoke about them to his sister in a voice as low as theirs.

"Rather intriguing, our next-door neighbours," he said.

"Hush!" warned Penny.

Tiny refused to be hushed entirely.

"Spies! Essential to this stage play. One of them is a Frenchman. He's probably an agent of the Vichy Government plotting to assassinate Winston Churchill. The other is an Englishman who has lost too much money at poker and has sold his honour to this sinister villain. They keep whispering to each other. Most suspicious!"

"They know you're talking about them," said Penny in a low voice. "Please don't, Tiny. It's very indiscreet."

They talked about other things—among them being Susy Guggenheim who shared the flat with Penny. She was rather trying. Penny said she was very nervy and very bored with life in London.

"An objectionable female," said Tiny, who had met her several times. "I should tell her to quit if I were you."

Penny put up a defence for her.

“She has many good qualities. She’s terribly kind and generous.”

“With her father’s ill-gotten gold,” said Tiny. “It’s easy to be generous with other people’s money.”

“You have a bitter streak in you, buddy,” said Penny. “You’re terribly hard on human nature.”

Tiny denied that.

“My second name is Pity,” he told her. “I’m sorry for almost everybody caught in this man-trap of war. It’s made a mess of everybody’s life. The inner strain of it attacks any weakness in them. We’re all living unnatural lives in a kind of nightmare. I’ve noticed it among the English folk with whom I have made contacts. They’re cut off from their old roots—mothers without their children—wives without their husbands, paying-guests in other people’s houses, bombed out from their own homes. They’re all waiting for this nightmare to end by some kind of miracle—the Second Front, or the death of Hitler, or a revolution in Germany.”

So they talked until their conversation was interrupted by the young American who had been to Harvard with Tiny.

He came across the room when he had finished his meal and spoke in a cheery way.

“Hullo, Hambleton! Glad to see you again over here. How’s everything?”

“Lousy,” said Tiny. “Do you know my sister Penny?”

“Why, sure!” answered the young American, whose name was Kenneth Mellett. “How are you, Miss Hambleton? The last time we met was at the Ritz-Carlton in Boston. Before Pearl Harbour and any idea of wearing a uniform and getting a free trip to England.”

“Join us,” said Penny. “We’ll order some more coffee.”

“Well, just for a few minutes,” said Lieutenant Mellett of the American Army. He had news of mutual friends in Boston.

“I had a letter from the Wakefields. They asked after you, Hambleton.”

“Very nice of them,” answered Tiny. Then he dropped his voice and spoke to Penny.

“Those two lads at the next table are taking an unnatural interest in our conversation. Don’t give away any military secrets, old dear. Don’t mention the date of the coming invasion if you happen to know it. I told you they were spies, didn’t I?”

“Don’t keep on kidding, Tiny!” said his sister. “Mr. Mellett is telling us about the Wakefields.”

One of the men at the next table, the one with the stiff leg, rose from his seat and came over to Tiny who had noticed several times that this young Englishman—he was obviously English—kept looking at him. He was a good-looking young man with a fresh complexion and grey-blue eyes and a rather pleasant way of laughing, as Tiny had heard him once or twice when he talked in a low voice, dropping it to a whisper now and then, with the French officer.

“Excuse me,” he said to Tiny, “is your name Hambledon? I couldn’t help overhearing it.”

“That’s O.K.,” answered Tiny. “Have we met anywhere?”

“No,” said the Englishman. “But it’s very extraordinary—I happen to know your brother Edward. I met him in France. He was my greatest friend. My name is Kit Hardy—Christopher Hardy.”

“Glad to meet you,” said Tiny. “Come and join us. That’s my sister, Penny. This is Kenneth Mellett.”

Kit Hardy looked at Penny and laughed in a shy way.

“I seem to know you,” he said. “Edward often talked about you.”

Penny stared at him with excited eyes.

“Oh, this is wonderful!” she cried. “Do come and tell us all you know about him. It must have been a long time ago since you saw him.”

Kit Hardy seemed to want to tell her something. He hesitated and glanced round the restaurant quickly.

“I ought not to tell you,” he said very quietly, “but I think I must if you will keep it secret. It’s all very hush-hush.”

“Mums the word,” said Penny.

“I saw your brother a month ago,” said Hardy. “Somewhere in France.”

“Good God!” exclaimed Tiny. “How did you get to France? How did you get back?”

Hardy laughed and looked uneasy.

“That’s why it’s so hush-hush. I daren’t tell you here with so many people about. Can we talk privately somewhere? If you would like to hear about your brother, I mean.”

“I’m dying to hear,” said Penny breathlessly.

“May I bring my friend over?” asked Hardy. “You may know his name. Your brother may have told you in his letters when he could still write from

France—Armand de Rollencourt.”

“Yes!” said Penny, “I remember. He was the young French officer on the road to Paris with the refugees.”

Hardy nodded, and smiled at her.

“That’s right. I was with them. Armand, come over here.”

Armand de Rollencourt had been waiting with a kind of eagerness for this summons. He sprang up from his chair and came to the next table with one quick movement.

“You will excuse us,” he said, in fairly good English. “Kit and I heard the name Hambledon. Before that we had talked about you. I said that that American officer is very like *Edouard*. He has the same mould of face. There is a little something in the eyes. It is remarkable, the likeness to our dear *Edouard!*”

Penny had wet eyes for a moment. She was deeply moved at meeting these two young men who knew her brother—her long-lost brother, as they used to say in the old melodrama.

“I’m Penny,” she said, holding out her hand to Armand de Rollencourt.

Armand bowed over her hand.

“*Edouard* spoke about you many times, *mademoiselle*. When I last saw him a month ago——”

Penny spoke breathlessly again.

“You, too? Only a month ago?”

Armand de Rollencourt glanced over his shoulder.

“We ought not to talk here,” he said. “It is indiscreet.”

It was in Penny’s flat, near Sloane Square, that they talked for several hours until Susy Guggenheim came back from a late party with American officers, astonished to see them at that hour.

It was a strange story which Christopher Hardy and Armand de Rollencourt had to tell them about Edward Hambledon, their brother.

## VIII

A HUNDRED books or more will be written about the underground movement in France, afterwards known as the F.F.I.—the French Forces of the Interior—and their more romantic comrades, the men of the Maquis. Perhaps in

some of them there will be a mention, or a portrait sketch, of that young American, Edward Hambleton, who was among them from the beginning and did good work for them, risking his life and sharing their long ordeal. But many of those who came in touch with him, except in the village of Grancourt Notre-Dame, did not know his real name. He had many names—Philippe de Troyes, Henri Bourdin, Charles Fleury, Jean Marquand, François de Bellgarde.

They did not even know, many of them, that he was an American. During those years in France he had ironed out his American intonation and—with Lucile as his teacher—spoke French perfectly, without accent.

In his own mind, as he told Kit Hardy, he was more French than American. He thought in French. He associated himself absolutely with the underground resistance movement. At first he had entered it as a kind of adventure which he found amusing and dramatic, giving him a small part in a great historical episode. Sentiment also had lured him on. He had wanted to please Lucile and earn her favour. But later he became fired with the spirit of this resistance against German oppression. He was with it heart and soul. He made comrades in it—men and women of all types and classes, lawyers, and architects, and artists, and poets, and factory workers, and garage hands, and peasants, and University students, who for the sake of France worked secretly for the day of liberation. Some of them were taken as hostages and shot. Some of them were arrested and put into concentration camps. He grieved for them because he had known them and worked with them. He knew that any day he might be caught and share their fate.

He had been in at the beginning. It had begun at first in Grancourt Notre-Dame when Suzanne and Lucile had cried out that they had not surrendered, and when the village *curé* had associated himself with that cry, and then old Dr. Moineau and a few others. He had been passed on to François Doumergue in Tours and had started faking photographs and passports. Doubtless it had begun in scores of other towns and villages of France in this small personal way, just individual protests against surrender and humiliation. At first it had seemed to him a sort of family affair at the house of Madame de Rollencourt, but gradually, when he went to Paris and other parts of France on missions from Doumergue, he had the knowledge that he was a member of a secret comradeship working underground and closely linked by some hidden leadership, obeyed but unknown even to its members. For Doumergue's printing press in Tours he helped to produce many broad-sheets for which he did cartoons and head- and tail-pieces. They were distributed secretly, calling upon all patriotic French men and women to avoid collaboration, to regard the Vichy Government with hatred due to

traitors, and to work unceasingly against the enemy, not by sabotage or violence—the time had not come for that—but by passive resistance, cold contempt, silence, pride, sarcasm, and ridicule. Later, when there was a closer liaison between the underground forces, the printing press in Tours turned out a weekly illustrated paper called *La France Libre*. Edward was its chief cartoonist, ridiculing the men of Vichy, castigating Hitler, Goebbels, and all that gang. For those cartoons he used one of his pseudonyms—Philippe de Troyes, and was well known as such in underground circles, who had no idea that this caricaturist with a grim sense of humour was a young American artist who had joined their cause.

There were times—many times—when to Edward Hambleton and others it all seemed futile and hopeless. What could it do, this underground movement, when the Germans were in full control, with the Gestapo ferreting out any opposition not only in Paris but in other cities and small towns? What could it do when Vichy under Laval—poor old Pétain became only a figurehead—went on with the work of collaboration and organized a militia as ruthless as the Germans in rounding up saboteurs and Maquisards, when those young men took to the woods rather than become conscript labourers in Germany, and when great numbers of French people, believing that Germany had won the war and would never be beaten, thought that a reasonable amount of collaboration was inevitable and necessary?

“Somehow,” they said, “we must swallow our pride and learn to live with these Germans. For the sake of the future we must learn to live in peace with them. There is something to be said for collaboration. Isn’t that the only hope of Europe? A closer collaboration between all nations? In any case, many of these Germans are behaving correctly in France. They have a secret admiration for our civilization and culture. They wish to be friendly. They suffer very much from our contempt and our silence which perhaps we carry too far.”

Edward heard that kind of thing from time to time. Those who spoke such words were not necessarily treacherous. Two years, three years, four years of war, is a long time to maintain contemptuous silence with German officers billeted in French households, and always anxious to be friendly. Sheer humanity broke down the silence sometimes. Not all of these German officers and men were of a brutal type. Some of them were not a hundred per cent Nazi. Some of them were decent fellows, as people in Tours told Edward. Some of them were men of culture who in their secret hearts hated the things that were done by Hitler in the name of Germany. Was it possible for French people to keep up a cold hatred towards young men billeted with them for months, and sometimes for years, when they were scrupulously

polite to the womenfolk, seizing every opportunity for doing some little service or courtesy? It was possible for great numbers of French people. It was possible for Madame de Rollencourt and Lucile. But others weakened. French good nature and tolerance yielded here and there after one year or two years.

Edward found this kind of thing happening in one little household when he visited them from time to time in Tours, which he was able to enter with his bogus *Ausweis* provided by François Doumergue. It was a baker's shop which belonged to the brother-in-law of his old concierge in Paris—Jean Meunier. He was looking into the windows of a bookshop one day when a girl passed him, and then came back and stared at him, and give a little cry of astonishment, and spoke excitedly in French.

“Is it possible? Monsieur Edouard? No, it is not possible!”

Edward turned and saw Yvonne Meunier who had posed for him in his Paris studio, and had flirted with him, and had once told him that he painted atrociously.

“Yvonne!” he exclaimed, delighted to see her again.

She flung her arms round him and cried out again emotionally.

“It is like a miracle, Monsieur Edouard! How do you get here? It is wonderful to see you!”

She laughed and wept a little at the joy of seeing him. A German soldier turned his head and stared at them as he passed with a sheepish smile as though he envied them.

“You must come and see Papa and Maman,” said Yvonne. “They will be enchanted to see you again. We have often spoken about you in thinking of Paris.”

That was the first time he went and he was touched by the welcome he had. Jean Meunier wrung his hand in an iron grip, and Madame Meunier embraced him and wept as Yvonne had done.

“We have spoken about you a thousand times,” she told him. “We never thought we should see you again. Certainly, Monsieur Edouard has gone back to the United States, we said. He is one of the lucky ones. And, in any case, what do you do here in Tours?”

“Yes,” said Jean Meunier, wringing his hand again. “What do you do here in Tours, *m'sieur*?”

Edward explained that he was living in the house of Madame de Rollencourt just across the occupied zone. It had been difficult to get back to the United States he told them.



“I go to Paris now and then. My old studio is still intact. I go to some of my old haunts, like the restaurant Père Jean. I see some of our old friends.”

“You visit Paris?” cried Madame Meunier. “That is like a fairy-tale. We talk of Paris. We dream of Paris. It is always an exile to be cut off from Paris in a city like this, which is quite provincial and filled with stupid people who have no intelligence.”

Edward smiled at this criticism of Tours by a woman of Paris. He had met people of great intelligence in Tours. But to the Parisian, there is no good life out of Paris.

“You will take a glass of wine with us, *m’sieur*?” said Jean Meunier. “You must meet my wife’s brother who is the baker here and a good fellow. For his wife there is not much to be said. She has the temper of the devil sometimes. It is always difficult, no doubt, to live in other people’s houses.”

Yvonne gave a shrill laugh.

“Papa and I agree about Aunt Charlotte. She is very pious. She goes to Mass every morning, but it does not sweeten her temper. She finds fault with everything, and especially with me. We do not love each other with devotion. She believes that I led a life of immorality in Paris because I was an artist’s model. She does not believe in my virtue, though I am very virtuous. Is it not so, Papa?”

Jean Meunier, who adored his daughter, gave a gruff laugh.

“It is the provincial point of view,” he said.

While they were speaking, heavy clumping footsteps came up the wooden stairs. Edward heard a door close and those heavy boots crossing bare boards. The others listened and stopped talking for a moment.

It was Madame Meunier who spoke next.

“That is the German soldier who is billeted here. A young fellow who keeps to himself, thanks be to God!”

“We hardly see him,” said Jean Meunier. “He is a clerk in some German mission.”

“He is always reading,” said Yvonne. “He will read himself blind one day. For a German, he is not completely repulsive like most of the others.”

Jean Meunier shrugged his shoulders and lowered his voice.

“I have no love for the *Boches*, as God knows, but in Tours, where there are not many of them, they have not committed atrocities, as yet. It’s possible that some of them are decent fellows, or would be if they did not have a blind faith in Hitler.”

“You are too tolerant, Jean,” said Madame Meunier. “All Boches are beasts. There is only one thing to do with them. They must be exterminated like vermin.”

“With one or two exceptions perhaps,” said Yvonne, laughing at her mother. “I would spare a few of the good-looking ones who have not been poisoned by Hitler’s school for torturers.”

Jean Meunier laughed and turned to Edward.

“Women,” he said, “have greater capacity for hatred than men. I do not wish to massacre all Germans, though I would have no mercy on those who have done atrocious things against Jews and hostages. The other day that young fellow upstairs helped me to carry in some loads of wood and coal for the furnace. He was grateful when I gave him a word of thanks. ‘It is nothing,’ he said. ‘I am glad to be of service.’ It was the first time we had spoken.”

“I hope it will be the last time,” said Madame Meunier. “These Germans try to seduce us by pretended kindness. It’s their way of enslaving us and making us lick our chains.”

“He’s a good-looking boy,” said Yvonne. “When I meet him on the stairs he blushes scarlet and says ‘*Bonjour, mademoiselle*’ with a horrible accent.”

“You do not answer him, I hope?” asked her mother anxiously.

“I turn up my nose at him,” answered Yvonne. “I pretend not to see him. But out of the corner of my eye I see him blush like a schoolboy.”

“After this war,” said Jean Meunier, “we must learn to live in peace with these Germans. Even now perhaps it is necessary to be civil to those who are polite. I am not altogether against the policy of Marshal Pétain, for whom I have a respect. He has saved France from complete occupation. He has gained certain privileges for France.”

“You say foolish things!” cried Madame Meunier, looking distressed. “What you are saying is treachery, Jean.”

“No, no! I am a good Frenchman. But I wish to be reasonable. This war is going on for a very long time, for many years perhaps. Those young men who take to the Maquis are only causing trouble for all of us. When they ambush Germans and shoot them they ask for reprisals. It is men like me who are taken as hostages and shot.”

“One day,” said Edward, “the Maquisards will help to liberate France.”

“You believe that?” asked Jean Meunier, shrugging his shoulders.

Edward didn’t argue the point. He had to be cautious.

On other visits to the baker's shop he met Meunier's brother-in-law, Alphonse Duval, and his wife Charlotte. They were ardent Pétainites, though they drew the line at Laval. And on other visits he saw that time was having its effect upon the relations of the Meunier family with the young German who was billeted upstairs. They did not maintain the same grim silence.

They answered him when he said '*Bonjour*'. On winter nights they allowed him to come in now and then to their sitting-room and play a game of cards with them. His name was Hans Spiegel. Even Madame Meunier had softened towards him and made him a single exception to the rest of the German race. Yvonne teased him because of his atrocious accent and laughed when he blushed scarlet at her raillery.

One day when Edward had made one of his visits to the baker's shop he missed Yvonne. She was trying to buy some wool for her knitting, said her mother. It was a winter afternoon, and already dark when he left and walked through the little courtyard to the street. Two figures were there under the archway. He heard one of them speak—it was Yvonne.

"Don't be silly, Hans. You don't want to get me into trouble, do you? It's all terribly dangerous. Don't you understand?"

They heard Edward's footsteps and were silent. He pretended he had not seen them or heard them and strode through the archway into the street.

"Yvonne is right," he thought. "It is all terribly dangerous if she plays about with that young German. I hope to God——"

He thought of a line he had learnt when he was reading at Harvard:

*'Allah is great, but juxtaposition is greater.'*

Two human beings, he thought, even if French and German, could hardly maintain silence and hatred for years if they lived under the same roof and were attracted to each other by youth, and the electricity of youth more powerful than high explosives. In any case, it wasn't for him to throw stones. Under Madame de Rollencourt's roof there was that German Helmuth Winter with whom he had a talk now and then, although he was heart and soul in the French resistance movement and hostile to the Vichy policy of collaboration.

THE old farmhouse in Grancourt Notre-Dame had become his home. He thought of it as home when he was away on his visits to Paris, Avignon, Arles, and Marseilles, in order to keep in touch with other groups of underground resistance. He was always glad to get back. He was always welcomed back as one of the family by Madame de Rollencourt with whom he was on terms of deep affection, and by Lucile, whose eyes lighted up at the sight of him—her beautiful eyes through which her spirit shone—and by Madeleine Delaroche, who called him her American brother.

They were taking great risks, those women. Sometimes he shivered at the thought that one day they would be discovered and denounced. Already they had helped more than a hundred men to pass from occupied to unoccupied France, and had helped to provide them with food and clothing. At first they had been French soldiers who had escaped after the Armistice. Then they were young men—boys of seventeen and eighteen—who had refused to be sent to Germany as slave labourers, and who were trying to get to England to join de Gaulle, or on their way to the Maquis in Grenoble and Haute Savoie where there were many comrades who had taken to the woods.

It was at night that these visitors called at the farmhouse. They came in twos or threes, directed there by the secret chain of information. They came to one of the outhouses in which watch was always kept by an old farm-hand named Gaston, a veteran of Verdun and a man of loyalty and courage. He announced their arrival by a trick of his own which he had learnt as a boy. He hooted like an owl, three times twice repeated. This mournful sound came across the field and reached the ears of Lucile and Madeleine reading or doing their needlework in the sitting-room lit by an oil lamp.

“The owl is hooting, Lucile,” said Madeleine.

“Yes, I hear it. It’s a good omen.”

They waited until all was quiet upstairs. Schwarzwald had dropped his heavy boots on the bare boards of his bedroom. He had come in drunk again. Madame de Rollencourt went upstairs quietly, and after a little while came down again to report in a whisper that Helmuth Winter, who read late, had put out his light. Half an hour later Lucile and Madeleine would put on their raincoats and goloshes. Lucile would generally carry the lantern, if there were no moon up. Madeleine would carry a basket in which there was a thermos flask with hot coffee and a long French loaf with a hunk of cheese. They would steal out from a back door and reach the outhouse across the yard and through the orchard. At dawn old Gaston would lead two or three young men to the Bois des Fées from which they could cross the line into the unoccupied zone.

Sometimes, when Madeleine was unwell, or when the night was stormy, it was Edward who held the lantern while Lucile carried the basket with the hot coffee and bread. It was interesting to meet these young men. They were good types. A number of them came from Paris. One night Edward met a young man he had known there. It was the son of Madame Marchand of the restaurant Père Jean in the rue Montmartre.

He did not recognize the lad at first in the barn there. Only a flicker of moonlight crept through the holes in the tiles when two men who had been lying in the straw started up as Edward pushed the door open and went in with Lucile.

“How goes it?” asked Lucile in a low voice. “Do not speak too loud. There are Germans near by.”

One of the young men answered.

“We are glad to be here, *mademoiselle*. It has been a long walk.”

He laughed quietly.

“It is quite a walk from Paris and we had to dodge the *Boches* from time to time. My comrade has sore feet and aches in every limb. It is some time also since we had anything to eat. Many hours, *mademoiselle*.”

“I have brought some hot coffee and bread,” said Lucile. “It will do you good.”

“A thousand thanks, *mademoiselle*!”

The other young man was peering at Edward. His eyes seemed green and cat-like in the darkness with a gleam of moonlight through the broken tiles.

“*Cré Nom!*” he exclaimed. “It is Monsieur Edouard! You came often to the Père Jean. You know my mother and father. I am Bertrand Marchand. I met you often before the war.”

“Good heavens!” exclaimed Edward. “It is good to see you again, my friend.”

The young man stepped nearer, flung his arms round Edward and began to sob.

“This war!” he said brokenly. “This German occupation. I have suffered many bad things, and now I am a fugitive.”

He was making his way farther south. He had been taken prisoner before the Armistice and had escaped from one of the prison camps near Beauvais. He had not seen his *maman* since the beginning of the war. Now he was going to take to the Maquis with Bertrand Vernon there, who was his comrade.

“Courage!” said Edward. “Courage, my little one! You will feel better if you pour some of this hot coffee down your throat. It is only three weeks since I saw your mother and father. I shall be seeing them again next time I go to Paris. I will tell them about you.”

“You have seen my Papa and Maman?” exclaimed the young man. “You go to Paris sometimes? It is like a miracle!”

He was rejoiced to have news of his father and mother. Edward stayed with him during that night until the first faint flush of dawn crept into the sky and through the beams of the old barn. Then it was time for these two young men to go. Gaston was ready to take them by the field-path to the Bois des Fées.

“Good luck!” said Edward, with a hand on the shoulder of young Marchand. “Good luck in the Maquis!”

“It is better in Paris,” said the young man. “It will not be amusing in the Maquis. But I hope to kill a German or two.”

He sent his love to his Papa and Maman.

## X

LIEUTENANT SCHWARZWALD began to reveal the worst side of his character as time passed. At first he had been polite in a rather boorish and sheepish way. Now he had begun to drink heavily, either outside or in his room, to which he invited two or three other officers in charge of posts between the occupied and unoccupied zone. His habits became disgusting and he was often sick after one of these late evenings when he played cards with his companions. Helmuth Winter never joined him but sat up in his room reading and studying. If Schwarzwald spoke to Winter it was in a gruff, ill-tempered way and more than once with violent and drunken abuse. Many times Madame de Rollencourt and the two girls heard sounds of quarrelling among the card-players, and the noise of a chair overturned or a bottle knocked off a table.

“They are quarrelling again, those young ruffians,” said Madame de Rollencourt, looking up from her needlework.

“I wish they would cut each other’s throats,” said Suzanne. “Especially I should be glad if Lieutenant Schwarzwald were to have his throat cut.”

To Lucile she confided the reason for her intense hatred of this blond young beast.

“He makes eyes at me when I pass him on the stairs, he tries to press against me with his body. One night I heard him outside my room. He turned the handle of the door very quietly, though not so quietly that I did not hear him. Thanks be to God, I had not forgotten to lock the door. He is a disgusting animal. He looks at me in a way which makes me loathe him.”

“He is certainly very objectionable,” agreed Lucile. “He is extremely repulsive.”

“He hates us,” said Madeleine. “He is filled with bestial desire for me, but he hates us all and is deeply suspicious. I think he must have overheard something. He has been suspicious of us ever since Captain Hardy left us that night. As you know, he made several enquiries as to the disappearance of Pierre Prunier. He did not believe Gaston’s story that the man had slipped away into the unoccupied zone because he had a girl in the south of France. We ought to be more careful of him, Lucile. He is dangerous.”

“I am always careful,” said Lucile.

But there was a night when she was not careful enough. It was a night when the owl had hooted three times twice repeated. Edward was in Rouen, where he was meeting a group of underground workers in Normandy. Madeleine had a bad cold and Lucile went with her mother to the barn from which the owl had hooted. It was one o’clock on a stormy night with heavy rain lashing on the cobble-stones of the courtyard and on the old tiles of the outhouses. The wind through a line of tall poplars made the noise of surf on a rocky shore.

Madeleine had tucked herself up on the sofa near the open fire in which the embers were burning low, giving a flickering light to the big room. The two Germans were asleep, she thought. Karl Schwarzwald was probably in a drunken sleep after three friends had departed. They had been singing German songs up there and then had settled down to cards for a time, judging from the quietude broken now and then by angry disputes. Madeleine’s aunt, that dismal lady, had been in bed hours ago. The old servants, Louise and Albert her husband, were sleeping at the other side of the house. Everything was very quiet except when Madeleine sneezed with that cold in her head.

Everything was very quiet in the old house—so quiet that after she had been dozing for a time a little noise startled her. It was the creaking of a door upstairs. Somebody had opened one of the bedroom doors. Somebody was moving in the passage upstairs.

Madeleine sat up on the sofa and flung off the rug which had covered her. She felt her heart beating against her ribs. Stretching out her hand she

turned up the lamp which had been burning low. Suddenly she sneezed three times, irresistibly.

Somebody upstairs had been standing still and now came along the passage where the bare boards creaked and stood at the head of the staircase. She could not see who it was because of the angle of the room. Somebody was coming downstairs in loose slippers and the old stairs creaked like the bare boards of the passage.

“Who is there?” cried out Madeleine.

Somebody laughed. She knew the sound of that laugh and she felt her blood run cold.

“It is I, Karl Schwarzwald.”

He spoke French with his strong German accent. He was now at the end of the room.

“What do you want?” asked Madeleine, sharply.

He laughed again.

“I cannot sleep tonight. It is possible that I drank too much wine. I heard you sneeze down here. I was outside your bedroom door which you keep locked so carefully. Then I heard you sneeze. I wondered who it was that sneezed. I came down to find out. It was a pleasure when I heard your voice, *mademoiselle*.”

“Go back to bed!” said Madeleine angrily.

But he came farther into the room. He was in a blue cloth dressing-gown with a cord round his waist. His bare feet were in loose slippers.

“I do not feel like bed,” he told her. “I want to talk to you. I have long wanted to talk to you, but you keep silence always. Now it will be pleasant to have a little talk in the middle of the night when everyone sleeps except us two. You have a cold, *mademoiselle*? That is a pity. I am very sorry.”

“Do not talk to me,” she said with a sharp edge of fear in her voice. “Go upstairs to your room.”

“I am going to talk with you,” he said, “even if I have to hold you in my strong hands. I am going to talk to you, and you must listen to me. We are quite alone. No one will hear.”

Madeleine stood up from the sofa, facing him.

“I will not listen to you,” she told him. “How dare you talk to me! I do not talk to a German.”

“No,” he said, “you do not talk to a German. When I pass you on the stairs you do not answer my ‘Good morning’. You do not look at me when I



smile. You do not see the love in my eyes. That is very annoying to me. Sometimes it makes me angry.”

“Go away!” said Madeleine. “You are disgusting.”

He gave a kind of laugh.

“I am not going away, *mademoiselle*. It is very pleasant in this room. We are alone for the first time. It is a very long time that I have been here without finding you alone. Now I am happy to talk to you.”

He came closer to her, within a yard, and she saw a glittering smile in his eyes.

“You are pretty,” he said. “The first time I saw you I said, that is a pretty girl. I will make love to her. It is necessary to have a little love in one’s life even in time of war, more especially in time of war. That was my first impression. But you have been very unkind to me. Sometimes instead of loving you I have hated you because of your silence and your pride and your contempt. I have hated you so much that sometimes I have wanted to strangle you. I thought to myself, I would like to make that girl pay for all she has caused me to suffer by her coldness and her contempt and her silence. One day perhaps I will put my hands, my strong hands, round her pretty throat and strangle her. It will be amusing to hear her scream, I thought. She will not talk to me, eh? Very well! I will make her scream. It was not good of me to think like that. I was a little brutal. I regret having thought like that. I wish to love you in a beautiful, tender, German way. I wish to put my arms round you and kiss your pretty mouth. Like all Germans, I am sentimental about women.”

“You are drunk,” said Madeleine harshly. “Leave me alone.”

“No,” he told her, “I do not think I am drunk. I was certainly a little drunk when I went to bed, but I now feel quite well. I feel very happy down here. Except for some little sluts in Tours I have had no conversation with a pretty girl. It is charming to be alone with a young lady of France. Madeleine Delaroche. A charming name. It is a name for the heroine of a French novel. You have the exquisite *chic* of many French girls—who will not talk to Germans, though we are so anxious to be kind. *Gott in Himmel!* I will make you talk to me tonight. Talk to me, Madeleine Delaroche. Talk to me out of that pretty mouth which I am going to kiss. For all this time in your house I have waited for one smile, for one civil word, for one little kiss. Now I am going to have all I want in that way. Say kind things to me. Kiss me, Madeleine.”

He stepped forward with that glitter in his eyes and took her arms in the grip of his strong hands, and tried to draw her towards him.

She flung her head back to escape his lips. She struggled fiercely in his arms like a young animal. She was strong too, and fought him back, though he laughed at her as they swayed together.

“No, my pretty one,” he said, panting a little. “You are strong but I am stronger. You are like a bird in my hands. Keep quiet, little bird. I am going to give you a thousand kisses. They are very sweet.”

She felt herself growing faint. Suddenly she shrieked, a long, piercing shriek. He tried to put his hand over her mouth, but she shrieked again.

“You will wake people,” he said. “It is silly. You will make me angry. It is better not to make me angry.”

She became limp in his arms. She was nearly fainting, but through her faintness heard another voice speaking loudly and harshly in German.

Someone was rushing downstairs. It was the other German, Helmuth Winter.

He seized hold of Karl Schwarzwald and flung him away from Madeleine, who fell like a crumpled doll on to the sofa.

Karl Schwarzwald faced his fellow-officer, breathing hard for a moment. He shouted out some German words and then swung his arm with a sledgehammer blow at the man who had been his friend.

Helmuth Winter staggered back and missed the blow. In his turn he struck at the younger man, but he was no match in strength or skill for that blond boy, and in a few seconds was knocked senseless to the floor. Other people were in the room now. Suddenly the room seemed to be full of people. Madame de Rollencourt and Lucile had come back. The two old servants, Louise and Albert, had rushed downstairs. Lucile’s aunt appeared like a ghost on the stairs.

“What has happened?” asked Madame de Rollencourt, in a sharp, frightened voice. “Madeleine, what has been happening?”

“Oh, my dear!” cried Lucile, kneeling by the side of the sofa and putting an arm round Madeleine.

On the floor lay the German officer, Helmuth Winter, in his pyjamas with blue and white stripes. He was very still.

It was Karl Schwarzwald who answered Madame de Rollencourt.

He was breathing hard after the fight, but he gave a short, harsh laugh.

“Lieutenant Winter came to interrupt a conversation I was having with your daughter. It was very foolish of him. He is a fool always and no good Nazi.”

“Why are you downstairs?” asked Madame de Rollencourt sternly. “Why are you not in bed?”

The smile left Schwarzwald’s eyes.

He glared at Madame de Rollencourt and then spoke very loudly.

“Why are you not in bed yourself? Why do you go out into the rain with your daughter? What is happening here in this house? I will denounce all of you to the Gestapo! I have been watching you all. You are all in a conspiracy for the escape of prisoners and the men of the Maquis. That American with you is an agent of the Resistance. Many times I have seen lights at night, I have heard voices and seen men slinking away in the darkness. That man who called himself Pierre Prunier was an escaped prisoner from the English army. I have kept all this to myself because I was in love with Madeleine Delaroche and hoped that one day she would be a little kind. But she has not been kind. Very well! I warn you, Madame! The German Gestapo is not gentle in its ways of interrogation, even with women. You are playing a dangerous game here. Because I am good-natured—though you think me a brute—I give you this warning. I will now say good night. *Heil Hitler!*”

He gave the Nazi salute and went slowly upstairs.

Helmuth Winter was regaining consciousness. Presently he raised himself and then stood up, deadly pale.

“I am sorry,” he said. “I apologize for Lieutenant Schwarzwald. I am very sorry.”

Madeleine Delaroche spoke to him. It was the first time she had spoken to him.

“Thank you,” she said.

## XI

UPON his return from Rouen, Edward Hambleton heard all this story. It was alarming.

“That young brute is dangerous,” he said. “He will want his revenge.”

“Thank God he has gone,” said Madame de Rollencourt.

He had been reported by Lieutenant Winter to the *Kommandantur*. He had been sent to another post and another billet.

After returning from Rouen and hearing this story Edward went into the room of Helmuth Winter, who was anxious to speak to him.

“I would like to show you some of my new sketches,” said Winter, “if it would not be wearisome to you.”

“I should like to see them,” said Edward.

They were good and he stayed to talk a little to this solitary man who spent so many evenings alone. In the course of their conversation, which was mainly about French art and literature, Winter broke off abruptly to speak about Karl Schwarzwald.

“He behaved abominably. I am ashamed of him as a German officer.”

Edward hesitated a moment before answering.

“I will speak frankly, lieutenant. Are there not many things done by German officers which are a disgrace to them?—a black stain which nothing will ever wipe out.”

Helmuth Winter looked startled. A slight flush crept into his thin face and there was a pained look in his eyes behind their horn-rimmed glasses.

“I hope not,” he answered. “Doubtless in war-time there are regrettable incidents. Young soldiers drink too much wine. Away from home influence and in a foreign country they take liberties with women. It is one of the worst things of war that it makes for immorality.”

Edward shook his head.

“I don’t mean things like that. I mean far worse things. Horrible cruelties. Wholesale murders. The torture of prisoners—Jewish men and women flung into gas chambers. Young men of the Maquis bludgeoned into pulp to make them speak and betray their fathers. Indescribable abominations done to men and women in your concentration camps. Polish civilians hanged in batches in the market-places before their wives and womenfolk.”

“No!” exclaimed Winter. “I cannot believe any of those things. I have never heard of them. What you tell me is horrible and unbelievable. Who has told you these things?”

“They are published in the newspapers of the world,” said Edward. “They are told by the friends of your victims on the radio. They are told by some of those who have escaped from your prison camps. All the world believes them to be true.”

“No, no!” said Helmuth Winter. “They are told for propaganda purposes. They cannot be true. The German people are civilized. They do not do these things. No word of them appears in the German Press.”

Edward shrugged his shoulders.

“Does truth ever appear in the radio Press? Do you believe all that fantastic rubbish in the *Völkische Beobachter*?”

Winter blinked behind his glasses.

“I do not go as far as that,” he admitted. “I have not gone quite crazy like so many of my contemporaries who have a childish belief in the Nazi faith with Dr. Goebbels as its prophet.”

Edward looked at him with a grim smile.

“You have made an admission, lieutenant,” he said. “You say that many of your contemporaries have gone crazy, and that they have a childish belief in the Nazi faith. Does not that faith preach against that weakness of pity and mercy? Is it not an intensive training in racial pride, and brutality, and utter ruthlessness? Is not the craziness of your contemporaries likely to produce monomaniacs and sadists, apt to commit any crime ordered by Hitler and his adjutants?”

Lieutenant Winter avoided Edward’s eyes and stared down at the carpet. He seemed to be thinking deeply—not pleasant thoughts. Presently he spoke again,

“I wish to be honest. We talk as man to man. I put my life in your hands by talking freely about these things. You understand?”

“Nothing passes beyond this room,” said Edward.

“I admit,” said Winter, “that I agree with you to a very great extent. Having a reverence for culture and intellectual liberty, I deplore the low standards of this National Socialism and its teachings. It is a perversion of truth. It is a denial and repudiation of our old German philosophy and culture. If it were to be maintained for a few generations, it would reduce the German folk to a race of intellectual slaves and robots.”

Edward nodded.

“What more then is there to say? You have said it.”

Lieutenant Winter shook his head.

“It has not yet gone very deep. There are millions of Germans like myself who have inherited and have not repudiated the old German culture. We are still civilized. It is only the Nazi boys—those lads of eighteen and nineteen—perhaps twenty-one or twenty-two—who have been under this new discipline of the mind, making them incapable of individual thought and intelligence. We older men smile at all that, though it is dangerous to smile.”

“Yes,” said Edward, “it is dangerous to smile. It is as dangerous as death for a German to smile at Nazi-trained youth because of the Gestapo and the

concentration camps, because these Nazi boys and even the children would denounce you as traitors to Hitler. It is because you are afraid of the evil system which you have allowed to prevail. And you know that system to be utterly cruel and utterly ruthless, so that you dare not speak above a whisper any word of criticism or any condemnation. Hitler's hangmen are at hand. Hitler's spies are everywhere. The Gestapo has terrible methods of its own. Do you deny the torture and massacre of Jews? Have you Germans of the old culture made any protest against that?"

Winter gave a deep-drawn sigh.

"Poor dogs!" he said, "I am sorry for them. Many Germans regret the hardships inflicted on them."

"Worse than hardships!" said Edward. "Terrible forms of death. Frightful cruelties before death, if any of these stories are true."

"I hope they are untrue," said Winter. "We do not hear of them. If they happen they are kept secret."

"Many Germans are involved," said Edward. "Many Germans must know."

Winter raised his hands with a gesture of despair.

"Doubtless there are many brutal types in Germany as elsewhere," he answered. "At its worst humanity is very degraded. But I know—I assure you—that in Germany today there are many kind-hearted people, many fine characters, many men and women who wept when this war began, and who have agonized ever since because of its horrors. They have not all been cowards. There are many Germans as well as Jews in the concentration camps. We shudder at the thought of those camps. But we can do nothing. We follow our destiny blindly. We submit to an authority we cannot overthrow. We are loyal to the Fatherland, even though Hitler leads us to inevitable doom."

"That is a slave mentality," said Edward. "In other countries there would be revolts. . . . But let me see your sketches again."

He thought this conversation had gone on long enough. He did not wish to be too hard on this decent-minded German who loved books and pictures, and believed, he said, in intellectual liberty.

He was obviously distressed. A sweat broke out on his forehead though it was a cold night. His eyes behind their horn-rimmed glasses had a beaten look.

When Edward said he must be going he expressed his thanks.

“It is most kind of you to talk to me now and then. The silence of the French, whom I would wish to know, is very terrible. I am exceedingly lonely in this room, and in my soul.”

“Good night,” said Edward. “Thanks for letting me see the sketches. They’re good.”

## XII

It was on a night, very clear and starlit, that an extraordinary thing happened creating great commotion in the old farmhouse of Grancourt Notre-Dame. It was shortly after that other night when Schwarzwald had behaved so outrageously. Madeleine was still suffering from the shock of it and was lying on the sofa while her mother and Lucile were doing their needlework and Edward was deep in a book. The aunt was playing a game of French ‘Patience’. Suddenly there was a tap at the sitting-room door and before waiting for an answer Albert, the old manservant, entered and spoke to Madame de Rollencourt.

“Pardon me, Madame,” he said in a low voice.

“Yes, Albert. What is it?”

“Gaston is at the back door, Madame. He wishes to see you. He says that something marvellous has happened, but he will not tell me. He is in an excited state, Madame, and appears to be completely *gaga*.”

Madame de Rollencourt put down her needlework and smiled at old Albert, who had a long-standing feud with Gaston.

“I do not think he has gone *gaga*,” she said quietly. “He is an old man of courage and good sense.”

“It is possible that he is drunk, Madame.”

“Tell him to come in,” said Madame de Rollencourt. “And do not malign a very loyal servant.”

“You will see for yourself, Madame,” said Albert.

Gaston came into the sitting-room, bringing with him a whiff of wet straw and farmyard smells. He held his cap in his hand and the lamplight shone upon his bald head fringed by a rim of white hair.

“What is it, Gaston?” asked Madame de Rollencourt.

Gaston’s old eyes were lighted by some inward excitement.

“Madame,” he said solemnly in a kind of whisper, “it is a miracle! I am not a very good Catholic. I do not attend Mass very often. Nevertheless this is a miracle.”

“Have you seen a vision?” asked Madame de Rollencourt. “Has Our Lady or Jeanne d’Arc appeared to you in the barn?”

“That would be nothing,” answered Gaston. “That might happen to any imbecile. It is more of a miracle than that!”

Edward had put down his book to listen to this conversation. Lucile had dropped her needlework and was looking at Gaston. Madeleine raised herself on the sofa. Mademoiselle Duchesne stopped playing Patience.

“What has happened, old man?” asked Edward. “Pull yourself together. Tell us.”

“Is the German upstairs?” asked Gaston cautiously.

“He is in his room with the door shut,” said Lucile. “Gaston, we wish to hear about this miracle.”

The old man breathed hard, staring first at one and then at the other.

“You will not believe it,” he said, “but it is true. I have seen them. I have spoken to them!”

“Who are *they*?” asked Edward. “Angels or devils?”

Gaston addressed himself to Madame de Rollencourt.

“Madame,” he said, “Monsieur Armand is there in the barn. With him is the English Captain who lost his leg.”

“*Cré Nom!*” exclaimed Edward. The others were silent, staring at Gaston, who went on talking.

“They dropped from the sky, below the Bois des Fées. I heard the noise of their engine. I saw the glint of their wings in the moonlight. It is a *Boche* plane, I thought. That was two hours ago. Ten minutes ago they came to the barn, M’sieur Armand put his hand over my mouth when I gave a cry.”

Edward had risen from his chair. He put his arm round Madame de Rollencourt, who also had risen and seemed a little faint. Madeleine had come off the sofa. There was a look of ecstasy in her eyes.

Lucile had become very white.

“Can it be true?” she asked, looking at Edward.

The aunt had pushed her cards away with trembling hands. “The things that happen in this house are terrible,” she said.

“M’sieur Armand and the English captain wait for a message from you before entering this house,” said Gaston.



Edward answered him.

“I will come. It is incredible. Stay here, everybody. You must keep quiet.”

He went out at the back door and across the courtyard to the barn. Two men were standing there, in its darkness. One of them whispered to him.

“*Edouard! Mon ami!*”

Two strong arms were flung about him. He was kissed on both cheeks.

The other man spoke in English.

“Hullo, Edward, old bird! Isn't this great?”

It was Kit Hardy.

“This is incredible!” said Edward, keeping his voice low. “It's just past belief!”

“Any Germans about?” whispered Hardy.

“One,” said Edward. “Winter is still here. His window doesn't look on to the courtyard. But we must be dead quiet. How long have you got?”

“Two hours at most,” answered Armand.

“Come then,” whispered Edward. “Keep into the shadow. Don't kick against anything. I'll lead the way.”

Presently he brought them into the sitting-room and shut the door after them.

“*Maman!*” whispered Armand. He held her in his arms. Her tears were wet on his face.

Captain Hardy went limping over to Madeleine before he embraced Lucile.

She held out her hands to him and said: “*Christophe!*” And a flame of colour leapt into her face when she fell into his arms.

That was the first time that Armand and Hardy came back to Grancourt Notre-Dame. They had come to prepare the way for other visits, important for General de Gaulle in London and for the future liberation of France.

It was Armand who presently explained all this to Edward, hurriedly and urgently.

“I wish to take back all the information you can give me about the leaders of the Resistance in this zone. We have many other agents at work elsewhere. I wish to get a list of reliable people who will be ready to receive arms and ammunition in due course here and around Tours. We must find good landing grounds where an aeroplane may alight in the night without

smashing itself up. We were lucky tonight in the flat fields below the Bois des Fées, but it is too close to a guarded line.”

“I have already obtained this information,” said Edward. “I have already mapped out the district under instructions from Doumergue.”

“A marvellous fellow,” said Armand. “In his frail body there is a white flame of the spirit. We have been in touch with him through the men he has helped to escape.”

Edward looked at Kit Hardy.

“What are you doing in all this business?” he asked. “Have you joined de Gaulle’s staff?”

“I am a liaison officer with the de Gaullists,” said Hardy. “After getting to England I pulled every wire I knew. They had no use for a one-legged man. Then at last I said the right thing to the right man. So here I am. It’s a miracle!”

“We must get to business,” said Armand. “We must not indulge in general conversation. Before dawn we have to get back to my aeroplane, which is eight miles away. That is a long promenade. Tell me, Edouard, my friend——”

He bent over the map which Edward had sketched out.

But he was interrupted by his aunt.

“I must protest,” she said in a harsh whisper. “I do not like any of this. It fills me with terror.”

“Courage, my dear Aunt,” said Armand, glancing up at her impatiently and turning to the map again.

Mademoiselle Duchesne raised her thin hands which were trembling with emotion.

“Armand, I implore you to have a little caution. For your dear mother’s sake, and for Lucile and Madeleine. We are already wretched. We are under suspicion. There is a German upstairs. That horrible young man Schwarzwald is waiting to get his revenge. You have not heard that story, which is horrible.”

“There is no time to tell that story now,” said Madeleine hurriedly. “For goodness’ sake, Aunt——”

“What happened?” asked Hardy anxiously.

“Nothing,” answered Madeleine, though the colour ebbed from her face before it flushed again. “Schwarzwald behaved like a beast, that’s all. It is not unusual for a German to behave like a beast.”

They spoke all the time in whispers. There was only one lamp in the room shining on Edward's map which was spread out on a small table.

Hardy whispered to Madeleine.

"Can't we go into the shadow world where we can talk to each other?"

Madeleine agreed. They went into the shadow world beyond the rays of the lamp. Lucile had left the room like a ghost, closing the door behind her with breathless care lest it should creak. Presently she came back with a thermos flask full of hot coffee, which was always ready in case the owl hooted.

"Madeleine," said Hardy, "it tore out my heart when I left you that time."

"This is like a dream," she told him. "Is it only a dream? Shall I wake up and find that you were never here?"

"I'm here," he told her. "I hold you in my arms again."

There was no time for all they wished to say. They hardly spoke in that brief time they had together. In the shadow world, beyond the rays of the table-lamp, they held each other close and hardly talked.

"Christophe, *mon bien aimé!*"

"Madeleine, *ma chérie!*"

From the table came the whisperings of Armand and Edward, and from a chair there was a queer little noise which was the suppressed sobbing of a terrified woman who was Mademoiselle Duchesne. Madame de Rollencourt and Lucile were bending over Armand as he talked with Edward.

Suddenly they stopped whispering and listened intently. It was Lucile who first heard a noise upstairs and warned the others.

"*Attention!*"

A door upstairs had opened. A floor-board creaked along the passage.

"*O mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Lucile in a faint whisper.

Armand moved from the table and went with a silent tread towards the window, where he gripped hold of Hardy's arm, pulling him further into the darkness with Madeleine.

Lucile took the map from the table, so stealthily that there was no rustle of paper. She put it on a chair under her embroidery.

"It is time we went bed, *maman,*" she said in a clear voice. "You have been asleep and I did not wish to wake you."

"Yes," said Edward, "Lucile and I hardly dared to move. You were sleeping so peacefully."

“How foolish of me!” exclaimed Madame de Rollencourt.

They were silent again and heard the floor-board in the corridor upstairs creak loudly again. Then there were soft footsteps down the stairs which led into the sitting-room.

A voice spoke in French with a German accent.

“Pardon me. I am feeling very unwell.”

“Is that you, Winter?” asked Edward quietly.

They could see him now on the stairs, just as Madeleine had seen Karl Schwarzwald one night. But unlike the blond, fresh-coloured Schwarzwald, Winter was deadly pale.

“I am deeply sorry,” he said. “I thought you were alone, *m’sieur*. I thought you were reading late into the night as I do myself sometimes.”

His deep-sunk eyes behind their horn-rimmed glasses looked at Madame de Rollencourt and Lucile.

“A thousand excuses,” he said. “I will return to my room.”

“You are ill?” asked Edward. “Can I do anything?”

He moved towards the staircase.

“No, no, it’s nothing,” said Winter. “Or at least I must not disturb these ladies. I have a sharp pain through the lung which is perhaps a touch of pleurisy.”

Madame de Rollencourt spoke to Edward.

“A hot compress will perhaps be good for Herr Winter. I will boil a kettle. Tomorrow we will send for Dr. Moineau.”

“*Bien!*” said Edward. “I will bring up some hot water and some linen. Tomorrow we will get the old doctor to see you, Winter. Meanwhile, a few tablets of aspirin may help if you will go back to bed.”

“A thousand thanks,” said the German officer.

He stood there with a queer look of anguish on his face. He spoke again with a quiver of emotion in his voice.

“You are very kind. I am deeply touched.”

He hesitated for a moment and then went upstairs again, and they heard his footsteps down the passage and the creaking of the floor-boards, and the opening and the shutting of his door.

“*O mon Dieu!*” said Lucile again.

“That gave me an ugly moment,” said Edward in a low voice.

Armand de Rollencourt came out of the darkness and breathed heavily, after holding his breath.

“That was terrible!” he exclaimed in a whisper.

This first visit of Armand and Christopher was a brief one. After silent farewells they went out into the night again. They had eight miles to walk before getting back to an aeroplane in a flat field below the Bois des Fées.

That night Edward played the part of the Good Samaritan to a German officer, binding him up with a hot compress and dosing him with aspirins. It was a strange act for a man who was deep in the Resistance movement, helping the men of the Maquis, who were not tender of any Germans in their hands.

### XIII

EDWARD HAMBLEDON was married to Lucile de Rollencourt. They had discussed this idea many times before deciding. It was Edward who had pressed for it.

“We love each other. Why wait?”

“Our lives are so uncertain, my dear,” Lucile had answered. “We need not disguise from each other that we are living very dangerously. If you were caught, or if I were caught, it would be terrible to be torn apart after we had married.”

“I don’t see the logic of that,” Edward had told her. “Why more terrible then? Besides, we shan’t be caught. I am always cautious. There is very little risk to either of us.”

“No, no, *Edouard!* We are taking great risks. Do not deceive yourself.”

“I want you to be my wife,” he answered. “I have waited for you very long—since that day I fell in love with you in the Bois des Fées. Do you remember our first walk together? I fell for you then.”

“We have been very happy in our love,” said Lucile. “I love you so much that I could not bear the torture if anything happened to separate us. Let us wait until France is liberated.”

Edward laughed and made a wry face.

“That will be a long time yet! Years ahead, Lucile. I want to marry you tomorrow. Let us grab at what happiness we can while we have the chance.”

Madame de Rollencourt favoured the wedding.

“It will make me very happy,” she told them. “Already I look upon *Edouard* as my son.”

Lucile yielded at last and the marriage took place in the village church early one morning after Mass. Old Dr. Moineau came over as one of the witnesses. Madeleine was there, very emotional and weeping a little. The *curé*, who had been a soldier at Verdun in the last war, blessed them and spoke solemn words as they knelt before him—words about the spiritual meaning of marriage, and then about the special significance of this marriage.

“It is a symbol,” he said, “of friendship between two nations and two peoples—the United States and France. When Lafayette went to America in the time of their war of Independence he established a sentiment between our two countries which has never faded. In the last war American troops came over to France in our time of need and spilt their blood on French battlefields. They will come again, I feel certain, before this war is ended. They will be once more on the side of liberty against those who have enslaved us. And this young man who now kneels before me, who has taken this daughter of France to be his wife, is a forerunner of the American legions. As we know, he loves our dear France. As we know, he is ready to risk his life for us. He is our generous-hearted friend sharing our anguish, helping our young men, active in work for our liberation from the tyranny of our ruthless enemy. From these altar steps I bless him and thank him, and ask Our Lord to protect and guide him, and give him by this marriage with a lovely flower of France—our beloved daughter Lucile—new strength and courage, and a spiritual happiness of exceeding sweetness.”

Lucile did not wear a white dress or any marriage veil, but in her blue frock and a little blue toque she was beautiful in Edward’s eyes. Her own eyes were very grave and luminous as she placed her hand on his arm. They took wine with the *curé* and the doctor in the old farmhouse. That strange and miserable lady, Mademoiselle Duchesne, mopped her eyes as though Lucile’s wedding morn was a tragic affair. She had given a frigid kiss to Edward and spoke a few tearful words to him.

“It is all very unwise. It makes me tremble for poor Lucile. I can only hope you will be happy before we all get shot.”

Edward smiled at her and patted her arm.

“Courage, *mademoiselle!*”

Dr. Moineau was in a good mood, and chaffed his friend the *curé* as usual.

“You spoke a lot of fine phrases,” he said. “But that bit about Lafayette was a well-worn *cliché*!”

“I’m not going to get annoyed with you this morning, you old heretic,” answered the priest good-naturedly.

“If there had been a German in the church,” said Dr. Moineau, “he would have been filled with suspicion about our young American friend. You just handed him over to the Gestapo.”

“Thank God there was no German in the church,” answered the curé. “I can smell a *Boche* a mile away.”

It was a happy wedding morn for Edward Hambleton of Massachusetts and Grancourt Notre-Dame. After the *déjeuner* he slipped away with Lucile and they walked together hand-in-hand to the Bois des Fées, where he had first walked with her. There was a sprinkle of snow on the ground, and a blue sky overhead, and air like wine.

“Happy?” he asked.

“Strangely happy,” she answered. “It is strange to be happy when France is still enslaved.”

They had two days of happiness, forgetting the war and the German occupation of France, and the men of Vichy, and the poor hostages in Paris, and the agonies of Europe, and all tragic things. In their room upstairs, to which they slipped away early, they were in Seventh Heaven, though this big room, barely furnished, was unheated for lack of fuel. At the other end of the corridor was that German officer, Helmuth Winter. They could hear him coughing now and then, and lowered their voices, and smiled into each other’s eyes.

“All this is fantastic,” said Edward once. “It’s really unbelievable that I should have married the most beautiful girl in France, and be living in Grancourt Notre-Dame, and sitting in a room with a German officer ten paces away. I’ve abandoned my country and family. I’ve almost forgotten that I was once a perfectly good American. How is my French accent, lady?”

“You speak French like a Provençal,” answered Lucile with a little laugh. “Perfect, but slightly of the Midi.”

“Now you’re insulting me,” he protested. “I shall make you pay a forfeit for that. Ten kisses.”

“Attention!” said Lucile warningly. Helmuth Winter was coughing again.

They were exceedingly happy for two days. On the third evening after their marriage they were sitting downstairs with the others when Madeleine

turned on the radio. She had tuned in to the English B.B.C., which was a punishable offence, though not dangerous here now that Schwarzwald had gone. Madeleine had made an intensive study of English since she had fallen in love with Kit Hardy. Edward had helped her. The B.B.C. was a good education for her. Having turned it on, like so many other listeners she did not listen just then to the world news, but after a word from Madame de Rollencourt went out of the room to make the coffee.

Edward was listening with half an ear until after a second or two he listened with a sudden intensity. Lucile glanced at him and saw that his face had suddenly become pale. She saw him get up from his chair with a startled look. She heard him speak in a low vibrant voice.

*“Sacré bon Dieu!”*

“What is it, my dear?”

He made a gesture as though asking her to keep silent and went on listening. Then he spoke in English again, which he only did now in moments of emotion.

“Well, I’ll be darned! . . . Great God! . . .”

“What has happened?” asked Lucile, aware that he was deeply moved.

Madame de Rollencourt was staring at him. She could see that some tremendous news had hit him.

“Is it something terrible again?” she asked.

The Germans were trying to blur out the English voice. It spoke through a continual jamming noise. Edward listened again for a few moments longer, and then switched off the radio.

“Astonishing news!” he announced. “Something which will alter everything. Something which may be very serious for me. Something which may change the destiny of the world and ensure the liberation of France.”

“*Edouard*, we wish to know what has happened,” said Lucile. “Is it just a secret for yourself?”

She was smiling, but her eyes were uneasy.

“The Japanese,” he said, “have made an unprovoked attack on the American Fleet at a place called Pearl Harbour. It means war for my country.”

“Does that matter to us?” asked Lucile. “Japan is very far away.”

Edward laughed at her. He was strangely excited, she saw. He was gravely perturbed about this news.

“That is the egotism of the French mind,” he said. “My French wife, thinking only of France, says: ‘Does that matter to us?’ ”



“Does it?” asked Lucile, answering with a smile which blunted the edge of his sarcasm.

“It does,” he told her. “The President of the United States has already accepted the challenge of war with Germany and Italy. We missed the news yesterday. This is old stuff. My folk are in this war with Hitler. I am no longer a neutral. In France, under German occupation, I am now an enemy alien. That’s worrying me a little.”

It worried him a lot. It worried Lucile when she understood the full implication of that astonishing news. And yet transcending personal anxiety was the conviction in her mind that some day, and surely, it would mean the Liberation of France and victory over the Germans.

“*Edouard*,” she said, “it is wonderful, this news. It fills me with joy. Your country has inexhaustible man-power. It has the greatest arsenal in the world. It will have the greatest air force, and innumerable tanks and guns and all weapons of war. Germany will not be able to stand against all that force. It is the doom of Germany!”

“I believe that is right,” answered Edward. “But meanwhile, Lucile, you think more of victory than you do of your unfortunate man who is me. Don’t you understand? I can’t stay here any more. I shall have to go.”

“Go?” she asked in consternation. “Leave me, do you mean?”

“I shall have to become a Frenchman,” said Edward. “I shall have to use some of those faked identity papers. I shall have to disappear from Grancourt. I shall have to tear myself away from you. It will tear my heart out—a bleeding heart!”

“I shall come with you,” said Lucile. “Where you go I go. Isn’t there something in the Bible about that—some Jewish girl?”

“I don’t see how we can stay together,” said Edward.

They discussed every possible chance of that. They might go to Rouen on false papers. He had friends in Rouen now, where there was a strong underground movement. But it might be easier for him to disappear in Paris. The greater safety perhaps would be to get to the south of France—Nice or Antibes.

Helmuth Winter had something to say about it. It was on the evening after the news had come. He met Edward in the corridor upstairs, and after coughing nervously asked whether Edward would come into his room for a moment, if he would be so very good.

“Yes?” asked Edward.

Winter shut the door carefully.

“Pardon me,” he said, “but I wish to give you a slight warning. You have been very good to me. I am most grateful to you.”

“A warning?”

Winter looked at him earnestly through his horn-rimmed glasses.

“I have heard the news about the American entry into the war. It is very sensational, is it not? I fear that for Germany it is a great blow—not now, but in the future.”

“I agree,” said Edward.

“Pardon me,” said Winter again, “but I have been thinking of your own position. I should be deeply grieved if anything happened to you.”

“What kind of thing?” asked Edward cautiously.

Winter hesitated, and then answered:

“You are no longer a neutral here. Your position is difficult.”

“Yes,” said Edward, “I see that.”

“It is also dangerous,” said Winter.

“You think so?”

“I do. Certain reports are already in the hands of our Gestapo. Lieutenant Schwarzwald——”

“That young ruffian!”

Winter nodded.

“It is very dangerous. Perhaps I ought not to tell you. Perhaps I am betraying my duty as a German officer. Indeed, I know that I am. But you have been very kind to me.”

“Thanks,” said Edward. “I will think over what you say.”

He felt perturbed when he left the room and went down the corridor to the room he shared with Lucile. He told her of Winter’s words, and she turned pale.

“Oh, my dear! I am afraid.”

“I must go,” he said. “Not for my own sake but for yours. Oh, my God! After two days of marriage! *Cré Nom de Dieu!*”

“God will tell us the right thing to do,” said Lucile.

It was difficult without the aid of God to know what was the right thing to do. After much bewilderment and a thousand different plans, Edward decided, with Lucile’s agreement, that he should go to Rouen without her and find out whether it would be a safe sanctuary for both of them if he disguised himself as a Frenchman. His friends of the Resistance would help them.

There was no time for further hesitation. He left Grancourt the following day, after a sleepless night with Lucile, who wept bitterly in his arms.

#### XIV

EDWARD was away in Rouen for a little time. He went there as Jean Plumoison with a forged identity card and German *Ausweis*, showing that he was a salesman of the Magazins du Louvre. His friends in Rouen welcomed him as warmly under the name of Jean Plumoison as they had done when he was Edward Hambleton, American citizen. Indeed more so, because they had warmer feelings towards the United States now that they had joined in the war against Hitler. Several of them embraced Edward and expressed their belief that American man-power would turn the tide against Germany. With Great Britain they were not so pleased. The delay in making a Second Front in Europe which would draw off the German reserves from Russia seemed to them incomprehensible and lamentable. "The English are ready to fight to the last Russian," said a girl called Yvonne Marquand, who had become very pro-Russian after being very anti-Russian.

"They are hard pressed for man-power," Edward reminded her. "They are doing great work with their Desert Army, and their Navy and Air Force have a big job."

"The R.A.F. comes over to bomb German airfields in France, and kills many of our civilians," said Yvonne. "It is perhaps inevitable, but it is not amusing. It does not make me love the English."

Like other French people she was apt to be critical at that time of the British war effort. But this young woman with short curly hair and the face of a pretty rogue who was very active underground in the Resistance was delighted to hear that Edward Hambleton, alias Jean Plumoison, had the idea of bringing his wife Lucile to Rouen. She had been to school with Lucile and adored her.

"We have two very nice rooms upstairs," she said. "They were used by my two brothers. One of them was killed at Sedan and the other is a prisoner of war in Germany. They will suit you and Lucile perfectly. I will arrange it with *maman* who has made you one of her heroes. We will talk to her about it when she comes in."

Madame Marquand was delighted with the idea.

“It will save us from having two more *Boches* billeted on us,” she said. “The others have just been moved with their unit. They were polite but horrible. It will be a joy to have you. You and Lucile will pass very well as my nephew and niece. Your French has greatly improved. No German would detect any difference of accent.”

She showed Edward the rooms upstairs. They had a view looking above old roofs to the towers of the Cathedral, appealing to Edward’s artistic eye.

“Marvellous! I shall have to make a sketch of that.”

The rooms were simply furnished. One of them had a big old *armoire* dating, perhaps, from the seventeenth century. One of Yvonne’s brothers—the one killed at Sedan—had left a lot of books stacked untidily on his shelves, his text-books at the Lycée, and a mass of French novels and poetry.

“It will be a little Paradise for Lucile and myself,” said Edward.

“When will you bring her?” asked Madame Marquand. “The sooner the better. From what you tell me you are already under suspicion in Grancourt Notre-Dame.”

“Perhaps next week,” said Edward. “Meanwhile, a thousand thanks, Madame. It is very kind and generous of you.”

“It is nothing of the kind,” answered Madame Marquand, who was a plump matter-of-fact lady, very *bourgeoisie* in appearance but with intelligence and spirit. “Nothing will ever repay the work you are doing for France—our American champion! I have heard all about you from François Doumergue who writes to me now and then when he sends somebody from Tours. He is very enthusiastic about you. He calls you his American D’Artagnan.”

“He exaggerates my service,” answered Edward, who had no conceit of himself.

So it was all arranged for him to bring Lucile at the earliest possible date.

But other arrangements were made elsewhere, as Edward discovered to his horror when he went back to Grancourt Notre-Dame. It was dark when he reached the farmhouse after walking from Tours through the Bois des Fées. There was a little powdered snow on the ground and the moon was up shining in a ghostly way through the trees and flooding the fields beyond with a milky radiance. Presently, after his long walk, he could see the old chimneys of the farmhouse black against the sky.

“In five minutes,” he thought, “I shall hold Lucile in my arms. My very dear wife! My beautiful lady of France! My lovely Lucile!”

He lengthened his stride. He whistled a little tune to himself. There was a sense of joy in his heart. The week away from Lucile two days after his wedding had seemed a long and tragic exile from her. Now that was over. In three minutes he would put his arms about her and kiss her lips.

It would be safer in Rouen. There would be less anxiety. In those two rooms they would find their sanctuary. Yvonne and Lucile were great friends. Madame Marquand would be kindness itself. His only regret would be leaving Madame de Rollencourt and Madeleine. For his mother-in-law he had a deep affection and respect. He respected her fine intelligence, her courage, her beautiful poise of mind, her serenity and dignity. She had treated him like a son. He called her *Maman*.

No light shone from the farmhouse windows. The curtains had been drawn two hours ago. Helmuth Winter would be back to his billet—that lonely man who admired France and French literature and spent his evenings reading and studying always in loneliness—poor devil.

Edward had a key to a little door near the kitchen. He let himself in and was astonished to find no lamp alight. He went into the hall, which was in pitch darkness. Then he called out and there was a tremor of fear in his voice.

“Lucile! . . . *Maman*! . . . Madeleine!”

There was no answer. Fear began to clutch at him. His hands became very cold. A coldness crept across his scalp.

He lit a match and by its light found his way to the sitting-room. The door was open and he went inside just as the match flickered out. He lit another and strode with it across the room and lit one of the lamps. He was trying to keep a hold on himself. He was trying to kill that fear which was clutching him.

“Now don’t go crazy,” he said aloud. “Maybe they’ve gone for a walk in the moonlight. Maybe the owl hooted and they’ve gone to the barn. Maybe they’re all upstairs because one of them is ill. Steady, lad! Steady, Jean Plumoison, my old one!”

He stared round the room. He didn’t like the look of things. A little work-basket lay on the floor. All its contents were spilt and scattered—needles and pins and reels of silk. A silver thimble had rolled under one of the chairs. He stooped and picked it up. It was Lucile’s thimble.

Somebody had been to the writing-desk—an eighteenth-century piece with inlaid wood and a nest of little drawers. The drawers had been turned out. Letters and papers were scattered on the floor. One of them was from himself. He recognized his handwriting. It was a letter to Lucile.

It was these letters lying on the floor which put him into a panic. That overturned work-basket may have been a simple accident. Lucile might have upset it when hurrying upstairs because Madeleine was unwell. But these letters, these private letters scattered about the floor, meant something worse than that. Something frightful had happened—something which he guessed and yet did not dare let it take charge of his mind.

He gave a sudden cry. It was a supplication and a prayer.

“Oh, Christ!”

For a few moments he stood as though turned to stone. His face was deathly white. His eyes were filled with dread and anguish. Then suddenly he strode to the little table on which he had lit the lamp. He picked it up and took it out of the room with him and went up the stairs leading to the corridor and the bedrooms.

He shouted out in a harsh voice:

“Winter! Are you there? Helmuth Winter!”

No answer came.

He went into Winter’s room. The bed was unmade. The book shelves were empty. There were no books or baggage in this bare room. Winter had gone. He had taken his books away.

Edward went into the room he had shared with Lucile. Here the bed was made, but there was a great untidiness in the room.

The drawers in a chest-of-drawers were all turned out on to the floor. Ladies’ frocks in a big wardrobe had been flung out. Old letters and envelopes lay on the bare boards as they did downstairs.

“Oh, Christ!” cried Edward again.

He knew what had happened. His wife Lucile had been arrested and taken away after her papers had been searched. Madame de Rollencourt and Madeleine had been taken with her. Perhaps also Mademoiselle Duchesne, who had always been afraid of that and knew that one day it would happen.

Edward was alone in this house. He would not hold Lucile in his arms that night.

It was old Gaston who told what had happened. Edward found him in his cottage that night near the barn upon which he kept watch. With him were Albert and his wife, the old servants up at the house. They all moaned and wept when Edward appeared, haggard and broken by his anguish.

“For God’s sake tell me,” he said.

It took them a long time to tell him. Like all simple folk of their kind they could not tell a straight story, but interrupted every sentence by

lamentations and cries to God and curses upon the Germans. While Edward listened his heart seemed to drip blood. He felt faint and had to sit down on one of the kitchen chairs. These old people were talking together. He listened intently, trying to get the drift of what they were saying. Old Gaston was the least incoherent.

He had been the first to see the arrival of the German police. They were the black S.S. men. With them was Lieutenant Schwarzwald. There were about twelve of them in an army truck followed by a closed van. They saw Gaston running towards the back door and shouted 'Halt!' covering them with their rifles. Lieutenant Schwarzwald spoke to him in French.

"We shall want you, you old dog."

One of the German police, who had jumped out of the truck, grabbed him and twisted his arm so that he cried out because of the pain.

The S.S. men, with the exception of their officer and the man who was holding Gaston, guarded the entrance to the farmhouse. The officer and Lieutenant Schwarzwald knocked at the main door which was shut. It was opened by Albert, who turned pale at the sight of them.

Schwarzwald spoke to him sternly:

"Tell Madame de Rollencourt that we wish to speak with her. We shall also want the other members of the household including the servants."

The two officers strode into the sitting-room. Only Madeleine was there at the writing-desk. At the sound of their heavy tread on the polished boards she turned and saw them and her face blanched. But she rose and spoke to Schwarzwald.

"Are you not ashamed to come here? What do you want?"

He laughed for a moment uneasily.

"This is not a social visit, *mademoiselle*," he answered. "It is a police investigation. This is Lieutenant Langbach of our Security Police."

The black uniformed officer clicked heels, but his steely eyes were hard.

"I must interrogate everyone in the house," he said. "I have a list of the names." He glanced at the list and read them out:

“Madame de Rollencourt.  
Lucile de Rollencourt—daughter.  
Madeleine Delaroche.  
Marie Claire Duchesne—female relative.  
Edward Hambleton—American.  
Albert Longchamps—servant.  
Louise Longchamps—his wife.  
Gaston Lefèvre—farm-hand.”

Madeleine took no notice of him. She stood there staring through him until she saw her mother come into the room with Lucile and her aunt.

Albert and Louise remained outside the door until the lieutenant spoke to them in a rasping voice and ordered them to stand inside and shut the door behind them.

“Take seats,” said the lieutenant to Madame de Rollencourt and the other ladies.

Madame de Rollencourt looked at Madeleine and smiled. It was, said old Gaston, to give courage to this young lady.

“Then,” said Gaston, “the German officer asked a thousand questions.”

“What were the questions?” asked Edward in a faint voice.

“I can’t pretend to remember them,” said Gaston. “There were many about yourself, *m’sieur*. I remember they asked where you were. It was Madame de Rollencourt who replied that she did not know.”

“We shall search the house for him,” said the lieutenant.

“What else?” asked Edward.

“They went back to the English captain who called himself Pierre Prunier. They asked many questions about him. Madame de Rollencourt said she knew him as Paul Prunier. That was the name on his identity card.”

“We have proof that he was an escaped English officer,” said the lieutenant. “We will leave that for a moment.”

“He asked questions about men who had been seen to leave the outhouse at night. Lieutenant Schwarzwald had seen them from his bedroom window several times. He had also seen Madame de Rollencourt and her daughter crossing the courtyard in the direction of the barns and outhouses in strange hours of the night. The American also had been seen with a lantern. What was Madame de Rollencourt’s explanation of that?”

“Madame de Rollencourt had answered that Lieutenant Schwarzwald must have mistaken shadows for human beings. Perhaps he had taken too much wine on those nights.



“The police officer answered harshly. ‘That is an insult to a German officer.’ Schwarzwald had flushed hotly with a scowl on his face.

“The interrogation passed to Lucile. Some of the same questions were put to her. Many others followed. Then it was the turn of Madeleine and Mademoiselle Duchesne, who kept saying: ‘I know nothing. I am an invalid. I know nothing at all.’

Presently it was the turn of the servants, who denied having seen men entering the house at night.

“I was willing to tell many lies,” said Gaston. “But it is a fact that the young men whom we helped did not come inside the house.”

Schwarzwald kept smiling. Once he turned round to look at Madeleine who was sitting somewhat behind him and smiled at her. She took no notice of him.

“For God’s sake tell me what happened,” said Edward. “Why do you not tell me?”

“We are telling you, *m’sieur*.”

After three hours of this interrogation, which began at nine o’clock in the morning, the police officer stood up and spoke harshly, in his abominable French.

“It was French spoken by a German pig,” said old Gaston.

“This is a preliminary investigation,” he said. “You will be questioned later in another place, after we have searched this house for papers. I give you ten minutes to prepare yourselves upstairs. You will be taken to the police headquarters. You are my prisoners.”

“How many of us?” asked Madame de Rollencourt.

He read out the names.

“Madame de Rollencourt.  
Lucile de Rollencourt.  
Madeleine Delaroche.  
Marie Claire Duchesne.”

It was only Madame Duchesne who gave any cry. She uttered a piercing shriek and would have fallen if Lucile had not rushed to her and held her up.

They were taken away in the closed van which had followed the German truck.

This terrible news was given to Edward piecemeal by those old people who had been present at the scene. He sat listening to them with his long

legs outstretched and his head bent. His face was drawn by agony.

Lucile was in the hands of the Germans. His beloved wife had been torn away from him to suffer imprisonment and every foul thing including perhaps torture or execution. Her sufferings would be shared by Madame de Rollencourt and Madeleine. They were the three women whom he loved. He loved Lucile with a passion which now was his own torture. In taking her they had strangled him, torn his heart out, made him mad.

“Oh, Christ!” he cried out again.

He rose from his chair and found that he could hardly stand. He leant against the wall of this cottage kitchen, and put his clasped hands up and dropped his head upon them, and groaned like a stricken animal. He was unconscious of the hands about him, the hands of the old woman Louise who patted his shoulder, and the rough hands of Gaston who held him up. His eyes were bloodshot, but he did not weep. His lips were dry, and when he spoke it was faintly.

Several times he whispered his wife’s name.

“Lucile! . . . Lucile! . . . Lucile!”

Once a shudder shook him and he cried out loudly—a great cry which was torn out of him.

“Oh, God!”

“It is a tragedy,” said old Gaston. “I am sorry for him. This war is a tragedy for all of us. God has forsaken us.”

“God has not forsaken us!” cried the old woman Louise angrily. “It is we who forsook God. God will have pity on us, even yet!”

She wept loudly, but Edward did not hear.

## XV

EDWARD made frantic efforts to get news of the place to which Lucile, with her mother and aunt and Madeleine, had been taken. François Doumergue, in Tours, promised to find out if it were at all possible. Among his secret agents were men and women who posed as collaborators with the Germans and worked in their offices. From them he might hear something.

He was sympathetic with Edward, but took for granted that Lucile and the others—with the exception of Mademoiselle Duchesne, who was of no

account, having no courage—would be resigned to their fate whatever it might be.

“They knew the risks,” he said. “They took them willingly, as we all do for the sake of France. They will not falter.”

Edward groaned.

“The risks are too heavy for women,” he said. “The price is too frightful.”

“The price is martyrdom perhaps,” said Doumergue calmly. “Those of us who work for the Resistance must be prepared for that.”

“I ought not to have let it happen,” said Edward in a voice of anguish. “I was a blind fool. I thought we could get away with it. It seemed an easy game. I’m guilty of what has now happened. I ought to have forbidden Lucile to go on with this work.”

“No, no!” said Doumergue. “She would not have obeyed you, my friend. Her soul was in this work. Her brave and generous spirit. Whatever happens she will accept it with spiritual valour.”

Edward groaned again and put his head in his hands.

“I dare not think what they will do to her,” he said. “Those devils of the Gestapo. I go crazy when I think of it!”

“For you it is very hard,” agreed Doumergue. “You will suffer more than Lucile, whatever they do to her. But you are also in danger, my friend. You must get out of this district, where you are known as the American. I propose to send you to Rouen. I will keep very closely in touch with you. You will go on with your work. You will have an opportunity of going to Paris now and then, which will be very useful.”

“I shall not go to Rouen,” said Edward. “I shall stay here until I find out where they have taken Lucile.”

“That is unwise of you, my friend,” said Doumergue.

Edward stayed in Tours for a week. He saw Doumergue every day, but there was no information to give a man racked by anxiety and self-torture. Then one morning, after giving his left hand to Edward, Doumergue said quietly: “I have news.”

Edward stared at him with sunken eyes.

“Tell me,” he said.

“It is not too bad,” said Doumergue. “They were examined at police headquarters. They have been sent to a concentration camp for women near Amiens. They refused to give any information, of course.”

“I must go to Amiens,” said Edward. He rose from his chair and walked to the door as though already on the way to Amiens.

Doumergue held him by the arm.

“Do not go near Amiens. It will only do harm to your wife and the other ladies. They are very anxious to get hold of you, those devils of the Gestapo. They asked many questions about you at the police examination. They have a dossier about your movements.”

“I shall go to Amiens,” said Edward, stubbornly. “Somehow I will arrange a way of escape.”

“Sit down, my friend,” said Doumergue, putting his hand on Edward’s arm. “Let us talk reasonably. I am not inhuman. I know what agony you are suffering. But let me tell you the best way of arranging for your wife’s escape—the only way.”

“Tell me, for God’s sake!”

“It is to go on with your work for us. In Rouen you will have good opportunities of organizing and helping the Resistance. You will be in touch with liaison officers in England. When England is ready to start the Second Front it will be with the help of American troops. You will be there to meet them. They will be guided by information received from you. You will have with you a legion of fighting men secretly armed by supplies dropped from the air. In this way and by that work, my friend, you will be hastening forward the day of your wife’s liberation and the liberation of France for which your wife has risked her life. All that will happen.”

“When?” asked Edward. “For God’s sake, when?”

“Next year or the year after,” said Doumergue quietly.

Edward raised his hand and laughed—a harsh laugh of despair.

“Two years! Lucile is to stay in that hell for two years! I am to live in Rouen doing this futile job while Lucile is starved and tortured. I would rather face a German firing squad at dawn tomorrow!”

“Do not be impatient!” said Doumergue, with a kind of dark irony.

He patted Edward on the shoulder.

“Think it over. My plan for you is best. You will be working for your wife’s release. Isn’t that worth while?”

“It’s hopeless,” groaned Edward. “It’s utterly hopeless.”

But he went to Rouen, which was one of the centres of the Resistance movement in France, gradually forming a network across the whole country, beginning in a small way but getting stronger, and presently getting arms from men like Armand de Rollencourt and Kit Hardy, who dropped them by

parachute in lonely places. In Rouen he was known to a group of friends as Jean Plumoison. From Rouen he went elsewhere, to many places, under different names.

## *PART IV*

### INVASION

#### I

IT was 1944, and that year began with a rising hope in many nations that the long agony of the war would end before another winter came. The enslaved peoples of Europe in German occupation waited for their liberation with impatient anguish. Could they hold out much longer—enduring hunger, and suffering mental torture and all forms of misery?

The Germans were in retreat before the Russians and as they retreated they were merciless to the inhabitants of cities which they were forced to abandon. Mass executions, destruction by fire and high explosives, was their way of leaving these places which they had captured with flame and fury in their victorious advance. There was no mercy on either side in Russia. On both sides they fought with a ferocity which had never been equalled in history. Along a thousand-mile front German soldiers knew that they had no other way out but death when they were closed in by Russian armies moving irresistibly in great pincer movements over vast spaces. They had orders to fight or die, sent by Hitler himself, who with obstinate pride and a sullen refusal to order a general retreat when that was still possible, commanded his generals to hold on to positions already threatened with encirclement. The Russian armies with their heavy tanks and massed artillery and millions of human ants surged on, leaving German strongholds isolated and surrounded. There could be no surrender, but in most cases only a fight to a finish. The Russians had a word for it, the word 'liquidation'. They liquidated those strongholds and encircled groups. No prisoners, or as few as possible. Had they not revenge to take against German generals and troops who had hanged and shot their brothers and fathers and many women in many cities and a thousand villages? Had they not to avenge murder and torture?

In the ruins of Russian cities, blasted by air raids and gunfire, Germans and Russians fought from house to house and cellar to cellar, and one heap of rubble to another. They fought with machine-guns and hand-grenades in

dark cellars. They clubbed each other and strangled each other, until the last Germans were dead.

Thousands of those young Germans who had once been so jaunty and arrogant in their victorious onrush were now herded into a few square miles, with massed artillery closing in upon them, narrowing their standing room. Shells smashed among them and tore their bodies to bits. Russian bombing planes dropped high explosives upon them and reaped more death until all were dead, or only a few groups of haggard, stunned, and starving men stood amidst the strewn corpses of their comrades. They were 'liquidated'.

"Had Hitler gone mad?" So many people asked and no answer came, except here and there from a German general who emerged from a dug-out in which he had shirked suicide and stood blinking in the daylight as a prisoner, with all his army dead or dying in a Russian trap. "Hitler is mad," said one or two of them. "His orders were our death warrant."

The world watched that Russian advance on a thousand-mile front. It was moving at incredible speed. Every day brought a new list of towns and villages liberated—a hundred—three hundred. Here and there they were checked, but only for a short time. With cool and terrible decision, with cunning strategy these Russians generals, who had come out of the unknown, who had been peasants or mechanics, or privates in the Red Army, less than twenty years before, were outmanœuvring the most professional army in the world. When halted in one place, they struck in another, terrific hammer blows left and right. In wide sweeping movements by-passing German fortresses and strong-points, they drew loops upon the map, making new encirclements of German armies. They were getting closer by thirty miles a day for over a thousand miles from Stalingrad to the German frontiers. They were on their way to Germany's back door. Hitler was doomed on his Eastern Front.

On the Western Front there were pauses and delays, except in the air, where there never was a pause, by day or night, in the destruction of German factories, oil plants, munition dumps, railroads, rolling stock, naval yards, submarine bases, ports, and harbours. The *Luftwaffe* had been beaten out of the sky. At last, beyond a doubt, Britain had attained complete supremacy in the air and now was joined by the American Air Force with its inexhaustible number of heavy bombers. The sky over Britain was filled with the roar of their engines and the rush of their planes. The German ground defences took a heavy toll of them. Thousands of young airmen full of life and hope of life, went out like moths in the candle-flame when German 'flak' reached up to them with frightful fire, or when the German night-fighters darted round them like midges on their way home. The enemy had gone over to the

defence in the air, making fighters instead of bombers. It was the proof of our own supremacy, and all their fighters could not stop for one night the fury of our air raids when, time and time again, a thousand bombers set out on long journeys—they were heard over the chimney-pots in English towns and villages—to drop vast loads of high explosives on their targets for the night. So it went on, month after month.

In England one question was being asked wherever a group of people met in trains and buses, in quiet rooms or gardens, in clubs and teashops.

“When do you think the Invasion will start?”

Knowledgeable fellows had ideas about the moon and the tides.

“Not before the end of March.” “Almost certainly in May.”

Pretty ladies with friends in the War Office or Admiralty, or the wives of naval officers, or the sisters of Staff captains and brigade-majors, put two and two together and got the wrong answer every time. February 10. . . . March 7. . . . April 15.

“Of course, my dear, I mustn’t tell you. It’s most frightfully secret, but if you promise not to tell anybody else——”

It was to be the year of Invasion. That had been announced by the man who knew. The newspapers were advertising it to the enemy and the Germans answered back. Their West Wall was impregnable. British Invasion forces would be flung back into the sea. They would be massacred and drowned.

One Invasion had happened with only moderate success, and for a time with delay and disappointment. British and American forces in Italy were not making the pace of the Russian drive. It seemed to be a hark-back to the methods of the last war—costly frontal attacks against entrenched positions. Why send our men against those mountain ridges, with peak after peak strongly held behind them? Why not make other landings higher up the coast behind the German lines? There was costly fighting at Cassino. The Anzio landing had not gone well. The Americans had not gone out into the blue with their armoured columns against little or no opposition. They had waited until the enemy had gathered strength against them. For a time the critics were gloomy about the Italian campaign. We seemed to have made a mess of it somehow. It was all very old-fashioned, wasn’t it?

The world waited for the news of an Invasion on the coast of France. That would be the real thing, giving the final death-blow—if successful—to Hitler and all his madmen. A formidable adventure against a coast heavily fortified and defended by every diabolical device. Our men would have to risk it. It was the only way of ending the war. But there were many—the



fathers of those who would have to do the job—who looked forward to this Invasion with terror as well as with hope. The losses might be frightful. The assault—perhaps many assaults—on mined beaches against coast batteries might fail again and again before we established a bridgehead.

“Will it be tomorrow?” people asked each other. “Did it happen at dawn today?” asked the mothers of fighting sons or the young wives when they switched on the early morning news. The tension became intolerable as the weeks passed, and then the months.

## II

IN the early part of that year Penny Hambledon had another visit from her brother Tiny, who was still with his armoured column in the south of England. He had been taking part in big-scale manœuvres with American infantry. They were as near to the real thing as might be done without the enemy in position. A wide stretch of the countryside had been cleared of its inhabitants, farmhouses and cottages had been turned into machine-gun posts. The infantry had attacked behind a barrage of live shells. There had been no sham about machine-gun bullets. Five hundred men had been killed—it was whispered—*pour encourager les autres*. The Americans were determined to be tough by the time they reached the coast of France.

Tiny Hambledon was mostly silent about all that to his sister Penny and to Cynthia Birch, who came up in February to meet him in town. The three of them dined together at Durrant’s hotel, where he was putting up again.

“You’re looking fine, Tiny,” said Penny, over the dinner-table one night. “You look as hard as nails.”

“I am as hard as nails,” he answered good-humouredly. “The iron has eaten into my soul. All the softness has gone out of me and I’m just a steel robot, completely dehumanized. I’m a killing machine. Once I was a beautiful young idealist. Say, how many pounds will it cost me to have a double whisky in this scene of English gaiety and splendour?”

Penny laughed and glanced round the room. The last relics of the *ancien régime* were sitting at the little tables talking in low voices—if they talked. Mostly they sat quite silent—these old couples who had been together forty years and more, having nothing new to say to each other.

“Poor old dears!” said Penny. “They’re charming when you talk to them.”

“Does one talk to them?” asked Tiny with an air of amazement. “Introduce me to a Duke, old girl. I’ll write home to Mother about it. I’ll brag a bit and say ‘I din’ed last night with the Duke of Weymouth. A very charming old fellow’. ‘Damn it, sir,’ he said, ‘English society has gone to the dogs. The stately homes of England are now heaps of rubble. Why, damn it, sir, I shall have to end my days in a boarding-house infested by black beetles.’ ”

“No Dukes, I’m afraid,” answered Penny. “But I could introduce you to a retired Indian Civil Servant who looked after the Rajput princes.”

“Not good enough!” said Tiny, haughtily. “Nothing less than a Duke will satisfy my snobbish sadism. Say, I could do with five times the amount of this microscopical portion of meat. You civilians must be starving to death!”

A group of American officers came into the room. A table had been reserved for them. One caught sight of Hambledon and gave a friendly nod.

“One can’t get away from Americans,” said Tiny with sham sulkiness. “Aren’t there any English in England?”

“I’m English,” said Cynthia. “Have you forgotten that you once said I was the most English thing that ever came out of England?”

He had avoided her eyes until then. He seemed shy of looking at her. That queer shyness which she had noticed in Massachusetts now and then had taken hold of him again. But now he turned and smiled at her and there was a softness in his eyes, though he had said that all softness had gone out of him.

“Did I say that?” he asked. “Then I guess I wasn’t telling a lie. You’re as English as a hollyhock in a Sussex garden.”

“Do you like hollyhocks?” asked Cynthia.

“They go with thatched cottages. They’re part of the English fairy-tale.”

“Tiny keeps on talking nonsense,” remarked Penny. “Can’t we get him to talk seriously and tell us when the great Invasion is going to start?”

“If he knew he wouldn’t tell,” said Cynthia.

“Ask me?” said Tiny.

“When’s the Invasion going to start, buddy?”

Tiny lowered his voice, after glancing right and left with exaggerated caution.

“For God’s sake don’t tell anyone,” he whispered. “But the fellows on top have lost the plans. Everything was ready, but some careless chappy—one of the Big Fourteen—mislaid the only copy of the Great Plan. It’s believed that he left it behind in a taxi-cab on the way to Waterloo, where he

was meeting his best girl. Sheer absent-mindedness, but very annoying to the Supreme Command!”

Penny gave a little squeal of laughter. Cynthia rewarded this jest with a smile. In her own mind she was thinking about the strange personality of this big man who loved her. On his lips were quaint conceits, but in his mind, as she knew, he was searching for some spiritual revelation of the eternal mysteries. He had a hunch that he was going to be killed. That made him hurry in his search for truth behind the veil of this illusion called life. Because of his very vital Ego he was desperately concerned to know whether his personality would go on after death or be extinguished like a candle-flame when it is puffed out by a passing breath of wind. He had written her strange letters lately, full of this. He had bared his secret wounds to her, his lack of faith, his despair because his former ideals had fallen into ridicule and contempt, and were smudged out by the propaganda of hatred, the exaltation of the fighting men, the complete regimentation of the human mind to the slogans and discipline of war and national patriotism. He seemed to perceive a deep hypocrisy in the utterances of public men on the side of the Allies. They proclaimed that all of them were fighting for liberty and democracy, and the rights of ‘the little man’, and the independence of the smaller nations. Yet they knew, he wrote, that Russia had in the past denied all such liberty, and had ridiculed and abused the Western democracies, and now was arranging to dominate the smaller nations and Sovietize them according to plan.

*The leading articles in your newspapers make me sick (he wrote to her). Have they never read any books about Russia? Have they never talked to their correspondents in Moscow? Well do I know that this war can't be won without the Russian legions and the guerilla armies of Russia fighting like gorillas. But need we deceive the poor dumb mob and betray our own sincerity by pretending that Father Stalin is a benevolent and democratic guy, all on the side of free speech and free labour and the Christian ideals, and the rights of the little man over his own little life? Have we forgotten that the Ogpu taught the Gestapo all its tricks of torture and espionage? Have we never heard of what happened in the Ukraine in 1933? Do we believe that the killing of German soldiers en masse and the refusal to take prisoners is in line with all those fine ideals of civilization which ensures the favour of God for the side of righteousness which, of course, is ours? Aren't we*

*all being doped and duped by this falsity from which one day we shall be awakened with a jerk?*

*I hate to bore you with this kind of thing. It is, I know, extremely boring, and sounds to some ears like disloyalty, so that I rarely speak about it. I am not disloyal. Being caught in this war I see there is no way out but by bending all one's will to beat the Germans and the Japs. But I would like to think that my life will be given to make a better set-up of civilization for those who come after me, and I am doubtful of that. I would like to think that the world will make a better job of the peace for which we guys are fighting than it did last time. Can I be sure? when on every side I hear nothing but a peace of vengeance and a conflict of political ideas, murderous in their hatreds and blood feuds. But all that is trivial, my dearest heart, compared with the eternal and ultimate truth which I now seek in a hurry. Is there a God? Does He care for the human creatures who kill and murder each other through the ages? Does He take sides? Does He intervene now and then? Shall I—one of these lousy animals—cast off this clay and emerge a pure spirit with an immortal Ego? Answer me. Give me your evidence. Tell me the truth of your own faith. Be honest with me and be patient. I am haunted by all this.*

So he had written to her. Now over a dinner-table he was talking flippant things and playing the jester.

### III

IN a little smoking-room beyond the dining-room they heard the nine o'clock news—mostly about devastating air raids over Germany—and they were joined by three of the American officers who had been dining in the hotel. Conversation was merry and bright, and time slipped away until Penny started up from her chair and said: "Gosh! I must be getting back."

Something caused her to stop a few moments longer. She was listening to a wailing sound which rose and fell on a high note. The others stopped talking and listened.

"Air raid warning," said one of the American officers.

It was the first time Tiny Hambleton had heard it over London. He looked interested but not alarmed.

“I must go like the wind,” said Penny. “I may have to get the ambulance out. I wouldn’t like to miss my first raid.”

“Maybe it’s a false alarm,” said the youngest of the American officers—a boy named Spencer Willett who had been a cub reporter on the *Herald Tribune*.

But it wasn’t a false alarm. It was the beginning of the February Blitz which continued for five nights—the last Blitz on London made by German pilots before the pilotless planes later in the year. There was a sudden crash which shook the old hotel with a kind of shudder.

“I’m off,” said Penny. “Good-bye, everybody!”

“Now don’t go and get killed, girlie,” said Tiny.

She did not answer him. She had already gone.

There was another explosion not very far away. The floor-boards shuddered again as though the earth were giving way under them. But now there was a furious concerto of sound. The London barrage had opened up with great artillery. Guns of all calibres were firing. One could hear the rush of the shells overhead.

“This is amusing, but also alarming,” said Tiny. “What do we do now—I wonder? Any deep shelters in this ancient hostelry?”

He looked at Cynthia. They were alone together as the three American officers had gone out into the hall. Cynthia seemed to be taking this affair calmly. She showed no sign of fear.

“I’m against cellars,” she told him. “I should hate to be trapped in one of them. One just has to take one’s chance. Give me a cigarette, Tiny. Tell me about those manœuvres you’ve been doing.”

He gave her a cigarette, but he did not tell her about the manœuvres. He was interested in this air raid. It was his first experience of this kind. There was a terrific racket over London. More bombs were bursting. Somewhere there were heavy falls of masonry. The London gunners were having a great time.

“I would like to see what those old ducks are doing,” he said. “Come out into the hall, Cynthia. This is a scene in the drama of England which I want to watch.”

“You’re still a dramatist,” answered Cynthia, smiling at him.

He took her hand and led her into the hall.

“Your hand is cold,” he said. “Do you feel scared?”

“Not scared, but conscious that you and I may know all about the eternal mysteries if one of those German pilots makes a lucky hit on this old

house.”

He turned to look at her for a moment with a queer smile in his eyes.

“That thought is in my own mind,” he said. “In a way, it would be good if we went together on that voyage of discovery.”

“We’re getting morbid,” she told him. “It’s ridiculous to talk like this. It isn’t done, you know.”

She laughed as she spoke the last words. Tiny had often used that phrase as a mockery of the English character. ‘By Gad, sir, it isn’t done, you know! Bad form and all that!’

There was a very heavy explosion—the noisiest and closest yet.

“I’m getting scared,” said Tiny. “I can feel the cold sweat of fear. I’m not a hero. I once wrote a play about the idiocy of war. It was a very good play. It had a long run on Broadway until they started all this nonsense again. Jeepers-creepers!”

“One gets used to it,” Cynthia said reassuringly. “Look at those old people.”

The elderly residents of this old hotel had assembled in the hall.

Ancient ladies had come down and were talking to each other brightly. Old gentlemen with tousled hair and silk pyjamas showing beneath their dressing-gowns had grouped themselves round a coal fire now burning low. They were not talking about this air raid. They ignored it. They were exchanging reminiscences about India in the good old days, and South Africa in the time of the Boer War.

“I was at Magersfontein,” said one of them. “Pretty hot show and damn bad generalship.”

“Do you remember Peggy Deverell at the County ball in Cape Town? I fancy you were there?”

“Oh Lord, yes! Married that awful fellow Thorneycroft. Can’t think what possessed her!”

The guns were firing with concentrated fury. A glass on one of the tables slipped towards the edge. The walls of this hotel were shaken by a giant hand.

“My grandson goes up to Eton next term,” said one of the old ladies in a high-pitched voice.

Tiny Hambleton turned to Cynthia with a smile on his lips.

“All this is incredible! It’s like a Somerset Maugham play. With death hovering overhead and the hell of a barrage around them, the English gentry

of ancient vintage show their contempt of Hitler and defy his bad manners. It doesn't seem real. It's a caricature."

"They don't show any blue funk," said Cynthia. "But, of course, they're frightened. That's why they've come down into the hall. They think it's safer, though of course it isn't."

"London can take it," said Tiny. "The old Folks at Home can take it. It's supernatural!"

Presently the guns were silent and into the silence came a high persistent wail.

"The All Clear," said Cynthia.

The old people nodded to each other.

"Well, good night again. All over!"

"Spoilt my beauty sleep," said one of the old dames who had never been beautiful.

They departed to their bedrooms. The last old gentleman slip-slopped upstairs in bedroom slippers, pausing half-way to cough asthmatically.

"Let's go and have a look at London," said Tiny.

It was midnight, and Cynthia was staying at Penny's flat during the absence of Susy Guggenheim, who was away on leave in Scotland.

"Isn't it a bit late?"

"There's no such thing as Time," answered Tiny.

They went out into the blackness of London by night. It was very quiet now. No guns. No bombs. They seemed to be alone in London when they walked down George Street. Not a chink of light showed through any black-out curtain, but above them the sky was lurid, pulsating with a red glow, and, at one point above the chimney-pots, they could see flames rising high through rosy clouds of smoke.

"Somewhere round the Tottenham Court Road," said Cynthia, who knew her London.

By some miracle a taxi was coming down George Street and Tiny stepped into the middle of the road and shouted out: "Hi!"

"Where do you want to go?" asked the driver grumpily, eyeing this American officer.

"As near as you can get to that fire," answered Tiny.

"I'll want a quid," said the man.

"How much is that, chum?"

“A pound, major. I’m robbing you, but I’m tired and you’re an American. See?”

“I’ll be robbed,” said Tiny. “Wait for the lady.”

“Isn’t this rather absurd?” asked Cynthia, when she sat beside him. “I don’t like it quite. It’s making a peep-show of London’s agony and London’s ruin.”

“I want to see into the red heart of it,” said Tiny. “I shan’t be a scoffer!”

He became a helper. It became a strange adventure in the night for an American officer on leave.

“Can’t go no farther,” said the taxi-driver. “Safety first is my motto, especially after midnight.”

Tiny handed him a pound note.

“Take a sleep in your cab,” he said. “I’ll pay you double for the journey back.”

He gave his hand to Cynthia and helped her out.

“Gee!” he said, “this is the red heart of hell all right. I’ll say it is!”

Some kind of factory or warehouse was blazing fiercely. Fire-engines were already at work trying to get the flames under control. A crowd had gathered but were being kept back by policemen.

“Make way there!” one of them shouted. “Can’t you people go to bed?”

The crowd opened and made way for an ambulance. Tiny caught a glimpse of a nurse sitting forward as though ready to spring out.

“Anybody hurt?” she asked, speaking to one of the policemen.

“Dead most likely. Trapped in their cellars with the houses on top of ’em. Not a chance I should say.”

He jerked his thumb towards a side street.

“Down there,” he said. “There’s a squad trying to do something about it, but it’s pretty hopeless.”

“Think I might be of use?” asked Tiny.

The policeman looked up and grinned at him.

“I’d say you’d be equal to two average men. Quite a height, aren’t you?”

“Say, Cynthia,” said Tiny, “would you mind waiting a few minutes? Go back to the cab if you’re tired. I’d be glad to lend a helping hand. Maybe that’s why I came here. A kind of hunch.”

“I’ll wait,” said Cynthia. “Don’t do anything rash.”

“You bet your life I won’t,” answered Tiny, raising his hand as he went away from her.



She waited for him ten minutes . . . twenty minutes . . . half an hour . . . an hour and a half. She had taken shelter in the cab where the taxi-driver was asleep at his wheel. She smoked several cigarettes and did not feel the need of sleep. The crowd had dispersed. There were no flames in the sky now but only a thin vapour of smoke which had a sharp acrid smell. She was getting anxious about Tiny after the first half-hour. What on earth was he doing? She had seen the light of decision in his eyes as he had moved away from her. Perhaps he thought he might find God in a back street of London where people were buried in the ruins of their slum. Or perhaps he was only excited by a sense of drama. He still looked at life as a playwright. He still saw good situations and odd types of character.

Tiny was very odd in his mind. He hated the ugly cruelties of life. They made him ironical and bitter. That was why he hated war. And yet he would lead his Sherman Tank into action against the enemy with all guns firing, though he called it one of Satan's chariots. He was a mass of contradictory ideas, this big tender-hearted man who had been foolish enough to fall in love with her.

When the hour had passed—she timed it on her wrist-watch—she became nervous about him.

“I wonder if he's dead?” she thought. “Perhaps that hunch of his has happened. He was certain he was going to be killed. Perhaps, while I stay here, he's lying dead under a pile of masonry.”

She opened the cab door and stood on the pavement. The driver was sleeping heavily. She was in a great loneliness. Most of the houses about her had been hit in the Blitz of 1940. They were empty shells of houses with the wind blowing through their window-frames. One had collapsed into a heap of rubble upon which two black cats were fighting with snarls and spittings. There was an ugly sinister feeling in this dark loneliness. The ruins of Pompeii would not have been more uncanny than the corner of this street in London.

“Hullo, Cynthia!”

His voice rang out at last. She could see his tall figure coming through the darkness. Other figures were about him. They all came towards the taxi-cab. They seemed to be very cheerful and chatty.

“Great work!” said a policeman.

“What beats me is how you got down into that cellar,” said a man in civilian clothes with a steel hat sideways on his head. “You're not on the small size, either.”

“Well, thanks a lot,” said Tiny. “Glad to have met you all.”

“Good night and thanks,” said the policeman. “Sorry you had to spoil one of your nights on leave.”

“That’s all right,” said Tiny. “Good night, folks!”

He got into the taxi-cab where Cynthia had taken her seat again.

“Sorry to have been so long,” he said. “Ten minutes, was it?”

“An hour and a half,” she told him. “I thought you were dead.”

“Gosh! An hour and a half? You don’t mean it!”

He told her what had happened as they drove back to Chesham Place, where Penny had her flat.

“A bunch of guys were trying to make a hole into a cellar under a pile of broken bricks and rubble. As they worked more stuff kept falling down. It was the labour of Sisyphus. I had an idea that if we broke in farther away below ground we might advance to the cellar more easily. I’m pretty good at a pick. I managed to make a hole through a neighbouring cellar below a house blasted in the last Blitz.

“Down there in the blackness was quite a bunch of human beings. They had all been sleeping on mattresses before the house came down on top of them.

“I couldn’t stand up straight and my torch was like a tiny spot-light in the darkness. I turned it from one figure to another. There was an old woman with blood trickling down her forehead. She was sitting up staring at me, then said: ‘Good evening, dearie. We knew you would come.’ A young woman lay there with heavy beams crushing her legs. She held a baby at her breast. I saw her eyes looking at me. She had a face like a Greek mask—the Tragic mask—but she gave me a sort of smile. One body didn’t stir. It was a bald-headed old man who lay crumpled up like a dead dog. In the far corner was a young girl of about eighteen. Rather pretty, I thought her, with red hair. She sat up and started using her lipstick. One man was groaning. I stopped over him and put my light on his face. He was an old fellow with white hair. He was half-buried under bricks and rubble. I heard him say something. ‘Jesus!’ he said three times. He looked pretty far gone.”

Tiny Hambleton gave this glimpse of his adventure in the night as he sat next to Cynthia in the taxi-cab driving through a blacked-out London.

“War on civilians,” he said, “and that’s what civilization has come to in this year of grace. It makes me laugh!”

He laughed then in a queer harsh way. Then he put his arm round Cynthia and drew her towards him.

“Sorry I kept you waiting so long.”

“It was worth it. You did good work, Tiny.”

“It’s pleasant in this rattle-trap,” he said. “Let’s go on driving for ever regardless of expense.”

But the taxi-cab halted at the block of flats in Chesham Place. Penny had been back half an hour and was in her dressing-gown.

“What have you two been doing?” she asked. “I thought you were dead.”

“Not this time,” answered Tiny. “What happened to you?”

All sorts of things happened to Penny. She had driven her ambulance to south-east London. She had seen many tragic things that night.

“Those poor people were wonderful!” she said. “I shall never forget them.”

“The Hambledon family have been doing well tonight,” said Cynthia.

“One of the Hambledons feels like a drink,” said Tiny. “I propose to loot that bottle of gin from Susy Guggenheim’s bathroom. All among her face creams and headache cures.”

It was one o’clock in the morning when he returned to his hotel. In spite of his flippant way of speech he had been deeply moved by the night’s experience. He would never forget the scene in that London cellar. It was new to him, but England had been enduring that kind of thing for years. Hundreds of thousands of small houses had been destroyed like that. “The endurance of these people is supernatural,” he thought. “But humanity ought not to be asked to suffer all that. Isn’t there any sense at all in the human animal? Can’t he put all this behind him? Won’t he ever learn—that poor boob called ‘Man’?”

He thought of the old fellow who had called out the name of Jesus three times.

“I wonder if Jesus heard?” he thought. “I wonder what Jesus thinks of this kind of warfare, and this agony in London cellars, and the same agony in German cellars with women and babies lying in the ruins?”

In his own mind he cried out a kind of prayer.

“O God! . . . O God!”

There was something else he remembered of that night’s adventure.

Cynthia had been kind to him. She had lain with her head on his shoulder in the taxi-cab. He had felt the warmth of her body. She had held his hand in a tight clasp.

“If I didn’t know I was going to be killed,” he thought, “I should be very happy with Cynthia’s love. I’d have a good time with Cynthia and Tessa. I’d

try to do something to make a better kind of world when all this murder ends.”

#### IV

HE saw Cynthia only once more before the morning of June 6, when he went elsewhere.

The year was passing from Spring into Summer, a cold dry Spring in England with only a few weeks now and then of mild and sunny weather, yet, as he thought, divinely beautiful. Nature paid no attention to the strife of men, but clothed the earth again in loveliness.

*Your English countryside (he wrote to Cynthia) is a garden of delight. We Americans down here on the coast are doing our best to spoil it by our tanks and guns and tractors and the blight of a mechanized army, but we don't succeed. The oaks of Sussex are bursting out into little green flames. The hedgerows are spangled with wild flowers. Every cottage garden is a miracle of flowering plants—I guess Shakespeare knew their names—and your birds are mating in the bushes and singing Mendelssohn's Spring Song. No wonder you people love your little island and fight like hell to safeguard it. It's a gem when you get away from the squalor of industrial cities. Yesterday I heard a cuckoo shouting. It gave me quite a thrill. I thought back to all I knew of English history. King Alfred, I thought, heard that merry bird that morning he burned the cakes in the peasant's hovel.*

*Lasses leaning from their castle turrets heard "Cuckoo, Cuckoo!" in the woods beyond. Richard Cœur de Lion, Harry of Agincourt, Queen Bess, Anne Boleyn, many heroes and poets, and pretty sluts, heard that laughing shout of Spring's messenger all through the pageant of English history. But there's one thing they didn't hear, which you and I hear every night now. I hope it doesn't keep you awake—that drone of bombing aeroplanes, hundreds of them, thousands of them, on their way across the Channel to drop their packets of high explosives. It's reaching a crescendo. It means that we're softening up the enemy's West Wall. It means that I shall be doing a cross-Channel trip before many weeks go by. I shall shed tears of blood if I don't see you before I go.*

In her father's house on the edge of Cranleigh, in Surrey, Cynthia heard the cuckoo calling for the first time that year and laughed at the glad sound of it. Tessa heard it with delight.

It was queer how a little thing like that stirred one's emotion in war-time. Cynthia found that she had tears in her eyes and wondered why, and then knew. The cuckoo heralded the coming of Spring, and with the coming of the Spring would come the great adventure for which everyone was waiting with hope and dread—the attack on the Channel coast, the invasion of Hitler's Europe. Thousands of young men would fall in that attempt. There would be terrible battles. They would be on a bigger scale and more costly than the war in Italy, where there was only slow progress after the landing at Anzio. If it were not more successful than that the war would drag on for another year or more, unless Russia rolled on again. Russia had been rolling on for months, encircling the German armies who would not yield ground in time for retreat and died where they stood. Now Russia was pausing awhile—waiting perhaps for the British and Americans to make the assault on the Western Front.

"It must happen soon," said Cynthia's father. His thin, scholarly face, below silvery hair, looked anxious and strained.

"Perhaps tomorrow," said Cynthia.

"The doctor tells me that all the London hospitals have been ordered to stand by for immediate action," he said. "I confess it makes me shudder. I remember the casualties of the last war during the battles of the Somme and Paschendael. Too ghastly!"

It was at the breakfast-table one morning when they spoke like that and Cynthia's father noticed that his daughter had another letter from young Hambleton, whose handwriting he recognized now. She had put it on one side to read later and privately. He wondered whether there were anything serious in that friendship. His wife had the romantic idea that this young American—Penny's brother—was very much in love with Cynthia. Well, he had seen no signs of it and he hoped it wasn't true. He wouldn't like anyone to take Cynthia away from him. He needed her comradeship. His wife was always out and about. He would miss Cynthia terribly if some fellow were to take her away as poor Gerald had done.

April had passed into May. There was a cold snap and two sharp frosts which ravaged the fruit blossom in Surrey gardens. He was much distressed about it, and called to Cynthia to see the tragedy.

"Calamitous! Look, this accursed frost has killed our chance of any apples this year, when all that glorious blossom promised a fine harvest. It's

the same with the plums and the currants. It's really too terrible!"

Suddenly he laughed, surprising Cynthia by this change of mood.

"What's the matter, Father? Why do you laugh?"

"How absurd I am! How absurd we all are! Here am I moaning over my frost-bitten blossom when in a few weeks millions of young men will be hurling themselves against a fortified coast defended by every diabolical device. One has no sense of proportion! We all think our small misfortunes so vastly important, when they matter very little in the scale of things."

"All the same it's a pity," said Cynthia in her matter-of-fact way. "We need fruit in war-time."

Presently she looked up into the sky.

"Father, look! Aren't they wonderful with the sun glinting on their wings? American Fortresses. There they go again."

"I hate to look at them," said her father. "I wish to God man had never learnt to fly, or never put such a victory over Nature to such evil use."

"They're bursting up German oil stores," said Cynthia. "They're smashing up German railways and defences on the coast, and lines of communication. They're helping to save the lives of our men who will have to do the big job."

She was thinking, above all, of one man who would be in that assault on the Channel coast. Those American Fortresses were preparing the way for him. They would make his way safe, or safer. She wanted him to come back again. He had a hunch that he was going to be killed. That made her frightened sometimes, though it was very absurd of him.

It was early in June when he came to see her again, without previous warning. She was weeding in the garden when she saw his tall figure coming down the path.

"Good heavens!" she cried.

"I agree," he answered. "The heavens are kind and so was my brigademajor. I have twenty-four hours' leave. That means I must get away by the crack of dawn. Can you put me up for the night, lady? I need naught but a crust of bread and a beaker of cold water."

She had her old gardening gloves on and pulled one off to give him her hand, but he pulled the other one off too and kissed both her hands.

"You look wonderful in an English garden," he told her. "You belong to it. Roses grow where you tread. Hollyhocks—aren't they hollyhocks?—whisper their secrets to you. And those little blue things down there—I can't guess what they're called—have copied the colour of your eyes."

“Are you talking poetry or prose?” asked Cynthia, laughing at him. “Tiny, you’re the most absurd creature!”

“I know I am,” he told her. “I can’t help it. I’m a comic. But today I feel on top of the world. It’s marvellous getting this glimpse of you before——”

“Before what?” she asked.

“Before getting seasick.”

They looked into each other’s eyes.

“Is it coming?” she asked. “At last?”

“I guess so. We shan’t know until we go.”

Cynthia dropped her trowel.

“Oh, Tiny! It gives me a tight feeling about the heart.”

“It gives me a cold feeling about the feet,” he said with a smile. “I’ll hate to leave England. How are your father and mother? How’s Tessa?”

Tessa came home from school and was delighted to see the giant man, whom she loved almost as much as a Sealyham puppy and the very battered Golliwog which she took to bed every night. At lunch that day there was no conversation about the war but talk, among other things, about Penny and Susy Guggenheim who shared her flat. Penny, said Tiny, was hoping to see her naval officer before long. He had been given command of a destroyer and had had an exciting time fighting German boats off the coast of Holland. Susy Guggenheim had become engaged to a young officer in the Guards—almost too beautiful to be true. She had knocked off cocktails and was a reformed character under the influence of this young gentleman, who was a good Catholic and strict in his moral code. Penny, by the way, had seen that French officer Armand de Rollencourt and his friend Kit Hardy, who made secret journeys to France and back. They were still in touch with Edward—he had married that girl Lucile, but had left the village of Grancourt Notre-Dame. The family there had all been rounded up by the Gestapo and put into a concentration camp. Edward was stricken, but had flung himself into the underground movement with passion.

“Edward was always a romantic guy,” said Tiny, “unlike his matter-of-fact and hard-boiled brother.”

“Both of you are idealists,” said Cynthia. “Idealism seems to be a family weakness. But I’m terribly sorry for your brother. It must be frightful for him.”

Tiny agreed, but was silent for a moment. He was thinking how frightful it would be if he had married Cynthia and then had lost her like that,

knowing that she was behind prison bars in the hands of gaolers who had no pity on women or any human being.

That afternoon he lay in a deck-chair in the garden while Tessa was having a lie down.

“It’s Paradise here,” he remarked to Cynthia, who sat on a cushion by his side with her head against his knees.

“It’s not too bad. I’m glad you like it, Tiny.”

“It’s so beautiful that it gives me a pain in the heart. There’s nothing so lovely as an English garden like this. Your grass is so green and so smooth. Your flowers are like Elizabethan sonnets. That bird is singing like a *maestro*. What’s the name of the lad?”

“It’s a thrush.”

“A pity that it doesn’t last for ever,” said Tiny. “But the flowers will fade and the leaves will fall and an English winter will arrive to freeze one’s marrow bones.”

“Another summer will come,” said Cynthia. “Another thrush will sing.”

“Not for all of us,” answered Tiny. “Across that strip of sea, thirty miles away, there are some bad boys waiting for us. There are many lads here in England who won’t see another summer.”

Cynthia reached up and touched his hand.

“Don’t get morbid,” she said. “Lots of them will come back after liberating Europe.”

“That’s true,” he agreed. “The lucky ones. I hope they’ll help to make a decent peace and build a much more decent world. But I don’t think they will. The big boys on top will be in control, and the fellows who did the fighting and the dying will get the dirty end of the stick again.”

“Not this time,” said Cynthia. “Among the big boys on top are some great idealists. Your Mr. Roosevelt won’t let things slip back to the old ruts.”

Tiny laughed a little and put his hand on Cynthia’s hair.

“Lady,” he said, “I like to hear you say so. But my Mr. Roosevelt, who means well and is doing well—I’ve no grudge against him—will have to compromise with political gunmen, and the old reactionaries, and vested interests, and the American habit of mind which harks back always to Isolationism and self-interest. Believe me!”

“I don’t believe you,” answered Cynthia, in her blunt way. “I’ve been listening to Raymond Gram Swing.”

Tiny laughed again.

“One of our illusionists,” he said.



Tessa came running into the garden and wanted a game. It was a game of hide-and-seek in which Tiny, in spite of his height, disappeared from human vision, flattening himself behind an oak tree, lying flat behind a border of high-growing lavender, crouching behind the garden roller in the outhouse. Good fun for an American officer expecting to land with his tank on a hostile coast any day at dawn. Good fun for Tessa who knew nothing of all that.

“You haven’t grown up!” said Cynthia, after this strenuous exercise when she had caught him before he reached the home base. “You never will, my dear.”

He read out a fairy-tale to Tessa when she had gone to bed and then went for a walk with Cynthia over the heath beyond the village, climbing to it by steep winding lane with foxgloves and ragged robin and wild parsley on its sandy banks.

“I know a bank whereon the wild thyme grows,” said Tiny. “It must be a bank like this. Are we in Arcady or the forest of Arden?”

At the top of the lane, as they came on to the heath, a view opened up. It was a far view across the Sussex Downs. They stood there looking up at the sky again. Flight after flight of bombing planes were passing over towards the coast. The air vibrated with the deep humming of their engines like monster bees.

“In ten minutes they’ll be over Calais and the coast,” said Cynthia. “They’ll make it easy for you, Tiny.”

“I wish you wouldn’t remind me of it,” he answered. “A most unpleasant thought, spoiling a charming scene. Let’s go and sit on the roots of one of those old oaks. Let’s pretend that we’re back in peace again. Do you remember the Big Stone on the edge of Assawampsett? Do you remember our talks—or perhaps it was only my talk? Did I bore you to death?”

“Pleasant memories,” answered Cynthia.

They sat down on a fallen log. The open country was in front of them with a patchwork quilt of fields over which light shadows passed. The Sussex Downs were faintly blue on the far horizon. Behind them in the woods birds were singing.

“Here and now,” said Tiny presently, “I’m inclined to believe in God.”

“Good!” said Cynthia. “Have you found the evidence?”

Tiny smiled and put his arm round her.

“Nothing to write home about,” he answered. “No sudden conversion or blinding light. But here, this evening, in this enchanted spot, with those birds singing and that beauty in our eyes some kind of faith creeps upon me. There must be a meaning in all this. There must be a Mind behind it. It can’t be blind chance and the casual concatenation of atoms and electrons. There must be a design in this pattern, and a Designer behind it. Unfortunately, man in the mass is not part of the world’s beauty. He spoils it, destroys it, defaces it. He’s an orang-outang. Curse the fellow! Man is a lousy animal! Haven’t I said that before?”

Cynthia laughed at this innocent question.

“You have. And I wish you wouldn’t say it again. It isn’t true.”

“No? With all his vices, cruelties, murderous instincts and fiendish hatreds?”

“You’re not an orang-outang, Tiny. Remember all the heroes, all the saints, all the poets, all the nice friendly folk of the world.”

“In the mass those nice friendly folk are murderous,” he answered. “Or else they’re duped by their leaders into thinking that mass murder is justified, patriotic, and Christian.”

“Sometimes it may be,” said Cynthia. “It is now. Only I don’t call it murder. It’s a fight to the death against evil powers.”

He was silent for some time. Then he laughed.

“We’re not altogether blameless ourselves. We’re not innocent lambs, are we? We helped to make this war before Hitler came. Then Hitler came, and I agree that he has to be scotched with all his scorpions. No way out of that by beautiful sentiment. Only by blood and death. That’s how it is. That’s why I have to get up early tomorrow and catch the first train to London. To hell with it, anyway! Let’s forget it. Let’s bask in this beauty. Gee! It’s wonderful!”

They stayed on the heath until the shadows lengthened in double summer time. They forgot the evening meal, or didn’t care about it. No human being came their way across the heath, but they could hear a grumbling, grinding, thunderous noise on the roads below.

“A convoy,” said Cynthia. “Probably Canadians on their way to the coast with tanks and guns. They’ve been passing for a week.”

“I may meet ’em somewhere on the other side,” said Tiny.

They had abandoned the fallen log. They were sitting side by side in a quarry with a sandy bank. A rabbit frisked in the grass above them.

“Gee! Look at the Jack rabbit!” exclaimed Tiny at the sight of him.

“I can’t look,” said Cynthia. He had put his arms about her. Her head was on his shoulder.

“Lady wood-nymph,” said Tiny some time after that, “I’m having a grand time. This is happiness. I suppose you know I love you like Romeo loved Juliet, like Dante loved Beatrice?”

“I know,” said Cynthia, “and I’m not worth it. I’m commonplace. I’m an ill-dressed gipsy. I’m a slut.”

“You’re an English wild flower,” said Tiny. “You step out of a Shakespeare play. You’re Rosalind with a touch of Beatrice. Anyhow, you’re my woman. I fell for you when I first saw you in Massachusetts and I’ve been darned faithful to you.”

She put up her hand and thrust her fingers through his hair.

“You’re a knight-errant with a Yankee accent,” she said. “And you’re my man and you talk so much you never let me tell you how much I love you.”

“Tell me now,” he asked. “I won’t talk again until I’ve heard from you.”

“I love you for your unworkable idealism,” she told him. “I love you for your non-Christian Christianity. I love you because you love beauty and Tessa and hide-and-seek in a Surrey garden. I love you because you have pity and chivalry even for those you are going to fight. And I love you because you love me.”

“That was good,” he told her. “That was nicely said, lady. I’ll learn that by heart. Do you mind repeating it?”

She refused to repeat it.

Some time later, when there was a gold and crimson sunset, he spoke to her quietly and without a touch of humour.

“Maybe this is my last evening with you—before I go across. I’ll remember every minute of it. Whatever happens I shall be grateful for this—this enchantment and loveliness and the feel of you in my arms and the sound of your English voice in my ears. Thanks a lot, my dear.”

“Tiny,” she said, “don’t go and get killed. Come back to me, won’t you?”

“I’ll try,” he answered. “And if I don’t, think of me here always on this heath with my arms about you and those long shadows creeping across the little fields, and that sun going down in glory, and that bird—another thrush, is it?—piping a gay song at bedtime.”

“Tiny, I want to weep,” said Cynthia. “But I hate tears. They’re so silly, aren’t they?”

But she wept a little before she took his hand and went back with him down the steep lane to Cranleigh. He went away early next morning. Tessa was still in bed and asleep when he crept into her little room to say good-bye. She was sleeping with a smile on her lips with her old Golliwog pressed to her face. Perhaps she was dreaming of fairies. Tiny—her giant man—stooped down and kissed her.

Cynthia went to the garden gate with him. He was late and would have to make a dash for the bus on the green.

“Good luck, Tiny!” she said.

He embraced her and answered with a smile.

“I’ll need it.”

“I’ll think out a little prayer for you now and then.”

“Thanks a lot. It may do me a bit of good. I’ll be thinking of you.”

He looked into her eyes for a moment and then raised his hand in salute.

“I guess I’ll have to run. See you soon, I hope. Maybe I’ll help to finish the war for you. Take care of yourself.”

“Run!” cried Cynthia.

He stood there as though unable to move.

“Well, so long, Cynthia,” he said. “Keep on loving me. I’m going to fight like hell for England, home, and beauty!”

“Run!” she cried again. “You’ll miss that bus!”

“You look good at that garden gate,” he said. He stooped and picked a little blue flower and put it to his lips.

“Well, I’ll be going.”

He was gone.

It was a week later, on June 6, when Cynthia and all England and all the world heard that the Invasion had started. Cynthia heard it on her wireless. . . .

Under the command of General Eisenhower, allied naval forces, supported by strong air forces, began landing allied armies this morning on the northern coast of France.

IN those formal frigid words was announced an episode of human history never before seen under the sun or the stars. Four thousand big ships and many thousands of smaller craft made an assembly in the Channel. They were carrying hundreds of thousands of young men belonging mostly to two nations who once had been united, and then by war had been separated, and now by a miracle of history had come together again in a deadly struggle against an evil power which threatened them both. A full moon looked down upon the Stars and Stripes and the Union Jack fluttering from many mastheads. That pale clear light of the moon revealed endless lines of battleships, cruisers, destroyers, great transport ships, merchant ships, tugs, and barges, and all manner of craft deeply laden with men and material of war. Some of them were packed tight with high explosives. One bomb falling amidships would have blown them up sky-high in a fury of flame and thunder. Aboard these ships were guns, tanks, trucks, jeeps for mechanized armies who would be out for speed after the first break-through. Little lights flashed and twinkled and spluttered from tall thin masts as the Admirals gave their signals and lads in the wireless rooms transmitted them from ship to ship. The human cargoes were tightly wedged, body to body, steel hat clinking with steel hat. What was working in their minds under those steel helmets? What was working in their hearts inside their battle-dress? Many of them were the men who four years before had stood on Dunkirk sands after a long retreat with only one way of escape—and that a chancy one. Enemy planes had flown low above them, like roaring devils, dropping bombs among them. Not much sign then of the R.A.F. whose small numbers were fighting against great odds in other regions of the sky. They had stood up to their shoulders in water, some of them, waiting for their turn along a narrow jetty where a ship was ready to take them off. Big ships here and there and fine targets for the German bombers, and crowds of little ships—the old pleasure-steamers, the old yachts, the fishing-smacks come out across the Channel to rescue the last of the British Expeditionary Force, which had promised to hang its washing on the Siegfried Line. Not a good memory that, and yet somehow good, for there they were going back again after four years, going back to the same coast, going back with mighty strength, and, by a series of miracles, going back with the certainty of victory over an enemy who had seemed invincible.

Under each steel hat each brain throbbed. No time really to say good-bye to the missus or the kids. Seven days' leave, a month or so ago. It had gone like a flash. A bit of gardening. A few words with the neighbours. A visit to the pictures. Now this was what each man had been waiting for and knew was coming, though he hadn't said so to his wife or his girl. His girl had

piped her eye when he left her, poor kid. War had no use for that kind of thing. It tore people apart, broke up homes, made a mess of everything. Well, this business ahead would finish all that one way or another, and the sooner the better.

It would be pretty tough getting ashore. Lot of nasty stuff was waiting for them. But they'd do it all right—must do it. Some fellows would be unlucky, of course. Bound to find a bit of shell with their name on it. Perhaps they would take the Hun by surprise. That would be a bit of all right. Pretty, that effect of moonlight on the sea and all those ships bobbing up and down. Marvellous, really, if you come to think of it.

The American legions were aboard. Before the Japs attacked at Pearl Harbour they hadn't dreamed of a night like this, crossing from England to the French coast. They would have said a fellow was crazy if he had imagined such a thing. They had been garage hands in New York, and Chicago, and Detroit, and Omaha, salesmen of soft goods, clerks, printers, taxi-cab drivers, college boys, farmers, professors, anywhere between Kentucky and Connecticut, or between San Francisco and Miami or between Texas and Maine. Then they had been drafted and had a hell of a time in camps and barracks, getting very, very tired of army life. What was the good of it, anyhow? What were they doing in this war with Hitler? It was the Japs they wanted to set about. Or perhaps somehow it was their war. Some fellows thought it was their war. F. D. R. thought so and he seemed to know. A war for liberty and all that. Hitler first, anyhow. That was his idea. It seemed more natural after that spell in England. Not a bad folk, the English. Very friendly, on the whole. They had stood up to the bombing. They had guts. Those young English girls took a lot of beating. Pretty, too, some of them. Not the ones who grabbed at dollars. Plenty of them. Plenty of little sluts; but nice girls too, quite respectable. Charming girls in Cambridge and Winchester, and the little old English villages like pictures in fairy-tale books. Now England was being left behind with its pubs, and its old inns, and its dark little streets, and its cottage gardens, and its shabby little picture houses, and its cricket matches on village greens. That would be a dream soon. Ahead there was France or Belgium. One day perhaps Germany. A hell of an adventure to get to Germany. But Eisenhower's armoured divisions—tough boys—would get there all right. The way to Berlin was the way home. And the sooner the better. Yes, sir! Gee! That was some Armada round about them. Thousands of ships under the full moon up there, all winking and blinking from their mastheads. And those fellows up top were having a great time. The sky was crowded with them. They were racing across the moon. They were playing hide-and-seek with the stars. They were

like swarms of midges on a summer evening. You just couldn't count them. Thousands, tens of thousands. Four-engined bombers zooming overhead. Every type of aircraft—Fortresses, Lancasters, Halifaxes, Typhoons, Mustangs, Spitfires. The Armada of the sky, never before seen by the face of the moon, never beheld by the stars in such vast numbers. Those boys up there were having the biggest party ever. Those were the boys who had been softening up Hitler's defences. It was they who had made the endless drone above English chimney-pots during the last month or so. They had gone crashing through the sky. They had bombed a thousand targets. Of those who went out they lost five per cent for certain. The odds had not been too good after twenty trips. Good-looking lads. Just boys who took life or death lightly and beat the old Greek gods by their spirit. Now there they were, over this world of ships like legions of avenging angels or the black bats of death. Very comforting to have them there. . . .

So these men, British and American, had such thoughts under their steel hats, and others never spoken and never guessed, as they stood tightly packed in those transport ships, heading for the Normandy coast. It was a coast defended by infernal obstacles—thrust out into the sea—long sharp prongs tipped with high explosives, mines strewn along the shore, coastal batteries, hidden guns, pill-boxes. Into this spider's web of devilry boats filled with men were blown up or holed on the sharp prongs, or sunk by the floating mines. Many men, whose minds had been busy with secret thoughts until they hurled themselves ashore, fell in the first hour or less. But hundreds of thousands of their comrades, not thinking now, but exalted and outside themselves with the flame of human courage and passionate purpose, careless of death in terrific moments, climbed up the cliffs, hurried on, dragging their guns, seizing enemy ground, going forward into the unknown. They had broken through Hitler's fortress. Ahead of them were bloody battles, the sweat and toil and fury and terror of days and nights under heavy fire before they won the Battle of France round about Caen, and then swept in fast-moving columns through France and Belgium to the frontiers of Germany, by-passing the enemy pockets of resistance, taking masses of prisoners, smashing the retreating armies, breaking them to bits, in astounding and victorious pursuit.

PENNY HAMBLEDON was one of those millions of women who listened to the wireless news with an excitement which had in it a secret dread for one man who had gone across the Channel to attack a hostile coast. For those women who had husbands, or sons, or lovers in that adventure it was not in terms of allied armies, or allied naval forces, or strong air forces, that they thought of this assault upon Hitler's fortress of Europe, but as it would decide the fate of one man or boy among that multitude of soldiers, sailors, and airmen.

"Will he get through? Will he come back? Is he dead already while I listen to that voice on the B.B.C., or hang on to this rail in an overcrowded bus, or bend over this bench listening to music while you work. Why don't they give us more news? Is it really going well? Perhaps there have been frightful casualties."

Penny Hambleton had a lot at stake in the success of the Invasion. She had a lieutenant-commander named Richard Arkwright among the allied naval forces. His destroyer would be busy as an escort ship. On his last leave, some months ago, he had never given the slightest hint of the Invasion date, though he had spoken about it in general terms.

"I don't suppose I shall get any more leave until the Show is over. It will be a big Armada when we transport the armies out to France. Thousands of ships, I suppose. I'm looking forward to it. It's going to be the biggest thing ever. I don't believe the Hun will stand up to it. We shall have plenty of air cover, that's one thing. The *Luftwaffe* doesn't show a sign of life. They don't attempt to interfere with all those convoys on the roads."

She had listened to him with hero-worship, and made him blush when she told him she was crazy with pride about him and wanted to kiss his golden stripes.

"I'm glad I'm going to marry into the British Navy," she told him. "A lieutenant-commander's wife! It's too wonderful."

But even while she spoke these words she had a stab of fear in her heart. Would she marry into the British Navy? Many times since she had been in England she had heard the B.B.C. announcers, lowering their voices slightly while speaking formal words:

*"The Admiralty regret to announce . . . The next-of-kin have been informed. . . ."*

"What's the matter, Penny?" asked Richard Arkwright, seeing some trouble in her eyes.

"Nothing," she said. "A sudden attack of the jim-jams."



He spoke cheerfully.

“Getting morbid? Oh well, one can’t dodge the risks in time of war. But I never give a thought to that. We’re all living pretty dangerously these days—civilians as well as the fighting services. I think the civilians have had the dirty end of the stick so far. No fun being bombed in a jerry-built house!”

Lieutenant-Commander Richard Arkwright, whom she had first met in Boston, Massachusetts, when he had blushed like a schoolboy, and looked so lovely in his naval uniform, had disappeared behind a veil of mystery. He would be out there somewhere along the French coast.

And her big brother Tiny had gone. She was sorry for Tiny, who had always been her buddy. He hated war. She remembered his mockery in that play he wrote—a Broadway hit. He had a hunch that he was going to be killed. She had seen a kind of sadness in his eyes, and behind all his wisecracks and amusing talk there was always a touch of bitterness, or at least of melancholy, because life hadn’t worked out as he thought it should.

And he was shocked by human cruelties and by the downfall of his own ideals. She didn’t agree with him. From the very beginning she had been all for England and its heroic fight for liberty against desperate odds. The United States ought to have been in at the beginning, she thought, and that had led to heated arguments with Tiny until Pearl Harbour had changed him. Now she was anxious about him. She would weep her heart out if anything happened to Tiny.

Then there was Edward over in France with the underground movement.

Would there be a rising in France? Would Edward be one of its leaders? Frightful things might happen. There would be mass executions. Edward, her artist brother, so sensitive to all the colour of life, so utterly unable to fit in to any kind of drudgery, so fine and delicate in his mind, might be shot with peasants and young Frenchmen, rising—perhaps too soon—against those Germans in occupation of their country.

She spoke of these things one night to Susy Guggenheim.

“Susy, sometimes I get scared! I have so much to lose in this war if things go wrong.”

“They’re going well, aren’t they?” asked Susy, glancing at herself in a little mirror which she carried with her powder-puff. “Didn’t you hear the nine o’clock news? We’re right beyond the beaches. We’re fighting outside Caen. Our American boys are well on the way to Cherbourg.”

“It’s all so impersonal,” said Penny. “They don’t tell us about the killed and wounded. My imagination is haunted by the things they don’t tell us—

the agony of our wounded boys, the dead on the battlefields, the losses at sea.”

Susy gave a little yawn and then laughed.

“I should go crazy if I thought about that! Far better not to think in that way. I’m for bed. I want my beauty sleep.”

She disappeared into the bathroom and then, after some time, reappeared in her pyjama suit of blue silk which clung to her limbs.

“Penny,” she said, “I want to tell you a piece of news. I’ve held back on it for twenty-four hours, but I’m bursting to tell you.”

“Good news?” asked Penny.

“For me, wonderful! I’m no longer bored. Life is different. I’ve just become engaged to an English lord, and a very beautiful one, with a little fluffy moustache. He’s in the Guards. I call him ‘Brighteyes’. Other people call him Lieutenant Lord Abington.”

“Congratulations!” said Penny. She became warmer than that. “Oh, Susy, I’m so glad, my dear! That’s marvellous. I hope you’ll be terribly happy.”

“I am terribly happy,” answered Susy, forgetting her need of beauty sleep. “Strange as it may seem, I’m very much in love with him. I mean, it’s not just a relief from boredom. It’s the real thing, honey. I almost swoon at the sight of him. He’s just too wonderful, with the face of Lancelot—you know—and the figure of a Greek hero, and a mind which is very English but not unintelligent. He has a sense of humour I believe, though I’m not quite sure. Anyhow, he laughs at my back-chat, and when he laughs he shows the most dazzling set of teeth.”

“His own?” asked Penny.

Susy threw a cushion at her and then came over and said: “Kiss me, honey, I’m crazy with happiness!”

They sat up talking, and then went to sleep in the same room on the two divans artfully concealed by day but perfectly good beds by night.

It was very early in the morning, just after sunrise, when Penny awakened with a sudden shock. Somewhere in London there was a big bang. The concussion shook the window-panes with violence.

“Susy!” cried Penny. “Did you hear that?”

Susy stirred and sat up.

“I heard a bang,” she said. “And now I can hear a siren howling. It’s an air raid. Drat the brutes, waking me up like this!”

“There’s something coming,” said Penny. “It’s making a very strange noise. Not like an ordinary plane.”

“Oh, let me sleep,” cried Susy, lying down again and covering her head with a silk eiderdown.

Penny sprang out of bed and went to the window and pulled the black-out curtains, letting in the light of a June morn. She and Susy were high up in the block of flats with a view over many roofs. The sky was slightly flushed and cloudless. Something was coming across it. She could see it very clearly. It was a small-sized aeroplane but unlike any she had seen before. It was travelling very fast with a queer thumping noise with its engine. Thump. . . . Thump. . . . Thump. There was a light at its tail—a flame. Suddenly its engine shut off but she could see the thing still flying on. Then suddenly it dived and was out of sight.

“How very odd!” exclaimed Penny.

Three seconds after she had spoken these words there was a violent explosion somewhere beyond Chesham Place—perhaps a long way beyond Chesham Place, but near enough to make Penny’s heart jump against her ribs.

“Susy!” she cried.

“Oh, hell!” said Susy.

It was the arrival of the pilotless planes which at first were treated as a joke. “Doodlebugs” they were called, to the annoyance of those who had to crawl out of the ruins of their little houses or who stood by heaps of rubble which had buried their wives and children.

## VII

IT was a bad week-end in June for the inhabitants of London. Many pilotless planes came over, uncanny, casual, horrible. Londoners learnt to know the sound of them, and the sight of them, and the destruction caused by their blast. But there was no panic, and for the first few days it was laughable to read the accounts sent out by Dr. Goebbels’ propaganda bureau as reported in the English newspapers—the roads out of London black with frenzied fugitives—the wild storming of railway stations—the consternation of the Government. They let themselves go, those German journalists, with an amount of imaginative lying never before surpassed even by them. Hitler would win the war, they wrote, by V1 followed by V2 and V3. Not all the Russian victories, nor the landings in Normandy, would avail the Allies. The war for Germany would be won by new weapons and the genius of German

technology. And so strange is the German mind that the people seemed to believe this incredible fairy-tale.

In London, while this tale was told, people went about their work and daily routine as usual, but with their sense of hearing slightly more acute to the wail of the sirens and the ‘chug-chug-chug’ of this inhuman Thing.

Penny Hambleton was one who kept to her programme during the first week-end, or at least during most of it. She accepted an invitation to lunch at a little restaurant in Kensington with Susy and her officer in the Guards—Lieutenant Lord Abington. He was almost as beautiful as Susy had described him, very tall and elegant in his uniform, with little brass buttons which told the initiated which regiment of Guards he was in.

“A nice little place this,” he observed as he entered the restaurant. “I’m told the food is quite amusing and artistic, if not satisfying.”

“Tell us all you know about the Doodlebugs,” said Susy, when they were settled at a little table with a cloth of red and white check.

Young Abington laughed.

“I’m very lacking in technical knowledge about them. They’re jet propelled, if that means anything to you. Let’s have a look at the menu. Isn’t that more important at the moment?”

Penny’s eyes roved about the restaurant, in which she saw a number of young men and women in uniform. A pretty young thing was having lunch with a naval lieutenant who reminded her of Richard, so that for a moment she had a pang at the heart. . . . Where was Richard? Lost somewhere in the mist of war.

Susy and young Abington were having a flirtation with their eyes. During lunch no word was said about the war. Their talk was mainly about film shows and Hollywood, stars of whom this officer seemed very knowledgeable. But he was a very good-mannered young man and turned to Penny frequently to include her in the conversation. He had once been out to New York and Boston. In fact he had an uncle and aunt in Boston.

“I must say I had a very good time,” he told Penny. “If I wasn’t a perfectly good Englishman I should like to be an American.”

“We take second place, of course,” said Penny, with a touch of irony.

Young Abington saw the point and laughed again.

“Well, one belongs to one’s own country as a matter of habit and tradition. England would take second place in any American mind, wouldn’t it? Anyhow, God bless President Roosevelt and also Henry A. Wallace.”

Penny showed the surprise in her eyes.

“What do you know about Henry A. Wallace? Most people here have never heard of our starry-eyed idealist.”

“I’ve been reading his post-war plan,” explained the young officer. “So far, it’s the best blue-print of the shape of things to come.”

“Say, Brighteyes,” cried Susy, “the officers of the Guards seem to be very intellectual. I didn’t think it was necessary for you to have brains. I thought you were just perfect soldiers *sans peur et sans reproche!*”

Young Abington’s brown eyes revealed his sense of humour.

“You’d be surprised,” he said. “We have to learn an awful lot nowadays. We even have to think a bit now and then! I admit it’s an effort in my case, but that’s due to the intermarriage of cousins in my family. What do you think of this food? I call it not at all bad for a starving nation in war time.”

Presently he spoke to Susy and gave her a special invitation.

“Will you come to the Guards’ Chapel with me next Sunday? It might amuse you. It might even convert you to the ways of righteousness.”

“Fine idea,” said Susy. “I need it. In uniform, I suppose?”

“Oh rather! And it suits you wonderfully, if you’ll allow me to say so.”

“I like to hear you say so,” answered Susy.

Suddenly some expression in her eyes startled the young Guardsman.

“Feeling unwell?” he asked.

“It’s one of those Things,” said Susy. “They scare me stiff.”

Young Abington smiled across the table at her.

“It’s quite all right. Sit tight.”

Penny was listening. The Thing was coming rather close, she thought.

She saw that Susy had turned a kind of greenish pallor. Other people about them were listening but not showing any sign of alarm. The pretty girl with the young naval officer took a cigarette from his case and smiled into his eyes.

“It’s going over,” said young Abington, reassuringly. “It’s gone.”

He smiled at Susy again as a loud explosion happened, not enormously far away.

“Ridiculous!” he exclaimed. “What good does it do to Hitler or his crumbling *Wehrmacht?*”

“It wouldn’t do me any good if it smashed through this restaurant,” said Susy. “It wouldn’t do any of us any good. I don’t call it a joke!”

“The odds are heavily in our favour,” said Abington. “London is a very large city.”

“Somebody gets it,” argued Susy. “Somebody has to be killed. While we’re sitting here other people die, don’t they?”

The greenish pallor of her face had gone but she spoke nervously.

“Self-preservation is a very strong instinct,” said young Abington. “One can’t get away from it. Let’s have some more coffee.”

They had some more coffee. Susy had pulled herself together and was smoking a cigarette. Abington kept the conversation going with amusing chit-chat about nothing, or very little—cats—he adored cats—Gracie Fields—a wireless play by the B.B.C.—an amusing book about America—*So Little Time*—and a good anecdote he had heard about Field-Marshal Montgomery. Susy played up to him and once made him laugh so that he spluttered over his coffee.

“I say! That’s pretty good. Isn’t that what you call a wise-crack?”

No one heard the arrival of another flying bomb. Probably it had glided for some distance. It gave no notice before its blast struck this little restaurant in Kensington like a tornado. Several people were flung to the floor. There was a shattering of glass which, by good luck, was blown outwards instead of inwards. Cloths were ripped off the tables, and plates, cups and saucers strewn about the floor. The lady behind the cash-desk had disappeared below the counter. Susy Guggenheim had been hurled off her chair and was clinging to a hatstand.

There were two seconds of silence.

“Anyone hurt?” asked young Abington.

Everyone began talking.

“Well, that was a near miss.”

“I wonder where it fell?”

“Not a quarter of a mile away—Church Street, I should say.”

“No bones broken, I hope?”

Young Abington rescued Susy from the hatstand.

“Not hurt, I hope? I’m frightfully sorry. Most annoying interruption to a pleasant meal.”

“I thought I was dead,” said Susy. “I thought I had been blown into the next world. I guess we’ll get out of this place. Hitler has a grudge against it.”

“Let’s go and see where the bomb fell,” suggested Abington. “It’s a nice afternoon for a stroll. What do you say, Miss Hambleton?”

Penny had the afternoon free, but she thought of the old proverb that ‘two’s company, three’s none’.

“You go with Susy,” she said. “I’ll go back to the flat and examine myself for bruises. That blast hit me like a hammer.”

They left the restaurant and stepped over the broken glass. People were leaving, among them the young girl with the naval lieutenant.

“Topping day!” said the young naval man. “Let’s do a walk in Kensington Gardens. Sure you’re feeling all right?”

“Sound as a bell,” said the girl. “A bit of a shock though, wasn’t it?”

“Quickly over,” said the young man. “Look at that blue sky. Wonderful!”

## VIII

SUSY returned late that evening as usual.

“They made an awful mess in Church Street,” she said. “Not far from where we were having lunch. I was scared stiff, Penny. If any more of those Things come along I shall scream.”

“They’re not amusing,” said Penny. “I hope we have a quiet night. That window of ours is not too good. A lot of glass! I think I’ll stuff it up with cushions. They might help, don’t you think?”

“Penny,” said Susy, “are you afraid of death?”

Penny considered this question.

“I want to live,” she answered after a second’s thought. “I want to see Richard again. But if I’m killed I shan’t know much about it, and I’m ready to take my chance like all these Londoners and like all our men in Normandy.”

“I’m afraid of death,” said Susy. “I hate the idea of it. I like my beautiful body. I can’t bear the idea of having it mangled and blown to bits. I want to go on living, especially now that I have Brighteyes—who adores me. Why should I be smudged out before I’ve had a chance?”

“Don’t get morbid, duckie,” said Penny. “I’ll make you a cup of cocoa. You’ll go on living all right. I’ll come to your wedding if you’ll let me know the date. Won’t you have to walk under crossed swords?”

“I guess we’ll get married in the Guards’ Chapel,” said Susy, cheering up. “Won’t that be wonderful? I’m going there tomorrow and I shall think of myself standing at the altar with six bridesmaids behind me. You’ll have to be one of them, Penny.”

“You bet! When is it coming off?”

“Not just yet. Brighteyes will be going to France pretty soon. He’s doing Staff work now, thank goodness. What’s that noise, Penny?”

She raised herself from the sofa—which was also the bed—and listened anxiously.

“The backfire of a taxi-cab,” said Penny. “Keep your nerve, lady.”

It was a quiet night except for a few distant bangs, and two or three strange noises like a thumping in the sky—not heard by Susy Guggenheim who slept peacefully and deeply.

In the morning after breakfast, brought up by two maids, Susy monopolized the bathroom for a considerable time until Penny shouted out to her: “Hi! Come out of that, and give me a chance! It’s getting late.”

“Two seconds,” answered Susy. “I’m making myself look beautiful.”

She looked attractive when at last she emerged after careful treatment of her face and hair. She put on her uniform of the American Red Cross and examined herself in the mirror over the fireplace.

“How do you think I look, Penny?”

“Very American Red Cross,” answered Penny. “A credit to your country and the dear old Stars and Stripes. There’s some interesting stuff in the *Sunday Times* this morning. Hard fighting round Caen, but with the Germans weakening.”

“Oh, bother all that!” cried Susy. “I shall be late. See you at lunch, old dear. I’m bringing his lordship with me. He likes you quite a lot.”

Penny grinned at her.

“That’s nice of him! I’ll be here. Have a good time. Say a little prayer for me.”

Susy came over and kissed Penny’s cheek.

“Oh, Penny, I’m terribly happy!” she said.

“Fine!” said Penny. “Don’t be elaborately late for lunch.”

Susy glanced at a little wrist-watch and gave a squeal.

“Gee! I must be off.”

Penny dressed herself and sat down at a desk to write a letter to Richard Arkwright. Once she raised her head and listened. Guns were firing not far away. There was a heavy explosion with a sudden crash. The big windows rattled. The desk on which she was writing seemed to rise and tremble for a moment.

“One of those Things!” she said aloud. “And rather too close. I wonder where it fell?”



She finished her letter to Richard and then wrote others. They were to her father and mother and the Wakefields in Taunton, Massachusetts. She also dropped a line to Cynthia Birch, asking her whether she had heard from Tiny, who was in the thick of it out there in Normandy or Brittany.

Time slipped away. She looked at her watch. A quarter-past one.

Susy was late. She ought to have been back at one o'clock. That was rather annoying, because downstairs in the service restaurant the best food went off if one arrived late.

Half-past one. Penny took the lift downstairs to the hall and stood outside the door of the block of flats for a few minutes. Probably she would see Susy driving up in a taxi-cab with her young man in the Guards. Nothing happened in that way.

She went back into the hall and spoke to the friendly porter.

"What time does the Service end in the Guards' Chapel?"

He looked at her strangely. There was something queer in his eyes.

"Why do you ask that, Miss?" he enquired.

There was something queer in his tone of voice. He was generally so courteous and smiling.

"Miss Guggenheim was there this morning," said Penny.

The hall porter stooped below his desk as though to find something. He seemed curiously embarrassed and uneasy.

"Something happened at the Guards' Chapel this morning," he said in a husky voice. "One of those Things. It was rather—unfortunate."

Penny felt her heart give a lurch and the blood seemed to drain from her face.

"Anybody hurt?" she asked.

"I'm afraid so. A very bad business, Miss."

Susy Guggenheim and Lieutenant Lord Abington did not come home to lunch. There were not many saved from the Guards' Chapel.

## IX

FOR eighty days, and then a lull with more to follow, London was under fire again. There were days and nights when the flying bombs came over almost

incessantly with hardly any time between the All Clear and the next Alert. They were doing great damage to rows of little houses in the south-east suburbs with a terrific blast after each explosion which did freakish and frightful things, blowing buses and taxi-cabs across the streets, tearing off doors, shattering whole blocks of flats, cutting down trees in the parks, making strong walls sag and collapse. London streets were strewn with glass. Most of the windows along Piccadilly and other highways were blown in or blown out. Shops which had gone untouched through the great Blitz were now wrecked or damaged, and thousands of houses had empty holes where their windows had been quickly pasted up with cardboard. It was the glass which killed the greatest numbers. More than seventy per cent of the casualties were caused by flying splinters which slashed like knives, cutting people's throats as they lay in bed, cutting their eyes out, cutting their bodies as though by razor-blades.

"We don't mind operations," said the nurses of the London hospitals, "but this is butchery."

The mothers and children who had been evacuated to the country in the time of the great Blitz had streamed back again during the long respite. Now with Government aid and warning they surged out again to other people's houses in other towns, north of the danger-zone in southern England, which was the target of the flying bombs. London was the centre of the target and the big bull's-eye, for these sightless inhuman machines—the V1 dear to Hitler's heart as his last hope of victory. If he could knock out London and destroy its morale he might even yet, he thought, win at least a negotiated peace and save his skin.

He couldn't do it. The morale of the Londoners stood this last ordeal as they had stood the first. They had strangers' eyes watching them—French, Polish, Belgian, Czech, Greek officers and men, and masses of Americans billeted in houses once sacred to the British aristocracy of Victorian days in Grosvenor Square, Cadogan Gardens, and other residential quarters, now shabby and war-battered.

These strangers' eyes watched London under fire and were filled with admiration for the people. They took it again without whining. They didn't like it. Many of them thought it worse than the great Blitz because there was no defence against them when they arrived. The guns did not open fire after that calamity in the Guards' Chapel. Taxi-drivers and bus-drivers were under the menace of death all day, and because of the sound of their own engines could not hear the approach of the abominable Things. But the Londoners carried on as though nothing were happening. Young girls strolled into the parks during lunch-time and sunned themselves without the flicker of an

eyelid if the sirens sounded the wail of the Alert. Along the Serpentine girls in uniform watched American soldiers rowing up and down and exchanged back-chat with them before and after another bang somewhere in South Kensington, or somewhere south of the river.

“These London girls are wonderful,” thought Penny. “It must be some tradition in them, or some pride, or just the courage of youth. . . . I must get my nerve back! I must kill that little devil of fear which bites me now and then. I refuse to be afraid. I just won’t get scared.”

It had been a great shock to her when Susy was killed. It seemed so impossible to believe that this vital life-loving girl should have been blown out of existence. Her clothes were still hanging in the cupboards of the flat. On the bathroom shelf were her face creams and lipsticks. It was lonely without her. It was lonely at night when those Things came over at intervals of ten minutes or thereabouts. Penny started up in bed, listening to their approach, waiting for the explosion, sometimes pulling the bed-clothes over her head, before it happened, to guard herself from glass splinters. Once or twice she dragged her mattress into the little bathroom—which had no window—but it was so hot and airless she couldn’t sleep.

She fought a secret battle with herself. She was scared of being scared. She didn’t like the icy finger of fear which touched her spine now and then when those Things fell near.

“I can’t allow that,” she said to herself several times. “I’m going to be Richard’s wife. I’m marrying into the British Navy. I’ve got to be brave.” Deliberately, when the siren sounded when she was off duty, she went out to walk down one side of Cadogan Gardens where always American soldiers were playing baseball in the road, or leaning against the railings of the houses where they were billeted. They had hung up cans on the railings for cigarette-ends and wads of chewing gum. Through the basement windows, where once smart little maids in caps and aprons had waited on the folk upstairs, groups of soldiers were playing poker before black-out time so that she could see them down there. As she passed some of the lounging men greeted her in a friendly way—a bit too friendly.

“Anything doing tonight, missy? Come to the pictures?”

She shook her head with a smile.

“Nothing doing, buddy. I’m not one of those.”

“Oh, say! No harm meant, you know!”

“No harm done.”

One night, coming from Sloane Square Station—she had met Cynthia in town and had been to a film with her—she heard an American soldier

enquiring the way to the Rose and Crown in Lower Sloane Street. It was very dark and he seemed bewildered by finding himself in London for the first time, as he told somebody near the booking-office.

“It’s a hell of a city! I’m just a country boy. I come from Kentucky.”

“I’ll take you to Lower Sloane Street,” said Penny. “I come from Boston.”

“Say, that’s nice of you. From Boston, eh? Boston, Massachusetts. I’ve been there and I wish I were back there now.”

“Don’t you like England?” asked pro-English Penny.

“It’s a great country,” he said. “I’ll say it is—for a week!”

“Take my arm, buddy,” said Penny. “Don’t bump into the lamp-posts.”

“It’s sure kind of you,” said the boy.

It was pitch dark going down Lower Sloane Street to a block of flats opposite the Rose and Crown. The flats had been taken over by an American unit to which this boy had been posted. He was a tall, loose-limbed young man and rather nervous, she thought, because of this darkness in a great unknown city.

“Stop a minute,” said Penny. “Come into this doorway.”

She heard the now familiar sound of a flying bomb. It was coming in their direction.

“One of those doodlebugs?” asked the boy.

“Yes. It will be O.K. when it passes.”

“Gee!” said the boy. “I’m sure scared.”

He stared upwards into the dark sky. There, very clearly, was a flying bomb with a flame at its tail, coming at terrific speed—with that thumping noise getting loud.

“Holy Mother of God!” said the boy.

He took his hand from her arm and crossed himself.

“I’m sure scared,” he said again.

The engine had cut off. Penny counted, three seconds before the crash came. It was somewhere near Sloane Square, she thought. She could feel the blast of it, like a smack in the face. The young American staggered back and clutched the area railing.

“Thought I was dead!”

“Nothing like it,” said Penny. “Well, it’s over now. If one isn’t dead one’s alive.”

“I’d like to be in Boston, Massachusetts,” said the young man. “Maybe I’d feel safer if I were in Lexington, Kentucky. This European war ain’t no good. I’m fond of cattle and pigs.”

He peered through the darkness at Penny and then gave a kind of laugh.

“Say, you’re terribly brave, lady! You make me feel like a white-livered louse.”

It was curious that she felt very brave. The little devil of fear had not touched her spine with its icy finger, even when the flying bomb had been overhead. It was because of this young soldier who had been so scared. His fear had made her brave. She had wanted to mother him.

“You’ll sure get used to them,” she told him. “One hears them coming.”

They were opposite the Rose and Crown.

“That’s the place you want,” she said. “That big building. It’s stuffed full of American soldiers. I guess they’ll make you feel at home.”

“I guess they won’t!” he answered grimly. “It’s a long way from Kentucky.”

“Well, I’ll leave you now,” said Penny.

He held her hand for a moment and seemed sorry to let it go.

“I’m darned grateful to you, lady. I’m a big boy but I get scared in a city like this. It makes me want my mammy. I’ll say it does. Well, thanks a lot. Maybe we’ll meet again!”

“That would be fine!” answered Penny.

She raised a hand to him and retraced her steps to Cadogan Gardens on the way to Chesham Place.

She didn’t meet him again. She was having breakfast the next morning when there was a heavy, sharp, explosive crash in the direction of Sloane Square.

“No peace!” she said aloud.

She had a long letter from Richard. He was anxious about her.

*I don't like all these doodlebugs flying about you (he wrote). I'm safer at sea, though it has been pretty lively, off and on. I've been having a topping time with the best crew in the British Navy—grand chaps all, and as keen as mustard. We've given Hitler what-for once or twice, but the censor won't let me tell you about it. My only worry is about you. Those infernal machines must be making a great mess in London and I hate the idea of your being in the middle of the bull's-eye.*

She had other letters to read and was reading one when the little waitress came to clear away the breakfast.

“Did you hear that big bomb at eight o’clock?” she asked.

“Yes,” said Penny. “Where did it drop?”

“Opposite the Rose and Crown in Lower Sloane Street,” said the girl. “It did a lot of damage they say. About a hundred American soldiers killed, I’m told by the hall porter. Such nice boys, too—always joking and laughing. It makes me feel quite queer to think of it.”

It made Penny feel ‘quite queer’. She thought about the boy from Kentucky. “Maybe we shall meet again,” he said.

“Poor boys!” she cried. “This war is terrible.”

“Oh well, it won’t be long before it ends,” said the little waitress. “Keep smiling.”

“Aren’t you afraid sometimes?” asked Penny.

The girl laughed.

“No, I can’t say I am. I don’t bother about those Things up top. Too much to do! It keeps one from worrying. Well, I’ll take your tray.”

Penny had a long-distance call from Cynthia.

“Could you put me up for a week or two?” she asked.

“Better not come,” said Penny. “Too many doodlebugs. It’s not amusing.”

“I’ll come if you can have me,” said Cynthia. “We’ve plenty of those Things down here and I’ve sent Tessa away to stay with an aunt. You might like a little company at night. Aren’t you lonely?”

It was kind of Cynthia, she thought. She was glad to have her.

## X

LETTERS began to arrive from Tiny. They were written mostly to Cynthia, but Penny was not forgotten by him.

The letters to Cynthia were very private and self-revealing. She had to skip many passages when she read them out to Penny. He had been in the fighting round Cherbourg and the Brittany peninsula. Later, he had been in one of the columns under General Patton’s command which had gone out into the blue, driving through France, by-passing German strong points,

crossing the Seine, rounding up groups of German prisoners and striking eastwards.

*I have had astonishing experiences (he wrote to Cynthia) and I am not quite the same man as when I left you. They have made some change in my mind and given me a different vision of life and its unfathomable mystery. I have become less egotistical and self-centred. I see now, or think I see, that individual life counts very little in the larger plan by which the destiny of mankind is being worked out. Death is not the great disaster I once thought it was, if it is the price that must be paid for things which give value to life in the long run, such as the freedom of the human soul, and the fine flower of a nation's culture, and the continuity of civilized ideas. Those are things worth dying for, and I have seen the flame of the spirit here in France which has consumed self-interest, burnt up natural desire of the individual ego for self-preservation and led young men and women to face death and torture with utter disregard. "For what?" I asked myself and some of them. The answers varied. One answer was, "For France. . . . Pour la patrie", and that did not seem to me convincing or illuminating. The Nazis give the same answer for holding out in machine-gun nests and strong-points until they are nearly all killed "For the Fatherland". That is only the old patriotism and nationality stuff which is the prime cause of war and is based on stupidity and narrow-mindedness and illusion. For here in Europe it's only an accident that makes one fellow born on one side of a frontier and another fellow born on the other side. If the frontier shifts his nationality is altered. A Hungarian becomes a Czech. A Slovak becomes a Slovene, or something of the kind. A Serb becomes a Croat. (I can't sort out this marmalade of races and nations.) Is he then to fight and die for a fatherland to which he has belonged for six years or so? Humanity will never get on to a reasonable chance of peace so long as the human mind is limited to frontiers and customs barriers and rival jealousies of power and prestige, inflamed by a bunch of crooks on one side or the other. One day I had a talk with a black-bearded, middle-aged Frenchman who had been in the Maquis. He had been captured by the Germans and put to the question . . . . The Gestapo devils beat him to pulp to get the names of his comrades. He wouldn't give them away and they left him for dead in the morgue of his prison, where there was a pile of corpses. He crawled away at night and by some miracle*

*escaped. I met him with a bunch of Maquisards who had ambushed a German tank and a bunch of infantry, thereby preventing the blowing up of a bridge over which I had to go with my bus. He seemed to be the leader though he had to use crutches to get about. He spoke good English, having been French master in an English school, and I had a talk with him and shared my rations with him on the edge of a wood. He had a kind of fire in his eyes, which were very much alight. It was an inner light which shone out of him.*

*“What made you take to the Maquis?” I asked. “I guess you knew that if you were caught it meant death and torture. Did you risk that for a red, white, and blue flag, or for a bunch of crooks called the French Government, or because you hate the Germans?”*

*He thought I was joking, but after a laugh he answered seriously:*

*“I hate the Germans, and perhaps one day France will get a good government, and, in any case, I love France! But I was willing to risk death for something more than that, for something in which I believe. My inner faith.”*

*“Tell me,” I said, “that’s what I want to get at. What’s your faith, friend?”*

*“I am not a good Catholic,” he told me, “but I have a faith which perhaps is good Catholicism. I believe in the spiritual values of life. I believe that we are put into this world with what intelligence we have, or can acquire, in order to take part in the struggle of humanity—some people call it evolution—to rise above the ape man and reach a higher level of consciousness in touch with the Divine Spirit which is revealed to us in goodness and beauty and truth.”*

*“That sounds to me pretty good,” I told him. “But did that Divine Spirit tell you to ambush a German tank and shoot up a lot of German boys?”*

*“Certainly,” he said with great assurance. “The Nazi creed which has enslaved the minds of those German boys is a denial of my faith. It does not believe in beauty or truth or goodness. It seems to undo and destroy the growth and struggle of human intelligence and all the spiritual values for which men have been groping and trying by many agonies to reach. It is a hark back to*



*primitive man—the Neanderthal man, the Ape man. It denies the freedom of the mind. It hates pity and mercy and chivalry and beauty. Therefore, those who support this creed must be killed lest civilization perish. I became one of the killers, though I was once a pacifist and refused military service and went to prison in consequence. I was willing to give my life in defence of this faith. I am alive but I am a cripple. My limbs are crippled but my soul is free!”*

*I have put down his words as close as I can remember them. Sitting there on the edge of the wood in Brittany it was, you will think, a strange conversation. It had a strange effect upon me. I took that fellow's hand and said: “By God, sir, those words of yours have lit a little lamp in my darkness. Thanks a lot. I'm glad I met you!”*

*He was startled, I think. I looked a ruffian with a three days' beard and a steel hat jammed on my head.*

*“I should like to talk with you more,” he said. “It is unusual perhaps to meet an American soldier who is interested in such things, which are somewhat metaphysical.”*

*“Monsieur,” I told him, “you'll never meet another. I'm a lone guy on these battlefields.”*

*I'm sorry I forgot to ask his name. Our column had to move on in support of a bunch of infantry who were being slashed to pieces from a sunken road hidden by tangled hedges. But while I was doing my stuff I thought a lot of what that black-bearded Frenchman had said. Sure he lit a little lamp for me!*

In another letter he described a scene in Cherbourg:

*It was pretty tough going (he wrote). Our American boys had to fight their way through the houses on the outskirts of the city and street by street under a criss-cross of machine-gun and rifle fire. Some of them just went crazy and fought with blood in their eyes, throwing hand-grenades and using their bayonets. My tank nosed its way down a narrow street choked with fallen masonry and burning timbers. Quite a few dead lay about—Americans and Germans. My crew were keyed-up and pretty grim. We sprayed the wrecked buildings and knocked new holes in them, through which our boys went in for close fighting with the Germans, who put up a hell of a struggle. Once we caught a bunch of about fifteen or*

*twenty making a dash for it across the street. We just blew them to bits. It was all impersonal at the time and I felt no kind of pity or horror at this carnage. It was only afterwards, when I climbed out and had a look at things, that I found myself a bit sick and trembling in every limb, not with fear—I was strangely unafraid—but with the drunkenness of intense excitement. Most of the dead lying around had been very young fellows, and among them was one still living—a fair-haired Saxon boy. I spotted him because when I came close he raised himself and threw a hand-grenade at me which missed me by a yard. I wondered if I would plug the little bastard, but I saw that he was pretty badly wounded with blood oozing through his tunic. He looked about eighteen, and I felt kind of sorry for him.*

*I spoke to him in English, not thinking he would understand.*

*“You’re one of Hitler’s little devils,” I said. “Just asking to be killed.”*

*I was surprised when he answered in English:*

*“I wish to be killed. I wish to die for my Führer!”*

*“You’re a damned little fool,” I told him, “that Führer of yours has let you down, laddy. He’s just a crazy madman with blood in his eyes and hell in his heart. German youth—the Hitler Jugend—is flung into this blood-bath because he is a monomaniac with the lust of power!”*

*I don’t think the young fellow understood that—not more than a word here and there.*

*“Heil Hitler!” he cried, and then blood came out of his mouth and he fell back dead.*

*I felt sorry for the kid, though I should have to kill a lot more like him. These boys don’t know any better. It isn’t their fault that they’ve been stuffed with false ideas and false loyalties. Maybe if I had been born in Bonn instead of Boston and duly enrolled in the Hitler Jugend I should have been a fanatical Nazi believing that Hitler was the hero chief of the German tribes, leading their race to its all-powerful destiny. It’s a pretty ghastly thought that a whole generation can have its mind debauched by propaganda and poisonous teaching.*

*But what I want to tell you about is a scene in a cellar, there in Cherbourg. Some of the inhabitants were still alive, in their cellars and some of them crawled up to welcome us, though there was still*

*a lot of shooting. They looked like people who had gone through hell and now saw American doughboys as their avenging angels. A French padre spoke to me in English:*

*“We thank you,” he said. “We thank you from our hearts. God bless you.”*

*“Thanks a lot,” I answered, though I doubt whether God had much to do with this affair of blood and slaughter.*

*“I would like you to come into our cellar,” said the padre. “You will see how we have been living during this siege. You will see the courage and faith of our French people.”*

*I went down with him into a deep cellar below a heap of ruins. I gave my head a bang on the beam over the cellar door and then stopped, and went into a semi-darkness. There were about twenty people down there, mostly women and children, and there was a stench which nearly made me vomit. When they saw me they set up a cry of joy and came crowding about me, weeping and laughing. Women flung their arms about me and I was kissed a hundred times, and had to be rescued by the padre, who was enjoying the scene.*

*“We have had a bad time,” he told me. “We have had no food and very little water. A child was born here to the noise of guns. Two of our old women died. Their bodies lie under those blankets. We could not bury them. We said little prayers and sang songs. God was with us.”*

*I remember reading a story of the catacombs in Rome during the time of Nero’s persecution. I was reminded of it then. Some of these women, the younger ones, had a kind of beauty. Their eyes were luminous in white faces. Somehow I felt that the Spirit of which my black-bearded Frenchman had spoken had given these peasant women courage and faith in this dark, stinking cellar, under the fury and furnace fires of the battle above them. Maybe, I thought, I could find God in a place like this. An odd and freakish thought to come into the mind of a big American buddy with a steel hat on his head and the job of killing on his hands. “I’m going crazy” I thought. We’re all crazy. I took a look at the woman with the new-born babe. She lay there, a little apart from the others, with the child at her breast, and she looked up and smiled at me. She was just a girl with black hair looped over her ears. She was like a painting of the Mother and Child by an Italian*

*primitive. "Well, good luck to you all!" I said, before I went up top into a street of shell-smashed houses littered with dead bodies. The padre came up with me and shook my hand—my filthy hand—and raised it to his lips.*

*"God be with you," he said. "You are a crusader who has come far to save our dear France and to rescue all that is left of civilization in a world where the Devil goes about like a roaring lion devouring all that is fine and beautiful!"*

*It made me feel queer when he kissed my hand—that dirty paw of mine.*

*"I'm not a religious man," I told him. "I find it hard to believe in God. I find it hard when looking at a scene like this."*

*He looked at the dead bodies of those boys and the frightful muck-heap of that street in Cherbourg.*

*"I agree," he said. "It is more easy to believe in the Devil. The Devil has much to do with it. But, in the long run, God will defeat the Devil because goodness and beauty will prevail, and justice will be done, and freedom will be restored to the enslaved peoples. It is the eternal conflict between good and evil. Does not your faith, my dear sir, go as far as that?"*

*He smiled at me with dark eyes in a dirty sallow face like that of a mediæval saint.*

*"Maybe it does," I told him. "Maybe I'm getting as far as that."*

*"I will pray for you," he said. "I will pray for an American giant!"*

*"Thanks a lot," I answered. "Now I must go and do a bit more murdering."*

*It was the night we took Cherbourg.*

Tiny Hambleton's was one of the columns which broke away and went for the joy-ride through France after the British Second Army had smashed the enemy at Caen and Falaise in close, bitter, bloody fighting which in the end destroyed Hitler's best divisions, cut off the Channel ports, trapped hundreds of thousands of German soldiers whose efforts to retreat were turned into a massacre by British and American bombers. Hitler, and Rommel under his orders, had chosen to throw all they had into this battle, instead of pulling out in time. He had put in his crack divisions of Panzers, brought up his S.S. divisions, flung them into counter-attacks with the grim

desperate purpose to break through at Avranches and cut through to the Channel coast, isolating and destroying the British Army. It was a gambler's chance. There were anxious days for the British High Command. The ardent Montgomery kept his nerve and knew that if his men could hold out, the doom of Germany was certain. If they could hold out, Patton's armoured columns could break away for the long chase and the *coup de grâce*. If they could hold out. . . . They held out doggedly in spite of heavy losses and many dead. They held and pressed on, smashing each counter-attack and gaining ground yard by yard. Fortresses, Lancasters, Typhoons, every type of bombing aircraft flew over the German lines by day and night like swarms of gnats on a summer eve. They sent down their splinter-bombs on German troop formations, slashing them with steel scythes. They caught German columns in the roads and left miles of wreckage and burning trucks and ammunition wagons blown to bits. They swept low over woods in which tanks and men were hiding and set them on fire. They reached out to assembly groups far behind the lines and broke the German lines of communication so that reinforcements could not move along any road or rail until darkness came; and with darkness came ceaseless flights of bombers searching for their bodies and their guns and their supply columns.

Tiny wrote about all that to Cynthia.

*The British are taking it (he wrote). They're doing the tough stuff just now. They have the dirty end of the stick. They're giving the Germans hell on earth. When they've done the job we shall have an easy way through with very little to stop us until we reach the Rhine.*

He was away with his armoured columns. It was some weeks later before he wrote again.

*All this lately has been astounding, and, in a way, exhilarating. I have been, as it were, outside myself, unconscious for long spells of my own Ego, and caught up in a flame of emotional experience beyond ordinary life—though I suppose as a playwright I have been more carried away by its tremendous drama than other fellows who take it more stolidly. We have been liberating the people of France, and it has been impossible not to be uplifted and swept off one's feet by this pageant of human joy and ecstasy for hundreds of miles. In every small town and all the villages of France along our drive—dilapidated old fairy-tale villages with the reek of manure heaps and pigs in their courtyards and*

*farmsteads—the inhabitants have come rushing out to us, screaming, laughing, weeping, waving little flags, holding out fruit and flowers. There were old men and women, sunburnt and wrinkled, and young girls with their eyes afire, just crazy with joy, and young men, lean and hungry-looking, who had been hiding from the Germans. They wore berets and arm-bands and bits of uniform and each man had a rifle slung across his shoulder. I have come to know them as the F.F.I., the French Forces of the Interior. They are the fellows who took to the Maquis—or the bush as we should say—fighting a guerilla war, without mercy on either side against the Germans and the Vichy militia whom they hate worse than the Germans. They have been darned useful to us, giving us the whereabouts of the enemy, rounding up Germans in woods and quarries, ambushing men on their retreat, cutting the lines of escape. Grim lads, they look, trappers of men, leading a hunted life themselves. Now it is their time for revenge, and, believe me, they have no pity on the Boches or on those who have collaborated with the Boches, though they keep a certain amount of discipline, and obey their leaders.*

*The girls fling themselves at us, throw their arms round our necks, kiss our dirty, dust-smothered faces. In every town it is the same, day after day. The Germans have quitted some of these places only half an hour before we swung into the Grand Place. In some towns they were still there, sniping at us from windows, but not checking the exuberance of our welcome from young women and boys and children who ignored those bullets as though they had been raindrops, and laughed when we fired at the snipers and turned our guns on to the Mairie or the village school in which they were making a suicide stand. We by-passed German strong-points in the open countryside, leaving the F.F.I. or our own infantry, coming along behind, to deal with the situation. We just drove on through the days and nights until we ached in every limb, and until our eyes sank into our heads for lack of sleep.*

In one letter written to Cynthia, Tiny described the prisoners captured by his armoured column in the Cherbourg peninsular and afterwards in his drive through France. He had a queer feeling, he wrote, when he saw these German soldiers and spoke to some of them. There were always a few who could speak English. Theoretically he hated them. He had read the atrocity stories in the English papers and they had made his blood curdle with horror.

For humanity's sake and the decency of the human animal he had hoped that some of them were false, but he was bound to believe others and he had heard vile things from the French people here and there, though on the whole the Germans had behaved not too villainously in Brittany. But when he came face to face with the prisoners, when he saw those herds of dirty, exhausted, shell-shocked men who, after capture or surrender, just flung themselves on the ground, sleeping in a kind of stupor, until they staggered up to be marched off to the cages, something like sympathy and pity stirred in him. Those poor devils, he thought, have been through hell, just the same as many of us. We're all in this hell together. Perhaps they had just as little to do with the origin of the war as Chicago salesmen and Kentucky farm boys and Texas ranchers and garage hands in New York. They were lagged by Hitler. He guessed they didn't want to fight for world domination—but they fought for their own country, couldn't help themselves, anyhow, as every mother's son fights for his fatherland. My country right or wrong. There they were, half-stunned by our bombing and shelling, afraid they would be killed if they surrendered, poor frightened bastards—except the young swine of seventeen or eighteen, who were like young tiger cubs and spat out abuse when they were being looked after in hospital.

Tiny had a talk with one officer who spoke English remarkably well with what Tiny thought was the 'Oxford' accent. He had surrendered with eighty men from a fort upon which the Americans had turned their guns and then their flame-throwers. He had been wounded and his head and right hand were tied up with bloody rags. He looked deadly pale, but saluted stiffly when Tiny went towards him.

"Your men put up a good fight," said Tiny.

A flicker of light came into the dead-looking eyes of the German officer.

"It is good of you to say so," he answered.

"It is also true. There are many dead and wounded."

Tiny offered him a cigarette, but he refused with a word of thanks.

"What are you fighting for?" asked Tiny. "Do you still believe in Hitler?"

The officer hesitated for a moment and then shrugged his shoulders.

"He has made many mistakes. We cannot fight on two fronts. We have lost too many men, especially in Russia."

"Now all the occupied countries are rising against you," said Tiny.

The officer, who was a young, good-looking man, smiled faintly.

"They do not love us."

“Didn’t you do your best to make them hate you?” said Tiny. “Your Gestapo do not treat them with loving-kindness. Why do you tolerate these degenerates? Why have you done things which make the name of Germany a moral stench in the world?”

The young German officer was already pale and turned paler.

“Those are terrible words,” he said, “and I am your prisoner.”

“Maybe I ought not to have said them,” answered Tiny. “I don’t want to insult you, but I’m telling you God’s own truth. It’s good for both of us.”

The young German raised his hands slightly. One was tied up in a bandage.

“The German Army has nothing to do with the Gestapo,” he said. “We know nothing of their methods. We are soldiers and not policemen or jailers. We do not like the Gestapo.”

“Glad to hear it,” said Tiny; “but haven’t the German armies fought without any touch of humanity and with ruthless cruelty?”

“Total war is ruthless,” said the young officer. “All war is merciless. Your bombing of German cities is not beautiful for our women and children. But I do not argue with you, sir. Germany is beaten. We shall have to suffer the price of defeat. But there will be a Third World War, and next time we shall win. It is our Destiny!”

“Laddy,” said Tiny, putting a big hand on the young German’s shoulder, “there will be no next time. We’re going to take care of that.”

“You cannot kill eighty million people,” said the officer. “You cannot keep us down for ever!”

He saluted again stiffly and walked away.

I pushed on in the old bus through more villages and more towns where the people yelled at us, and kissed us, and offered us good French wine long hidden in their cellars. One sentence spoken by that German officer kept nagging in my mind. ‘There will be a third world war.’ If that happens, I thought, then this war, like the last, will have been just wasted with no sense in it. Are we going to be such fools as to let it happen? In that case humanity ought to be wiped out, for it has no sense and will learn nothing, not even from the piles of dead which were its youth, not even from the bombing of its women and children, not even from the certain destruction of civilization by the machines it has invented.

The most thrilling letter written by Tiny at this time was addressed to Penny, and it arrived when Cynthia was staying with her. She read it out and



before the end of it gave a cry of amazement, and at the end of it wept.

It began by describing his adventures with his armoured column on the way towards the German frontier. Most of the way was a picnic, he wrote, but there had been some fighting here and there, and they passed through towns just captured by the Maquisards who had risen against the Germans in these districts and were hunting them down in the woods and farmsteads where they had gone into hiding. Some of them put up a fight and died to the last man or boy. There was no quarter for those. Other groups surrendered with terror in their eyes, because they believed they would be killed by these fierce fellows of the Maquis, who once had been in hiding from them.

*I saw some grim incidents (wrote Tiny). Some of them made me turn sick because I hate to see the torture of human beings, and especially of women—whatever their sins may have been. In several villages through which we passed the Maquisards were dealing with women and girls who were accused of collaborating with the enemy. I heard their shrieks when they were seized by young men of the Maquis and had their hair cut off while their neighbours laughed and jeered and hissed. Some of them were respectable-looking women of middle age. One was quite an old woman with white hair. One was a pretty young girl who was mad with terror. I spoke in my bad French to some of the people standing by when she was dragged into the market-place.*

*“What has she done?” I asked. “That young woman.”*

*A middle-aged woman answered me.*

*“It is Yvonne Meunier. She came from Tours with a baby. The father of the baby was a young Boche. He was billeted with her for some time. She used to meet him at night. Now she will be punished, like all these vile women who gave themselves to the Germans. I shall laugh when I see her head shaved!”*

*The girl was being dragged towards a cart. She struggled fiercely like a young animal and her eyes were wild with fear and rage. Two men on the cart dragged her up so that she could be seen by the crowd.*

*One of them had a long pair of scissors which he kept snipping while the others tried to hold her down.*

*“Cut off her hair!” shouted the crowd.*

*“Coupez! . . . Coupez! . . . Coupez!”*

*It was then that I felt sick. It was horrible to see that poor child. What was her crime? Perhaps that young German, who was the father of her baby, had been in love with her. Perhaps he had been a decent fellow, in exile from his own home, attracted by this pretty French girl. They were two human beings—weren't they?—a boy and a girl, suddenly caught by the irresistible passion of youth, beyond the difference of frontiers or race or war. These young Maquisards denounce the sadistic cruelty of the Germans, but here is sadistic cruelty and utter lack of pity and imagination. I had an idea of interfering. I spoke to one of my crew—Spike Johnson.*

*“Johnny,” I said, “I’d be glad to save that kid. I don’t like it.”*

*“It’s a dirty business,” he said, “and that girl is darned pretty. But, maybe, we shouldn’t interfere. It’s none of our business, skipper.”*

*I strode forward towards the cart, but something else was happening. A tall fellow—one of the Maquisards—was making his way through the crowd below the cart. He spoke to them in a stern voice and the man with the scissors held them poised over the girl’s head. Suddenly she shrieked out:*

*“Monsieur Edouard!”*

*She cried out to this tall fellow to save her. I could make that out.*

*He climbed up on to the cart and the girl flung her arms about him and clung to him. He spoke to the crowd again and they all began talking excitedly and arguing with him. I stared at him. I thought to myself, I know that face. I’ve seen that guy somewhere before. He had a long, lean face and sunken eyes. He looked emaciated and haggard and ill. There was a fringe of beard round his face. One of his arms was in a sling, as though he had been wounded.*

*“Good God!” I thought. “Good God!”*

*It was Edward. I was dead sure of it. For weeks I’d had the idea that I might come across him somewhere in France. I had kept a look-out for him in the towns and villages. Now at last I had found him.*

*I shouted to him:*

*“Edward! For the love of Mike!”*

*The crowd made way for me and I clambered up on to the cart where Edward was standing with that young girl clinging to him.*

*He stared at me out of his sunken eyes. I had my steel hat on. I hadn't shaved for three days. My face was plastered with the dust of French roads. He spoke in a dazed way:*

*"Is that Tiny? It's incredible!"*

*His sick-looking face—he looked darned ill—creased into a kind of smile. A new light jumped into his eyes, and then suddenly they became wet and he flung one arm round me and kissed me on the cheek.*

*I must say I was thrilled by this meeting. I laughed and kept shouting idiotic things, and thumping him on the shoulder.*

*"Darn me if this isn't the grandest thing that's happened yet! Jeepers creepers! If this doesn't beat the band!"*

*Down below, the village crowd were astonished and excited by this affectionate demonstration between a leader of the Maquis—because that's what he was—and an American tank officer.*

*He spoke to them in French. He told them that I was his brother and that the Good God had brought us together on this day of liberation. He asked them not to spoil it by cutting off the hair of this young girl, whom he had known as a child. He asked for their pardon of her because of this joyful day and this miracle which had happened to him.*

*The crowd cheered. They stormed the cart to shake hands with me.*

*Old men and women kissed my dirty face. The young Maquisards thumped me on the back. The girl who was going to have her hair cut off was forgotten in this new excitement and lay sobbing on the cart until Edward raised her and took her down and whispered a few words to her before she went away with a woman who seemed kind to her.*

*Then Edward turned to me and smiled.*

*"We've lots to tell each other," he said. "Is it a thousand years since we were together in Lakeside Farm by the waters of the Assawampsett?"*

*"How's your wife?" I asked. I felt very emotional at meeting Edward. I felt kind of shy. But I remembered he had been married to a girl called Lucile.*

*He turned to me with a tragic look.*

*“Lucile is dead,” he said. “They killed her. I am alone!”*

*“I’m sorry,” I told him. I couldn’t think of anything else to say.*

*We talked half-way through the night in a little old inn of France crowded with the men of our armoured column and Maquisards and villagers. They gave us free wine and free coffee. Out in the village street people were marching up and down, cheering, and singing the Marseillaise. Inside, some of our kids were drinking too much wine, and singing American songs, and clinking glasses with men of the Maquis.*

*We had orders to move on at dawn. But before dawn came, Edward and I, sitting apart from the others behind the stove, talked about everything.*

*It was that one-legged laddy, Kit Hardy as Edward called him, who first heard of Lucile’s death. He and the Frenchman who had been working with the F.F.I. in Amiens, where they were near the women’s concentration camp. Both of them were desperate to rescue the women they loved in that grim-looking prison with its high, blank walls. They had suffered agony when they had first heard of the arrests. It was one night, more than a year ago now, when they had landed with their aeroplane in the neighbourhood of Grancourt Notre Dame. They had made their way to the old barn and had found it deserted. They had crept round to the house and found it shuttered and barred. It seemed to be empty and abandoned, but they dared not knock or make a noise. Then they had gone round to Gaston’s cottage, who was trustworthy; he was terrified when he saw them. “They are waiting for you,” he said. “This place is being watched by men of the Gestapo. They think you will come back.”*

*He told them the tragic tale of the arrests, and both Hardy and Armand de Rollencourt heard it like men who had received mortal wounds. It was Hardy who was most stricken, as Edward heard afterwards from Gaston who came to join him. Hardy wept, with his head in his hands. He had come back to Grancourt Notre Dame with joy at the thought of seeing Madeleine again. Now she was gone. They had taken her to one of those camps where many women died and many went mad.*

*It was from Gaston that they learnt the whereabouts of Edward and the name by which he went—François de Passy. They found*

him in Rouen where he was staying in disguise, though not for long, as he moved about frequently and was often in Paris, Lyons, Grenoble, and Marseilles. It was through him and his fellow-agents that de Gaulle kept in touch with the F.F.I., and arranged reception places for arms dropped by men like de Rollencourt and Kit Hardy. It is a strange and romantic story which seems fantastic, though one knows now that at the right time the men of the Maquis were very helpful and efficient.

Round about Amiens—where the underground movement was strong—Hardy and the Frenchman worked secretly to get access to the prison by bribing a German sentry who was in love with a French girl. She was working for the Maquisards. They smuggled in letters to Madame de Rollencourt and Madeleine. Mademoiselle Duchesne had gone mad. Lucile was dead. They had put her under the third degree—those Gestapo devils. They had tortured her, mentally if not physically. She had stood up to it and her spirit was unbroken, but her health failed. Insanitary conditions, a cold winter without warmth, the persecution of the Gestapo had been too much for her and she died one night with Edward's name on her lips. Some of the women tiptoed to see her dead body.

“She looked beautiful in death and like a saint,” they said. Even the prison warders were touched and did not push away Madame de Rollencourt and Madeleine from the cell in which Lucile lay that night, before she was buried in the cemetery outside the prison.

It was through the German sentry and a warder inside that Hardy kept in touch with Madeleine. One day he told her in a note that she and Madame de Rollencourt would find their cells unlocked. At five o'clock in the morning, just before dawn, they must creep down by the iron staircase outside their cells which led to the prison yard. Armand and Hardy would be there waiting for them with a ladder long enough to scale the high walls. If they heard any sound they must not cry out but keep close into the darkness behind the wall.

They heard a sound. It was not a pleasant one. It was the sound of a man being strangled before he had time to fire his rifle. Two other sentries were being dealt with by men of the Maquis, who moved and worked silently.

*Hardy held the ladder for Madeleine and had his arm about her. Armand looked after his mother. Down below the wall, on the free side, were several men and women with cloaks which they wrapped round the two prisoners. They had to walk into Amiens and right down the long street called the rue des Trois Cailloux—the Street of the Three Pebbles. A German soldier outside the Hôtel du Rhin glanced at them curiously but gave no trouble. They looked like peasants on their way to work as forced labourers. Their papers showed them to be that. All that had been arranged. They took a workmen's train to Arras and three days later a train from Arras to Doullens. Thence, in stages which took several weeks, Madame de Rollencourt and Madeleine reached the line between the two zones and crossed into unoccupied France. It was in Avignon that they met Edward at last. He embraced them and said: "Where is Lucile?"*

*For several months he had been out of touch with his two friends and hadn't heard about the escape.*

*"Where is Lucile?" he asked. "Why is she not with you?"*

*Madame de Rollencourt wept in his arms.*

*"Lucile is dead," she told him.*

*"In that moment," said Edward, "I died too. It was as though my soul had been killed. For many months I lived only for hatred and vengeance. The Germans had killed my beautiful Lucile. All I wanted to do was to kill Germans. It was then that I took to the Maquis in the mountains of Haute Savoie. It took me some time to get back to sanity after being half-crazy. I seemed to get into touch with Lucile again. Her spirit came very close to me. The flame of hatred which had burnt me up died down and I knew that Lucile did not want me to be bloody-minded with only vengeance and murder as my guiding principles. For Lucile's sake I had to get out of that black pit."*

*Edward's life in the Maquis—it means bush or the scrub—must have been pretty wild and tough. He joined a group which contained many different types. One of his comrades was a professor from the Lycée in Avignon, middle-aged, bald, wearing pince-nez, and with a chronic cough. He talked to Edward about history and archaeology. He was a real scholar but with a burning patriotism which made him abandon his home life—he had a wife and children—and take to this rough life in the mountains where*

*there was no shelter but a cave or a dug-out and very little food at times and always the risk of capture by Germans or the Vichy militia who hunted them down like wild beasts. There was no quarter on either side. If they were taken they were shot. If they captured Germans they shot them there and then. A line of German boys was put up against the wall of a quarry and the Maquisards formed a firing squad with rifles or shot-guns. The German boys died gamely, giving the Nazi salute and shouting 'Heil Hitler!' before they fell.*

*The Maquisards were not always popular with the French inhabitants of the villages. Those peasants of Haute Savoie begrudged giving them food or shelter. It led to trouble for themselves—possibly death as hostages. Nor did they look favourably upon night raids by bands of famished men. They were terrified when they found the body of a Vichy militia-man or a German soldier lying in a ditch or farmyard after shots which startled them in their sleep.*

*"The Maquisards were not all angels," said Edward. "Some of them were young devils, who liked a lawless way of life with a bit of killing and a bit of loot." There were apache types from Paris in Edward's group, cunning, vicious, degenerate. Others were young peasants of good stock, hardy, at home in the mountains, and very brave. Others had escaped to the Maquis to avoid being sent into Germany as slave labourers. There were several university students of eighteen and nineteen, high-minded, gay, and debonair. One of them was a poet who wrote pretty good stuff which he passed over to Edward. He was beaten to death one day when he was caught by the Vichy militia. Apart from raids, ambushes, and executions, it wasn't a bad life in spring and summer, but Edward sickened of it because the worst types in his group dragged it all down by their filthy language and vicious habits. He lost a good friend when the professor died of pneumonia. He decided to quit when he came out of the black pit, as he called it, and had a vision of something better than blind hatred and killing.*

*A letter reached him from François Doumergue in Tours. It was a call back to bigger and better work. "We need you," wrote Doumergue. "The time of liberation is near. We want you as a liaison officer between the F.F.I. and the American armies who will soon be here. I will meet you in Avignon a month from the date of this letter. Do not fail me, my dear friend."*

*It was then that Edward left the Maquis, and on the 6th of June heard the news that the Allied Armies had invaded the coast of Normandy and were striking down to Caen.*

*Edward told me (wrote Tiny) that he had almost forgotten that he was an American. "My mind is French," he said. "My soul is French. These people here are my people, because of Lucile. I have worked and fought for this day of liberation. Today I feel close to Lucile. Her spirit will rejoice, for she died that this might happen."*

*Every time he spoke of Lucile his voice softened and sometimes broke. I could see that he was haunted by his love for her. I could see that he felt very close to her though she was dead.*

*"You believe in survival after death?" I asked him.*

*"I know it," he said, looking into my eyes. "Lucile comes to meet me."*

*I told him I had no faith in that. I told him about my search for some spiritual meaning of life which might lead me to belief in a Divine Mind and Purpose.*

*"God?" he asked.*

*"I guess that's the name for it!"*

*"Lucile was a Catholic," he told me. "She had wonderful faith beyond any kind of doubt. It gave her a martyr's courage."*

*"And you, Ted," I asked. "What do you believe?"*

*"I believe in Christ," he said.*

*"Ted," I said, "you look like Christ, with that beard and those luminous eyes. You have a Christ-like face, old lad!"*

*Maybe I ought not to have told him that, but we were talking with dead honesty that night, and I just blurted it out to his great confusion for a moment.*

*"I'm sorry you said that," he told me. "It isn't true, anyhow. I look like a bandit—which is what I am!"*

*"You look like a man who has been crucified," I told him.*

*He had been crucified by his sufferings and agony in the Maquis for his wife Lucile.*

*That night (wrote Tiny) we talked about you, Penny, and I told him about Cynthia. As we talked fellows came over to us, offering us wine and clapping me on the back and getting noisy. They thought a lot of Edward. They told me that he had been a fine*



*leader with a courage that never failed. He had taken great risks for France. The younger men worshipped him. He was sans peur et sans reproche.*

*I had to leave him just before the dawn. He came out and stood by my tank and we talked again for a few minutes.*

*“It’s grand,” he said, “to think that the Americans have come over in strength to liberate Europe. This is our heroic age. This has been our destiny. I knew we should be in before the end. We must help in shaping a better kind of world. Thanks a lot, Tiny. You’re part of the Divine Plan.”*

*“That’s a great thought,” I told him with a laugh. “It makes me feel good. It lifts me up a bit.”*

*We said other things which I won’t write down. They were pretty private—one soul to another, without camouflage. We talked in the dark, until dawn came with a pale light over the old chimney-stacks and ancient roofs.*

*Ted put his arm round me and kissed my cheek again as when we had first met.*

*“Good luck to you, Tiny!” he said. “You’ll find what you want at journey’s end. We’ll meet again in this world, or the next!”*

*“By God, I hope so, Ted,” I answered. “And since I’ve seen you again I’m inclined to believe it. You’re not in this world now. You’re just a disembodied spirit.”*

*So I left him with his tragic face and an inner light which shone from him, and a kind of nobility which I had not known in him when he was my kid brother. I felt proud of him somehow. I felt I had been in the presence of a man who had become fine and strong and wise by suffering and the agony of the soul. One day I’ll be glad to meet him again in this dream or the next. . . .*

*Well, here’s my love, Penny, old dear!*

## XI

CYNTHIA had to leave out many passages from those letters when she read them out to Penny. They were the bits which she read many times to herself, sometimes with tears. Not once did he mention that foolish ‘hunch’ he had had that he was going to be killed and she hoped that it no longer haunted

him. Yet in those letters he wrote, here and there, as though he would never see her again, not in so many words but with a passionate regret that his love for her had been unfulfilled. She had held him at arm's length too long, he wrote. He was sorry that they had not married in Massachusetts when she was living in that lonely cottage and when he suffered agony because she was hostile to what she called his sentimentality. He was a sentimental cuss—that is to say, he loved her with a faithful heart, as the only woman in the world with whom he could go hand-in-hand along the road in perfect comradeship. There had never been any need of words between them. He was happy in their silences. He loved her utter sincerity of mind, and her downright way of speech, and the gipsy in her—that wild nymph way with her.

In those long evenings in the cottage when he had lain at full length stretched before the fire, or in an old chair with his long legs stuck out, he had had his best hours of life, except when sometimes he became angry and morose because she would not let him hold her in his arms. Now all that was just a memory. Out there in the war it seemed like a different life and a different world. The other one—in Massachusetts and afterwards in England when he had stayed with her and played with Tessa and sat on the roots of the old oak looking over the English countryside—all that was like a dream which had gone. There he was with a steel helmet on his head at the wheel of his tank getting used to the look of dead men, and lousy prisoners, and the sound of gunfire, and the filth and litter of war, and the cheers of French peasants, and tales of tragedy at every halt on the wayside, and in every farmhouse where they stopped for a drink. But all the time throughout this exciting adventure, this amazing experience, the other dream was in his mind like an old song running through his head.

*I see you, my dear (he wrote), as I drive my bus down the long straight roads of France. I raise my glass to you when I drink sour French wine which these liberated people offer to us when we halt in their market-places. I see the frank, straight look of your eyes when mine are smarting with dust and I hold your dream body in my arms when I go to sleep like a dead man on a patch of grass by the roadside. So you see I think of you always, or very often, even in this charivari of war. I am, dear heart of mine, your very faithful lover.*

But there was never a word about the future. He did not look forward to peace. Never once did he write any day-dreams about the time when, after the war, they might live together. He wrote like a man who has gone away

for ever and looks back upon the past with a tenderness of memory and emotional regret for much that had been missed.

Cynthia thought of him all the time. Every bit of war news on the wireless or in the papers was linked up with him. The arrows on the map pointed to where Tiny might be. She knew that he was with an armoured force striking every day farther into the heart of France and nearer to Germany. They were fighting round Trier. They were at last on the German frontier. They had driven through Eupen and Malmedy. With luck they would soon be well into the Reich.

Things were going marvellously. One by one the Channel ports were being captured with masses of prisoners. The British Second Army, after its tough, close, bloody fighting, had gone into the open with incredible speed—beating even the American record—had struck north through Belgium. Brussels was liberated. British troops went on to the canal country round Antwerp. German armies were cut off with no way of retreat. The end of the war seemed to be in sight. London and southern England were almost free from flying bombs. The black-out was being relaxed. Evacuees were pouring back. The war might be over in a few months, even a few weeks, if all went well.

“If Tiny can only stick it out a few weeks more,” thought Cynthia, “that hunch of his will be disproved—that silly hunch of his which made me so angry with him.”

She found herself saying queer little prayers, though she was not much good at that.

“Dear God, keep an eye on Tiny. . . . Dear God, don’t let Tiny be killed. . . . Dear God, guard my big American lover.”

She went down on her knees by her bedside and then argued with herself even with her face in her hands.

“Why should God look after Tiny more than after all the boys who are being killed? It’s ridiculous to believe that God saves this one and lets the other die—the only sons of their mothers, like David and Michael, and Rupert and Anthony, and other boys I knew. He didn’t save them, poor kids. Why should I expect miracles for Tiny?”

She altered her form of prayer.

“Dear God, end this war quickly so that all the boys may be spared.” But many times again she found herself putting in a special plea for Tiny Hambleton of the American Army.

She had a letter written from him she guessed in the neighbourhood of Trier. He wrote of being near a German city which, according to a book he

had read, was very Roman in its make-up. There were the remains of a colosseum and a big Roman archway called the *Porte Nigra*, and the first Christian church built in Germany by the Emperor Constantine and looking so new—he had seen it through his field-glasses—that it might have been built at the time of the Grand Central Station, New York.

*It's strange (he wrote) to be looking into Germany. I think of what must be happening in there in the German towns and villages with our armies on the frontier, getting ready to smash through, and with our fleets of bombers overhead dropping death on them. They were sending their youngsters—even young girls—to build a new trench line against us. They must know the game is up. They must know that Goebbels is a liar, and that Hitler has betrayed them. They must be filled with terror and despair.*

*Many women inside there must have lost their only sons, or two, three, and four sons, because of Hitler's gamble for world power. All their sacrifice and all their agony, and all their tears have just been wasted. They have only themselves to blame, maybe—and maybe not! How could they resist the spell-binding stuff poured into their ears? How could they go against the thugs on top? What did these German peasants and farm boys know about the rights and wrongs of things, or, if they knew, could face the headsman's axe, or the firing squad unless they had the courage of martyrs? Some of them did, I guess. The concentration camps are full, I hear. Many have been executed. Anyhow, staring into Germany through a pair of glasses, I don't find myself stirred by rage or hate. I don't want them all to be massacred, though I'm all for shooting the atrocity merchants and the leading thugs. I'm sorry for those people. I have a kind of pity for them. I know darned well that even in the United States the mass of poor boobs have no control over their own destiny and are quite unable to stand aloof from political slogans, almighty boloney, the tidal wave of newspaper propaganda, the widespread rumour, the whispered lie, the slanders and faked facts poured out by the political bosses or the newspaper combine. Think of what happens during a Presidential election! So these Germans, the ordinary folk, have been powerless under Hitler—powerless to see the truth, powerless to resist his orders, powerless to save the lives of their own sons, or to do anything about it. Maybe they're more primitive and more brutal than most others. Is that their fault?*

*Latin civilization didn't penetrate their dark forests for a long time or at all. They can't be blamed for that. In any case I have a surging up of loathing for all war, and a sense of pity deep-rooted in my mind for all its victims. It is the worst form of unintelligence. It is the worst horror which humanity inflicts upon itself. That is not inconsistent, I think, with another side of my mind—the hope of a quick victory, the exaltation of being one soldier in these armies of liberation. I am willing to die for that. For the sake of a future generation of boys who may escape this man-trap of war and may have enough intelligence to thrust it away into the discard of uncivilized things, I am willing to face death at journey's end. It's an odd thing, dear heart, but I am not afraid of death and I believe—I think I believe—that I am getting near to a faith in the future life. If you like to put it that way I believe—or think I believe—in a Divine Consciousness of which the human mind is part.*

*I have been outside myself now and then. I have left my big clumsy body. And my talk with Ted has made a change in me. He seemed to me Christ-like. I told you that. He spoke some words which had a profound effect upon me. Something he said about journey's end. He told me I should find there the truth for which I have been groping. I haven't reached journey's end yet, but I have an idea that Edward is right. There may be the ultimate revelation for me somewhere beyond the German frontier. I may find God—that's a queer thought—in Germany!*

Towards the end of September, when Cynthia was home again in Cranleigh, Penny came to stay for a few days with her. London was almost free from bombing. Only a few pick-a-back planes—old Heinkels—crossed the Channel, to drop high explosives before they were shot down. Another secret weapon—one of Hitler's new toys—was being tried out according to rumour. People in Chiswick and places in Essex heard heavy explosions which were unlike the noise made by flying bombs, and made no sound before they crashed, causing enormous craters, but with very little blast above ground. It was, they believed, a rocket bomb, but only a few arrived at that time and most of them fell in wild and open places.

In the lanes and fields of Cranleigh and on the heath above the village, there was a sense of peace except when bombing planes filled the sky with the noisy vibration of their engines. The heavy foliage of a sunless summer was beginning to turn into russet and gold. In the gardens leaves were falling

on the lawns. In the hedges the blackberries were ripening and the first faint mists of autumn were creeping up to the little hills after rainy days.

Cynthia's quick eyes noticed a change in Penny. She looked a little worn and nervy.

"Have the doodlebugs got you down?" asked Cynthia.

Penny smiled and shook her head.

"They sure didn't, lady, but I can't say I liked them, and when they killed Susy Guggenheim I must say I had a big shock. But I don't hear from Richard and that's worrying me more than buzz bombs. And a lot of American boys I know are being killed in France. I see their names in the *New York Times*. The casualty lists are terrible."

"Perhaps this war is hardest on women," said Cynthia. "Here we stay with fear nagging at us because of our men out there. I'm worried about Tiny. Every young wife in this village, which is crowded with young wives, goes to bed at night wondering if she is already widowed. And it doesn't look too good at Arnhem."

It didn't look too good at Arnhem, after high hopes and a stupendous adventure when the sky was crowded with airborne troops and when over the wireless came the news of their perfect landing in Holland. Now several days had passed and still the Second Army had failed to link up with them from Nijmegen. Something had gone wrong. The weather had gone bad on them. The Germans, whom we believed to be beaten and in their last ditches, were fighting hard and ferociously to prevent our Rhine crossings and the turning of the Siegfried Line. Our men were being plastered from all sides. The Germans claimed that they had already captured two thousand five hundred of our men and were shooting up the rest.

That night when Penny arrived the full story of Arnhem was told over the wireless by two men who had just returned. It was an heroic and pitiful tale of human courage strained to the utmost test, and of human bodies smashed and slashed by every murderous weapon before the last survivors were given orders to retreat and trudged back through the darkness in single line holding on to each other's capes. They were wet, hungry, exhausted, and still under fire as they waited by the river bank for little boats to ferry them across.

Penny wept when she listened to this story.

"Those glorious men!" she cried. "I would go down on my knees to any one of them and kiss his muddy boots!"

Cynthia gave a long-drawn sigh.

“The courage of men is marvellous,” she said. “There’s something Divine in heroism and self-sacrifice. But aren’t the Germans just as brave, though we call them fanatical and desperate when they make their last stands in the Channel ports and other places? They’ve had a hundred Arnheims, and I dare say German women have wept for their sons and lovers.”

“Let them weep,” said Penny. “I’ve no pity for them!”

“Tiny pities them,” said Cynthia. “He can’t bring himself to hate them all.”

“Oh, Tiny is crazy!” cried Penny.

Cynthia smiled for a moment.

“It’s a noble kind of craziness. Perhaps he’s more Christian than the Christians. He reminds me of a character in Chaucer—‘a very parfit gentil knight’.”

“Who’s Chaucer?” asked Penny, who was a modernist.

Then she asked another question:

“Is Tiny converting you to his crazy ideas?”

Cynthia smiled again.

“They’re not so crazy as all that, unless it’s crazy to hate war, and cruelty, and the old ape in man. He’s willing to lose his own life if he can save another generation from this kind of thing.”

She looked over at Penny, who was sitting by a little fire—it was getting chilly in the evenings—with her frock tucked above her knees.

“Penny,” she said, “did Tiny ever tell you about a hunch he had?”

Penny nodded.

“Once. He has a hunch that he’s going to get killed. It’s only one of his crazy notions. But I wish he hadn’t said it. I’m terribly fond of Tiny. If anything happened to him I should cry my heart out.”

Cynthia didn’t tell Penny that if anything happened to Tiny her heart would go dead. She didn’t tell Penny that she had had a hard struggle as far back as her time in Massachusetts to keep him at arm’s length because of her loyalty to a dead husband. She had been tempted by this tall young man who had come into her cottage and tried to make love to her. She had loved him for his kindness, for his grumpiness, for his sense of humour, for his big strong gentleness, for his comradeship. She had been frightened, sometimes, because of the passion in his eyes. Unless she had kept a tight hold on herself she would have yielded and been glad to yield. Now she had promised to marry him and all her life and everything that life would mean

to her with his love about her was hanging by a thread—the thin thread of fate between life and death in time of war.

“I’m hoping Richard will be back for Christmas,” said Penny. “The war ought to be over by then. Maybe we shan’t have to wait so long as that. I give it until the end of October.”

Cynthia was doubtful about that. The Arnhem episode, she thought, had spoiled the time-table.

“I think we ought to go and cook up a bit of supper,” said Cynthia. “Nothing but sausages, I fear! I’ll fry some potatoes.”

“Fine idea,” said Penny. “I’ll give you a helping hand. But there’s a tinkle on the telephone. Shall I answer it?”

“I will,” said Cynthia. “It may be Daddy. I hope Tessa is all right.”

It was not her father speaking. She did not recognize the voice but she remembered a name.

“This is Christopher Hardy speaking. Do you remember Kit Hardy? I met you one day with Armand de Rollencourt.”

“Yes,” said Cynthia, “I remember. You knew Edward Hambleton in France.”

“That’s it,” answered the voice—a pleasant, kindly voice. “I’ve just come back from France again. I’m looking for Miss Penny Hambleton. I went round to her flat and the hall porter thought she was staying with you.”

“She is,” said Cynthia. “Would you like to speak to her?”

Christopher Hardy hesitated for a moment.

“Not over the telephone. I have bad news for her. Could I come round to see her? I’m not far away. I have a car.”

“That’s all right,” said Cynthia. “Bad news?”

Her heart missed a beat.

“Bad news about what?” she asked.

“About one of her brothers,” answered Hardy. “Not Edward. The one called Tiny.”

“Dead?” asked Cynthia.

She spoke the word quietly. Her voice sounded very quiet and calm, as a nurse might speak about a patient.

“Badly wounded, I’m afraid,” answered Christopher Hardy. “I’ll be round in half an hour.”

Cynthia put down the receiver and stood very still. She felt cold. Her hands had gone cold. She was dead-white though she did not know that. It



was Penny who saw how white she was. Penny had been in the kitchen getting out the knives and forks. She came in with a tray. She was whistling an old tune—*Rule Britannia, Britannia rules the waves*. It kept her in touch with a young naval officer somewhere at sea.

Suddenly she stopped.

“What’s the matter, Cynthia?”

“Kit Hardy is coming,” answered Cynthia. “Do you remember him?”

“Sure I do,” said Penny. “A one-legged hero. Friend of Edward. But why are you so white?”

“He’s bringing news of Tiny,” said Cynthia.

Penny stared at her.

“Bad news?”

“Not too good,” said Cynthia. “He’s been wounded.”

“Bad luck!” said Penny. “Poor old Tiny. But he’s still alive and that’s a comfort. Maybe they’ll send him back by air.”

Cynthia felt a little faint—so faint that she swayed and might have fallen if Penny had not made a rush and put her arms about her.

“Cynthia! Oh my dear!”

“Sorry!” said Cynthia. “Very silly of me. Now I’m all right. I’ll go and cook those sausages.”

She cooked the sausages. They were spitting and bubbling in the frying-pan with some chip potatoes.

“Feeling all right?” asked Penny once or twice.

“Yes; I’m all right.”

But she was frightened. Tiny’s hunch. . . . He had had a hunch that he was going to be killed. She had tried to laugh him out of it. She had been angry with him. He ought not to have spoken like that. Now she was scared.

Kit Hardy arrived in his car. They heard it stop outside the garden gate.

Penny opened the door for him. Cynthia heard his steps in the hall, a dot-and-carry-one because of his artificial leg.

“You’ve met Cynthia Birch,” said Penny. “She’s going to marry Tiny.”

Captain Hardy was in battle-dress. He held a *béret* under his arm. He was startled at Penny’s words and a grave look came into his eyes when he held Cynthia’s hand for a moment.

“I didn’t know that,” he said. “Edward didn’t tell me. I’m sorry. I mean I’m sorry I didn’t know.”

“How is he?” asked Cynthia.

“He has been wounded outside his tank near Aachen. There had been heavy shelling. One of his men had just been killed—a young fellow called Spike Johnson. Tiny had carried his body into a trench and put a blanket over it. A German shell burst close and Tiny fell. It was a stomach wound and he was bleeding a lot when the stretcher-bearers took him away.

“I happened to be there,” said Kit Hardy. “I was doing liaison work between the Americans and the F.F.I. One of his officers told me it was Tiny Hambleton, the tallest man in the armoured column and one of the best. I went over to the stretcher where he was lying before they went away with him. I bent over him and said: ‘I know your brother Edward and your sister Penny.’ He looked as though he understood. He had scribbled something on a bit of paper and gave it to me. I have it here.”

Kit Hardy felt in the breast-pocket of his battle-dress and pulled out a cigarette-case. Inside was a bit of paper with some words scrawled on it.

“I guess it’s for you, Cynthia,” said Penny.

She passed the bit of paper and Cynthia read the words:

*“Journey’s end. I’ve found . . .”*

The sentence was unfinished.

“It’s kind of you to bring it,” said Cynthia. “Many thanks.”

She folded up the little bit of paper and put it in the pocket of her apron which she was still wearing after cooking the sausages.

“Is there any hope?” asked Penny in a low voice.

“There’s always hope,” answered Hardy. “But he looked bad. I’m deeply sorry.”

Cynthia had left the room.

She knew there was no hope for Tiny’s life.

She seemed to know it very certainly that night when she stood looking out of the window in her bedroom where she had switched out the light. Outside the moon was up and the garden was flooded with a milky radiance. The trees were etched blackly against a pale sky. Above the trees, flying low, came a lot of four-engined bombers. She listened to their heavy drone, familiar after five years of war—that war which Tiny had hated so much, which he thought was a degradation of the civilized mind, though he had been ready to die for the liberation of France and for the liberty of mankind. He had been searching for something all the time, for something which would reconcile all this horror with some Divine and Eternal Purpose, for something which would explain the mystery of life and human endeavour, and agony, and evil. He had been anxious to know whether there was a

survival of personality after death. He had wanted, he told her with a laugh, to find God somewhere. In his last letter he thought he might find the Answer to all questions at journey's end. Now he had written her a message.

*“Journey's end. I have found . . .”*

She knew what he meant. She could fill in the last word.

She knew he was dead. She knew it somehow at three minutes past twelve that night.

She went into Penny's room and called to her.

The curtains had been pulled back and the moonlight crept in.

Penny sat up in bed, startled.

“What is it, my dear? You look like a ghost in this moonlight.”

“Tiny is dead,” said Cynthia.

She went down on her knees by the side of Penny's bed and wept.

Once she raised her head and spoke to Penny again, who had her arm round her friend.

“For Tiny, it's the end of the war,” she said. “He's out of it now. For him, it's Victory!”

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Through the Storm* by Philip Gibbs]