

PARTNER  
IN  
THREE WORLDS

Dorothy Duncan

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*Title:* Partner in Three Worlds

*Date of first publication:* 1944

*Author:* Dorothy Duncan (1903-1957)

*Date first posted:* Oct. 19, 2017

*Date last updated:* Oct. 19, 2017

Faded Page eBook #20171026

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# PARTNER IN THREE WORLDS

DOROTHY DUNCAN



*Harper & Brothers Publishers*

NEW YORK *and* LONDON

PARTNER IN THREE WORLDS

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Every character in this book is a factual representation, though some of the names are true and some are not.

Each Czech has been given a name other than his own in order to protect the members of his family who may still be living under occupation conditions at the time of writing. Such changes do not detract from the authenticity of the story. They have been used only as a measure of protection for innocent people.

In the case of internationally known personages, true names have been used. Nothing said about them here would be likely to give information which could not be obtained elsewhere.

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## A WORD BEFOREHAND



THE paper somebody else is reading always appears to have more in it than one's own copy. In Montreal, this is peculiarly true. So in these days and nights of the war when the trams in this Canadian seaport are crowded beyond belief, it is better to read the paper someone else manages to hold up than to try to unfold one's own.

When the tram wheels ground against their brakes as Côte des Neiges began to level off to meet Sherbrooke Street, I got up and started on the slow journey toward the door. I steadied myself against the broad back of a man who was blocking my passage, gave a friendly nudge to a girl who hung on an air gunner's arm, and then found myself halted for the moment as I peered over the shoulder of a little fellow who was absorbed in a late edition of the Montreal *Daily Star*. He held his breath and leaned forward into the lap of a tired munitions worker whenever passengers pressed against him, but he kept his balance with one hand on a strap and the half-folded newspaper in the other.

The car stopped with a vicious jerk and the bilingual French-Canadian conductor shouted "Ghee . . . Guy . . . Goy." To make sure we all got it he added, "Guy Street."

My eyes picked up headlines and subheads in the little fellow's *Star* and saw vaguely a picture in the middle of the sheet. Then I found myself spilled onto the street along with a rush of fetid air and an assortment of humanity. That picture in the little fellow's paper! I knew one of those faces. I knew it well!

The tram went on with a clanging of bells and I stood on the curb in the Montreal dusk. Had it really been Jan Rieger? Could it have been? But I had seen him, right there. I waited for the red light to change to green, crossed to pick up a paper at the corner stand, and tucked it under my arm as I hurried on my way.

"Hi, darling!" I called as soon as I unlocked the door. It was his day to get home first. "See what I've found."

We spread the paper under the lamp on the table and leaned over it, trying to bring Jan's face toward us through the convex lens of an old magnifying glass. It was only a commonplace news photo and its caption said it had been taken at an unnamed port. The uncommon thing about it was the subject matter. It showed German prisoners being transferred to a liner, guarded by soldiers wearing tam-o'shanter. The background had been retouched to

remove all marks of identification. Well in the foreground was the open cargo port through which the prisoners were entering the ship, and there at one side stood Jan in British battle dress, watching his charges. His expression seemed to us a mixture of exultation and bitter irony.

We moved the magnifying glass up and down, trying to bring him forward into three dimensions, trying to remember him as we had seen him last. Almost a year had passed since then. We knew he had been transferred to the Intelligence Corps, and we understood why he was unable any longer to tell us where he was or what he was doing. It had been a long time since his last letter. And now here before us was that fine Czech countenance again, earnest, aloof and unmistakably alive. It could be no one else but Jan.

He had the face of a Roman statue with a sense of humor. The prematurely gray hair cropped close to his well-moulded skull gave his age as forty-odd. Two strong lines cutting down through his cheeks from a dominant nose to enclose full, mobile lips assured a rich humor that betrayed itself often in sudden warming smiles. But it was his passionately just and ever-judging eyes that held us now, as they had always done.

When we met him first he was serving as a private in the Canadian army. He had come to us through a chance introduction, in the way of so many wartime meetings in this seaport on the St. Lawrence. If we entertained him at first from a sense of duty, the duty was quickly forgotten. He wasn't exactly messianic, though he appeared to have that effect upon many people who first encountered him in our living room. It was rather that he brought to the surface and intensified the underlying spirit of everyone he talked with, throwing the light of his mind on every subject and adding warm kindness to every emotion. There were some, of course, who remained immune to his spell, but he nevertheless brought their innate spirit to the surface, as he did with everyone else.

For almost a year he came to us in Montreal as often as he could. Sometimes the army swallowed him for weeks at a stretch. Then the telephone would ring and a voice with a savory Czech accent would announce his return, and the next week or two would be filled with long evenings of conversation before our fire.

One of the first things we learned about him was the large inner pride of his race, the independence, and the politeness that bases itself upon a horror of intruding or being in the way. The nature behind that strong Roman face could be sensuous and almost delicate. Or it could be hard and suspicious, contorted with temper and a burning fury. In the presence of those he trusted his thinking was philosophical and wry. When he spoke of the age-old enemies of his fallen country his mind turned again, and became ruthless with the weight of justice behind it. But at its core it was an enduring mind. Everyone who encountered

it felt its weight.

Yet it was only as we knew him better, and learned some of the convolutions of his strangely dramatic life, that we came to understand that his appearance and his intelligence were both masks for his heart. I mean by that the kind of heart a boxer has when he keeps on fighting with blood in his eyes and his knees shaking long after he should be stretched out cold on the canvas. I mean, too, the kind of heart possessed by an exile thinking of home.

We could only guess what he was doing in that picture with German prisoners. Did it mean he was on his way back to Canada with them? Had he seen action in Africa? At least one thing was certain; he had come into contact with his enemies at last, and they were prisoners under his guard at the moment the camera had caught him.

We had known him only as a private soldier, but we knew that a long chain of circumstances which started before he was born had led him straight through poverty, war, prominence, international fame and then disaster to this moment. Someday, he had said, we would know the rest of his story. Now he was a man submerged in a past so tangled with clues that it was difficult to tell which were important, which were not. For his relevant past went all the way back to an era which thought itself innocent and at least was guileless and very young. . . .

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# AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN



## CHAPTER I



**S** EVEN of us lived in one room and a tiny kitchen. There were only three of us who ate and slept there, but the other four were never absent, for they were the paintings and photographs which hung on the walls. In one way or another they dominated my whole life.

Besides Mother and me, there was my grandmother. She was a presence and an impediment in our daily affairs, but she had no more effect upon the life of our imagination than if she had been an irritating and penetrating noise over which we had no control. And yet if it had not been for Grandmother, my mother and I might never have grown so close, so hidden away together from what she was.

Perhaps it would be best to tell about her right away. I remember her as a small woman, thin and bony, and I knew always that she didn't like me. She was seventy-two when I was born. Once upon a time she had been the spoiled daughter of a wealthy bourgeois family of Prague. She had fallen in love with an attractive young man who was her opposite in every imaginable way. He was a worker, possessed of enormous vitality and a courageous belief in himself. She thought when she married him that she could force him to give up his weaving for a relatively good position behind a desk. But she was disappointed.

Why Grandfather married my grandmother no one could ever guess, but his stubborn and independent mind probably never accepted for a moment her petty suggestions when he was courting her. He was even then master of Perutz' whole workshop, the greatest textile manufacturer in Prague. He loved to work, but he refused to be bossed. In fact, from the time he fought on the street barricades of Prague in the revolutionary uprisings of 1848 until the day he died, he maintained his independence intact. And always his fame as a weaver increased.

It was when my mother and her younger brother were children that my grandfather suddenly left his job with Perutz, either because he had been given orders which he couldn't obey without compromising his integrity, or because

he could stand no more of my grandmother. He went to a textile firm in Alsace-Lorraine and stayed there some years, but always he sent his earnings home. When he could stand the separation from his children no longer he returned to Prague. The day he came home he found my mother, a young girl of fourteen, keeping the house for her brother of ten because her mother had gone away.

Grandfather had no words of recrimination for Grandmother when she returned some days later, and he never asked her where she had been. But from that day on he never spoke a word to her again.

The details of my grandmother's personal affairs in those years I do not know and I never asked for enlightenment. It was enough to see the selfish, vain woman who lived with us spend her days caring only for her own amusement and personal comfort. But I do know that she did everything in her power to wreck my mother's life, though she would doubtless have considered herself motivated by mother love. No one, she was determined, should marry her daughter unless he was wealthy, and wealthy young men were not easy for my mother to meet. Whenever a presentable but impecunious youth came to call, Grandmother arranged to have a short talk with him alone. After that, he never came again, and my mother was led to believe he had lost interest, like all the others.

She was such an attractive young woman, my mother. I still have pictures which show her sweet face framed in soft curls. She looked like her father and she carried all his strength of character, but it was years before she understood how to use that strength to her own advantage. By the time she was thirty-two she had resigned herself to the life of a spinster. Her brother had gone away to earn his way in the world and her father had moved into the country where he could work independently of the big textile firms. Her mother needed a servant, and that, it seemed, was where her duty lay.

She had one girlhood friend whom she sometimes visited with her mother's permission. When she met a stranger one afternoon at the home of this friend she made no mention of the fact, because he had expressed no wish to call upon her and obviously cared nothing for the good graces of her family. Within three weeks they were married.

He was handsome, polished in his manners, and surrounded with the atmosphere of adventure. He was a well-known figure in the casinos of Baden-Baden and Carlsbad, renowned for the flourishing risks he would take and the ease with which he was always able to recoup his losses. From his appearance and his way of living at the time Mother met him, he impressed everyone as a wealthy man, but he alone knew that his days of great risks were over.

There is no wonder that Mother fell in love with him so easily. On his part, he probably meant her no ill, seeing in her a fortunate harbor. Perhaps he

thought her financial background was better than it proved to be, but he was also genuinely in love. So they were married, without Grandmother's permission.

They rented a small apartment in a pleasant section of Prague called Vinohrady, which in translation means "the hill where grapes are grown," and furnished it to their own nineteenth century tastes. And they were happy, as only two people can be when they believe their last hope for happiness has already gone.

One afternoon about a year after they were married he went out as usual, and Mother never saw him again. He was found dead on the street from a heart attack and they carried him straight to the morgue. It took Grandmother no time at all to close her own home and move in with Mother. In slightly less than two months I was born.

## CHAPTER II



THE room where I grew up was in a house on the left bank of the Vltava in Prague, in the industrial suburb of Smichov. The railway and locomotive factories of Ringhoffer were there, so it was one of the cheapest parts of the city in which to live. The house had three floors, with small, ordinary shops on the ground floor, facing Palacký Street. Our room was on the second floor, over the shops, with two windows facing the street and one window at the back in the part used as a kitchen. The back window overlooked a garden in the courtyard behind the house.

This room in which the three of us lived contained my whole world. Some of the heavy walnut furniture which my father had bought when he and Mother were married was in it. There were two beds and a cot for me, a few chairs, two enormous wardrobes which were always kept in perfect order, a dresser for china with lace edgings on the shelves, and one very large round table with turned legs and crossbars between them. It was under here that I played hour after hour while Mother worked above me.

In her youth she had sketched, as every young girl in a good bourgeois family was taught to do. Once a professor in the academy happened to see some of her work and at once offered her a scholarship because he was excited about her ability to draw hands. Grandmother forbade the acceptance of the scholarship, and the sketching was stopped. But now she was sketching again, and this time it was all right, because our lives depended on it. The last of the small amount of money left by my father was nearly gone.

First Mother designed patterns for embroidery, and then she bought a few

materials and transferred the designs onto linen handkerchiefs and tablecloths. After that she worked the designs in fine embroidery. But she had no skill in selling them, for her experience of people was limited and her knowledge of the commercial life of Prague was nothing at all. A few people bought her linens because they wanted to help her, and then after awhile they forgot and stopped buying altogether.

I remember only vague episodes in these years, and I tend to forget, as one always does, their relation in time. My first clear recollection has been colored by the sound of Mother's voice, retelling the story many times. But it will explain, better than a basket of generalities, what those years were like.

### CHAPTER III



SHE walked slowly along the narrow, snow-crustrusted pavement, and for every step she took the small boy at her side took three. Occasionally I skipped in an extra one to help my short legs catch her stride. One of my fists clutched two fingers of her left hand in its shabby glove. My own left hand was a knobby ball in the pocket of my tight brown coat. We said nothing, but each of us was very much aware of the other.

She began to walk more slowly within the folds of her long skirt, and we bordered the shop windows for warmth. Whenever I was jostled I pressed against Mother's thigh, taking comfort from the rhythmic flexing of her muscles. Then the spired tower of the Karlův most loomed before us in the dusk. I raised my eyes from hip level to look at it, but why we were here I didn't know. We were a long way from home. I didn't realize that it was the only bridge across the Vltava which charged no toll.

The sky was a softer shade of gray over the Karlův most. The city seemed to be cleft in two, held apart by the dark, churning river. When we neared the middle of the bridge Mother stopped and I drew close to her skirts again. She looked down, but instead of picking me up so that I might sit on the stone balustrade, as she sometimes did, she stared at me and her face was as blurred as the dusk.

"Please," I said.

She looked away, staring at the point of an island upstream, and I stood beside her silently.

"Very well," she said at last. Her voice was beautiful, but very tired. "Here . . . lean against Sainte Ludmila." She placed me on the parapet beside the imposing statue. We were apart from the passing streams of people. No one noticed and no one cared how long we stayed like this, or which direction we



might take when Mother chose to move on.

Far above the city on the Hradčany the twin spires of St. Vitus' Cathedral held a fresh frosting of wet snow, and the green dome of the Church of St. Nicholas was covered with it. Feeble yellow flames began to glow one by one in the wake of shuffling lamp-lighters, and the bridges across the Vltava were necklaces of light. Mother stared out at the ice floes on the river as they poured away and disappeared into the darkness, and over her shoulder I watched a stream of faces as they drifted along. There were two officers of the Imperial Army, their tall caps covered with gold braid. Behind them was a bakery vendor, his tray half empty. I caught the odor of spicy frosted gingerbread, heart-shaped wafers and cakes painted with poppy seeds. For awhile there were only the black coats and black hats of clerks and merchants and artisans, and then there were three countrywomen with lace caps and embroidered aprons showing beneath heavy shawls. They were laughing together with deep-throated voices.

It was quite dark now and I felt there was something strange about Mother's silence. A curly-bearded Jew touched his dirty cap as he bumped into Mother, but she paid no attention, seeing only the dark water pouring northward through the city, hearing only the rumble of ice crunching against the great stanchions below. The cold of the stone had found its way long ago through my patched breeches, but still I made no sound. Mother knew I was there. I understood no will or desire separate from her.

Suddenly my small heart became terrified. Fright began to race through my body until I trembled with panic. Something was happening beyond the range of my understanding. I was a baby animal consumed with an unnamed terror. Mother was going to leave me.

With a wrenching sob I reached toward her, though she had never been as much as an arm's distance away, and threw myself upon her with all my weight. I flung my arms about her and buried my face in the folds of her soft neck. She held me quietly so, and after a little the trembling began to ease. I didn't cry, and neither of us spoke. Then my arms broke their grip and one hand reached for her ear, dropping down to trace the line of her chin until it found the warmth at the base of her throat.

"All right, Jan," she said. Her voice was strange and empty. "Your will to live is strong. Let's go."

I slipped from the parapet, thrust my left fist into the tight coat pocket, and we set off to retrace our way across the bridge and back to Smichov. Mother's voice reached down to me in the darkness. "When you're much older I'll explain this night to you," she said. "You're too little now to understand words like suicide and despair. This is the fourth anniversary of your father's death. There's not much left in the world for either of us."

"Yes," I said, comforted by the sound of her voice. My eyes were hunting landmarks in the dark to tell me how much farther we must go to the room we knew as home. When the street gave a sharp lurch to the left we followed it and began to walk faster, for the lights in the shop windows of Palacký Street were ahead.

It was the sausage shop that drew us. But when we reached the door Mother stopped. With her hand on the knob she drew back, and her face took on again the expression I had seen on the bridge. I clutched tighter at her fingers and drew her to the lighted window of the shop. Behind the panes lay rows of black sausages, liver sausages, blood puddings, garlic sausages and sausages of truffle. In the center of the showcase was a bowl of liver pâté, flanked by round, mauve hams, and overhead were festoons of swollen meal-colored links interlaced with ropes of slender pink ones.

"Please," I said, tilting my head far back in order to look into Mother's eyes. "Please," and I began to tug her toward the door.

Inside the shop, warm, spicy odors seeped into our nostrils and into our lungs, and both of us knew just how hungry we were. The fat proprietress behind the counter was tying a parcel for the only customer, and when he had tipped his hat and left the shop she beamed on us.

"Good evening, *paní* Riegerová," she said. "I thought you were never coming. Three days I have been waiting. I have a message for you."

"I know," Mother said. "We've been . . . I had plenty of food to last . . . we . . ."

"Yes, of course," said the sausage woman. They were both Czechs and their individual prides must be kept intact. Another customer entered the shop and a small bell tinkled musically at the back. "If you don't mind . . . just a moment. I'll wait first on this lady."

We moved to the side of the shop. I was quite still, but my fingers loosened and renewed their grip on Mother's hand spasmodically. The smells of the shop were becoming torture to us both, and saliva kept forming in my mouth. My eyes went from plates of salami to fat hams and back again. Mother tried to look above them, until her eyes rested on a large calendar on the wall. It showed a single date—February 7, 1900. After that she kept her eyes fixed unmoving on the bare wooden counter.

Finally the customer made her choice and the long, sharp knife cut through a round sausage loaf and left a thick slice to be wrapped in brown paper and tied with a red string. Money clinked in the drawer and then we were alone in the shop once more, and the fat woman behind the counter was still smiling.

"Look, Jan," she said. "This piece of bologna I have been saving for you. The kind you like. What should I have done if you hadn't come in this evening?" She held out the plate with thin, circular slices of pink sausage in

the middle of it. My left hand came out of my pocket and began to reach for the meat. Then I put it back and looked at Mother. Her lips were only a thin line now and her eyes were hidden under wet lashes.

"But it's yours," said the proprietress. "It's paid for. That piece of embroidery you left with me last week. The meat is yours. You must select more . . . enough for several days."

"I can't," Mother said. "Except for Jan. You know that embroidery paid for meat we've already eaten . . . long ago."

"Oh, my dear *paní* Riegerová." The proprietress was pushing the thin slices of food into my hand. "You don't understand. A very wealthy lady from across the river came in today. She likes my sausage best in all Prague. Her coachman brings her here. She saw your work . . . I've been keeping it there, on the table where it could be seen. She wanted it, and I asked for it three times what you have taken in food. She paid for it gladly. And she wants you to do some more for her . . . much more, just like it. Her daughter is to be married. I have her address here, somewhere . . . in the Malá Strana . . ."

I had stuffed the last slice of meat into my mouth, and tears were running down Mother's cheeks. But the proprietress was busy hunting for a small slip of paper in untidy drawers and by the time she found it the tears had been wiped away.

"Thank you," Mother said, with her usual quiet dignity. "If you don't mind, I'll take a thick slice of spiced sausage, please. And you must add what the boy has just eaten to the bill."

With the wrapped parcel in her hand and the door open, she turned to smile at the fat sausage woman. "I'm truly grateful to you," she said. "I think you must know that."

"Thank God instead, my dear," came the answer. "You're in His hands. Good night, Jan. Come back and see me soon."

The faraway sound of a tinkling bell echoed as the door closed behind us.

## CHAPTER IV



THERE was nothing wrong with my childhood, so far as I could tell. Our home was all in one room, but why not? I knew of nothing better. It was familiar and Mother was there and I liked it. The world outside our windows was a pageant that I watched with endless interest, but I had no wish to go down to the street to play. Until I was six years old I seldom left the room, except to go on short errands for Mother to one of the shops below, and when I did I was always glad to come straight back. Everything I wanted was right

there.

The window at the back opened over a garden which seemed to me enormous. A great tree reached nearly to the sill. At the far end of the garden was a seat with an arbor of vines growing over it, and here the proprietress of the house sat on sunny days, isolated from her tenants whom she considered inferior and regretted having there. She lived somewhere on another part of the second floor.

The window sills were stone and very wide, and Mother always put bread crumbs there for the sparrows. I was constantly delighted as I watched them. Behind the garden was a stone wall which separated our house from a bakery. Beautiful smells of freshly baked loaves of bread came to us through this window. Nearly always the smell was pleasant, but sometimes when I was hungry it could be painful as well.

The windows which overlooked Palacký Street were my introduction to the outside world. It was an important thoroughfare of Prague, leading from the river through Smichov to the outskirts of the city. It was wide enough to accommodate four horse-drawn carts abreast, but whenever two of the horsecars which ran its length happened to pass, and carts were on the street at the same time, the carts had to go up on the sidewalks or be run down. Many of these carts carried coal, and I liked to watch people who needed it badly jump onto the carts and knock as much as they could into the street before they were detected. As it fell, others would run along and pick up the pieces.

It was still the era of leisurely transportation. Whenever Grandmother wanted to go into town, as we called the other side of the river, she waited until she saw one of the horsecars approaching from the Ringhoffer Works down the street, then she waved to the conductor and rushed downstairs. Two houses below, the streetcar waited until Grandmother climbed in breathlessly, and then it went on its way. The first time an electric car ran down the street everyone hung out the window to watch. Grandmother wept and declared it the work of the devil. Mother said quietly she needn't worry, for it couldn't possibly last.

The street was lined with middle-class and workers' shops. Everyone knew the distinction between them. There were sausage shops with white tiles in the window for the patronage of white-collar workers in the factories, petty government clerks and other shop proprietors. There were also butcher shops which sold horse meat for the trade of the workers. So it was with everything sold on the street.

No one ever came to see us and we had no real friends, but that again seemed a natural state of affairs because I had never known any other. Mother was much too busy to encourage neighborly chats. I had no companions of my own age, but I didn't mind. I much preferred to watch the boys in the street

below than to play with them, for they seemed to make a great deal of noise as they broke windows and were chased by policemen. I played my own quiet games under the table while Mother worked and told me stories, and I continued to hang over the window sills and watch the life that went flowing back and forth below.

Perhaps another reason why I was never lonely was the fact that there always seemed to be so many of us living in that one room. Grandmother alone was trouble enough for two. She had to be served and waited upon because she refused to do anything for herself. Whenever she started to sigh loudly as she sat in her chair by the back window we knew she felt aggrieved at one of us, but she would seldom say specifically what had annoyed her or what was troubling her mind. Nearly every afternoon she went out to meet other old ladies of her acquaintance in a public park on Žofín Island in the Vltava, and as soon as she arrived home she wanted attention from us both. Mother's work seemed to her of no importance whatever.

Whenever she felt particularly offended, or wanted to emphasize for the millionth time her disapproval of a daughter who could be so thoughtless as to have the child of a dead man, she sighed deeply and looked at the two oil paintings which hung together on one wall, calling them as witnesses to her downfall into such proletarian surroundings. They were both half-figures, brown with age. One was her mother, a mean, pretentious woman in a bonnet with a large gold chain hanging over a black bombazine dress which was buttoned to her chin. The other was the portrait of a very good and very dull gentleman who was her older brother. He wore the uniform of a colonel in the Austrian Imperial Army Medical Corps, and his hand remained forever stuffed between the loosened buttons of his jacket. Because of him, I formed an early loathing for military life.

On the dresser stood a daguerreotype of my uncle, Mother's younger brother. Grandmother looked at that a great deal, too, and it was of more moral support to her than the oil paintings. My uncle looked like her, for he was small-boned and his features were pinched. He had always been enormously ambitious. He did not want money so much for the power it gave him as a safeguard against ever having to remember his life as a boy in Prague, in a house filled with insecurity and parental disagreements.

He had left home as quickly as he could, some time before Mother was married. He had started as a petty clerk in one of the largest banks of Prague, eventually had become an accountant, and then he had left Prague in order to get farther away from his family. He went into a German bank in Dresden and then to Berlin, where he had become a director of the Deutsche Reichsbank. Somewhere on the way he had acquired a German wife and a son who was two years my senior.

When I was about four years old, soon after the episode on the bridge, he began to send a small check each month to Mother, which he said was for the three of us. The checks were very small in amount—one hundred Austrian kronen, or about twenty dollars—but they represented safety from destitution.

Mother always told me about her brother in a tone of voice that made him sound like a minor saint, and she reminded me again and again that without his kindness we would all be lost. I looked at his photograph and tried to see the little boy Mother had known, but he was hidden behind the features of “Your Uncle.” It was a clean-shaven face, long and ascetic, but it seemed to me to be made of stone, for it held none of the wrinkles made by smiles. His hair was cut short in the German fashion and brushed straight upward from his forehead, and because I knew no one else who looked like that, he remained a strange and rather terrifying figure.

Grandmother wrote him long letters filled with complaints about Mother and asked him to send her a separate allowance. He wrote regularly once a month, and nothing in his twelve letters each year ever underestimated the grand gesture of his aid to us. Instead, he emphasized his pleasure in being able through his great wealth to help his parents and his sister. If it weren’t for so many unexpected expenses caused by his wife and child, as well as his social obligations, he would send us more. As for Grandmother’s complaints, he reminded us once again that if we couldn’t keep peace among ourselves, he would cut us all off for good.

These letters always made Mother cry, not because of his threats but because she felt we were depriving her poor brother of money he could ill afford to let us have. Grandmother merely sniffed and looked out the window toward the bakery.

And then I began to receive boxes at Easter and Christmas filled with old clothes, books and playthings that had belonged to my cousin. Again I was reminded by Mother of my uncle’s generosity, but even this couldn’t dull my interest in the contents of the cartons. I can still recall the way they smelled—of fine soap and rooms in another world. These were the first picture books in my life, the first dolls and tin soldiers, the first tailored suits and shoes. They spelled the beginnings of a new world to me, beyond the confines of my imagination.

The seventh presence in our room was Grandfather. Mother had a small picture of him in a locket which she allowed me to look at only when Grandmother was not at home. While she talked about him I looked at his long white whiskers parted down the middle, and he became for me everything a child admires in a man.

He lived now in the attic of a farmhouse near Žatec, in the hop region of Bohemia. Here he had a loom where he made beautiful homespuns for the

petticoats of farm women and the dress jackets of farmers. They were all his own patterns and he was famous throughout the countryside, even though textiles were already being made in Bohemia by machinery. Through Mother's eyes I could see him sitting in his attic before the loom, surrounded by a mess of things which I thought would be everything a little boy could want to play with, while he threw his shuttle back and forth through the threads of the warp and sang lustily as he worked.

To a large extent, Grandfather compensated for the presence of Grandmother's portraits in oils and my ever-judging uncle who sat on the dresser in plain view of everything we said or did.

## CHAPTER V



LIKE concentric rings unfolded in water when a pebble is dropped, the boundaries of my world gradually increased beyond the confines of the room. I became aware of other people who also lived in the same house. And to us, now and then, came someone to see Mother on business.

Slowly Mother's clientele grew, but so slowly during those early years that little perceptible change was made in our way of living. She worked so steadily that she never seemed to stop. One of the most persistent memories of my life is the sight of her sitting beside the big table in the middle of the room laboring over her designs or embroidering the linens to which she transferred them.

Since she was the only meaning of my existence, the one who solved all problems through the bottomless nature of her love, I was unable to think what she was like. Once I overheard a man in a shop on the corner speak about her beauty, mentioning her hair and shoulders and deep-set dark eyes, but I had no way of gauging the terms. To me she was authority and sanctuary and wisdom and supply. She was also the strongest person I could imagine, and the most wonderful.

On the whole, I thought more about her hands than I did about any of her other features. They were closer to my line of vision, for one thing. From the tension or relaxation of her small fingers I could guess her mood before her face had given her away. If I fell, her hands picked me up; if I was cold, they warmed me; when I was ill they brought me coolness and healing. Had I ever lost her in a crowd, it would have been for her hands that I should have searched, for I would have known them more surely among thousands of other pairs than I knew my own face in a glass.

How many nights did I lie in bed when she thought I was asleep and watch their quick movements? Sometimes they would be washing the floor at two in

the morning in order to have the room clean for the next day. If I woke up and saw her still sitting in the light of the kerosene lamp at the table, I knew there would be finished work in the morning, and after it was delivered there would be more food. Once in awhile, but rarely, if I saw her sitting close to the windows, using the light from the gas lamp on the street below, I knew she had finished a much larger order than usual. She was celebrating by stealing this hour in the middle of the night to do something she loved more than anything else, writing poetry which no one ever saw.

All Mother's designs were made on the big walnut table in the middle of the room, first with needles and later with wheels. They passed through paper onto the linen and even through the linen onto the wood, and there they all stayed. Long afterward, when Mother had become an authority on design, and gave out her work to be completed by needleworkers in Moravia, she would caress the table top and say, "So much work, so much happiness, so many tears."

I think it was the door in the wall that started her telling me stories. It had no doorknob and the keyhole had been covered with a piece of metal on the other side. In our room, it was just part of the wall. My cot stood against it and covered the lower half. But smells and noises came through the door to us, and sometimes when I lay in bed with my ear not far from the cracks, I could hear voices and cries of pain on the other side. It frightened and fascinated me at once, and no amount of explaining from Mother could make me understand what really went on in this strange hinterland. Nor could I be made to realize that the rest of the second floor of the house, which was occupied by the widow who owned it and her son, had an entrance separate from ours. I never saw the people who made the sounds and smells behind the door, and so I believed them to be inhuman, quite unlike the men and women who passed on the street below our windows, because I couldn't solve the architectural problems of a separate entrance to their apartment.

When I was awakened in the middle of the night it was easy to hear what went on behind the door, though I never distinguished words, only tones of voice and cries of pain. There was an endless variety of whining, complaining voices, but their counterpart was always the same unpleasant, rough voice which broke into shouts both in Czech and in German. It was this second voice which haunted my dreams for years, long after we no longer lived in that room.

Whenever I was awakened like this Mother would take me in her arms and begin a fairy story, and when I was quieted she would put me back and go on with her work, letting the story flow through her imagination until I was once more asleep. Though the tales might begin with elves in the woods who could be seen only by those with a good heart, or fairy princesses riding through



moonlit skies on a cloud, they never ended without an application to my practical experience.

When I was older I understood what the noises on the other side of the door meant, but they continued to dog my dreams. The son of the widow who owned the house was a doctor, employed by the Ringhoffer Works and other industrial firms in Smichov. It was his office which lay beyond the door beside my bed. The smells which came through were carbolic acid and other disinfectants, perhaps formaldehyde, too. And the cries were those of working men and women who had injured their hands or feet or eyes at one of the plants. Since the company paid for their treatment, they had to take themselves to the doctor's office. And also, since the company paid, the doctor wasted no time with polite manners when he treated them.

That was why, too, Mother always became anxious whenever I raised my voice or laughed as I played during certain hours of the day. These were the doctor's office hours. If I forgot and spoke too loudly there would come a beating at the door and Mother would whisper that I must remember to be very quiet or we would surely lose our home.

After awhile a few people began to come to our room. They were girls, mostly, and the beggars. Some of the shopgirls in our neighborhood began to come to Mother to have her make a design of embroidery on a collar or a handkerchief for a gift. Whenever they asked anxiously what it would cost, Mother avoided answering. And then when the girls came to fetch their little gifts, they were invariably worried because the embroidery had turned out to be so much prettier than they had expected and they were sure the cost would be too dear. But Mother would give them a price which made their faces light with surprise and relief. Always after one of these encounters Mother sang while she worked. More than once she pointed out to me that even for poor people such as ourselves there could still be moments when we might feel rich.

With the beggars it was like that, too. Every Friday, by permission of the town authorities, beggars were allowed to ring doorbells in Prague and ask for money. Most of the ones who rang bells in Smichov were glad enough to be given food, for many doors there were shut in their faces. But always Mother took whatever provisions we happened to have in the house on Friday and gave a part to whoever rang our bell. I never knew her to turn a single beggar away without something.

One Friday afternoon one of the girls was waiting for Mother to finish her order when the work had to be interrupted to attend to one of these men. After he had gone the girl scolded Mother soundly for being so generous when well-to-do people were chasing the beggars away. It was one of the periods when a story gained credence, among those who wanted to believe it, about a beggar woman who had been found dead in a shack with thousands of gulden in a

sack under her bed. The story came easily to the tongues of those who wanted an excuse to shut the door in the face of a beggar.

Mother said quietly to the girl, "If I knew I had given the very last food we had, a hundred times over, to men who didn't need it, while one alone had been in want, it would be worth the ninety-nine disappointments to know I had not passed that single one by."

## CHAPTER VI



I MUST have been about five years old when I began to deliver Mother's finished work. At first she took me to the different houses of her clients to show me the way, and after that I went alone. It was a great help to her because now she had more time in which to go on with more work. Some of the clients left me standing outside their doors, and then sent word through their maids that they would settle the bill the next time they passed our street. They were not unkind, but simply rich and unable to understand that it meant I would not take home any bread that day.

The small shop people always paid at once, perhaps because they understood why I was so thin and pale. When I came home with money, though it was sometimes only thirty kronen, I felt as proud as though I had been the one to earn it. And when I was disappointed and was told that the bill would be paid later, it took me a long time to get up the stairs and face Mother with my report.

Before all Mother's customers to whom I delivered finished articles I kept an instinctive reserve. I never bowed too deeply and never accepted an invitation to prolong a conversation. I knew I must be polite, because these people gave us the means of living, but I could never like them because we depended upon their favors.

As soon as I brought some money home I was sent at once to the grocer on the corner, and most often what I bought was coffee. I still remember that I paid twelve kreutzers for the amount I bought each time. In our room, there was always a pot of coffee on the stove, and I began to drink it earlier than I can remember. The rest of our food was bread, sausages and cakes. Mother could afford no time to cook and Grandmother would never touch a thing in the kitchen. So I was sent to the pastry shop and the sausage shop to buy something we could eat quickly without cooking. I never once remember eating fresh fruit, fresh vegetables (there were no canned foods in those days), or freshly cooked meat in all those years.

I loved the grocery shop on the corner. It seemed fantastically large to me,

and the few clerks behind the counters so many. One day as usual I lingered at the window outside to stare at the nuts and prunes and garlands of artificial lemons. The coffee I had just bought was in one of my pockets and I was intent upon the sweets before my eyes. I didn't even turn around when I was jostled by another boy who stood beside me looking in the window. After he had left, I knew that my coffee was gone.

Mother had never scolded me or spanked me in my life, but still I was afraid to face her and tell her what had happened. When I didn't come home she became desperate, and though she seldom left our room any more, she went out to hunt for me. I was still sitting on the stone steps of the grocery shop, crying quietly in my desolation. She hugged me and took me home and we went without coffee until another piece of work had been paid for. But from that day to this I have never lost anything, even to mislaying something unimportant.

It was the same way with the glasses. Mother had six water glasses which she thought the most beautiful in the world. Since she was for me all authority, I was convinced that not even the Kaiser had better ones. And then one day when I was about five I broke one of them. The glass splintered to the floor and I was stunned. Mother simply looked at me.

I dropped down on the floor beside the broken pieces and began to sob and beg her to forgive me. Immediately she was down on her knees beside me, begging me not to cry.

When I was much older Mother still had the five remaining tumblers. I was skeptical of their value then, and often laughed at her for holding them so dear. It was only after she died that I found them carefully put away. By that time I knew nearly everything there was to know about glass, and I saw that they were old Waterford and almost priceless. I have never since broken another piece of glass. One has to learn a reason for being careful, inside when quite young, if care in small matters is to seem important later on.

## CHAPTER VII



IT was no time at all after I began to deliver Mother's work that I came to think of Prague as the boundary of my life, instead of one room. I became familiar with the city and its various parts, and began to take the life of its streets for granted. There were plenty of officers with clanking swords and beautifully embroidered uniforms and high black caps. There were German students with scars on their faces. There were the dragoons with their golden helmets, and all the other regiments of the garrison who marched behind bands

that played martial music. There were plain people, too, and young ones and old ones, and I learned to pick out of the crowd those I liked, while the rest flowed by in a stream.

My favorite spot in the whole city was the new and busy section around Wenzeslaus Square, backed by the National Museum. This was the section where well-dressed men and women shopped for fine paintings, glass, silks, laces and exquisite clothes. It was also the section where members of the Austrian aristocracy rode out on fine afternoons in their shining broughams.

One wing of the castle on the Hrad had been given over to daughters of the aristocracy who had not married and yet were considered too modern to go into a nunnery. Here they lived under severe regulations, though not exactly closed away from the world. They had the privilege of making shopping expeditions on occasion, and they always appeared in public two by two in carriages which were distinct from those of other wealthy families of Prague. The driver and coachmen on these broughams wore court uniforms, the horses were always white with long white tails that reached nearly to the ground, and even the harnesses were of sterling silver.

I liked especially to watch for these carriages, and I had my favorites among the aristocratic spinsters. Two of them went often to Stutzig & Jäger's for afternoon chocolate and cakes, and I came to know the time of these frequent visits. One of these spinsters was very old and I thought she looked like a witch. The young one who was her constant companion was as beautiful in my eyes as a fairy queen. When the groom held open the carriage door for them he took off his hat and swept it to the ground. I was always as close behind him as I dared to be, wondering what I should do if the beautiful one ever stopped to ask the name of the boy who watched them so attentively.

After awhile I found more interesting things to do. Grandmother fell into the habit of taking me with her as she walked on the Karlové náměstí. At one corner of its beautiful garden was a large coffeehouse called U Krále Karla IV ("At the King Charles IV"). We always went into this coffeehouse through the back door, straight into a large and spotlessly clean kitchen, and there we were welcomed by a huge, handsome woman who was the cook.

I loved the smells here, and there were always waiters running up and down from the kitchen to the customers in front. So I was quite willing to sit here by the hour while Grandmother talked in a corner with the cook and we all drank coffee and ate cakes.

And then one day this same huge woman from the kitchen of U Krále Karla IV appeared at the door of our room, but she was no longer good-natured. I spoke to her politely and told her Grandmother was out, but she brushed past me and confronted Mother with a bill for all the coffee and cakes we had eaten for weeks past. She said Grandmother had told her that her

daughter would send her money for it all, and she was angry because the bill was so long overdue. Mother paid her without a word and the woman went away.

When Grandmother came home Mother asked her quietly why she had done it. Grandmother replied that if Mother said anything to make her feel guilty she would write to my uncle at once and tell him so. Besides, she said, she could hardly be expected to sit at home all day and look at nothing but her daughter and grandchild by the hour.

I doubt if she did write to my uncle about it, but not long after that a different kind of letter came from Berlin. I was invited to spend a summer with Uncle's family. Mother asked me with a shining face if I would like to go, but I had no answer. What was Berlin, except the name of the place where boxes came from every Christmas and Easter? How far was far away? I tried to measure the sensation of going away.

"Will *you* like it in Berlin?" I asked her.

She emptied the grounds from the coffeepot and set it back on the stove, hiding her eyes as she explained. "You'll have to go alone, Jan," she said. "A friend of your uncle's will take you. And I must stay here. I couldn't leave Grandmother alone, you know."

I thought about this carefully. "Uncle wouldn't like that," I said. "He wouldn't like me without you."

Mother's hands worked at the sink while her voice went on explaining. Uncle had invited only me. He had sent a ticket in his letter, and it was all arranged that his friend should look after me on the train. It would be only for a little while, and when I came back at the end of the summer I could tell them all about Berlin and my cousin and Uncle and Aunt.

I thought about it some more, and then I said with firmness, "Thank you, I guess I'll stay here, too. You can look after Grandmother, and I'll look after you."

But Mother had other plans. It became obvious that she had no intention of letting me settle this question for myself. It was an opportunity for me to see the world and have some of the advantages, even for a single summer, that she couldn't give me. I was to leave the day after tomorrow. Before I could reply she went on to tell me what a lovely summer it was going to be, what good times I would have, the games I would play with my cousin and his friends, how I could learn to swim at beaches, what fun it would be to tell her all about it when I came home, and how wonderful it was to have an aunt and uncle who loved me enough to ask me to stay with them.

"But who will run errands for you while I'm gone?" I said weakly.

She looked at me then, knowing I had given in. Quickly she changed the subject to talk about the small presents I would take for each member of the

Berlin household. She would make them herself. As she went back to the walnut table I twisted my head on the heel of my hand to watch her. She was smiling! Berlin must be a good place, I decided, if thinking about it made her look like that. Maybe I would like it after all. Besides, I had been sent for, and that made me important. I could hardly wait for the time to leave.

## CHAPTER VIII



MY eyes were still red and swollen when the train pulled into the Anhalter Bahnhof in Berlin, for I had spent the six hours of the trip from Prague crying. It wasn't until the banker who was a friend of Uncle's had taken me by the hand in the Prague station and led me away from Mother that I realized how it would be without her. She stood there on the platform smiling and waving her hand, and the strange man jerked me along without ceremony because we were late and the train was ready to leave. Before we were settled in our compartment, it was under way.

The strange man unfolded a newspaper, raised it before his face and ignored me. Two other men in the same compartment were reading, and a pretty woman who sat across from me smiled. But the friendly overture only made me feel farther from Mother, and I began to cry. I was too proud to let anyone see it, so I hid my head in the folds of my coat which hung from a hook over my head. And there I stayed until we reached Berlin.

If Aunt and Uncle saw the traces of tears on my face as their friend led me toward them they gave no sign. Passengers from our fashionable Vienna train were tumbling out and there were happy greetings all around me. I began to feel important. Aunt was looking at me closely, but I had eyes only for Uncle. He was Mother's brother and he belonged to me, the first man of my own family I had ever known. Suddenly I was happy and Berlin seemed a fine place, even as Mother had said it would be.

Uncle held out his hand to me and I took it, unable to raise my eyes above a heavy gold watch chain which was looped in two waves across his black waistcoat. "*Küss die Hand*, Uncle," I said in the manner of my training. "I hope you are well."

"Well enough," he replied in German. And then again in Czech, "Well enough." His voice was high-pitched and somewhat querulous. I could see his small gray eyes now, under a bowler hat. He was giving me his close attention. "You're not very big," he said. "You're puny. Leo is twice your size already."

"I'm six and a half," I said.

"Yes, I know. Come along." He took my hand and propelled me down the

platform toward the rotunda of the station. "But my things," I said, pulling back. I had nearly nothing in the way of luggage: one small suitcase that had belonged to my father, and a small package with the gifts Mother had made. The parcel was clutched tight under my arm, but the suitcase had disappeared.

"In Berlin, a man never carries things," said Uncle, sounding cross. "The porter has your suitcase. You should have given him your package, too."

I looked up with a wide smile. I was a man; Uncle had said so. The rest of his pronouncement was lost on my ears. I trotted along at his side, trying to see in every direction at once, while Aunt walked slightly to our rear. The bright lights and the crowds and the enormous roof of the Bahnhof were all of such a size that I was sure this must be the most colossal building in the world. Even the policemen seemed to be supermen, with their gold-plated and peaked helmets, handle-bar mustaches, gilt buttons and long clanking swords. Everything about Berlin seemed to be a compliment to my arrival.

It was raining when we reached the street. We were stowed away in a hansom cab, and we no sooner started to move along the glistening street than Uncle began to draw my attention to buildings as we passed. The rain beat down on the roof of the cab and gusts of water blew in on the driver and on his white top hat. We turned into a side street off the Kurfürstendamm in the section of Berlin known as Charlottenburg, and drew up before a block of apartment houses with lights showing in cracks around tall windows.

Uncle let us stand in the rain while he paid the driver, and then he led the way into a lighted foyer behind heavy glass doors, up two flights of carpeted stairs, and into his own apartment. It was warm and filled with the smells I had come to recognize in the boxes I received each Christmas and Easter.

A boy was standing in a far doorway, dim in the shadows, watching. "Come here, Leo," Uncle said. "This is Jan. Show him to your room and tell him where he's to sleep."

I was confused with new impressions and excitements as I followed my cousin down a long hall with doors on either side. The apartment occupied an entire floor of the building, and all the rooms seemed incredibly large. I caught glimpses of a piano, thick rugs, flowers in vases, large paintings in ornate frames, tall lamps hooded in red silk shades, and a whole room lined with shelves and shelves of nothing but books. Inside the last room on the left I stood just within the door as Leo began to point out the portion of its furnishings which I might share. An immense bed in the middle of the room was his; a small cot in one corner was mine. The desk was his, but I might hang my clothes on one side of the mahogany wardrobe which towered toward the ceiling.

"Put your suitcase under your bed when you've emptied it," Leo said. And then, pointing to one wall covered with shelves on which were ranged more

toys than I had dreamed existed anywhere in the world, “If you do as you’re told, I may let you play with my soldiers once in awhile. The ones I don’t really much like.”

Tall windows extended from the floor to the high white ceiling. They were half covered with rich blue damask, looped back to show heavy lace curtains which fell to the floor. A carpet splattered with roses covered the floor right to the walls, and on Leo’s bed a satin-covered eiderdown carried the same color of magenta red. Newly sharpened pencils and a pad of paper were on the desk. Over the desk hung the first electric light I had ever seen inside a house. I looked at the unshaded bulb steadily until it began to blur my vision. I wanted only to turn it on and off myself, to see how it worked. Nothing else in the room seemed as beautiful as that light bulb.

Leo left me while I washed my hands and combed my hair, and then I went out into the hall, not sure what was expected of me next. I wanted to find the lavatory, but Uncle came toward me, beckoning the way to the dining room. So I followed him obediently.

The dining room was a place of shadows and massive oak furniture. After the first spoonfuls of warm soup had reached my stomach, I looked around. I had never been in a room that was so full of furniture. Leo was sitting opposite me at the table, with Uncle on my left and Aunt on my right. Two maids moved silently about, bringing food on large silver platters. At home, we had soup often, but when we did it was the entire meal. Here, with so many different kinds of things to eat, and so many implements beside my plate, I became confused.

Mother had taught me how to behave at the table and she was proud of the way I handled my fork and knife and never spilled a single crumb on my clothes. In our circumstances, it was a terrible thing to be careless with what we had. We always used her wedding china, because she wanted to accustom me to fine things. And so she was sure I would know how to behave in her brother’s house in Berlin. If I found myself in an unfamiliar situation, she had said, and wasn’t sure how to behave, I must delay my actions and watch until I could see what others did, then follow their lead.

I remembered the advice now. Every moment brought new things to eat which were unfamiliar to me. I was too short to see much above the table and no cushion had been put on my chair, so I was the slowest eater and by the end of each course the others were waiting for me to finish.

“What’s the matter, Jan?” Uncle said, breaking a silence in which my knife and fork were the only sounds in the room. “You don’t seem to like what’s put before you.”

I looked up, wanting to tell him that I had never before known so many new and pleasant taste sensations and I was sorry if I couldn’t eat as quickly as



the others. Before I found the words, Aunt said, "He's only trying to show us he's sophisticated about what's given him to eat." She didn't look at me as she spoke. "Leo thinks our food is all right. So you'll have to put up with it while you're here, too."

I was mortified and much too proud to explain that I was confused by the complicated service. I tried to hurry, but that only made me forget to be careful. Uncle sat very still watching me while Leo and his mother exchanged small smiles.

"Use the proper knife, Jan," Uncle said crossly.

I looked at the others to see what they were using, but they had finished the course and Aunt's fingers were drumming on the table beside her plate.

"I don't want any more," I said, though I had never wanted anything so much before. I put my knife and fork together across my plate and then something slipped and the fork hit my glass of milk. The glass overturned, spilling the white liquid across the table cloth and onto my only suit. I tried desperately to mop it up with my handkerchief while Leo's derisive laughter rang in my ears, Uncle's eyes cut me in pieces, and Aunt sighed with indignation.

My handkerchief was inadequate for the job. Uncle's voice, smooth now and with what I took to be a friendly tone, said, "That's right. Don't waste any of the milk. Why don't you wring your handkerchief out in your glass, and then you can drink it after all?"

Both my hands were over the glass, obedient to Uncle's suggestion, when Leo spoiled his father's joke by laughing aloud. I was too ashamed to leave the table, but I could eat no more. My chin stayed on my chest while the others finished, and as soon as I was allowed to go to my cot I crawled into it, desolate. There I lay all night crying spasmodically and longing for my mother.

I suppose they meant to be kind to me, but their natures were incapable of comprehending the fullness of such a word. In the bosom of his family, Uncle was autocratic and sharp, and inclined to make poisonous jokes at the expense of everyone else. In the presence of guests or business acquaintances, he was ill at ease and to hide the fact his eyes shifted and he made blustering statements which no one else was inclined to deny. He had imitated German bankers as a type so slavishly that he was now indistinguishable from them, both in manner and appearance. The stiff brush of his hair thrust up from his forehead and the way he directed his gaze in the vicinity of other peoples' chins was even more Prussian than the Prussians. Yet I found it difficult not to admire him, because he was Mother's brother, and she had taught me to revere him as the male head of our family in the absence of Grandfather.

Aunt was a dry, routine sort of German woman of Berlin society, with no

softness traceable anywhere in her face or in her manner. Her conversation was made up exclusively of worthy small talk when it was not concerned with sarcasm, more often than not directed at me. Her eyes were so pale they had no depth whatever, and her features were well placed and matter-of-fact. Her hair was the color of butter and she wore it pulled back from her forehead and temples, gathered into a knot at the nape of her neck. Except when she spoke to Leo, I never saw her smile.

My cousin was two years my senior. At the ages of six and eight, this difference was vast. Like his father, he too had a double personality. In the presence of his parents or their friends, he was a wisecracking smart aleck. Whenever he broke into a conversation, which he did frequently, everyone stopped to listen. The Czech accent with which my German was flavored—I had learned German as a second language when Mother used the two alternately in teaching me to speak—gave him endless amusement. He listened to me attentively in order to mock my pronunciation.

And yet when we were alone in his room, Leo was always kind to me. He was tall, very strong for his age, and his mind was truly clever and overdeveloped. He let me understand that he joined in the chorus of criticism and amusement at my expense because he felt it would make his mother pleased enough to repay him with special privileges. I began to like him. He had dark brown hair, large intelligent brown eyes that missed very little of what went on around him, and his whole body was tanned by the sun. I also admired the extent and the quality of his wardrobe, as well as his conscious sense of the proper things to wear.

Every evening when we were undressed and in our beds ready to go to sleep, Aunt came to sit for awhile beside Leo, kissing him and giving him his daily ration of a large piece of chocolate. When Leo was tired of her caresses and grumbled that he wanted to be left alone, she passed my cot and gave me a small piece of candy, quite briskly murmuring good night. I was sorry for Leo then, because he didn't know how really nice a mother could be.

When guests came to the house I was carefully kept in the nursery, as Leo's room was called, and only once or twice my uncle came to get me in order to show me off. Then I found that I was allowed to enter Berlin society for the purpose of saying almost anything, in order to amuse the German guests with my accent. Back in the nursery, I could still hear their laughter and Leo's attempts to imitate me, as he tried to make his audience laugh again.

Each morning at precisely ten o'clock the telephone rang. Everything in the house was as punctual as that. It was Uncle calling from the bank. After speaking to Aunt or Leo, he insisted that I come to the phone. I had never spoken on a telephone before and it frightened me so much I never understood a single word he said. This went on the whole time I was there. When he came

home for dinner each day he told me how stupid I was and said I should use Leo as an example; he spoke with ease to anyone on the telephone.

Every Sunday whether the weather was fine or not, Uncle took me for a walk through the Tiergarten. These were the pleasantest hours of my stay in Berlin. Uncle always used the Czech language then, and I had the feeling that he was softer away from Aunt's critical eyes and Leo's acute observation. But even when he spoke warmly of Mother and I tried to express my understanding by pressing his hand, he paid no attention to me, and I saw that he was merely talking to himself in a one-sided conversation for his own release.

Sometimes we visited the animals in the zoo, Uncle explaining about their native habits and how rare some of the specimens were. I hated the zoo because I was overcome with pity for these beautiful and strange creatures behind bars. Sometimes we went to the aquarium, where the German love of classification and order spoiled my fun in looking at the fish. I grew tired of these side excursions on the Sunday walks, but Uncle never did. While he instructed me in the habits of the animals, I watched the big-footed German men and hard-faced women and their well-behaved children, and the beautiful horses cantering through the Tiergarten, carrying Uhlans and Cuirassiers.

Once in awhile we walked through the Brandenburger Tor and down Unter den Linden, Uncle pointing to the buildings which he wanted me to admire. Another Sunday it would be the proper time to stop at the Sieges Allee. Here Uncle explained to me not only the name of each statue, but the years and exploits connected with the fame of the men they commemorated. There they stood in even ranks, a king flanked on each side by his chancellor and his greatest statesman, and they never deviated from the pattern, in lines as rigid as a parade ground. Uncle's explanations made an indelible impression on me. Out of them grew an extreme dislike for Prussian fame in stone.

Once I saw the Kaiser riding through the Tiergarten in an open brougham. As he came into sight Uncle quickly snatched off my navy cap with its ribbons hanging down my neck, and he motioned me to imitate the rigid attention at which he stood. I was deeply impressed by this view of the Kaiser, surrounded by handsome guardsmen. Afterward I found I could remember only one thing about this symbol of the German Empire—a pair of sharply waxed mustaches, upturned at the ends.

And then came the end of the summer, and there was talk of my going home. Unfortunately for the peace of mind of Uncle and Aunt, the friend who had brought me to Berlin changed his plans about returning to Prague, and they could find no one to take me back. I knew they were more than annoyed, but I could think of nothing to say whenever they began to talk about it because I was so afraid it meant I couldn't go home at all.

One evening when dinner was announced by the usual bell and I had

followed Leo to the dining room, there was Mother, waiting to take me into her arms. When she finally released me I just stood looking at her as though she were an apparition. In turn, she stared at me, for I had changed almost out of recognition in the three months of my visit in Berlin. The food and the comfort had given me weight and a healthy appearance, in spite of my loneliness, and my face was now round and rosy where before it had been pinched and thin.

During the meal Uncle told Mother in detail about my bad manners, and explained how grateful she should be to Aunt for the sacrifices his wife had made in taking care of a second child in the midst of her busy life. Mother was sitting across the table from me, next to Leo. I looked at her from under my lashes and I saw tears in her eyes. But she smiled at me as though she hadn't heard what Uncle was saying.

That night, after I had undressed myself as usual and crawled into bed, I waited for Aunt's last visit to Leo before I should be gone. When she came, Mother was behind her, and I began to tremble with joy. Mother sat on the edge of my cot and smoothed the hair back from my forehead while Aunt was kissing Leo. As they started out of the room, Mother turned back and reached to a shelf where blankets and comforters were kept. She pulled an eiderdown off the shelf and laid it over me, patting me gently as she did so.

Aunt's face was full of astonishment as she said crisply, "What are you doing that for?"

Mother looked from my bed to Leo's, where he lay under the mate to the eiderdown she had given me. "The maid forgot," she said. "She hasn't put as many blankets on Jan's bed as on Leo's. He'll be cold if he doesn't have this."

Aunt came straight to my cot and jerked the eiderdown off, folding it and putting it back on the shelf as she said, "It makes no difference what Leo has on his bed. A child who must live as you do should be hardened and not petted. Let Jan learn to get along by himself in this world."

I still don't know why I remember that last night more clearly than any of the rest of my stay in Berlin.

## CHAPTER IX



THE trip home to Prague with Mother was a different story from the ride three months earlier with the stranger. Now it was an exciting adventure, and every strange sight and sound was colored for me by her presence and the light she threw on everything by her comments and her answers to my excited questions. I was deliriously happy. Even the fact that we were forced to ride in

a third-class carriage on a very slow train, because Uncle saw no reason to send us back on a first-class express, had no power to dull our joy in being together again.

The train crawled in a leisurely fashion away from the industries which ringed Berlin, away from the sandy flatlands of Prussia and eventually into the wooded country of Saxony, stopping to puff and catch its breath at every little station and watering post. Beyond Dresden we began to cut through the Sandstone Mountains as we followed carefully the shore of the Elbe. Then wooded hills gave way to wider carpets of cultivated valley, and Mother said it was growing more like our own country. She could not understand why I remembered nothing of the scenery from my trip to Berlin. I stood with my nose pressed against the windows, balancing myself to compensate the train's motions, and did not tell her why.

Black forests of evergreen mixed with hardwood rose steeply into the sky when the hills shot up sheer from the river's edge, and we crawled along between a wall and a path of water, with identical green hills on the other side. I wanted to see more farms and the people at work on them, but Mother said there would be few until we reached Bohemia.

I left the window to sit beside her on the wooden bench, and began to look around at the other people who were riding with us in the third-class carriage. There was a woman with a crumpled baby on her lap and a small, soiled child clutching at her skirts. The man hidden behind a newspaper who sat next to them might be a husband and father, or he might be a stranger. The young soldier beside Mother was snoring. Two girls farther down the aisle chattered together, half watching the soldier and giggling whenever his snoring grew loud. Farmers with bundles and workers smoking pipes with porcelain bowls were scattered through the coach, and far down at the end a family was spread out in the midst of baskets and boxes. A small boy and his older brother were concerned with a large hamper and the cat sounds that issued from it now and then.

The train continued to measure the path of the Elbe on its way to Bohemia under the afternoon sun. I touched Mother's elbow. "I think I'd like to talk to those boys at the end of the coach, if you don't mind," I said. "Is this our country yet?"

"No, dear," she replied. "You'll know when we cross into Austria because the customs men will come through the train."

"What for?"

"To see if we're trying to take anything across the border that is forbidden."

"I see. Are we?"

"No, dear."

"Then I think I'll go talk to those boys."

She watched me as I made my way through the bundles of babies and small children that had spilled into the dirty aisle. When I looked back she smiled. And then presently I was at her side again, tugging at her sleeve to distract her attention from the window. "Look," I said, in the manner of one carrying a great secret, "there's a kitten down at the end of the car. A very little kitten, all furry. The boys have him in a box. He's not very happy because he's been sick from the train, and their mother is mad and she says I can have him. He's all gray and white."

"A cat, Jan?" My face must have been filled with pity and intense desire for a small animal that needed love. "What would you do with a cat in Prague? And what would the boys do without him? Are they Czechs?"

"No, they're German. I'd love the kitten. That's more than they do. It needs someone to look after it."

She studied my face carefully. "Are you sure that's what they said? That you were to take the kitten?"

"Yes. They kept pushing him at me."

She thought a minute, while I leaned my elbows on her lap. "Your grandmother probably wouldn't like you to bring a cat home. Or the landlady, either. And the kitten would have to be fed regularly, you know."

"Yes, I know. He can have part of my milk each day. And I'm sure they'd like a nice little gray and white kitten like this one, aren't you?"

Mother straightened my collar. "Well, there are lots of things your grandmother doesn't like. Perhaps if you explained to her yourself how much this kitten needs you . . ."

I was already on my way to the other end of the coach.

When the train slowed down to meet the next station I made my way back to Mother. She was peering from the windows again. Outside was a row of houses, cowsheds and livery stables, cross views of narrow streets, and then the concrete platform of a station. The boys had told me it was Bodenbach, the frontier. I slid onto the bench beside her, leaning against her back and holding my jacket over my middle with stiff arms and an air of mystery.

"Don't look at me," I whispered as she turned around. "The boys said the customs men would take it away. I don't think they'll notice, do you?"

"Well, you look a trifle fat, even for a boy who's been visiting his uncle in Berlin. Here. . . ." She reached to the rack above our heads and pulled down a brown paper parcel. "Put that on your knees and open some sandwiches. We'll have our supper while we're waiting."

I gave her an arch smile of conspiracy and followed her bidding. But the food was only munched as I watched the door at the end of the coach. Suddenly a voice behind us said, "*ZOLL . . . REVISION!* Customs! Show your

luggage! What have you to declare?"

Everyone in the carriage began to lay bare their small belongings, embarrassed to show forth their personal effects before strange eyes. "Where are you going? What have you got there?" the officer with a thick neck said to Mother. She answered quietly and I said not a word, chewing on my sandwich and holding my belly with my left arm. The officer thrust his hand inside our bags, turned over Mother's box of embroideries and moved on to the next bench. I stopped chewing, but I remained motionless until the officers had left the coach.

Then I said, "Look!" in a voice of rising excitement. "Oh, Mother, isn't he a beautiful kitten?" The paper parcel was deposited on her lap, my jacket was unbuttoned with care, and a small gray cat face with a snub nose and frightened eyes peered out. "He likes me already," I said, rubbing the animal's nose. "Isn't he going to be the most wonderful cat?" The kitten thrust its nose into the gentle stroking of my finger, and Mother watched us both.

Two boys scrambled down the aisle, shoving each other aside. When they reached me the older boy jerked the kitten out of its nest in my lap without ceremony. I tried to hold it, but the boy jerked it away and held it at arm's length and the kitten began to cry.

"*Nein . . . nein. Das ist mein. Du hast es gesagt!*" I cried. The boys made a face at me and ran back to their mother, taking the kitten with them.

I began to cry. I dug a fist into each eye and pretended otherwise. "They only let me have their cat because they wanted me to get it through the customs for them," I said. "They never meant me to keep it at all. I hate them . . . I hate them both!"

"Never mind, dear," Mother said quietly, patting my knee. "Some day I'll buy you a dog. You'll like that better."

I shook my head and continued to rub my eyes.

"You'll meet lots of people in the world like those boys," Mother went on. "If you allow yourself to hate them, you'll be giving them importance they don't deserve. Despise the bad qualities in them, but not the individual people. Then they can't hurt you, really, down inside."

I looked up at her. "Did they do that because they were German?"

"No. Of course not. But Germans are a peculiar kind of people. They have their own ideas of right and wrong. Many things that seem bad to us seem all right to them. Do you understand?"

"Yes," I said. I noticed that the train was running through a different kind of country now and I went back to the window.

There were lush meadows filled with cattle, clusters of farmhouses and tile-roofed barns that were sweating in the sun, and patches and patches of oats, rye, wheat, hops, turnips and beets measured off like the squares of a

quilt. Sometimes the small villages we passed were close beside the train, sometimes they hugged far hills. All the houses had flowers in the dooryard and pots of flowers on the window sills. Men at work behind horse-drawn rakes and women and children picking hops or stacking purple beets seemed another race of people in their full skirts and embroidered bandannas. They were different from any city folk I knew.

We began to eat again, sharing the parcel of food between us. Nothing could keep me from feeling close to Mother and on my way home again.

## CHAPTER X



FROM every ugly experience of my young life, Mother drew a moral deduction to train my religious character. She never called it religion and there were never any words like duty or obligation or sacrifice. But she nonetheless gave me a basis of moral law in the mode of her own faith which has lasted me to this day.

People without imagination, she said, needed pictures of God as a glorified human being in order to understand even a little about Him. But God and Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost could never be found in material beings or things. They were represented, she said, by every human being in the world to some degree, and all human beings should be approached as representatives of God.

Prayers, she felt, were senseless when they were automatic repetitions of memorized lines at certain fixed hours in certain fixed places. That sort of praying was the escape of sinners to appease their own remorse, a kind of trite bargain with their own consciences. If I felt at the end of a day that I had been good and kind to other people, had worked honestly and done even the slightest good deed, then my day had been wholly a prayer to Him.

Though she had been raised a Roman Catholic, she no longer went to church. She believed that God is everywhere, and so she felt she was still good in His sight if she worked on Sundays, for God was in our room and could be found there as easily as in a cathedral. Every stitch she put into the making of a livelihood for her child and her mother she considered a wholehearted prayer, and so she felt no need of reading prayers from books which offered them prepared.

She never sent me to church, nor did she ever forbid me to go. The time would come, she said, when I would find my way into a church because I felt the need of a place of refuge. But I must never go there to be seen or to state my presence. I could stand in the darkest corner and take into myself the atmosphere of seclusion which creates a certain relaxation of soul, but I must



remember that the first pews in front were no nearer God than the ones next the door.

Confession, in Mother's mind, was a poor escape for weaklings who, through their own admittance, tried to shift the responsibility of a judgment on their bad deeds to some other human being. Nothing had been accomplished by a confession in a church if the sinner himself had not repaired his misdeed, instead of merely confessing it and saying a few automatic prayers.

These things I learned before I was old enough to talk, for they were the basis of all the fairy stories she told. Sainte Marie, for instance, became the spirit of the mother of every child, the incarnation of mother love. And when she spoke of the way of Golgotha and the stations of the cross, I understood it to be the way of everyone's life, in which the cross of suffering must be carried until the day when the soul becomes free.

Mother believed in an immortal soul. When the body dies, she explained, the soul remains in the universe, though often it must wait to find a new form of return to the human sphere. She wanted me to remember always that one day when she left me it would be her body only that would be gone. If my future life was good enough, she would still be with me, though she might then accompany me in a new form. I must be very careful, therefore, not to pass her by when she approached me once again. In the meantime, as always, I would be governed by this great and mysterious power which we call God, so great and so incomprehensible for the human mind to grasp that even the name of God is only a feeble expression for an idea too wide for the human thought to hold.

Not even my experiences in Berlin were able to shake this faith. It took the following years of school to test it with fire.

I went first to a public elementary school not far from where we lived in Smichov. The pupils were the boys of the neighborhood and they were all strangers to me. They were the sons of factory workers and small tradesmen and petty government clerks. The school was housed in a two-story frame building painted an ugly yellow color. It was flush with the road, a highway which led to Plzeň, and it was surrounded by railway workshops which shared the smoke and soot from their chimneys with us. There was neither a yard nor playground anywhere near.

There were approximately two hundred pupils in the school, all boys. The rooms were bare of ornament except the teacher's desk on a raised platform, movable blackboards, and colored photographs of the head of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. We sat in rows on long wooden benches, with a wooden trestle in front of us to serve as a common desk and our backs against the trestle behind us. The subjects we studied were fundamental: reading, spelling, numbers, writing and patriotic songs which were led by the teacher as he

accompanied us on his squeaky violin.

The day began when we put our two hands side by side on the front edge of the trestle desk. There we must hold them rigid and painfully motionless, touching our fingers to the wood but not our wrists. The teacher walked up and down and watched for a single flicker of nervous movement. When he found a quiver he pounced with a long ruler and rapped the back of the offending hand sharply.

My neighbor on one side was the son of the Smichov postmaster. When his fingers twitched, his hands were rapped lightly, just a tap. When my fingers twitched, they bore red scars from the ruler for several days. So it was that I learned about class distinction. According to the place held by one's father was a boy's place in school life. Had I been the son of the meanest artisan in the railway yards, my hands would have been beaten less harshly than they were, because I had no father at all and my mother worked very hard in no social category the teacher could understand.

It was the same with the compliments we received on the work we did in spelling or writing or numbers. No matter how hard I tried, the teacher's acceptance of my work sounded like a criticism though his words often said it was correct. Often it wasn't noticed at all. Perhaps if I had understood then as I do now that even teachers in those days of the old empire were classified in different social grades and levels, I could have saved myself from many hurts. The *Lehrer*, or teachers in elementary schools such as this one in Smichov, were looked down upon by the professors in the academies, and in turn the professors in academies were frowned upon by professors of the university. Socially, the *Lehrer* and professors never met, for there was a world of class consciousness between them.

As is usual in such a society, my classmates took their cue from the behavior of the teacher. Because he showed that he considered me beneath them in social rank, they scorned me too. So at the age of less than seven I became a bitter little boy. Since all my classmates were potential enemies, I found it necessary to hurt someone else in turn, and I began to be cruel to Mother in small ways.

At the beginning of each term she took me to the bookshop to buy the growing number of textbooks I needed. It was impossible for her to afford new ones, so she always chose used volumes that were tumbled together in a bin in the back of the shop. Then she spent the night before each term making folded paper covers for them, but she was never able to hide the dog-eared pages inside or put back pages that had been torn out.

I hated these old books with a passion. After all, Mother herself had given me a love of the beauty of cleanliness, and now I could not throw it away so lightly. Every day I saw the greasy smears of grubby hands, the scribbings,

and I had to tell the teacher again and again before the whole class that I couldn't complete an assignment because pages in my books were missing.

Mother could hardly have liked these trips to the bookshop at the beginning of each term, but I never made them easier for her. I made no attempt to hide my dislike for the books or my resentment at having to use them. One year she turned from the bin of secondhand books and asked the clerk for new copies of every book on my list. Her face was fixed in a painful smile, but I could see nothing except the shining new covers and the crisp white pages of the volumes the clerk gave me. As a result, I was often hungry during the following months, but I refused to admit even to myself the connection between these two events.

Whenever it began to rain while I was in school, or the temperature dropped suddenly, Mother would put aside her work and walk to meet me with a shawl or a cap or an umbrella. The other boys laughed and made fun of me for days after each of these encounters. So one afternoon, when I saw Mother coming some distance away, I ran around a whole block to avoid her. I thought this would help to make me more acceptable to the dirty little stinkers who were my classmates.

Mother made no mention of having gone to school to meet me when I finally reached home. But I was thoroughly ashamed in my heart, and after that I bore the jibes of the other boys in silence, still wanting their admiration, but wanting even more not to have to avoid Mother's eyes.

The only other events I remember clearly from my years in this elementary school were the police station and the bricklayer's son. The police station, headquarters for the very poor borough adjoining Smichov, was directly across the street from the school. Every noon when we returned to school from lunch at home, and again when school was over at five in the afternoon, we stood about in front of the police station and watched the station wagon, which we called the Green Mary, bring in the day's roundup of drunks, prostitutes, pickpockets and bums. I was especially impressed by the green cock feathers which the policemen wore in their helmets.

The bricklayer's son was a stupid lout who was as unruly as he was incapable of learning. One day his mother and father appeared in the classroom at the request of the teacher, and I remember well the slavish manner in which they showed their respect for him. While we all sat and listened, the teacher told them how useless and stupid their son was, without softening his words. When the teacher was finished, the bricklayer and his wife bowed with deep respect and marched over to their son who was lolling at his place before one of the desks. The mother held him down while the father began to beat him with a great stick he had evidently brought for the purpose. The boys crowded around to watch the performance and the teacher looked on with a smirk of

satisfaction on his face. When the beating was over and the parents had taken their son home, the teacher got out his violin and we all sang patriotic songs.

## CHAPTER XI



AT the approximate age of eleven, our elementary schooling was complete. Normally a boy in my position would at this point leave school forever and go into training as an apprentice of a chosen craft. This is what many of my classmates proceeded to do, and I have often regretted that I didn't follow them, but Mother had no intention of allowing me to stop my education so soon, as though I were no better than a son of the proletariat.

The boys who went on with their studies now passed from a public elementary school into one of two kinds of preparatory school, of which there were several in Prague. Classical schools prepared for university courses in philosophy, medicine, the humanities and what would be known in America simply as liberal arts. Nonclassical schools prepared for military academy, engineering and technical courses in the university, or one of the specialized academies which gave entrée into business or civil service in the empire.

There was no question of my entering a classical school. I had a revulsion toward the thought of becoming a doctor or a teacher, and even though I might have longed for a professional career as an engineer, the long years of study for such a life made it too expensive an undertaking for me to consider. A nonclassical school, in preparation for one of the civil service academies, was my choice, and Mother knew precisely which one she wanted me to attend.

It was located in a huge, beautiful building on the border of Smichov and the Malá Strana. It was very well equipped, with large, modern classrooms, an impressive entrance, wide marble stairs leading to the classrooms which occupied four floors, a fine gymnasium, buffet lunch served every day at ten o'clock to the students, and an excellent staff of teachers. But it also charged a yearly fee of a hundred and twenty kronen, and that was far beyond Mother's means, even by the tightest of stretching.

She went to the Smichov town hall and applied for a written statement which was known as a "poverty certificate." This document asserted that I was eligible through its possession to a waiver of the tuition at the nonclassical school. Gaining entrance in this fashion mortified me, but Mother rose above shame in her pleasure at seeing me enrolled in what she considered the most select educational institution in Prague. I could hardly disappoint her by refusing to go.

Here, for the next four years, I undertook to master such subjects as

literature, history, geography and drawing; Czech, German and French; chemistry, physics, algebra and geometry. There may have been other subjects, too, which I have forgotten, but there was no singing. My classmates were chiefly the sons of the military aristocracy connected with the garrison. They were well-mannered boys and they never mistreated me, as the children in the public school had done. They merely ignored me. In the years I spent there I made not a single friend, and after awhile I gave up trying to find one.

I still have a photograph of my class, taken the year I entered, in 1907. Thirty-five boys were arranged by the photographer in four rows. In the center of the front row sat the headmaster of the school and the head of our form, their lips in straight lines, their eyes staring into the camera as though they were about to tell the photographer what a stupid and clumsy fellow he was. They were flanked on either side of the front bench by the boys whose fathers were the most socially prominent. Their names carried the prefix *Graf* or *von* or *Freiherr*. In the next row, also facing the camera squarely with self-confidence, were the next in rank. There were still smiles on the faces of the boys in the third row, but in the back row stood a disconsolate group of six. We were the backstairs lot. Our collars were too high, our haircuts too close, our eyes dulled from too much extra work at home. I was the shortest of the six and the poor food I had eaten all my life made my eyes seem too large and round for the rest of my face.

I found it increasingly difficult in this school to care whether I was good or bad in my assignments, for the highest praise I ever received for the best work I could do was a nod of indifference on the part of the professors. But Mother helped me in the evenings whenever I fell behind in a subject, working on her designs while I pored over my books on the other side of the big walnut table. She gave me confidence and sent me back to school each day with a renewed determination to win good marks in order to bring pleasure to her. I had finally outgrown my desire to torment her in order to ease my own small hurts.

One day I came home as usual after school, ready to make deliveries of Mother's finished work to various parts of the city. I found her face warm with excitement and she could hardly wait for me to lay down my books to tell me about a wonderful surprise she had for me. She took me by the hand, led me to the cupboard and opened it with a flourish, turning to watch my pleasure when I saw what she had hidden there.

I looked at the two enormous books and then picked one of them up and turned it over in my hands. It was heavily tooled in gold leaf, ornate beyond belief. Its back indicated that it was volume two of an encyclopedia of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. That morning, Mother explained, a very nice gentleman had visited her, bringing with him the best regards of the headmaster of the nonclassical school. Mother was thrilled as she told it, and I

tried to avoid her eyes. After compliments about me had been exchanged, the caller told her about a list he had been given, containing the names of the finest and brightest boys in the school. To the parents of those fortunate students he was making the remarkable offer of a set of the encyclopedia for the small sum of two hundred and fifty kronen, to be paid in monthly installments. He was sure Mother would appreciate the thought of the headmaster in giving her an opportunity of helping me in my work at school through the ownership of this beautiful edition. "Have you already signed for the whole set?" I said, trying not to show my dismay in my voice.

"Yes, of course," she said. "And wasn't it fortunate that I had enough in the house to give him the first payment this morning?"

"How much was it?"

"Ten kronen. That leaves just ten kronen a month to pay for two years."

I felt sick and I wanted to run out of the room. Mother had been taken in by a swindler and I knew the headmaster had never sent him to see her. I listened as she went on to tell me how impressed the head would be when he heard that she had been willing to do this to help me in my career.

It made me ashamed of myself. I felt I should have been able to save her from being so humiliated. The encyclopedia was utterly useless to me or to anyone else, but how was she to know it when so many of my studies seemed senseless to us both? When I knew she could no longer accept my silence as surprise, I kissed her and thanked her for such generosity when it meant a sacrifice on her part for so long a time. At that moment was born a never-ending dislike and suspicion of all salesmen and promotion methods for selling useless articles. For months after that I dreamed at night of Jesus throwing the money-changers out of the temple.

## CHAPTER XII



TIME ticked itself off by days and weeks and years. Yet, in the way of a boy, it seemed a static element to me. It was here and now. Today was today. Yesterday was ages past and tomorrow was unknown. This moment, this hour, was time. It was mine. Who cared for anything more? One day was my birthday and I was ten. Another day was my birthday and I was eleven. Ten and eleven were names Mother gave me for those special days. They were meaningless as applied to anything but myself. When I was twelve, twelve was a thing to be. There was no thirteen; there would never be a thirteen. When I was thirteen, thirteen was a thing to be, and twelve was forgotten. There were no brothers and sisters to remind me of how it had been or how it would be.

Grandmother was ancient, Mother was ageless, and now was time, and time was myself.

My world was still a place primarily of action, and my questions were still concerned with the how of my environment and the what. It would be some years before the philosopher's why overrode other queries in my mind's attempt to relate myself to mankind in a larger sense. There was a hunchback who sold papers on the corner, the doctor behind the door, the woman who owned our house but never entered our room; there was Grandfather whom I had never met, and the beautiful people who rode by our windows in their new horseless carriages. Each had a place in my world, but I made no attempt to classify them. There were also activities like doing my lessons, and running errands for Mother, and scuffing dead leaves along the pavements, and counting gray horses. These were things to do.

I was lonely, but I never thought about it. It was only afterward that I could look back and tell myself how it was. None of the boys in my neighborhood ever wanted to play with me because I was different. They knew it and I knew it. I spoke well, like my mother, and that was different from the way their mothers spoke. So I was separated from them for reasons I could see but not understand. The boys at the nonclassical school wouldn't play with me, either, though I talked as they did. I still lived in the wrong section of town.

Independence of human companionship had been forced upon me early, and by the time I was twelve I had come to take it for granted. In the place of friends, I depended upon countless new experiences to elicit wonder and make my own. There was rhythm and design, for instance, though I never thought about them in the abstract. I found them everywhere. First there had been Mother's designs, which I tried to copy before I could hold a pencil alone. There was the wind in the tree outside our window, and the pattern of coal-blackened wheels on the road below. And there was swimming, which I loved above everything else.

I had learned to swim in the muddy reaches of the Vltava before I was eight years old. I called it the Moldau River in those days, because all place names in Prague were German, though Mother had taught me to think of the old Bohemian town by its Czech name of Praha, which means "threshold." As a stream, the Vltava was undistinguished, but it was the spinal cord of the old city, lovingly laced by a string of beautiful bridges. There was no other place I preferred to be from early spring until late autumn, whenever I could steal an hour or so for my own. One could watch fishermen along its slimy banks catching finny creatures which only a boy would consider worth pulling up on a bent pin. There were always barges being marshaled downstream by officious tugs, carrying produce from beyond the hills to the Elbe and so to Hamburg in Germany. There were boatmen to talk to while they sat lazy in the

sun and dreamed of younger years at sea.

When the days were warm enough I would strike out rhythmically across the water, feeling the response of my muscles as I spurted beyond the path of an oncoming string of empty barges. Well out of their way, I would roll onto my back and stretch out to float while the sluggish river carried me downstream at its own pace. Over one shoulder I could see the Hradčany, rising steeply on the Malá Strana side. Copper domes and pointed spires stabbed into the sky, and the bells in their old towers clanged and echoed the hour. Over the other shoulder the dark buildings of the Staré Město rose heavily from the water's edge. Ahead of me I could watch clouds puffing above the plateau of the Vyšehrad.

I would swim again, conscious of my strokes sluicing evenly through the water, bending it away from my head. The sun would hit my hands as they came out of the water and sliced back again, and my body rolled with the strokes. I loved the rhythm of my own motion, as I had loved the designs growing under my pencils when I was a small boy. Tired of swimming, I would float again and think about myself. I was held in a cradle of water hung between the hills on either side. Space was a new extension of time out here. Gravity was circumvented, and I felt lord of myself alone.

## CHAPTER XIII



IT was about this time, when I was still in the nonclassical school, that the pattern of my life changed once again. Grandfather came to live with us, after Mother had visited him in the country and found him unable any longer to support himself by his weaving. He was eighty-five then, and I was twelve.

With no preliminaries of getting acquainted, we understood each other completely. I felt as though I had been looking for him for a long time. Perhaps it was because Mother had made him so real a figure in my imagination through her stories about him from the time before I could remember. He was still very tall and handsome, with a silky white beard that fell to his chest, and blue, straight-seeing eyes. He fondled his beard constantly, parting it and smoothing it together again. The weakening of his eyesight he lamented every few days, but as soon as he began this Mother or I would take his glasses from his nose and wash the lenses. It would be another while before we heard about the weakness of his eyes again.

He loved to examine with minute care every piece and scrap of material that Mother brought into the house. Whether it was a strip of cotton, a linen square, a piece of wool or a scrap of silk, he put it under his old magnifying



glass and counted the threads in the warp and woof, explaining to me over each piece how it had been made and what kind of machinery had been used in its manufacture. He admired only the hand-woven textiles, and these with reservations, because none of them measured the quality of his own work. The bits of material made with machinery never failed to send him off into a tirade of condemnation for the machine age we were living in. He hated all machinery with a passion, and he swore at factories as modern devils which were pushing the quality of handcraft aside.

When he came to live with us we had to move from our one room on Palacký Street into a small apartment of two rooms and a tiny kitchen in a house near the coalyards on Nádražní třída. Now our windows overlooked a small garden which adjoined a brewery. Dances and festivals were often held there in celebration of national holidays, but they never seemed a compensation for the loss of the smell of freshly baked bread which I had loved as long as I could remember in our first home.

Grandmother never spoke to Grandfather because he would never speak to her. They were like two fish swimming in a tank who pass and repass in the water but never take note of each other's presence. Grandmother spent most of her time at the window which overlooked the brewery garden, though she still went out occasionally to meet her friends in a coffeehouse or in the park. Her presence had come to mean nothing to me, as an ugly piece of furniture can lose its power to irritate simply by its familiarity.

Whenever Grandmother went into the kitchen to get a cup of coffee, she looked through Grandfather—who used the kitchen as his workshop—as though he weren't there. She poured out her coffee and set the pot back on the stove, and then she gave a louder-than-usual sigh as she took up her place again at the window. At least once a day the two old people would meet accidentally in the narrow corridor which ran between the living room and the kitchen. When this happened, they both backed away and stood waiting, listening to see who would move first. It was always up to Mother or me to set the signals and send them on their way.

Mother was the angel of our home, interpreting us one to the other and always dividing her attention between Grandmother and Grandfather so evenly that neither could complain of being, neglected. It was like her never to attempt to force either of them to change their ways.

I came upon Grandfather in the kitchen one day laboring over a contraption he had set up in one corner. Its pieces he had carved from cartons, putting them together with glue, and now he was turning the affair into a machine which seemed to please him highly. He called me over to look at it.

"See," he said, pointing to bits of tin foil and buttons which were serving as weights and counterweights. "They work like this . . . so, and so . . ." He

made them revolve to show me. "I'll get it yet."

In all my schooling I had never had any kind of instruction in the use of my hands for carpentering or construction, and I admired extravagantly Grandfather's ability to make such a contrivance. "What is it?" I said.

He went on tinkering with it, trying to make the buttons and tin foil move as he wished them to do. "It's a solution of the problem of perpetual motion," he said. "Or it will be, when I've finished with it. No reason why it should be such a problem for mankind. I'm going to try changing this weight, so . . ."

I left him absorbed in his invention. He worked on his scheme for perpetual motion almost until he died, but it never once occurred to him that it was one more machine to add to all those he so bitterly condemned.

Everyone who encountered him felt Grandfather's charm. I suspect my grandmother was no exception. Within no time at all after he came to live with us he had made countless friends throughout the neighborhood, for he loved all men who were honest and he was never afraid to let them know it. Whenever I could find time apart from school or running errands for Mother, I accompanied him on his slow walks through Smichov. And if I couldn't find him on the street or at home, I knew where to look. He was sure to be in the tobacco shop on the corner, talking to Ludvik, the old soldier who ran it.

Tobacco shops in the empire were state-owned and they were always run by government employees, usually war veterans. This shop at our corner carried the huge Austro-Hungarian double-headed eagle over the door, and the inscription below it read: *Kaiser und Königliche Tabak-Regie*. Grandfather never smoked, but the shop sold newspapers and there were always papers and magazines lying about, and the old soldier who ran the place was a fine one to talk with about the state of the world. There were also the other customers who came and went and stopped to chat with Grandfather, and I never tired of listening to their conversation.

Though he had never heard of the theories of Marx, Grandfather was always on the side of the worker, and he never failed to tell once again about his own experiences on the barricades in Prague in 1848. He felt that such an experience of early fighting gave him priority of opinion over any opposing point of view. He distrusted the Japanese with bitterness, though he had never laid eyes on an Oriental in his life, and it was from him that I first heard of wars. The late fight between Russia and Japan still worried him.

So the world outside Prague began to emerge in my imagination as a reality. It must not be thought, however, that I had any actual grasp of politics or diplomatic affairs. I believed what I was told in school about the glories of the empire and the value of our close association with the Kaiser's Germany. What went on in Washington or London or Peking we never heard about, and if we had it would have seemed as lacking in interest as a news item

originating in the Lama's temple in Tibet today.

When the German naval program began to show fabulous increases in new construction in 1907, no one talked about it in the tobacco shop because it was not an item of news. On the other hand, a fire in one of the coal mines in our own country kept the shop talking for days. One of Ludvik's nephews perished in it.

I tried to say something to make Ludvik feel better, but I found it difficult to guess what it would be like to have a dead nephew. Ludvik said, "My own brother's boy, to get it like that."

Not wanting to add to the old soldier's hurt, but rather wanting to take his mind off this thing which involved relationships I couldn't understand, I said, "Did you ever have a father?"

Ludvik forgot his grieving for a moment and looked at me sharply. "I should hope so," he said. "Everybody's got to have a father."

Someone came in for a pipeful of tobacco and when he had gone out again I said, "Not everybody."

"We won't argue about it," Ludvik replied. "Here comes your grandfather."

It was on May Day in 1908 that the Kaiser and a lot of other German sovereigns assembled in Vienna to congratulate the Emperor Franz Josef on the sixtieth year of his reign. The Kaiser's entourage passed through Prague on its way to Vienna, but the city saw nothing of it. We were a provincial town then, and the royal party was guarded from any contact with us. Not long before there had been street disturbances in Berlin, caused by agitation in the Reichstag for a reform of franchise. Kings and princes and potentates all over the world sent congratulations to Emperor Franz Josef that May. We heard about that in school.

When I talked about it at home Mother said, "He's not your emperor. You're a Czech. We'd have our own king now if they hadn't beaten us at the Battle of the White Mountain. Someday we'll be free again."

But her words meant little to me. I didn't feel oppressed by Franz Josef. My troubles were much smaller ones, and much closer home. "Watch out, Jan," she went on, her voice calm and sweet in contradiction to the strength of her words, "a boy becomes what he admires. You must learn to distinguish good men from bad ones, even when they're in high places. Most people in the world believe whatever they're told, and they mistake ceremony and pageants for greatness. You must learn not to do that."

In June, conversation in the tobacco shop turned to the wreck of the French military airship in Ireland, and Grandfather clucked at the foolishness of trying to fly through the air, as though the good Lord hadn't meant men to keep their feet on the ground. A German zeppelin made a first voyage with fifteen

passengers. When it crashed two months later after sailing four hundred miles, Grandfather felt doubly justified in his complaints about the ways of men.

Next spring there was another Balkan crisis. It was terminated by Russia's formal recognition of Austria's annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and there was a celebration throughout the empire. Our school closed for a day. But Mother said it was a robber's feast. It seemed to occur to no one else that trouble between ourselves and our neighbors could ever be settled any other way.

When Queen Wilhelmina of Holland gave birth to a daughter, Ludvik happened to see a minuscule notice of it in the back part of a newspaper. When I asked a leading question in response to his announcement, Grandfather decided it was time to give me some basic instruction in the natural processes of life. He handled the subject with firmness and finesse. Ludvik helped by explaining that Holland was a small country, though the Dutch Empire was important any way you looked at it because it was spread among islands in the Pacific, and they were rich with foods and minerals that Europe couldn't do without. Between them, they left with me the impression that sexual instinct had originated in the South Pacific with girls who had brown bodies and hands like warm water caressing the bow of a canoe. I also gathered that sex was more or less confined to tropical islands.

The German Kaiser and Kaiserin went forth to Vienna and back again, and three hundred and fifty warships were mobilized for naval maneuvers in England. We heard nothing about either event, and if we had, we would have seen no connection between them. France announced an intention of spending \$500,000,000 on naval construction to cover a ten-year period and a cabinet crisis followed in Berlin. When a queer man who really read the papers talked about these things in the tobacco shop one day, Ludvik pointed out that if some people didn't watch their steps they'd be making a war before they knew it. He didn't actually believe his own words, but Grandfather counteracted such nonsense by proving how a war in the twentieth century was impossible.

It was in that spring of 1909, when I was thirteen years old, that I was faced with a major decision. No happenings in the outer world could possibly assume importance in the face of it. What was my future career to be? The majority of my classmates were going on to the *Kadettenschule* as a matter of course. But even had I been drawn to a military career by the glamour of uniforms and social prestige, such a course would have been out of the question for me. One required references for admittance to the cadet's school.

There was a further choice of three more years at the nonclassical school in preparation for an engineering or technical course at the university, or entrance at once into one of the specialized academies in Prague which gave college degrees. A university education was eliminated from consideration because of

its expense and the extra time it would require. Besides, mathematics had always been my hardest subject. There remained, then, one of the specialized schools.

These were three. The Export Academy sent its graduates into the African colonies of Germany and Holland to expand the plantations there. The Commercial Academy concentrated its teaching in the field of business and merchandising. The Agricultural Academy devoted its efforts to training in modern methods of farming and stock raising.

I dismissed the Commercial Academy at once because I had no interest in trade or the market of buying and selling, and Mother agreed that she had no desire to see me in such a bourgeois world. Between the Export Academy and the Agricultural Academy my choice wavered back and forth. One week my thoughts were colored with a passionate desire to live in Africa. I saw my life filled with adventure and exploration in foreign lands, far from Smichov and all it stood for in my mind. Sometimes, when I let my imagination drift toward Africa, I felt a twinge of compunction for my selfishness in considering such a life because it would mean leaving Mother behind. Then I would turn my consideration to the Agricultural Academy and I would think for long hours about the possibility of becoming a farmer. I saw myself riding a beautiful mare over lush fields of ripening grain, enjoying the finest food I could conjure in my mind. And at the end of every sun-filled day I would return to a spacious farmhouse and Mother. The Agricultural Academy was my final choice.

So Mother wrote to Uncle and told him how proud he would be of my decision. Her letter brought a prompt reply. Uncle pointed out that I must bring myself to realistic thinking at once. The only possible school for me to enter was the Commercial Academy where he had begun his own memorable career many years ago. If eventually I should do well there, and prove myself worthy of his recommendation . . . if I remembered also to do nothing to oblige him to deny any connection with the family . . . there was no reason why I couldn't find an appropriate place in some bank in Prague, to follow the illustrious path he himself had chosen. And remember, he added, that I must speak only German in future. There was no place for the Czech language in a business career.

When mother had finished reading the letter aloud, from her corner Grandmother continued to make the clucking sounds with which she had been punctuating each period. I began to feel lightheaded, as though I were going to be sick, and then I lost my temper. It wasn't the first time it had happened in Mother's presence and it was not the last. But she looked surprised and hurt, as she always did, and eventually I grew calmer and went to get a cup of coffee from the stove. I remembered what Grandfather had said the first time he saw me in a tantrum: I would have to learn somehow to live with other people, and

if I didn't learn by myself the world would soon teach me. Others were unlikely to forgive me as quickly as Mother would. That made me ashamed, but already I knew subconsciously that the world was unlikely often to see me naked with fury.

Mother was restless that summer of my last year at the nonclassical school. One evening in late June I came upon her reading a letter which she hid in the folds of her blouse as soon as she saw me at the door. I got out my books to study as usual, but the lines on the page of the algebra text blurred under my eyes and my mind wandered off to other matters. After awhile I said, "I forgot. I told Grandfather I'd meet him at Ludvik's. I guess I'd better go."

Mother said nothing but she watched me as I snatched my cap and hurried away. Out on the street I put my hands in my pockets and began to whistle a new waltz the band had been trying out in the brewery garden under our window. Had Mother believed my falsehood? I couldn't be sure. Perhaps I'd better find Grandfather and spend a little while with him in the shop. But instead of stopping at the corner, I walked on.

The night was hot and Prague stewed in its own humidity. Couples walked arm in arm under the dark chestnut trees, hesitant to entrust their desires to steamy sheets. Children played tag in and out of purple-dark lanes, unrebuked by parents who wondered why the young were insensible to temperature. Priests moved along quickly in their black broadcloth, anxious to reach the cool bowl of a church from whatever missions had detained them. On the boulevard the night looked crumpled.

Slow-moving crowds poured along the pavements, their voices beating through the heat like blood pounding in the ears of a feverish patient. I listened, and smelled the hot breath of the city night, and was at home in my own world.

An era that had lasted for nearly a hundred years was dying of internal rot, but no one knew it. An era that had come to be taken for a norm had three more years to run. Man had been given a memory without the counter-ability of projecting himself into the future, and so the era was expected to continue forever, world without end. Some hoped, some dreamed, some planned, but no man could be sure that three years, and no more, were left. To those who read the papers that hot Prague night, the world that stretched wide beyond the hemming hills was filled with massive happenings, but nothing was so real as the weight of the heat.

I decided to cross the river and after awhile I was on the Karlův most. I let my hands slide along the cool gray stone of the parapet until I reached the statue of Sainte Ludmila. Mother had told me so often of the night when she had meant to jump into the river with me, I thought I could remember it, too. Now a cool breeze began to sweep down the valley of the Vltava. My nose

went up to smell it, and everyone else who felt it began to move a little faster through the night.

The summer was only begun. Three years more, but a multitude of small events and overblown men must be disposed of first.

When I got back to our apartment Mother watched me for a few minutes and then she asked me to stop wandering about and sit down. She took the piece of white paper from her blouse and told me it was a letter she had received that morning from Uncle. He had answered her second request that I be allowed to go to the Agricultural Academy in the autumn. In a few words, couched in business clichés, he reminded both Mother and me that the time had come when I must finally take over the burden that he had been carrying for so many years. It was my turn to keep us alive. He repeated that he trusted I would not force him to cut us off before I was prepared to be the wage earner of the family and their sole support.

There was no display of temper this time when Mother had finished reading. The matter was settled for us and we knew it. There was nothing more for either of us to say.

## *CHAPTER XIV*



**I**N the autumn of 1911 I entered the Commercial Academy, the only boy in my form from the nonclassical school of Malá Strana. Once again I was a stranger, in a strange world. Here I found none of the stiff good manners, the studied quietness, the tendency to use as few words as possible in expressing ideas, that had characterized the social habits of the sons of the military in the Malá Strana. Instead I was surrounded by noisy, rambunctious youths with no manners at all, and I despised them for their crudeness. They were sons of wealthy merchants and men of commerce. It was obvious they were imitating their fathers. They seemed to think that the louder they spoke and the more they emphasized their presence by obtrusive behavior, the more important they would be thought.

The academy was housed in an old, medieval building in the Staré Město behind the Tyn Church, at the other extremity of Prague from Smichov. The corridors were too narrow, the rooms too dark, and the desks too cramped. It was necessary to keep the hanging gas lamps lighted through most of the days, and during the short periods between classes we had a choice between the dark corridors or a cobblestoned courtyard for relaxation. It was in the courtyard that the janitor sold sausages and bread every day at ten o'clock in the morning. Across the street was an open meat market which shared its flies with

us. They not only came to walk over the sausages, but they stayed to torment us in the classrooms as well.

If I went into the courtyard during recess I was lonely in the midst of the horseplay and noise. So I usually wandered through the corridors until classes reassembled. One day I found a row of old photographs on one of the walls, showing classes back to the year 1858, when the academy had been founded. There was Uncle in one of them, a young man with hard, thin lips and a tense expression about his eyes. I felt sympathy for him for the first time.

I hated the studies of accountancy and bookkeeping and insurance algebra, of commercial economics, stenography and business correspondence. I hated the sausages and bread sold by the janitor when I remembered the morning lunches we had eaten in the nonclassical school. And so one day in the courtyard, when I had been pushed more roughly than usual by some son of the *bourgeoisie* who wanted to show me how much of an outsider I was, I found myself tripping him so that he sprawled on his face. Before he could get to his feet I had walked away.

It was a tremendous relief. I had never been strong and knew I could never defend myself adequately in a straightforward fight. Now I found that I could use my wits for protection. Whenever I was mocked or pushed about I discovered that I could kick and hit faster than they expected me to do. I seldom fought fair; my purpose was to make them leave me alone, and I didn't care what their reasons were so long as I achieved peace for myself.

But the final result was unexpected. Instead of being outlawed by my classmates, I became an object of admiration. I was invited to join a gang of boys who considered me a suitable member. In no time at all I was given a place of honor second only to their leader. This was a fellow whose name was Eisenstein. He had come to the Commercial Academy with the reputation of being the champion nuisance in the school from which he had graduated. He was the son of a rich furniture manufacturer and he detested the Commercial Academy almost as much as I did. He had wanted to study engineering, but was being forced instead into preparation for the management of his father's prosperous firm.

Eisenstein taught me how to grease the blackboards; how to put a powder in the inkstand which would cause the ink to bubble over the professor's desk; how to smear the edges of the desks with ink where he was in the habit of leaning as he walked up one aisle and down another. And I became adept at cutting figures and maps on the tops of the desks, following the grain of the wood with a knife to make outlines of German colonies in Africa where I would much have preferred to be.

For the first time in my life I found myself inside a group, able to keep others out if I didn't like them. I also found that there were boys who had no



wish to belong to the herd, who wouldn't have accepted an invitation from us had one been offered. That was a new idea to me. Karel Berounský was such a fellow. He was handsome, sharply intelligent, independent and scornful of what, even then, he called the mass mind. I had the feeling that he was always watching his fellow students from a vantage point of judgment outside their comprehension. I admired his ability to be completely at ease with himself, but for the moment the excitement of belonging to a group who wanted me as a member and even looked to me as a potential leader went to my head. I could never have guessed then that Berounský would one day be my closest friend.

In every respect but one I obeyed the rules of the gang and helped to devise new kinds of deviltry with Eisenstein. The exception was a matter of work. It was a point of pride with us never to be seen on the way to or from school carrying textbooks. A stationery shop half a block away let us use a shelf in the back of the place to hold our books overnight. I threw my texts onto the shelf each afternoon with the others, and picked them up on the way to school in the morning. But I always carried a notebook in my inside pocket, where I kept notes on each day's work to guide my studies at home in the evening.

The subject of girls occupied a good share of the conversation in our gang. Boys who were the sons of rich families, like Karel Berounský, walked on the Graben every Sunday noon with the daughters of their families' friends. On the same street in the evening they threw an eye, as we phrased it, on the girls who were without social status in Prague. Those of us without girls preferred to pass our fellow students on Sunday noon and make embarrassing remarks through half-closed lips. In the evening we affected more familiarity than we felt with the shopgirls, clerks, waitresses and domestic servants who let us fall into step beside them and then said "Go on and don't bother me" as soon as we spoke.

Though I enjoyed walking the streets with my gang, I could never bring myself to show off by accosting one of these girls. They would doubtless have been easy to know if we had had more to offer them in the way of an evening's entertainment. The time would come, I knew, when I would have to prove that I was as familiar with girls as I pretended to be. But I could never risk the possibility of an open rebuff.

There was one girl on the boulevards in the evening whom we never spoke to, though all of us admired her without restraint. She was tall and slim and cool and distant, with lovely honey-blond hair. Her figure looked particularly beautiful as she walked. She was older than we were, probably as much as twenty, and we considered the way she dressed the last word in smartness and distinction. Wherever she went she attracted the glances of passing men, but no one ever spoke to her. Even we admired her from afar and discussed her respectfully among ourselves.

It must have been in the spring of 1914 that I met this lovely vision walking in the Kinský Gardens one Saturday afternoon. I followed her at a discreet distance, and when she sat down on a bench I prepared to walk past her, looking the other way. Then something fell at my feet. I don't remember now what it was, a book or a glove or a handkerchief. I picked it up and saw her hand held out to receive it. She said something about what a beautiful day it was and how lovely the gardens were, but she was shy and embarrassed, too. I mumbled a reply and walked on.

All the way home I could think of nothing but her smile. I was convinced she was the sweetest person in the world because she had been so pleasant to me. I was still thinking about her when I walked with Eisenstein and two other members of our gang on the Národní třída the next evening.

They saw her coming toward us before I did. My heart began to beat very fast as they remarked on the blue dress she was wearing.

"So long," I heard my voice saying to Eisenstein. "I'll see you later. I've got an appointment."

Before they could question me I strode ahead and approached the lovely vision coming toward us. "Please, may I walk with you just a little way?" I said under my breath as I reached her side.

She stared at me and my knees began to shake. Then her face broke into a smile and she took my arm. Just as my companions reached us they heard her say, "I was afraid you weren't coming. Where shall we go this time?"

We walked off in the direction from which I had come. I didn't dare catch the eyes of my companions, but I knew they had turned and were following us. She talked easily and swiftly and I tried to smile, as though I heard what she said. After a block or two my heart returned to a normal beat.

Her name was Julča, she was telling me. She worked in the Kaiser Kaffee on the Václavské náměstí. It was a well-known night club frequented by officers and members of society. In Austria-Hungary in those days officers could go to the most expensive places without cost because their presence in any night club or restaurant or coffeehouse made it fashionable. Others who would spend money freely followed the whimsical taste of the military caste. And the Kaiser Kaffee was popular with the officers that spring.

Every evening, she said, she was paid to sit at the bar, talking to anyone who wanted company. It was her duty to see that only expensive drinks were chosen by her companions, while she drank colored water. She hated her work and wished desperately that she could find something else to do.

As we reached the door of the Kaiser Kaffee I tried to say I was grateful for the permission to walk with her. My companions had disappeared. I bowed as she turned to leave, and then she came back. "Would you like to walk home with me after I've finished here tonight?" she said.

I was too surprised to find a reply. But she smiled again and said she would meet me on the corner at twelve-thirty. For nearly six hours I walked the streets, smoking my first cigarettes which nearly choked me because they were the cheapest brand. It was after one in the morning when she finally appeared, and we walked through the dark streets to her home. She lived behind the abattoir in Holesovice.

When I told my interested companions next morning at school that they were wrong in believing there was anything more than casual friendship between Julča and me, I was confident they would not believe me. They were ready to judge from my tired eyes that a more intimate relationship existed than I could have invented. So Julča served as my prestige in the eyes of the gang, as well as a good comrade for the next few months.

At least three nights each week I met her in the early morning hours and walked home with her. She listened to the outpouring of my dreams and hopes, and I believed she understood me as no one else had ever done. In turn, she fascinated me with her recital of the brutality and bad taste to which she was subjected every night. I realize now that I was probably the only male of her acquaintance who was more interested in her heart than in her body. I never asked for more than these few hours of walking home in the darkness by her side. And nothing more was offered.

## CHAPTER XV



I WISH I could say now that I knew at once on the twenty-eighth of June in 1914 that something of far-reaching importance had happened, but if I did it would not be true. As far as I could see, it was only a hot summer holiday dedicated to the memory of St. Vitus. Late in the afternoon extra newspaper editions were cried on the streets to tell of the assassination of the Archduke and his Duchess in Sarajevo. Few people knew they had gone to Serbia or why they were there. There was no emotion to be seen as the news was read, nor was there any visible feeling of regret. As the following weeks went by the newspapers were filled with words of righteous wrath which emanated from the Foreign Office in Vienna, but no one paid much attention to them.

Those were weeks in which I had enough to do in worrying about myself. Shortly before the Sarajevo incident I had received a degree from the Commercial Academy. It carried with it no honors, for I had managed to pass my final examinations by the skin of my teeth. Throughout the preceding winter Uncle had been writing to us more frequently than usual. His letters carried admonitions to me to do well at the academy, but they also filled me

with hope because he kept talking about the fine recommendations he would give me once my course was over. Leo was about to receive a degree of Doctor of Medicine from the University of Berlin, and once his tuition fees ceased, Uncle would be able to send a larger allowance for Mother and his parents.

As soon as Uncle learned of the results of my final examinations he wrote without delay. Under no circumstance could he now endanger his honor and good name by recommending me to any of his friends or associates in the banking world of Prague. I would have to get along on my own and find employment where I could. As for the increased allowance, his plans in that direction were altered, too. Leo, it seemed, had changed his mind about becoming a doctor. He was really a genius, Uncle explained, and he had discovered just in time that his talents lay in another direction. Instead of leaving school, he was now going back to the university to begin again, this time working toward a degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with scientific research his aim. Uncle felt sure we would all be proud at hearing this. Unfortunately, his expenses would be heavier than ever now, and he felt the time had come when we must all get along without his aid. He was transferring his burden to me.

It was senseless for me to hunt for a job during July. All businessmen in Prague went into the country for a month or two each summer, and while they were gone few transactions of any kind were made. Moreover, during this July there was an added reason for making no commitments and hiring no new employees.

On the last day but three in July, I was scuffing my heels on the pavements as usual. Every morning I went out and walked until I was too tired to go farther, using the crowds and the heat and the noises of the city as an anesthetic against thought. The brass notes of a band came along a side street, measured by drums. The heads of the crowd turned to watch and I stood watching too as the band, followed by soldiers, marched past.

There was something different in the atmosphere of this particular morning that I couldn't define. Military bands and marching soldiers were to be seen often. Were there more people on the streets today than usual? Or was it only the tempo of everything that seemed different? Everyone seemed to be moving more slowly. Except the soldiers. Not much. Not at all, if I watched closely. Only when I didn't watch, I felt it.

I began to walk slower myself, on guard. Not much slower. Not so anyone could notice. Then I began to watch, too, to wait for a sign. I realized everyone else was doing the same thing. Watching and waiting. For what? These people weren't all out of jobs, worried and frightened as I was.

The crowd along the curb began to disintegrate into errand boys and women on shopping excursions and men late for work and children with

nothing else to do. Perhaps it was all inside my own imagination. I began to walk a little faster. Then I realized that most of the people on the street who had stopped to watch the band and the marching soldiers were Germans and Austrians. A Czech always felt things like that in Prague, even someone in a stupor as thick as mine.

On the Karlové náměstí I met Eisenstein. He had to speak to me before I saw him. "They've crossed the border," he said. "Before dawn this morning. The ultimatum expired at midnight."

"Who's crossed what border?" I replied.

"Our troops, of course. They're on their way to Belgrade. Now Russia's mobilizing, and that means Germany'll be in it, too."

I looked at the sunshine reflected in the shop windows, at the faces of people passing, at the cars moving in a smooth line down the middle of the street. "What day is it?" I said.

"The twenty-seventh . . . no, the twenty-eighth. Berlin pulled that trigger when it went off in Sarajevo, if ever . . ."

"Have you got a cigarette?" I said.

Eisenstein looked at me hard, offered me a light, and then gave me a pat on the arm. "Well, see you sometime," he said. "I'm working in my old man's office. There's a nice little piece standing over there on the corner with her eye on us. If I weren't busy I'd . . . well, so long. See you sometime."

I went on my way aimlessly, forgetting almost at once what Eisenstein had said. I was thinking about his good fortune in having a father with an office where he could work without question of honors or no honors attached to his degree. By the time I got home late in the afternoon I was tired and hungry, and I hardly answered intelligibly when Mother spoke to me. She had to say the same thing twice before my mind took account of her words.

The husband of one of her customers had sent her word that he would give me a job. He was the general manager of a factory in Smichov that manufactured kitchen and sanitary ware. The factory had received enormous orders from the government for field water bottles, messkins, drinking cups and other aluminum eating utensils for the army. The bookkeeper needed an assistant. I was to see the bookkeeper at once.

So I found my first job. The bookkeeper was almost totally deaf, but he could add and subtract like a machine. I sat at a high desk in the same cubicle with him all day long, listening to him talk when he wasn't poring over books, but never able to answer because he wouldn't have heard a thing I said. I took orders from him and did as I was told. He instructed me in orderly behavior in an office, outlined my duties which consisted exclusively of entering orders from retailers in a large account book in a neat and precise hand, and impressed upon me the necessity of promptness in getting to my desk on time.

My salary was eighty crowns, or approximately sixteen dollars a month.

Those were the months when war spread over the Continent and the first battles got under way, but I was able to think of little besides my new work. It was important that I should keep that job. The factory was only a four-minute walk from our apartment house, so I could leave in the morning and again at noon when the five-minute whistle blew and be on the stool before my desk on the hour. By the end of the first week I knew all there was to know about entering figures in large books to indicate the size of orders that came in not only from the government but from retail shops as far away as towns in South America. After that the work was simply a matter of routine, stupid, deady and inescapably dull. I was given to understand from the first that no advancement was possible, and there was no place higher in the factory where I could eventually hope to go.

Slowly the war began to work its way into my consciousness. I still saw Julča once or twice a week, to walk home with her when her work was done. Her talk now was of the things she overheard in the café among the officers. Because she hated all military men, she hated war as a device engineered by the army for its own glory. We took it for granted that it was the same in the countries which were now our enemies.

Headlines containing the names of strange battlefields had no meaning. We were unable to think what fighting between French and Germans and Austrians would be like. France, to me, meant only a mean, petty French teacher whom I had hated in school. England meant Charles Dickens whom I had admired and read often in translation. But Dickens, an Englishman himself, had told us how cruel and despicable his own countrymen were. It was all right if our soldiers killed Murdstones and Uriah Heeps. Russians were better known to us, because they, too, were Slavs. But I knew about the dreadful conditions existing in Russia under the czars, so I felt it was a bad country and thought of Russian aristocracy as our opponents. As for the Serbs, they were Slavs, too, but the revolting murder of the King of Serbia and his wife Draga in 1903 by their own people had made such a lasting impression of horror on me that I considered them too disorderly and brutal for respect.

Mother seemed to me to cry constantly during these autumn months of 1914. She cried for those who were doomed to die on both sides, for crippled Frenchmen and wounded Russians, as well as bereaved Viennese families and shocked Czechs here at home. She was unconscious of any political meaning in the war, so she prayed each night for all soldiers on fields of battle, and thanked God I had been born too late to go through this horrible holocaust which was going to be over, praise be, by Christmas.

Grandfather confined his activities these days exclusively to the reading of newspapers. When he had read every word in every paper in Ludvik's shop, he

wandered into the parks and picked up more papers from the benches and brought them home. He needed a strong magnifying glass to make out even the blackest headlines, and it is doubtful if he derived the full import of anything he read. Day after day he damned the Japanese. They were the cause of all this unhappiness in the world, even to the battles then raging in Galicia. When I tried to argue with him, he brushed me aside. He knew what he was talking about and I was a mere child with no opinions worth considering.

Grandmother took no notice of the war at all. Even when Mother's orders began to fall off sharply until they disappeared almost altogether, and my sixteen dollars a month had to serve as our sole income, she chose to believe we were deliberately trying to make her hungry and uncomfortable, and her complaints never ceased.

When Christmas came and went and the war was still going on, the impact of its meaning on the lives of everyone in Prague began to show more clearly. I found myself holding the pen suspended above the big account book whenever a military band marched by the windows of our office. I found myself watching men in uniform on the streets, trying to imagine what they had been like in civilian clothes. Suddenly petty clerks and factory hands would appear at their posts in the factory to say good-by, wearing uniforms now and all but sneering in the faces of their superiors who had as suddenly lost all the glamour of their high positions. It was astonishing and faintly exciting to watch these superintendents and office managers become overly polite to the soldiers who had once quailed under their glances, and try to explain why they were physically unfit for military service themselves.

Then individual stories of heroism began to filter back from the front, and any man in uniform on the streets was looked upon as an important personality. Girls turned down dates with anyone but an officer, or a soldier if no officers were available. There was a permanent clank of spurs on the streets, the shine of high patent-leather boots and the color of red breeches on members of cavalry regiments. When the first uniforms of field-gray battle dress were seen in town they were considered mysterious and intriguing, because their wearers were known to have come through one of these new-fashioned battles of trenches and many nationalities and modern weapons.

And then there were the black, casket-like boxes being carried through the streets. These were wooden chests, painted black and marked in white to indicate regiment and battalion, which were given to all reservists for carrying their personal effects. Often now we saw crowds of young men carrying these black chests, young men and middle-aged ones, usually drunk and singing in every language of the empire. They were always going in one direction, up the hilly streets to the Bruska Barracks, where they sat on the steps outside until their names were called and officers in beautiful uniforms walked among them

to greet those they recognized from the last classes of compulsory military training groups.

I began to meet friends from the Commercial Academy, looking like young gods in the uniform of the Windischgrätz Dragoons. And in the winter months of 1915 wounded soldiers began to pour into Prague through the Franz Josef Bahnhof, wearing Cossack caps and carrying Russian swords captured from their fallen enemies. We only saw the ones whose wounds were slight. Crowds shouted at the carloads of these soldiers as they passed along the streets, and cigarettes and flowers were thrown into their laps.

By the spring of 1915 I had fallen into the habit of working in the factory until midnight and after. When there was no work of my own to do, I found someone else's. It was monotonous and dreary, but it was better than walking the streets with their disturbing encounters, and it was much better than staying at home to listen to Grandfather's whimsical and old-fashioned opinions and watch Mother's expression which was worse than if she had openly revolted against the life we were living.

As the nights grew warmer I braved the surges of young people on the streets who sang and shouted as though the restraint of a cumbersome past had been put aside forever, and Julča and I would sit until nearly dawn on benches in a park near the abattoir. The wide, impersonal sense of drama which had been building through the winter and into the spring was becoming focused at last, straight on me.

"Why don't you enlist?" she said one night, as though she had been thinking about it a long time and now had heard her cue.

It was strange how her question added nothing new to my mind. I hardly listened as she talked on. For a long while my subconscious had been working on a consuming desire. It had come to the surface at last and I couldn't pretend it out of existence any more. Our cigarettes were flecks of light in the tunnel of darkness under the trees.

"I won't be nineteen for another three weeks," I said. "I'm not eligible to be drafted for two years. Mother will never consent to sign my papers now, and there's no other way I can get into the army."

"Have you asked her?" Julča said.

I waited a moment before I answered. "No, I haven't asked her," I said finally. "What's the use? I know how she feels. My grandfather's ill and she has enough worries without my adding any more. It would just about kill her if I left her now."

It was a relief to admit to myself at last what I really wanted to do. But I would still have to wait, and try to find a way. Julča went on to talk about my taking an officer's training course. There would be no need to shoot Russians, she kept saying. If I was smart I could find a good desk job for myself that



would pay well in the army. Plenty of others were doing it. Why shouldn't I howl with the wolves? I was almost happy that night for the first time in many months. I kissed her gently when I left her at her gate.

Once the longing to get into the war had been acknowledged in my conscious mind, I could think of nothing else. I hadn't the slightest scrap of political feeling, and I gave not a moment's reflection to the right or the wrong or what the war was about. I saw it as my only chance of escape from a life I could no longer endure. Not only would it enable me to get away from home, but it offered unlimited possibilities for adventure and eventual success. I saw myself becoming a famous hero overnight. I was entitled to join an officer's training course because I had a college degree, and I suddenly realized I could send more money home from my pay than I could hope to do if I stayed at my desk in the factory. If I were killed, Mother would have a pension for life.

But chiefly I thought about the exciting possibility of being sent to wonderful and strange countries that I could never otherwise hope to see. If I didn't get into the army soon, my last chance of escape would be gone. The idea became an obsession. Somehow, I must get Mother's consent.

Grandfather grew more feeble every day. Three times in two weeks he took a few pieces of silverware that Mother gave him to a government pawnshop, where he had to stand in long lines to exchange them for a few crowns and a certificate. They were wedding presents and a silver spoon I had received when I was born. The last time he came home big tears were running into his beard. He lay down on his bed and looked straight up at the ceiling. By the end of another week he had forgotten there was so little in the house, and in his delirium began to ask for chocolate. It was the first time in his life he had ever asked for anything, and Mother had to refuse because there wasn't a penny in the house.

One rainy night at the end of March I returned home from the factory as usual shortly after midnight. I was hungry and weary and forlorn. When I reached the courtyard in front of our building I raised my eyes automatically to our apartment. All the windows in all the apartments in the courtyard were closed as usual for the night, except one. The window in the room where Grandfather slept was open and the white curtains were blowing out. Windows were opened in Smichov at night for one reason only . . . to let out the soul of someone who had just died.

When I opened our door I could see Mother in the room Grandfather and I shared, kneeling beside the bed. A white linen coverlet was over his face. Grandmother sat looking out the window, her eyes as expressionless as ever. When she heard me, Mother rose and took me in her arms, trying to comfort me. I could neither cry nor speak. Something in me envied Grandfather because our troubles were no longer of any concern to him.

I sat with Mother all night beside his bed. Just before dawn she went into the kitchen to make some fresh coffee. When she came back I took the cup she offered and then quickly, without looking at her, I said, "I'm going into the army, if you'll sign my papers." My voice was very tired.

She put one hand over her heart and just stood there in the middle of the room, beside Grandfather's bed. Before she could say anything I went on. "I can't live here any longer, Mother."

Had I given her long arguments about how much I wanted to be a soldier she would have known the answers to dissuade me. No doubt she had been saving them for this moment for a long time. But what I did say hurt her all the way through. She simply stood still and said nothing, and then she turned and went back to the kitchen.

There wasn't a single sound in the house, anywhere. The lack of it was a weight, pressing against my mind. There was too much to think about, so I could think of nothing. I could only hear the blood pounding in my ears, beating out a black rhythm like the sound of drums. I looked about the room. Once it had been a refuge and sanctuary, but it wasn't now. There was a worn suit on a hanger in one corner, and next to it some of Grandfather's clothes. A battered alarm clock ticked on a table beside the iron bed where Grandfather lay. The clock and the clothes were meaningless, and no part of me. A small volume of poetry was on the table. I picked it up and put it into my inside coat pocket. I tried not to notice the form under the coverlet on the bed.

No one was in the other room as I went through. Grandmother was with Mother in the kitchen and the door was closed. I could hear Mother sobbing faintly. The only man I had ever loved had done me this last service. Mother was crying her heart out, but Grandfather served as the cause and I was relieved of feeling that her tears were for me.

I went through the courtyard and into the early dawn. On the same hilly streets where so many others had climbed in the last months, I made my way to the Bruska Barracks. A line had already formed when I got there. The doctor laughed as he tapped my flat chest, but he passed me, and then a recruiting officer asked me where I wanted to serve. I didn't know. I had no money to buy two horses, which was the requirement of an aspirant for officer's stripes in the cavalry. All I was sure of was that I didn't want to serve in Prague. So I wrote "*Kaiser und Königliches Infanterie Regiment 91*" on the application blank because I remembered that some of my comrades from the academy had joined that unit, and an hour later I was sworn in and posted to Česká Budějovice.

A life of adventure had begun for me at last.

# CZECHOSLOVAKIAN



## CHAPTER XVI



THE train stood in the station yard that stretched beside the Danube. It was made up chiefly of cattle cars, but at the far end, beyond the roofed platform, there was one first-class carriage. The lamps in the station were dim and the lamps in the one carriage made no impression on the heavy spring dawn. Gray figures milled about the train, thick as ants but with no visible direction in their movements. Now and then there was a shout or a command, but the noises of backing engines and opened steam vents predominated. Underlying all other sound was the steady shuffle of heavy boots on cinders, like surf pounding a sandy shore.

As the sky began to pale, the lamps under the shed went out and the milling gray figures came into sharper focus. Some were gray, but others were green, some were brown and many were blue. They all looked rumpled and the faces above the uniforms were haggard and gaunt. Now it could be seen that the cattle cars were filled with standing men, close packed. The doors bulged with soldiers, looking down on the ones below who passed back and forth in the hope of finding a place to squeeze themselves into. Heavy boots went on shuffling in the cinders, and the Danube began to catch light on its slow-moving surface.

Across the river the bulging promontory of the fortress of Belgrade pushed its nose between the two rivers that met at its foot. Gray barracks huddled below the mauve brick ramparts, and windows in the enormous buildings of the fortress began to glow as they caught reflections of the rising sun over the Pannonian Plain spreading flat across Croatia and Hungary into the heart of Europe.

A guard unlocked the doors of the first-class carriage with a clanking of keys, and the group of waiting men who were privileged to travel in this space reserved for officers and civilian passengers crowded close. “*Zdravo, braté,*” the guard said under his breath as he held the others back and let me enter first. I mounted the steps and moved quickly along the corridor to an empty compartment in the middle of the carriage, but I had no sooner seated myself

beside the window than the door of the compartment opened and a man in a uniform of olive-green poked in his head. When he saw me in the dim light he backed out quickly and went on. This happened twice, and then a third figure appeared in the door, saw that the compartment was vacant except for me, and moved in.

His clothes were in marked contrast to those of the rest of the passengers pushing up and down the corridor of the carriage. They were civilian cut and made, they were of fine dark broadcloth, they were new and well pressed and immaculately clean. He nodded in my direction, but my uniform produced no disturbing effect upon him. Carefully he placed his black leather suitcase on the rack over his head, folded his topcoat and hung it behind the seat he had chosen opposite me at the window, and then pulled a book from its pocket and prepared to read. He appeared a wealthy Jew, probably twice my age.

The noises on the platform grew louder, the shuffling took on a faster tempo, the engine far ahead let out three high-pitched whistles, and the door of the compartment opened again. This time the man who looked in hesitated, then addressed me with exaggerated respect in the only French words he seemed to know. "*Pardon. Occupé?*" All travelers found them useful.

He was a well-built, more than middle-aged officer in the uniform of an Austrian infantry regiment. All insignia of rank had been removed, but from the dark patches where they had formerly been, I judged he must have been a colonel. His manner was that of the professional Austrian officer, conservative, cultivated, delicate and even slightly whimsical. He waited for my reply with an attitude of careful indifference. I answered shortly in French that he might come in and take a seat. He bowed slightly, evidently understanding the tone of my voice if not my words, and shut the door behind him as he chose a place next to it.

Again I was asked permission to enter. It was apparent the train was about to get under way. The second man spoke French with a heavy accent. He was also in the olive-green of the Imperial Army, but he was obviously Hungarian. His skin was swarthy and his hair black and oily; his features were sharp, pulling down to a long, pointed chin. Though his uniform, like the Austrian's, was devoid of any distinguishing marks, his boots showed him to have been a cavalry officer. He sat opposite the Austrian beside the door, on my side of the compartment.

It was after the train had begun to move that I was begged once again for permission to occupy a seat. I had been watching Belgrade disappear over my left shoulder, thinking how the war had actually started here when the fortress was taken by the Austrians, and I scarcely turned my head to answer. I could keep them all out if I wanted to, but why should I? "*Mais oui,*" I said, "*Entrez.*"

The last man stepped over the feet of the Hungarian and looked at the two places left in the center of the compartment. He looked at me and then at the civilian. His face moved slightly without becoming any softer as his eyes rested on the man across from me, and then he sat down between the Hungarian and me. I had been watching him in the reflection on the window and I knew without looking up that he was a German. He was a young fellow, hardly older than myself, with a thin, highly-bred face and quick, hard eyes. I judged him to be a *Junker*, and from the marks where epaulettes had been torn from his shoulders, an officer in a regiment of guards. He sat stiffly, staring straight ahead at the photographs on the wall over the opposite seat.

After that I said “Non” sharply whenever the door opened and my permission was begged to occupy the last seat. I added, “*Fermez la porte!*” After I had said this several times the Hungarian saved me the trouble by thrusting one of his long legs across the door, motioning away anyone who tried to open it. If they persisted, he merely pointed at my blue uniform, and they went on.

No one spoke in the compartment, and there were only the sounds of the greaseless wheels under us grinding over unrepaired rails. Meadows white with daisies and fringed with pale willows passed by the window, then fields of newly plowed red earth, orchards in feathery bloom, vineyards marked by stiff, bare poles, flaming Judas trees and waxen dogwood in dark patches of woodland, and occasionally a meandering, dirty, slovenly village.

When the train met one of these clusters of houses it usually slowed its pace and sometimes it came to a full stop. Then there arose the sounds of hundreds of voices from the cattle cars ahead and an answering gabble from the peasants and soldiers on the platforms. Where was the train going and where would it stop next? No one in the cattle cars had an idea, and no one on the platforms could give an answer. At every station there was shifting; some jumped from the open doors of the freight cars and as soon as they did, others from the platform crawled in to take their places. Human cattle looking for their stables, with just enough animal instinct to find them in this shifting, unorganized wandering over the scarred face of Middle Europe.

My head fell back against the dirty cushion and I drifted into a sort of half sleep, forgetting where I was, forgetting that it was May in the year 1919. My body was tired and my mind was tired. There was no pattern in my thinking, for it was without will or purpose. A tension held too long had snapped, and now the images poured through my brain unchecked, fighting each other, pushing and shoving, without reason. I couldn’t quite lose consciousness, but I couldn’t stay awake.

A boy who had once been me was tormenting my mind. Four years ago or four centuries ago? What was there in common between the boy who had gone off to war in search of adventure and the officer in a French uniform who was now myself? I could remember many things the boy had done and thoughts he had dreamed, but what connection did they have with the tired mind and body that was me?

The boy of four years ago had believed that a uniform exchanged for his own clothes would automatically separate him from the world he had left behind. But the new tunic and trousers were unequal to the task of changing a nature overnight, even though they carried thin stripes on sleeves to indicate impending rank when the training course was ended. Nobody bothered about sizes or the fit of uniforms when they were handed out to recruits. Nor was there a walking-out suit or even a change provided. So the boy found himself in patched and spotted clothes previously worn by other unknown soldiers, with cap falling over ears, sleeves over hands, trousers under armpits to keep from being tripped. That didn't seem the way an adventure should start.

Maybe another kind of uniform would do it, something more dignified. Please sir, could he be transferred from the officer-aspirants' course to a front-line outfit? He didn't so much care about a commission. But no one had ever heard of such a request. There were no precedents to follow. At last, however, repeated appeals changed the uniform to a new one of field-gray, and for a few days before the new regiment moved into line everyone in the town of Česká Budějovice looked with a mixture of feelings in their faces at this young boy who was going to fight at the front. The new uniform helped a lot. And then the regiment marched off to the train, with gay martial music helping to lighten the weight of a very heavy pack.

Six horses or forty-eight men in a cattle car. So the signs read, but since they were men there were usually more. Nine days in a cattle car while it crossed slowly the whole of Austria and Hungary, passed through Vienna and Budapest, and moved on toward the Dukla Pass. Then the train stopped in a valley in the Carpathians and the cattle cars were unloaded, and there was no food, no order, no organization, only mistakes. A forced march over the mountains toward the front lines began. On the way we heard that Italy had declared war on us, and the entire thirsty, hungry replacement battalion growled because we were not on our way to fight Italians instead of Russians. Italians were not brother Slavs.

Up and up, over the mountains, with packs growing heavier and legs weaker. A lance-corporal insisted on falling back to stay beside me whenever I couldn't keep up with the others. It gave me new strength and warmth, in spite of my empty stomach. It was good to have found a friend. We stopped to drink from a mountain spring, with our faces buried in the water. Fifty yards farther,

around a bend in the mountain path, we came on two half-decayed Russian soldiers lying in the source of the spring from which we had been drinking.

When the battalion came down onto the plain of Galicia we could see the explosion of big guns on the horizon and feel the ground rumble underfoot. The road was crowded with fleeing Galician Jews, old men with long beards wearing caftans and women in flowing black squares tied over their heads, pushing children before them in carts. Our officers had to force them off the road so we could get through.

We went up to the first line in the night, and at dawn came the order to advance. So we moved forward in the dim light with bayonets fixed and heavy packs on our backs, wondering where the enemy was. We had been told to kill Russians, but how could we if we didn't know where they were? Through the earsplitting noise of hell came another order: the man on the right of the flank must run over the fields until he found the next battalion, tell them where we were, and return. The man on the right was I. I? A boy who used to bear my name.

How did he feel in his first battle? How was he able to make his legs follow the commands his ears had heard? This was adventure, and he was in it.

The Russians must have seen the movement when I began to run. I could hear bullets cracking by, and then a light field gun let loose, and the earth blew up all around me. I stopped running and began to walk. Why run? Mother would hear that I hadn't hurried away. Shouts came at me from a deep hidden hole where Hungarians were crouching. I delivered my message and turned to go back. This time I didn't run at all. I was within sight of my own outfit when an exploding shell knocked me flat.

I was alone in one of the holes our battalion had vacated when I came back to consciousness. My back was warm and sticky with blood and it oozed along my sides. I couldn't move, except for my hands, and shrapnel was bursting and crashing all around me. Then I knew how frightened I was, and I began to cry. My hand went inside my shirt to find Mother's picture in my wallet. I began to call her louder between sobs. Someone heard me and came back . . . my friend, the lance-corporal. Our battalion was retreating, but he pulled and carried me until we were in the shelter of a hill. I woke up again to find myself lying in straw on the floor of a schoolhouse in Starysol in Galicia, where typhus and cholera cases had been sent.

When the doctor stood over me he spoke only Hungarian, so I couldn't tell him about my back. The clotted blood on my uniform was covered by dirt and he didn't turn me over. He gave each man two tablets of aspirin and went away. It was an ambulance driver who discovered that I was wounded and not sick with disease. He smuggled me into a train with slightly wounded soldiers going back from the front. My lance-corporal friend, he told me when I asked,

had been killed.

Five pieces of shell splinters and countless lice were taken from the wound in my back in a wonderfully clean hospital in Hungary. Within six weeks I was learning to walk straight again. In that Hungarian town far away from the war, people complimented me when I walked along the street and called me a hero, but I was ashamed and the shame turned to contempt because they knew so little about the battles they talked of glibly and were so ready to tell me to go back and give the enemy one for them.

I could still hear my own voice crying for Mother when I had been hurt and helpless in the hole. I could also hear the voices of officers as they lashed us with foul words to make us mad enough to fight . . . or perhaps to cover their own inefficiencies. Those didn't seem to me to be the memories of a hero.

The train rumbled across an iron bridge and ran onto the dirt roadbed again as it continued over the Pannonian Plain. Someone had spoken in the compartment and the sound had cut through my half-waking thoughts, but I couldn't tell where it had come from. I kept my eyes nearly closed and examined the others. The man across from me was still reading. He seemed to be continually on the point of smiling, though not from amusement. He had clever and sometimes shrewd black eyes that moved from side to side as they scanned the pages of his book.

The three officers were still sitting stiffly with their legs together and their hands lying on their knees. It was a habit they had acquired from the formal etiquette of their armies. They all had set expressions. That, too, was a habit. Before attack you set your face that way, as though against eternity. You were no longer yourself then, because your life was a hostage for the battle, for the reputation of the high command.

I studied the Austrian in the opposite corner. His eyes were red and he was having trouble with his nose. The German beside me continued to stare straight ahead at the photographs on the opposite wall. Though he was as young as I, his features were old-looking, a counterfeit of maturity caused by strain and fatigue rather than wisdom. I supposed I must look much the same.

In the ceiling the lamp swayed from side to side with the train's motion. It was still burning feebly, to no purpose. Silence filled the compartment like a waiting presence. I turned so that I could look from the window, but the drifting scene failed to make an impression on my mind. It worked as a soporific instead and my eyes closed again.

"It's a pity no one wants to talk on trains these days. My name is Drucker." The words, spoken in French, were audible this time. I raised my eyelids slowly and saw the man opposite looking at me, still with his book open in his



hands. The Hungarian, the German and the Austrian looked at him too, moving only their eyes. Drucker smiled, passing his glance from one to the other, but it was obvious the language was unfamiliar to them. He looked back at me.

“Even if they could understand,” he went on in French, “they would not speak until Monsieur le Capitaine said something first. It is because of the French uniform, of course, a victor among the defeated. Perhaps they would not speak even then.”

“Perhaps not,” I said. “Who cares?”

“We have a long way to go. It would be pleasant to exchange ideas. You are from Alsace, perhaps?”

“No.” It was only oriental politeness which sought to flatter me by raising my rank. I slipped down in the seat, leaned my head back and closed my eyes.

This is nothing but a jungle, my mind kept repeating. The train is a circus, taking the jungle animals from city to city. Uniforms distinguish the tigers from the leopards and wolves with a few tame herd animals thrown in for contrast. We’re on a railway line running through a jungle. The bars of our cages have been broken and we’re roaming around in a strange environment, hunting for old and famous and familiar places . . . Zagreb, Innsbruck, Danzig, Lodz. Thousands of us on this train are tired animals, trying to find our way home, moving from place to place, not sure any longer where our countries begin or end. All of us are rootless men.

Yet there’s something wrong with that image. It’s right about our countries. Fences at the borders have been taken away, like doors of cages, but do the animals know how to use their freedom? Nobody is sure today whether his home is in one country or another. Can that change a man’s heart? When the fences come down and the animals start to roam, are they happy until the wolves find more wolves, the leopards more leopards, the lions more lions? In this compartment, no one can talk freely until I speak first. But now I have spoken and still the Hungarian will not talk to his Austrian comrade-in-arms. Our Croatian conductor can now openly hate the Hungarian and the Austrian and the German, but he will not hate me if he thinks I am a Frenchman or if he knows I am a Czech. Back at Belgrade, a Serb guard in the station called me brother, but who is my brother? Animals don’t become tame simply because their bars have been removed.

“You are from Paris, perhaps?” Drucker watched me as he pulled at my thoughts, trying to bring them back for the purposes of conversation.

“No.”

“A distinguished city. I know it well. I thought . . . your accent . . . you are

on your way home now?"

"Perhaps." I answered without opening my eyes. But his pleasure in talking to someone he considered a victor in the war was not daunted by my rude replies. Had I rattled my sword and put on a display of Latin arrogance with gestures he would have liked it even better.

"My own city," he went on, "is Vienna. Perhaps you know it? I wasn't born there, but I have traveled much in the past twenty years and one becomes a citizen of the world after awhile. Please accept my compliments. The French are a remarkable people."

"Yes," I said. "But I'm not French." I shifted my position on the dirty seat and he stopped talking.

Just when had I ceased to hunt for adventure by way of the war, in those long-ago days of four years ago? At some point, at some moment, I had stopped being a child. But where? When? The days and months were long and filled with strange commands, strange surroundings, strange feelings and thoughts and new points of view. Nothing made sense and there was little time for reasoning anything through to a conclusion. One morning in a battle on the Galician plains I was a frightened, weeping boy. Life had an enormous meaning because at any instant it might cease to be. But after awhile I was an automatic machine, with no feelings, no dreams, no personal will. At what moment had the change taken place? In Vienna, in the training school? Perhaps. But why there, and not some place else? It was difficult now to say.

After being discharged from the hospital in Hungary I was sent to join a class of three hundred and sixty recruits who aspired to win commissions in the Imperial Army. I still wore the dirty gray field uniform, bloodstained from my wound and patched where it had been ripped by the nurses. My classmates were beautiful in the smart outfits of the famous *Deutschmeister* and *Tiroler Kaiserjäger* regiments. They liked to spend their evenings in Vienna night clubs and brothels, getting drunk and being entertained by the gypsies in Bruck-Kirajhida. Any overtures on their part for comradeship I refused. Why? It was hard now to say.

There was only one reason why I had finally consented to go through the Officers' Training School. If I passed the course my pay would give Mother a much larger allowance, but it was something beyond that. I was determined to win a commission, one star and then more stars, for the single purpose of rising in rank above the officers who had beaten us with their walking sticks to keep us awake through the nights before battle, who had cursed us and let me be carried in a manure cart with typhus and cholera cases because no one cared whether I lived or died. I was still less than twenty, and I wanted to pay them

back. I was no longer afraid of being afraid.

Every night I studied while my classmates spent their allowances on drink and girls. I would have liked to drink, too, and I'd have liked a lot of girls. But each day I accepted extra duties in order to learn, and every Sunday I spent at the barracks, sitting at a wooden table where I used matches to make formations on a theoretical parade ground. A thorough understanding of parade ground ceremonials was considered essential to winning a war. I had never been a scholar, and if I had thought about it at all, I'd have said I lacked a first-class brain. So I had no choice but to work hard while the others played.

One day in November of 1915 the final examination was given. Sons of the most prominent families of Vienna and the whole empire were there, trying to solve theoretical problems of war. When the results were made known, an unknown corporal in a dirty field uniform led his class. For the first time in my life I realized I could have what I wanted, if I were prepared to work hard enough to earn it.

Two weeks later I was again at the front. Three times I had been commanded to stay in Vienna at the school as an instructor. After a third refusal I had my way. In a new uniform with proper insignia I was sent to join my old regiment on the Italian front, now as a cadet warrant officer. On the Isonzo we went in seven hundred strong. We came out with a hundred and thirty men alive.

My thoughts focused back to the compartment and the train when I heard an undertone of whispering on my right. The German and the Hungarian were talking quietly at first and then louder in the German's native tongue, doubtless convinced that I could not understand what they were saying. They took no notice of the Austrian, though he emphasized his presence by constantly wiping his eyes and blowing his nose on a large blue and red handkerchief he must have bought in a Belgrade bazaar. Drucker seemed to be buried in his book, but I knew he was listening, too.

The Hungarian, it developed from his conversation, was a count. The weakness of Vienna, he was saying, had brought on the catastrophe of the war's end. Of course, the treason of the Czechs had helped.

The young German *Junker* was exact in his speech. He agreed with the nobleman that treachery had been entirely to blame, but he hesitated in choosing his words and it was obvious that his mind was confused. He found it impossible to understand the situation in which he found himself. He had been fighting with the German guards in Macedonia, so he knew only that Bulgaria had betrayed them by submitting to an early armistice. At home, he was convinced, someone had stabbed the German army in the back. Why, look,

they were so close to Paris . . . Russia had given in over a year ago . . . all of Belgium was in their hands . . . so were Rumania and Serbia and most of Italy . . . only treachery could account for such a sudden collapse.

He stopped speaking and looked across at the Austrian, who blew his nose again. The set of the *Junker's* mouth when he turned back to the Hungarian indicated his opinion that the Austrian Empire was one of the weak links in his calculations and the undoubted cause of Germany's surrender. He looked at Drucker to indicate there might be others. In his own mind, he could never admit defeat.

Drucker glanced at me over his book when I opened my eyes. He knew I had understood the conversation, too. The train had stopped at a station and I got up, stretching as I stepped over the boots of the other officers to reach the door. They stopped speaking at once and allowed me to pass. I stood on the platform of the first-class carriage, breathing deeply of the fresh air. It was Subotica, according to the sign on the station.

Below me, on the platform, was the same milling mass of people who appeared wherever we stopped. No one seemed to know where the train was going or how long it would take. Soldiers tried to get into the cattle cars and the men in the cars tried to keep them out. After awhile the engine whistled and I went back to the compartment. As I entered, the Hungarian was talking about what an impertinence it was of Rumania to claim parts of his country. He gestured broadly to emphasize his statement that Hungary would never vanish, but knew well enough how to recover territory that was rightfully hers.

"At least the Austrians and the French never fought against each other," Drucker said in French as I sat down.

"Except on the Piave," I replied.

"Yes, a little on the Piave. Were you there?"

I looked at the Austrian colonel in the corner. "For awhile." The others were listening, but still they gave no sign of understanding the words we spoke.

"You are going to Prague, perhaps?" Drucker said.

I looked at him. "Perhaps."

"General Franchet d'Esperey was fortunate in the composition of his army. You come from Salonika?"

"Yes," I said.

The Hungarian had understood the name of the city and he scowled but he made no comment. His dark brows had come together over his nose.

Drucker's smile spread across his face. He looked from side to side of the compartment and then he addressed himself to me for the first time in German. "It is too bad we do not at least have newspapers to read on trains these days. But since we do not, any conversation is better than silence, don't you agree?"

I made no reply and his brown eyes rested on my blue uniform. The others turned their heads slowly to look at me, too. They were all uncomfortable at the disclosure that I understood German. They waited to see what I would do. I closed my eyes and shut them out, and there was silence again in the compartment.

The splintering rocks that fell down the mountainsides when the Italians shelled our positions near Gorizia were more dangerous than shell fragments. Days and nights and weeks and months of 1916 went by. None of the generals seemed to have found out how to fight a war in the mountains. On both sides, each mountain was a fort. We killed each other with artillery and from time to time the Italians launched an attack. Each attack was repulsed with enormous losses on both sides; on ours from their artillery and on theirs when their infantry came forward to occupy the ground.

It was waiting for these attacks, without relief and always in the same sector, that was bad. Whenever I couldn't stand the inaction any longer I volunteered to go out on patrol. It was easier to take a long chance in some sort of action than to wait through the cold nights on the mountain and try to hide from my thoughts. On patrol we generally had to go down into the valley, and for company down there we had the bodies of *Bersaglieri* who had been killed months before by avalanches from the hills.

One night at Kostanjevica about a week before Christmas I volunteered again to go on a wire-cutting patrol. It was routine, but it was better than not going. I took six men with me and we worked our way on our bellies over the ground in the darkness, lying still whenever the Italian searchlights moved near us. Suddenly we came on the lip of a huge crater that had been formed in the mountains by centuries of erosion. A star shell broke at that moment and lit it up. We saw what looked like a whole company of Italians crouched in there, the whites of their eyes showing in the light of the star shell. There were about three hundred of them and they were surprised to see us. They had no means of knowing how many more were behind us. Because they were surprised, they took it for granted we were stronger than we were. They surrendered at my order, their hands going up in the air while the star shell sank, its light dwindling.

The Italians seemed docile enough as my men started rounding them up. At least, none of them wanted to commit suicide by making the first move. Then on the far edge of the crater I saw a dim figure sighting along a rifle. I knew he had me. The flash came, but when the bullet cut through my neck just at the Adam's apple I felt no pain. It was rather as though someone had struck my neck with the side of his hand.

I regained consciousness in a field hospital at the rear of our lines, and from there I was taken to Ljubljana in Slovenia and my head and upper half of my body were put into a plaster cast. I was three months in that cloister they had turned into a hospital and the nuns fed me through a tube in my throat. When it was time to leave I was glad because the sisters were not bad nurses but too strict disciplinarians. I had received another decoration for bravery, but the citation seemed to be without meaning. I had also received a rise in rank to first lieutenant.

Back in Bruck-Kirajhida I was assigned to train officer-aspirants to throw hand grenades. "Remove the pin, count twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three, and throw . . ." I kept telling them that over and over. We used live grenades because a man needs practice in keeping his nerve when he holds a live grenade in his hand. He has to learn not to throw it too soon, because if he does the enemy can pick it up and throw it back. He also has to learn to throw it straight, thinking only of himself as he does so, and not what is happening in the minds of the other men around him.

The cadets were only a year or two my junior, but they accepted me on my own terms, as an old man hard with experience. They were still apt to think of other things beside the will to kill. Those other things had to be squeezed out and thrown away. Part of my job was to appear confident of the ease and safety of grenade throwing. I must also appear a better man than any of them because I had been in battle and they had not.

One day in the trench where we practiced, an aspirant lost his nerve and dropped his grenade after he had pulled the pin. It rolled along the trench filled with thirty cadets and everyone's eyes were glued to it when it finally came to rest. My actions were purely reflex. I picked up the bomb, jumped out of the trench and threw it. Just as it left my hand it exploded, and in the shock my reflexes took over completely. Afterward I was told what happened.

They said I jumped back into the trench and saw the boys watching me. "You see?" I said, being matter of fact. "They won't hurt you. Now once more. Pull . . . count . . . throw." Their tension relaxed and I called an N.C.O. to take over. The lesson went on.

I got out of the trench and by that time one of my boots was filling up with blood. The next thing I remember clearly was being in hospital again, after a piece of grenade had been taken out of my thigh. I spent two months there, and once during that time I was visited by the commanding general. He complimented me for what he called a brave act, and especially for not letting the cadets know until hours afterward where I had gone or that I had been hit.

All the orderlies and nurses were in the far end of the room, listening. After the general had gone, the orderly who changed my dressings remarked that my wound deserved more than a pat on the shoulder. But decorations were given

for killing, not for saving men. What difference did it make, anyway? I had three medals already. I didn't feel brave and it wasn't good to be complimented as though someone had mistaken my identity. I tried to figure out why I had picked up the grenade and taken it out of the trench the way I did. Apparently the human body can perform anything if the brain has prepared it. Maybe what men call courage shows at the climax, but the climax itself is the product of many other things and is seldom controllable at the moment. Was my matter-of-fact attitude that day the response to an instinct to keep my dignity, or simply to rectify a mistake and so be immune from my own criticism? It was difficult to say.

When I got out of the hospital I asked to be sent back to the front, and by the time I rejoined my regiment they were at Monte Gabriele. It was 1917 and great preparations were being made for an invasion of Italy. The Italians ran very fast as we chased them across the Tagliamento to the Piave. We were tired when we finally came to rest in Motta di Livenza, but probably not so tired as they were.

Units of the German army had joined us during the last few days of our rapid advance. Now while we rested in billets, the German detachments made a tour of inspection of the Italian equipment we had acquired along the way, and there was a lot of it. Every Italian gun and truck and storeroom filled with matériel the Germans painted over with large white signs to say that it was now the property of the German Imperial Army. Nobody could stop them, of course, and in a little while it was all moved back to Germany. A good many local fights broke out between Austrian and Czech units and the German detachments that had joined us, and whenever this happened the Austrian or Czech battalions involved were moved up to the front-line at once.

In the spring of 1918 our regiment received orders to move again. We were loaded into trains and moved off for an unknown destination. We believed we were headed for a well-earned and long-promised rest in Bohemia, but the train went through Zagreb and on to Belgrade, and at Nish we were unloaded. There was great confusion as we were marched along the Morava River. Even the greenest replacement in the ranks knew that something was wrong. Commands contradicted each other, and usually there were no commands at all.

When a bridge suddenly blew up in front of us the order came to retreat. I was sent in command of a group of thirty unwilling Czechs from my company to make contact with the German army in the Maritsa Valley. On the way we were surrounded by a contingent of Serbian cavalry and we were prisoners of war.

The train ground on its generally northwesterly way, stopping, starting, jerking, puffing, coming apart and being put together again. By the end of the

next afternoon the Hungarian had gone. Other officers and a passenger in civilian clothes had joined us in the compartment, and then they had left again at various stations. We were isolated from the world in this train, separated from reality by windows and doors and the movement that took us without personal effort from one point on the map to another. It was morning, it was noon, it was night. The night was long, punctuated by shouting and a mélange of noises whenever the train stopped at a station. Sometimes men came through the train demanding to see identification papers, and then the train moved again, sliding through a world of chaos and confusion and night. It was day again, and the same thing went on, men without meaning being moved through a world of no pattern and no identity. The past was gone and the future refused to appear.

When it was clear that the train was now in Austria, and Vienna not many hours away, the Austrian colonel began to brush himself off for the seventeenth time, shook out the red and blue handkerchief and wiped his watery eyes once more. He had said little during the whole tedious trip from Belgrade, ignoring the subtle insults of the German and the physical kicks of the Hungarian who had trouble keeping his long legs still. There were only four of us in the compartment now: the Jew and the German and the Austrian and myself. There had been almost no conversation except when civilian passengers had joined us for a time. Then Drucker had talked a great deal. Now he had begun another book and was content with silence.

The Austrian colonel cleared his throat and pulled his neck clear of his collar. He looked like a well-meaning professor dressed for a part in a play. He was never quite able to submerge his delicate manners in the part he had assumed. For two days he had been listening, or perhaps only caring for his own thoughts while the bickering went on, and now he had received the cue he had been waiting for.

"I shall be leaving you at Vienna," he said, looking at no one in particular as he spoke. Drucker raised his eyes from his book and the young German flicked an imaginary spot from his knee. "I gather no one will mind." His voice was cultivated, with a rich patina of Viennese culture over the German words. No one answered, so he went on. "The fact that this train runs at all is remarkable. This particular car, for instance." His eyes traveled briefly over the restricted box of a compartment we had shared for so many hours. He looked at its shabby fittings and the dirt on the floor. "For the past four years it has been shunted all over Europe. How many officers do you think have traveled to battle in this very room? How many plans were made where we have been sitting?"

The train bucked over the track and the four of us swayed with its jerky motion, unconscious of discomfort because we had been moving over so many



bad roadbeds for so many years.

"For you," the Austrian went on, speaking directly to me now, "it is strange, wearing that uniform?"

"I've been wearing it quite awhile," I said. "I'm used to it." I glanced down at my strong, British-made boots. "Where I was, any kind of uniform—any kind of clothes—were good."

"You were in the Balkans a long time then?"

"Long enough."

"So . . . you have both lost and won the war. What a peculiar feeling that must give you."

I turned my head to look directly at the colonel, but his face was tragic in its meaningless expression, rather than resentful. The German had become rigid, looking at neither of us.

"So much that was lovely has gone forever," the Austrian went on as he examined his eyes in the mirror over his seat. "Of course, many of the stories we heard at the front are doubtless untrue. Vienna could never change as much as they say. It would be useless to have survived if things were as bad as that. One must be moderate, even in crediting rumors. It is well to remember that our heritage will never forsake us."

The German rose to his feet and pushed toward the door. When it stuck, he kicked it open. Then he stood in the corridor staring out at the darkening countryside, his hands clasp and unclasp behind his back. The Austrian pulled the door shut behind him.

"I recognize the outskirts of Vienna," he said. "It will unfortunately be dark before we get in. I am sorry you gentlemen must continue into the wilderness without me."

Drucker spoke to me in French. "The last time I was in Vienna, not many weeks ago, they were beating up any officer seen on the streets who was still wearing his decorations."

I made no reply. The Austrian took his luggage from the rack and went along the corridor toward the platform at the end of the car. The German stayed in the corridor, his back still turned. The Jew went on. "One can always be wrong. They are beating up officers in Vienna because the mob remembers how badly they were treated as soldiers by these same men. If they had won the war, flowers would have been thrown at them."

I looked at the man who sat across from me. He had no wish to be unkind. Before we were many hours out of Belgrade he explained to me in French, so our companions couldn't understand his words, how easily he recognized their hatred for him. He said it was because the Austrians and Germans had chased his people out of Galicia. The Jews who had been made homeless had crowded into Vienna and many cities of Germany. It was only a natural will to survive.

Like himself, many of them had made good in their new homes, and now they were hated for having done so. They hated him on this train because he represented all the refugees who hadn't starved to death, but had become wealthy instead by way of newly discovered talents in the large cities. While they were establishing themselves in business, the Germans and Austrians had lost this war of their own starting. It was necessary to find a whipping boy to drain off disgust with oneself. So the German and Austrian let him see their dislike.

He was expanding the same subject now. "In your new republic," he was saying, "there has not been a single riot or street fight. Not that I know. When officers return, what do they do? The men who served under them take a vote. Those officers who are not acceptable to their men are demobilized and sent home. So their career ends, but they are not beaten."

I had not heard of this. It sent my thoughts off again on a new tangent. "They're mobilizing all over Czechoslovakia," the voice went on. "There's a campaign on against Hungary, but I doubt if they will succeed in taking back the part of Hungary ceded to your nation at Versailles. One day you Czechs will be hated by Germans the way they hate us now. When you have become prosperous and strong they will all curse you twice over, the way they are already cursing us."

The train slowed down and stopped on a siding on the outskirts of Vienna and there it stayed for the rest of the night. No one knew why. It was the way of railroads everywhere in Europe in those days. Some of the first-class passengers walked up and down, up and down on the siding through the night, but the cattle cars remained crowded because no one dared lose his place in them. I stayed where I was, half asleep. Toward morning Drucker came back from his pacing and after awhile the train moved on again. The German had found a seat in another compartment.

The last time I left Vienna I had been wearing a gray field uniform of the Austro-Hungarian Imperial Army, heavy with decoration ribbons and the stars of a first lieutenant. How long ago was that? A year—a century? I was on my way to the front again, filled with a renewed sense of excitement because I had been given one more chance to run away from a boy who would catch up and turn into me if I didn't put him far behind. I had no idea then how nearly finished my active career was, in an army that would soon go out of existence altogether.

When the Serbs surrounded us and took us prisoner they removed the only purpose I had known for months and months and years and years. War had absorbed every thought, every reaction of my body and my mind. And then

suddenly there was nothing to strain against any more. All we had to do now was walk. The Serbs told us when and where to go and we followed blindly, with no will and no reasoning and no responsibility. The whole of Macedonia lay ahead of us.

We walked through crooked valleys, up the sides of mountains that looked like giant slag heaps in hell, except that they froze at night. We walked down steep inclines and found it much worse than climbing up. But we always went on climbing up again, otherwise there would have been nothing to come down, and every day it was harder.

The mountains killed us more easily than they did the Serbs who were accustomed to them. Each day some of us died. In no time at all we had no boots left, and then there was blood on the rocks as we walked. Whenever a man fell, the Serbs let him lie and we marched on. It was a wilderness of rock and starving peasants. Many wars had been fought here, many battles had been lost and won on these same steep slopes. And as though the mountains we had to cross weren't enough, the higher mountains of Albania on our right threw their shadows across our path.

For twenty days we marched over Macedonia with the altitude tearing at our lungs. The only food we ate we foraged for ourselves. We dug potatoes in the fields and ate them raw. We ate cabbage raw, too. Once we commandeered two live sheep and then we had to kill them and cook them into a stew with more cabbage and potatoes in a huge pot over a fire we built in a tilted field. But we had no utensils with which to eat the stew after it was made and the Serbs didn't care whether we died of starvation or not. So we raided a hut that had been a malaria hospital for Germans when they had been in command of this territory. We found bedside basins and instruments in a makeshift laboratory, and we used them to eat the stew.

When we had followed the brown, swift-rushing Vardar down its cold way from the mountains to Skopje we were glad to see shops and houses again, even these Turkish buildings on steep, cobbled streets. Our minds were too tired and empty of thought to realize what our ragged, dirty column looked like as we moved slowly through the crooked streets of the town, but I saw minarets and women with covered faces and bearded men with fezzes on their heads sitting in cafés. The smell of Turkish cooking and the muted sounds of Turkish life were there, too, but our tiredness held them off, as something guessed at behind a screen.

We didn't stop in Skoplje. We went on and on, threading our way across more mountains in our raw, bleeding feet. The near hills beyond the Turkish town were spattered with white markers on Moslem graves and the far hills were blue against the sky. We had to cross those, too, if we happened still to be alive when the column got that far. Sometimes the sun shone through racing

clouds close overhead, but most of the time it rained.

Then toward sunset one evening we climbed another ridge of sharp, jutting stone, like hundreds we had climbed before, and there below us, beyond the foothills and a strip of coastal plain, was the sea. We could even make out moving specks on the water which we guessed were ships of the British navy. The low sun polished everything and made it glow. We had reached the Aegean, and I knew then I was not going to die.

The train began to run somewhat faster now, picking up speed gradually through the open country. A short, nondescript little man had joined us outside Vienna, but he kept a newspaper before his face and paid no attention to the two of us left by the window. The German came back once to collect his bag, and when he went out he deliberately left the door open behind him. We didn't see him again.

Soon we would be at the new border of my country they called Czechoslovakia, and I would be nearly home. I was on my way to report to the headquarters of my regiment in Česká Budějovice. I tried to think how it felt to be a Czechoslovakian. How would it feel to go back to Prague, having left it to join an army that was now technically of an enemy country? It didn't make sense. I hadn't been fighting for a political principle, to free a nation. I'd been fighting to escape from myself, to merge myself with the biggest adventure open to a boy in my time.

And now, just because I had been born in Prague, and not some miles south on the other side of the Danube, I was a victor and not one of the vanquished. Had I earned that role?

It was a strange name, Czechoslovakia. Not really a choice name for a country, but probably the best they could find to say what they wanted to tell the world. Anyway, it was the name we had, though it had no great ring like England, or a deep resonance like France, or the hurry and sharpness of America, or the sound of wind over empty steppes like Russia. Belonging to a new country would mean new responsibilities. I tried to think about them but my mind rebelled and stopped working on this pattern of its own devising. I wasn't ready to think about the future yet.

The prison camp the Serbs put us in was at Mikra, on a dirty waste along the sea beyond Salonika. We lived in tents half-buried in the ground inside fences of barbed wire. The wire separated us from the world outside, but there were strong, invisible wires to separate us from each other within the camp, too. German prisoners had nothing to do with Bulgarians, Czechs had nothing to do with Germans, and Hungarians had nothing to do with either of us. So the summer wore away, full of meaningless days and nights without end. We

were still half-starved, half sick, and our minds were incapable of coherent thought.

It was in September of 1918 when a group of Czech Legionnaires arrived at our prison camp. They had a list containing the names of every soldier in the Austro-Hungarian army who had been born within the boundary of what they claimed as the new state headed by Thomas Masaryk. Those in the prison camp whose names were on the list were lined up in the yard, and I was among them. They asked if we were ready to consider ourselves citizens of Czechoslovakia and to proclaim our loyalty to it. I looked down the line, and most of them said yes. It seemed a good thing to do, so I said yes, too.

After the Legionnaires had gone I thought about what had happened. It was hard to make my mind stay with the thing that was worrying me. We had been fighting for nearly four years like beasts, not men. We had been disciplined by an army into organized killing and we had been able to lean back on discipline as though it were a wall. Not to think and not to question was a virtue. Now we had been asked suddenly to make a decision for ourselves, with no time to learn once again how to reason and weigh both sides.

I had agreed to consider myself a citizen of Czechoslovakia, but did that mean I must admit shame at having been an officer of a defeated army? I felt a duty toward an organization that had given me a chance to get away from a life I had found intolerable in Prague. Had I now deserted my duty this day? What did it mean, this act of mine, not only for now but for a distant future? Had I a right to claim my national birthright when others had won it for me?

What would this new country of mine be like? How could I tell? Faint echoes of words I had once heard Mother speak about independence and birthrights traveled in and out of my mind, but I couldn't hold onto them. If I could have talked to Grandfather, he might have made the issue clear.

The first men in this camp to proclaim their allegiance to the new Czechoslovakia were not ones I would have chosen for compatriots. Some were officers who up to now had been fanatic German admirers, who had refused to speak to the Czech soldiers under them in any but the German language, whether the Czechs understood or not. Now something new had happened and it flattered their sense of power to think they had done it. So they were enthusiastic and loud in their new allegiance, ready enough to speak their native tongue.

Some of those men who had been questioned in the yard had refused to consider themselves members of the new republic because they had always lived in Vienna, even though they had been born in Bohemia or Moravia. At least they were honest with themselves, in spite of the temptation to wipe away the past few years by this sudden opportunity to change their citizenship.

Was I being equally honest with myself? I tried to lash my mind into

coherent thought as it slipped away into another channel in order to forget. What would Mother have told me to do? She had taught me loyalty, but I remembered more clearly now some of the things she had said about one day being free. I had once joined the Imperial Army of Austria-Hungary because I was a subject of the empire. It was coming clear now. But in doing so, had I ever denied an attachment to my own race and my own people and the city of my birth? No, because at that time they were one. The empire was being dissolved, so my allegiance had been dissolved, too—by a force outside myself.

In a few days we were released from the prison camp, some two dozen of us. We were given new French uniforms that fit us, and the same ranks we had held as Austrian officers. We were quartered in Salonika under huge French army tents, fed well at a special barracks mess, and were allowed pay commensurate with our ranks. It was dizzying. General Franchet d'Esperey was our commander. Under him we were an army basically French, but augmented by groups of men from nearly a dozen other armies, some of them whole divisions, who were at heart on the same side. This was a recognition that the heart and the mind could co-operate as one. In a certain sense they won the war.

General Franchet d'Esperey was short, solid-plump and somewhat brutal in appearance because of the way his black mustache sprayed out under his hooked nose across his fat face. But he was a good general. He had a staff of British and French officers who had learned their trade on the Somme and at Passchendaele and in Palestine, at Verdun and the Oise and the Argonne. By this time they knew as much about fighting as the Germans did and more than the Bulgars would ever know. Besides, they had plenty of supplies. The British navy saw to that.

In the fall of 1918, a picked regiment of this army moved into Bulgaria and simply kept going. They stabbed up into Europe just where the Germans couldn't reach them, and before mid-October Bulgaria was knocked completely out. In that sense, they won the war, for when Ludendorff heard this news he fell down in a fit.

I remained in Salonika with a communications detachment, and for the next six months I learned more about certain aspects of the world than I could have dreamed existed. In those months Salonika was a cesspool, a Babylon, an incredible place to a boy who had seen nothing of city life for three years of dogged fighting, and who had seen little enough of any kind of varied life before that. Scum from all over the world was in this dirty Aegean port, and some cream was still floating on top.

There were English and French officers who displayed freak records and abilities. There were military formations of Indo-Chinese like little monkeys in

their French uniforms, East Indians, Sudanese with tattoo marks on their faces, Senegalese, Maltese, Moroccans with turbans and veils hanging over their uniforms, Arabs, Syrians, Greeks, Italians, Rumanians and Serbs to add to the polyglot of tongues. Thousands of Spanish Jews formed the core of the city's basic activities. And then there were the South African negroes from the merchant marines.

Along the waterfront the buildings were in ruins, but under the castle the cobblestone streets of the Turkish section crawled laboriously up the mountain to form a labyrinth of pinched and crowded houses that had been untouched by the great fire. In the Vardar section, out-of-bounds for officers, the streets were lined with nothing but brothels. They all had balconies, which hung over the narrow streets that were like lanes, and on the balconies the naked women of all colors and shades and flesh tones stood while a seething mass of men passed below them, up and down, up and down all day and all night long.

Some of the brothels were large rooms open to the street with mats laid about on the floor. There were always lines waiting and watching the whores give service inside. East Indians in line awaiting their turns always squatted on the ground, their weight on their heels and their faces impassive. In other brothels there were bars and improvised platforms in the middle of the room where little boys and girls of nine and ten, wearing next to no clothes, went through the contortions of belly and nautch dances.

Homosexuals offered their particular wares openly. There were always more customers than the market could supply. Colors were brilliant in Salonika, smells were intense, sounds were polyglot, hopes were high. Every little news vendor on the corner spoke six or seven languages. All street signs were in three tongues: Greek, Hebrew and French. Signs were hung on the sides of buildings warning anyone who found a rat to kill it because Bubonic plague had broken out within the city limits.

One of the mind-jerking experiences of my months in Salonika was the constant contact with men I had considered my enemies because I had sworn to go into battle to kill them. Englishmen, Australians, Frenchmen, Americans—these represented only a part of an enormous concentrated power that stretched around the globe. They had plenty of food, good uniforms, a spirit of self-confidence. But of them all, the British Tommy impressed me most. He was reasonable, fair, well-behaved and he looked better in every way than men I would have considered his superiors without question a few months ago—officers in the imperial armies.

The world had suddenly become so much wider and more exciting and complex than I had dreamed it was. It had so many different faces, it had so much more variety of sound and color than I had ever thought existed anywhere. What had Austria-Hungary and Germany been fighting for? It was

obvious to me now that all the propaganda I had been taught in school was foolish and untrue. Our enemies were not monsters; they were these same Englishmen and Frenchmen and Americans. I began to feel pride in being considered their ally.

I had not heard a word from Mother in more than a year and a half and there was no method now by which I could send her a portion of my pay. So it went down my throat in liquor. Along the waterfront in the luxurious night clubs of the Tour Blanche, Greek society and officers met, but they were too expensive for a first lieutenant, even if his uniform was now blue. So were the Russian girls who had escaped from the revolution in their country and were now offering the fullness of their beauty for the pleasure of Syrian, Latin, Nordic, Jew and Greek.

So September passed and it was October. It was a lifetime of experience, it was November, and the war was over at last. Searchlights tore the sky into shreds; sirens blasted eardrums; drunks became more drunk, and officers roamed freely through the forbidden Vardar while soldiers found themselves on the Tour Blanche for the first time. The war was over, but Salonika went on. It was December, January, February, March. It was another lifetime, a new existence, unrelated to anything past.

In the early part of May we were told we could go home. The smells, the colors, the voices and sounds of weird music in Salonika went on. They were still beating through my blood and my brain after five days on the train.

What was my home? Where had I been? How could this stranger in a French uniform go home to a world he had never known? He had come into being in the midst of a war, homeless, in a world without boundaries. What would it mean now, to be a citizen of an independent country? A wild animal looking for its home was independent, but could still be lost.

Where was Mother and what did her long silence mean? Had her letters been withheld from me, or was she dead? In all the letters I had received from her, she had talked only of her love and encouragement. They had told nothing of what she must have gone through. What use would she have for the stranger who was coming back to her in place of the boy who had gone? I wasn't ready to call any place home, when I had yet to find out who the man was who had taken the boy's place in my mind.

The brakes of the train ground against its wheels and then it stopped and steam blew off from the engine. Once more there was the noise of mixed voices outside and the closing and opening of doors. An official in nondescript uniform stuck his head in the compartment, asked a few questions, looked at our papers, and when he handed mine back he said to me in Czech, "A French officer, eh? On your way to Česká Budějovice?"

"That's what it says on my pass."



“So I see. Where do you live?”

I hesitated and he turned an eye of suspicion on me. “I’m going to rejoin my old regiment,” I said.

He turned my papers over and read them again. After a moment he shrugged and handed them back to me and went away.

I turned to watch the country from the window. Was it my imagination that made me think it looked tidier, better kept and more fruitful than the country we had been passing through before? The small villages were immaculate, and those people I could see were smiling as they worked. Perhaps they were not exactly smiling, but they looked as though they were happy and were likely to smile easily and often. They were certainly different from the Serbian peasants, and even distinguishable from the Austrians who had appeared in the unfolding scenes outside the window the day before. What made that difference? Or was it only an extension of my imagination? Where were we now, and who were these people who could smile though they lived in the very center of Europe?

I thought about it awhile and then suddenly I realized we were in Czechoslovakia. Was that what it meant to be part of a new and independent nation, respected by oneself as well as in the eyes of the world?

The train had stopped again. I heard the voice of Drucker. “You’ve been asleep,” he said. “This is your station. I wish you a pleasant journey from now on. It has been most interesting, this trip.”

I tumbled out onto the platform with my bag and discovered that my heart was beating too fast. Morning mists were still lying over the plain. It was difficult to make out what lay beyond the station as I picked up my bag and started off on the avenue that led to the barracks.

## CHAPTER XVII



THE town was well awake and about its early morning business before I reached the gray walls of the barracks. I passed courtyards where dogs were barking at the heels of children who were leaving for school, where women were hanging out wet sheets and underwear, where hawkers were knocking on doors and maids were scrubbing paving stones. The town smelled sweet with baking bread and pear trees in bloom. It was a world at peace with itself and I did not belong there.

I stopped at a shop for coffee and a bun. People at the tables were talking about themselves and laughing over small jokes they all understood. I felt in my pocket for the order which instructed me to report to the headquarters of

the regiment to which I had first been attached in an army that was now out of existence. Strange how the old forms still remained after a revolution! Why should I have to report back here in Česká Budějovice? I didn't mind; it was as good as any other place. But the order seemed to make no sense.

The barracks were just as ugly as ever, and just as capable of erasing one's sense of individuality. Yet I felt at ease as soon as I had passed through the gates, for here I knew what was expected of me and there was no need for questioning thoughts. Major Čížek looked up as an orderly announced me. At first he looked surprised, and then he came around the desk and shook my hand warmly. "So that's where you've been!" he said, making a motion toward my uniform. "You know you were reported dead?"

"No," I said, remembering that Mother had not written to me for a year and a half. But I had written her after I reached Salonika. "I was taken prisoner in Macedonia."

The major gave me a puzzled look. "Your battalion reported you missing, believed dead."

I explained how our patrol had been cut off. The expression on my face must have said more than my words. The major looked at me sharply and then he smiled in the crooked way his men so much liked. He explained carefully about the situation then prevailing in the Czechoslovakian army: the men in all units were given the privilege of objecting to any officer who had, during the war, behaved in a manner they felt contrary to the new national spirit of the army. He went on to say that he wanted me to undertake to form a company of engineers. If I could do so, we would leave for the Hungarian border at once.

I tried to explain that I was at his service, but how could I agree to do as he asked unless I knew how the men would receive me? Instead of answering me directly the major said, "You were awarded a captaincy nearly a year ago by the Imperial Army. Your record as a soldier and an officer is known to us fully. But for the time being, you will retain your former rank. I'll have the men fall in for inspection at once. We'll see what you can do about getting a company together. There's no time to lose."

When we reached the courtyard the men were already waiting in line. They were still wearing the field-gray of the Imperial Army, but their old marks of rank had been removed and replaced by new Czechoslovakian insignia. I stood before them in the bright spring sunshine, and as I looked up and down the lines I recognized familiar faces I hadn't seen since the Serbs led me away in Macedonia. They were all studying me carefully. What were they thinking? Were they remembering old orders for discipline that now seemed in retrospect to have been persecution? I was not afraid to face their various tempers, though it was conceivable old grudges were being nursed against me. Perhaps they expected me to make a flattering speech, to woo them. I looked up and down

the line, letting my glance rest for a second on each face, as though I were the one who was passing judgment. My brain was as cold as ice. Then I said in a voice as crisp as I could make it, "Who will serve with me in a new company of engineers? We will leave for the Hungarian frontier in a few days."

They shuffled their feet and looks passed up and down the lines between them. Three men stepped forward, but before their left heels had clicked against their right heels, the entire line broke formation and crowded around me. It was unsoldierly, but it was the way of the men in those days. They wanted to know how I was and where I had been and to tell me they were glad to have me back. I heard the words *bratře poručíku* on every side; calling me "brother lieutenant" was another sign of the new spirit within the ranks. My company was quickly formed.

After that I was given a forty-eight hour leave, and I left on the first train for Prague, still in the French uniform. All the way I slept and it was dark by the time the train pulled into the Franz Josef Station. I walked out through the crowds, feeling very strange, as though I were moving through a recurrent dream of childhood.

The first change I noticed was a large sign where the name of the station had been, indicating that it was now called the President Wilson Station. All over Europe that name was taking the place of one-time kings and elder statesmen. I went out to the street and saw that its name had been changed to Hooverová.

I stood there, puzzled and wondering. How many other things had been altered in Prague since the last time I had seen it? How many things more important to me than the names of streets? I decided to call someone on the telephone and ask about my mother. It would be easier to face news of her in front of a small black telephone box. But I couldn't think of the name of a single neighbor I could call.

I lit a cigarette and stood there trying to brace myself against the next thing I must do. People began to look at me and some spoke as they passed. Others patted my shoulder and two girls waved from a passing car. At first I thought someone behind me was attracting this attention, and then I realized it was the blue uniform they were saluting. I merely happened to be inside it.

As I began to walk toward Václavské náměstí I saw another new street sign that read Maréchal Foch. I went on and on, letting the lights and the faces of people on the street and the familiar sounds of my own language drift through my senses unchecked. Gradually they had their comforting effect.

I stopped again when I found myself at the corner of Příkopy, which we had known as the Graben. The name of the old Kaiser Kaffee was changed, too, but people were going in through its doors, laughing just as they had done years before when a shy boy had waited night after night on this same corner

for a girl. Because I was afraid to go to Smichov I followed a couple inside. It was the first time I had ever been through the doors. Instinctively I kept waiting for someone to turn me out of the place, but I was welcomed by the *maître* and shown to a good location at the bar. My wishes were waited upon breathlessly, and the service offered with my drink was disconcerting. I remembered how the sword-clanking officers of the Imperial Army had been welcome in any restaurant and café in the old days. Now my uniform was creating prestige for them here in the same way. Suddenly it seemed very funny.

I drank slowly and looked about. It was a smaller room than I had imagined it would be. A girl in evening dress sat between two men farther down the bar, but she was the only one in the room who might possibly work in the place. I ordered another drink and when I started to pay, the barman motioned my money away as though he were embarrassed by my offer. He asked me how it was where I had been, but the question indicated no real desire for information. I asked him if there was a girl working in the café by the name of Julča. When I tried to describe her he scratched the back of his head and decided there was not. "I've only been here three months," he said. "Wait. I'll ask."

His face was pulled down to an assumed solemnity when he came back. "Sure," he said. "She used to work here. Right along. But she must have got tired of it. She jumped in the river one night. About a year ago. That's what they say. Friend of yours?"

I thanked him and left. I hadn't really expected to find Julča. I didn't expect to find any part of the old world as I had left it. It was the fact that even a few things could have remained unchanged that I found more disturbing than anything else. How could any aspect of life not show some difference after these last four years?

I jumped on the first streetcar that came along on its way to Smichov without giving myself more time to consider my hesitancy in making this last lap of the long journey home. I slumped into an empty seat and stared out the window, trying to focus my thoughts beyond the lump in my throat. The car moved along the *quai*, following the bend in the river. It was too dark to see the water except where it reflected lights now and then. The car made another slight bend and my eyes drifted over the face of the Hradčany across the river. Here was another change, more profound than any of the others. The lights in the castle were on. It was the first time in my life I had seen them like this. No windows had ever been lighted up there before the war. Now there were lines of them, giving the dark mass of the old castle a faint contour against the night sky.

There stood the Hradčany, just as it had for centuries, the stronghold

around which Prague had grown. Beautiful and massive, it sent its thrusting towers into the sky to mark a meeting place of generations, a contrast between the old world and the new. On the crest of the hill were palaces, monasteries, churches, convents, and now offices of the new republic. That must be the meaning of the lights in the castle. Once upon a time its old yellow walls had been the home of the kings of Bohemia. Now Thomas Masaryk lived and worked there. What difference did it make if three hundred years had been lost between the last king and the first president? History would call it nothing.

Time expanded in my mind, on and on, until it burst like an overinflated balloon. What difference did anything make, now or forever, if I couldn't find Mother waiting for me? The wheels of the streetcar kept repeating "alive or dead, alive or dead." A tugboat on the river hooted its warning to another barge, and the sound brought a wave of nostalgia for the days of my childhood on the Vltava. Alive or dead, alive or dead . . .

It was nearly midnight when I got off at the corner by the building where we had lived. Here everything was the same so far as I could see. Just as I reached the outer door of the building I remembered that I had no key and the concierge always locked up after ten o'clock. I stood there in the dark, trying to think what to do, while a housemaid moved in the shadows, wrapped in the arms of a boy in overalls. As men always do in moments of indecision, I took out a cigarette and lit it, and in the flare of the match I saw beside the door a small sign Mother had kept there for years, advertising her designs. Surrounding her name were tiny samples of her needlework, fine and delicate and colorful. I looked at the sign a long time.

The housemaid disentangled herself from the boy's arms, and as she put a key to the door I held it open for her with my hand. She looked at my uniform and let me in without a word, falling back to say a further good night to her boy. A man lurched in behind me, carrying beer from the saloon next door, and disappeared in the dark. When I looked up at the window where the curtains had been blowing out the night Grandfather died I almost expected to see them blowing out still, but the window was dark and closed.

The years fell away from me as my feet moved over the cobblestones of the courtyard in the dark. They knew without help from my brain just where to go, where to avoid the water that always stood in certain small puddles after it dripped from the eaves, how to avoid familiar obstacles on the uneven floor of this inner yard. I let them carry me upstairs to our door, and then I waited again for some minutes before I knocked.

There was no sound. After awhile I knocked again and a dog began to bark downstairs. Then I heard a slow shuffling that grew more distinct as someone behind the door approached it. Not Mother, but someone very old and cautious. The bar was carefully pulled back on the inside lock and the door

was opened carefully, slowly. An old, worried face under white hair blinked in the light from the stair well. She made no sound as she looked at me. The door opened wider and she stood aside to let me in.

All the time I was crying with my head on her knees I could feel her gentle hands stroking my head, following the hairline to my collar, moving softly across my temples. Sweetly, slowly they stroked me, as they had done when I was a child, and after awhile I was able to stop crying and be still. Her hands hadn't changed. They had the same rough tips caused by the needles, and they still told me more about her love than anything else I knew. A kind of hard core went out of me with the crying.

Neither of us made any attempt to sleep that night. There was too much to say. Some of it came out in words, and much of it grew in the silences. There were so many things I found I had no need to tell Mother. If she couldn't understand with her mind, she accepted with her heart.

When the windows began to pale with the morning, we finally tried to sleep. Toward noon I woke up to see her sitting on a chair at the foot of my bed. How long she had been watching me I don't know. She brought breakfast to me in bed, and then we began to talk of events in an outer periphery beyond ourselves.

For a long time she had not written to me because she had been told by a sergeant in my old company, who stopped to see her when he was on leave in September, 1917, that I was dead. It was a trick often played by soldiers at this time. They used it to get money from the families of their comrades. This sergeant doubtless believed he had seen me dying on the field, but he also believed that Mother would pay him for delivering the last reminiscences of a companion of her son. Mother surprised him by refusing to cry in his presence. She merely thanked him for his courtesy in coming to see her and sent him away with a blessing, completely unaware of his intentions.

Outwardly she accepted the story of my death by not writing to me from then on. No word came from me to refute the sergeant. But she never for a moment believed me to be dead. She knew she would have felt different, somehow, if it had been so. And she was equally sure that some sort of communication could be maintained between us, without a written word. When I finally managed to get a letter through to her from Salonika, she was not surprised. But it happened to arrive when Grandmother was dying, and by the time the funeral was over the letter was nowhere to be found. She might have written to headquarters in the hope of reaching me eventually, but she had lost the feeling of any need to write to me by that time. She was convinced I would be conscious of her love just the same.

I watched her as she talked and tried to remember her as she had been when I went away. Her values, her spirit and her gentle character were still

there in her face for anyone with a heart to see, but her physical responses now were all tired and old. She had been pitifully hungry throughout the war; nearly everyone in Prague had been close to starvation except for the very rich and the usual war profiteers. She had been cold because they never had any heat in the apartment, and night after night through the winters she had pulled herself out of bed at two in the morning in order to get milk for Grandmother. Long lines formed outside the dairies every night. At dawn the milk was given out as long as it lasted, and those at the end of lines got none. Mother's clients had stopped buying handwork; the allowance from my pay had been her only income for more than two years and then it, too, had stopped. Uncle had sent her nothing at all. Now the clients were slowly coming back again.

It felt strange to be alone with Mother. All my life our one or two rooms had seemed unbearably crowded because there were always too many people living in too small a space. Now our home appeared large and luxurious in comparison with the way I remembered it, and also in comparison with army tents and mud-holes in the ground. I missed Grandmother only as I would miss a headache when it stopped. I missed Grandfather in the true sense of wishing I could talk with him again, but the world had moved too fast for him at the end of his life. He would never have understood how different this war had been from the fight on the barricades in 1848, and not understanding, he would have considered me weak to have been so deeply affected by it.

Yet beyond the absence of my grandparents there was something else different about these rooms, something gone that had always oppressed me. I wanted to know what it was in order to enjoy the change even more. After awhile I knew what I missed, while Mother was telling me about Leo.

In 1917 my cousin had been called into service by the Imperial Army, for he was still an Austrian subject. He was put into the Medical Corps as a private, and they sent him to train in Prague at the Hradčany Barracks. He came to see Mother out of politeness and then he came again. She had been anxious at first to give him something to eat that he would like, something he wouldn't find poor in comparison with his own home and the rich food his mother served. All she could make were some cookies without flour, sugar or butter, and some coffee, but he seemed to enjoy them. One day she discovered that Leo was always hungry because the army was short of rations and he had no money to buy food in restaurants.

Mother always knew how to feed hungry hearts, even if she had too little food to satisfy empty stomachs. Leo needed her affection even more than he needed food, but she gave him both. She said he was a tall, well-mannered boy, shy and no longer a show-off. She called him an aesthetic type, with marks of deep unhappiness in his eyes.

Uncle, of course, had been furious when Leo was made a private in the

Austrian army; he thought he should have been granted a commission as a medical officer at once. Uncle's way of easing his injured pride was to give him no pocket money.

Leo became tremendously fond of Mother. She let that part of her story go without saying. One day he put his head on the table and started to cry as though he were a small boy. With his voice muffled by his hands he tried to tell her how much he wished he could have been me because then he could have lived with her always. He hated his own mother and father, and he was convinced they hated him, too.

There were many aspects of human nature which Mother was incapable of understanding because she could never believe any human being was all bad. She felt that Leo misjudged his father, and she felt it her mission to obliterate that misunderstanding. So she wrote to my uncle and asked him to come to Prague because Leo needed him badly. Uncle refused.

In a short time Leo had a nervous breakdown. That was what Mother called it. She learned then that sometime before, Leo had fallen in love with a sculptor in Berlin who had taught him to use morphine. He was discharged from the army because he had begun to use it again, and that brought Uncle to Prague fast enough. They met in Mother's presence and it must have been a first-class row which even she was unable to prevent.

As they were leaving, after Uncle had informed Mother he would put Leo in a sanatorium in Germany, his eyes fell on the portraits of Grandmother's mother and brother. He came back into the room and looked at them a long time. He talked about his relationship to them and what fine figures they were. He said how proud it would make him to have such portraits on his own walls in Berlin, to show his friends what his family background had been. There was just the right place for them in his library, where they would show up to far better advantage than they did here.

Mother could never have resisted such broad hints, even had she wanted to. She insisted that Uncle take the portraits. Their grim prudery was of no use to her, but she was careful not to say so, and Leo was pressed into service to help carry them away.

In all my life I have never met another man who remained so true to his own mean character as my uncle. It may be that he showed a somewhat better side of his nature to others, but I never saw it. He had a genius for bringing out the worst of everyone with whom he associated. How the same two individuals could have produced both him and my mother was always beyond my comprehension. And yet, because of the circumstances of their early life, as well as the opposite quality of her own nature, Mother never condemned him nor let me speak ill of him in her presence. As a result, I suspect he has had a far greater indirect influence on my subconscious mind than I guess.



I asked Mother how Leo was getting along. She hesitated for more than a moment, and then she gave me the end of the story, her hand patting mine while she talked, as though to counteract the effect of her words. Leo had been released from the sanatorium with a record of complete recovery, but instead of going home, he disappeared. Weeks later he was found in a cheap waterfront hotel in Hamburg, the kind of hotel with beds to rent by the hour. He had finally taken enough morphine to end his life.

I was sorry for Mother because she was still so unhappy about it, but Leo's death made small difference to me. So many better men had died in my presence in the past four years. It was the lack of meaning in his life, not his death in itself, that spelled tragedy. I looked up at the large rectangles still showing on the wall where the two portraits had always hung. Then I knew what it was that had made the house seem so much happier. As long as I could remember those two grim relations had been used to reprove me whenever Grandmother felt in the mood for reprimand. Those two brown faces had frowned on everything I had thought or said. It was fine to have them gone forever.

There had been seven of us in two rooms that rainy night in 1915 when I went away to war: Grandfather's body, Grandmother, the portraits, the photograph of Uncle, Mother and me. Now there were three. Grandfather was with us still in a small frame on the dresser. We had achieved the ultimate in luxury. Mother and I were alone together in our own home. I went off to war again at the end of two days, but this time I had no wish to go. Even before I left I began to look forward to the day of my final return.

## *CHAPTER XVIII*



ALL over middle and southeastern Europe the war went on in continued actions which were a direct development of the major World War. At the time I had no way of knowing how quickly the Americans and British had lost interest after the collapse of Germany. Years later Churchill called this the "unknown" war, but it was real enough to us.

When Béla Kun, who would probably have been forgotten fairly soon if his name had not been so easy to remember, led a commune in Budapest in 1919, he began to throw himself in all directions at once like an exploding bomb. He liquidated his enemies right and left at home, and then he set out in a wild burst of super-nationalism to grab back some of the territory Hungary had lost under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.

So it became necessary for Czechoslovakia to defend her new borders. By

the time I detrained with my company in Slovakia to take over a fortification section on the narrow stream in the south near Ipolské-Šahy which formed our border with Hungary, the fighting was over, Béla Kun had fled and Horthy's reaction had risen. There his soldiers walked up and down, up and down across the river, not more than twenty feet away. They were glum because Hungarians find it difficult to be any other way, dank with sourness in the face of their ingrowing nationalism. On our side, we walked up and down, too, chiefly for exercise and because there was nothing else to do.

During the first months we were there we searched the property of Hungarian nationalists who were living on our side of the border for arms. They had stores of weapons from machine guns to rifles and ammunition hidden in their barns, in their kitchens, in manure piles and even in their beds, hoping for an opportunity to rise in support of Horthy. After this was done, we simply walked up and down beside the river until October, 1920. Sometimes a few shots were fired across the stream by each side, but there were no real battles and no major casualties.

These eighteen months formed a plateau in my life. I was neither getting on nor going backward. And I was very restless, not realizing that such intervals full of no significance would continue to occur for me approximately every ten years. As an officer of the garrison I was invited to the manor houses of the Hungarian gentry, as well as into the homes of the Slovakian peasants, and I played checkers often with two old priests. Gradually I absorbed a certain amount of insight into local problems, though I had no understanding of politics whatever.

To be called a member of a democracy is one thing; to know how to behave in exercising that privilege is another. No one without experience in living under the military system of the Continent before the old war can begin to understand what it meant to a Czech to be told in 1919 that he was now free to govern himself. Democracy in any practical sense cannot be simply given to people; it must be learned and felt and used. It was far more than a new mode of political behavior. One had also to feel it in one's mind.

I sensed these things, but I found it difficult to concentrate my mind to the point of absorbing them. A weary soldier is the last person in the world to take on new responsibilities in return for the privilege of being free. Freedom means only one thing in his language: complete relaxation of a kind suitable to his nature, usually women and liquor. My nights were still torn apart by dreams of the fighting years, dreams in which I would go through again the sensations of seeing my comrades blown apart, of feeling again every shock my body had taken unflinching at the time. It was a delayed reaction after too many years of filth, disease, exhaustion, and often despair.

Though my days were monotonous, my body gradually grew strong again.

And then the dreams began to recede, allowing my mind freedom to coordinate the information and significance of events around me. Already my new country was making mistakes, apparent to me as a disinterested military observer free from local pride. In time those mistakes in Slovakia were to become magnified until they were seen by the whole world, but now they seemed insignificant to our government which was intent on so many larger problems.

For exactly one thousand years of Hungarian rule in Slovakia, education and independent thinking had been rigorously suppressed. As a result, the population of this province was restricted chiefly to wealthy Hungarian landlords who were surrounded by great parks and hunting estates, and their peasants. With the end of the war, the landlords had been expropriated, and Slovakia became one of the four provinces to form the new state, together with Bohemia, Moravia-Silesia and Ruthenia.

The system of self-government which was instituted throughout the country was entirely new to this province. In Bohemia and Moravia, formerly under Austrian rule and not Hungarian, there was a large class of bureaucrats and even intelligentsia ready to step into administrative posts, but unfortunately there were too few Slovaks with sufficient education or experience to administer their own affairs. To accelerate the new administration, many Czech bureaucrats who would have preferred to remain in Bohemia or Moravia had to be transferred to Slovakia. Their disappointment made them bitter, and their bitterness made them too often tactless in their contact with the Slovakian peasants.

As for the peasants themselves, they saw only that Czech officials were ruling them where formerly Hungarians had ruled. They overlooked the fact that they had not yet had time to develop a generation of educated sons and daughters themselves, and they distrusted the assurances of the Czechs that their administrative work was only temporary, that it aimed only at filling the gap until Slovak education had overcome the disadvantages left behind by Hungarian neglect.

And there was another factor, deeper and more subtle, which made relations difficult. The Slovakian peasants were devout Catholics, dependent on their priests who had for the most part been trained in Hungary. The Czech bureaucrats who came to administer their affairs were mostly easygoing Catholics, freethinkers, or Protestants. It was an age-old situation and it did nothing to alleviate the bitterness between the two groups.

Only the presence of the former wealthy Hungarian landlords was needed to fan these sparks into flames, and the landlords were still there. Deprived of their power by the new Czechoslovakian regime, they blew on the smoldering embers of bitterness. So the foundation of a major conflagration of quarrels

was laid, waiting to burst out nearly twenty years later.

In the autumn of 1920 I was asked to indicate a willingness to stay in the permanent force of the army or to accept demobilization as an alternative. Horthy's men were tired of walking up and down on their side of the river. At last we could go home. But I found the choice a difficult one to make. I liked the contact with my men; on the other hand, my nature was of such a texture that I dreaded the necessity of submitting myself to military regulations for the rest of my days. Yet if I asked to be demobilized, what would happen to me? I had been unhappy enough before the war. Would my life follow the same pattern again?

I knew that many of my fellow students at the Commercial Academy now held important positions in the business world of Prague. But again there was the other side of the picture. On the streets of every town in Czechoslovakia one could see shabby men in field-gray uniforms walking about with their hands in their pockets, some resigned to selling pencils and carbon paper to small shops, others caustic and forever unwilling to give up their glamorous military careers. They were the generals, colonels, and especially captains and lieutenants who had been repudiated by their troops as elements unfriendly to the new nation.

The army was the only place in which I had found any measure of success. My men were begging me not to leave them. And yet I knew I would choose demobilization. A whole life was waiting to be lived, out there in the world somewhere, and that life was mine. I was still young, only twenty-four, and I wanted desperately to become something more than a soldier. I was filled with impatience to move on to the new adventure of being myself.

So Jan Rieger, ex-officer of the Imperial Army of Austria-Hungary, ex-officer of the Army of the Republic of France, ex-officer of the Jan Hus Regiment Number One of Czechoslovakia, three times wounded, thrice decorated with medals he could no longer wear because the empire which bestowed them had ceased to exist, came home to hunt for his place as a citizen of the new, yet very old country of his birth.

## CHAPTER XIX



HOW I spent many weeks looking for a job and failed to find one is a sorry tale, similar in pattern to a thousand others of the same genre. When I got back to Prague I had just enough money in my pocket to buy one suit of civilian clothes, a pair of shoes and a hat. Mother had my old shirts pressed and ready for me. I turned in my state-issued uniform, and after it was gone I

felt bare. It was like walking down a crowded street in a dream without any clothes, wondering when other people would begin to notice that I was naked.

I had no profession except soldiering. I discovered that I had forgotten everything I had ever learned in school. Occasionally I would be filled with a terror of poverty, because I knew what it meant. But I had one thing now I had never possessed before: proof that I could get what I wanted if I were prepared to work hard enough for it. The war, and the Officers' Training School in Vienna, had given me that.

I went first to the factory in Smichov where I had worked before the war to see if I could get back my old job as bookkeeper. They had no use for my services because the business was in a bad way; most of their properties had been in Germany and Austria. I sought out a few school acquaintances and found them singularly unable to recall my name. Eisenstein had been killed in the second year of the war. Sometimes I was asked if I had been wounded and I learned to say no, hiding the scar on my throat with a scarf because one employment manager had informed me they could use only men who had received no wounds in the war.

Must I always start from the beginning, I thought, each time over again, never able to advance step by step like other people? Yet I was never really despondent and certainly not unhappy for long after each refusal. I was learning to see Prague with new eyes as I walked over the face of the city looking for my own place within it. And seeing it new, I was learning to love it more.

Before the war this had been a subject city, a provincial town, and because it counted for little in the world of power as Berlin and Vienna counted, its crowds had been second-rate crowds and their movements secondary movements and their thoughts important only to themselves. Now there was a new expression on the faces of the people I passed on the streets. The whole city was growing like a wheat field in the sun.

Officers in French uniforms from the military missions swaggered along with sophisticated, beautifully dressed women on their arms; thousands of French, Italian and Russian Legionnaires wearing strings of war decorations found anything in the city theirs for the asking. There were even countless Germans on the streets now. After going underground in 1918 and 1919, they had come into the open again, finding no disposition among the people to persecute them. They were merely ignored. And everywhere there were gay, busy Czechs who knew rising prosperity for the first time in their lives.

Whenever a crowd gathered to watch a street incident or wait for a gate to open, I joined it. I wanted to be with people who knew what they wanted and where they were going. It was some time before I realized that the individual minds of the people in these crowds were not so very different from my own.

Their faces were often impassive, giving no thoughts away, but hundreds of thousands of violent war images must be masked behind each one. It was their jobs and their professions which formed a protective film between their memories and their daily work. When I had a job it would be the same with me.

Yet there was more purpose in these crowds than merely a million individuals earning their food and beds. As I walked out the soles of my new shoes that autumn, the meaning of these changes I saw in Prague gradually wore their way into my mind like rain eating into a thatched roof. My birthplace was making itself over as quickly as possible in the likeness of an ideal which had lain buried in its subconscious for nearly three hundred years—the freedom to be itself.

Proudly, and at the same time simply, Czechs were showing forth their old treasured traditions. National costumes had always been frowned upon by the empire except on certain holidays; now they appeared everywhere on the streets in splendid handwork and color. Nor did it seem that my people were going to be content merely with their traditional past. Side by side with the beautiful old baroque buildings, new structures which belonged to the twentieth century were going up. In the solar plexus of Europe, new techniques were being used with a long view toward the future. Old bureaucratic buildings had been turned to new uses, and the modern structures were rising with clean, metallic designs.

Even quite small things gave evidence that we now belonged to ourselves. Every German place name had been changed. There were new automatic public telephones on street corners and the mailboxes had been painted sky blue and decorated with the scarlet Bohemian lion rampant with its flying double tail. Sometimes I saw people on the street look at them and smile inwardly. Parks and restaurants and thoroughfares had been cleansed of the trappings of Austrian and Hungarian nobility. For the first time in three hundred years the solid, forthright Czechs were enjoying their own ancient and beautiful city. Up on the steep streets of the Malá Strana a thin old man with a white beard and a wide-brimmed black hat took daily walks in a firm, elastic step from the castle, adding a kindly smile to his nod whenever he was recognized as Thomas Masaryk, the founder and president of the republic. Secret service men who followed him found their assignment difficult because he steadfastly refused to consider himself a being apart from his own people. It was encouraging to remember that he was the son of a coachman.

That year the summer had been good, as though even nature were helping to erase the sour coldness of the war. The autumn sun warmed the valley of the Vltava, while night frosts changed the green of the parks and gardens to rich reds and gold. I sauntered in the parks and moved indolently with the crowds,

thoroughly relaxed at last. I knew something was waiting for me, some work that needed me alone to complete it, a place of my own in the larger whole, and before long I would find it. In the meantime, I had no doubt that it was wonderful simply to be alive.

One afternoon I found myself standing in front of the Associated Bank where my uncle had begun his career. In the old days I had always avoided the building when I could, for it seemed to me to bear a marked resemblance to Uncle's high-brushed hair and small eyes. I was also convinced that it was working in a bank which had changed Uncle from a man who could conceivably be Mother's brother into the person I had known in Berlin. I looked up at the windows that stared with blank eyes on passing traffic. Over them, below the third level, was a row of window boxes full of small shrubs and vines. On either side of the main entrance stood boxwood trees in tubs, their foliage clipped in the shape of globes.

Without meditating on my reasons, I walked between the two tubs to the great metal door and tugged at my coat to smooth it over my hips before I passed through. Inside, the bank was dark and impressive with patrician gentility, like a club for wealthy old men who refused to recognize a new, modern world. Since it was the second largest bank in the republic, it could afford to be a trifle shabby at the seams. Serious, solid, ancient business was its only interest; new and perhaps unstable money it had no wish to attract.

Mahogany tables and counters returned no warmth to the touch of hands, and the frosted-glass partitions which separated tellers from each other encouraged privacy and discretion. The clients who were transacting business at that moment appeared to have reason to be ashamed of themselves, as clients in banks so often do, while the tellers and assistant managers wore expressions which signified that they were on the correct side of the mahogany barricades which separated them from the public.

The doorman was watching me closely. I stretched my neck inside my stiff collar and tried to appear at ease. "I'd like to see your personnel head," I said.

The man stared at me insolently, but when he spoke he used the customary tones of smooth respect befitting his job. "Do you have an appointment?"

I remembered that I had been an officer. "No. But I think he'll see me. Where can I find him?" I shifted my glance to the large clock on the opposite wall, as though I had no time to waste.

"Up those stairs," he said. "To the right."

When I reached the landing on the second floor I discovered that the hall branched in two directions. Which one should I take? There was no one to ask. Had the doorman said the stairs on the right, or right after I went up the stairs? I took the hall in the direction he had indicated, and after turning a corner I found myself in a large reception room. There were high windows and a high,

crenelated ceiling, and Persian carpets on the floor. Chairs with high backs upholstered in green leather were set at angles around the walls, and I noticed that on the back of each one the insignia of the bank had been pressed into the leather.

The room was as quiet and almost as shabby with gentility as a church. Over the mantel of a black marble fireplace hung a copy of a renaissance painting that I took to be Italian. It was flanked by photographs of bearded gentlemen in gilt frames, probably former presidents of the bank. On the far side of the room a walnut-paneled door stood slightly ajar but no sounds issued from behind it. For perhaps three or four minutes I stood there, arms hanging at my sides and my shoulders straight, wondering if I should sit down but deciding not to take a chance.

A man came through from the room beyond the open door and moved to within a few feet of me before he discovered that he was not alone. He was wearing gray striped trousers, a black morning coat and a black tie. Distinguished, I thought, but discreet. He frowned when he saw me and then his face grew bland. "Can I do anything for you?" he said.

"Are you the personnel manager? I'd like to inquire about a job in the bank."

He frowned again. "You're in the wrong part of the building. This is the board of directors' wing."

"I'm sorry, but could you help me anyway?" I said.

He leafed through the papers he held in his hand. "You'd better go back the way you came," he said, not looking at me. "And turn left on the first landing. You'll find the personnel director in the first office on the right."

When I thanked him he smiled, but not easily. As I retraced my steps and followed his directions I turned over in my mind a new idea forming in it, to the effect that working in a bank might not be so bad as I had always thought. From my intimate knowledge and admiration for the works of Charles Dickens I had expected to find in any bank a smell of money-changers and musty bookkeepers with damp palms. The remote air of refinement I had met instead was a challenge.

The personnel director asked me innumerable questions with regard to my background. I answered them honestly, but I carefully refrained from giving him Uncle's name. He said there might be an opening later, but I would have to pass an examination required of all bank employees, based on commercial knowledge, before I could be considered. In five weeks one such examination would be given, open to any graduate of the Commercial Academy. He gave me no encouragement and I left with the date and place of the examination written on a piece of paper which I stuffed into my pocket.

After that I gave up looking for any other job. Nothing at all remained in



my head from the years of work at the academy, but Mother had kept all my books and now I brought them out again. Systematically I began to go through them. They were filled with material that had once seemed dreary and much too complicated, but now I found it entering my mind logically and easily, as though I were reading and understanding what I read with a new brain. When I was told two days after the examination that I had passed with one of the highest marks, I was pleased but not surprised. The Associated Bank indicated its willingness to consider my application now, for undefined work at a salary of eight hundred crowns a month.

I had found a place for myself at last. Maybe not the right one, but at least a beginning. The first day I rode to the bank on the streetcar from Smichov I met a fellow who had once sat next to me in the nonclassical school in Malá Strana. After talking with him casually for five minutes I discovered that he, too, was an employee of the Associated Bank.

“What are *you* doing now?” he said, without much interest.

I waited a moment in order to enjoy the sensation of having a job to talk about. “I’m at the Associated Bank, too,” I said. “Matter of fact, this is my first day there.”

He showed more than a little surprise. “What department you going to be in?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t decided.”

“What makes you think you’ve got a choice?”

I shrugged and he went on, “Where would you work if you had anything to say about it?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Not bookkeeping or accounting, certainly. I prefer to deal with people. Secretary, perhaps. Secretary to the board of directors, maybe.”

He began to laugh and he kept on laughing for quite awhile. Then he said, “Wait till I tell that to the other chaps. I suppose you know there are only three secretaries in the whole bank, and only one for the board. And that’s want you think you want to be!”

He went on to laugh some more, and after awhile we reached the bank and he went to his desk in the bookkeeping department and I reported to the personnel director. He explained that there was usually an opening in the accounting department; that was where they had thought to put me because the heaviest turnover of personnel always occurred there. Good accountants were difficult to find, and to keep. From my record in the examinations he was sure I would be most useful to the bank in that department, but at the moment there was no opening. He had expected one about now, but it hadn’t turned out that way.

Was this sad-looking man trying to say that someone had changed his mind

and there was no opening for me in the bank after all? I must keep him from saying it. When he took a breath to sigh I interrupted. "Perhaps it's the bank's good fortune as well as mine," I said, "that I have other qualities besides an aptitude with figures. I can also handle people. I was an officer in the army. And I'm quite willing to show you how well I can meet the public if you'll give me an opportunity." My ears told me I was sounding stiff and unnatural but I didn't care. What had banks to do with naturalness?

He looked at me closely and his glasses glinted in the light from the high window. I waited motionless beside his desk. His telephone rang, he answered it shortly, and then he turned back to look at me again. Finally he sighed, gathered up a few papers from his desk and said, "Come with me."

He led the way downstairs and through a door that opened into one of the mahogany and frosted-glass cages inhabited by the tellers. Banking hours had begun and there was the muffled sound of footsteps as clients came and went through the large front doors. There was also the persistent swish of paper, pages turning in ledgers and bank notes being counted, modulated by the clink of coins. I was introduced to the head cashier and his assistant. I heard the personnel director tell them I was a new man on trial: my duties would involve carrying messages for them both, entering their accounts in ledgers and relieving them in turn in the cages during the lunch hour. As we stood there in the middle of the morning, I was the only one who showed no surprise.

The work I was given to do was not difficult and I had no fear of falling down in what was expected of me. The only thing I was afraid of was the possibility of being sent to the accounting department as soon as a vacancy occurred there. I tried to think of every possible way to prevent it.

The head cashier was a wonderful old gentleman whom I admired profoundly. He had worked in the bank most of his life and yet he had managed to retain a remarkable sense of humor which amplified his old-world mannerisms of courtesy and human understanding. He was in charge of incoming cash, and he taught me in a few hours how to perform the duties expected of me. He also taught me by inference the subtle art of handling customers in such a way that both customer and cashier parted after a business transaction feeling warmed by the encounter.

The old man's assistant in the next cage was a much younger fellow who had served throughout the war in the Kaiserjäger Regiment in the Tyrol. He found it impossible to forget the army. He was in charge of outgoing cash, and all his work was done with the precision of a military drill. When the customers left his window they must have felt as though they had been subjected to an order from a superior officer. He hated the head cashier with passion and made no attempt to conceal his feelings. When I was called to his cage to get a message or transfer some cash he plied me with questions about

my military experiences. When I went to the cage of the old man I found myself talking of people and the oddities of human nature.

So I shuttled back and forth between two worlds, trying to maintain an equilibrium and showing neither of the men where my sympathies rested between them. Each was apparently satisfied with my work, and that was what I wanted.

I soon found that the clerks in the bookkeeping and accounting departments had to stay in the bank and work many hours after I was free at two o'clock. I fell into the habit of returning to the bank after I had eaten lunch at home to volunteer my help, especially in the accounting department. There was nothing disinterested in the action. I knew precisely why I was doing it.

There was higher overtime pay, for one thing. Whenever I stayed until midnight the increase in my pay check at the end of the week was appreciable. But the most urgent reason was beyond the need of money. All through the war I had volunteered for patrols whenever I was too restive in the lines. I had also volunteered as a measure of meeting trouble before it could reach me. If I volunteered for a patrol, I was spared the constant fear of being called upon when I didn't want to go. So it was with my work in the accounting department. I believed with the force of a superstition that if I volunteered my services when they were needed, I wouldn't be sent there for permanent work.

After a time my voluntary help became noticed in far corners of the organization. Perhaps what I did would not have seemed remarkable to the directors if there had not been so many young men in all the various departments of the bank who looked upon their work as something in the nature of a joke. They were the sons of important commercial families, whose custom it was to prepare their offspring for careers in the family business by first having them trained in a bank.

There were any number of these scions of industry in the Associated Bank. They moved aimlessly about in the foreign exchange department, the securities department, and the banking division, helping to give the bank an appearance of gracious courtesy in its dealings with clients, at the same time keeping the industrial plants of their parents firmly rooted to the capital investment of this particular banking house. The actual amount of work they managed to do was negligible, but no one seemed to expect them to do more.

So my own deliberately hard work became a matter of comment. Having once drawn attention to myself, further events added weight like wet snow accumulating on a snowball being pushed uphill, and chance was given a good deal of assistance by my determination to make no mistakes. Others could afford to be careless, but I have never believed it was a privilege in which I might indulge.

Late one morning as I returned to the cage of the assistant cashier with

bank notes from the vault, I saw a familiar face leaning over my ledger at the high desk in the space behind the cages. I couldn't imagine what he was doing there. The cashier explained to me under his breath that he was the manager of the banking department, making his usual inspection. I could hardly believe my ears. When I had known him, he was a professor in the Commercial Academy. Of all my teachers in all the schools I had attended, this one man had shown me the most active dislike. Before the entire class, shortly before graduation, he had predicted that I would end on the gallows because I was good for nothing else.

I watched him as he went through my cashbook, page by page, studying the figures intently. After awhile he turned, and when he caught my eye I knew he had been aware that he was looking at the work of a former pupil. He came toward the cage with a wide smile lighting his face. "Those figures are as perfect as lines of men on a parade ground," he said, so that everyone back in the cages could hear him. "Perfect. Never saw anything neater. But I'm not surprised." He put his hand through the open window of the cage and laid his arm across my shoulders. "This fellow was one of my most promising students. I'm proud to see such results from my teaching." He gave my shoulder a pat and went back upstairs to the directors' wing.

I don't remember how long it was after that before the next chance came my way. I happened to be counting a huge package of bank notes received from Vienna that morning, as I did every day. They were notes of our own currency returned to us by foreign banks for exchange. Suddenly my finger stopped fluttering their corners as I counted. I went back four notes to touch them again. Then I took out two and examined them closely, without knowing why I did so. I started to put them back in the stack and go on with my work, but something made me stop. I extracted the two notes and took them to the head cashier, but he saw nothing wrong with them. They were like all other 500-crown notes on our bank. However, because he was a kindly man and I was persistent, he went with me to the manager of our department.

We were received in his handsomely furnished office and after a deal of consultation and expert examination, the notes were sent by special messenger to the National Bank. Word came back at once that they were both forgeries. Later the European market was flooded with them, but these were the first to be found in Prague.

I went back to my work between the two cages, but up in the directors' wing they knew now who I was. I had been in the bank seven months. I had bought a new suit, and the year 1921 was nearly over. Chance had to combine with my determination once more before the next opportunity to go forward came my way.

## CHAPTER XX



TWO of the gilded youths asked me to join them one night on a party, probably because I had been doing a lot of work for them. I declined because I had promised to work with the accountants, but I was pleased nevertheless. Later they asked me again and this time I agreed to go. I was starved for a chance to be young and foolhardy and debonair.

They met me at the bank after I had finished work at eleven o'clock and swept me along into their formless plans. We were of approximately the same age, in the vicinity of twenty-five. My new suit was of a good cut and passable material, kept in constant press by Mother. I carried myself like an officer and I thought we appeared much the same on the surface. But as I listened to their conversation I felt we were worlds apart. They were still finding it difficult to forget the glamour of the uniforms they had worn during the war, with their red cavalry breeches, patent-leather boots and clanking sabers. They also regretted the absence of lovely Viennese women who liked such uniforms.

For my part, I regretted the loss of nothing I had known in the war. It had presented me with no desk or membership in an officers' club in Vienna. For me it had been kill or be killed. My French uniform hung at home in a closet, meaningless now. However, I made no show of stressing these differences in our points of view. I wanted too much to find out what their lives and their mental processes were like.

Stefan Horník was fair and blue-eyed. He had been a research student in chemistry before the war, but now he cared neither for pure science nor for the manufacture of textiles, which was his father's occupation. He loved gypsy music more than anything else in the world and kept insisting that we go to the Gri-Gri where some gypsies from Moscow were featured. He also talked about women, pocket money, the stupidity of his tailor, and his reaction to a new cocktail he had tried once and was eager to try again.

Jiří Mašek was dark and incorrigibly gay. His conversation was dotted with the names of famous people he had encountered through his family's connections. Perhaps he meant to impress me, but I thought even then how unimportant a man becomes through his own words when his attention is centered on the eminent persons he has met. Jiří was insatiably interested in gossip. He believed every innuendo he heard and repeated it immediately with the air of having been party to its origin. Each morsel that came to his ears he savored delicately, chuckling to himself and then passing it on as though to flatter his hearers. He scorned Stefan's gypsy music, liking better Blaške's violin as it sent forth the strains of Viennese *lieder* at Zavřel's. He also talked

of women, pocket money, the cut of a new suit, and his reactions to the same cocktail Stefan had liked.

I had nothing to add to the conversation. When we went into the first noise-filled room I followed them to the bar and waited for them to order first. Whatever they said I would say too, in order to hide the fact that I had never been in a Prague night club before. I felt uncomfortable because I knew they were watching me, hunting for mistakes, and my old trick of waiting to see what others would do in a strange situation would not be good enough here. I must arrest their fears about the suitability of my companionship in some other way.

I pretended to feel the effect of the first drink before they did. I called for another and another, and as they followed, my plan of action grew bolder. We went on to other clubs and whenever a barman waited for our order I gave the name of a cocktail no one had heard of, using a bawdy word in lieu of a name because I chose to hide my ignorance that way. The supercilious barmen found the tables turned on them when they were put in a position of having to figure out what I meant. Stefan and Jiří thought it a remarkable joke. My monkey business amused them and that was all they asked of me. It also made them somewhat envious because they were bound rigidly within the social customs of their class and dared not try to be original.

They asked me to go out with them often after that, and my circle of acquaintances grew among these young men of the bank. As it grew, my reputation increased. For one thing, I could outdrink them all. My mind never became intoxicated, no matter how much liquor I put into my body, because I watched myself carefully and I knew exactly what I was doing and why. I never let myself take the last drink that would have been too much. When I threw things, and I threw a lot, I knew what I was doing. Nothing gave me more satisfaction than telling exactly what I thought of them all when they believed I was too drunk to recognize my own words. It made me seem more daring and original than ever.

And so the board of directors of the Associated Bank heard of me yet again, for the fathers of many of my companions were their friends. I was being watched closely at my work; they expected to find mistakes traceable to my late hours, but they never found the slightest difference in my efficiency or behavior, because I liked my work and I was young and strong.

One day the head of the securities department of the Associated Bank, whose son was one of my companions and who was himself one of the directors, asked me if I would like to work in his department. He tried to tease me by adding that he felt he might have more control over his son if he could put me where he could see me more often. I was pleased to accept and I spent a week in his department before I was transferred once more. The foreign

exchange department had just been taken over by a new director from Vienna and it was expanding rapidly. Someone else decided I was needed there, rather than in securities, so there I went.

Hans Wissmuth had already attained something of a reputation in the bank for his singular behavior with the men who worked under him. I had heard of his sophisticated Viennese manners and the way he made cutting remarks with a cynical smile, but I had never seen him. When I went into the outer office of the foreign exchange department I was met by a clattering of typewriters and voices. I had been told to report to Mr. Wissmuth's secretary, who had his own small office apart from the hubbub in the large room. He led the way to the inner office of the new director.

Like all such offices in the bank, the floor was covered with a Turkish rug of rich design and color. There were brocade hangings at the windows and several fine old clocks on the mantel of the fireplace. It took me a moment to focus my attention on the man sitting behind the desk. He was fairly large, but everything in the room was massive enough to make this single human being appear inconsequential. He was looking vaguely in my direction but he said nothing. The clocks began to chime and count the hour and when they stopped I realized he was scrutinizing me as he might have watched a dog being paraded at a kennel show.

"I beg your pardon," I said, my voice echoing faintly.

"Who are you?" The words were not peremptory but rather indifferent.

"I was told to report to you. They said you needed a new clerk."

"So I do, but then, who doesn't?" He fingered some papers lying on his desk. Then he opened a drawer and took out a pencil. "Can't imagine why anyone wants to work in a bank."

I made no reply and the pencil began to tap against the edge of the desk. Suddenly I realized that he had an impediment in his speech, a peculiar quality of voice that made it difficult for him to sound as he felt. What a handicap for a banker! That was why he tried to compensate for it by his cynical remarks.

"Your appearance is in your favor, of course," I heard him saying. "Your night club record is also impressive." His eyes fell to my knees and traveled up again. A not unkind smile played at the corners of his eyes. As I watched, the smile turned out to be a squint. He pressed a buzzer beside the telephone and when his secretary came back into the room Wissmuth said, "Lower that blind. And then take this fellow away and show him what to do. I presume he can add and subtract, if nothing else."

So I worked in the large outer office of the foreign exchange department during the time of the great financial breakdown in Austria and Hungary. Every day the desks were heaped with unfinished sales slips and orders of speculators for the sale of the falling Austrian and Hungarian crowns. We

could never go home at night until the desks were cleared.

Several weeks later Wissmuth happened to call for his secretary one day when the man was at lunch. Then he called for someone else to take dictation but I was the only one in the outer office at the time who could do so. I had not seen my immediate superior since the day of my first interview with him, except as he passed through the office; his secretary relayed his instructions to the office staff. Now I picked up a pad and a pencil and went to him. Without looking up at me he dictated rapidly into his collar a long and complicated cable to London. When he asked me to read the message back I was unable to tell him two consecutive words he had said.

He looked up at me then. "Where do you think you are?" he said. "This isn't one of your night clubs, where you can be as drunk as a lord."

I made no reply, simply bowing and leaving the room. Without reflecting so much as a moment, I went straight to my desk, wrote out my resignation from the bank and sent it to the personnel director by runner. Within ten minutes I was called to his office. The Associated Bank, he said, was prepared to accept my resignation. But before my request was acted upon, one of the directors had insisted that he be allowed to talk to me personally. Would I agree?

I agreed, and he then proceeded to conduct me back to the office of Hans Wissmuth, who came toward me as I entered the room. The expression on his face was a revelation. I heard him saying that I was the first of his employees possessed of sufficient pride to refuse to accept his way of dealing with people. He held out his hand and when I returned his clasp he asked me to serve as his personal secretary and I accepted. I felt only sympathy and admiration for a man whose bad nature so nearly hid his fine qualities, all underlaid by a sense of deep inferiority.

It was during this period of working for Wissmuth that I met Karel Berounský again, the boy at the Commercial Academy who had scorned membership in Eisenstein's gang because even then his independence of judgment had made him immune to flattery. He was serving the foreign exchange department in the capacity of public relations expert, for his social contacts were wide and of the best, and our desks were not far apart. He still held a peculiar interest for me because his nature was as nearly diametrically opposed to my own as any one man's could be. We fell into the habit of lunching together, and occasionally I met him in a group at night, but it required a long period of casual acquaintance before we learned to trust our liking for each other.

I stayed in the foreign exchange department through the crisis of the German mark in 1923. Five telephones stood on my desk and frequently I found myself talking into all of them at once—to Paris about exchange on the



franc, to London to get quotations on the pound, to Amsterdam, Vienna and Berlin. Once in the middle of a frantic afternoon, as I switched receivers from ear to ear, I suddenly heard the voice of Uncle in my mind, telling a frightened boy of six that he was an idiot because he couldn't learn to talk on the telephone. I had to explain to the harried Dutchman in Amsterdam that I wasn't laughing at him.

## CHAPTER XXI



**S**URELY every man who finds himself at some period of his life consenting to the labor involved in the writing of his biography is faced with the necessity for finding a pattern by which words may be woven to form truth. No man can tell everything about himself, even if he has the will to do so, nor are many of us capable of judging rightly what has been of significance for the rest of mankind in the welter of happenings in our days. No doubt this accounts for the fact that the majority of published autobiographies, written by men who are known figures in the public eye, follow a set pattern which answers the single question: "How did I come to be the man that I am?"

The fact that the answer of the individual himself to this question reveals far more than he dreams he is saying, makes each new autobiography a mine of interest for the psychologist in every reader. Havelock Ellis narrowed his comments on his own life to a single sharply defined theme, namely, the growth in his consciousness of a realization that men and women are different, and the ultimate expansion of that consciousness into his life's work. Stefan Zweig gave us the broad panorama of the life of an intellectual Jew in Vienna through the past sixty years, with wide political and social judgments implicit in it. Since he was a man skilled in the use of words, he was able to keep out of that story the personal details of two marriages, as well as the struggles inevitable in mastering his craft. He kept those things unsaid because he had no wish to reveal them, and yet at the core of his from ear to ear, I suddenly heard the voice of Uncle in my mind, telling a frightened boy of six that he was an idiot because he couldn't learn to talk on the telephone. I had to explain to the harried Dutchman in Amsterdam that I wasn't laughing at him.

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If I have friends who consider me something better, or worse, than merely a normal man, that must be their opinion, not mine. To me, the significance of my life so far as it has developed lies in the fact that I have been forced to make soul-deep adjustments in three different kinds of political units. To make the telling of that series of adjustments of interest and value, something of the personal aspects of my life must also be told.

So I give them to you. It is not an easy task to dig them out of the past. I do so because the pattern of my story may prove to be of some small help in furthering a wider appreciation in the American mind for the kind of men in Europe whom they must think of in future as brothers, whether they choose to do so or not. Today I find myself rather disinterested in the young man that I was, inclined to minimize his enthusiasms and emotions. I would prefer to think of him as more perceptive and certainly more aware of coming disaster than I remember him to be. But his story will be valueless in forming the pattern already set unless it is honest.

As I have already said, I felt no particular constraint as a child by reason of the fact that I was a subject of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. People like ourselves had not been persecuted in such a direct way that we were able to understand it. I was indoctrinated with no dreams of revolution and freedom, except the rather generalized ideals of my grandfather, because I had no friends among the young idealists who carried in their minds the image of the fresh, virile Czechoslovakia they later created. When I enlisted in the Imperial Army, I did so from no dramatic motives of hatred, nor even from a sense of duty. I wanted only to escape personal unhappiness by trading it for what I believed would be glamorous adventure. It must not be overlooked that I was also strongly motivated by what Freud has called the "death-wish," an instinct consistently played upon by the purblind dynasts and militarists of Central Europe.

Eventually I came to cherish the ideals of my country in its new republicanism, to feel myself a true representative of it, but I had first to go through years of ever-broadening experience and a widening education in discovering what the rest of the world was like before I was in a position to appreciate my own. My great adventure turned out to be one of the mind.

## CHAPTER XXII



NOW for the first time in my life I had more than enough money. In fact, I had plenty of money. My salary was ample, but it formed only part of my income. Everyone around me was becoming richer by the day and I saw no reason for deliberately limiting my own income to the extent of my salary. I obtained immediate news about every movement of the stock market at firsthand, so it was easy enough to fill out a white form for a large purchase in the morning and use it legitimately for my own profit.

I suppose no two men react in the same manner to the acquisition of money after a long period of poverty. Everyone I knew was spending the last cent of his ample salary and so did I, as fast as I could. I had promised Mother many years before never to gamble with cards; it set her mind at rest whenever she tended to worry about the possibility of my inheriting my father's weakness for big stakes. And I never did. But all my life I have gambled with my career.

Instead of hoarding my income I ordered custom-made suits from the best tailors in Prague, lots of suits and fine accessories to match. I sent Mother for the first real holiday of her life to spend the summer at Franzensbad, and I joined her there for my own vacation. Then I tried to persuade her to let me rent a larger apartment in a better section of the city, but she was adamant in

her refusal to make such a change. She had no desire for a finer home. She was completely happy where we were. I think, too, she was more than a little afraid of having to learn new habits. She also maintained that the old apartment of two rooms in Smichov was filled with memories which she might lose if we disposed of all the old furniture and began a new life in strange surroundings. Whenever I bought her a new dress she worried about the cost, never able to realize that she had enough money now to buy cupboards full of new clothes. Poverty had become to her like a pain inseparable from her being. She was endlessly proud of me and my work, but she was unable to admit that it meant the end of hardship and want. Without the necessity for denial, she would feel deprived of her reason for living.

At the bank I watched with consuming interest the reaction of my associates to the increasing fortunes they were making on the stock market. Executives leased apartments in buildings constructed by fashionable and expensive architects. They filled them with tremendously costly and ugly furniture. When one of the managers of the bank moved into his new apartment in a building with three floors, he immediately had an elevator installed at his own expense to save him the necessity of walking up two flights. The libraries in these apartments were alike—shelves of leather-bound books unmarred and uncut. Many of these men had never opened a book in their lives and were not likely to start the habit now. With their new houses furnished and their wives attired in fine clothes, they went on to buy the most expensive cars on the market, but they were always careful to park them on a side street behind the bank, away from the eyes of curious clients.

I watched all this with three parts amusement and one part envy. And yet I respected Mother's desire to remain where she was, so nothing more was said about our moving. I was still far from satisfied with myself; I wanted much more than money. Not even added power which money might eventually give me offered promise. There was something lacking in my life that was more important than any of these things and I had to find out what it was. I could express it for myself in the simplest of terms: I longed for more of life to live. I wanted a wider and wider world in which to find a complete expression of myself, but just what that form of world would be and what I specifically wanted to express I had no idea.

So I continued to embrace life in terms of the 1920's, with ardor and a flourish of splendid recklessness. I became as familiar with dawn as I was with noon.

The attitude of the young man in Europe to night life, both before the old war and after it, has been more talked of in America than understood. Because puritanism is the backbone of Anglo-American culture, neither Englishmen nor Americans have realized how thoroughly Europeans have understood and

accepted the Greek conception of the orgy.

Fundamentally, Europe has always been a man's world, in which the family was all-important. In ancient times the orgy was arranged as a religious rite, created to act as a safety valve for the male animal's recurrent impulse to kick over the traces of civilization, to return to his primitive memory as a hunter, as a free man without responsibilities. In ancient Greece whole villages and towns, at set seasons, went wild in the bacchanalia. The mardi-gras is a survival, in a diluted form. Even in England it can be seen occasionally in bump-suppers at Oxford and Cambridge when for a single night an entire college is allowed to celebrate a victory by getting drunk. In America, where racial traditions are mixed, the bacchanalia survives sub rosa at conventions.

In modern Europe private orgies became systematized, at least by the upper classes. Realizing there was no longer a place for the goat's foot in urban life, Europeans compromised. Young men were expected and encouraged to sow wild oats in their early twenties, for if they did not, outbreaks were apt to occur in their forties which might endanger careers and families. The French *grand bourgeois* or the Austrian count who arranged for his son to have a mistress was merely taking out an insurance policy on his son's career and the safe continuance of his family.

In the new Europe that blossomed after the war, such stable arrangements seldom existed. The old nobility could no longer afford them and the new *bourgeoisie* were too busy with the present to worry about the future. A new streamlined night life stepped into the vacuum and tried to fill it, answering the returning soldier's need for superinduced excitement. Those of us who were an integral part of this spectacle in Prague had no way of comparing ourselves with the ages, nor did we think then that we should eventually be embalmed for posterity by Bruce Lockhart. We were having what we took to be a wonderful life, and that was enough for us to think about at the time.

It was a voluptuous world, full of underlying tragedy and frustration, masked by a modern hardness more superficial than real. Its big moments were seen by brains excited by alcohol, ready to exaggerate or depreciate the merit of the performers according to the mood of the moment. It was punctuated by the last cries of the wild old gypsy life of middle and eastern Europe, more poignant than ever because instinctively we knew the world would never see its like again.

In retrospect, I can understand what a strong social and cultural influence these night clubs produced on me. There were specific reasons why this was so in my case, of course. In the first place, I had outgrown the two rooms in Smichov, but I felt at home nowhere else. My social life was completely formless, and I was a man with an exuberant nature. So the night clubs became my only home, and I learned to be master in it.

But there was another reason, too—the unique quality of night club entertainment in Prague after the war. Before the war Prague had been quiet, sturdy and dull. By the end of the war it boasted a score of night clubs known throughout Europe for their brilliant entertainment and their own brand of smartness, patronized by international figures with a taste for excitement. But essentially these clubs belonged to the young men of Prague.

In Berlin the term *Nachtlokal* became known popularly as *Naktlokal*, for stiff Prussian discipline broke down into gross and drunken orgies where women and often men were stark naked. One seldom heard of famous performances in Berlin; one heard much of naked flesh and indecent *lebende Bilder*. In London, the British made of their night clubs what one would expect; they were expensive, second-rate and dull. In Paris they were chi-chi; tourists found that sleekly manicured men in dinner jackets sitting next to them at a bar were pimps waiting to show the way to a brothel next door or upstairs. In New York they were smoke-filled basement holes, winked at by a law which forbade their existence.

In Prague the growth of the night clubs was somewhat different. Few, if any, cabarets can compare in art to the theater, but in Czechoslovakia they came close to it. The frontier world of old folk music and folk dances was at our back door, and this fact gave us a richer heritage to draw upon in our city night life. If we were not the night club center of the world, we were close to it. To us came great actresses, singers and dancers who had made their names in Vienna, Berlin, St. Petersburg, Budapest and Paris. Eventually Negro jazz bands found their way to us from the States. But it was the Czech and Viennese musicians, born of music-loving peoples, who dominated the cabarets with their own peculiarly intoxicating rhythms. If any one thing differentiated the night life of Prague from that of other capitals, it was this.

The rest of the world thinks of Czech music as that of Dvořák and Smetana; we knew these two composers as part only of a deeply rooted national culture. The Czech heart sings and cherishes the songs of our people, and the cabarets of Prague reflected our taste. Gypsy music we considered artificial and overdone; sugary Viennese *lieder* seemed to us symptomatic of a decadent empire; Negro jazz was noisy and amusing but not understood. Yet the loudest drunk would become quiet and stop to listen when one of the musicians began to play a Chopin waltz or a folk song of Dvořák in the early hours of the morning.

There was the Chapeau Rouge, small and exclusive, offering no program and no hostesses. We went there to hear Wolff, a round, curly haired genius who became the rage of Central Europe before his career was ended. All night long he sat at the piano in his velvet jacket, drinking brandy which was sent by his admirers. Whenever the offerings ran low he began to shout “cognac—

cognac” through the words of a song. It was here that I first ran into Bruce Lockhart, Count Sternberg with his wooden leg, and the brothers Doubek, whom we considered arbiters of good taste.

There was the Sekt Pavilion where crowds of bar girls were employed to wangle drinks and tips from the customers. Like Boccaccio’s and Esprit, they put on a new show every few weeks. Zavřel’s was the place where the barman presided over a continual crap game; half a million crowns lost or won in a few throws of the dice were ineffectual in changing his expression. At the Restaurant Elner I saw pink stockings for the first time on the legs of a Vanderbilt as she came to the table next to mine with her new husband, who was a member of the staff of the British Embassy. Until that night, stockings in our world had been only dark or white.

Of all the clubs, the Alhambra was our favorite. Unlike so many of the others, a stage occupied one side of the huge room, a long American bar another. Around the dance floor were tables for tourists and the uninitiated because we considered that dancing was only for the unsmart. Boxes lined the walls in tiers, and here the knowing young habitués reserved their favorite locations for the season. This main room held some eight hundred guests, for the Alhambra occupied the major portion of the basement floor of the Hotel Passage (later called the Ambassador) on Wenzeslaus Square. Beyond was the smaller Chinese Pavilion, open as a rule only to those who were personally known to the management.

I had fallen into the habit of dropping in at the Alhambra bar every afternoon at four o’clock with Stefan and Jiří after the bank closed. Jiří had already joined his father’s firm and Stefan was leaving the bank soon. Because they could speak only Czech and German, they took no interest in the other habitual patrons of the bar who represented the international set in Prague at that time. I fell into conversation with some of the men of the foreign missions and through them I met a number of the younger diplomats. Stefan and Jiří found my new acquaintances dull, so they went their own way. New acquaintances turned into friends, and before I realized what had happened, I was an accepted member of a group of men who were stimulating as well as amusing. In fact, they were as intoxicating to me as strong drink.

There was Captain Gaston Chedeville of the French military mission. He wore civilian clothes which seemed to us effeminate and overdone. No one mentioned it, but we all knew he was a member of the Deuxième Bureau; part of each day he devoted to affairs at police headquarters and his nights were spent exclusively in the cabarets; his main interest centered on the German dancers. General H. E. Rozet had been commander of a French Foreign Legion regiment in the war; he wore a square red beard, a gold-rimmed monocle on a black silk ribbon, and strong perfume; he reminded me incessantly of one of de

Maupassant's heroes. With him always was Captain Prunet, a florid, stocky fellow with fat jowls, round glasses and a constant smile; he nourished a deep attachment for the of the Czech dancers at the Alhambra. Monsieur Dunal wore the large red button of the Legion d'Honneur in his lapel and was addressed by everyone as Monsieur le Commandant; at this time he was engaged in transactions with the Czech government on behalf of a large French industry.

No one had to push these Frenchmen into a political discussion. They were full of pathos about the war, placing permanent emphasis on the unique importance of their military victory. I seldom saw one of them drunk. Probably it was a kind of stinginess, without regard for the fact that their French franc and the size of their incomes gave them plenty to spend. But it made for good talk, and that was what I wanted just then more than anything else.

Through this group of men I learned how provincial the life of Prague had always been in comparison with the nonchalant and sophisticated ways of Paris and London. I also managed to acquire a wider understanding of world history than lectures in school or my own reading had ever given me. I discovered the exhilaration to be found in weighing and judging divergent points of view, different qualities of mind, until independent conclusions could be reached in my own thinking which were often in direct opposition to my preconceived notions.

Among the Anglo-Saxons I came to know only one man as well as I did these Frenchmen. That was Arthur Randles, European manager of the Cunard Line. I was uncertain for quite awhile how to place him, for he was neither English nor American, though his nature seemed to derive from both. When I learned that he was a Canadian I understood the dual quality of his character. He was extremely vigorous and supplied with endless good humor. People remembered him easily because he carried on his forehead a scar received in action with the Canadians in the war. He was a natural leader of men and he spoke Czech extremely well. Above everything else, he taught us that Canadians are neither English nor American. We were known throughout the night clubs not only to the musicians and entertainers, but to other patrons as well, for we considered ourselves masters of the variations and nuances of this hectic life. Whenever we joined a party, the spirits of the group rose; whenever we found a new band or a new drink or a new actress to admire, the band, the drink and the actress became a vogue.

I have read Bruce Lockhart's *Retreat from Glory* more than once, in German and in English, and I still doubt if he learned half as much about my countrymen as we learned about England from him and his compatriots in our midst.

When the Englishmen and Americans first came to us we were ready to be



impressed by them. They represented not only two victorious nations in the war, but also two of the richest countries in the world. We watched them outbuy everyone else with only a small bundle of bank notes which they carried in their trouser pockets. The rate of exchange was greatly in their favor, but we could hardly blame them for that. It was their mission and they fulfilled it with ease. Our disillusionment came later when we found them not only uninformed about the most obvious facts of history and politics in Central Europe, but totally disinterested in rectifying their ignorance.

Then we began to realize that in their own minds the British considered all other peoples to be their inferiors. We were all right to drink with, and our girls were fine for flirtations, but they fell into a blank silence of annoyance whenever we tried to talk of world affairs, as though we had committed an unpardonable breach of social conduct. The Americans were equally unwilling to bring their conversation to anything remotely resembling a serious level. To them, America was the best old country in the world and they felt sorry for everyone who wasn't fortunate enough to live there. Pressed for reasons for such an admirable loyalty, they were glib in the use of superlatives in describing the United States, as though they had learned their facts by rote in school. But somehow their ignorance of all matters outside their own country, which might have formed a basis of comparison, left us unimpressed by their ready words of self-appraisal.

I can be amused now at the gross misdemeanor we committed in the eyes of the Englishmen by our tendency to consider the Americans and British the same kind of men. We found it extremely difficult to differentiate between them. Americans were not arrogant in their manners like the English, but they talked louder about themselves and it added up to the same thing in our minds. Even the effect of alcohol on them was the same. Both Americans and Englishmen lost their indifference to other kinds of people as soon as they became high. Then they could outdo even my own countrymen, for all our mercurial temperament, in their gay good nature because they were no longer afraid to let themselves be charming and lovable. So we tended to prefer their company in the early hours of the morning.

It is obvious that besides the entertainment and drug value of this existence it provided a measure of education into the ways and manners of other countries. A young man can become an intimate with a stiff English diplomat in the small hours in a night club, particularly when the Englishman is in a foreign land, as he could no place else. One recalls that famous English quotation: "It was in another country, and besides, the wench is dead. . . ." There were, of course, a dozen other languages and nationalities with us in those years of the 1920's. Yugoslavs, Poles, Swedes, Hollanders, East Indians, Danes, Egyptians and a score more moved through our nights, but Randles,

Chedeville and I could always be found together.

We played a game with each other which no one ever won. Every morning Randles and I reached our respective offices at nine o'clock, clean-shaven, well pressed and clear of head. Now and then we called each other as we began our day's work. Then Chedeville would make his rounds, first to one of us and then to the other, bringing his pretty manners to see if he could once win this game by finding us not at work on time. He never did, for we were young, healthy and determined in this matter of keeping our private affairs separate from our work.

I must mention one other man who was important to me in those days. He gave me the last bit of assistance I needed to gain complete confidence in myself. I met Count Willy Kolovrat first through the beautiful Martina, one of the dancing stars of that time. He spoke to her in passing as she sat beside me at a dinner party, she introduced us, and from that night until he left Prague some six years later, our friendship was unbroken.

Kolovrat was a member of one of the oldest families of Czech nobility. The family mansion stood below the Hradčany in Malá Strana, but he maintained his own apartment on the side of the hill. He was fifteen years my senior. Too many of his own generation had gone in the war, and thus he drifted into a younger crowd. He had unlimited time at his disposal, but he was not a happy man for he could never make a final adjustment with the postwar world. He was tall, strong, kindly and attractive, with white-blond hair and freckles across his nose. He spoke eight languages fluently and walked like a cavalry officer, which in fact he had been. One leg was always kicking an invisible saber out of his way.

We fell into the habit of walking home together every dawn across the Národní most as far as the point on the other side of the river where he went one way to Malá Strana and I turned left toward Smichov. Half the time when we reached the place of parting, we turned back over the bridge in order to prolong our talk. Though I am notably stubborn and proud, Kolovrat was able to do for me something which no one else could have done. In such a way that I never felt corrected, he showed me each of my slightest mistakes in manner, movement or speech made during the preceding night.

Such delicate distinctions are important in Europe, far more important than an American or an Australian, for instance, can ever realize. One man knows instantly of another man exactly where he belongs in the social world by the way his white tie is worn, how he holds his wineglass, the height at which he raises a woman's hand in kissing it, and the amount of understatement he uses in praising his current passion. Kolovrat enabled me to hurdle this social barrier.

Wherever he appeared in Prague he was greeted warmly, for underlying his

perfection of manner was a grace of heart as rare as it was warm. It was essentially for this characteristic that I admired him so extravagantly. When he ordered a drink the barman forgot everyone else in the vicinity while the two discussed the ingredients of a new concoction Kolovrat had discovered somewhere, or the state of the barman's wife's health. In the early morning as we passed the fruit markets he always greeted the women who were setting up their stalls. They knew him as an old friend and invariably tried to press upon him flowers and fruits. Even the police in Prague saluted him because they remembered the days of the war when he had been their much-admired *Rittmeister* who always spoke to them in Czech. One morning at four o'clock he chased a man he disliked over the sidewalks with his Bugatti sport car, but the police waved him off when they finally caught up with him, merely suggesting that he think better of such behavior another time.

Mother adored Kolovrat, too. On a certain Sunday noon I woke up to find him sitting with her in the other room, drinking coffee and eating a large slice of bread and butter. He kept insisting it was the best breakfast he had ever tasted in his life. Mother had never met him before but they were talking as though they were old friends. I missed him greatly when his inner restlessness took him off to hunt for his own adventure in the Argentine. It was not until 1937 that we met again.

## CHAPTER XXIII



ONE day the buzzer on my desk rang to call me to the office of my chief, Hans Wissmuth. I picked up some documents I knew he was waiting to see and went in. For some time now I had been entertained in his home, where I had met many of the men in foreign financial circles whom I would otherwise not have known. But during banking hours our relations were as formal as ever.

Would I be willing, he said now, to undertake a delicate piece of work for the bank, one which was rather unusual? There was no precedent for it, and it required the maximum of loyalty and diplomacy.

It appeared that speculations which were being made by certain large banks and groups of financial houses in Czechoslovakia had antagonized Rašín, our Minister of Finance. He was the courageous individual who saved our country from inflation at the end of the war when the currency of neighboring countries was being rapidly debased. Now he had no intention of watching his work ruined from within, so without warning he had put a deputation of accountants into every bank in Prague to revise and control any business transaction which

might jeopardize the safety of the currency. For the length of the stay of the five men assigned to the Associated Bank, the board of directors wished me to hold the title of secretary to the board in order that I might serve as liaison between the Minister's men and themselves.

I asked Wissmuth for more details of the work expected of me before I agreed to his suggestion. An enormous standing reward had been posted by the government, he told me, for information leading to detection of any break in the law on the part of any bank in any of its transactions. There were some fifteen hundred employees in the central branch of our bank, and some one of them might well be tempted to falsify a record for the purpose of collecting the reward. It was to guard against this possibility that the board of directors felt they must have someone they could trust implicitly to represent them and keep in constant touch with the work of the five-man commission as long as it remained in the bank.

The advantage in this investigation was unquestionably on the side of the deputation, for not only were these five ambitious young men out to earn their personal laurels, they also had the might of the state behind them in every decision they were prepared to make. The bank felt its strongest counterweight would be the presence of someone at these investigations who was not only trustworthy, but also familiar with all departments of the organization.

I accepted the appointment and for five weeks I stayed on the heels of the commission. Ten years later I saw one of these five men become director of the National Bank of Czechoslovakia, a sort of minor Montagu Norman. By 1943 I met him again when he had become a refugee from Hitler, bitter and old and friendless.

At the conclusion of the investigation the Associated Bank was exonerated by the Minister of Finance. The board of directors mopped their collective brows, informed me that I had been praised by the commission for my tact, and to show their own gratitude they asked if I would be willing to accept a permanent appointment as secretary to the board. I found myself remembering the day when I had applied for a job in the bank only three years before. I accepted the appointment and moved to a desk in the heavily carpeted inner office of the board in the directors' wing of the bank.

With this last rise both in salary and status I should have been well satisfied, yet I was not. I was proud of myself, for I have as much vanity as any man. But I realized now as I never had before that only a portion of myself could be used by the bank, no matter how much they were prepared to require of me. Another part of my being was still hungry, still searching for expression in another kind of world.

## CHAPTER XXIV



IN America, girl can meet boy almost anywhere, and it can be delightful. In Europe before the old war, class distinctions imposed a barrier no one could pass at will. After the war many of the barriers still remained; weaker, perhaps, with gaps in them, but they were still there.

When the war ended I had known only two women I could recall with anything but disgust. One was my mother and the other was Julča. It was an abnormal situation for any young man, but I did not realize it then. During the war I had fallen into the same kind of experiences most soldiers go through. Perhaps I was a personable young officer; I don't know. They might have been the same under any circumstances.

The wife of one of my colonels invited me to their home for tea. When I arrived, shy and ill at ease, I found her alone, dressed in a revealing negligee. The nurtured ideals of my childhood were shaken at the notion of a colonel's wife considering for an instant—as she obviously did—an intimate relationship with a junior officer. And then there was the Christmas package handed to me when I was in hospital. It contained a note from the unknown sender. Because I found the handwriting interesting, I wrote to thank her, after which we corresponded for a month or so. The day after I returned to barracks the owner of the handwriting appeared with her suitcase, come to stay with me. Such visitors were usually welcome in the officers' wing of the barracks of those days. She was at least a dozen years my senior and the first thing she did was pull from her purse a picture of her little boy. She wanted him to be a cadet when he grew up and she thought it would be fine to be the mistress of a man who might one day be her son's senior officer. I sent her away as unceremoniously as she had come because she had profaned a relationship more sacred in my eyes than marriage.

Back in Prague I might have found my way into the home of a number of prominent families through my connection with the bank, but this kind of social life held no appeal for me. These young bourgeois girls, I said to myself, were snobbish, they were tame. At this moment they offered nothing I wanted. If they knew the story of my life they would consider it merely unfortunate, without any skill in guessing at my psychological problems. They would never have been able to understand my mother, and of course they would not recognize the more subtle effects of the war on our generation.

It was natural, therefore, that the first girls I became fond of were the ones whose background resembled my own. The entertainers of the night clubs were often splendid artists; they were never cheap performers. But they had no

more status in society than I did. They, too, had known what hunger was, and they had survived by pitting their wits against the world. Like Julča, they were warm, generous and affectionate. They were not intelligent and they were often confused, but we understood each other completely.

Throughout my life there has rested deep within me an intense aversion to being thought a nuisance. Always I will leave a party or an engagement early, sometimes losing many pleasurable hours, rather than run the risk of being wished out of the way. Here in the night clubs I was frankly adored by the girls who entertained us because I understood equally well their tragedies and their jokes. I neither used them thoughtlessly as men of greater wealth were in the habit of doing, nor tried to pretend I was better than they. I preferred having them make me a tin god in poor surroundings, in spite of the perishable nature of such metal, to the role of outsider in the homes of Prague society. Nothing gave me greater amusement, or so I told myself repeatedly, than to be whispered about and pointed out as a notable *roué* by society girls who came to the cabarets occasionally with their families.

It was an extremely limited world, but while I lived in it, it was all mine.

One warm week in May, 1922, a new show opened at the Alhambra. Aloof from the crowds at the tables around the dance floor, we sat watching as the new acts went on. The opening acrobats and comic teams bored us, so Chedeville and I became absorbed in a discussion far removed from our surroundings. We turned around only when Kolovrat sighed audibly to draw our attention to the next number.

It was a solo ballet, a difficult act to put over in a city where the simplicity of national dances was so much more popular. From where we sat we were unable to see the dancer's face clearly on the scarcely-lighted stage. She was new to Prague and the others decided she was good. I could see nothing remarkable about the dance and said so. Maybe she could be good, but nothing is successful out of its proper setting. A classical Greek dance looked no better in this night club than the Parthenon does when transposed to a city bank building in London or New York. I went back to our discussion.

A little later she slipped onto a stool at the far end of the bar. She had thrown a coat over her dancing costume and her hair was still moist around her temples. She was different from the usual run of dancers to whom we were accustomed, a tiny girl, much smaller than she had seemed dancing on her toes on the stage. Most of our entertainers were lusty, full-limbed blondes or warm-blooded titians. Her fragility piqued the curiosity of the men with me, a reaction at least true to human nature everywhere, and it captured my interest, too.

We drifted over to the long bar and sat beside her. The barman set up our drinks. Then Kolovrat spoke to her. He complimented her on her dance in his

own easy way. She looked at him in the mirror over the bar and did not move or speak. Then Chedeville got to work on the other side. He leaned over the bar in her direction and gave her one of his most devastating smiles. It failed, too.

So far I had taken no part in this game. Some men can try to pick up a girl without success and think nothing of it. To me, there is no letdown worse. For the moment I preferred to be out of it.

The barman set her up with a glass of orange juice. The others were confident the girl would soon learn who we were and be eager to make amends by being friendly. She must be very green not to know anyway, for nearly all new actresses in Prague had heard of us through the backstage grapevine before the curtains parted for the first time on their act. But something told me this girl was not entirely green and that she simply did not want to be picked up. I caught the barman's eyes. He had the same idea.

Suddenly the girl said, "This is a public bar, isn't it?"

"Yes, ma'am," he replied, grinning.

"Then you ought to clean it off."

He stared at her and then catching her point, grinned again.

She slipped off the stool, looked right at us, and went off to her dressing room. I realized then that the scene was not funny at all; it was poignant—a very little girl, three habitués annoying her, orange juice at the bar, and all in a strange city. I was not proud of us.

When she had gone the barman made a comic face at us. "Never mind, you'll soften her up in time."

"Who is she?" Kolovrat said.

The barman thought a minute. "Rée Bertin. From Vienna."

"She looks just a kid," Chedeville said.

"Eighteen," the barman replied. "That's old enough."

It was old enough for her to know her own mind, anyway. Each night after her act she came to the bar for a soft drink, then disappeared immediately to dress. She never returned to the tables of patrons later, as the other entertainers did. She talked to the barman and that was all. Because we found we could make no impression on her, she began to seem overweeningly desirable. With my own pride stung, however indirectly because I had never spoken to her myself, I became unreasonable and decided to do something about it.

On the fourth or fifth night of her two-weeks' engagement I managed to sit near the end of the bar where she always perched on a stool much too high for her small, hard legs. I opened a discussion with the other three which I hoped would keep them occupied for some time and then I withdrew while they tore the subject to pieces. When Rée Bertin arrived they scarcely noticed her and I took my chance. As soon as she had ordered her drink and the barman had

turned to prepare it, I raised my voice to attract his attention. “Járo,” I said. “Tell the manager I want a word with him when he comes around tonight. His show is falling off this week. It’s too pure and artistic. Nobody wants to watch toe dancers any more.”

I looked straight at the barman’s back as I spoke, but I could see her from the corner of my eye in the mirror. Her body had become rigid. “What’s wrong with my dance?” she said, turning on the stool to face me. Her gamin eyes were blue with fear.

I wanted to tell her quickly there was nothing wrong with her dance; it was beautiful and all of us were completely crazy about it and about her. I couldn’t bear to look into the fright in her eyes. She was such a kid and this was probably her first solo job. Instead I shrugged my shoulders and continued to watch her in the glass without turning. “It would give me great pleasure to tell you,” I said casually. “But these stools are uncomfortable. A bar is hardly the place to discuss such a subject.”

She was on her guard. “What do you know about dancing?” she said.

I shrugged again. “Nothing. But I could certainly tell you how to improve yours.” I turned then and looked directly into her saucy little face. Its defenses were all gone. I didn’t like what I was saying and I didn’t like myself for saying it, but I had accomplished what my companions had been unable to do with their flattery, and I had to go on as I had begun. They were listening intently now. “I have a table in the Chinese Pavilion,” I said. “Go and change and meet me there and I’ll give you all the professional advice you need.”

She continued to look at me with her abnormally large eyes, her short nose tilted up and the perspiration making black ringlets around her face. Then without answering she slipped off her stool and disappeared.

The other three mocked me when she had gone. They thought it a fine joke, and asked me what I’d say if she kept the appointment. I ordered drinks and evaded their teasing and then left them to make my way to the smaller room. In twenty minutes she joined me, her hair combed now away from her face, her nose freshly powdered and her street dress making her look somewhat less childish.

We were both uncomfortable as I fought desperately in my mind to think of something to say while she waited to let me make the first move. I had read nothing about dancing and knew nothing about it except what I had picked up through overheard conversations in the cabarets. I thought I knew a graceful performance from a poor one, but how could I tell Rée Bertin she was good and yet not good enough? I could think of no generalized comments that would make sense to her.

She refused anything stronger than fruit juice when the waiter came for our order. After he had gone she turned to watch the dance floor and I watched her.



She had an adorable face. Somehow I must take the fear out of her eyes, kiss the pert mouth, do something immediate to make her laugh and be happy.

The show was over and the orchestra was playing one of the popular songs of the moment. The music was as intoxicating as champagne and the whole room was drunk with it. The sound of laughter rose over the shuffling of feet as the dancers returned to their tables. Voluptuous bodies of Italians, Rumanians, courtesans from Warsaw, and Hungarian dancers from Budapest were pressed close by their partners as they sang the words of the song.

My girl is a gypsy, and gypsies are sweet,  
Not bashful or coy, but ready to tease,  
Her kisses are warm, her kisses are straight,  
She loves and is not afraid.  
My girl is a gypsy, and gypsies are sweet.

The girl beside me was crying softly, her face turned away as she fumbled in a pocket for her handkerchief. I watched her for a moment as she dabbed at her eyes, feeling thoroughly ashamed of myself. I picked up the small, strong-fingered hand lying in her lap and enclosed it in my own fist, and then I began to talk. I told her there was nothing wrong with the way she danced. She was lovely and she had great talent. All I wanted for her was a better opportunity to show what she could really do, a better spot on the program, different music to bring out her peculiarly vivid charm. She wasn't like most dancers. She mustn't try to be like even the best of the others. She must be as different as her personality was unusual. She must attempt new forms of expression in her dancing that would enhance her extreme type of beauty.

For instance . . . if she could get a stage electrician to experiment with her on a new kind of lighting effect she might work out a means of projecting herself far beyond the limits of the ordinary stage. She was tiny, but she needn't let her lack of size dwarf the volume of her charm. Ideas began to form in the wake of my words and now I could scarcely get them out fast enough.

"Look," I said, dropping her hand back into her lap in order to use both of mine to outline what I meant. "Let's get a monotone screen for your backdrop. None of these fancy scenes, just a plain screen. And then let's have the lights thrown against you as you dance in such a way that your whole body is projected in a dancing shadow against the backdrop." My hands tried to indicate what I wanted to say. "With its enlarged movements and blurred patterns it will be like a counterpart of your own dance. And the color effects can be blended the same way."

Her eyes were shining as I finished and her body was moving in a nervous tension as she followed my descriptions. We forgot everything else in the room as we became absorbed in expanding these ideas. Sometimes she would laugh

spontaneously as a child laughs from unaffected delight, and again she would grow arch as she thought of the possibilities of such a departure from routine and its probable effect upon her career. I had long ago forgotten my three companions who were waiting to know how I had progressed with my ruse. I had also forgotten that my chief impulse in the beginning had been to succeed where the others had failed.

Night after night we met as soon as Rée's number was over. I was unreservedly in love for the first time in my life and she was in love with me. It was a heedless passion for both of us because we knew it could have no logical conclusion but separation. Yet we accepted these weeks together without question. We were surprisingly alike in our natures as well as in our background. She had come through poverty and loneliness to make her way as a dancer, and her disdain for night club habitués who threw their money away carelessly was too intense to permit her to accept favors from any of them. She continued to be impertinent and to tease me as no one else had ever been permitted to do, but I adored these qualities as evidences of her independent spirit.

On Sundays we got entirely away from the atmosphere of the night clubs. It was May and the city was sweet with the odor of lilacs and young leaves and fruit blossoms. There is no season of the year when Prague is ugly, but the months of spring in the valley of the Vltava are indescribably beautiful. The Hradčany rises through terraced veils of green and all over the face of Malá Strana the roofs of very old houses can be seen in tiers, each wrapped in terraced layers of trees and gardens. Most of them have been there for a long time, their gray stone walls and red-tiled roofs reaching from the river to the hem of the great buildings at the summit. As the sun moves across the city from dawn to dusk the colors on the Hradčany change from orange gold to mauve and purple, and the sweet smell of the gardens and orchards moves along the river on the evening breeze.

Of all the parks and lovely walks in and around Prague, we liked the Kinský Gardens best. They were maintained by the city now for the use of the public, but their heavily wooded slopes and sheltered gardens had not been changed from the days when they had been the private estate of Count Kinský. As we came through the woods on one slope of the hill we could see the city spread out below and the Vltava like a beige ribbon of light sweeping in generous curves under its interlacing bridges, the Staré Město beyond its far bank a flattened pattern of tiled roofs and flecks of market squares.

And then we would wander on, hand in hand through warm sunny Sundays, talking as neither of us had talked to another living soul in our lives, telling our dreams and our hopes and our small vanities, stopping to embrace in the shadow of the woods and then coming out into the sun again. It was

warm on our faces and relaxing to our mood. We could hear the bells of the Loretto Church in the shadow of the Capuchin monastery as they rang the hour, their sound echoing through green domes and onion-shaped pinnacles on the crown of the hill. The spires of St. George's Church thrust their slim spears into the sky, almost out of sight in the bright light, and the city below was weighted with a cloying intricacy of baroque design, capped by copper domes.

Nowhere was Prague a place of splashing color. With the retiring sun warming its westerly windows, it seemed for a brief hour to be a place entirely of mauve and gold. From the terraces of the Malá Strana fanning out below came the heavy fragrance of old shrubs and well-tended flower gardens. Purple walls and golden windowpanes. Blossoms of yellow and blossoms of mauve. Shadows and light. The sound of the city rolled up from the slow-moving Vltava, like the theme of our two lives, combined for this short space of time into one. Merry, cautious, stubborn and sad.

Through Rée I experienced for the first time the flowering of a creative idea into tangible expression. I knew at last the meaning of complete satisfaction in my whole being. She translated my suggestions into a new dance, we worked it out together to an arrangement of one movement of a Tchaikovsky symphony, and after she had rehearsed it until she was nearly exhausted, we put it on for the manager of the Alhambra. He was sufficiently impressed to give Rée a second month's engagement with top billing in the new show, and her dance became the sensation of Prague night life for a little while.

During these weeks I dreamed long dreams of becoming an artist myself. The excitement of creation had gone to my head. One day I thought I would be a choreographer, another day I would be a composer, again I decided to take up painting and after that I thought about writing plays. I was still young enough to believe that I had only to want enough of life to be able to turn it to my own inner needs. But when I told Rée my plans she would laugh and tease me, knowing my nature well. For in another part of my mind was the persistent need to be practical, whatever else I might do.

I saw very little of Mother these days. I got home long after she had gone to bed and when she served my breakfast in the mornings I was seldom in a mood to give her much company. She asked for no explanation of my absence and her loving eyes never altered when they rested on me, for she had long before determined and told me repeatedly that I must do as I considered best with my life. The expanding capital of Prague was still a small town in some respects, however, and someone must have told Mother of the great romance known to everyone who frequented the night clubs. One Sunday morning she tried to tell me in her sweet, quiet voice that she was ready to respect and love whoever I might bring to her as my future wife. I could only kiss her hand and

explain that I had no thought of marrying anyone now. When I did, she would know. She smoothed the hair on my temples as I leaned over her, and that was the last mention she made of a subject which must have occupied a good deal of her mind.

At the end of two months Rée left to keep other engagements. When she tried to thank me for the inspiration I had given her, for the new ideas in her work, for encouragement that would surely make her a finished artist, I stopped her words with a kiss. For a little while I had made her a queen in the night club world of my friends. Agents whose business it was to observe audience reactions had given her long contracts in other cities as a result. But I knew the encouragement and inspiration had been equally shared.

The new dance I had taught her won an ovation for her in the Winter Garden in Berlin. Paris, Cairo, Brussels and Madrid followed with their acclaim. She wrote to me every week for several months and I answered with letters many pages long. Then her letters ceased. Sometimes one of the girls in a new show would address me by name and repeat a message she had promised to bring from Rée when they had played on the same program in Budapest or Stockholm. I knew this was her way of telling me that she had not forgotten.

The image of her pert little face remained in my heart. I found that I was constantly hunting for it whenever the curtain went up on a new show. Sometimes through the fumes of cigarette smoke and alcohol I would think I saw her sitting across the room at another table, and I would seek out every one of these girls who reminded me of Rée, trying to forget her in new conquests. But I never found anyone else who needed me as she had done, who could accept the impression of my creative ability and translate it through her own art.

The wheels began to run faster, I drank more and slept less, and my appetite for this life became insatiable. I had become celebrated as a connoisseur of beautiful women, but no one knew better than I the limits of such fame. I was compelled to try them all, one after another, because I was always searching for another Rée. I was the soldier who had never expected to survive, catching up on time.

## CHAPTER XXV



SO another two years and a half went by. And then a variety of events took place in such juxtaposition as to make a farce of their combination. At the time I tended to believe they were tragic.

One night at the Alhambra bar a man whom I knew only casually tapped me on the shoulder and asked if I would care to join the party in his box. Chedeville had shortly before returned to Paris, Kolovrat was out of town and for the moment I was alone. He added that two of his guests were the Wiesner sisters and they had expressed a desire to meet me. This was their first introduction to a night club and he thought perhaps I could help enlighten them. They were nice girls, society and all that.

As he implied, it was conceivable they had heard of me, but their name was unfamiliar and I had no wish to meet them or any other sweet young innocents of society. The man continued his pleading that I help him out and I finally consented after assuring him, with a bachelor's usual facility, that I had a later date elsewhere.

The show was under way, so introductions were made in an undertone in the darkened box and the two girls turned their attention back to the stage. In the reflected glow from the footlights I studied their profiles. They were both quite young, probably seventeen and nineteen. The younger one was indrawn and shy and the older was self-assured and eager. I had heard their names as Olga and Toni. Olga, the younger fair-haired one, was very beautiful and I found myself watching her with interest. Her hair was parted in the middle and brought smoothly across her temples and behind her ears. One expected it to end in pigtails, but it hung in loose soft curls to her shoulders. Part of the time she watched the stage and then she would drop her eyes to her lap, after awhile raising them again.

Toni showed no traces of her sister's embarrassment. On the stage the infamous Anita Berber was giving one of her contorted, half-naked obscene dances in which she tried to express the struggles of a pervert, or perhaps this time it was a drug addict. I had no interest in Berber but I could not take my eyes from this society girl who was trembling with excitement as she watched. What could such a dance signify in her eyes? What was she thinking as she watched? Once she turned with a quick, impulsive movement to smile over her shoulder at me in the dark, and then she went back to her intense preoccupation with the dance. Toni had none of the smoldering, nascent beauty of her younger sister, yet she was strikingly attractive because of her taut eagerness and a certain youthful freshness.

The acquaintance who had brought me to the box centered his attention on Olga after the show was over, so I found myself escorting Toni when they prepared to leave. At the awning before the entrance of the hotel they stepped into a handsome limousine, a chauffeur wrapped fur rugs about their knees, and just before he closed the door Toni leaned forward to ask if I would come soon to see her at the home of her family. I bowed and they drove away.

"She's fallen for you," the man said. "Not bad. Do you know how many

millions she represents?"

I muttered something and left him to return to the bar. Within an hour I had forgotten the entire episode.

A week or so later I was dining at the Restaurant Elner with friends when I saw the two girls again. They were in the company of two people who were presumably their parents. As I passed their table on my way out, bowing slightly when I caught Olga's eye, Toni reached out to stop me and then introduced me to her mother and father. I murmured a few pleasantries and rejoined my friends. Once again I forgot them.

Two days later I received a note from Mrs. Wiesner, inviting me to dine with them on a specified date. I started to dictate a polite refusal to my secretary and then changed my mind. I have always been curious about human beings; added to this incentive for accepting the invitation was a state of mind verging on boredom which I had been harboring for some weeks. The gambler's blood of my father warmed my brain and I wrote that I would be with them for dinner on the night in question.

The Wiesners lived in a large apartment in a new building. Before I had been there five minutes I learned that they also owned an extensive estate in the country. Papa Wiesner was a magnate of the clothing industry, but he also made money, money, money in a dozen other enterprises from moving-picture theaters to paving blocks. Wherever he invested a crown, a thousand crowns came back to him. He originated no ideas of his own and no one gave him any. By chance he had made his first thousand and after that he had only to hold on to it, using the power it gave him to milk the brains, inspiration and trust of small people for his own benefit. His manners were the essence of stupidity and bad taste.

Mama Wiesner looked as though she had escaped from a circus troupe. The way she wore her hair was extreme, her evening gown was ridiculous, her manners effusive and loud. Pompous, ugly and common, she reminded me of nothing so much as a fishwife in ermine. No one else could initiate a subject of conversation. She was as loud, vulgar and gross as the furnishings of the rooms she lived in. Any doubt I might have been harboring as to the advisability of living underground in night clubs when I could have been making a place for myself in bourgeois society instead, I lost at once.

The hour at the dinner table was a ghastly experience. Olga hardly raised her eyes from her plate. Even Toni was nervous and uncomfortable, watching my reaction to her family. Here in the bright light from the chandelier overhead she had the knowing eyes of a woman. Her cheekbones were wide and her mouth was wide and full, but there was no laughter in the corners of it now. I felt suddenly sorry for this daughter of a millionaire who was trembling for fear Jan Rieger of Smichov would not like her family. I felt so sorry for her

that I lost my annoyance with her mother and father. I wanted to shield her from their depredations on her character, to show her that it was all right, she could be an individual separate from them, untainted by their grossness because she was able to see it for what it was.

I must have communicated something of what I felt across the table, for her nervousness lessened. Under the light, her chestnut hair had a tawny glint in it, and her dark lashes shaded enormous, vivid eyes. Chiefly because her brows were so high and arched, her eyes seemed always wide open and forthright. Even when she sat still and said nothing there was a permanent sparkle about her, in marked contrast to the sad, delicate beauty of her younger sister. Unlike the night club entertainers I had known, she was a mystery to me as well as a challenge.

One course followed another, served by badly trained maids. My experience in night clubs and restaurants made me long to jump up and call for my bill in disgust. Papa and Mama Wiesner were trying to outdo each other in flattering me. Watching Toni, I tried not to listen to what they were saying. Papa needed a young partner in his business. . . . It would be a fine thing for a bright young man to take over the management of all his holdings. . . . There would be limitless opportunity to make his own way, backed by the Wiesner millions. . . . Young men didn't get opportunities like that every day. . . . It would be a smart fellow who saw a good thing when it was offered him.

Olga excused herself and left the table. Mama Wiesner interrupted her husband's monologue to tell me what a good girl Olga was. Papa shook his head violently and Toni rose and asked if they would excuse us, too. I followed her from the room. Somehow the rest of the evening passed and I took my leave at the earliest possible hour for terminating a dinner engagement. I had paid for my curiosity; I promised myself not to be such a fool again.

But as though one bad decision could only be followed by another, I found myself less than a week later faced by the first setback in my career. It was the last day of December in 1925. Chedeville had come to me just before noon with a whimsical complaint. He had returned from Paris that morning and a clerk in the bank just across the street from us in which he kept an account had offered him what he considered a bad exchange rate for his francs. He was only half serious as he told me how impertinent the clerk had been when he complained, but in typical French fashion his emotions intensified as he spun out his story until he was excited and angry at its end. He would do no more business with such an organization, he said.

I knew the importance to my own bank of an account like Chedeville's, which might in turn bring us even larger accounts from the French mission. Their prestige value was great. So I quieted Chedeville's anger and gave him a

slip of paper to take to one of the tellers downstairs. On it I asked that he be given every consideration as a friend of mine and treated as well as possible in the matter of exchange.

I might have been more careful in the wording of the note; I might have realized the possibility of ambiguity in my request. But I didn't. Unfortunately for all of us, the teller interpreted my words to mean that I wished him to give Captain Chedeville the internal rate of exchange reserved for officers in banks and financial houses, which differed by an amount equal to a fraction of an American cent from the rate available to the public. Chedeville was unaware that he had received a special privilege, and went straight across the street to his own bank to tell them how much better he had been treated by us, adding that he intended to transfer his account at once.

Ten minutes later I was called to the office of the general manager of the Associated Bank. He was angry as he demanded an explanation of my action in breaking what I knew to be a mutual agreement among the banks with regard to the internal rate of exchange. Chedeville's bank had lost no time in complaining. For a moment I was unable to think why I was at fault and even how Chedeville had been able to obtain this extra fraction of a cent on his francs, and then I realized what must have happened in the teller's mind. He had thought I was asking him to give my friend as good a rate of exchange as he would give me.

Without waiting for me to explain, the general manager proceeded to give me what we call a terrific head washing. I have never enjoyed being shouted at, and certainly not without cause, but his anger gave me time to think. If I threw the blame on the teller, he would certainly lose his job with us and it would probably cost him his reputation in all the banks in the city. When I finally found an opportunity to speak I tried to explain the importance of Chedeville and the unimportance of the fraction of a cent, but I knew it was no use. The general manager was waiting for me to apologize and ask forgiveness, after which he could report to the bank across the street that I had been properly chastised.

It was my turn to be angry. I left his room without another word and returned to my own office. After awhile I called the personnel director on the phone and told him about the unfortunate episode. I asked him if he thought I was expected to resign at once, and he told me to do nothing until he could talk to me, and hung up. An hour later he came to my office, in the meantime having conferred with the directors. They had no intention of kicking me out because they considered me a man of potential value to them. But for the prestige of the bank, some action must be taken. If I would not go on record with an apology, I must be kicked up to a post as assistant manager in one of the branch banks in a small town in Moravia where a vacancy had just



occurred.

He watched me intently as he talked, and whatever my face may have told him, it prompted him to go on. In a few years, he said, I would be called back to the central office in Prague if I managed not to let myself become a forgotten man, and would probably then be given the direction of a department. In the meantime, I would have an opportunity to prove myself in the backwoods.

When he left me it was three o'clock. I had until the bank opened on the second of January to decide what I wanted to do. The very thought of leaving Prague to live in a small town in the perimeter of the country gave me the same kind of shudders the word Siberia must have produced in an officer of St. Petersburg in the days of the czar. So I sat at my desk and began to recapitulate the waymarks of my life, trying to find an answer for the future from the mistakes of the past.

Mother was without need now, but she would be relatively insecure if anything happened to me. I had wasted money, thrown it away in amounts which once would have represented security for both of us for our whole life. Yet the spending had never been entirely reckless. It had helped my career. To have been modest, economical, diligent and unimportant would have insured my job as a teller, but it would hardly have brought me to the position I now held. Virtue alone would not have been enough; it was my bad behavior, even my colorful sins, which had pushed me forward. Put less dramatically, it was the contact I had made with many foreigners of high position that made me seem both incalculable and enterprising in the eyes of the bank. I had made a name for myself in my own way, and friends of my own choosing. The only time the directors of the bank met these men whom I knew intimately was on official occasions in a large crowd. Wrong or right, I could hardly go back now to being a diligent and serious fellow.

As I sat there the telephone rang and the voice that greeted me from the other end of the wire was strange. Then I recognized Toni Wiesner. I answered her greetings for the new year absent-mindedly, and then I heard her inviting me to join a party that night. I excused myself by saying that I had a previous engagement. She waited a moment and I heard a sharp intake of breath, like an inverted sigh.

The first of January is a day of traditional celebrations and superstitions in Czechoslovakia. It seems of tremendous importance to us that the year start with good omens. We open our doors or pick up our ringing telephones with apprehension, lest our first caller be an enemy instead of a friend. As the year starts, so will it end.

I heard Toni still talking, asking me now if I would perhaps consider seeing her alone, not in a party. Would I prefer that? Even for a little while, if I

had another engagement later on? I had no other engagement for that night, except a vague agreement to show up at a large gathering in one of the clubs. Toni's call was an omen of some sort and I dared not ignore it, in the face of the mistakes I had made recently. We made an arrangement to meet for dinner and I said I would get theater tickets, too.

But the evening was not a success. Toni was excitable and I was absent-minded, still turning over in my head the choice of two evils which faced me. She tried very hard to convince me that she was sophisticated, not realizing how much I preferred her natural state of wide-eyed wonder. I scolded her mildly and drifted off again with my own worries, and shortly before midnight I took her home.

I had no intention of going in when we reached the door of her apartment, but as we came up the stairs her father descended upon us and took me by the arm and propelled me inside, trying to say something through a cigar he was chewing about wanting to talk to me. Toni protested violently and then I found that we were alone in the drawing room. I took out a handkerchief and passed it over my brow, fumbled for cigarettes and lit one for each of us. Toni had crossed the room to lean against the piano with her back to me. As I held out the lighted cigarette she turned about to face me, her hands on the shining ebony behind her for support. I had never seen such an expression of confused frustration.

She ignored the cigarette, so I mashed its tip in a tray. "Don't look at me," she said before I could turn around again. "Stand where you are . . . please do. I want to say something, but I can't if you watch me." A grandfather's clock began to strike the hour somewhere in the house. Neither of us moved or made a sound as it went through the measure of twelve strokes. Before the reverberation had ended she went on. "I've got to get away from here. I've just got to. If I don't, I'll get like Olga. I know what I'm saying. I know what I'm doing. That night you came to dinner . . . it's always like that. Don't pay any attention to them. Just me."

I could hear her small fists beating against the piano, but I stayed as I was. Her words seemed to have no intrinsic meaning; they were a counterpart of my own muddled thoughts.

"I've never done this before, you know. But I've got to get away. Right away. I've just got to. He's not my father. Mama married him after my father died. She wasn't always like this. I . . . please, Mr. Rieger, will you take me away from here?"

I knew she had asked me a question, but what was the answer? I had so many answers to think about all at once. It was the first part of the first day of a new year, and I must make no more mistakes.

"It's New Year's," she said, as though to emphasize my own thoughts. "I

know you don't love me, but I don't care."

I could feel her wide, vivid eyes on my back, feel the intensity of her desperation. Through my mind raced a thousand images . . . Rée, lovely and warm Rée, the general manager of the bank and a stupid provincial town perhaps like the one in Slovakia where I had been quartered two years, the smoky rooms of my night clubs and all the short but intense and eternal moments with women I would never see again.

"I'm not afraid of . . . of . . . sin," she said. "I could learn."

I turned around then and laughed. "Silly girl," I said. "Come here."

She was as beautiful as a young bird ruffling her feathers to attract a mate. Her eyes were shining in the soft light and her lips were half open. She moved toward me easily and when she stood before me she put her arms about my neck. "Will you marry me?" she said. "And take me away from here?"

I looked down into her eager face. I pulled her arms from about my neck and took one of her small, boneless hands and kissed it. My father would have understood me just then, I knew. I left her standing there and walked through the hall to the library where Papa and Mama Wiesner were sitting together, suspiciously expectant. I gave them no opportunity to say anything as I bowed and asked them in a dry voice for the hand of their daughter Toni.

For answer I received a punch on the back from Papa and a wet kiss on the cheek from Mama. Wiesner tried to say something about my position in the business world as the husband of his daughter. I turned on my heel and went back to Toni, but I remembered his words.

## CHAPTER XXVI



FOR two months more this farce played itself to a conclusion. I had lost all sense of control over my own affairs. I watched myself go through the motions of a man engaged to the daughter of a millionaire, sometimes with a feeling that I had trapped myself, but more often with a detached amusement at the performance I was giving. I bought rings, sent flowers, was measured for new suits, and allowed myself to give small farewell dinners to old friends I didn't expect to see again. As a crowning absurdity, I listened to an architect ask my opinion and wishes in the matter of a design for the country house which my future father-in-law was giving us for a wedding present.

Even when the details of my business connection with the Wiesner organizations was under discussion I was quite unable to take myself seriously in this new role. The old man had led me to believe that I would be son and son-in-law to him, his right hand man and business heir. But almost at once I

discovered that my position would be less than that of a servant in the firm—a front which he could use to impress rival concerns.

Instead of being hurt and angry—the part I was playing didn't call for such emotions—I joked with him. If I was going to be a foolish figure I thought I could at least act with the intelligence of a man who understands his role. To all my suggestions for injecting new ideas into his business affairs, a Rieger brand of idea for a change, he had the same answer: "You don't understand business methods."

This was no time or place for a show of stubborn pride. Exaggeration and flippancy was the theme. I told him it was up to him to make it possible for me to learn all there was to know about business; invest in me as he would in his sugar industry. I thought quickly and made him a proposition. Why couldn't he pay me a substantial salary and send me to . . . Paris, for instance? With the connections I had made in the bank I would have entrée to any number of business houses there. I could learn at his expense and repay the investment when he made me a manager in one of his enterprises. Besides, Toni would love a year in Paris while our new house was under construction.

Perhaps it was the last consideration which decided him. He agreed to send us to Paris and pay me two salaries: one to be deposited to Mother's name in a bank in Prague, the other to be sent to us in France.

I had already informed the general manager of the Associated Bank, on the morning of January second, that I must tender my resignation to take effect in a month's time, due to my coming marriage and subsequent position in the Wiesner interests. Neither of us mentioned the matter of Chedeville and the franc exchange. The corporate face of the board was saved in the banking world and so was mine. They gave me innumerable letters of introduction to take to Paris and expressed deep regret over our parting. I had now only to close my desk in the directors' wing on the day appointed.

But one more joke was pulled on me the day before I left the bank. If anything should have told me I was not being funny, but rather mad, this was it. One of our liveried messengers came padding over the carpets to bring me a visitor's card on a silver tray. It carried the name of my uncle. By the time he arrived through the corridors to my inner office to be announced at my door, my face was sober and straight. We bowed to each other with exaggerated politeness and I deliberately sat him on the opposite side of my desk with his face toward the light. We exchanged meaningless pleasantries and I waited for him to reveal the motive of his call. I knew it could never have been by chance. Finally it came out: Mother had written to him of my approaching marriage to Wiesner's daughter. He wanted to congratulate me, not I gathered on winning Toni's hand, but on winning the support of so many millions. I realized he was trying to tell me how important I had become in the international world of

finance. For a moment I wanted to punch his face, but I tossed off his compliments with a casual wave of the hand.

There was still more on his mind. Inasmuch as I had no brothers or other near male relatives, would I do him the honor of allowing him to serve as my best man at the wedding? Why not? That would complete the comedy.

Only Mother maintained her dignity through those days. I had broken my promise to her in not telling her my plans before I asked Toni to marry me. I could have explained to her that I had merely been the one who said yes, but I knew better than to tell her Toni had done the asking. When I returned in the early hours of the morning on New Year's Day I gave her the simple fact of our engagement and plans to be married within two months, and then I had to watch the stunned expression cover her face. Had it remained, I could never have gone on with my role of jester, but she recovered quickly and from then on hid every suggestion of the pain I was giving her. Mother could never for an instant be less than the great lady.

She invited the Wiesners to our home and when they came she treated them with simplicity and natural charm. But they were as uncomfortable in her presence as I had been unhappy the first time I had entered their house. It was useless for me to try to bridge their two worlds; Mother and my family-in-law could never have anything in common. Toni was drawn to her at once and Mother responded generously, but it was always Toni who sued for Mother's affection, never the other way about.

The civil marriage ceremony took place in the town hall. One would have thought Uncle was the groom. He was nervous, excited, proud of himself, overly attentive to the Wiesners, talkative and arch with Toni and altogether delightful in the eyes of my new parents-in-law. At the reception in their apartment he did the honors of our side of the house, perhaps intentionally over-playing his part in his attempt to hide the fact that I had suddenly taken off my false face in a colossal letdown.

All I could think of was Mother, sitting quietly in the shadows at the back of the drawing room. She was not unhappy and she had no wish to mar my pleasure. This was not her world and since she knew how to behave only as the simple soul and great lady that she was, she removed herself from the noisy friends of the Wiesners in order not to get in their way. Without knowing she was doing it, she had finally held a mirror before my face, and I saw myself clearly for a complete fool.

Mother left for Franzensbad immediately after the reception, and three days later as we crossed the frontier at Cheb on our way to Paris, there she was on the station platform. She had found out the time of our train and had come all the way from Franzensbad in order to spend these few moments alone with us and wave good-by to us once more.

## CHAPTER XXVII



NOWHERE else in the world in our time have any people learned to live so graciously in a city as the French lived in Paris. I was prepared to like this capital because I liked the Frenchmen I had known and also because I had once worn the uniform of the country with gratitude and pride, but these were sentimental reasons and they were inadequate preparation for the impact of Paris on my Slavic disposition.

When I arrived there in the spring of 1926, the Left Bank had already become the focus of bright young writing, but since I was unfamiliar with the bulk of modern literature—particularly of the Hemingway-Stein school—I was spared inevitable comparisons between my own reactions to the city and those of more articulate men. I felt as so many others have done in their turn, that no one else in the world could possibly appreciate Paris as I did, no one else love it so much. In talking about it, my conversation became as prodigal with adjectives as a parson's Sunday sermon.

We took a small apartment in Auteuil behind the church in the Rue Corot. At first we behaved in the usual fashion of strangers in Paris: we visited famous shrines, ate in renowned restaurants, made pilgrimages to Malmaison and Versailles, took in all the churches and cemeteries and monuments, and thought we were the first to discover the delicate beauty of Sainte Chapelle. We had ourselves lifted up the monstrosity of an Eiffel Tower to drink benedictine at its top, went to the opera, patronized the best *couturiers*, and drank in Harry's bar at the Ritz. All this excited Toni beyond her most vivid hopes and for awhile I was pleased to feel that I was the means of giving her this freedom. There was no pretense of more than amiable affection between us, but for the time being we both considered that enough.

After several weeks of sight-seeing I decided it was time to go back to work. I took a letter of introduction I had received from a director of Credit Lyonnais whom I had known in Prague and presented myself to the directors of the Grand Magazins du Printemps, one of the largest department stores in Paris. It was my expressed aim to study every department of the organization and I was given the utmost co-operation as an unpaid volunteer worker.

To begin with, they sent me to Clichy to an enormous building which housed the export department of the firm where colossal mail orders from the French colonies were handled. I learned to tabulate these orders as they arrived, watched them being filled, helped wrap packages, pushed great hand trucks loaded with mail sacks, and even assisted in weighing and distributing them to trains. My knowledge of the intricacies of such a business expanded

rapidly enough to make me dizzy.

At first I was invited to spend my lunch hours with the officers of the firm in their private canteen, but after the second week I excused myself and asked permission to eat with the employees who had accepted me as a fellow. This may have seemed a strange aberration on my part, but the French are inclined to let others be as peculiar as they choose. So I took my bottle of red wine from the counter with the workers, ate my sardines and *filet mignon* with spinach, finished with roquefort or camembert cheese and a long loaf of white bread, and listened to the conversation around me.

I was utterly fascinated by the spirit of these ordinary, uneducated young men and girls. They possessed an innate finesse—a quality which I had come to accept as the ultimate in sophistication—unrivalled by any man or woman I had known in the night clubs of Prague. They were gay and witty and quick-tempered; their minds had an edge that delighted me. Their logic was flawless and their common sense served as a basis for every turn and twist of their agile minds. Having once met these people, I lost all interest in the aspect of Paris most familiar to tourists. I began to hunt out the true Frenchman, to learn how he lived and what made him as he was. And the more I knew of him, the more I admired him.

Toni took no share in my absorption. She thought she had married a confirmed night club addict, and when I now refused to patronize the night life of Paris because it bored me, she was both disappointed and annoyed. She was willful and imperious and I was stubborn, so we quarreled. In addition to the stake her father had given me, she received a separate allowance and she announced her intention of using it to amuse herself in her own way. She proceeded to do so, but we usually met for dinner in a small restaurant around the corner from the Rue Corot, called l'Auberge du Mouton Blanc.

I had formed an attachment for the Mouton Blanc because it was part of my new mood. Regular patrons were given their own napkin rings and a cubicle in a wall box beside the front door. Each evening as they came in they reached for their own napery on the way to their tables, and when they went out they put their napkins away for the next night. Here in the Mouton Blanc I began to understand the subtle art of the epicure. *Radis roses* were not radishes as I knew them in Prague, where small boys sold them in bunches from baskets in beer halls, but an hors d'oeuvre to be tested and tasted slowly with the same ceremony accorded to the sixty plates of hors d'oeuvres served at the huge Brasserie Universelle which Toni preferred. *Vin rosé* from a cold carafe cost a few centimes, but it could not be matched by all the French wine shipped out of the country in sealed bottles.

In every way that was a strange and illuminating year. The first time we went to a cinema I discovered the relief of being able to show my admiration

or disapproval of the picture along with the rest of the audience, who shouted or booed or talked back at the actors in accordance with the quality of the film.

I learned the ultimate satisfaction of evenings spent on the Butte de Montmartre while I watched the lights of Paris come on. And then I would wander down again and cross the Seine to sit for hours in the Dôme and the Rotonde, listening and sometimes joining a strange group of Frenchmen while the sound of Paris soaked into me. Those were the days before Montparnasse had been taken over by American tourists.

On Tuesdays I walked along the Allée des Acacias in the Bois de Boulogne to watch French society drive up in their handsome cars for the purpose of visiting one another in the back seats of their limousines while their uniformed chauffeurs sat on benches beside the walk and talked to each other, too. As likely as not their conversation was about their employers.

On Sundays I found my way to the *guignol* theater on the Champs-Élysées to watch well-behaved, serious and exceedingly handsome children with enormous eyes as they in turn watched the marionettes. Their sharply intelligent observations and incisive comments were a revelation to me. Children are not adults from the cradle in my country. I can still hear the sharp chatter of these amazing audiences at the *guignol* theater whenever I look into the brown beady eyes of Renoir's otherwise pink and white infants.

By the end of the summer I was transferred to the main department store of Printemps on Boulevard Haussmann where I served as an interpreter. Whenever a call came for someone to help a Swede or a Pole or a German or anyone else who could speak Czech or German but no French, I conducted them through the entire house and attended to their sales. So I learned not only how to handle customers but also the quality of the French goods which they bought, from furniture to perfume to lingerie and toys.

Here I discovered the singular art of French clerks in showing and selling the products they handled. Behind their smiles lay a vibrating touch of laughter which displayed their pleasure in presenting a lovely piece of silk or a beautiful pottery bowl. Their senses invariably reacted to merchandise which they would never be able to buy for themselves, and it gave them more pleasure to handle it than the customer would ever know in owning it. These were simple workers, but they were neither little people nor common people, as modern parlance would have them called.

Now I spent my noon hours on the terrace of the Café Weber, shunning the Café de la Paix where no self-respecting Frenchman would allow himself to be seen. I could look in one direction to the Place de la Concord and up another to the Madeleine, and all the while I could listen to the symphony of voices around me. There was more noise from street traffic in Paris than I had ever known anywhere else in my life, but I had ears only for the music of the



French language, its cadence so different from ours.

An old woman held out copies of *L'Intransigeant* and called her wares; midinettes from surrounding shops stopped at the next table long enough to eat their sandwiches and never stop chattering; men with heaven knows what occupations spun out their political arguments for hours; famous mannequins from the ateliers and *couturiers* of Rue Royale and Rue St. Honoré exchanged gossip over their *apéritifs*. And all the while I listened and listened, loving them all because they were Paris.

As I saw less and less of Toni I found myself turning inward for the pleasure of watching my own imagination and learning expand. Since she had no interest in joining me, it was a journey I would have to take alone, for I certainly had no intention of going back to a life I was through with forever. I began to buy quantities of books at Flammarion on the Boulevard des Italiens and an equal number from the stalls along the *quais*. They were exclusively French, for what else could I read while I sat on a bench in the Tuileries or near the Rond Point?

I came to know my way through the galleries and corridors of the Louvre blindfolded, and when I had absorbed as much as I could of the old masters, I found my way to the Luxembourg. Many of the paintings I learned to like without the help of shibboleths of culture, and much I disliked without knowing why. I can remember standing for hours, time after time, before the Mona Lisa, wondering why I could never see her as anything but a dull and dreary doll. I tried to make myself look at the painting as though I were the first man in the world to see it, fresh from Leonardo's brush, but it escaped me and I never discovered what elusive quality had caught the attention of the ages to make it the most famous painting in that great collection. Certainly the fact that it had been stolen under dramatic circumstances in no way lessened its fame.

On the other hand, I knew very well why I was drawn back constantly to study and admire the Degas dancers, the Cézannes and Monets and Renoirs and even the white lights of the Utrillo street scenes. They were the Paris I had discovered, given back to me through the creative mind of Frenchmen who had known and loved it too. In a strange way I felt a kinship with these men, and feeling it, I was never lonely.

In the evenings I fell into the habit of walking under the heavy chestnut trees along the Champs-Élysées toward one of the loveliest sights in all the world—the burning sky of a sunset behind the Arc de Triomphe. After dark I would sit for hours on the terrace of the Café Fouquet, still listening and liking what I overheard.

Somerset Maugham, in *The Summing Up*, has said that “the unexpectedness, singularity and infinite variety of the ordinary afford

unending material. The great man is too often all of a piece—having created a figure to protect himself from the world or to impress it. . . .” He refers to material for the writer, of course, but I couldn’t help remembering those Paris days when I later read this book, for so it was with me then. Unhampered by alcohol and lack of sleep for the first time in ten years, my mind was absorbing a wealth of material from the infinite variety of the ordinary. How or where I might one day use it I never thought.

It was on the terrace of the Café Fouquet one evening that I had a return of the old hallucination, thinking I had seen Rée Bertin several tables away. I sat and watched the girl’s profile as she turned her head quickly from one to another of the group she was with, and then as though she had felt my stare she looked over her shoulder in my direction, and our eyes met. It was one of those moments we all experience from time to time. A message passes between two pairs of eyes in a room filled with people who are unaware of the shared knowledge and secret understanding in it, like a wireless message that goes through material obstacles because to the radio wave they do not exist.

This time it was actually Rée. She rose and came toward me, holding out her hands and letting her face fill with the light of recognition. For a few moments she sat at my table and we talked about each other. She had just finished an engagement at the Folies-Bergère and was leaving Paris soon; I told her of my marriage. Then she returned to her friends, but in those few moments we both knew that our love for each other still lay deep and strong within us.

Had I known then that it would be twelve years before we met again I might not have let her go so easily. The next time I saw her it was in Warsaw, the same kind of stray encounter. By that time we could summon only a casual, friendly interest in each other. She was still a notable success in her dancing, and I was on a semi-diplomatic mission for my government. Where she is now I have no idea.

## CHAPTER XXVIII



TOWARD the end of our projected year in Paris, Toni’s father wrote that we were expected home. Without consulting us he had canceled all arrangements for building our country house because he wanted us to live with the family, and quite candidly he added that he felt we had become too independent in Paris and needed a check on our actions when we returned. A suite of rooms in the town apartment and another in their country house had been set aside for us, but we would have our meals with the family. Toni had

no more wish to return to Prague under such conditions than I did. We let the summons go unanswered.

On the heels of the first letter Papa Wiesner sent instructions for several transactions which he wanted me to handle for him before I left Paris. They were of a questionable nature and I promptly wrote to tell him I would have nothing to do with them. He replied that I was a donkey and added that every business firm like his took advantage of such loopholes in the law if the men behind the concerns were really smart. How else would he have managed to get where he was now?

I refused to discuss the matter further and told him so by return post. I added that I intended to stay in Paris without further financial assistance from him, because I could not undertake now to work in the kind of organizations he represented. Toni could do as she liked about returning to Prague without me. I realized with a shock after the letter had gone what a long way I had fallen from my position in the bank.

As soon as Papa Wiesner received my resignation from his interests he got on a train and came to Paris, bringing Mama Wiesner with him. There were scenes and tears and recriminations in which I refused to take part. Mama began packing Toni's clothes as Papa insisted she go straight back with them, and Toni unpacked as fast as her mother took the gowns from their hangers. Her reasons for wanting to remain in Paris were obviously different from mine, but we were equally determined.

So the Wiesners went home and we moved to a smaller apartment on Rue des Longchamps, overlooking the Bois and the Château de Madrid. All Toni had asked of me was to take her away from her home and her parents, but in her heart she had counted on more. Having made a bargain, she refused to stand by it. She was possessed with a childish desire for sin, as though it were a commodity to be bought and hung around one's neck like jewels. Perhaps she felt that by breaking the codes of behavior taught by her parents in their outwardly bourgeois conventionality, she would be able to throw off the memory of her life with them.

Unfortunately, however, she had no flair for the spectacular or even the small *pecado* because she was devoid of finesse. There was little point in trying to discuss our divergence of views because she always burst into tears at the least indication of not being able to have her own way. I have no doubt that in her own limited fashion she had reason to feel cheated. Nevertheless, it was impossible for me to treat her as though she were an entertainer, which appeared to be her desire, and she made no attempt to fit into the role of a wife. She made friends whom I never met and a few whom I did meet most unwillingly. Yet I found it impossible to blame her. Whatever my pride suffered at her hands was due me, for the mistake had been mine in believing

we could turn marriage into a business arrangement and make it succeed.

Somehow the next two years dragged on. I went no further down and I did not move up. It was another of the plateaus in my life similar to the one in Slovakia during the two years following the end of the war, when we paced Horthy's men on the other side of the stream that formed our mutual boundary. Faced with the necessity of supporting a wife as well as myself, I found a job at the Compagnie des Wagons-Lits which had shortly before amalgamated with Thos. Cook and Son. I waited on tourists behind the train accommodation counter and received for my services the sum of eight hundred francs a month.

The first day on this job I refused the generous tips offered by customers, but the other clerks made it clear that I must take the tips or leave. They depended on this income to supplement their small salaries and they had no intention of being deprived of it by my foolish example.

There is no sense in pretending it was a fine job or that I was doing any more than earning a living in a depressing manner. I was ashamed of the work because it was using so little of my experience and ability. At night I took home tourist folders and analyzed the material put out by every country in Europe to attract paying guests. I built up a study on the basis of style, illustrations, make-up, advertisements in these folders and sent it to the Czechoslovakian Minister of Transport as a suggestion for changing the old-fashioned and inefficient folders put out by my own country. I received no response from Prague, but the manager of Wagons-Lits, to whom I had also given a copy of my report, introduced a separate desk for information on Czechoslovakia and put me in charge of it. The pay was slightly higher, but not much.

It was useless to try to tell myself that this was a career for me or that I could ever be remotely satisfied with it. I was in a strange sort of stupor during these days, irritated by Toni on the one hand while I maintained a code of politeness in her presence, and on the other hand lulled by the charm Paris still held for me. I had failed completely in my banking career and I was ashamed to return to Prague as a member of a wealthy family with which I wanted nothing more to do. Had I accepted the post in the provinces offered by the bank, I would long ago have been called back and would by now have been on my way to a possible seat at the directors' table. The time would come soon when I must salvage my self-respect, but I continued to hold the day off as long as I could this side of a breakdown.

One early winter afternoon when mists from the Seine were blurring the gray outlines of Notre Dame, I heard someone speak in Czech as I stood thumbing over books at a stall on the Quai des Grands Augustins. I turned to look at the speaker and found Karel Berounský waiting for me to recognize him. Had I seen him before he spoke I would have tried to get away, but there

he was, with no mark of censure in his eyes. It was good to hear Czech again, to see a familiar face from boyhood and from the bank. We wandered on to the Boulevard St. Michel to find a place to eat together, and halfway through the night we were still talking.

In every respect but one we were opposites. He was exceptionally tall for a Czech, strikingly handsome with black hair and strong, sharp features. He had a way of raising his hair on his forehead to indicate incredulity, but he kept the rest of his face muscles rigid. He was dangerously clever, with an ability to see through every human pretense and small sham down to the rock bottom of reality. Here in Paris for the first time on a short holiday he found that he hated every aspect of it, and he was entirely willing to let his condemnation include the whole French nation. Nothing I could say moved him; it was a disagreement between us that lasted in one form or another for the next ten years.

He considered me foolishly sentimental in my love for Paris because he could see the French only as moneygrubbing cynics without charm. He conceded their logic, but added that life could never be compressed into mathematical formulae as they tried to do it. He was convinced the country was a bad ally for Czechoslovakia to depend upon, and he distrusted the motives of every Frenchman who tried to flatter him.

It was only a deep, underlying sense of beauty and the value of creative expression which we both shared that gave us a basis for friendship. It was strong enough to make us tolerant of each other's extreme unlikenesses in other respects. With women he was something of a mental sadist, lashing them with cutting sarcasm until he brought them to desperation. And yet they always came back for more because all women were mad about him. He thought I was stupid to waste my time on night club entertainers, as he had seen me do in Prague. He preferred the sport of breaking down the resistance of society girls, after which he lost interest in them and would abandon them in turn.

Because I remonstrated with him, begging him to let the girls down more gradually, he reproved me for being a masochist. Each time I had fallen in love, I had fallen all the way, torturing myself over every new affair. I called him brutal and cruel, and he tried to prove to me that my way of dealing with women in the old days in Prague was even more cruel because I allowed affairs to drag on through my fear of hurting others.

Men admired Berounský almost as much as women did, but he had few male friends. His mind was too sharp and he could undermine their overinflated self-esteem too easily. Aside from the fact that his ruthless realism was too strong a tonic for most of the men he knew, he would brook opposition and criticism from no one. No one, that is, except eventually from me. Our friendship flourished because it was based on an admitted need for

each other. I was overly sentimental and emotional and he was overly sophisticated and objective. So each of us frankly used the other as a balance for our differing natures. He stole a little emotion from me to add some sentiment to his own life, and I began to depend upon him to pull me back into cold reality from the brink of being a sucker.

He had contracted malaria during the war and it left him with a mild form of hypochondria. He was continually worrying about his health and seeking new doctors for possible ills, but he never used these worries as a means of asking for sympathy. It was self-interest intensified. His penchant for sport clothes, in sharp contrast to the accepted propriety of custom-tailored business suits in Prague, had no explanation that I could ever find. Women thought his manner of dress an added attraction.

I found myself telling about my marriage that first night we met in Paris, and in the telling I doubtless fell over backward in taking all blame upon myself as a measure of self-punishment. Karel listened laconically, the scalp on his forehead occasionally moving upward from his eyes and down again. When I had said everything I intended to reveal, he brushed aside my sentiments with a single phrase. It was the total answer to him, and because he saw it so clearly, it was the final answer for me.

“Send her home,” he said. That was all. In those three words he implied that I was doing Toni no good by letting her stay on in Paris, and I was certainly doing myself no good by allowing her to continue to humiliate me.

Karel went back to Prague in a few days and shortly before the end of December in 1928 Toni went home, too. I saw her off on the train and later a divorce was arranged, to the relief of us both.

As soon as one mistake was rectified, the chance to remedy others followed. I looked up from my desk at Wagons-Lits one day to see two men approaching me whom I would have avoided by running away if I could have done so. They recognized me as they caught my eye and were as astonished as I was chagrined. One was a director of the Associated Bank in Prague and the other was general manager of the largest clay deposit company in Europe. I welcomed them politely, but with none of the familiarity which had existed in our relationship in Prague, and in turn they hid their own embarrassment, for which I was grateful. They insisted that I join them for dinner after I had taken care of their train accommodations, but I refused on the pretext of another engagement. They left Paris without my seeing them again.

The encounter shook me. With Toni gone, I no longer felt any necessity for keeping my job with Wagons-Lits. I heard from Karel Berounský occasionally now and the crisp phrases of his comments encouraged me to take stock of myself. The only way I could do so to advantage was to be free of the counter job. In walking the streets of Paris, I thought, getting back into touch with

Frenchmen instead of tourists, I could find an answer to my problems. So I turned in my resignation.

I met Chedeville one evening in the Café Weber, the third chance meeting in three years with old friends. We found strangely little to talk about. He had been in Berlin much of the time since I left Prague; Arthur Randles had returned to Canada and Willy Kolovrat had gone off to the Argentine. He asked about my wife and I explained shortly that she had returned to her family. His interest accelerated with that piece of news; since we were now definitely separated he felt free to tell me what a mad thing I had done to leave my position in the bank and take up my fortune with the Wiesners instead. None of my old friends could understand why I had done it.

I listened to him idly, wondering what he would say if he could know that he was the one and only cause of my leaving the bank and my subsequent marriage to Toni. The situation was ironic, but it was no help in bringing us closer together again. After an hour or so he went off with the promise of looking me up as soon as he got back in town, but I never saw him again. He died a few weeks later.

One evening in January when I put my key in the lock of the apartment on Rue des Longchamps I found a note on the letterhead of the Associated Bank, telling me that if I contemplated a return to Prague in the near future there might be an interesting position open for me which could only be discussed in person. I was tremendously excited, but at the same moment I knew I could never go back to Prague under such conditions, for if nothing came of the discussion I would look more of a fool than ever.

I let days go by, fighting with myself because I longed to go home and yet was too proud to take the chance. Another letter came in the now very shaky handwriting of Mother. She had heard that my wife was back in Prague. I must never forget, she said, that no matter what had happened to me through these years in Paris there was always one person in the world who was waiting for me. It was as though she knew of my inner fight and was answering me in her own way.

Her letter sounded more resolute than I had ever known her. Though she begged me to come home where I belonged, she also added: "Do not speak and do not think about the past years you have gone through. You will go on now by your own strength as though you had never been away."

I knew there was no longer any need to fight with myself. I packed my belongings, turned in the key of the apartment to the concierge and caught the afternoon train from the Gare de l'Est. January is as good a time to leave Paris as April is a good time to meet it first.

## CHAPTER XXIX



ON this return to Prague there were not so many outward changes to be seen in the face of the city. What I found instead was a tendency in myself to look at it with new eyes. For the first time I was able to compare it with another European capital, as a man can compare women perceptively only after he has known one intimately. Paris had taught me how to come to understanding terms with a city, and now I loved my own Prague not less but more for the experience. I saw new meanings in its ancient traditions, its old gray stones and crooked streets and terraced gardens, its parks and homely pleasures, its domes and spires and chanting bells. It was my natural home and I knew that now, and was glad.

The Paris train gets in shortly after seven in the evening. As we had done on my return from the war, Mother and I talked nearly all night. She was less changed this time, though her spirit seemed to have gained new strength, an added firmness which she tried to transfer to me. Toni wasn't mentioned then or at any other time. That was how Mother was.

The following day I went to the bank to present myself to the director who had written me in Paris, Antonín Hardt. All the way there I kept my collar up and the brim of my hat pulled down, and as I followed the familiar route through the door of the bank and up to his office a strange mixture of thoughts coursed through my mind. Hardt's welcome was cordial as well as delicate; it allowed my inferiority complex no chance to function. Instead of waiting for me to cross the long room to his desk, he came toward me with his arm outstretched to take my hand, asking at the same time if my trip from Paris had been good and how had I found my mother? Again there was no mention of my wife.

When I was seated beside his desk and cigarettes were lighted he began to talk about the subject of his letter, implying that I had done the bank a favor in responding with my presence. The board of directors, it transpired, were looking for a man to fill a certain new position now in their control. The qualifications for the work had been carefully considered and it was only after Hardt had met me in Paris—without mentioning now how he had chanced to meet me or the manner of my work there—that he knew their search was ended if I could be persuaded to consider their proposition. The directors had already met and agreed that it be put up to me.

The Associated Bank had been forced to take over management of one of the many industries in which it held shares. This was a practice all over Europe. Whenever a bank came into ownership of the majority of stock in a



company, or even a proportionately large share, at least one and often several directors of the bank immediately became directors of the company, and its president was appointed from among themselves. Every bank in our country maintained interests in all kinds of industry: coal, textiles, sugar, flour mills, shoes, glass and china, clothing, steel and armaments.

So the Associated Bank had recently acquired control of a glass factory in Carlsbad which had one small salesroom in Prague and branches in several resorts in Czechoslovakia as well as one in Paris. It was a new manager for the Prague salesroom the bank was searching for, a man with the kind of business experience I had acquired in Paris. The turnover of sales in the Prague branch was small, but the directors believed it could be developed to the point where it would help the recovery of the firm.

I listened to Hardt's words and thought about the man himself, as well as the implications of what he was saying. He was a paradox of warm kindness and cool logic. This offer was not being made as a favor to me; if the bank wanted me to work for them again in this new capacity it was because they believed I could work to their advantage. But what made them think so? I had learned a great deal about department store methods in Paris, and about travel, but the merchandising and selling of glass was another matter. How could I promote glass when I hadn't the least idea how it was made, what its qualities were, even the extension of its many uses?

When I found words for my doubts Hardt brushed them abruptly aside. Such considerations had already been discussed in the directors' meeting. They knew me and they believed I could do the job they had in mind. The only people left to convince were the men in the factory itself. It was run by a board of three and they were raising heavy objections to the appointment of someone who had had no experience with glass. The bank wanted me to go to Carlsbad to see these people. If an agreement could be reached with them regarding my appointment, I could stay there several weeks to learn how the factory was run before returning to take up my new duties in Prague.

There was nothing more for me to say. He asked me to think it over and let him have my decision within a few days. He saw me out as cordially as he had greeted me, and I walked home again with my hat still pulled far over my eyes.

To anyone unfamiliar with European ways, I am sure the position in which I found myself that day would be next to impossible to understand. On the Continent, no man ever expected a second chance to make good. I phrase that in the past tense deliberately. We did not have the same intense preoccupation with "face" that Orientals do, but we certainly felt its importance far more than Anglo-Saxons can ever understand. I had not lost face when I left the bank to go to Paris, because it was understood that I had stepped into the business world of my father-in-law's enterprises. But when that association ended

abruptly, and I stayed on in Paris to be discovered eventually serving as a minor clerk in a tourist office, I had lost face more completely than if I had done nothing in Paris to earn a legitimate living.

In Europe, when a man falls down from a position he has occupied with distinction, he is considered to have fallen for one reason only: because he is no good. It is incomprehensible to a European how college students in America can wash dishes and wait on tables and press clothes, and then fraternize on equal terms with their fellow students when the work is over, even hoping to rise one day to positions more eminent than those held by the men they are serving. It is equally beyond their comprehension how an American can lose everything he has worked years to build up for himself and then when adversity hits him, set about building again from the bottom up. A bank president selling apples on Broadway after his bank has crashed appears to a European ludicrous and shameful, if not incredible.

In Europe, when men fall from pedestals no one gives them a hand or offers to help them up. Except in very rare instances, once down they stay down. Nor do they make the mistake of trying to climb back by themselves. There is no alternative but to keep on going, though face must be saved through it all. It never occurs to a man who has met reverses to alter his mode of living, so long as he has not yet spent his last cent. He pretends that his setback was only a minor incident, already nullified by a great scheme which is working according to his deep-laid plans. He mobilizes his relatives and his friends, makes extravagant outlines of new enterprises in which he will, of course, be headman with an impressive title, always better than the position he has lost. In short, he behaves like a shipwrecked man from first-class who believes his only chance of survival is on a raft with companions from his own part of the ship because they are the right people.

No set of generalizations based upon human behavior is without exception. Some men did manage to come back, but when they reached the top a second time there was often a strange smell about them. No one was able to take it for granted that they had come back the hard way, unless the feat was accomplished after a migration to the United States, that lightning rod of countries which has for three hundred years drawn off into its ground the dangerously ambitious, the frustrated, the failures, allowing them hope and a second chance.

Americans are well aware of the way Europe has affected their lives through the impact of two wars in this century. Yet they are inclined to misunderstand how their own policies have affected Europe. When the United States clamped down its quota system, the result was a sense of claustrophobia all over the Continent. This reaction was the more acute because the war had unleashed so much violence in the crowded lands of the old world. It is worth

considering whether or not there would have been the spate of Fascist parties in Europe after 1918 had the opportunity to migrate to America not dried up.

When I left Hardt that day in January I spent no time thinking along this line of reasoning about face-saving. I knew it all intuitively. What puzzled me beyond belief was why the board of directors of the Associated Bank chose to give me this second chance. It was unnatural. And yet Hardt's manner had been too cordial and forthright to be misunderstood. There was a missing link in the chain of circumstances which I couldn't find, and until I did, I had no intention of accepting their offer.

There was no point in trying to talk this over with Mother. Her answers to all problems were simple and good and usually right, but when the problem was her only son's future, she could hardly be expected to grasp reality sufficiently to give sound advice on the subject.

I thought of Karel Berounský. He was the man to tell me what to do. I went home and waited until nightfall, and then I found my way to his bachelor apartment in Vinohrady. It was the first of hundreds of long nights I spent with him there. He lay on his couch with his feet on a stack of cushions, or he sat crossways in a lounge chair with his feet on a bookcase while I paced the floor and talked. This was what I had hungered for in Paris without knowing it—that sharp bite into the mind of masculine conversation, the weight and pungency of it. We understood each other with no flourishes of explanation because our dissimilarity of temperament was plainly marked. It was my way to talk around a point because I relished the devious courses I took to enclose the heart of anything I wanted to emphasize. Karel punctuated my stories and excursions with mere grunts of disapproval or snorts of derision, calling me here a sucker and there a fool. But he listened to me hour after hour.

It was nearly dawn before I let myself bring up the matter of the bank's offer of a new position under their aegis. One by one I outlined the facts as Hardt had given them to me. It was the ultimate test of friendship, this laying bare my full face for Karel to see.

His right leg dangled up and down on the fulcrum of his left knee. He lit another cigarette from the stub of the one he was finishing. I waited out of range of his penetrating, observing glance. When he finally spoke, all he said was "Well?"

"What do they want me back for, after . . . Paris? How can I give them an answer until I know why they want me?"

"Idiot," he said, making the word in Czech sound sharp and final.

I shoved aside the folds of curtains at his windows to let in the winter morning. "It's a terrible responsibility," I said. "I know nothing about glass. It may be that the men in the factory, as Hardt said, will refuse to have me."

"If the bank wants you, they'll have you. Besides, it's only a small shop."

I turned to look at him but he was staring at the ceiling.

"You know what I mean," I said. "I'm not afraid of responsible work. I'm afraid to fail again in Prague. If I start in as manager of a glass shop now, after . . . leaving the bank as I did three years ago . . . no one is likely to support me. The business isn't paying and they want me to make it pay. I'm not the man to do it."

His leg stopped wagging and he turned his head slowly to look at me. "Hardt told you why you were the man they picked, didn't he?"

"No. That's what I can't figure out. It doesn't make sense, and until it does I can't make a decision."

Karel unwound himself and sat up straight. "All right, fellow," he said. "If that's all you want to know, you've got it now. My information is confidential through the bank, but I know what I'm saying and you listen tight. After Hardt happened to run into you in Paris, one of the first pieces of business that came up before the board of directors happened to be this glass factory they'd just taken over as a bad debt. They had decided to build up the Prague outlet and Hardt suggested you as the man to do it. He made quite a speech. He said they all knew you were able. What they didn't know was that you had gone broke in Paris. And instead of your getting into the office of a questionable speculator, or turning into a gigolo, you were earning a respectable living in a very small way. Who ever heard of such a thing? Had you ever written any of them to ask for help? No! Had you ever been known to ask anyone for anything? No! Thinking it over, they decided you were a most remarkable fellow, and the bank would be crazy not to make further use of you."

At the conclusion of this longest speech I had ever heard him make, Karel wound himself up again on the couch and went back to staring at the ceiling. I tried to take in the implication of his words but I found it difficult. I went back to pacing the floor. Somewhere I had deviated from the usual pattern, because I had acted in the only way that seemed natural to me, and now I was being rewarded for behaving like myself.

After awhile Karel said, "You're still crazy, but don't make a mistake in this. Tell Hardt tomorrow you'll accept the offer. Never mind what they pay you. It's glass. It's beautiful. You can respect it. Therefore you can sell it."

Suddenly I was very tired. My stubborn resistance had given way at last under the lash of Karel's realistic comments. I could feel my body relaxing after too great a tension, and yet my mind was fresh and newly strong. If Karel believed I could do it, I could.

## CHAPTER XXX

THREE days later I left for Carlsbad on the seven o'clock train and shortly before noon I followed my luggage onto the platform at the famous spa. Somehow I had expected to find the place the way it always looked in pictures taken at the height of the season, with gardens and heavy foliage and bright sunshine and crowds of expensively dressed people of all nationalities walking up and down past the colonnade. But the station was empty, the streets around it were empty except for two horse-drawn, dirty sleighs, and a silence like death hung over the snow-covered buildings.

The train went on its way and left me standing there. From behind the freight shed two moth-eaten old men emerged to stare at me. I asked if they owned the sleighs and if one of them would drive me to the Carlsbad Crystal Factories. They mumbled together and finally one of them stalked over to one of the sleighs without giving me an answer and began to take the blanket off his horse. I got in behind and we started off down the hill toward the center of the town.

Every one of the enormous, luxurious hotels which were standing in horizontal layers were dark and their windows were tightly covered with boards. I asked my sulky driver where a stranger could stay for two weeks and for answer he drove to a small, unprepossessing inn where I left my bags and engaged a room. Then we went on. When I spoke in German I managed to get an answer to my questions now and then. I learned that most of the natives of Carlsbad went away in winter. It was their time for a vacation. Apparently those who had served the rich during the season were in turn letting others wait on them now.

The broken-down horse clopped along at his own pace through the deep snow, and the creaking sleigh jerked along behind his sweating haunches. At the bottom of a hill a narrow, cement-walled rivulet moved in a straight path through the dead town, giving off steam to prove its source in the hot springs which had made the spa famous. We crossed it, passed through the township of Fischern, and perhaps three-quarters of an hour later encountered a community of ugly suburban houses. In the bottom of a valley we drew up before a gate inscribed with the name of the factory.

The sleigh came to a halt and without turning in his seat the driver named his exorbitant fee for the ride. I had no choice but to pay and watch the horse pull him aimlessly away. Then I looked about. Beyond two rows of low brick buildings that resembled barracks and were doubtless the homes of the glassworkers I could see the factory. I began to walk in that direction, picking my way through pools of slush and mud. Some of the brick buildings of the factory were without windows, one had a huge stack rising into the air that

gave off a filthy colored smoke, and all of them were scabby with peeling yellow-gray paint and great wet spots of mold on the outside walls. Except for the smoke I would have been certain the place was unused. As I came closer I could see heaps of ashes beside the building with the smokestack, and everywhere in the factory yard were great mounds of broken glass.

My heart was in my heels as I stood looking the place over. A girl came out the door of one of the buildings and when she was near enough I asked her where I could find the manager. She pointed to a three-story structure and went on her way. Once inside the administration building I found no more cordiality that I had outside. A girl seated behind a reception desk was another unfriendly creature. I gave her one of my visiting cards as I asked to see the manager, but her only response was the motion of a thumb over her shoulder pointing at a door on the other side of the room.

I opened it, thinking it led to another reception room or hall, and found myself standing in a large room dominated by a long conference table at which three men were seated. They stared at me as everyone else had done since I arrived. My first impulse was to apologize for my unannounced entrance, but I thought better of it and merely bowed slightly from the waist. As my eyes grew accustomed to the change of light I recognized one of the three men, Rudolf Meyer, head of the firm. I had met him several years before in the bank in Prague.

This glass factory was his family's enterprise. When it became too heavily in debt to the bank it had been reorganized with a majority of the new shares now held by the bank and a minority held by the Meyers, together with one other shareholder.

Rudolf Meyer was British honorary consul in Carlsbad. His manners were elegant and aloof. He spoke with an excellent imitation of the clipped accents of British society. His suits were custom-made in Saville Row, he smoked Gold Flakes, and he kept a white handkerchief tucked up his left sleeve. He was known to be greatly in demand in Carlsbad society during the season.

He greeted me now with no trace of enthusiasm, asked me to join them at the table and then introduced the other two men. The one on his right carried the name of Edward Bělský. Though I had not previously met the fellow, I knew a great deal about him. He had been a prosperous shoe manufacturer. With a large amount of available money to invest, he had sought the advice of the securities department of the Associated Bank and after due consideration had decided to put it all into Carlsbad Crystal. But with his money had gone the stipulation that he be appointed managing director of the company in order to control its spending. He was a small, fat, melancholy man who was never seen without a smoking oversized cigar in his mouth. His whiskers were blue on his jowls and his eyes were nearly hidden under heavy brows. Like Rudolf

Meyer, he made no show of being pleased to see me.

The third man was introduced as Rudolf's older brother, Lorentz Meyer. I judged him to be about fifty. He was exceedingly lean and nervous, with strong, sharply chiseled features and clever eyes. His artist's hands cupped his crossed knees, one of them carrying a lighted cigarette to his mouth and then quickly back again. He was the designer and chief technician of the crystal factories. He seemed to hear little of what went on around him, as though his mind were forever concerned with new patterns and ideas. His greeting was the only one free of distrust and even antipathy.

My appointment as manager of the Prague branch was discussed at once. When Bělský growled that I knew nothing about selling glass I agreed with him easily, adding that a new point of view might do no harm to their business. I was at their disposal for the next few weeks to learn about glass, from its beginning to its final merchandising. I waited for their next move. Rudolf was frigidly polite as he informed me that they were all three opposed to my appointment, but it would be foolish to waste time discussing the matter. The Associated Bank had indicated a desire for my services and under the circumstances they were helpless to disagree.

Before I could answer, Lorentz Meyer jumped up from the table with an air of nervous distaste. Sitting listening to the others talk he had appeared half asleep and utterly relaxed. Now he moved with rapid strides to a hatrack at the far end of the room, disentangled his own belongings, and with a wide sweeping gesture threw a black cape over his shoulders. He put a wide-brimmed black hat on his graying head, said "Nobody needs me here" to the wall, and went out the door.

His brother looked disdainful and Bělský shrugged his shoulders. Rudolf Meyer began to outline what he expected of me during the weeks I spent at the factory. I would follow the process of glass manufacture until I knew as much as I could gather from observation. Then their sales organization would be explained to me. I learned that their branches were in Marienbad, Franzensbad, in Prague, a small one in Carlsbad proper, and one in Paris which was the property of a third Meyer brother.

By the time he had finished, the afternoon was on its way toward dusk. He led me toward the door and halfway across the room mentioned my salary. When he named the generous figure I knew it had been determined by Hardt, for it was the exact amount of my salary at the bank before I left that organization. Bělský groaned when he heard it.

There were five hundred employees in the factory, Meyer told me as he led the way to the sample department where he decided I should start. From grandparents to children, every member of the families who lived on the property worked in one capacity or another in this plant. He went on to give

me more statistics. I had eaten nothing since six o'clock that morning and I was hungry, but there was no alternative to listening and trying to extract at least a relative meaning from them.

The Czechoslovakian glass industry began in the fourteenth century when the craft of hand-blown glass was first introduced in the western borderlands of the Bohemian kingdom. It was a wild frontier country, but it offered an abundance of wood to fire the furnaces and the necessary ingredients for the glass itself. Glassmakers opened up virgin forests, built their homes around the glassworks and constructed roads to their settlements. They worked in clans to protect their craft from competition and the cost of outside help.

In the seventeenth century, when Venetian glass was the pride of every festive table in the civilized world, a new glass mixture was discovered in Bohemia. It was colorless and especially resistant to engraving, and it became known as Bohemian crystal. Another invention which contributed to the growing fame of these glassmakers was the accidental discovery in Prague of the famous gold-ruby glass coloration. From then on Bohemian crystal found its way into the markets of the world.

During the eighteenth century English lead glass became a serious competitor and to offset reverses in the Bohemian industry, young clansmen among the glassmakers were sent to foreign markets to study customs and fashions. As a result, new designs and new decorations were invented, new forms were added to old lines of samples, and a method of producing drinking glasses with one or more colored layers was discovered. One man invented a method of sandblasting and another produced a polishing process. In 1752 a royal decree prohibited the emigration of glassworkers from Bohemia.

Throughout the nineteenth century Bohemian crystal maintained its place in world markets. Modern methods and new glass products changed small glassworks into huge industrial plants. Modest experiments in special glass articles developed into important enterprises. By 1918, when the glass industry of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia was consolidated in Czechoslovakia, special schools to promote the artistic development of glassmakers were organized.

Now, in 1929, there were nearly a hundred and forty glassworks in the country where hand-blowing, glass cutting, engraving, enameling and other decorative methods were carried on. One hundred and fifty thousand glassworkers were employed. Large glassworks, such as Carlsbad Crystal, were organized for every process necessary to produce the finished article. Of them all, this place in which I had come to learn a new trade manufactured the very finest luxury items. Everything was made to order from samples; no stock was sold direct in the showrooms. By the end of the day my mind was choked with information. Rudolf Meyer had left me to the mercies of the factory executives who made no attempt whatever to help me. They spoke German



exclusively and they were correct in the strictest German sense, but their cool reserve held me off as they weighed and watched me. I tried to ask questions about their work, to indicate my interest and earnest desire to learn, but they answered only in monosyllables. When the factory whistles began to blow they moved off to end their day's routine, and I went back to the administration building.

It was completely dark outside now and the workers were scattering fast to their homes. All lights were out in the administration building. I returned to the sample department and found two young men putting on their coats. When I asked them to tell me how to get back to Carlsbad they looked at each other, shrugged their shoulders, and one said that a bus ran every hour on the main road. He pointed in an oblique direction and they went off together in the dark.

I started to pick my way over the unfamiliar path through snow and slush, trying to follow the direction they had given me. I plodded along in the dark, feeling that my future was as black as the night, when suddenly the road went away from under me and I found myself falling. I came to rest on my face in half-frozen mud in a deep ditch beside the road. I crawled out on all fours and got back on the road, and after awhile I found the bus station. It was only later, in the lighted bus, that I discovered my face was bleeding and my hands were skinned under the weight of mud they carried.

When I finally reached the small hotel where my bags had been left, I was utterly miserable. Nor was my state of mind helped when I discovered on inquiry that all visitors to the Carlsbad Crystal Factories were able with no difficulty to call a taxi from the station to take them back into town. Obviously the two young men had known this when they sent me to find the bus.

Instead of several weeks, I stayed four days in Carlsbad, and then Rudolf Meyer informed me that I was to return to Prague at once to take over the showroom there. The manager whose tenure was at an end wanted to leave right away. I guessed that this was only another in a chain of moves designed to break me as quickly as possible, but I made no protest and left as I was bidden, knowing little more about glass than when I had arrived.

## CHAPTER XXXI



THE small showroom of the Carlsbad Crystal Factories in Prague was on Příkopy, diagonally across from the Associated Bank. Shortly after noon of the day following my return from Carlsbad I left home as I had done for all the years when I worked in the bank, waved to Mother who stood watching me from the window as I left the courtyard, and took the same Number Nine

streetcar.

Nothing can obliterate the memory of unusual events in one's life so quickly and thoroughly as an old routine picked up again. Here I was, doing the same things in the same way as before my marriage. It made Toni seem a mirage and Paris a place in my dreams. The streetcar crawled through Smichov, past the street where I had been born, past the nonclassical school in Malá Strana, over the bridge where I had walked so often with Willy Kolovrat, and I left it as usual before it turned into Václavské náměstí.

This time, instead of crossing the street to the bank, I approached the old patrician house which now had a shop on the ground floor and a private bank above. There were two rather small showcases in the front of the shop and above the door the name of Carlsbad Crystal in neon letters. When I opened the door and went inside the place was empty. It was less than twenty feet deep and only about fifteen feet wide. There were no windows and the principal light came from a crystal chandelier in the center of the ceiling. Along both side walls and at the back were glass shelves, lighted indirectly and backed by mirrors, and in the center of the room was a showcase with a black glass top. The mahogany shelves at the back were separated by an archway curtained with velour hangings.

Everywhere there were pieces of crystal. They stood on the shelves all around the room behind sliding glass doors, a few fine specimens lay on the top of the table under the chandelier, and every one of them sparkled and threw off shafts and points of light. There were vases, compotes, candlesticks, cigarette boxes, ash trays, plates, and rows and rows of table glasses of every shape and size and kind. Some of the crystal was amethyst, some topaz, cobalt, olive-green, ruby. Most of it was untinted and translucent with the pure brilliance of cut diamonds.

As I stood there transfixed, the curtains at the rear of the room moved slightly. Slim fingers appeared through them, like a diver's hands parting water, and then a slender young girl stuck her head through the aperture she had made and looked at me. Her hair was the color of pale primroses, her skin was fair and her eyes gray-blue. She smiled in a friendly, childish fashion, then asked if I wanted anything, her tone of voice implying that I had come to the wrong shop by mistake but it was quite all right.

I asked to see the manager, and now she looked rather like a child who has done the best she can with her tables but the answers just won't come right. "He's not here," she said. "He's having coffee at the Continental across the way. But he'll be back after awhile." She smiled again and I told her I would return in an hour.

Out on the street I found the light of day singularly flat and vapid. For the first time since my return from Paris I felt a sudden surge of excited interest.

The crystal was tremendous. It was vibrant and responsive and alive. It was so much more than merely something to use. It was bold with beauty in its clear facets, its purity in which the eye could detect no flaw in transparency, even the way in which its fragility was accented by feathery decorations engraved to heighten the effect of the original mold. I knew nothing about types of glass or prices of sets or even the uses of many of the pieces I had seen. But I wanted very much to go back and find out, and I wanted more than anything else to be alone in that shop again, to let the rhythm of the glass flow into my mind.

There was nothing to do but wait for the manager, so I walked down Národní třída to the Café Slavia, one of the many popular coffeehouses in Prague. To my mind, such places are the mark of a civilized city. Certainly in Prague they tended to make life easy and graceful.

Each afternoon they were filled with men of the city who used them as an Englishman uses a club or a favorite pub. Here they sat and drank steaming brown liquid and munched sweet rolls while the pages of newspapers rustled through the rooms and eyes scanned the sheets for news of foreign markets and politics, local gossip, and the bad state of affairs in Germany.

So I sat in the Café Slavia on this day in early February, rustling a copy of *Lidové Noviny*, though I was too stimulated by thoughts of the crystal to read the columns of black type that ran up and down before my eyes. Around the room were other men and a few women, all reading if they were alone, or talking quietly in small groups. No one was hurried. The marble-topped tables were spaced sufficiently far from each other to avoid a sense of being crowded, and no one presumed to occupy a seat at another man's table without invitation.

Ordinarily I would have been in no hurry to leave, but this afternoon was different. Shortly under an hour I was back at the shop on Příkopy. This time the manager greeted me as I came in. There was no sign of the girl with pale hair. He made a ceremony of welcoming me, for my appearance heralded his release. He said he was glad to see that I appeared an energetic fellow; I looked much the way he did when he started in this place. Never mind, my spirit and my ambitions would get broken soon enough.

He thought he was being friendly, I suppose. There were a thousand questions I wanted to ask him about the stock, the sales organization, his employees and his relations with the factory, but he wanted to talk about nothing except himself. He kept on making sweeping flourishes and saying that he was welcoming me as a new member of the White Cargo Club. Soon I would find out that the stupidity evident in the internal conditions of the firm could break a man's spirit in Prague as easily as malaria, alcohol, solitude and native women could do it in the tropics. He felt as though he were going back to civilization, now that he was leaving the organization forever.

There was no answer I could make to all this, and after a time he parted the velour curtains at the back of the shop and ushered me into the room beyond. It was a close, cupboard-like affair, some fifteen feet by six or seven. The short wall on the left was taken up by a desk, a typewriter and a filing cabinet. There was no window anywhere. On the right were two heavy tables for wrapping parcels, and a washstand with a coat rack beside it. The girl I had seen an hour earlier was leaning against one of the tables. It seemed the room could scarcely hold all three of us, but the manager who was in such a hurry to leave pushed me before him and I squeezed against his desk while he went on with his irony about the positions we were trading.

The strong distaste I had originally felt for the man was rapidly turning to hatred. His manners were pleasant enough and his type as an individual was inoffensive, but unconsciously he was trying to destroy me as he had already been destroyed. All the energy which Karel Berounský had injected into me was steadily being sapped, along with the delight in this new work which the sight of the crystal had given me an hour earlier. Knowing how little that injected energy amounted to, and how easily the thought of the beautiful, rhythmic glass could be effaced, I was sick with fear of the results if he kept on talking much longer.

He began to open drawers and hand me catalogues and books and files and sales slips, all the time covering me with his vitriolic disappointment in the half-dark room. In the front part of the shop there was silence. I felt it was imperative that I get some air, get away from this man, get out of this place altogether. I turned my head away from him instinctively, and as I did so I caught the eyes of the girl who was leaning against the table in the shadows. It might easily have been my imagination, but I thought she was trying to give me some kind of negation to his words. She didn't move and she made no sound, but her eyes were gentle and friendly. Whatever her intent, her communication was an encouragement, giving me the support I needed badly at that moment.

With the sound of an opening door in the salesroom, I was freed from the rising sense of claustrophobia. My predecessor went back to the showroom, and when I followed him through the curtains I saw him talking to a haggard, begrimed individual whose cap was still on his head. "This is Novotný," he said, without giving my name in turn to the other man. "Miroslav Novotný. He's the stockkeeper."

Novotný hated me on sight. He was sullen, he coughed continually, and he was deliberately rude to both of us. In my country an employee is not expected to adopt a slavish manner toward his employer, but he must at all times be dignified and aloof and even-tempered. This man obviously wanted to kill all bosses, of every breed, and he made no attempt to hide his feelings.

It was decided that I should see the stock room, which occupied additional space behind the building in the courtyard. It turned out to be a windowless, filthy, damp, neglected cellar. The air was heavy and humid and I found myself unable to breathe without coughing. There was no question now as to the cause of the man's behavior. I would have wanted to kill a few bosses myself had I been forced to work in such a hole. But the glass was stored with order and efficiency on clean shelves. Novotný followed us as we went back to the shop.

Now a youngster of fourteen was talking to the primrose-haired girl. "Well, here's your whole staff," the manager said. "Milada Beranová . . ." indicating the one I had seen first, ". . . and Paula. Paula runs errands for us and helps Beranová when I'm not around."

So this was my staff: an arresting, sensitive girl of perhaps twenty-three; a mad, sick man; and a young female apprentice with a turned-up nose, a large mouth and swinging arms, and the manner of an urchin who has seen too much on city streets at night. The man who was about to leave pulled out his key ring and detached one for the shop door and another for his desk, handing them to me along with a fistful of letters which had not been opened. "They've been here quite awhile," he said. "Why should I read them? I'm going back to civilization. They're no concern of mine."

He went into the back room to get his coat and hat, and the other three stood there silently. Novotný watched me like a dog that has been beaten and starved. But he seemed to smell the possibility of change and a look of suspicion weakened almost imperceptibly his savage expression. He was still ready to growl at my approach, but he was no longer snarling. Paula watched me boldly, fresh, knowing and waiting. Milada Beranová turned quietly and began to dust the crystal pieces in the showcases, touching each one lovingly with her slim fingers and then putting it in place again.

As soon as my predecessor left I retired to the back room and began to go through the files of correspondence, hoping to learn how customers had been approached and attended. In the drawers of the desk I found a confused mess of sales slips, cash reports, stock books and unanswered letters. It took me four months to make order out of this chaos, working until three and four o'clock every morning. But this first day I could merely observe the confusion and resolve to put it right as quickly as possible.

Late that first afternoon I heard the shop door open and then voices that sounded like customers. Novotný had gone back to his cellar stockroom and Paula had disappeared. I sat still and listened, grateful for the opportunity to stay hidden until I could become familiar with the stock. Beranová was out there, capable of handling any possible sale better than I could. And then suddenly I knew I must face the customers now, this first day, regardless of my

lack of knowledge and my disinclination to sell anything to anyone at any time.

When I parted the curtains and stepped into the showroom I saw two middle-aged couples and an elderly man with the cap of a tourist guide from one of the travel agencies in his hand. From my experience in Paris I guessed that these were Americans. They were rather noisy and they flashed money around easily, by word if not in actual fact. They spoke no Czech or German and were trying to tell the guide what they wanted to see. My English was poor at that time, but I risked my limited knowledge to ask their wishes. They didn't want to buy anything, one man said; they were just shopping around. One of the women added that they were interested in drinking glasses. The shelves along the walls held nothing but sets of table glasses, so I led her to one side. Beranová stayed quietly at the rear, saying nothing, and the guide stood near the door. There were hundreds of samples, from sherry glasses to champagne to liqueurs to port. Some were hand engraved, some were ornamental in design, some were heavy with gold rims and gold patterns adapted to exotic tastes, some were severely modern with emphasis on faultless material and utility of line. All of them were scintillating in the reflected light. I looked back and forth from the tumblers which Europeans insist on using for ordinary drinking water, as distinguished from the smaller tumblers for mineral water, large goblets liked by Americans for water at dinner, huge tumblers used by the English for whisky and soda and by Europeans for beer, glasses used for champagne in Europe and ice-cream in America, to those of a special color used only for Rhine wine. It was a bewildering array.

"Just . . . what kind would you like to see?" I said to the American woman. Her husband and two friends were standing behind her now, their eyes going back and forth along the shelves.

"Well, I'm not sure," she said. "Every place we go, they talk about empire and rococo and baroque styles of glass. What do they mean?"

I had no idea. In my wanderings about Paris through the museums I had gained some knowledge of French Renaissance furniture, but I had never thought of the same styles as applied to glass. Baroque . . . rococo . . . empire. The words rolled in my mind. Their sound alone ought to tell me something. My hand went out and picked up a glass with delicate painted figures in gold and enamel on its face. It looked the way rococo sounded . . . gay and light. I set it on the table in the center of the room and the woman looked at it.

Again I tried to let my imagination guide me. Baroque sounded heavy and round and pompous. I picked up a goblet that was heavily gilded and deeply cut, with a bulging bowl and a thick pedestal. I put it on the table beside the rococo wineglass, by now quite pleased with myself. To find a goblet that would show the influences of empire style was fairly easy. All the trappings of

Napoleon that I had seen in France gave me the clue. Scrolls and square-cut designs were characteristic of this period. I found a severely simple goblet with an outward-flaring rim, a diamond-cut base, decorated with diamond cuttings on its bowl. Then I lined up the three glasses and told the waiting Americans which was which. The palms of my hands were moist and my knees were unsteady, but they had no way of knowing it.

Their interest became more specific. One couple decided to buy a complete set of table glasses, twelve of everything, but they still weren't sure what style would best suit their dining room in a place called Nyack. "What would *you* suggest?" the woman said to me, explaining her color scheme and the style of her furniture.

I turned back to the shelves as though considering her problem, but I knew I could keep up the deception very little longer. At my side a white, slim hand reached to the shelves and handed me a glass as though I had asked for that particular one. She handed me another. I took them from Beranová and set them on the table, and all the time she said nothing. The guide had been translating their English into abbreviated Czech.

The woman was delighted with Beranová's choice, and after considerable discussion with her husband and her friends, she chose one of the two samples. "Now I want the whole set," she said. "You don't sell from stock? Well, how much will the whole thing be, and how long will it take to have them made? We'll be back here in a month."

Again the slim, delicate fingers put a piece of paper on the table before me, written over in Czech in a funny, childish scrawl. The prices of all the glasses were there, and an approximate date of delivery. The gesture went unnoticed by everyone else, and I gave the information as though it had come straight from my own head. How easily Beranová could have shown herself the expert in this sale! When it came to writing up the order, Milada Beranová was there with the proper forms, taking my dictation and inserting the information I couldn't give her. I was filled with admiration and gratitude for the generous manner in which she had not only given me full credit for the sale on my first day, but had bolstered my confidence.

As the four Americans turned to leave, the man whose wife had given the order held out his hand. "Here," he said. "Here's a good-luck charm for you. Thanks for taking so much trouble with us."

I took his hand and a small coin fell into my palm. "Don't lose it," he said. "It's a rarity these days."

When they had gone I turned it over. The head of an Indian was stamped on one side and a buffalo on the other. I had no idea what kind of coin it was, but I knew the man had meant it as a gesture, so I treasured it as a charm and a symbol. Even when I discovered years later that it was worth only five cents in

America, I still kept it and I have it yet.

Novotný came in just as Beranová finished the sales slips. I rather expected she would give me a certain smile of superiority now that the customers were gone, just to show how much I needed her. Instead she said quietly, hardly looking up, "I'm so happy about your first order." Then she turned to the glasses and began to polish them. There was no underlining of the word "your" in her voice, to give it a double meaning.

Novotný looked at her and then he turned his head slowly and looked at me. His hand went up to his head and he took off his old dirty cap and put it into his pocket. Neither of us said anything, but slowly and almost painfully he smiled. Whether he knew it or not, from that moment he no longer had any need to fear dismissal, though I had been given full authority by the Meyers to engage a new staff if I desired one.

## *CHAPTER XXXII*



CERTAIN fundamental patterns of behavior had by now become second nature to me. No matter what I attempted to do, I could not be satisfied until I gained full control of all the possible facts. In the case of Carlsbad Crystal, this did not mean that I had to learn to blow glass. It did mean that I had to learn its history, had to master a knowledge of its costs and methods of production, as well as existing and potential markets. There was also a tendency to rely more surely on my own imagination. Until now I had found small enough scope for imaginative thinking of any kind in my work, but after the first day in the crystal shop I could feel a new creative power bearing against my mind for release. Imagination would have to help me to improvise the relationships which I must establish with the Carlsbad factories, with my staff, with the products I had undertaken to sell, with people who would eventually buy them. And it would take time, but I was not impatient.

There were many bitter moments to face during those first weeks in the shop. Former acquaintances from my social life in Prague who had known me as the big shot of the night clubs, industrial and diplomatic figures whom I had met as secretary of the bank and later as Wiesner's son-in-law, came to look around. They would point with scant interest to the first small object their eyes fell upon, as an excuse for their presence, and then ask why I was working in such a place. Couldn't I find anything better to do?

It was difficult not to turn on my heel and leave them to Beranová, but I made up my mind to go through with it. I decided to handle these men, the hardest customers I would ever have to face, by regulating their behavior



through my own actions. I refused to pretend this was a temporary position. I let them know I liked what I was doing and gave not a damn for their opinion. At first they were astonished, and then they were puzzled. What a strange way for a man who had lost face to behave in Prague. They talked about the phenomenon to their friends and after awhile the friends came in to see for themselves. Our cash records showed only a small increase as a result, but it kept the shop door opening and closing rather frequently for awhile.

Almost at once I moved the stock room to the ground floor at the rear of the building, where Novotný could work in better conditions. I had asked permission of the managing board in the factory to make this change and had been refused, so I went ahead on my own, confident that a future increase in business would make them forgive the small added expense.

During the process of this move I happened to discover some sample glasses that were unlike anything in the showroom. They were not in full sets, only odd pieces, such as a water tumbler and a finger bowl in one style, a champagne glass in another, a sherry in another. All were decorated with coats of arms, and Beranová told me they were samples of orders the factory had made through the past seventy years for royal dignitaries. One was rimmed heavily in gold and carried the letters *E VII* in enamel on the side. On another were two capital *A*'s interlocked and surmounted by a crown. These had been ordered by Edward the Seventh of Great Britain and Queen Alexandra. There were pure baroque wineglasses with the coat-of-arms of His Holiness Pope Pius XI, and others with the inscription of King Haakon of Norway and King Alfonso of Spain.

For years these samples had been gathering dust in the stock room. We pulled them out and after they were washed and polished they made a noble array. Beranová watched with interest. She had a nice bend to her mind and her taste was innate. Whenever I made a suggestion for change, she considered it carefully and then gave me her opinion, without apology when it differed from my own. But her remarks were never personal. I found myself wanting to tell her about the beautiful glasses my mother had always treasured, and how I had broken one of them when I was a small boy, but it was impossible to do so. Whenever our conversation seemed likely to reach beyond our work, she shyly withdrew.

We put the royal glasses on a shelf by themselves in the most attractive spot in the showroom, careful to see that the lights hit them in such a way as to heighten their engraved or enameled insignia. Pleased with the effect, Beranová saw to it that the glasses on the surrounding shelves formed a background of modernism for our exhibit. And then I undertook to have small cards embossed with the title of each owner, which we placed before the samples for identification. Almost at once this shelf became the center of

attention for every newcomer in the shop.

Americans were particularly impressed. Nearly all of them tried to buy one of the samples. Though they were not for sale at any price, I found that on the strength of the impression they made I could now suggest to customers what they ought to buy, and have them agree because we had already sold to royalty.

Those few glasses turned our small shop into a kind of museum. It became a show place with historical connections, and that fact changed ordinary merchandise into wares of value. Instead of our customers looking for useful objects, they now realized they were obtaining a value in our crystal ware that could not be expressed in figures. Instead of our goods being on the level of a sales table, they were put upon a pedestal of culture.

The elderly man who had brought the four Americans on my first day was one of the best guides in the city. During the war he had been a steward on an Austrian pleasure cruiser which had been interned at Southampton, so his English was good. When he came to see me the next day we talked a long time about his work, and because I treated him as a man of experience, he brought us every foreigner who went through his hands from then on. In time it was the same with all the other guides in the city.

As I have said, I spent each night until the early hours of the morning at my desk in the rear of the shop, reorganizing the internal affairs of the business of this branch. The more we sold during the day, the more paper work there was to complete at night. If I could spend years in night clubs to further my career in the bank, as well as feed my taste for gaiety, I reasoned that I could work through the nights in this little room for an even better purpose. Yet I never once found those months a hardship. Crystal had become my hobby as well as my job, and I was absorbed in it to the exclusion of everything else.

I wrote letters to customers, worked on price quotations for future orders, and wrote instructions to the factory. I found myself telling the Meyer brothers and Bělský how their business in Prague should be handled. They allowed me to have my way because the turnover of orders was increasing so fast they could do nothing else but agree with me. The arrogant and offensive criticism which my predecessor had received daily from the factory, judging by the file of correspondence in the back room, was missing now.

For the purpose of learning something about the technique of glass blowing and some of the intricacies of the glass industry, I read everything I could find on the subject. The love of beauty which I had inherited from Mother, and my continuing sense of rhythm, found full expression in the glass which I not only handled, but thought of now as a potential outlet for my longing to create. At night I kept dreaming about myself as a boy, swimming in the Vltava, parting the water with my extended hands. Then I realized why: the motion of

swimming and the flaring shape of a fine crystal vase were not dissimilar. In my subconscious mind they were apparently the same.

One passage in a book I found made a profound impression as I read it. Maurice Marinot, a renowned French glass designer, wrote:

An understanding of the effects of weight dominates the whole process of glass-making. Glass can only be blown when a heightened temperature has made it very malleable. The weight of the ductile mass at the end of the blowpipe tends to make it continually lengthen and hang downwards, and it is only by constantly rotating the tube that balance is maintained and the shape preserved. The glass-maker's tube is not only an implement for blowing. It is a kind of lathe, movable in space, on which the vessel is turned and shaped by contact with the tool applied to it. A constant, instinctive judgment of the degree of heat in the glass is necessary, so that the worker may adapt the scope and speed of his movements to the ductility of the glass. The working of glass, therefore, consists in blowing it while rotating; in forming it while it is alive with the life given it by the fire. And all this must be done with decision and flexible judgment in a very short space of time, and with no possibility of rectifying mistakes.<sup>[A]</sup>

That was equally applicable to the making of glass or the making of a life's work. Again when Marinot said: "I consider that a fine piece of glass is that bearing the plainest evidence of the blowing which formed it, and that its shape should represent a moment in the life of the glass which has become fixed in the instant of cooling," I knew what he meant; glass was much more than a series of articles of use, or the means of fulfilling a snobbish desire for possession. It was the evidence of a philosophy; it was beauty and meaning fused.

At the end of my first ten months in the shop I was able to report an increase of nearly three hundred per cent over the sales of the preceding year, in spite of a falling level of prosperity everywhere. In those ten months I had also gone to Paris to advise the elder Meyer brother on methods of making his own shop more attractive, and I had spent considerable time in Vienna and Berlin investigating opportunities for opening branches in those cities.

During these months Milada Beranová gained confidence in herself. I had only to tell her casually one day how Frenchwomen dressed almost exclusively in black to heighten the tones of their natural color and at the same time to give them dignity, to see her appear a few days later in a new, and highly becoming black dress which she had made herself. It turned the pale primrose hair into a halo for her gray-blue eyes and straight sculptured features. The casual young

girl who had smiled at me the first day I entered the shop was now a young woman of distinction.

Paula had disappeared some time before by mutual agreement, like a snowbank on a sunny day. It was a relief to have no more of her nailing arms and impertinent manners. But Beranová needed help, and I knew the kind of girl I wanted in the shop to work with her. Above everything else she must be beautiful. I had become convinced that articles of exquisite beauty should never be handled by plain saleswomen. It was unfair to the women as well as to the merchandise. In our shop we had consciously created an atmosphere which enhanced the beauty of our products. The glass was everything. Its bare spaces and clear, decided designs that related logically to form demanded a proper setting. Lorentz Meyer had proved again and again his comprehension of the possibilities of his materials. It was up to me to keep jarring notes out of the shop.

I came across her by chance, working behind a counter in one of Prague's department stores, and I knew her at once. I watched her manner of handling customers and then I spoke to her in German. In the guise of a customer who desired information about the articles she was selling, I spoke to her again in French, and she replied in both languages with scarcely the trace of an accent. Later it developed that she spoke English as well. Added to all her accomplishments, she was the most beautiful girl I have ever seen anywhere.

Božena Krásná was her name. Her features were as placid and even in their composition as those of a Hollywood star; her skin was the texture of satin, her hair the color of the midday sun. When I talked to her at length and offered her a sales position in our shop, I found that she had been on the point of running away from Prague because she was depressed by the automatic nature of her work. Krásná was born for happiness and joy, not only to accept but to give with open arms, in full measure.

When she joined our staff the atmosphere of the shop lacked nothing. Beranová gave it distinguished charm and Krásná brought to it scintillating vitality. Even Novotný became clean-shaven and better dressed, for no one enjoyed these changes more than he did. One would have thought it was all his own private success.

Now Karel Berounský fell into the habit of dropping in to see us. Before long he took up headquarters on the chair beside my desk each afternoon when the bank had closed. At first he mocked me, reminding me of the disbelief I had expressed in my own abilities less than a year before. But the beauty of the crystal began to absorb him, too, and before long he was delving into all the variety of interests I had accumulated in this work. After the dry monotone of life in the bank, our small shop excited him, insofar as Karel was able to be enthusiastic about anything without cutting his pleasure through with the knife

of his cynicism.

For a time it was our show windows on the street that captured his attention. He conceived fantastic ideas for their dressing, and left me to carry out the technical details. Lorentz Meyer had invented three new colors in crystal which had become renowned in the trade because of the distinct change they underwent from daylight to artificial illumination. Karel decided we should make their quality visible to passers-by. So I rigged up a window which enabled me to throw an artificial spot of light on a vase made of one of these new crystals, showing it to be a deep rose-mauve. Then I placed another object made of the same kind of crystal so that it took the full daylight, and that one was the blue of periwinkles.

Whether it was this particular window display or another that was first mentioned in a trade publication, I don't remember now. Sometime during that autumn an article on window dressing appeared in the *Gazet van Antwerpen*, citing a display in the Příkopy branch of the Carlsbad Crystal Factories as the most artistic show window the writer had seen on a trip through Europe. Later similar articles appeared in *Marketing and Design* in London, several times in a Bulgarian paper, and again in a Swedish magazine in Stockholm.

No attempt had been made to meet the taste of a local clientele in these displays. I purposely arranged my showcases, not for the attraction of ordinary passers-by in Prague but rather in the hope of appealing to individuals with taste. In doing so I managed to reach out directly to the diplomatic corps in Prague.

As soon as the resident foreigners began to patronize our crystal, Prague society took notice. They would never have been attracted by the beauty of our show windows alone because lovely glass is a commonplace in our country, but as soon as they realized that our shop had become a rendezvous of diplomats and wealthy visitors, they decided ours was as good a place as any other in which to buy their glass.

The once sleepy shop was now an overcrowded salesroom where customers arrived as though they were making an official visit. No one pressed them for a sale. They greeted each other, admired Milada and Božena discreetly, talked to me about their world, and were seen by each other. They also bought crystal, which was an added satisfaction.

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[A] From *Modern Glass*, by Guillaume.

It was shortly before Christmas in 1929 that I welcomed to the shop an old gentleman who was introduced to me by the Prague consul for El Salvador as His Excellency Fuentes, then accredited Minister to Berlin. He was in search of a set of crystal glasses for the palace of the president of his own country, and he wanted it complete for a hundred settings. During an entire morning I showed him what we had.

Señor Fuentes promised to return in a few days to give me his decision. After he had gone I put on my hat and went across the street to call upon Antonín Hardt at the bank. I told him what had happened, adding that I believed the Minister had been troubled in making a decision about a crystal pattern because he was also looking for china for the president's table, and he wanted the two to match as nearly as possible. I went on to outline my plans for making a double sale.

Next morning two exceedingly stiff and correct German gentlemen arrived to call on me. They were managers of the Bohemian Ceramic Works which happened also to be the property of the Associated Bank. Hermann Gründlich was a short, stocky, middle-class German of the Third Reich who repeated everything he said twice over in long German phrases of pedantic exactness, as though he had come to give me a lecture on some branch of *Wissenschaft*. His companion, Adolf Fischer, was a tall, lean, uncommunicative German, also of the Reich, who was, I knew, one of the finest technicians in the ceramic industry. In spite of his equal rank in the firm, he clicked his heels and sat at attention whenever his colleague spoke to him.

They brought samples of dinner sets because they had been instructed to do so by the bank, but while they displayed the dishes they made no attempt to hide their distrust of me as an impertinent opportunist. How could I expect to sell their china when I knew nothing about it? They had also brought portfolios of figures to back each plate, as though all sales were simply a matter of paper work. After they had gone I looked over the files and realized it would take an expert to decipher them, so I put them aside and concentrated on the china itself, matching pieces with some of our crystal sets in a way that I hoped would please the Minister from El Salvador.

Two days later Señor Fuentes gave me an order for a complete glass and china installation for his president's palace, one hundred of everything. It came to a figure that neither factory had ever seen before in a single retail business transaction. While accountants in their bookkeeping departments sharpened pencils and put away red ink for some time to come, I was consumed with excitement over the prospect of a new field of activity that was already growing rapidly in my imagination.

I cared nothing now for Edward the Seventh and Queen Alexandra. They were dead royalty. If I could make a sale of such magnitude in a small shop on Příkopy to the head of a state which I had trouble locating on a map, how much more could I sell to the heads of states all around me in Europe?

## CHAPTER XXXIV



EGYPT was next. In the early spring of 1930 the Egyptian Legation in Prague was moved from a suite of rooms at the Ambassador Hotel to a new building. The Czechoslovakian Chief of Protocol, Minister Strimpl, brought to the shop Dr. Hassan Nashât Pasha, Egyptian Ambassador to Berlin, and Serri Omar Bey, the Egyptian Minister to Czechoslovakia. As a result of this visit we furnished a complete set of table glass for the new legation.

Shortly thereafter it was announced that King Fouad of Egypt was coming to Prague to celebrate the official opening of the new legation, and great plans were being made to entertain him. On the first night of his visit a diplomatic reception was scheduled to be held in his honor at the legation. President Masaryk would receive at the King's side.

Two days before the event I happened to meet Serri Omar Bey and learned from him that the legation was in a frenzied state because the rooms where King Fouad would hold court were still incomplete. The decorations which had been ordered from Paris had not arrived. Without asking permission of my factory in Carlsbad, or even waiting to get in touch with the bank, I offered my services on the spot, suggesting that we put at his disposition the most beautiful pieces of crystal in our collection to decorate the salons and presentation rooms during the King's visit.

The Egyptian Minister studied me obliquely from the corner of his dark eyes. "It is a possibility," he said. "And what would be your charge for such a service?"

I explained that my firm would be honored by such a showing. The opportunity to place these pieces of hand-engraved crystal where they would serve as background for the presence of the King of Egypt and the President of Czechoslovakia would be ample reward in itself. Serri Omar Bey was pleased to accept my offer.

All that night and all the next night Beranová and I worked in the Egyptian Legation. We were given an unlimited account for all the flowers we could use. Here and there and everywhere we placed rich blooms, filling blank spaces and arranging vistas, making background interest and foreground interest and always remembering that the clear crystal itself was a decoration

fit for any king's taste. Because we were so intensely interested in solving this problem, we had no sense of fatigue. Servants brought us food on trays now and then; otherwise we lost track of time.

Through the hours I was constantly conscious of Milada's hands. I found I couldn't keep my eyes from their delicate grace as they brought to life each piece of glass she chose for a table, a shelf, a window sill, a mantel. She filled the vases with white lilacs, purple lilacs, yellow and cream daffodils, crimson tulips, saffron tulips, and gorgeous hothouse roses. And always the slim, cool fingers chose the right length of stem, the right number for each vase, making arrangements to promote the best in both flowers and crystal container.

One small room was pointed out to us as the place reserved for King Fouad and President Masaryk in which to hold their private conversations. It contained little more than a sofa in the shape of a crescent and a taboret standing beside it. We spent at least an hour discussing the color of the vase and the kind of flowers to go in this room; which crystal cigarette box and which ash tray would be most appropriate. When we found the right combination to suit us, and arranged the pieces on the taboret, we were finished.

From that day on, our business with the diplomatic corps was assured. The manner in which I had helped the Egyptian Legation became a public secret, and ministers, consuls and attaches from every legation in Prague were our constant visitors, characterizing us as friends of the foreign colony. Even the Czechoslovakian Foreign Office, and eventually the President's office, came to hear of the incident. Before it was forgotten again in the press of new business and new customers, word reached me from the Hradčany that my understanding help had been appreciated at home as well as abroad.

And then in April, 1930, I was called to Carlsbad, where I was informed that the executive board of the factory had nominated me to fill a new position as head of all the branches of Carlsbad Crystal, my salary to be increased considerably and my headquarters to be in the resort town.

My emotions were something more than mixed as I returned to Prague and set about searching for someone to succeed me as manager of the Příkopy branch. First I offered the job to Karel, but he laughed in my face. He admitted that he possessed neither the patience nor the diplomacy necessary to enable him to carry on where I was forced to leave off. Finally Jiří Mašek, one of my first friends in the bank, one of the men who had introduced me to Prague night life, agreed to take it over. His temperament was well suited to dealing with a variety of people, and he was still sufficiently capable of being impressed by important names to feel that I had deeded him a gold mine.

For two weeks he worked with me in the little back room, learning how I handled every detail. And then I went off to Carlsbad, feeling much as though



I were giving away a child. I left Milada, Božena and Novotný with regret, but I thought of them as safeguards for the evolution of the business. I knew they loved the child as much as I did.

It took less than a week in Carlsbad for me to discover that I had been kicked upstairs. My title indicated that I was head of all branches, but actually I was Rudolf's assistant.

Lorentz Meyer kept aloof from all discussions of business. He showed me his new ideas for designs and discussed their market possibilities. He recognized the fact that I loved his crystal and respected his workmanship and talent. The other two, together with lesser executives, presented a united front against the intruder from Prague. Every suggestion I made was promptly vetoed. Every inspection I made in a branch brought on quarrels and private complaints to Rudolf Meyer or Bělský.

Had I been a Frenchman I could have shrugged my shoulders and given in to the inevitable. But I was not even a philosophic Slav to the extent that my predecessor in Prague had been, finding a way to mock himself and everyone else in a similar position. I had formed a passionate regard for crystal—for the crystal of Lorentz Meyer specifically—and I knew it held great possibilities for serving my inner needs as well as the reputation of my country in world markets. I had no intention of giving up the relationship I had managed to establish with it.

Now I spent as much time in the factory as I could, watching the glass blowers at work, talking to them, learning something of the technicalities of their craft, truly admiring their skill and the manner in which they expressed pride in their work. A great many of them were Czechs, but I saw no dissension between them and the German workers; they were all Social Democrats. Gradually they began to express their friendliness in small ways, by a twinkle in a pair of eyes as I walked through the rooms, by a chuckle when I spoke to a man at one of the furnaces. Sometimes a worker would jump down from the platform before his furnace as I passed and thrust a box into my hands. The contents were always amusing glass animals which had been made in spare time as a mark of affection. By a grapevine route of their own they had known which orders came from my branch in Příkopy. These animals were a way of saying that they considered the Prague orders artistic and worthy of their efforts.

Whenever visitors came to the factory—and it was a customary practice in those days to welcome anyone who wanted to inspect Czech industry at its source—it was my duty to show them over the plant. They were a varied assortment, from Indian potentates to American businessmen. Of them all, I remember three more clearly than the rest, for differing reasons.

One was an elderly gentleman in civilian clothes, surrounded by a group of

French officers. As soon as we started through the furnace rooms and he spoke to his companions with sharp tones of command, I recognized General Franchet d'Esperey. In customary fashion, I asked if he would like to blow a piece of glass. Most of our distinguished visitors were pleased to be asked, but few availed themselves of the privilege. Not so the general. He got onto the platform by the stove, took the blowpipe which was reserved for such occasions, received a drop of liquid glass on its tip and began to blow into a wooden form until his face was purple. He was enormously pleased with himself.

I promised to send the tumbler to his hotel in Carlsbad as soon as it had cooled. But when it was taken from the mold it was a badly misshapen article of ugliness. I said to the blower who had assisted in the ceremony, "He was my general in the war. What would you do?"

The old fellow let his face break slowly into a grin. Without a word he blew another drop of glass into the mold. When it was ready we took it to one of the engravers and had the general's initials carved on its face. In due time it was put into his hands as the product of his own skillful breath. He accepted it with a smile as he said, "*Enfin* . . . it is not too difficult, your glass blowing!"

I remember, too, an earnest, quiet woman who came alone to visit us one day. She said very little as we went from room to room, but her few questions were indicative of a deep feeling for social problems, and her responses to my comments were sharply colored by wit. She was a Doctor of Philosophy, president of the Czechoslovakian Red Cross, and daughter of the president of the country . . . Dr. Alice Masaryk.

A third vivid memory from that period was my first encounter with an Indian prince. The Maharajah of Tripura, a pompous brown man, came to the factory with his entire gaudy retinue. After the party had inspected the glass blowers at work, the maharajah indicated his desire to look at samples of crystal ware with a view to giving an order. I led them to the showroom and brought out for the Indian's consideration one of the finest pieces of craftsmanship we possessed, a baroque goblet, while his entourage rattled and swished through the room. He looked at the piece I held out and then disdainfully pushed my hand aside. He walked away and began to look at other pieces. One of his attendants whispered in a high-pitched, quite audible voice, "His Highness is very wealthy. He can afford the best. Only the best may be shown him."

So I offered the maharajah a goblet heavily encrusted with gold. The fine transparency of the glass was lost in its decoration. It was exactly what he wanted. He gave a large order for his palace, specifying that the only clear space remaining on the glass was to be enameled in colors with his coat of arms.

During that summer in Carlsbad I was more concerned with observing the Sudeten Germans and their relations with Czechs than I was with anything else. I remembered the two years I had spent in Slovakia at the end of the war and all the mistakes in tact and diplomacy I had seen made there in those early days of welding together a republic. Here the reasons for dissension were obviously of another nature. In the eyes of the German-speaking section of the population, Czechs in the Sudetenland were weak because of their determination to be considerate and friendly in what they thought was a true democratic manner. As a result, the Germans scorned them. It made me acutely ill to watch the whole unhappy scene.

Carlsbad was in full season now. It had been ugly enough in the middle of winter when everything was boarded tight, but now in July it was despoiled by too many visitors who were discontented, avaricious, quarrelsome, overfed, sticky with gossip, and bored to the bone. I avoided every aspect of their so-called gay life, playing no morning golf, no afternoon bridge, drinking no pink teas and frequenting no bars. I eschewed the tea dances at the Imperial which were obligatory for Carlsbad society, and I never appeared at the more formal dances at the Pupp Hotel.

Night after night during those summer weeks I sat alone on a bench on the *Alte Wiese*, smoking in the dark, wondering if the evolution of my career had become systematic in its periods of rise and fall. Was there a loose thread that I had not been able to find in the pattern, a thread that came unraveled at intervals? If that were true, then I must find it and knit it back, for I couldn't afford to let this rise and fall continue forever. And the time to find the unraveled thread was now.

I began to analyze myself and my own qualities ruthlessly. In no sense of the word was I a professional man. It was too late to acquire a specialized knowledge equivalent to that of a doctor or lawyer. It was equally doubtful if I could ever qualify as a technical expert in the highly difficult and complex art of glass-making and designing. But I did see, in all modesty, that I possessed certain advantages the pure technician rarely has. For one thing, I had built up a large knowledge of people.

Some men are born shrewd, some achieve shrewdness, and some have caution thrust upon them. Most of the individuals I knew fell into one or the other of these categories. Karel had been born shrewd; Rée Berlin had shrewdness forced upon her by the circumstance of being a beautiful young dancer performing in a man's world. Whatever caution and even shrewdness I now possessed had been acquired through a slow and painful process.

The first steps toward consciously acquiring a mental equipment to protect myself from others, as well as from my own nature, had begun when I was at my lowest ebb in Paris. During the past fourteen months I had added a further

store. Once upon a time I would have resigned my position with the Meyers at the slightest hint that I was unwanted. Today I had no intention of doing anything of the kind. My career made coherent sense to me for the first time in my life, and I was resolved to do whatever I must to stay with this work which had acquired meaning for me far beyond the salary it paid.

The days were warm in Carlsbad that summer, but the nights were fresh and cool in the darkness under the old trees. I badly needed someone to talk to, but all around me were only the bored and boring rich and the natives who were busy serving them. In Paris I had often been alone, but the situation was different there. I had never lost the consciousness of being in a foreign country; its strange manners and customs were a drug to my mind; I was in it but never of it. Here in Czechoslovakia I was newly conscious of being at home and also of having an added mental equipment with which to analyze the life that went on about me. I wanted to know more about my country, to understand it better, because in spite of everything I was happy in it and I had no wish to leave it again.

The thought of my father was often in my mind that summer. He had spent many years of his life and all his money in the casinos of Carlsbad. He must have known the place well. What had gone on in his mind in those years before he met and married my mother? I could only guess, for she had seldom talked about him. Thomas Masaryk had outlawed all games of chance in the spas of the country, but what other and more fundamental differences had come about in my world to make it unlike the one my father had known? How would Czechoslovakia look to him if he could peer out from wherever he was and see it now? It was a democracy and no longer part of the Austrian Empire, but what did that mean in my life? How much had I come to take for granted in this democracy?

The foreigners who visited our factory were always curious to know many details about the evolution of Czechoslovakia. They asked for statistics and proved facts in the fields of education, agriculture, economics, health insurance and so on. They wanted to know how it felt to live in a democracy after having been part of an empire. I was never able to give them statistical data because I had never bothered to read parliamentary reports or any other kind of social publications. I felt these princes and other important personages could send their secretaries to borrow voluminous reports from the library if they were unable to read the answers they sought in the happy faces of Czechoslovakians all around them. As for telling them how it felt to live in a democracy, I could say honestly that it felt fine. But I had come to take it so much for granted that I could hardly realize it had ever been any other way.

Now during these long nights alone in Carlsbad I began to probe deeper within my own mind. If democracy could not be given to men, but must be

learned, where had I—along with all the other individuals and groups that made up my country—learned to live in harmony and fruitful enterprise? To learn means to study and to be guided to a conclusion. Perhaps we had learned the meaning of democracy unconsciously because we had all studied the ideas of Jan Hus. When he had preached in the early fifteenth century he had not called his faith democracy, but the words he used added up to the same thing—humanity, equality and freedom. Had we also been guided to a conclusion? Undoubtedly we had, for Thomas Masaryk was the ideal teacher whose hand was not felt by his pupils but whose spirit was strong enough to enter them unobserved. It was Masaryk who had said that we would need fifty years of undisturbed existence as a state to realize the full meaning of democracy. Already more than ten of those years were gone, and our life in Czechoslovakia was rich and wonderful. What added good was in store for us at the end of another forty?

Perhaps Masaryk meant that we would understand ourselves fully by that time, no longer taking our good for granted? In the meantime we took pleasure in small evidences before our everyday eyes: the fact that we were no longer working under a foreign rule gave us an impetus in business to work not only harder for ourselves but for coming generations; the opening of new schools, the giving of scholarships and prizes to large numbers of people in all parts of the country were reflected in a growing sense of our own native culture. The fact that we were no longer disguised in the eyes of the world as Austrians or Germans made us proud to show forth the best that was in us.

So I became sharply aware of my own molecular part in the harmonious whole which had been unified by the genius of Masaryk. Fine glass was potentially a part of the cultural pattern of Czechoslovakia. In time it could be so understood by the world at large. My love for it, my infinite respect for it, and my intuition told me I need do nothing except give our glass a chance to speak for itself. It was part of the way I had learned democracy, by loving many little things that added up to the big words like humanity, equality and freedom.

## CHAPTER XXXV



THAT summer Mother went to the *Drei Lilien* at Franzensbad, as she had been doing now for several years. It was only a few hours' drive from Carlsbad, so I managed to get over to see her every week end. We never talked much when we were together. I often wish now that I had found a way to communicate more to her from my mind. My heart she understood, and that

seemed enough for both of us.

She still found it difficult to accept the luxuries I wanted her to have. The apartment in Smichov was the sanctuary she had made for us, to hide her from the large, violent and indifferent life of the city in which she had never wanted a part, and nothing could persuade her to leave it permanently. She had seen her son—the only human being in the world to whom she felt any attachment—established and successful, after having come close to despair of seeing him survive. There was poignant dignity in the situation. Mother had been what she was in order that I might become the man she saw before her now, but the comfort and security of success carried no meaning into her own life. She was too old, and her appetites had been restrained too long.

As the life of Carlsbad wore in on me she noticed the strain in my eyes when I came to her each Sunday for a few hours and she wanted desperately to help me. When I told her the simple facts behind my move from Prague, she persisted in misjudging the cause of my preoccupation. In the past, her anxieties had always been caused by poverty. So now she became convinced that I was sacrificing my own comfort in order to keep her at Franzensbad.

One Sunday toward the end of July I found her moved into a small, unpleasant room at the back of the *Drei Lilien*, overlooking an alley. When I protested violently, she said it was only to help me. She had no right to take more from her hard-working son. She didn't want to be a nuisance to me. Then I became angry. It had been a long time since she had seen me in such an uncontrolled fit of temper. I was overworked and irritated and I used this excuse to release my pent-up anger at many other people. I shouted and walked the floor and then I dashed from the room, slamming the door as I went. I found the manager and ordered him to move Mother into the best room in the hotel as soon as I left, one with sunshine and a good view, and then to fill it with flowers. He was to send me the bill and not let her see it.

By the time I returned to her my anger was gone and the tempest had subsided, but she was still suffering from it. People with tempers always shout loudest at those they love most, because instinctively they know that no one else will stand it. She was crying, with one hand pressed against her side and the other holding a handkerchief to her eyes. It was time for me to return to Carlsbad. When I kissed her good-by, promising to return the following Sunday, she tried to smile, for Mother could hardly begin now to deplore the behavior my tempers forced upon me.

Three days later I received a wire from the *Drei Lilien* asking me to come at once. Mother was ill. I borrowed Bělský's car and drove as fast as I could through the valleys and over the mountains, but it was midnight before I reached her. She had suffered a stroke, probably not her first, and now she was unconscious. The doctor told me she could live only a matter of hours, perhaps

days.

In spite of the fact that I had gone through a major war and still had the marks of seven wounds on my own body, the experience of the following five days was seared on my soul and nothing since has been able to heal the invisible scars it made. She looked so different from the mother I had always known. I felt as though the change had been caused solely by the way I had treated her. Toward morning, still unconscious, her lips moved and I heard her murmur my name. I held her hand and she must have realized I was there. In another few hours her eyes were open and she was even able to be raised on pillows and speak to me.

She wanted desperately to go home. The nurse and the doctor both tried to quiet her, but she was adamant. She refused to die in the hotel. She wanted to go home. Her determination seemed to give her strength and she persisted in the demand, begging me not to let her die where she was. She wanted to go back to her familiar rooms in Smichov where she had lived for so long.

I talked with the doctor and he agreed that nothing could save her life; therefore she might as well try to get back if it would ease her mind. So we set out in an ambulance, and every few miles we had to stop while the nurse gave her an injection. Sitting in the front seat beside the driver, I felt I would lose my reason each time the nurse signaled us. It took from eleven in the morning until seven at night to drive the hundred and twelve miles back to Prague.

She lived for another night and half the next day. Alternately I begged the Lord to take her quickly and talked to her as to a child, not realizing that her words were only an automatic response without meaning now because she no longer knew what she was saying.

The last time she called me I picked her up in my arms, and it was thus that she died.

## *CHAPTER XXXVI*



**A**FTER the funeral, where I saw my uncle for the last time, I disposed of the apartment in Smichov and gave away all the furnishings it contained. My love for Mother had no need of chairs and tables to keep it intact. I packed my personal belongings and sent them to Carlsbad, and then just before I was ready to walk out of the place for good I returned to Mother's room. In spite of all the other forces which have played upon me, I am a European, with perhaps more sentiment and even mysticism in my nature than men of the new world. I couldn't avoid picking up a few things which she had treasured, to keep as symbols of our life together. There was a watch that had belonged to

Grandfather; an alarm clock that had never ceased to keep time since before I was born; some old pictures, some flowers Mother had pressed with care, and a notebook filled with her poems.

Then I went back to Carlsbad. It was hot and the spa was in full, overripe bloom. Two days after my return Rudolf Meyer informed me that I had been selected to go to London in September to open a new branch of the factory on Regent Street.

Any change in my surroundings seemed welcome just then, so I agreed to go. The contract which I signed stipulated that two salesgirls from our firm should go to England with me for three months to teach a staff of English girls how to sell our goods. For my part, I could stay permanently in England as manager of the branch there, or I could return to Carlsbad at my own convenience.

I suggested that the two girls from the Prague branch be allowed to go to London, but Rudolf Meyer vetoed Beranová because she could speak no English. Krásná he said would be all right and I might take her if I chose.

That night I called Milada. I said, "How would you like to go to London for three months? I'm leaving to take over the new branch there in September."

She had never crossed the frontiers of Czechoslovakia except for a short excursion to Switzerland as a child. I could hear the catch in her breath. "Excuse me . . . what did you say?" came her voice at last.

I repeated my question, and this time she laughed when she heard it, as though I had said something very amusing.

"It would only be for three months," I said. "My contract says I may take you and Božena if you both speak English. You'd have to teach English girls how to sell the glass."

"Oh . . ." I could almost see her smile fade at the other end of the line. "That's very nice for Božena. I'm glad she can go. But you know I don't speak English."

"Yes," I said. "I know. Here in Carlsbad they say you couldn't even learn."

There was only a split moment of silence. Then her voice came back sure and sweet. "I will know English by September," she said. "Please don't engage anyone else. I'll be ready to go with you and Božena by then."

I had grave doubts about her ability to accomplish such a feat, but I couldn't discourage her. At least it would give her a few months of study and a new interest, and that could do her no harm.

Toward the end of August Rudolf Meyer went to Prague on one of his regular inspections. In his presence Milada waited on a group of Americans entirely in English, with an adequate vocabulary and a good Berlitz accent, and she completed her exhibition with a sizable sale. When the Americans had gone, he engaged her for the London trip on the spot.



A few weeks later Milada Beranová, Božena Krásná and I reached London and presented ourselves at the Regent Street shop. Rudolf Meyer was there ahead of us, full of his own plans. Both of these two beautiful Czech girls attracted the attention of everyone who met them, but they did nothing to encourage the advances made on all sides. They found a small apartment for themselves in Kensington and turned their attention to the wearisome business of getting the new shop in running order.

There is little point in laboring the details of those three months in London. This London branch of Carlsbad Crystal was attached to a large English glass and china shop. The staff of English salesgirls made no impression on us. They represented the average type of London clerk. They were negligent in their personal appearance, and as we learned in the dressing room at the rear of the shop, not to be compared from a sanitary point of view with the cultural minimum of our Czech people in the same social position.

It was the year of the BUY BRITISH campaign. When Milada and Božena heard the girls in our shop advising English customers not to buy the glass they were supposed to be selling because it wasn't made in Britain, they decided their usefulness in London was at an end.

British impassivity (we called it British in those days, being unable to distinguish between Welsh, Scotch, English and Irish) made all of us feel uncomfortable. It was so impressive I was almost ready to believe the English were inevitably right. Eventually I discovered that their silence usually hid nothing more than ignorance. But then, sometimes it hid tremendous knowledge and even compassion. The trouble was, you could never be sure. I have come to know England much better now, but I must still insist after careful consideration that London is the only city I have ever lived in which made me feel an inconsequential alien, and what was worse, that I had no right to complain about it.

One month after Božena and Milada went back to Prague, I followed them. I reported to Antonín Hardt, telling him that I considered my mission in London finished, since the shop was in perfect working order and the English partners were prepared to replace me there. Now I awaited his further orders. His reply showed me that he already knew about the internal affairs of the London branch. He went on to tell me what had been happening to Carlsbad Crystal during my absence.

Against the better judgment of the rest of the managing board, Bělský and Rudolf Meyer had pushed through a proposition to open an enormous shop on a dead side street in Prague to handle a cheaper line of glass because they felt the demand for luxury goods had disappeared in the depression. My old branch on Příkopy had been losing heavily.

As I listened I felt torn with a sharp pain. Something beautiful was being

smashed into small pieces, something I had nurtured and loved. For all his impressive façade of careful calculation, Hardt seemed to know how I felt. He went on to tell me that Gründlich and Fischer of the Bohemian Ceramic Works had expressed their readiness to join this new branch on Revoluční třída with their own goods, as partners in the enterprise, on the stipulation that I take over its management.

It was a while before I said anything. Then: “You know the position in which you place me?”

“Perhaps. What is in your mind?”

“You are putting me on a spot where everyone in Prague can watch me break my own neck. I haven’t the least interest in a cheap line of glass or china. It means that my old branch on Příkopy will be my competitor. A shop on Revoluční třída will be a dead end, leading nowhere.”

Then he said something which I was never able to forget. “A street doesn’t make a shop, but a shop *can* make a street.”

It was a spur, as he doubtless knew it would be. I had no alternative. “You called me from Paris,” I said, “and I don’t think you’ve regretted it. Now I’ll show you that a shop *can* make a street.”

So I went down to look over the place on Revoluční třída. It was too large, too bare, too unfriendly. Hardt had led me to believe that I was still senior to Jiří Mašek and could have the two girls from Příkopy if I wanted them. But Mašek thought otherwise. In the eyes of all the employees in the factory at Carlsbad, as well as those in the branches, my appointment as manager of this shop which would handle a lower grade of goods was a setback. When I asked Božena and Milada if they wanted to transfer to my new shop, Božena refused without a second’s thought. With a smile of apology she tried to explain that she felt she was better fitted to sell luxury goods.

Two of my old staff requested their transfer to Revoluční třída. Novotný and Beranová helped me put it in order, and though Novotný cursed day after day about the entire project, there was between the three of us a feeling of comradeship. Together we had built something, and together we could do it again. While Novotný made extra shelves and got the stock in order for an advertised opening, Milada and I went to the Bohemian Ceramic Works to study the details of china manufacturing.

The factory was a large building, sitting squarely beside a reservoir in a wide valley of northern Bohemia near the German border some miles beyond Carlsbad. The extensive buildings were white and very clean, in command of all the landscape roundabout, and tremendously busy. Rosenthal, the famous German ceramic master, had built this factory in 1922 here in a Bohemian valley for the purpose of entering not only the Czechoslovak market itself, but also the extensive export market open to Czechoslovakian goods. His scheme

failed and in a short time he sold out to the Associated Bank, in conjunction with another private banking house. The factory was still manned entirely by Reich Germans from Saxony and Bavaria.

Whereas I had been told nothing and shown nothing at the Carlsbad Crystal Factories, we were now subjected to an appalling efficiency in pouring facts into our heads. We might have been mental defectives, so minute and elementary was the instruction. For two weeks we let them give us piecemeal the secrets of china manufacturing and promotion, listening quietly and hiding the disdain we felt for their inability to realize that we both had sufficient sales experience as well as imagination to enable us to do without their long exhortations.

It was during these two weeks, when we were left to our own devices at the end of the day, that I came to know a little more about Milada's life before we had met. She was born, and had always lived in Zizkov, a suburb of Prague. It was a district inhabited chiefly by workers and small tradespeople who were strong Czech nationalists, even in the days of the empire. Her father had been a wood carver and he had died when she was quite small. After his death her mother, left with four children, had gone through a fight to keep them, even as my own mother had struggled for the sake of her one child.

These facts came out little by little, for Milada was never inclined to speak of herself unless I pressed her. Winter lay over the valley during our two weeks at the china works, so we had little to do but sit before the fire at the inn and talk.

As long as she could remember, she had been the weakest of the four children. When the International Red Cross came to Prague in 1918 to select the neediest children of the half-starved former empire for care, she was sent by this organization to Switzerland to recuperate and learn what fruits and milk and butter and eggs tasted like, and how they could turn small, emaciated bodies into healthy, happy children.

Milada was one of the most tranquil and deeply happy persons I have ever known. She seemed to have an inner spring of confidence and poise that welled up to succor others whenever they became parched with disappointment and worry. Probably at no time would the ten years' difference in our ages have seemed so great as the time when she went to Switzerland. I was in uniform in Salonika in those days. Had I encountered her then she would have seemed a funny, skinny little girl with yellow pigtails and hollow cheeks. Now she was very beautiful. Her cheekbones were prominent still, but they gave her sleek features the look of a highly-bred international beauty. Even the way she sat easily and gracefully in a chair, with the fire throwing dancing lights into her cornflower eyes, bespoke the self-possession so natural in a Czech girl of her background.

When her schooling was over she became an apprentice in a needlework shop. Then she was offered an opportunity to work in the Příkopy branch of Carlsbad Crystal. After that she had no wish to do anything else. She had been a member of the Sokol, and a love of Czech independence had been strongly embedded in her mind from childhood. I knew that many men admired her. I also knew that she had been given ample opportunities both in London and in Prague to work at higher wages in larger establishments. Yet there was no trace of bargaining in her manner and no hint of coquetry. She was unlike any other woman I had ever known.

During the hours of our work her manner toward me was strictly formal and impersonal. Yet there was no doubt about the degree of our dependence upon each other. She made no overtures, but she responded simply and naturally to my interest and the evidences of my deep attachment. Asking nothing for herself, giving generously of her warm nature to anyone in need, she was yet too independent to fall permanently into anyone else's shadow. No one made the mistake twice of trying to take advantage of her. So she was at once simple and complex, beautiful enough to demand a man's soul with an expectation of getting it, and yet ready to give encouragement and affection with never a thought of reward.

Those two weeks out of time at the Bohemian Ceramic Works were a strange interim for me. We watched the clay go into great mixing vats, we watched the fires burn hot under it; we saw the stuff mixed and stirred and shaken and poured and pressed, all by machinery. We learned how it was molded and shaped by hand, and then how it was baked, glazed, painted and heated again, and finally inspected and packed. Sometimes I caught Milada's eye when one of the managers tried to tell us what fine plates these were, or what extraordinary cups those were, and how we must push this or that pattern. Most of it looked dull and commonplace, and some of the patterns were downright ugly. But our opinions were not requested and would have been unwelcome had they been offered. The great vats of cream-colored mud continued to be mixed and poured and molded and baked.

And all the time I was falling in love. Because it was unlike anything I had called love before, I failed to recognize what was happening to me. I simply thought I was extraordinarily happy. If Milada knew how I felt, she gave no sign.

Toni and I had been divorced some time before and she had married again. Once or twice I had seen her in a crowd in Prague, but her embarrassment over these encounters was obvious, so we had avoided conversation. The idea of marrying again had never crossed my own mind. When I thought about my three years with Toni, it was only to conclude that marriage was a state of affairs for which I was unfit. Karel Berounský had infected me with some of

his sharpest cynicism on the subject. Milada would certainly marry some day, but until I was faced with the fact, I refused to think about it. I did make the mental reservation that the man of her choice had better be one who could take good care of her. No man had any right to marry unless he had everything in the world to offer a woman, and nothing to gain from such a partnership. I held a firm conviction on that point.

On the last day before our scheduled return to Prague, Milada and I were in Gründlich's office. While he talked with her in pedantic polysyllables about matters which she already knew by heart, I wandered across the room to a case full of china. In a corner of the top shelf I found one plate and a single bouillon cup which attracted my attention. I picked them up and studied their lovely shape, their ivory glaze and the fine platinum ribbon which was their only ornament. There was nothing of the *gutes deutsches Geschirr* in these pieces. They were the only ones I had seen in the factory on which the mark of uniform German taste was missing. Here at last was something of real beauty.

I carried them across the room and placed them on the desk before Milada. She said nothing, but from the slight movement about the corners of her mouth I knew she agreed with me. Gründlich watched us with puzzled interest. I asked him if this pattern would be included in our stock. He replied that the samples were troublesome and objectionable.

"But why?" I said. "They are very fine and they should sell well."

"No," he persisted. "They were suggested by an American representative who thought his countrymen would like them. Americans are strange, you know. We don't make them up for Europeans. They are too *übertrieben* . . . too extravagant.

"I agree with you, Herr Gründlich. But I should nevertheless like to have them for the Prague showroom."

He began to protest with gestures. He gave me a lecture on salesmanship. When he had finished I informed him that I considered it advisable for the man who sold the goods to decide what he must have, not someone sitting in an office in a factory. He gathered without my putting the thought into words that I was tired of accepting his German domination. Compromise had gone far enough.

"Of course," he said. "If you insist . . ."

Whether or not I had those samples seemed a small matter at the time. I had persisted for the reason that I admired them, as well as to show Gründlich that I could not be bullied. It was the first showdown between his superiority complex and my own conviction of strength based upon past experience. From then on, I received fewer lectures at his hands.

## CHAPTER XXXVII



THE official opening of the shop on Revoluční třída was anything but gay. Novotný, Milada and I tried to pretend that everything was fine and that we were going to make a success of it, but no one came. We rattled around among the cases and tables, watching streetcars go by the door and almost nobody go by on foot, even to look in our windows. It was only Milada's brave smile that kept us from losing hope.

Four days later, a surprising thing happened. While I was working in my office at the rear of the shop, Milada came to tell me that we had three distinguished visitors. When I followed her into the salesroom I found Chief of Protocol Strimpl with two women. He introduced me first to Madame Hana Benešová, the wife of Dr. Edvard Beneš, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and then to his own wife. I was deeply embarrassed to be found on Revoluční třída surrounded by inferior glass and china. I assumed that Strimpl had made a mistake in bringing the wife of the Minister of Foreign Affairs to this shop instead of to the branch on Příkopy, but I tried to cover my dismay by showing the best pieces of crystal and china we had.

Madame Benešová is a shy, disarmingly gracious person. In a few moments I was talking to her naturally, forgetting my surroundings. She said she had heard a great deal about my glass from members of the diplomatic corps. She had asked Minister Strimpl to bring her here, to see the new shop and to meet me in person.

As though she were reading my thoughts, Milada handed me the plate and cup with the fine platinum band which we had brought from the Bohemian Works. There was no question of a sale. Madame Benešová examined the two pieces with interest and we talked about their understatement of design. We went on to discuss the part china and glass were playing in Czechoslovak industry as a whole. After an hour or so the party left.

Two days later Stretti-Zamponi, a noted Czech painter who served as artistic advisor to the Foreign Office, appeared in the shop, asking to see the pieces of china mentioned by Madame Benešová. I brought out the plate and bouillon cup once more. He examined them carefully and then told me that the Černín Palace on Hradčany was being remodeled for the use of the Foreign Office. He thought this china set would be appropriate for state banquets.

So administrative red tape began to unwind. Eventually not only the china, but also a set of crystal designed by Lorentz Meyer at my request was purchased by the Foreign Office for their new quarters. Shortly afterwards I was informed that every Czechoslovak Legation in the world was to be

furnished with a complete set of the same china and crystal; in the future they were to be considered state tableware of the republic.

From then on the tempo of our days began to increase rapidly. An international convention of Rotary Clubs was held in Prague that summer of 1931, and while it lasted our shop was crowded with customers. New salesgirls were hired and I found it necessary to engage a personal secretary.

There was a wide variety of names on our order blanks during the next six months. I recall Dr. Morris Fishbein of the American Medical Association; His Excellency Abdel Fattah Yehia Pasha, Minister of Foreign Affairs for Egypt; Robert Igoe, an American politician who bought two crystal decanters for Mayor Cermak of Chicago; Jarmila Novotná, Feodor Chaliapin, and Emil Ludwig; Count Karszo-Sidlewski, the most charming of the Polish diplomats; Minister Charles-Roux of France and Madame Charles-Roux, a fanatic collector of ruby-gold flacons; Lord and Lady Selsdon, those two good people who later became great personal friends as a result of this chance visit to our shop; Principe San Severino and the principessa, who brought the whole Italian colony with them from time to time to share their passion for glass; Lord Nevil Fairhaven in his Rolls Royce and his insouciance that made the girls sigh in his wake; Minister Roberto Blasquez of Mexico, who countermanded whatever his wife ordered with a different choice of his own; Francis Marion from Hollywood; and Mrs. Helen Burton, whose antique shop in Peiping was known to the world of travelers.

Our staff was enlarged to seven. And now it was fashionable to find one's way to this unfashionable street to buy glass and china. Limousines bearing the flags of every country represented in Prague drove up before our door. Shiny black motors of the rich found ample space to park in the vicinity. We were far busier than we had ever dreamed of being in the shop on Příklad. I had proved to Antonín Hardt that his words were true. A shop could make a street.

It was not that Bohemian glass was a new fad. It was a folk-craft centuries old. Now I watched it begin to circulate throughout the world, to become ever more widely recognized for its artistic merit. I felt as a musician must feel when he discovers lost manuscripts from a forgotten period in the culture of his people, and through his own direction is able to bring them to life again. Perhaps I even knew a measure of the kind of excitement that was Diaghilev's when he took the design of the ballet which had been used by nameless people in his own country for centuries, and showed it forth for the delight of the whole world through the conscious art of Nijinsky. The relationship between music and glass, in its rhythm as well as in its forms, kept growing in my mind.

Unlike music and the ballet, which can be enjoyed by anyone with the price of admission to a concert, glass must be possessed, by the very nature of

its function. And to possess the finest glass, a good deal of money is necessary. So the public which became familiar with our products was relatively small, limited by income. And that made me sad. Not once, not a dozen times, but hundreds of times during the next years I was impelled to quote a lower price on a piece of glass or china when someone who could obviously not afford what they wanted came into the shop just to look, and then remained to admire. I could never quite forget the shopgirls in Smichov who had made sacrifices in their own small way in order to buy some of Mother's handwork, and the manner in which she had invariably convinced them that her prices were lower than they had expected them to be.

It was partially due to the fame of our customers that the renown of our products spread, but partially only. In a large measure it was the potential of the glass itself which formed a ground where I could meet our customers, a meeting ground out of which grew relationships that were commercial in a secondary sense only.

Some nine or ten months after we opened, Jiří Mašek came to see me. It was our first encounter since my return to Prague from London. He announced his decision to give up any further hope of competing with me. His resignation had already gone to the bank and to the Carlsbad Crystal Factories. He had scarcely left the shop when a call came through from Carlsbad. Rudolf Meyer informed me that the Příkopy branch was now under my orders; I could go back there as manager if I liked, or I could hire a new one to succeed Mašek and stay where I was. In either event, both shops would be under my control.

All that night I stayed awake making plans, and the next day I asked Milada to take over the management of the Příkopy branch. Much as I would miss her help and the comfort of her presence on Revoluční třída, I wanted her to have wider experience on her own, and I believed we could make both branches pay.

We went back to Příkopy together that same afternoon. When we entered the tiny shop I felt as though we were returning home after a long journey. The shelves of beautiful crystal still sparkled along the walls, taking all the light in the room unto themselves. A salesgirl I had not seen before mistook us for customers, and a man was partially visible in the back room, probably Novotný's successor. And there was also beautiful Božena Krásná.

Her smile was as wide and extravagantly lovely as ever, and her *sang-froid* was unimpaired, quite as though there had been no question of her disloyalty less than a year before. Because she had received nothing but admiration from men all her life, she expected nothing else under any circumstance. One could only take her on her own terms. If she wasn't ashamed, there was no need for me to be. I told her and the rest of the staff that Beranová was the new manager of the shop, under my orders. They could stay on if they chose, but loyalty



would be demanded of them all and I would accept nothing less.

They agreed to stay, but within a few months Božena turned in her notice, telling us she expected to marry a wealthy hotel proprietor. I saw her once or twice after that riding in his fine car, and I heard her mentioned as one of Prague's beauties. Then one day Milada told me that Božena was dead. She had been rushed to the hospital for an emergency operation a week before her marriage and she had never regained consciousness.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII



FROM the day the shop on Revoluční třída opened I kept a business record of our customers. The first booklet was a small, black-covered affair which seemed adequate for the purpose. Within a few weeks it was replaced by another of more generous size, and then they grew into a file of notebooks, filled with names and addresses and marginal notes on each order. I still have those records. They are filled with long lists of familiar names, famous names, names of men who are dead, and names that evoke some of the richest memories of my life. A few of our customers were rogues and some were parvenus, and some, even without their titles, were noblemen. A great many of those names are still to be seen on the front pages of the daily press.

It takes only a little while, in dealing with men and women upon whom the world has put the finger of fame, to cease thinking of them as personages. They are simply human beings, good and bad, kind or cruel, warped and free. And yet among the thousands whom I met and served in the course of the next six or seven years, I found singularly few who were devoid of some virtue. Perhaps it was the medium over which we met that brought out the best in us all. Crowding my memory as they do today, I could wish to speak of them all one by one, in a vain attempt to bring back the sense of those years. But it would do no one any good. I can choose only a few to reproduce here, as one would choose old friends to talk to in a crowded room when only a small portion of those present can possibly meet and converse in the allotted time of one party.

One day a remarkably old but still vital man came into the shop, followed by a rather shy young woman. He wore a leather jacket and rough trousers, and he carried a knobby stick. He might well have been a farmer, in town for the day. As he accustomed his eyes to the change of light from the street he looked around at the tables, and then he walked straight to the case where the finest hand-engraved pieces were kept together. He picked up one after another, saying nothing as he inspected them carefully, turning each one in the light.

There was an incongruity between this burly man with no finesse of manner and the delicate pieces of crystal in his heavy hands. Yet he caressed each one as though he loved it and understood the workmanship that had gone into its completion, and once he called to the young woman with him to point out to her something he particularly admired.

I was tremendously interested in the old man. In a way, he made me think of my grandfather. I knew better than to interrupt his pleasure by any comments of my own. He knew as much about fine crystal as I did. After awhile I asked if he would care to see my own collection, and showed them the way to my office, where I kept a small case of rarely lovely pieces. For two hours more we talked about glass, and then he rose to leave. At the door he turned, as though he had nearly forgotten his original errand, and gave me a very large order for one of our finest sets. When I took his name I discovered that he was Antonín Švehla, the Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia and leader of the Agrarian party. The woman with him was his daughter, Madame Černá, wife of the Minister of the Interior.

The following day Madame Černá came again to bring me a small parcel from her father. When I opened it I found a priceless tumbler of Milton glass. He begged me to add it to my collection.

As a result of those two hours of conversation with a man I greatly admired, a new idea grew in my mind. After I had worked it out I wrote to the Ceramic Works, suggesting the innovation of a line of small porcelain figures representative of Slovak and Czech peasants, similar to Copenhagen figurines. Over a period of several months I studied a collection of photographs and paintings, gradually developing the designs I wanted. The factory was willing to try the new venture and eventually we brought out a series of these small porcelain peasants. The first group I sent as a gift to Prime Minister Švehla. In a short time they became collectors' items.

It was during this first year that I received a call one day asking me to leave for Carlsbad without delay. The King and Queen of Siam desired to be shown through the crystal factories. When I reached their hotel to escort them on the tour, I met Jan Masaryk for the first time. As we followed the royal party to the waiting cars he explained in an aside that he knew me better than I thought. Wherever he went over the world, he said, the subject of glass, the pride of Czechoslovakia's industry, arose. And lately whenever Czechoslovak glass was mentioned, my name was coupled with it.

Jan Masaryk was our minister to the Court of St. James's in those days. The son of the founder of our state, he has never made the slightest attempt to trade on his great name. By his own abilities he has made a career for himself, and the stamp of his personality remains in his wake. I have found in him the charm of a man who could meet any stranger, anywhere, by dissolving all

stiffness in a situation through a handshake or a joke. He is also a man who has never forgotten his friends.

The following day I received an order from the King of Siam for a complete set of china and glass for their manor in England, the designs to be of my choice. In a little while the incident was forgotten in the press of new customers and a rapid expansion of orders from all over the world. I lived completely in and for the shop. After closing hours I worked on until Milada came to remind me that it was time to eat. Since the death of her mother—a kindly, self-effacing woman who had come to the shop one day to meet me and then had gone straight into a hospital for a last operation—Milada and I had drawn even closer in understanding.

So the days and weeks and months and years ticked away. During this time I can truly say that I was never bored and that I never felt I had lost a day. In retrospect it is difficult to sort out dates and years and remember which event came before another. From this distance I doubt that it matters. The list of famous names in the record books grew longer. Almost daily the Foreign Office called to say that we could expect a visit from this or that diplomatic personality who had expressed a desire to see our place. I could quote lists from the books, but the very act of putting them down would imply an importance in my mind which, as personages, they never occupied.

All around me now was the turmoil of compliments and expressions of admiration, punctuated by invitations to dinner and cocktails and tea, and still fancier parties. Sometimes I accepted the invitations, but more often I did not. Milada's company was all I wanted as soon as the shop closed. She knew I was only a normal human being who happened to be in love with the color and rhythm of the materials I handled, as well as very much in love with her.

It was as though I were in a canoe which I had pushed away from shore. The act of pushing had been mine, but once the small craft entered the current, it was no longer my own force which took me on. I could make a mistake and upset the balance of the boat and fall into the water. Or I could learn to steer and let the water carry me forward. Bohemian glass was the clear, rushing stream. After awhile the shores spread farther apart, and the horizon grew wider and wider. But I had no intention of making the mistake of thinking it was my own power which propelled me. My job was to keep my balance, and let the current have its way.

More and more often now I was being asked to suggest individual patterns to suit the taste of a surprising variety of people. The Egyptian government forwarded a large order for a complete set of china and glass for their Foreign Office. They asked me to design the set. After some study of the lore of the country I decided to emphasize the color sacred to Mohammed. The china was green, banded along its fluted edges with gold, and the purple crown of the

King of Egypt decorated the center. When the crystal was designed to match, it made a fairly impressive display.

And then there was the lotus pattern. (In point of time, it was somewhat later.) The Nizam of Hyderabad, through his Minister Ali Yavan Jung, asked me to suggest a design for a set of tableware for his palace in India. The Minister had with him two ornamental flower paintings from the Mogul period, intended as gifts for King George VI and Queen Elizabeth at their coronation. From a study of these intricate designs I derived a sense of the importance of the lotus flower in Indian lore. After a series of sketches, I finally made one that I liked, sent it to the factory and told them what I wanted. The china was to be ivory, clear and pale. The effect was to be of a flower resting in moonshine on a still lake. I asked Gründlich to turn my orders over to the designer, and the artist understood what I wanted. I was delighted with the result.

Another pattern which remains in my memory as one of the most successful of all my projected ideas was one that involved Russia in 1934, when she was still considered something of a barbaric state in the rest of Europe. Shortly after Czechoslovakia signed her first trade agreement with the U.S.S.R., the Soviet representative in Prague, M. Alexandrovski, became their Minister Plenipotentiary. Almost as soon as the announcement appeared in the press I decided to reach out for a Russian order. Until that time we had never received any of the Soviet diplomatic corps in our show room.

The problem, it seemed to me, was to create models in glass and china which could be presented to the new Minister as suitable pieces for his official table. Somehow I must combine sentiment and politics in one design. But how? The possibility of getting such an order was slight, yet it pleased me to stretch for such an ambitious goal.

The military helmet worn by the Soviet armies, Asiatic in curve and reminiscent of the Tartars, intrigued my imagination. Turned upside down, it could easily become the shape of a drinking glass . . . plain, simple, unadorned. So the glass was made, with only a small hammer, sickle and star engraved on one of its facets. Then I planned a china plate. It would be ivory glaze, also unadorned except for the finest hairline of platinum around the inside ring of the plate. A delicate hammer, sickle and star would be painted in platinum on the flange, to match the design on the glass. The effect was deliberately cold and puritanical, but sharply beautiful.

When the samples came from the factory I set about composing a thirty-page brochure in which I described the quality of the articles, the technical details of the workmanship that had gone into them, the deliberate intentions of the designer. I remarked on their literary qualities, pointing out how their plainness, their lack of ostentatious decoration, their hard brilliance, their

emphasis on unspoiled material seemed to me to be representative of the country which M. Alexandrovski represented. I even added that I had deliberately avoided the obvious and ordinary use of gold for the coat-of-arms because of the symbolic idea of gold which clung to the mind of the rest of the world.

When the treatise was finished I had it bound handsomely. I ordered the construction of a case lined with red velvet which would contain one plate and one goblet. Then I showed the presentation to Hardt. He laughed in my face. He kept asking how I expected to persuade the Bolsheviks to stop using tin plates and cups in favor of glass and china. Perhaps it was a lot to ask of a bank director, but in the end he made no move to stop me.

So I made an appointment with Alexandrovski and presented the velvet-lined box and the booklet. He was undeniably excited. He kept repeating that he was going to Moscow the next day; I had come at an opportune moment; he would take the samples to the Kremlin as evidences of Czech culture and good will. Then he quieted down and discussed the enlarged opportunities for trade between our two countries.

Within the next two weeks we entertained a succession of Russian visitors in the showroom. We also received letters from diplomats of the U.S.S.R. posted in distant countries. Before many months we had furnished sets of china and crystal for Soviet embassies and legations in Budapest, Athens, Tokyo, Rome, Brussels, London, Oslo, Bucharest, Sofia, Prague, Ankara and Warsaw. However, only the last three chose the pattern I had thought most fitting for the martial mood and frugal manner of entertainment which I presumed prevailed in all Russian embassies and legations. Obviously I was wrong. The others ordered glass and china patterns that were heavy with gold and Byzantine designs, certainly neither puritanical nor plain.

In all these years I received only one order for a design which I was unable to fulfill. Prince Mohammed Ali sent word from Cairo that he would like me to suggest a pattern in glass for a tombstone which would completely cover his grave. I replied with regret that I had no suggestions to offer. Perhaps as a sop to us both he ordered a series of crystal lamps for his private mosque, which were made in due course and sent to Egypt.

The economic section of our Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested an outline of my wishes for the glass and china industry in a new trade agreement which was being drawn up with Switzerland and Austria. I knew what my wishes were and I gave them in detail.

It was later in the same year that I was granted permission by the bank and the two factories to make a trip into the Balkans and the Middle East to introduce the glass and china of Czechoslovakia to new markets. The names of the two firms which I represented would not be stressed; I made it clear that I

wanted to speak for these products as representatives of Czechoslovak industry in a way that had never before been done.

First I went to Sofia by way of the Orient Express. Our legation there had been informed of my intentions well in advance of my arrival. The city surprised me because it was so definitely of the East. Before I got through the customs shed and into a cab I had been forced to grease the palms of everyone from the customs inspector to a soldier guarding the exit. At the large exhibition which was opened in the Hotel Grande Bulgarie, officers swept through the rooms in capes that touched their heels. Queen Giovanna of Bulgaria pleased everyone concerned when she placed a sizable order for the palace. The rest of the government followed suit.

For two weeks our products were exhibited at the Grande Bretagne in Athens. Madame Veniselos gave us her patronage and Samuel Insull, who was also in the hotel at that time, did not. I remember those two weeks best for the hours I spent on the Acropolis and all the evenings I wandered through Piraeus after my official duties were over. I ate in sailors' canteens, watched fishing boats prepare to leave at dawn, and wandered around the docks, trying to drink in the salty, tough flavor of the port. To one who had grown up in the center of a continent, nothing on earth is so strange.

Then I went to Cairo and once again the exhibition had to be set up in the largest hotel, this time the Continental. It was hot and late in the season and I was tired. And yet I would allow no one else to unpack the cases, wash each piece, arrange the tables with proper linen and flowers, and see to every last detail. It would have been far wiser of me to have hired help, but I never believed that anyone but Milada was as capable as I in these matters. Someone might drop a cigarette ash on one of the fine pieces of linen, or break a goblet from the souvenir collection. So I did all the work myself, laboring through whole nights before the exhibitions were scheduled to open. I was driven from within and I could do nothing else.

## CHAPTER XXXIX



THOUGH I saw no political issue in the work I was doing, I definitely believed that through glass and china I could help release some of the long-stifled potential of my country. My good fortune lay in the fact that my work was part of a wider and more significant national pattern. The more I came to realize this, the more pleasure I took in the long and painstaking hours I gave to it.

It was no longer merely the glass of Carlsbad Crystal, or the china of the

Bohemian Ceramic Works that I was selling. These were the products of Czechoslovakia's highest form of folk art and I was the custodian for their future appreciation throughout the world. As this conviction grew, I decided that my glass and china must have a home which would give it a fitting background, a place where it could be seen to full advantage, surroundings commensurate with the pride I felt in this aspect of my country's future.

Toward the end of 1933 I learned that the private banking firm which had for many years occupied the second floor above the shop on Příkopy was about to move into a new building of its own. As soon as the news reached me I went to the superintendent of the building and got him to show me through the empty rooms.

This old patrician house had been built and occupied for many years by a man named Leon Bondy who had been president of the Prague Chamber of Commerce and one of the wealthiest industrialists in the former empire. In spite of the fact that the house had been converted to other uses, the marks of his expensive taste were still upon it. All the rooms on the second floor had enormously high ceilings, for one thing. They were masterworks of hand-carving, and the windows were high, Gothic apertures filled with hand-painted Bohemian glass of ruby colors. The walls were composed of hand-carved mahogany panels and the floors were laid with some of the finest parquetry in the whole of Europe. Outside the ruby-glass windows a balcony of medieval wrought iron ran the width of the house in front.

Bondy had been one of the most notable collectors of glass in the Austrian Empire. So in the large main room at the front of the second floor, which he had used as a banquet hall, the wood panels were carved with the shapes of famous old Bohemian drinking goblets. I had known the rooms were spacious and beautiful, but I had never before seen this carving, or known of its existence. When I saw it my plans were settled. I walked through the rooms, one by one, refurnishing them in my mind. I was almost breathless with excitement, but I made notes of all the changes that would be necessary and considered every minute detail before I prepared to lay my plans before Hardt.

During the occupancy by the bank many desecrations had been committed in the lovely old rooms. Heating pipes had been installed directly through the priceless parquet floors to connect with ugly radiators that defiled their surroundings. Electric wires had been hung carelessly on the wood carvings along the walls, and doors of valuable hand-carved mahogany had been removed from their hinges and stacked in corners, to give easier access for the bank traffic. All this unsightly devastation would have to be repaired and righted. And I must also think of a way to unite the downstairs shop with this upper floor.

I was deliriously happy when I finally went across the street to call on

Antonín Hardt. He listened to my proposition without interruption until I had given him every detail for this new combined showroom which would eliminate the shop on Revoluční třída. I watched his sphinxlike face carefully as I talked, but there was neither encouragement nor displeasure to be found in its expression.

He began to remind me that there was a depression in Czechoslovakia, a backwash from America. Factories were panic-struck because they thought they had lost the luxury trade forever. They were turning to cheaper goods, and both our factories were still inclined to doubt that I could keep up our luxury trade much longer.

My grandfather's stubborn refusal to leave his handwork for mass production was echoed in my answer. I told Mr. Hardt that I had no intention of losing what we had built up. I was in no fear of joining the panic as it spread over the world. I felt it was up to us to keep cool and not rush for an exit because a fire had broken out. We would either find an easier way out or the fire would be quenched.

Hardt countered by saying that it was possible the crisis would become a chronic state of affairs. I replied that we would then accommodate ourselves to it. All the other factories in the country had joined in the rush to produce a cheaper line of goods. With fewer competitors there was no reason why our own production should not continue to climb steadily. And that meant we would be the sole representatives of the best glass and china in the country. Our wares deserved a proper setting.

"I suppose you realize that the shop you want to open would be unlike anything in the whole of Central Europe?" he said at last.

"Yes," I replied. "But it will be known as a showroom. Never a shop. I don't want it to be like any other. It will be a museum."

"I don't believe you can get people to walk upstairs to buy goods. Shops have to open directly off the street."

I waited a moment, to take the critical edge off my reply. "If I could bring people to Revoluční třída, don't you think I can find a way to make them walk upstairs? I want a beautiful stairway built from the old shop to connect with a reception room above. I'll keep the two small showcases on the street, to hold a few choice pieces. Perhaps we'll have an awning from the door to the curb, and a uniformed doorman. Why not? It's never been done before in Prague, but all the more reason to do it now and give added distinction to our glass and china."

There was the play of a faint smile at the corners of his mouth, almost as though I were a headstrong lad of seventeen instead of a man of thirty-seven. "Have you considered how much it would cost to remodel the building in the way you describe?" he said.



"I've consulted a contractor," I said. "According to his estimate it would be in the neighborhood of two hundred thousand crowns."

He thought about this for a time. It was an enormous figure, considered in terms of relative value. But I must have managed to transfer some of my own high enthusiasm to this cool banker as I went on talking. He promised to lay the proposition before the board of directors of the bank and let me know as soon as they reached a decision. I knew he would be my ally throughout the discussion.

Less than a week later I was in Hardt's office again. The board had decided that my project was sound. Both factories had given their permission to carry out my suggestions. Architects and contractors would be engaged at once, and I was to oversee their work. After explaining all this, Hardt came back to my own position in the new venture. "You've reached another dangerous corner in your career with both these firms. I suppose you know that?"

"Yes, I know."

"If this project fails, you'll lose all the credit you've accumulated up to now in both concerns. And in such a situation, since this whole project is yours, I wouldn't be able to do anything more for you. I'm sorry, but that's how it is. You've either got to make this an outstanding success, or you're finished."

I admired the man for his frankness. "I understand," I said. "If you still have confidence in me, I'll take those risks. I made a name for a street, as you said I could. Now I'll make a second-floor showroom known as the most outstanding center of glass and china in the history of the industry. Maybe in the whole world. . . ."

There was nothing more for either of us to say. I believed I could do it. The others waited to see. And the work on the building got underway.

## CHAPTER XL



ON the seventh of March, 1934, a date chosen deliberately to honor the birthday of Thomas Masaryk, the new showrooms were opened. Engraved invitations had gone out for a reception in the afternoon, and long before the appointed hour the rooms were ready. Milada and I walked through them together, inspecting everything ten times over. Karel Berounský joined us early in the afternoon, still carrying his old air of detached cynicism, but inwardly he was as pleased as the rest of us.

I have made little mention of Karel through these years. He remained my only intimate friend. Whenever I needed his advice it was given willingly, with

the same hard core of reality, but the time had passed when I needed Karel's point of view to bolster my confidence. Now I was the one to repay him from the store of enthusiasm in my nature which he needed to temper his own despair. As my political consciousness came into focus, we grew ever closer to a point of mutual agreement, though always I found I could test my ideas on the steel of his realism and come away with sharpened wits as a result.

The banquet hall glowed with a diffused brilliance on that opening afternoon. Pipes, radiators and unseemly wires were gone now, replaced by invisible technical devices. The wooden paneling had been cleaned to a mat finish, the ruby-glass windows brought in a faint color from the fading daylight outside. Underneath was the splendid design of the polished parquet floors, much too fine to cover with rugs. Overhead, from the center of the high, carved ceiling hung one of the most lustrous crystal chandeliers in the whole of Europe. There were six thousand handmade pieces in it. This chandelier, together with all our lighting fixtures, had been put in free of charge by the best lamp factory in Bohemia; they hoped by such an introduction to place their products in foreign markets, and their efforts were eventually well rewarded.

Along the far wall of the banquet hall glass shelves had been built to house our museum pieces. Down the center of the room were several long tables with black glass tops, covered now with exquisite linen banquet cloths. The largest Czech manufacturer of textiles in Silesia had begged permission to supply us with his linen. In time he was also rewarded with heavy orders. On each of these tables Milada had arranged a dinner setting to show to advantage various of our best designs. The wealth of spring flowers on the tables made the room gay in color and sweet to smell.

There were nine other rooms on the same floor. A winding stairway led from the small room that had once been our only shop to a reception hall which we had furnished in the manner of a library, with tables, deep chairs, lamps and reading matter. The reception room opened into the banquet hall, and beyond this great room were two more showrooms, each with linen-covered tables on which sets could be displayed. Opening from the other side of the reception hall was the administration wing. Five secretaries occupied one large office, file clerks and bookkeepers another. Novotný had a spacious sunny office at the back of the building, with storerooms adjacent where his five assistants kept order.

Our kitchen was an innovation for Prague. It was fully equipped with stove, chairs and tables, and any member of the staff could go there at any hour of the day for relaxation, a smoke or a cup of tea. It created more of a sensation among the factory and bank officials than any other feature of the new establishment. They were almost equally impressed by Milada's staff of six

beautiful society girls, each in command of at least three languages. My secretaries were all language specialists, as well.

Of all the rooms, my own office was the smallest and contained the least furniture. My desk was the one I had first used in the old shop downstairs and the two chairs on either side of it were straight and unpadded. One glass case stood against a wall to hold a few sample pieces, and that was all there was to it. My living quarters were almost as plain. They consisted of two small rooms at the rear of the same building.

As the hour of the reception drew closer, this afternoon of the opening, I remembered my persistent feeling that music and glass have a common affinity through their rhythm and form; even the designs engraved on glass were like melodies in music. Whatever the world of trade might call me—salesman or super-showman—I felt like a conductor who was about to present to the world, through the medium of many musicians, a program of priceless beauty. My musicians were the craftsmen who had created the china and glass.

This was analogous to the moment before the lights in a concert hall wink as a warning call to stragglers, and then after a pause start to dim, throwing the focus of attention on the stage. The musicians in the orchestra are ready, the audience sighs and waits, and the conductor raises his baton. During the space of a second or two the audience watches him almost as though he were an enemy. Who is this man, they think; can he please us? Is he worthy of the music he has promised to play? The baton moves, the audience falls under the spell of concerted sound, the conductor knows it. From then on, audience and musicians are one.

No conductor, as he leads his orchestra, is conscious of selling the sounds his musicians make. He spends no time thinking of change rattling in the till of the box office. So it was with our exhibition in that hour when sleek black limousines began to arrive before our door. Correct, charming and sometimes effusive members of Prague society and the diplomatic corps climbed our carpeted stairs, drank tea, chatted, examined the handsome tables, and departed, only to be followed by more guests and still more. No money passed from the hands of the guests to mine; orders would come by mail at a later date; buying and selling was never mentioned. We were receiving friends in a showroom which had been conceived and executed as a monument to Czechoslovakian china and glass. I was only sorry that the musicians, the workers who had made these lovely articles, could not hear, or see, the total results of their craftsmanship.

Hour after hour I moved through the rooms that hummed with voices and smelled of flowers and furs. Reporters from local papers and magazines walked through the crowds, taking notes while beautiful women greeted distinguished men. Now and then I caught Milada's calm blue eyes across a

sea of faces. I was inordinately happy, and I could pretend to be nothing else.

## CHAPTER XLI



CALENDARS on my desk, record books of orders, dates at the top of scores of thousands of letters all told me how the years were passing, but I had no feeling of movement. Time was always the present, filled with beauty and achievement. That first year in the new rooms on Příkopy went on its way and it was 1935, then 1936, then 1937. Each year brought its own new experiences, its own widening horizons. I continued to learn and to find opportunities to express my expanding knowledge in creative forms that received ever wider attention. No man can ask more of life than that.

With it all, the boy who had spent his early years in one room in Smichov derived his own brand of amusement from the sometimes pompous, often silly, and many times kindly personages who considered themselves gracious when they allowed press photographers to take their pictures as they inspected my work. The papers had a way of considering glass as photogenic as the visitors. Without a sharp sense of humor, the balance of my small canoe could easily have been upset.

We furnished complete table settings in china and crystal for scores of embassies, legations and consulates all over the world. We were patronized by increasing numbers of Eastern potentates. Of all our customers they afforded the sharpest stimulus to my imagination, with their circumlocutions, their sumptuous robes, their oriental manners, and their extensive retinues.

I find my own brand of pleasure in recalling the day I looked upon the face of a woman who was shielded from the public gaze. The Imperial Embassy of Iran in Berlin telephoned a request for my presence in that capital. I had no wish to go to Germany for any purpose, but the request could hardly be avoided, even though I had a previous engagement with Madame Gamelin, wife of the French general. The Empress of Iran had indicated a wish to receive me for the purpose of discussing our tableware. So I made my excuses to Madame Gamelin and left on the night train.

During my entire stay in the German capital I was accompanied by a manager of Rosenthal's china factory who was also an officer of the Schutzstaffel, presumably to guard against the possibility of my making any sales outside the Iranian Embassy. At the Embassy I was met by the Chief of Protocol, and there we sat in a reception room for six and a half hours until the Empress indicated her readiness to talk with me. It was ample time in which to learn that few strangers ever looked upon the face of Her Majesty. Not even

guards at the Embassy were allowed in her presence. The curtains in the tonneau of her limousine were drawn as she drove through the streets. I was also instructed not to address the Empress directly. The Schutzstaffel man was impressed.

Late in the afternoon a door opened and I was bowed into the royal presence. I suppose I expected her to look like a vision out of the *Arabian Nights*, but what I found was a short, middle-aged woman in smart Parisian clothes, with henna-colored hair and high make-up on her olive skin. Two of her daughters were with her, shy, gazelle-like girls who dropped their heads when I made the mistake of glancing in their direction. Coffee was served, designs and colors and shapes of glasses were discussed through the Chief of Protocol, photographs were inspected, and finally the Empress indicated that she wanted a complete set of glass for her palace in Teheran, including crystal lamps for several rooms. The designs were to be of my choosing. The interview was over and I was ushered out.

Under the guise of courtesy, the man from the Gestapo invited me to dinner. I had already accepted an invitation from the Chief of Protocol, so the German joined us with no one's permission. After dinner he insisted on showing us Berlin's night clubs. I bade them both farewell when I took the morning train back to Prague.

This was the year when I was asked to select all the glass sent by Czechoslovakia to an exhibition held in the Brooklyn Museum; when some of our best pieces found their way into a permanent collection in the Sèvres Museum in France; when the Carlsbad Factories won a nationwide competition for a crystal loving cup to be given to famous visitors in Prague, as well as for sports prizes, in place of old-fashioned pewter or silver loving cups. This was the year when I opened my first exhibition in the Savoy Hotel in London and there met Queen Marie of Rumania. She was never niggardly with her charm, and she spread it around foursquare that afternoon. It was also the year when we furnished the Kabul Palace in Afghanistan with a magnificent set of china and crystal; when Myron Selznick came to talk about his Slovakian ancestors and buy Christmas gifts for a long list of Hollywood actors; when I was decorated with the officer's star of the Order of the Nile by the Egyptian government.

After the London exhibition, others were held in Vienna, in Geneva, in Bern and in Paris. More maharajahs ordered florid designs, and the number of palaces without our glass was growing less than the number of those we had furnished. Prince Regent Paul of Yugoslavia knew what he wanted for his table without hesitation. King Carol of Rumania had a difficult time making up his mind. After hours of hesitation he finally asked Crown Prince Mihai to make a choice. When the order was received, it specified that the letter *L* was

to be engraved on each piece. Lady Austen Chamberlain renewed our liking for the simple, unostentatious charm which we had learned to associate with English gentlewomen, and Lady Louis Mountbatten ordered a set of china and glass for her new home on Upper Brook Street.

So the orders followed one another, decorated with glittering names. In 1937 I went to London again, and again to Paris. King Ghazi of Iraq sent an order for his palace; so did the Sultan of Johore, whom I met in London with the Sultana. That was the summer when I was appointed a member of the International Jury for glass and jewelry at the Paris World Exposition. When I returned to Prague, Dmitri Kessel was there, taking photographs of the country for *Life* and *Time*. He went through both our factories, in Carlsbad and at the Bohemian Ceramic Works, and the results later appeared in *Fortune*.

One day Mrs. Valerie Claire Manville, mother of the well-known Tommy, came to the showroom, complaining bitterly because no one seemed to know who she was, but she ended by making all the salesgirls love her. She traveled in a cream-colored limousine with a personal maid, a chauffeur and a secretary, but she had no notion of the value of glass and said so. When she told Milada to pick out something really nice and send it to her in the United States, Milada did so gladly.

Every piece in the showroom Milada understood and treasured. When a customer came to look and stayed to admire, she felt a true pleasure in sharing her enthusiasm. Later, when those hours she gave so happily were translated into an order, the commercial aspect was sublimated for her, and she remembered usually the conversation rather than the sets purchased.

## CHAPTER XLII



I MUST explain that Rudolf Meyer had departed from the Carlsbad Crystal Factories before the opening of the big showrooms on Příklad. After he left, Bělský filled the role of commercial manager on the board and Lorentz Meyer managed the technical end of the business. Gründlich and Fischer filled identical roles at the Bohemian Ceramic Works. In my role as manager of their combined showroom in Prague, I served as a liaison between these two factories. Otherwise, they had no connection, except for the fact that the Associated Bank held controlling stock in them both.

Then in 1936 Lorentz Meyer and Bělský both resigned from Carlsbad Crystal. So long as Lorentz remained with the firm, creating new designs and accepting my suggestions whenever he thought them practical, I was content to be subordinate to the boards of management in both factories. But now I saw

two young men being appointed to replace Meyer and Bělský, two men with whom I had never worked and who knew nothing of the history of our growth in Prague.

Antonín Hardt listened when I went to tell him how I felt about the change. He agreed to discuss my position with the board of directors of the bank and give me their answer as soon as possible. I waited in anything but a sanguine state of mind. I knew I could go to Vienna any day I chose to take over the direction of Staatsmanufaktur Augarten, Austria's oldest and finest china works. They had approached me more than once. But I had no wish to go to Vienna; Austria was already palpably under the influence of Berlin. I wanted to stay in Prague, in my own country, with the glass and china I had made known throughout the world. But I did not want to be subordinate to the new appointees at Carlsbad Crystal.

Three weeks later I received notice of my appointment to a combined board of management for the Carlsbad Crystal Factories and the Bohemian Ceramic Works. My position as manager of the Prague branch remained the same, and my office on the board would be that of a liaison officer between the two factories, with full authority to implement my desires with regard to management and promotion. The possibilities for future growth in the two factories appeared limitless.

## CHAPTER XLIII



PRAGUE was a good city to live in during those years. It was a good place in itself, and it was good to me. It never seemed a two-dimensional place—so many miles in one direction by so many miles in another—but always a city of three dimensions. That was due to the use we made of the hills which encircled it. They gave one a lofty point of view.

The expanding city was still moving beyond old boundaries, alive, growing, restless, warm. This was the city of which I was an integral part, for Prague was I and I was Prague. Winter came to us in November. Once the snow fell, it lay on the ground until February, though the city streets were always clean. In March the ice on the river went out with a roar, and after that spring was a fast, newborn miracle. Fountains began to play in the parks, bulbs came up in geometric beds, grass turned green and no one dreamed of stepping on it. Lawns were sacred in Prague and so were monuments; urchins never played around marble images of our great men, nor did young girls take each other's pictures leaning against their feet. Such levity would have been unthinkable with us.

Summer meant boats on the river, rowboats, canoes, sculls, sailboats, motorboats and excursion steamers. Long rafts of logs from the Bohemian forests moved downstream with the current and pleasure craft wove patterns around them. Stout rafts bearing bathhouses were put out from the *quais*, and during hot week ends there was only the sound of splashing water along the Vltava and the swish of tires on pavements as motors carried city dwellers in all directions into the country.

Autumn brought a quickening pace to the city, a new lift to heads, a sudden resurgence of energy and determination. This was the time of year when one tended to remember old school days, to contrast them with modern institutions and countless social improvements of the past twenty years. Now we had fine new state schools, state hospitals, old-age pensions, unemployment insurance, free medical service available to every individual in the country, open-air theaters, free concerts. More and more we were welcoming representative groups of world-wide organizations who chose our city for their congresses and conventions. Prague was the color of copper-green roofs, stone walls heavy with purple shadows, yellow-haired girls with lifted heads and clear eyes, fine shops filled with expensive merchandise. It was the color of primroses and violets, lilacs and daffodils, sunshine and shade. It was the color of the mosaic tiles that formed our pavements, of the dolls dressed in Slovakian peasant costumes that were sold on corners, of our red, blue and white flag.

The texture of Prague was the texture of the rough native tweed of my jackets and my good worsted suits; it was the sharp, cool brittleness of a crystal goblet or a fine china plate. It was the brown crust of treated Slovakian cheese sold by vendors on Václavské náměstí, and the foam on a glass of cold Pilsner beer. It was also the feeling of river water parting to regular strokes, the sensitive wheel of a fine car under one's hands, and the first breath of cool wind from the mountains after a hot day.

Prague smelled of overhanging gardens in Malá Strana, of costly and pervasive perfume on the wives of international celebrities, of coffee and sweet pastry, and Christmas Eve suppers traditionally composed of carp soup, wafers with honey, more fish and fruit and cake and wine. It was the clean smell of scrubbed floors and washed linen and spotless homes. It was the heavenly smell of lime trees in bloom along city streets, of chestnut and acacia blossoms and flowers in the carts of vendors in the spring.

The sound of Prague was the sound of skates ringing on the frozen river, of ancient bells tolling out the hours, of healthy footsteps along city pavements, feet always on their way somewhere. It was the sound of foreign-tongued visitors, of fountains playing in the parks, of new buildings under construction and constant repair of the old. More than anything else it was the sound of



good nature in a quick response, of joking laughter, of smiles bursting into chuckles of pleasure. It was the sound of a happy people.

After a strenuous day Milada and I would get into my car and drive to Barandov. We loved this place above all others. To reach it we drove through Smichov, past sprawling villas on a climbing road, and eventually we came out near the crest of a hill which overlooked the river and the city. There we would sit on one of the terraces until the soft air and the night and the sound of carefree people had given us relaxation.

Barandov is unlike anything I have seen anywhere else in the world. It is a series of terraces cut one above the other on the side of this rocky hill that stands down the river from the Hradčany, opposite Vyšehrad. On these terraces were restaurants, a dance floor, orchestras, swimming pools, night clubs, a sports stadium, and wide promenades. From terrace to terrace one could look down to the levels below and watch dancers on warm summer evenings, games on a Sunday afternoon, swimmers playing in the pool to music, or simply pleasant people sitting at tables in the sunshine. Sometimes on a week-end one could see all these activities under way at once, and then look out to the boats on the river and beyond to Libuša's Castle; backed by the forests of Bráník and Chuchle. Above all the terraces, on the crest of the hill, were the ateliers of Czechoslovakia's thriving motion picture industry.

Milada and I had long talks at Barandov. It was the only place where we seemed able to forget the problems of the showroom. For eight years we had worked together, and because this work was my whole life, I was unable to imagine existence without her. Had it not been for my experience with Toni, I would have tried to persuade Milada to marry me, but I still felt the smarting effects of that early mistake. My career seemed sufficiently certain now to insure the future, but I had no life to offer anyone aside from my work, and in that Milada already shared.

I recall trying to say something of the kind to her one day at Barandov. She interrupted me before I could finish the halting words. "You mustn't try to say such things. I know." She looked across the river. "I'm not waiting for you to marry me. I can say it this once, but not again. From the day you first came into the little shop on Příkopy I've never had any other plans except to work with you. As long as you need me."

I watched the calm serenity of her lovely face, the strength in the graceful fingers, the gracious poise of her head. "You always understand, don't you Milada? You know exactly how selfish I am. And I can't promise not to be . . . even with you."

There was a twinkle in her eyes when she turned back. It was never any use to try to impress her with fine words, or to pretend that something was so because I wanted it to be. "You always give me more than you take," she said.

“You’ve opened my mind to a new way of looking at people, and the whole world. Let’s not talk about it any more. What time is it? You have an appointment at five.”

And so the subject was dropped. It was good simply to sit in the afternoon haze with empty cups on the table before us. These hours snatched from work-filled days were full of contentment.

## CHAPTER XLIV



BY the turn of the year into 1938 we knew as well as the rest of the world that things were going badly around us, that we were living in a steel trap. The true meaning of the Spanish War was plain to us, even though it remained obscure to Mr. Stanley Baldwin. We looked on with rising apprehension as cabinets changed rapidly in France and hatred showed itself in new forms in Germany. Austria’s professional tears fell as steadily as ever until she was occupied. In England, the coronation of George VI had mobilized emotions if not troops, and Russia remained the enigmatic bear. Refugees flowed into our midst from across our borders and we saw the expressions in their eyes and the lines about their mouths. The last time I visited Warsaw I observed the disdain with which I was treated by Polish officials because I was a Czech, and I remarked the new impertinence of Hungarian customs officials.

Yet with it all I remained completely absorbed in my work. In fact, my own personal happiness colored my mind to such an extent that I refused to believe everything would not in time be well. I had many acquaintances, some of them reaching the border of friendship, among citizens of German descent who lived in Prague or in the border sections of the country. In rare moments of relaxation we had been in the habit of talking about relations between their national group and ours. Some of these men were wealthy industrialists in Silesia. At no time in the past had I felt a stranger among them, nor were they ever loath to talk about the rich possibilities in Czechoslovakia for making ours a working democracy.

But by 1938 a change had come into these conversations. My old acquaintances were using words and a tone of voice that were new, phrases which could not have been their own because they came out so hesitantly at first, until gradually they were accepted as their own ideas. They couldn’t seem to realize how easy it was to recognize the similarity between their new words and the harangues which we all heard on the radio in Goebbels’ voice. Before long even their behavior took on the color of their second-hand ideas.

When waiters and chambermaids in Carlsbad hotels began to tell every

foreigner who would listen how unhappy they were under Czech domination, as though they were repeating lessons they had learned by rote, I began to wonder if democracy was an idea that could ever be given to any group of people, even by the best of examples. It was something which they must want enough to build for themselves. No one could give it to them by all the good examples and precepts in the world.

As early as the beginning of 1938 I could see that the lines were drawn. Once awake, it was impossible to close my eyes again. Too many industrialists and prominent members of society in Czechoslovakia were sanguine. Only the working classes (excluding such people as the servants in Carlsbad) seemed to realize fully what they were in for and how inevitable was their doom.

One evening in February I happened to be dining with a young English couple who had been our customers and my personal friends for some time, John and Pamela Wood. They came often to Prague, for they had a host of friends in the city, and each time they were received by officials of the Foreign Office. They were as delightful as possible, both writers of sorts, and I understood they were people of considerable property in London. We had been brought together by our common love of fine glass, which led us eventually to wider fields of discussion. They had a fair knowledge of European affairs, and our discussion on this particular night of the new trade treaty which Czechoslovakia had recently signed with the United States was prolonged.

As so often happened, Pamela Wood drew us off from the main theme of our talk. She said, "Look. You ought to open a showroom in New York. Just like the one you've got here." The waiter poured clear hock into our glasses and her eyes followed his movements. Then she went on. "It could be a tremendous success, really. If you managed it."

I smiled because I knew her words were not meant to be taken seriously. They seldom were, in spite of the intensity of her manner. I tried the wine. But apparently she was gripped by this sudden new idea of her own contrivance. "No, but really," she said. "It would be a wonderful thing for Czechoslovak industry. Look how Americans buy your glass and china when they come over here. Why *not* open a fine shop on Fifth Avenue?"

I explained that it would be a costly undertaking; that I had no private means with which to finance it; the factories could hardly be induced to spend money on such an undertaking; there were strict laws which forbade the sending of funds out of Czechoslovakia without a special permit. Also, I was doing quite well where I was. I thanked her for the flattering suggestion and changed the subject.

But John Wood wasn't ready to drop his wife's idea. We tossed it back and forth some more. He said he would be willing to put a considerable amount into a New York showroom on the provision that I managed it. Still I

considered the suggestion nothing more than an evidence of friendship, and after awhile the conversation drifted into other channels.

Why I chose to repeat the Woods' idea to Antonín Hardt the next day when we had lunch together I don't know. I meant only to indicate how well two English people thought of our products.

His reaction was electrifying. He wanted to know if the Woods were serious. I shrugged my shoulders and told him what I knew of them. Would I arrange a meeting for him? I had known Hardt a good many years, but I had never seen him respond so quickly to a new idea. I agreed to bring them together.

After this was accomplished I did nothing more to promote the fantasy. In fact, I was entirely skeptical. But the wheels had begun to turn and whenever new cogs were added, they fit. The machinery expanded and turned and produced new ideas and expanded and turned. And all the while I sat in my office on Příkopy and attended to my own work. After everyone concerned had disposed of my future to suit their combined pleasure, I was called in and told what they wanted.

John Wood had agreed in all seriousness to put up ample funds to open a showroom in New York for the promotion of our products in America. The bank was delighted to see new expansion taking place without having to furnish the funds. The two factories were pleased to have me off their combined board of directors and yet not beyond the limit of service to them. The Ministry of Trade, when it was approached, expressed enthusiasm because they saw in this venture a seal for the new trade treaty, an effective evidence of Czechoslovakia's good will. The Foreign Office urged that everything possible be done to open the showroom as quickly as possible; they were convinced that the resultant business would help appreciably in the tender political area of the Sudetenland. New orders would create more work, and more work would perhaps lessen internal unrest.

For the first time in my life everyone concerned with my fate was agreed in an effort to push me forward. For once, no one tried to hold me back. The bank, factories, Ministry of Trade, and the economic division of the Foreign Office were all in agreement about letting me go.

But I was not so sure I wanted this change as much as they did. Czechoslovakia was approaching a crisis and I knew it was not going to blow over quickly. There was never a moment's fear in my mind that any but a few small groups in the country would fall under the influence of Germany, but I did realize that we had a long struggle ahead to reach clear weather in Europe. Until the trouble was over, I had no wish to leave.

Then it developed that I had nothing to say about it. The Foreign Office made it plain that I would be doing the country a far greater service if I went to

the United States at once than if I stayed in Prague. On that basis, I finally agreed to accept the terms of the Woods' agreement.

Once the decision was made, developments piled on top of each other rapidly. The American consulate went out of its way to facilitate passport visas and entry permits. The National Bank allowed me to take out of the country a certain amount of money in my personal account to bridge the gap until my salary began in New York. It was to be the highest sum by far that I had ever received, and it was guaranteed in the terms of the contract.

All the seats I held on chambers of commerce, juries and a variety of committees were liquidated with mutual good will. Finally I went to each of our two factories to sign contracts for the exclusive rights to their products in the United States, based upon the contract which stipulated that I was to hold the combined offices of vice-president, permanent manager and partner in the new American firm of *Rieger, Inc.* In lieu of stock, my partnership was credited to my presence as manager of the American company and my own hard work.

On the twenty-fifth of April, Milada and I went to the lovely chapel in our historic town hall, and at eleven o'clock in the morning we were married. Antonín Hardt served as my best man. According to our custom, the bride must have a best man as well as the groom, so Karel Berounský attended Milada. Standing a little back in the shadows of the thirteenth century chapel were Milada's brother, Miroslav Novotný, and the old guide who had brought my first customers.

It was a gray morning when we went into the town hall, but as we came out to the street the sun was beginning to show through breaking clouds. Milada was radiant and gay and utterly lovely. We left our wedding party and drove straight to Barandov. We ate our wedding breakfast alone and sat on in the sunshine until nearly four o'clock. Then we went back to Příkopy and to work.

## CHAPTER XLV



IN May it was necessary to make a final trip to the factories, and on the twenty-first Milada and I set out. We drove to Carlsbad first, then on to the Bohemian Works, which were some forty-five minutes by motor in the direction of the German border. We had been too absorbed in our plans to notice anything untoward in the atmosphere on the way to Carlsbad, but now our attention was forced outside ourselves.

My chauffeur, Anton, surprised me by complaining that he had been unable to get any lunch in Carlsbad while we were eating at one of the hotels.

Whenever he had entered a restaurant and asked for food in Czech, the waiters refused to serve him. When he spoke to a policeman on the street, the man told him with tears in his eyes that he would soon forget himself and strike someone if he had to endure any more of the insults that had been hurled at him all day. I told Anton I was sorry about the lack of lunch, but I felt he must be exaggerating. We were expected at the Bohemian Works and I couldn't delay the trip. He could eat when we got there.

We talked to Gründlich and Fischer in a strained atmosphere which I took to be caused by the terms of the contract before us. The telephone rang. Gründlich picked it up, spoke shortly, listened to a rasping voice at the other end of the wire, and then hung up without a word. He passed a significant glance to Fischer before he turned to us and said, "I'm afraid all this we're talking about is senseless. Prague has just announced partial mobilization. Here's your signed contract, but I doubt if you'll ever have any use for it."

Milada and I looked at each other. I picked up the document and folded it carefully before I put it in my pocket. "If you'll pardon us," I said, "we'll have to get back to Prague. Instead of going to New York I'll probably soon be back in the trenches."

"There are better places than a trench for a man like yourself," Gründlich said. "Whatever may happen, Germany will surely be glad to use your knowledge and skill for more important work."

I stared at him, then at Fischer's back where the man stood motionless looking through the window toward the border, then I turned on my heel and followed Milada to the car.

Now in every village through which we passed we found crowds of women, children and old men lining the road, staring blankly toward the direction from which we had come. When they saw the letter P on the license plate of our car and knew we were from Prague, they shook their fists at us and sometimes growled curses. Anton told us he had discovered while we were in the office that they were expecting the German army to cross the border that day and they wanted to be on the road to welcome it. I felt in the side pocket of the car for the revolver I always carried there and put it on the seat under my right hand. It was a grim situation. Still in our own country, we were no longer of it so far as this section was concerned.

The great highroad from Carlsbad to Prague climbs in sweeping curves through fields of grain to a wide upland. Here the farms are divided into strips of hops, rye, wheat, oats, hay, turnips, potatoes and beets. Now in May some of the fields were plowed and drying under the sun and many were already sown. The land rises to forests on the horizon, and now and again tall firs slope down almost to the road.

As we approached a cross highway which came into our road through one

of these dense woodlands, we saw a cavalcade of huge army trucks appearing from the shadows of the trees. It was late in the afternoon and the light was in our eyes. All the old sensations of my first days of battle came over me again. My concern was acute because Milada was with me. The army trucks rumbled and roared toward us, and at last when they were clear of the shadows we saw that they were filled with Czech soldiers. They looked to us like helmeted angels.

For a time we followed them after they had turned into our path. Now the villages we passed through were bare of human beings. Even Henlein's followers in their white socks and black oilcloth raincoats had disappeared as the Czech troops came in sight. Then the trucks turned off for the German border and we went on toward Prague, passing nothing but truckloads of Czech soldiers, all singing and wearing flowers that had been thrown to them earlier as they moved through Bohemia.

It was late in the night when we finally reached the city. Women and children were following their men through the streets to the barracks. There were no tears and no one was drunk, as I remembered the recruits had been in the last war. Women tried to carry their husbands' luggage and children carried bundles for their fathers and brothers. Wherever trucks had passed, taking soldiers out of town, the road was strewn with flowers.

The following morning I reported to the Ministry of National Defense, asking permission to join my regiment at once. I informed the bank and the two factories that the New York project was canceled as far as I was concerned. My regimental headquarters answered by wire that my age class had not been called and that I must wait before reporting. Then the economic division of the Foreign Office called me, to say that I must continue with my plans to leave for the United States. My private project had become a mission, not only to present our native products to the American market, but also to make known wherever possible the true story of Czechoslovakia. They considered my trip to New York twice as important now because I could implement the promises of the government to do everything within their power for the Sudetenland.

The course laid out for me was plain enough but I had no heart to go on with it. Then Hitler announced that he had no designs on Czechoslovakia, our mobilized troops were disbanded, and Milada and I settled down to put our affairs in order.

There was a tremendous amount of work to be done. All our possessions had to be divided, for we intended to have two homes in the future, one in New York and one in Prague. Twice a year at least I would have to return to Czechoslovakia to inspect the output for America in the factories. I also had to go through all the products we handled, checking every shape and color and

design of every article. I had to pick out the ones I wanted for my sample collection in New York. I had to compile a list of the names and addresses of every American customer we had ever served. Furthermore, I had to break in a new manager for the Prague branch.

In the midst of this turbulence, the Foreign Office called me one morning to say that two distinguished American visitors were stopping at the Hotel Alcron. Their names were Mr. and Mrs. Henry Luce. The Foreign Office wanted me to invite them to our showroom to see our glass and china. I sent a messenger with a note at once and received word that they would come that same afternoon. In the meantime they would be received by President Beneš.

When they arrived I found them a charming American couple, he rather grave and she extraordinarily beautiful. I had no notion of the place they held in American life, nor did it occur to me that Mrs. Luce was the author of a successful play which I had seen in Prague shortly before, called "The Women." I had been told that he was a magazine publisher, but even though I had heard of *Time*, *Life* and *Fortune*, I was unfamiliar with the part they played in American affairs. My acquaintance with American publications was confined to one magazine, the *New Yorker*.

They inspected our entire establishment with keen interest and Mr. Luce decided he must have a set of crystal glasses. He chose the same pattern Lord Louis Mountbatten had liked: a handsome modern glass that flared out from the stem to the rim in shining rays. Unfortunately, the order never reached him.

They went on to my office and our conversation flowed into wider channels. They wanted to see our movie studios on Barandov and I offered to call the office of the Chief of Protocol to get someone to take them out. But no one was available. Americans can be fascinating to the point of making one forget the most pressing duties when they are around so I offered my services.

During the afternoon on Barandov, I chanced to remark that I would be in New York within the next few months. When I explained my mission, they both showed a gratifying enthusiasm and predicted certain success for the venture. Mrs. Luce began to discuss with her husband the best place for our showroom. Should it be Fifth Avenue, Madison or Park? They argued the matter while I listened with keen interest but little intelligence.

We spent a pleasant afternoon on the terraces in the sunshine. The colored umbrellas were up and the rock gardens that separated rows and rows of tables were rich with bloom. I pointed out domes and spires and castles and bridges as they queried their names, and we noticed with amusement a group of soldiers who were lying about on the grass beside two antiaircraft batteries which had been set up several feet from the terrace where we sat. I promised to get in touch with Mr. and Mrs. Luce when we reached New York, and after I dropped them at the hotel I saw them no more in Prague.



The days left to us were growing shorter now and none of them contained enough hours for all the things we wanted to do.

## CHAPTER XLVI



ON a July morning, under a sky of unadulterated blue, Milada and I visited first the cemetery where her mother and father rested, and then the small cemetery on a hill above Smichov where Mother lay between Grandfather and Grandmother. A violent electrical storm came up suddenly out of nowhere and we managed to reach the station five minutes before our train was scheduled to leave. Perhaps it was just as well that we had so little time. As the train began to move, we both had the sensation of standing still while the platform moved away from us, carrying with it the four familiar faces of Milada's brother, Karel Berounský, Miroslav Novotný, and the old guide. For their individual reasons they had come together to see us off: Karel, the sophisticated intellectual; Novotný, the faithful worker; Milada's brother, young and blond and very serious; and the broken old man who could look only backward to other days. We waved, but they stood unmoving, without a smile between them, just four men standing on a platform, watching a train pull away.

In London we finished the business of signing agreements with John and Pamela Wood in the presence of their English solicitors. Milada was made an equal partner in *Rieger, Inc.* We were entertained by Lady Ibrahim, who had recently received her divorce from the Sultan of Johore, by Mrs. Manville, and by Sirdar Krishna Mohan of the Nepalese Legation. The parties were gay, but we were too tired to give them our full attention. The day before we left we saw Jan Masaryk in his office. He looked worn and worried, but he gave us his best wishes for the project in New York. As we started out the door he called us back. "Here," he said, as he wrote something on a sheet of his personal stationery, "this will introduce you to a friend of mine." As I recall, it was a note to Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt, but it was never presented.

From London we went to Biarritz where we stayed two weeks to rest. It should have been a gay, happy holiday, but my mind was too concerned with thoughts of New York on the one hand, and Prague on the other, to allow me to relax. Milada and I had agreed not to talk about the political unrest all around us, so neither of us mentioned the stories we read each day in the papers, but fear kept on growing in our hearts.

On the twenty-third of August we sailed on the *Manhattan* from LeHavre, a ship of the United States Line chosen deliberately in order to familiarize ourselves with American customs. It was a clear black and silver night and I

was filled with an excess of sentiment as we pulled away from the European continent. Except for a crossing of the Mediterranean, it was the first time I had gone forth on a large body of water. I wanted Milada by my side at the railing, but I had hunted the ship over for her and she wasn't anywhere to be found. So I stood alone in the dark with my own devious emotions. Deep-throated horns blew, the anchor broke water as it was hauled in, bilge water sloshed against the great piles of the pier, the deck throbbed under my feet. When the shore lights had disappeared I went to our cabin, only to find Milada sitting there sad because she had been hunting the ship over for me, and in the dark we had missed each other like two children playing a stupid game.

During the seven-day passage to New York we made no acquaintances. Day after day we sat in our deck chairs with a calm blue sea all about us. Europe was the past and New York was the future and for seven days we could forget them both.

There were many things to learn on the *Manhattan*. The ship was full of tourists who were noisy and thoughtless and ubiquitous. We had often seen their like in Prague, so we were not surprised. It was the children who astonished us. We had never encountered anything like them. They looked like angels and behaved like devils. During the whole trip they crawled over our legs, knocked against our chairs, shouted in our ears, played tag across our laps and never once apologized or even seemed to realize how they were disturbing other people. European children would have been scandalized at such behavior, and their parents would have been mortified beyond repair.

At breakfast the first morning we made an agreement with our dining room steward. Throughout the entire crossing he was not to ask us what we wanted for any meal. Instead, he was to bring us food of his own selection, typical American food, and he was to tell us always what we were eating.

It was the third morning at breakfast when I suddenly began to suspect him of making fun of us. He brought us each a plate covered with something corrugated and brown which he told us was a waffle. On the waffle were a number of very small brown sausages. The pastry-like thing under the meat was new and fancy and we looked at it distrustfully, wondering if there was a special way to eat it. As we pondered the delicate situation the steward discreetly pushed a pitcher toward us, careful not to make a point of our ignorance. I peered in and saw that it was full of a liquid that was also brown. I looked at the steward. He leaned down to whisper that it was syrup and that we were to pour it over the sausages and waffle.

Then I knew he was making fun of us. Milada was incredulous. But the steward insisted that it was the way Americans always ate these things. Then Milada laughed. "We made an agreement," she said, "and we can't sneak out of it now." To show how brave she was, she poured a generous lot of the syrup

over her plate and the steward smiled.

It looked disgusting. As Milada cut into it with her fork and put the first bite in her mouth I felt as though she had betrayed everything we knew to be good taste. The steward was still watching me. Well, an agreement was an agreement. So I imitated Milada and took a bite. Then I made a discovery. It was good and I liked it.

On the first day of September a sense of excitement began to run over the ship. People spoke who had made no move to talk to each other before, in order to remark that we had passed Nantucket Light and by afternoon would be in port. This time Milada and I kept track of each other, and as the ship moved in toward Long Island we stood close together at the railing, hand in hand. Neither of us said a word as we passed the Statue of Liberty, and neither of us spoke as the skyline of the new world rose before us. We had seen pictures of it often, we had studied it in the movies, but this was quite different. It was tremendously impressive in three dimensions.

Contrary to everything we had been led to expect, the immigration officials were efficient and courteous. At four-thirty we stepped onto the pier in what seemed to us an inferno of noise, and again we were surprised to find all seventeen pieces of our luggage waiting for us under the big black *R*. Only one box was opened for examination, and we were free to introduce ourselves to New York.

A man approached us and introduced himself. He was Mrs. Manville's butler, he said. From London she had cabled him to meet us. Could he be of service? We thanked him and said no, doubtless showing plainly the pride we felt in being able to find our way about. We knew exactly where we wanted to go, for we had studied the advertisements in the *New Yorker* all the way across. After detailed discussion we had decided on the Ritz-Carlton, and there we went.

It was nearly dark by the time we were shown into a spacious room on the eleventh floor. Both of us made straight for the window, and then we stood looking out, holding onto each other, feeling as though we were surely in a strange, mad dream. Never before had we been so high above a city street. Up in the Eiffel Tower, yes, but this was different. There were no railings. We could look directly down into the canyon below where taxis and motors rushed back and forth and human heads looked like bugs crawling along the pavements. As we hung over the chasm a siren began to sound, screaming nearer and nearer. We watched all the traffic come to a stop while one small car making a terrible noise flitted madly along until it was out of sight, taking its siren with it. I turned to Milada. "But it's exactly like the movies," she said before I could get the same thought into words.

We couldn't unpack, we couldn't sit down, we couldn't do anything but

get out onto the street to see how much more of New York would be as we expected to find it. I can smile ruefully now at our basic ignorance. Because we had read all of Upton Sinclair, Dreiser's *American Tragedy*, and Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street*, *Babbitt* and *Dodsworth* we thought we knew everything possible about the United States. We had even read *Gone with the Wind* during the past week's crossing. On the ship we had seen "Alexander's Ragtime Band." In Prague we had always admired American pictures and had studied carefully "Mr. Deeds Goes to Town" and "My Man Godfrey." So we knew all about America.

When we walked out the door of the hotel we asked the imposing doorman where we were and he told us Madison Avenue, but offered no further hints. I remembered having heard Mrs. Luce mention the street, but I had no idea what its relation to the rest of New York might be. On the drive from the pier to the hotel we had sat in the taxi too excited to notice details like street names. All the thoroughfares had looked like the one in "Street Scene."

So we turned right into a dark side street and began walking, not wanting the doorman to think we were ignorant. At the first corner we looked at the sign on a lamppost, in order to find our way back, and there were the magic words *Fifth Avenue*! We felt unbelievably smart. Again we turned right and continued walking. Fifth Avenue seemed the most fascinating street in the world that night, and nothing I have seen since has given me cause to change that first impression. On both sides of the plate-glass windows, American showmanship has been developed to its zenith.

After walking several blocks we came to a church. Without considering whose church it was, or what denomination, we went in and offered our prayers of thanksgiving in the completely empty nave. As we came out I looked at Milada and Milada looked at me. "Broadway?" she said. So we hailed a taxi and asked the driver to take us there. It was the only other part of New York we knew by name.

He drove us to Columbus Circle and then started down the diagonal thoroughfare. The lighted signs grew closer and larger and brighter and more blinding and the crowds became denser. And all the time we remained unimpressed. It was our first major disappointment. Suddenly I realized we had eaten nothing since noon.

When we asked the driver to take us to a restaurant, any restaurant, he drew up before the door of Jack Dempsey's. The name was familiar, but I could not connect it with food in my mind. "Sure," he said. "Best in New York. That's what you want, don't you?" We entered the door with trepidation, but as soon as we were seated our assurance returned. We were confident we knew how to order food in New York. There was no reason to hesitate over the menu. When the waiter came to our table we looked up at him brightly. "Bring us," I said,

“some ham and eggs.”

## CHAPTER XLVII



FOR three weeks this heady sense of excitement bore us along. By common consent, we refused to read the papers. Almost at once I went to the firm of Wall Street lawyers who had been recommended by the Woods, where I was given every possible help in setting in motion the necessary formalities for establishing the firm of *Rieger, Inc.*

Then I set about hunting for a suitable showroom. I knew it would be impossible to duplicate our place on Příkopy, but I was determined to find the best possible background for our products. Day after day I surveyed the business section of retail shops. I made maps and sketches and eventually decided to limit my search to the area bounded by Forty-seventh Street, Fifth Avenue, Fifty-seventh Street and Park. And after awhile I found what I wanted. There was a vacant shop on Fifth Avenue above Fifty-third with wood paneling and a fireplace. There was another on Fifty-seventh which also had certain advantages. Today they are occupied respectively by Ansonia (with a completely remodeled front) and Orrefors. Before I got around to making a decision between them, events in Europe overtook us.

We could shut our ears no longer. Day and night now we listened to the radio. Most of the commentators spoke too rapidly to allow us to follow their meaning, but after awhile we found two we could understand. Later we discovered that Americans were inclined to deplore the way they spoke. Because the morning news from Europe came in after midnight, we sat up until three and four in the morning, listening to expressions of sympathy but no assurances of help for Czechoslovakia during all those dreadful days of Godesburg and the descriptions of Mr. Chamberlain's umbrella.

It was shortly before midnight on September twenty-first that we heard Jan Masaryk's voice speaking from London. He might have been in the next room, the reception was so good. When he had finished, the radio crackled a bit and then another voice began to talk about a remedy for dandruff. Milada turned it off. I put my head down on the table in this strange room in a far-off country and cried.

During the rest of that night and the next day we slept a little, but mostly we just sat and stared at nothing. More than anything I had ever wanted in my life, I wanted to be in Prague at that moment. I wanted to be with Karel; I wanted to tell Milada's brother we hadn't walked out; I wanted to tell Novotný we were still with him. I kept seeing their faces as they had stood on the

platform the morning we left. I tried to think what they were doing now, what was happening to them, how they were feeling, what they would do next.

It wasn't until a cable came the second day after the Munich Agreement that I realized for the first time that Mr. Chamberlain's umbrella had cracked down on my individual head, all the way across the Atlantic. Until then, I'd been too busy thinking about everyone at home. The cable was signed John and Pamela Wood and it read: THINGS UNEASY DO NOTHING UNTIL ADVISED.

Things uneasy! As I read the words an unreasoning anger swept over me, and all the sorrow I had been trying to put away for months was released. We were alone, abandoned in a foreign country. But I had no intention of staying, no matter what anyone told me to do.

There were things to do now, and doing them made me feel better. I went straight to the Czechoslovak consulate and asked to be recorded as a volunteer for any military group that might be formed outside Czechoslovakia. I was told I would be kept informed of developments. We found a small apartment on East Eightieth Street and moved into it at once. Milada was glad of the necessity for making curtains and buying the simple kitchen equipment we needed. She had never learned to cook, but she found a place to buy a Czech cookbook and began to teach herself. I wrote to Karel and to every other old friend in Prague, trying in this feeble way to let them know on paper that I was still with them and would return as quickly as possible. And gradually our days fell into a kind of routine in spite of our turbulent thoughts.

More cables came from the Woods. Each one cautioned me to do nothing until I heard from them again; they were making arrangements for the showroom to open as planned. They said it would help Czechoslovakia if I stayed where I was and told people the truth; they were pleased to have been the cause of getting us out of the country when they did.

Tell people the truth? What people? I was not in the habit of buttonholing strangers in a hotel lobby, in a barbershop, or in a restaurant to talk about the shameful treatment accorded my people. We had a portfolio of letters of introduction to prominent Americans, but it was never in our nature to ask friends of friends to help us, and now more than ever we hesitated to ask anyone to give us a hearing.

Already I knew, from the few men I had met in business, that Czechoslovakia was a long way from America, and that one refugee looked much like another in their eyes. The fact that we were not refugees of our own volition made no sense to them. On the few occasions when I did make a tentative statement about the situation in Europe, in the hope of being given an opportunity to expand my facts, I might as well have dropped a pebble in a bottomless pit. No one believed me. I could see it in their eyes even when their lips smiled. I was just another emotional foreigner with a gripe against my

neighbors who were always fighting among themselves anyway.

No one appeared capable of distinguishing between truth and lies. If you repeated a lie often enough and loud enough, that made it so. It was frightening. If they couldn't see the truth when I told it, how would they ever learn to recognize a lie? In time, more lies were going to pour in on them, just as they had on us. We had been too polite to answer back. Watching the indifference around me I was terrified and sick and afraid.

What did they mean when they called me a foreigner? Someone whose practical experience had been different from their own? Or one whose judgments were inimical to their particular set of values? It was so much more than a matter of tongue. I was a foreigner because on the deep plane of subconscious truth we could never meet.

Each day had twenty-four hours to get through, and the next day had the same. Sometimes it was even worse to be with Milada than to be alone, because her presence filled me with guilt for having brought her away from her beloved Prague. All around us were New York faces: kind, vacant, tired or gay faces, but nowhere was there a friend. Somewhere, somehow I must find one person, one man, one woman who could hear my wordless cry, who could tell me what I must do. But I was a foreigner, and that made me strange and condemned to walk alone.

A letter finally came from the Carlsbad Factories, telling me that arrangements could be made to send their crystal to Prague and from Prague to me. The money for it must go to them direct, because that was Hitler's order. I threw the letter in the wastebasket. No word ever came from the Bohemian Works.

Then I heard that Hardt had left the country. It was believed he had gone to Canada. No word came from him. I was told that my successor in the Příkopy showroom had jumped from an upper window in a Prague hotel because he was a Jew and felt he was trapped. He was replaced at once by a Sudeten German. Already the Gestapo was in control of Prague, though officially they stayed twenty miles away. Masaryk had resigned his post at the Court of Saint James's in protest over the Munich Agreement, and it was rumored that Beneš and his cabinet had left Prague.

Karel was bitter and sarcastic in his letters. I even went to the extent of getting an affidavit for him, through all the rigmarole of sending him passage to New York. But when it reached him he sent it back, thanking me politely with the comment that he was where he belonged and where he wanted to be. He saw nothing in England, France or the United States that was worth trying to save oneself to get.

Every letter I received was like a blow in the face. Every day added to piled up confusion and despair. Somewhere, somehow I must find someone to

talk to, someone who could advise me what I must do. The Woods said I couldn't leave New York, and yet both our factories were now in the hands of the Reich. The Czechoslovak consulate said I should stay where I was. And all I wanted to do was to go home.

Then one day Milada and I received an invitation to dine with Clare and Henry Luce. By that time I had gathered some idea of the fame of these two people in the United States. We accepted the invitation, not because we felt we could add gaiety to a party, but simply because I desperately wanted to ask their advice, to have them tell me their tempered opinion about the future of my country, about the hope of the world and all of us in it.

Clare Luce was very beautiful that night, and Milada was lovely across the table where she sat beside our host. Because we were Czechs and still conscious of the manners of our people, we felt it would be impolite to talk about ourselves or even about our country until the subject was broached by someone else. And our hosts doubtless felt it was only polite not to mention our personal attitude toward the Munich Agreement or to ask questions about our private plans, since politics have become like religion, a matter of emotion rather than logic.

A fragrant plate of roast Long Island duckling was put before me. I came out of my tense waiting long enough to realize that it was something new, something that smelled exceedingly good. And I was hungry. But my throat was too tight to eat. Until the subject foremost in all our minds was mentioned, I couldn't swallow a bite. Somebody must speak of world politics, say something to give me a chance to ask my questions, or I would disintegrate with the weight of unreleased worry.

Around the table knives began to cut slices of duck and the aroma was maddening. Mrs. Luce turned to me, waiting for a reply to a question I hadn't heard. I hoped my face gave none of my thoughts away. I heard myself saying in smooth, measured phrases, because my English is always inadequate under the stress of emotion, "Has it occurred to you that Czechoslovakia may decide to collaborate fully with Germany now? We have a saying in our country about howling with the wolves."

All knives and forks at the table were laid down on plates. All eyes looked at me. I fancied everyone was relieved to have the name of our country mentioned, and that I had done it. But Milada was distressed.

Mr. Luce disagreed, he said, and added that he gathered I was exaggerating. He thought too well of Czechoslovakia to believe such a thing could possibly take place. I replied that bitterness and injustice can make any group of men react against their inner conscience. I felt it quite possible that Czechs would prefer to collaborate with Germany now, rather than wait for any more blows from those she had considered her loyal allies.



I said these things not so much because I believed them as to provoke a continued discussion which would refute me. Somewhere, somehow at this table I must find my answer. But it was Milada who contradicted me. She began to explain in her sweet, confident voice that I must not be taken seriously. Never on earth would Czechs join the Nazis of their own will.

Seeing what they took to be a disagreement between us, our hosts changed the subject at once. I looked down at my plate, only to discover that the untouched food had been whisked away. After dinner there was no further opportunity for discussion. Almost immediately we were rushed off to a performance of "Oscar Wilde." Nothing could have been less likely to hold my interest that night, but that was hardly the fault either of Robert Morley or Mr. and Mrs. Luce. I would gladly have stepped onto the stage to interrupt the performance in order to tell what I knew to be true about my country, and in turn to ask if anyone could tell me what was going to happen next. But no one would have waited to hear. I was only a foreigner in evening dress, sitting with the Luces. Not even their kindness was able to reach me that night.

The same sort of thing happened again when Mrs. Manville returned to New York. We dined with her in her apartment in the Savoy-Plaza. I was eager to hear what was being said in London, but this time I determined to wait until the end of the meal before provoking a discussion. Mrs. Manville was a kindly person, full of good intentions. She said, "How do you like New York?" and "My, isn't Tommy a naughty boy?" She couldn't understand why we had moved to East Eightieth Street. We ought to get an apartment in Essex House; it would be so much nicer for us there.

The meal was hardly over before we were whisked off to a box in the diamond horseshoe at the Metropolitan. I have no idea what opera was sung that night. When it was over we were taken back to our own door, feeling lonelier and more forlorn than ever.

After that we began to refuse invitations. It seemed senseless to accept hospitality when we were in no mood either to enjoy it or to repay it later.

## CHAPTER XLVIII



ON a wet, rain-swept afternoon late in January we nearly bumped into a young Czech journalist we had met casually some time before. He was in a great hurry, but he stopped long enough to tell us a piece of news that was unknown to the public. Jan Masaryk was arriving in a few hours from London. Instead of leaving his ship at the dock, he was coming in with the immigration officials and the press from Ambrose Light. No one was to know anything

about it.

“Where will the press boat come in?” Milada said.

“Can’t tell,” he said. “But I wouldn’t be surprised if it was down at the Battery. Usually is.” And he was gone with a gust of wind.

Neither of us troubled to ask the other’s will. We simply said, how do we get to the Battery? We wanted only to catch a glimpse of his face, perhaps to hear our native tongue. We were afraid of the subways, but when we were told that was the way to get to South Ferry, we ventured all and went underground. By the time we came into the open again it was dusk. Somewhere on the way Milada had picked up a single white carnation which she carried in her hand under her dark umbrella.

We wandered around the great, smelly barn of a shed where the South Ferry boats come and go, and after awhile we saw that one pier was guarded by policemen. There were no crowds waiting there, only the cordon of blue uniforms. We moved in, to see if we could get onto the dock, but our way was firmly barred. We couldn’t even find a window that would give us a view of the place where the press boat was obviously going to dock.

“Come on,” I said. “It’s useless. You can see we haven’t got a chance even of seeing him.”

A voice spoke over my shoulder, a quiet, Czech voice. “What’s useless?” it said.

We both turned around to see a smiling young policeman. And he had spoken to us in Czech! “Sure,” he said. “My father and mother were both from the old country. What do you want? Looking for somebody?”

We were so glad to talk to him. We told him we had come only in the hope of catching a glimpse of Jan Masaryk as he got off the boat. We hadn’t seen anyone from home in a long time.

He looked at us thoughtfully a moment. “You don’t know him, do you?”

“Yes,” I said. “We know him. But he doesn’t know we’re here.”

He looked at us some more. Then he said, “Come on. Don’t say anything. Follow me.”

He led us through a door, down some steps, and through another door. Then he left us standing on the deserted dock in the rain. It was dark now and raining harder than ever. The wind blew it into our faces and down our collars. We were cold to the bone, but we didn’t care. After awhile we saw a launch moving toward the place where we stood. In the driving rain its outlines were blurred. We stepped back against the wall of the shed, and almost before its nose had bumped against the dock a horde of news reporters and cameramen were disgorged. They tumbled over one another as they ran from the boat to the stairs and on up, straight for the telephones. After a bit a single man stepped from the boat onto the dock, and then a small group followed him.

We stayed as we were until he was nearly upon us in the dark shed. Then we both stepped forward under the rusty hanging lamp. There was no need to say anything. He recognized us, and we saw how weary he looked. Milada thrust the white carnation toward him and his face broke into its characteristic smile as he took it. "Thank you both," he said. "It's good to know you're here. Are you both all right? Find a way to stay, if you can. And see me later, will you?"

He went on in the wake of the reporters to join his party, a man of many worries, bound by the strict rules of the part he was forced to play. Seeing him even for those brief moments made us feel less alone for a little while.

## CHAPTER XLIX



MANY people had given me letters to friends who might be able to use me in some kind of a job related to my experience in Europe. Now I began to present the letters. The men who were friends of friends all smiled and made promises that warmed me, until I discovered that New York is bursting with promises that never were intended to mean a thing. The trouble, it seemed, was that I was not an American and I didn't understand the rules of the game. A promise in New York is like a shake of the hand or a pat on the back. It indicates good will, but its contents are otherwise meaningless. A promise is used chiefly as a means of making the promiser feel better about himself.

One of the heads of one of America's largest department stores received me with his feet on his desk. During our interview the feet remained where they were and I remained standing because I was not invited to sit down. "What do you want?" he said, and I replied "Nothing." I went on to explain that I had come to him because a mutual friend had asked me to see him.

We discussed my qualifications and the owner of the feet became interested. He shifted me to another man through his secretary. The other man said of course they could use me; had just the place for a man like me; let me know in a couple of days. But after a couple of weeks I was still waiting to hear. I went back and a secretary told me that somebody had made a mistake, she guessed. The man I had seen originally assured me I'd find something else. Lots of opportunity here for a man like me.

At a meeting with the director of a large glassworks I was all but shown my desk. A couple of weeks later it turned out that a change of mind had occurred on the part of someone in the firm. The same thing happened when I was interviewed by another large glass manufacturer. My name was put up for country clubs and town clubs by their board; they assured me that was the way

things were done in their line. Once again something happened. I was told there had been some changes made; they would have to let me know later.

After that I stopped presenting letters of introduction. I know what to expect now, but in those months after Munich I was raw and sore and I felt betrayed on every side.

The Woods were going to fix everything up, they said. Their cables came regularly with instructions and advice. Could I believe anyone any more? I walked the winter streets of New York, and all the time I tried to imagine myself back in Prague. They needed me there. No one in the whole United States knew or cared what it meant to be abandoned in a strange land. The words of our mournful national anthem clung to my mind.

Where is my home? Where is my home?  
Brooks are running through the meadows,  
Pines are whispering on the hills,  
Orchards dressed in spring's array,  
An earthly paradise portray,  
And this land of wondrous beauty  
Is the Czech land, home of mine.

Without Milada I should probably have lost my reason, but whenever I paced the floor and began to rave, her voice remained cool and her words were filled with good sense. It was certainly no better for her than it was for me, except that I carried the added burden of knowing I had brought her into this strange, rich, happy, heedless country.

And then one morning it was all over. On the fifteenth of March we brought the paper in from the door and read that Hitler had marched into Prague during the night, in triumph down our own Václavské náměstí. The choice of going back or staying had been taken from us irrevocably. This time there was no need to cry.

Before our breakfast was finished another cable came from the Woods. REGRET AGREEMENT CANCELED. That was all it said. And from their point of view, they were right. Everything we had left behind was gone for good. The total of our worldly goods was on our backs and within the walls of these two rooms.

Confusion was disappearing like humidity before a driving wind. Once more I was on my own, faced with the necessity of starting all over again. I understood now what I must do. Here was our future, whether we were welcome or not. From now on, this would be our home.

# AMERICAN



## CHAPTER I



SPRING was fitful about making its debut in New York that year. Cold winds blew down the Hudson and across Central Park and through city canyons, churning up dust and papers and the smell of the subways that came through gratings on sidewalks. Some days the wind would haul to the east and then the rain would come down, not in sudden storms, but as though it meant to go on forever. The frantic screech of doormen's whistles tore through the monotonous beat of water on windowpanes and umbrellas and bus tops. But one day in April the sun shone clean through washed air and after that the face of the city smiled. Bulbs burst into bloom in beds around the Plaza, men swept old leaves out of the fountain, roller skates ground on pavements, and there were chalk marks of hopscotch games in the middle of side streets. In place of the rink at Rockefeller Center there were colored umbrellas, and more doors of more old houses on streets that ended in the East River were painted vermilion or emerald or wedgwood blue.

These were the days when I walked from one end of Manhattan to the other. Sometimes the walks were aimless, sometimes I set myself a specified area to dissect. One day Milada and I found our way to the Bowery and on to Hester Street and Mott and Mulberry and Park Row. We had been reading more American books and we wanted to see for ourselves. Usually I walked alone. Had I been able to find an equivalent of our European coffeehouses I should probably have sat in one day after day, reading papers and watching other men go about their business. But their counterpart in America is the corner drugstore, those centers of Yankee culture in which advertisers must surely all be born. And drugstores I hated. I could never decide whether they were at the root of American culture or whether they were an outgrowth of it.

The kind of shock we had experienced leaves its mark for more than a day. Because at first I had thought only in terms of the tragedy of my country, the reaction was doubly severe when I began to realize that ten years of the hardest work I ever expected to do had been smashed to bits and swept away. Not a single splinter was left. In such a situation, one can either find enough belief

and strength to start again, or one cannot. As I walked the streets of New York that spring I decided that I had the strength, but no belief. There was no sense in building up my small world again if not only I, but millions of human beings could be ruined by a few signatures on a piece of paper. To me, the agreement of Munich was not an isolated act but a symbol of the steady process of betrayal of everything that a sane man could believe. Yet the rest of the world seemed to mind very little what had happened at Munich. In such a world, what could I trust?

As children, most of us have been taught to look upon the ant as an example of persistence and diligence. We know that whenever an anthill is destroyed the ants will set about instantly to carry their eggs to safety and then they will rebuild their hill exactly as it was before the accident. Once upon a time I had believed in the validity of such instinctive work, but now I revolted against the ant principle. I knew that the fiends who had destroyed all honest work in my country would kick over more anthills until nothing but complete destruction lay about them in every direction.

And yet a man cannot go on living if he believes in nothing. My problem was to find a substitute for the old principles I had once considered infallible. I felt that I must talk to others who were able to realize what we were going through, whose experiences were similar to our own. There were a growing number of refugees in New York. I knew only a few of them by name, but I determined to hunt them out and talk to as many as I could. New York is essentially a city of villages, each one self-contained and self-satisfied, so it was not difficult to find these new guests of America. I went from one to another, asking questions and listening to answers. What were we going to do now? My questions played back and forth over the theme in an attempt to get at the root of our common problems, but the answers were all the same.

I discovered that there are two kinds of refugees in New York. One kind is wealthy, even by American standards, and the other kind is not. In Central Europe, in the days before 1939, there were strict laws in every country which aimed at preventing the flow of money beyond national borders. To find rich refugees in New York could mean only that they were people who had found ways of circumventing the laws of their own land. It must also mean that they were men who had felt a long time ago that Europe was unsafe. So in those days when I had been completely absorbed in my work, happy in a conviction that my country would always be my country, these people had been suspicious. While I was building up they had already begun to tear down.

And now they talked of nothing but their plans for making more money in America. Because they seemed to take it for granted that I was still the man of position they had known in Prague, they tried to interest me in their grandiose schemes. They were all attempting to sneak into an enterprise that someone

else had made a good thing, determined to put their money to work while they continued undisturbed in their social life on Park Avenue. Even the sighs they gave for their lost countries and for the people who were dying on the other side contained too many references to beautiful homes, wonderful furniture, carpets and paintings and cars.

A second group of refugees shared the same ideas but had insufficient means to enable them to talk of huge enterprises. These were the ones who nearly always spoke of opening a restaurant. If their ideas were more circumspect, they settled for a pastry shop. Because of their sentimental attachment for the smell and taste of familiar cooking which they missed in America, and also because they were naturally drawn toward some kind of work which they thought would bring them easy money without demanding too much hard work, day and night they discussed the possibilities of selling food. But it nearly always developed that they knew nothing whatever about baking or cooking good food. Their minds were not filled with visions of themselves standing over a hot stove, but sitting behind a cash register listening to it ring as it took in the dollars.

A third group of refugees were those who came out of Europe with nothing but the clothes on their backs, most of them unable to buy as much as a cup of coffee when they landed in New York. They were the ones with ample intelligence, plus admirable energy and will, to enable them to find a new place for themselves where they could dig their own little trenches out toward the sun. Their spirits were high because for most of them this was the first setback of their lives. They congregated far from Park Avenue, on the upper West Side, and they could be seen at any hour of the day walking up and down Riverside Drive, talking together and making their plans.

I respected these latter people and in part I understood how they felt, but I could no more fit in with their plans than I could with those of the wealthy refugees. I could admire them and at the same time be sorry for them, but I was in no mood to join them. They were happy enough to be ants in the new world, but I refused to become an ant again because I had already gone through too much ant work. What was happening in Europe appeared to me to be part of an epoch which would last too long for any of us to reach the sun beyond it.

Still one more group of refugees were those who had been sent for by members of their families who had already become established in the United States, perhaps for several generations. As soon as these refugees arrived they were absorbed into American life. No one thought of them as refugees for long.

If there was no place for us in any of these groups, then where did we fit? I didn't know. I stopped seeing the refugees, though some of them we counted as friends, and began to walk alone again. For awhile I haunted the movie

theaters. Day after day I went to them, as though to a drug. For an hour or so they allowed me to escape from myself, but when I came out into the daylight the hangover was bad. I stood for many hours in front of the show windows on Fifth Avenue that were filled with beautiful glass, until I was afraid of being observed and asked to move on. So I walked up and down Fifth Avenue and looked at women who were exotic and tantalizing and sometimes really lovely. Invariably I ended at the spot I liked best in the city, where I could let my head go back and my gaze flow upward until I found the topmost ledge of the R.C.A. Building. With its great upsweep, soaring straight above everything roundabout, it tempted me like a devil, beckoning me to try once more to climb high with it, over Fifth Avenue, over New York, over this whole new world.

Again and again I went back to it, but every time I turned away. I no longer believed America's slogans. Today a newsboy, tomorrow a president. Get a job washing dishes at Schrafft's and hope to become a manager overnight. They were not applicable to me. I was forty-two years old, not a boy. But I had nothing better to substitute. Somewhere I must find a new set of beliefs, to show me a new way of life.

It was toward the end of April that I retreated into Central Park. I walked over every inch of its winding paths. I tried the benches one by one. I watched other lonely men find solace in feeding fat pigeons, but I was never able to follow their example nor to spend any time looking at animals behind bars in the zoo. When the fruit trees blossomed and the turf grew heavy I spent hours lying on the grass, and there finally some new ideas began to swim into my mind.

Why did I like more than anything else to lie on the ground, I who had always lived in a city and had within me the traditional respect of a European for the lawns of his country? It was a new conception of freedom, this first opportunity I had ever known of letting my body find contact with grass and earth, even if this turf was mixed with cigarette stubs and chewing-gum wrappers. It comforted me as nothing else had done in the city, in spite of the fact that all about me were the façades of buildings like staring faces, some beautiful, most of them ugly. Every morning now I left Milada to find her own solace in work with her hands: mending, cooking, sewing, cleaning. I envied her, but I couldn't share her work. It was her chosen way of keeping her mind from worries, and there was only a limited amount of it to be done. So I went to the park. And day by day I began to piece together a new philosophy.

It was like a mosaic. Whenever I found one colored tile of an idea I had to look for a counter color, and that made me see still more pieces. Thoughts followed thoughts, and the ones that matched each other I held onto, until I could find still more that would fit the pattern. What had seemed ugly one day



became less ugly another day when my mind hunted for reasons and found them. Condemnation became tempered by wiser judgment. Sometimes I struck what seemed to be a dead end in my mental wanderings, and I had to go back and start over again. But day by day I felt that I was advancing, gradually finding my way to conclusions, noticing a true pattern emerge as the pieces were put together.

Each night when I got home I recapitulated my thoughts for Milada, asking her if I was right or wrong. And I found that she was reaching her own conclusions, just as I was. She not only agreed with me, she pushed me forward a little, urging me to go on to find more pieces, encouraging me not to stop until I brought dreams into the focus of reality.

Slowly I found my way out of business-bred reasoning into extreme sentimentality. And then back from sentiment to logic. One warm day when the trees made heavy shadows against the sun my mind kept repeating "grass and earth . . . grass and earth . . . relaxation and meditation." What did it mean? On this hard and dirty ground I had found the first chance in my life to think my own thoughts through. I could never have done it in a club chair, nor even in a coffeehouse. I said to myself, if we could get out of New York, back somewhere into this huge country, away from all these people, all this crazy ant activity which was only trying to seduce me into a repetition of the same foolish behavior that would lead nowhere . . . if this park had served for so many weeks as my only refuge among seven million people, what would a truly quiet, green place do for us? Running water that would fall over clean stones, wildflowers blowing in the wind, silence and seclusion away from all human foolishness?

"Where is my home? Where is my home?" The words of our anthem had a sharp new meaning for me. "Brooks are running through the meadows . . . orchards dressed in spring's array . . ."

I got to my feet. I had found an answer. Out of the tragedy of catastrophic failure, of broken castles in the air, out of a completely meaningless future had emerged a promise of happiness. Now I could do what once as a boy I had longed to do; I could be a farmer or a planter in a country across the sea. Nobody could stop me now . . . no uncle, no board of directors, no customers, no employees, no fights for higher income and titles. No longer would I have to bow before Indian princes, remember protocol and diplomacy. If America was the country of unlimited opportunities, I could interpret the words quite differently from the way the people who lived in the buildings that looked down on me were probably thinking of them. I wanted no opportunity to become a slave to money. If America was the country of unlimited opportunity, it would let me do what I liked.

I could hardly wait to get home to talk to Milada. When I burst into our

two rooms and managed to tell her what I had discovered in the park, she said, "Of course, dear. It's the only solution for us. In the deepest unhappiness there is always some happiness to be squeezed out. Let's take the few dollars we have and buy a small secondhand car. Let's get rid of everything we've brought except what we can pack and take with us, and drive out of New York toward the rest of America. No program, no plan, no timetable, no frontiers, no passport regulations, no customs houses, no prejudices of language. We can stop wherever we like, and then one day out there in the country we can find a place to stay and decide what to do next."

It is a miracle that Milada has never been an ambitious woman. Otherwise we might have landed on Park Avenue after all.

## CHAPTER LI



THE fact that we had made up our minds about what we wanted to do is not to say that we knew how to set about doing it. For some weeks we stayed on in our apartment, relieved to know we were going, but making no move to get under way. I wanted to be sure our decision would stick and that it would seem as good to us after a week or two as it had in the beginning. In the end, events took care of themselves and we moved along with them.

One day we ran into Dmitri Kessel, the photographer. It was good to see him because he reminded us of Prague and the time we had spent with him there. Through Kessel we met two young men only recently out of college who were also photographers, Frank and Harry Lerner. They did some work for me in photostating a few valuable documents, and we fell into an informal kind of discussion. I liked them because they were full of enthusiasm for their work and also because they were willing to accept me as a human being devoid of political significance. I went to their studio again and again, and each time I came away feeling a little more sure of myself because they appeared so certain that we were right in wanting to go into the country. It was the same with other American friends such as Henry De Give, the young lawyer who had helped us when we first started proceedings to incorporate *Rieger, Inc.* It was a tremendous relief to find that we were not completely alone in New York by virtue of our point of view. They also made us feel that we had been right to take the step of applying for our first naturalization papers the previous October on the day when we heard that Beneš had left Czechoslovakia.

And then one afternoon a strange man called us on the telephone. He said his name was Aaron Druckman and he added that he was a professor at Pennsylvania State College and a friend of the Lerner's. They had been talking

to him about us and he wanted to see us. I felt that the request was a little queer, but I suggested that we might arrange to meet at one of the hotels one day the following week.

“Why can’t I come up to your place?” he said.

People didn’t invite themselves to other people’s houses in Prague, but I remembered the informality of the Lerner and decided I must take one of their friends on the same terms.

“Very well,” I said. “We should be happy to have you call this evening. You know where we live?”

“Yes, I know. Frank gave me your address. Couldn’t I come along now? If you’re not busy, of course. I’m very anxious to talk to you.”

There was nothing to do but tell him to come, and yet I was uneasy about meeting the man. It seemed such a strange thing for anyone to do. But when he came into our living room he dispelled nine-tenths of our suspicions at once. An engaging man of something under thirty, with curly blond hair, a straight nose, warm lips and candid blue eyes, he seemed incredibly young to be a college professor. We learned in a few moments that he was a bachelor, that he played a cello and that he had studied abroad. He knew the writings of Thomas Masaryk intimately. He was as natural and informal as the Lerner brothers and he admitted that he had become interested in us through hearing them tell about our plans to drive across the country in search of a place to live.

I was reluctant to talk freely to a stranger about our nebulous plans, but he kept drawing me out. “Look here,” he said. “I understand why you want to see as much of the country as you can before you decide where you want to stay, but it’s a pretty big place, you know. It will take a long time to see it all. Why don’t you learn what you can of one small part of the country outside New York? Then you’ll know better what to look for when you go on to see the rest.”

“It is very kind of you to help us with suggestions,” I said. “But we have first to find that one small part.”

“Of course. That’s why I wanted to see you. How would you like to live in my cottage in a place called Shingletown in the Pennsylvania hills? For the summer. As my guests. It’s a beautiful place, and it’s full of a lot of intelligent Americans, too.”

Milada and I both stared at the man. How could he make such a suggestion! How could a stranger talk to us like this!

“Thank you,” I said stiffly. “You understand, of course, that we couldn’t accept such an invitation.”

“Why not?”

“But you met us only twenty minutes ago. We know nothing about each other. We thank you just the same.”

He smiled at my words, as though there was something funny about them. "Look," he said. "Do you like dogs?"

Now I was sure the man was queer. "Yes," I said. "Of course." I wondered how we could get rid of him politely so as not to hurt the Lerner's feelings.

"Fine," he said. "I'll make you a proposition. I've got a wonderful collie. I want to go off for a vacation as soon as summer school is over and I can't take him with me. Will you come and live in my cottage and take care of my dog? You'd be doing me a great favor. But don't wait until school is out. Come as soon as you can. There are a lot of things I'd like to talk to you about."

He was laughing now as though the joke were on him, and we laughed with him. Suddenly it seemed immensely funny. Before we knew what we were saying we had agreed to live in his house and take care of his dog for the rest of the summer. As soon as he had gone out the door we looked at each other as though we were now the crazy ones. It wasn't until a letter arrived from Professor Druckman two days later, giving us detailed instructions about how to get to Lewistown where he said he would pick us up with his car, that we realized what we had done. It seemed a wild chance that we were taking. But it was one step on our way into the country, and the summer wouldn't last forever.

Before we left New York we had one final encounter with a remnant of Prague and the life we had known there. We read in the papers that Dr. Beneš and Madame Benešová were to be officially received at the World of Tomorrow. On an impulse, we found our way out to the fair on the Flushing meadows and then to the Czechoslovak Pavilion. It was a scorching day and the sun glared back from the walls of the fair buildings, but inside the reception room it was dusky and cool. We stood at the back of the room, waiting for our eyes to become accustomed to the change of light, feeling a surge of happiness at the sound of our own language and the sight of many familiar faces. And then the Czechoslovak consul in New York, Karel Hudec, was at our elbow, insisting that we move closer to the official party at the far end of the room.

There were many frock coats and masses of flowers and Mayor LaGuardia was talking with Madame Benešová. She happened to raise her eyes and then she looked straight at us. She recognized Milada first. Her face broke into a warm, welcoming smile and we were drawn into the official group for a few moments. Madame Benešová pulled a single long-stemmed rose from the bouquet she held in her arms and put it in Milada's hand, and Dr. Beneš held my hand in both of his own as he shook it and said quietly, "It's good to see you. Everything will be all right. Keep your courage. We'll all be home soon."

## CHAPTER LII



ON the fifteenth day of July we set out for Pennsylvania. It was the first train we had traveled on in America, but nothing inside the coach could tear our attention from the windows. First there was the long tunnel under the Hudson River, and then there were the Jersey marshes. They were more horrible than anything we believed possible, and they stretched as far as our eyes could see beyond scummy rivers and coalyards and shabby factories and filthy tenements. We sank back in our seats and stopped looking, trying to pretend to each other that we weren't disappointed in the country we had set out to see. After awhile the scenery grew less noisome, but even the open woods looked unkempt and ugly with their wild underbrush. European forests are neat and open, and as high above the ground as man can reach there are no shrubs or tree branches left growing. Every little town the train went through showed its backside to the tracks. Most of the houses we could see were unpainted and dingy with coal smoke. This certainly wasn't the country we were expecting. By the time we reached Lewistown in the late afternoon our spirits were very low.

Professor Druckman was waiting for us on the station platform. He was as friendly as we had remembered him in New York. He stowed our luggage in the back of his car, put us into the seat beside him, and we started off across the mountains for State College, some thirty miles away. It was the first American highway we had seen, white and winding and wide, with forests coming to the edge of the pavement. Every turn and lift in the road gave us sudden new views of valleys and farms. Our spirits began to rise. The air was clean and sweet and invigorating, and Druckman began to sing "Roll Out the Barrel." It was the tune of one of our country polkas and we thought he was singing it to please us. He laughed when we thanked him, and then he began to tell us some of the differences we would observe between life in America and life in Europe.

Every farmhouse we could see from the crest of the mountains was situated in the midst of great spaces of cultivated land, as if each one were a small world in itself. Druckman explained why farm life in America was so different from European farm communities. Instead of many farmers living in one settlement and going out each day to the fields that radiated from it, these farmers lived in the center of their own land. We thought it must be a wonderful way to live, deep in a beautiful valley, miles away from the activities of other people. And we liked it more and more as we covered the miles, because these forest-covered mountains separated by rolling, cultivated

land were similar to parts of Bohemia.

When we pulled in to the curb before a drugstore in the town of State College we tried not to gape, but again we could hardly believe our eyes. The college buildings were large and beautiful, but they were surrounded by wide lawns. Students were leaving classes, boys and girls together, dressed in the most astonishing fashion. The boys wore no ties, the girls wore sport shoes and socks and loose sweaters, none of them wore hats, and they carried great stacks of books under their arms. What kind of students could these be, all very gay, shouting and calling to each other in a language we only half understood? Strange cars were going down the main street with students spilling out, and the sides of the cars and the backs of the boys' jackets were alike painted with funny words and figures. When two cars that were passing stopped abruptly in the middle of the block in order to let their inmates talk to each other, and one car refused to start again, more students appeared to push it half a block until the engine sparked and it went on its way.

We went into the drugstore and sat in a booth and Druckman ordered something which he called "cokes." Here were more of the same students, noisy, laughing, moving from booth to booth to talk to their friends. Girls sat with their feet tucked under, they all drank through straws, and none of them seemed to mind the fact that one of their professors was sitting close enough to hear their gay remarks. We were utterly fascinated.

Then we drove out of town again and on to Shingletown, some five miles away. It was a small community of perhaps twenty houses, all on one side of the road at the edge of a forest. The houses were white-painted frame buildings with field-stone foundations, separated from the road by white picket fences, and they were surrounded by gardens and orchards. It looked to us like heaven. Druckman's cottage had a small veranda, large windows, and an apple tree at the corner of the house. Hollyhocks were blooming by the picket fence and a sprinkler was rotating in the garden next door. Inside we found a large living room with a huge field-stone fireplace and walls solidly lined with books. Behind the living room was a kitchen which opened on the back garden, and upstairs there were two small bedrooms under the sloping roof.

As soon as we had entered the door a handsome collie came to greet us. Druckman introduced him as Duke, but he needed no formal overtures of friendship. He jumped on me and told me in every way a dog can manage that he was a good-hearted fellow and that he was glad we had come to stay. From that night on he tagged my footsteps from morning to night.

While the summer term lasted, Druckman came home each afternoon to find a warm supper in preparation and his bachelor's quarters metamorphosed into a home. Milada had put the place in order without a word. And then one day he informed us that he had decided to spend his vacation at home; he could

think of no other place where he would rather be. He was happy, and we were happy for the first time in many months. We were only three hundred miles from New York, about equal to the distance between Prague and Budapest, or halfway from Prague to Paris, but it seemed a world away from our worries of the winter.

I set about repairing fences and cleaning up the garden because I could think of nothing else to do for our host. The land around the house had gone untended for some time, so I removed rusted tin cans and old newspapers and rubble and weeds. And then I decided to plant something. I had never touched the earth with my hands before, but I was excited by the very smell and texture of it. I bought beans and peas, read the directions carefully on each package, and planted them, in spite of the fact that the season was late and nothing was likely to come of such activity. Then I brought a deck chair and a table into the garden and put them under an apple tree, and sat there reading and writing letters and watching the brown earth.

It was a world of peace and quietness, of new ideas and inner excitements that had nothing whatever to do with the world of cities and city men. The day my first bean broke through the ground I was beside myself with joy. I sat beside the garden for hours, certain that if I watched closely enough I could actually see the movement of those straight, pale-green shoots. When the first two leaves spread out on each small bean shoot I began to feel foolish for having considered myself a creative artist. Suddenly all my fine glass and china that I had been mourning lost its importance. I could think of no pattern or ornament to compare with these bean leaves. And they had come from nearly nothing, with so little help from me. One dry seed contained more potential beauty than anything ever developed in my own head.

Beyond a low stone wall on one side of Druckman's place was the garden of another professor. On the other side was the property of an old farmer whose family had lived in the same house for generations. He was exactly the sort of man I thought American pioneers should be. He wore a long, rather crumpled mustache, his skin was a weather-beaten brown, his all-purpose trousers were held up by suspenders, and periodically he went on a drunk which he slept off in a corner of his vegetable patch. So far as I could tell, he lived alone. Beyond him was an old couple whose name was Kline. She wore a sunbonnet and he hobbled about his garden with the aid of a stick.

For at least a month we talked to no one but Druckman. One evening soon after our arrival he had made a cursory introduction over the stone hedge to the professor next door. We learned that his name was Edward Nichols and that he taught English literature. He always called "hello" if he happened to be in his own yard when I went into the garden to read or write, but I only nodded gravely and there was no conversation. Gradually I became absorbed in

everything that went on in the garden of Professor Nichols, though I always turned my chair so that my back was toward it, and when I found that I could overhear his conversation with friends I retired to my vegetable patch. Still I realized that a life unlike anything I had ever known was going on there.

Eddie Nichols, as I discovered his friends called him, was probably thirty-five years old. He was tall and lean and dark. His eyes were deep pools of liquid brown, his hair was bronze, his skin showed evidence of much outdoor exercise, and his voice carried a deep ring through everything he said. His expression moved easily from gravity to mirth and back to intense interest in whatever he was doing. When he listened to the music of the victrola that was brought into the garden he was unruffled and thoughtful. When he was absorbed in a discussion he was quick with his points, tense and eager.

One afternoon I was surprised to find a ball game under way in the yard next door. There was Professor Nichols stripped to his brown waist, wearing nothing but a pair of bathing shorts, shouting and yelling with a group of his students, all of them behaving as equals and friends, calling the things American boys all yell from the corner of their mouths when they are playing ball. Impromptu games like that had been no part of my young days. I couldn't help thinking how different the temperament of the whole of Central Europe might be today if we had learned to play games, and take our share of beatings, the way American and British boys must learn to do. And that same night Professor Nichols was playing the piano in his house with a group of his close friends around him. The music drifted through the warm night, mingling with the chirp of crickets and katydids, while Milada and I sat in the dark under the apple trees, and fireflies sparked on and off through the shrubs, and moonlight made patterns on the lawn, and we thought how strange and beautiful this was after the city life we had always known.

One day Professor Nichols called to me across the stone hedge and asked if I'd like to take a ride with him. He was driving one of his students home to some place in West Virginia. It would be a good way for me to see more of the country and he would enjoy my company on the way back. I felt a little strange about accepting the invitation; I had become so fascinated by the life of Shingletown as I saw it from Druckman's garden that it had never occurred to me that Shingletown might be interested in the two Czechs who had come for a stay in its midst. But I very much wanted to go with Professor Nichols, and so I did.

As we started across the mountains and valleys, Nichols talked and the student talked while I listened and pondered the fundamental differences between this kind of teacher-pupil relationship and the ones I had known. There was a spontaneous warmth in the professor's manner, and his voice was entirely different from the one I had heard during the ball game. He began to



ask me questions without formality or the casual approach into conversation we invariably use in Europe. He was gay and full of quick energy of spirit and I had a passing impression that he was talking as a friend might in the presence of a convalescent whom he wanted to make smile. He talked about America and I liked his pride in her inner strength and beauty, her unlimited resources, her ability to learn, and the warm heart he knew was in her. As he spoke of the rich countryside his words took on a quality of poetry and the car slowed down perceptibly. When he tried to tell me about the vitality of America's workers and the stubbornness of the pioneers who had conquered the land he stepped on the gas and took a curve with a wild sweep into the wind.

In trying to answer his questions about my own country I felt suddenly limited in my use of his language and more than a little overcome by the renewed knowledge that my country was lost to me for an indefinite time to come. I asked him to correct me whenever I misused an English word, but he countered by saying that my mistakes had a peculiar interest for a teacher of English. He added that America was ours to be taken and to be loved so long as we were unable to go home. By the end of the day when we returned to Shingletown I was exhausted by all the new ideas which Professor Nichols had given me, but I was also very happy.

Several days later Milada and I were invited to the house next door to meet some of the professor's friends. There was Harold Graves whom they called Barney, tall and gray and full of kindly good humor. There was Jack Bowman, also of the English department, sensitive and exact. There were their wives who were not like professors' wives in Europe; they shared ideas and maintained intellectual standards of their own. There were the Woods and the Cannons, and George Palmer and Bill Hickling who had been their students. They all called each other by their given names and invited us to do likewise, but it was many months before we found ourselves able to accept the invitation. The first evening was followed by others. We met more members of this group of friends and we discovered that they all liked good music, whether made by themselves or others, they all talked about a great variety of things, and they all wanted to ask us questions.

It took us a long time to learn how to answer in the way they expected us to do. In Europe I would have been made vain by such questions, for there they would have implied that I was a wise person with much to say that was worth hearing. Here their questions seemed merely to say, "If you have an answer, give it. If not, tell us so." Their manner of asking touched my pride and forced me to answer; and in formulating my replies, my thoughts began to work far better than they did shut up in the silence of my own mind. I was amazed at some of the answers I found.

I was impressed by the way men of their kind never felt embarrassment or

shame in stating candidly that they knew nothing about this or that, and furthermore were willing to admit that they were anxious to learn what they didn't know. In Central Europe we never admitted our ignorance about anything, either in public or in private. If possible, we avoided any field of conversation or discussion in which our knowledge was not strong. If not possible, we turned the subject skillfully at the first opportunity. In Middle Europe it would be inconceivable for a man of position to say "I don't know anything about it."

The first evidence of a change of behavior traceable to these new American surroundings was a willingness to forget my vanity in sticking to a position I had taken after I was shown that my logic was faulty. I respected these professors and their wives and friends. They were critical, but they were also kind. Whenever they proved me to be wrong, they also gave me a way to rectify my mistakes. These things took time, of course, but the process of change was steady. The peaceful life of Shingletown was healing my nerves and the discussions were healing my mind.

When September came and we suddenly realized that another college year was about to begin, we tried to tell Professor Druckman of our appreciation of the start he had given us on a new life in America and made our preparations to leave. We tried to tell the group of friendly people we had met through Professor Nichols how much they had taught us and how they had made us feel at home. Then why leave, they said to us, if you like it here? They brought old Mrs. Kline to see us. She owned an old schoolhouse that had been empty for years, ever since a bus had begun to take the Shingletown children to school in State College. As a child she had gone to school there herself. It was within sight of Professor Nichols' house, at the edge of the forest. She was willing to rent it to us for next to nothing a month, though we would have to furnish it ourselves. Even before we looked at it, we knew we would stay. There was no place else in the whole of America where we so much wanted to be.

We bought a small car, because now we could no longer depend upon Professor Druckman to take us to State College for our shopping, and drove back to New York to buy furnishings to add to the pieces we had already ordered from Lewistown. We decided to get nothing out of keeping with the simplicity of this new life, so we chose sturdy, solid maple furniture: chests and a desk and a trestle table and Windsor chairs; chintz-covered lounge chairs, a handmade rug, a brass-bowled lamp, and a studio couch that would serve as both bed and sofa.

We stayed in the city for three days and our enthusiasm was so high that nothing in New York could bring us down to the old level of depression. We went to see the Lerner's to thank them as the first links in the chain of

circumstances which had sent us to Pennsylvania. Their interest in our new experiences fortified our faith in the decision to stay in Shingletown.

Once or twice we ran into some of the refugees. We made the mistake of trying to tell them about the completely different character of the people we had met in the college town in Pennsylvania, about the quietness of life in the country. They answered us with sarcasm and poor jokes; they said we liked our new life because we could sit on chairs on a lawn all day and do nothing. So we picked up our books and our collection of glass and went back to Shingletown, more than ever convinced that we were right to have dropped out of the race in New York.

## CHAPTER LIII



THE schoolhouse was a white clapboard building on a field-stone foundation, fifty feet long by twenty-five feet wide. An old bell that had once called children to classes still hung over the door. A great field-stone fireplace with a railroad tie for a mantel took up the far end of the room opposite the door, and each of the side walls was broken by four windows made from small panes of hand-rolled glass. Partitions on either side of the door made a kitchen and a bedroom, but essentially it was one large room.

Milada began the first day in our new home by putting the kitchen in order and I began to scrub the fifty-foot floor. I thought it would be great fun. I invented patterns on the floor to make the work more interesting, tracing designs as I wet it, soaped it, scrubbed it with a hard brush, and then rinsed it. The first square was easy, and I thought how beautiful it would be after it was dry and waxed and polished. But I had done only a third of the room when my body began to rebel. My knees and my back were sore and aching, my fingers were burning and all my muscles were stiff from the unaccustomed use. I told myself stubbornly that I would finish it if it killed me.

Always I had thought my youth had been a hard one. Now, scrubbing the floor, I realized that I had never done such things before. I had watched my mother or other people doing them. For the first time I knew what her work had really meant. Because I had seen her do it, I had almost thought I had done it myself. I determined now that in every kind of work in this new life, cutting wood, working in the garden, I would always set myself excessive limits, to see if I could be as strict a boss with myself as any real boss would ever be.

The floor was less than half finished when I saw that Milada, without a word, had started on the other end. So it was with everything we did in putting our first home in order. I chopped wood while Milada learned still more about

cooking. I washed windows while she made soft, pretty curtains for them. I uncrated the furniture and she rubbed it clean and smooth. And then we unpacked our glass, washed it, and Milada arranged it on the shelves of an old corner chest which Mrs. Kline had put in the house to surprise us. We hung our photographs of Prague and the pictures of our family and friends. And then one day we were able to say, "Come and see us in our new home."

The woods beside our schoolhouse turned brilliant as the autumn nights brought frost, and gradually the days grew colder. But the flames on our hearth burned high, and nearly every evening our room was warm with friendly faces. The unconventional habit of dropping in without invitation was new to us, but we learned that these people who came to see us expected no formalities in the way of entertainment and we welcomed them whenever a knock came on our door. Even Druckman's collie spent a good part of his time with us, running back and forth perpetually between the two places he considered home.

Meanwhile the war had begun. It had reached the point of official declarations just before we moved into the schoolhouse. The acknowledged outbreak of a war that Hitler had been waging for years was a relief to us rather than a sign for sorrow. We had known since 1938 that this moment was inevitable. Deep inside, I knew that I was going to take part in it somehow before it was over, but when or how must wait on developments. Only France and the British Empire were fighting Germany now, and I could feel neither sympathy nor confidence in either one of these powers. For decades they had been blind: they had turned their backs on Spain, they had turned their backs on us, they had turned their backs on Russia. I remained unconvinced that they were in a war now for any other purpose than to defend their own interests, and those interests were no longer mine.

So throughout the winter following the fall of Poland, while the armies of Europe were in a stalemate, we lived quietly. Night after night Eddie Nichols would come in, throw himself on the floor before the fire, and start to talk. The others would follow, sometimes many, sometimes a few, but invariably the discussions went on until the early hours of the morning. Our affection for these people grew and became real, and our education in ways American kept pace. The discussions began to reach deeper into history and the questions they asked us were more and more centered on Czechoslovakia. Being forced to find answers, I became more than ever aware of the quality and beauty of our country. But when it came to exact historic dates and questions of economics and politics, I realized to my shame how ignorant I was. They forced me to read and gain a more extensive knowledge of the history of Czechoslovakia in order to explain the present.

Always the questions reverted in time to Milada and Jan Rieger. Why had we come to Shingletown? What were we looking for? They asked us about our

past. It was simply a natural American curiosity which prompted them, but the questions became more important to me than to them. My past, compared with these new surroundings, became less and less impressive. After awhile, I realized that my success in Prague had lost its glamour. Talking to these men who were teachers, engineers, farmers, writers, I learned that they were all doing creative work in their own way. The apparent importance of my old life in Europe faded right out as I listened to them, and I saw it go without a backward glance.

Why had I come to this country, they wanted to know. Well, why had I? What did I expect from them, they went on. What did I? These people were not interested in extracting facts and theories from me which would corroborate various attitudes and political stands they had already taken. They just wanted to know the truth. Their minds were open. I felt obliged to answer them honestly, and in doing so I learned more than they did. When I asked myself if I would miss the world of glamour and success I had known, I was driven to form a conclusion from the people with whom we now lived. If a man has sufficient within himself, I decided, that is all he needs and all that counts. For the first time in my life I knew an inner peace, and I tried to tell them about it.

Still they plied me with questions. What was this inner peace? I did the best I could to describe something that no one can define. My personal peace meant freedom in myself, gratitude for my present life, a wish to live the rest of my days as I was doing now. Why did I like to dig in my own and my neighbors' gardens? Because it was something I had wanted to do since I was a boy, and having done it, I was not disappointed. When Milada served squash for our supper, it was my own squash. I knew now that I was able, with my own hands, to feed us. My hands, which before had wielded no heavier tool (except for a gun) than a pencil or a fountain pen to sign orders, were useful for growing food. It gave me an immeasurable feeling of self-reliance as a man, apart from myself as a member of a great institution. In the period of my success I had sometimes thought of my grandfather as crazy because he had chosen to live in the country instead of coming to town. Now I knew he had found the truth, at least the truth for himself.

During these nights I learned a new tolerance in listening to the expression of other peoples' opinions. At first I was inclined to interrupt with my own counter-opinion to a presented argument, and then I discovered that I was never interrupted in turn. Only after I had finished what I set out to say would the answers come. In Central Europe, there were only two ways of carrying on a discussion. Either a group agreed and talked around a subject in order to add to each others' shared opinions; or they disagreed. In the latter case, it was an open fight and it invariably ended with the opponents parting as irreconcilables, if not enemies.

During those nights in the old schoolhouse I learned that no one was ashamed or stubborn enough to keep him from admitting the fact if he changed his mind. I learned how much opinions could differ in these groups, how strongly they contradicted each other, and yet how these Americans always kept a balance in their manner of expression and especially in the way they never raised their voices. Often we finished in complete disaccord with opposing points of view which seemed unbridgeable, but the Americans would laugh and admit that while they had not been convinced by the strength of my arguments, they nevertheless respected my opinions. I could hardly believe my ears. It was one of the most resounding revelations of my life, to learn that a heated discussion need not terminate in personal hatred. They were still my friends.

It was not until the next year that I had an opportunity to see an American election operate, but it was of a piece with these new lessons. On this question, too, there were differences of opinion among our friends. There were times when the arguments grew so heated that I failed to see how these people could possibly leave our house and still be good friends after the words they had said to each other. And yet, as Milada and I stood still in our doorway, watching them walk across the lawn to their cars on the road, we could hear them laughing and joking, not as though it were a pretense used for the purpose of smoothing away their disagreements, but as though they were genuinely amused with each other.

After the election there were no traces of a grudge on either side. So I learned that the fundamental truths and basic ideas of democracy in this country are embedded in both political parties. Once again I recalled that Thomas Masaryk had said that a new democracy needed at least fifty years of freedom before its ideas could penetrate into every corner of the lives of its people. Unfortunately Czechoslovakia's fifty years had not been allowed to run.

## CHAPTER LIV



SINCE we had made up our minds to live in the country, we decided we had better learn something about earning our living from it. So in January, 1940, we enrolled in a short agricultural course at State College and went back to school together. The classes were a strange experience for us. Our English was still somewhat limited in this new field of scientific ideas and it was difficult to follow the lectures. At night we would read the words in the textbooks and pronounce them in our own fashion, and when we heard them in

class the next day we had no notion what was being said. But eventually we fell into this new routine and began to enjoy it. Milada learned what she felt was necessary for her to know and what she wanted to know, which was chiefly horticulture. I was more ambitious and read late into the nights to get everything I could squeeze from the course. In March we graduated, along with all the earnest boys of seventeen to twenty who had taken these months from other work in order to improve their firsthand knowledge of agriculture.

Sometime during those months we reached a decision to put all our remaining capital into a chicken farm. The idea didn't come into being whole, but simply grew out of our studies until it was there, and we accepted it without question. We had gone to the land to live, and therefore we must live from it, but we wanted something better than mere subsistence farming. We had no wish to work for someone else; we wanted to work for ourselves. Day after day we talked over the possibilities.

Truck gardening was out of the question except in the vicinity of a fair-sized city and then it would require too much hired labor. We were not attracted by the thought of raising pigs or goats or any specialized kind of farm produce that had a seasonal nature. We were not in a grain country and we had no wish to leave Pennsylvania because we hoped to stay as close as possible to our friends. Dairy farming required a large outlay and experienced help, none of which we could afford. Besides, we knew too little about cows to feel attached to the idea of caring for them. We had always preferred eggs to milk.

So we settled on chickens. They must be white ones, we decided, and we began to picture ourselves surrounded by the lovely feathered creatures . . . so clean, so cheerful, so small and dependent on our care. We could start with a small flock and make it pay, then gradually increase the size of our chicken farm until it was a sight to behold. And chickens we could manage by ourselves. No big industry, no labor-management problems, no employees to interrupt the solitude of the quiet life we had chosen to live in the country. It was a dream we felt certain we could transform into truth.

For a long time we kept our decision, not sharing it with anyone. We still had so much to learn. We thought we might even take more courses at the university in the autumn. We were far from ready to leave Shingletown, though it was a satisfaction to look ahead to a definite project when the time was ripe for it.

So it was like a voice from another world when a registered air-mail letter reached me from France, asking that I accept a position as American representative of the Sèvres china factory. I thought about it awhile and finally we decided that I should answer in the affirmative. After my letter had gone we gave it no more consideration. Long before we had come to the conclusion that we were in the hands of God. He had been good to us so far and we knew

He would continue to care for us if we kept our minds open to His voice.

Our vegetable garden in Eddie Nichols' yard was planted and growing well when France fell. Sèvres china had gone the way of our Bohemian glass. This new turn in the war brought a flood of memories of my years in Paris, and I found that my grudge against the country had disappeared. I could think only about the tragedy of the French people, rather than my dislike for their leaders. Shortly after the evacuation of Dunkirk we drove to New York and I went straight to the Czechoslovak consulate to offer my services in any military organization that might be formed as a result of this new turn of events. But once again I was told that I must wait. No military organization for Czechs was contemplated in America as yet.

We went back to Shingletown to our schoolhouse and our friends. The summer grew hot and Milada's skin browned beautifully. She wore light, pretty summer dresses and I felt that she was more lovely than I had ever seen her in Paris gowns. She learned to preserve fruit and vegetables, she wandered into the woods to pick berries, and in other ways made a place for herself in this new life. Only the knowledge of what was going on abroad made us feel selfish in our private heaven.

Three activities which we had never known before occupied us now: work with our hands, hours of fruitful reading, and long evenings with our friends. When Eddie discovered that my first reading about contemporary America had been the *New Yorker* he told me that his attic was full of back numbers. So I carried them on a wheelbarrow to the schoolhouse and then I vanished behind their pages until I had read all the copies, one by one. Milada and I discussed the stories of Sally Benson, James Thurber, Irwin Shaw and the others for hours on end as we tried to figure out what they meant.

There were still so many new things to learn in America. The unpleasant effect of skunks and poison ivy and copperheads, for instance. None of those three was known to us in Czechoslovakia. But there was the sweet sound of birds in the early morning, robins following me along a garden row as I hoed the earth and turned up worms for them, and the sense of enormous space in the clear air of a summer night in the country. Day after day the pool of rain water that stayed in a sunken place on the side road between our house and Eddie's turned the sky upside down for me to peer into and learn some more. The size of its mirrored surface changed now and then, but there was always enough rain to keep the hole at least partially filled. And on that patch of water was reflected all the moods of Shingletown, from dawn through the singing of cicadas on a hot noon to the bath of moonlight that poured down on us. And all the moods were good.

I came to discover that what I wore was completely unimportant. All the clothes we had brought from home hung useless in our cupboards, for my daily



garment now was a pair of denim overalls, and Milada preferred light cotton frocks. Eddie had offered me a good-sized patch of his yard for my vegetable garden, since the land around the schoolhouse had never been cultivated, so I walked back and forth between the two houses several times a day, carrying my tools with me. And on these walks it became obvious that the “good mornings” called to me from the gardens I passed had nothing to do with silk shirts and custom-made suits. These neighbors were talking to me, not to my dirty overalls and moccasined feet.

Once we spoke about getting old. Milada said, “I would like to look just as old Mrs. Kline does. She has preserved her dignity and a fine contentment. I don’t want anything more than that. She has lived here all her life, and she’s never needed anything else.” And having said it, she put a basket over her arm and went off to pick berries. She had no fear of skunks, copperheads or poison ivy. If any of the three appeared in her path she merely laughed and stepped out of their way.

By the end of the summer we decided to hunt for a farm. We were in no great hurry, for we knew what we wanted and we felt sure we could find it if we made no quick decisions. And after awhile we did find it, halfway between Allentown and Philadelphia in Montgomery County. It was not far from our friends, Hansell and Jean French, who had helped in our search, and it was only a few miles from the home of Bill Hickling, one of Eddie’s pupils and friends. It was for rent, not for sale, but we were offered an option to buy.

The country was rolling and the house stood on the slope of a gentle hill, facing across a long valley. It was part of the extensive estate of Paul Fisher who bred blond-maned Palominos horses. The house was whitewashed stone, three stories high, with walls eighteen inches thick, and it was surrounded by five acres which included a thirty-tree orchard of apples and peaches. It stood at the end of a large meadow which was divided by a fast-running creek. At the edge of the meadow was a stand of hardwood trees, and the fields on two sides of the house were planted with clover and oats. In front of the house were small pine trees and one huge oak, edging the lawn, and the orchard was behind the house.

The house had been empty for some years. Some way behind it were a two-story barn, a chicken house, a workshop, and a brooder house filled with a great quantity of metal chicken feeders, water fountains, stoves and what not else. There was also a shed which could be used as a garage, and a row of summer houses for chickens near the belt of hardwoods. Water was supplied from a well by electric pump.

Inside the house we found two large living rooms on the first floor which opened into each other, and behind them a handsome kitchen. One of the living rooms had a huge Washington hearth of field stones, and the other had a red

brick fireplace. The ceilings were heavy oak beams, the floors were hardwood, and the walls were papered. Upstairs there were three bedrooms, one with a fireplace, and one ample bathroom. These rooms also had beamed ceilings. On the third floor was a fine attic.

It was all we had ever dreamed of finding in a home of our own. On the day we made our final inspection and signed the lease, we met John Bergey and his wife, our nearest neighbors who lived two miles away and managed the estate for Paul Fisher. They were about seventy-five years old, and because they were Mennonites they wore nothing but black, even to his hat and her bonnet. They were a fine-looking couple, proud and upright. We learned from them that the whole section was Mennonite country.

We left Shingletown in December, 1940. It would have been a bitter wrench had we not known that the friends we had found there were not the kind to forget us once we were out of sight. One of the last parties I remember was what Eddie called a jam session at his house. He loved jazz and understood it. A group of students brought their instruments and while they played, Eddie gave us a commentary on the spontaneous nature of their performance. It was a common sight to us by now to see students in Eddie's house. At first the conduct between teacher and pupils had seemed incredible. They were never treated as youngsters, but as equals with their teachers in matters both gay and serious. The conviction was born in upon me that the new generation growing up in America would be straightforward, honest men and women because they had gained friendship and inspiration from such men as Eddie Nichols, Barney Graves and Jack Bowman. It was a good thought to take away with us.

## CHAPTER LV



THE saga of our days in Montgomery County went into the letters I sent back. Because those friends in State College had taught me to get on the level with myself and think straight, I found that I wanted to go on talking with them, to answer their questions even before I was asked. So it was that I spent long nights when physical work had to stop, typing out pages and pages and sending them off from the mailbox down by the dirt road at the edge of our five acres. I kept copies of everything I wrote because I had acquired the habit of such order in the days when all my letters took the form of business correspondence. Today I am glad I did so, because those letters captured the mood of our life on the farm, and they hold it still.

Telford, Pennsylvania  
December 23, 1940

My dear friends:

According to the dictionary which you gave me, an object is anything that can be touched with three fingers, also anything that can be perceived with the senses. Whatever I see and touch, after one week's struggle with the hostility of different objects, I also perceive by the sense of pain, such as tools, nails, splinters, fire. But this letter, the first one written in our new home, will show you that neither fatigue nor eight sore fingers can keep me from telling you that it has been a long week since we left Shingletown.

Monday we arrived at Hickling's home, driving through a terrible rainstorm the whole way (even the heavens cried when we left you), and entered our new house early the next morning with a blue and sunny heaven as our welcome.

A pleasant surprise awaited us. The house had a complete pipeless heating-system in the cellar and it was already warm. Mr. Bergey had found out that without such a furnace the house would be impossible and he made the installation in a single day. At noon the truck arrived, I helped unload, and, we had all our things in the house in two hours. At two in the morning we were sitting in our living room with clean floors and clean windows, all the furniture in place except books, glass and pictures, just as it was in the schoolhouse.

Tuesday we arranged the kitchen, I unpacked the bookcases and cleaned the attic. Thursday we scraped the floor of the dining room and the stairs, in the evening I prepared ninety Christmas cards, and then we painted our postbox with a lot of fun and a fight. It reminded me of our first artistic work in the bathroom of the schoolhouse. Milada insists that there is no doubt about my former character, so clumsy are the letters I made. Friday I worked over a huge area of the place so that no single paper or tin can could be found. Now I am sorry that we are not located along some important highway. This Friday everyone would have stopped to ask who lived on such clean land.

This evening Milada arranged our glass in one part of the high bookshelves. Sunday (in all secrecy) I scrubbed the floor of the bedroom and the hall. Milada cleaned the bathroom, and after this work of six hours we arranged our pictures. Today I dislocated every bone in my tired body digging a scientific ditch next to the shed, very complicated and probably wrong, and Milada the angel is preparing tomorrow's Christmas dinner.

There are a lot of improvements which show the good will of our landlord. New eaves on the house, three workers painting all the buildings white with

dark green window and door boards, chicken house roofs repaired and even the beginnings of a new road up to the house. I have not touched the chicken house and have put the date of this work for January first. Droppings bring luck.

As you see from this report, Jan the farmer has proved to be only a good interior decorator and a slow, but efficient floor scrubber, so your congratulations must wait until the first chicken house report. But I forgot . . . also a perfect garbage remover, as my Friday record shows.

The house is beautiful and it seems like a dream to walk down the open stairs or look through our fifteen windows (attic not included) over forests, fields and hills. I can even forget for a moment my uneasiness . . .

○ ○

December 29, 1940

. . . You cannot imagine how clearly the spirit of your friendship spoke to us from the lines of your letters. Through your generous gift you have assured yourselves that the *New Yorker* will prevent any rust in the joints of my brain and will safeguard our future discussions from nothing but chickens, drainage and vegetable troubles.

Seeing a *New Yorker* lying on the table under our lamp, I am reminded of the way I read copies of the *Reader's Digest* so carefully when we first came to America, believing it to be the best possible way of learning what Americans were thinking and saying. I stopped reading it fairly soon. Good books are not written either to be burned or to be presented to the reader in a concentrated teaspoon dose for quick and easy digestion. To read means to check up a writer in his thoughts, arguments and conclusions. And that means training in independent thinking. From such thinking we learn to evaluate human relationships, we gain wisdom, and we are trained in logical reasoning . . . all too important to be left to a book-dietitian's formula. It is like reading a recipe instead of eating the food that it describes.

You are perfectly right, dear Mrs. Graves, when you say that something is wrong with my Christmas card. Jan is not carrying water to the house in heavy pails, but since Friday he has been digging ditches to draw off water after a heavy rain. Where is Milada? Inside, hoping that Jan may not come back too soon, because the kitchen stove has gone out and she has no breakfast for him. This has happened only three times in twelve days, but why should I drop such a fine opportunity to be a martyr?

Yesterday we went with Mr. and Mrs. French to Norristown to shop. I bought heavy galoshes and water fountains for baby chicks, which are doubtless wrong models for practical use. Milada bought curtains for the

windows which she must return tomorrow because they are *already* wrong. You will ask why I am so nasty to Milada in reporting breakfast-and-curtain troubles with such evident joy. But please, consider what a man can do who is married to a woman of such outstanding qualities as those of my wife? She works day and night as though she were two men, she is handy, she knows everything, even how to fill in holes she has made in the wall, she provides me with delicious dinners (I do not say breakfasts), and takes care of me. She even drives on days when I should desert the car and walk.

Today I looked only for a moment in the chicken and brooder houses. They are so dirty my skin went cold and I felt I had to take a bath at once. Now I shall have the task of taking this matter in my hands without delay (and with double gloves) because February first is the latest date for the inauguration of the chicken farm with some speeches, the usual music, and ribbon cutting. One must make concessions to the public, even though we should prefer a more simple ceremony with only champagne and a cold buffet.

The place is still lovely, even with the mud, and we are very happy. On New Year's Eve, when midnight brings the new 1941, our thoughts and our prayers will include you all . . .

○ ○

January 5, 1941

. . . Last week I worked every day in the poultry houses. Sorry to disappoint you, but the present cycle of my mind is not "Broilers—layers—feed and eggs," as you suggest, but "Garbage—rubbish—dirt and more dirt." I cleaned the brooder house of a three-year accumulation of old manure, about three inches deep, which stuck to the floor as though it were cement. I carried out the fixtures from the chicken house, where bird cadavers were still lying around. And I regard these unpleasant moments as perfectly right; otherwise our life would be suspiciously lovely. Such work is the ring of Polycrates which I am throwing away as an offering to appease the envying demons.

Our living room windows are covered with beautiful curtains, the stove works fine since my last complaint and the breakfast is late no more. The furnace is wonderful; we are more than ever grateful for it as we listen to the storm that has been blowing around our house since yesterday, shaking the windows in a mad attempt to get in. It will take another couple of weeks before I can order my first baby chicks, because I want to have everything clean and disinfected before I bring my first flock on the place. . . .

○ ○

January 12, 1941

. . . In the matter of writing I am, alas, a bachelor, so the stand is five letters for the Shingletown team, four letters for the lonely Telford player.

Monday I started in earnest as a farmer. The stable work was very hard and ugly and I spare you a complete description of the episodes involved in it. They would require a Céline to do them justice. Now a big truckload of manure, with all its horrors, waits to be carried away. Yesterday I tried a cross and rip saw and a plane for the first time in my life. I put six window glasses in a sash, after having broken them myself the previous week, and now I would not be afraid to build a three-floor house.

While I write, a very charming person sits next to the fire working patiently on her curtains for the staircase and kitchen. She tells no long stories about her own hard work, she does not compare herself with Mrs. Hercules, she does not complain about her own burned hands and arms in keeping the home fires smoothly burning. She gives me all the credit as hard-working superman, because she is Milada, the housewife. She is the permanent sunshine of the Rieger Place, and should my chicks show any weakness in bones or feather growth, I shall use Milada as a good Vitamin D compensation for them, in place of sunshine. No late breakfasts any more, everything is perfect. If she ever finishes her curtains for the windows on the second floor, I shall build a third in order to give her some new windows to decorate. . . .

○ ○

January 26, 1941

Writing this letter once again on a quiet Sunday afternoon, I do not know if it will reach you tomorrow or later in the week. It depends upon my ability to walk the four hundred yards from our house along the completely glazed road to our mailbox at the edge of the forest. This is the second time a stormy ice-rain has transformed the whole land around us into an immense skating pond. It has even cut the antenna of our radio and broken many branches on our trees and shrubs.

This time the storm arrived on Friday, when Milada was in Souderton purchasing provisions, and you can imagine how nervous and anxious I was before she reached the house. We could never understand your newsreels when we saw them in Europe, showing blizzards. Now I know what they meant.

. . . Since Christmas our neighbors, the Bergeys, have been asking me each week if my chickens have arrived. There are days when I am equally skeptical about the speed of my work. Mr. Lawless, head of the poultry marketing division of the Agriculture Department in Harrisburg, came to see us one day this week with Mr. French and stayed for dinner. He agreed with me that all

danger of disease in and around the houses must be checked before I put the flock in them.

We had a terrible rainstorm the day after he was here and this evening both the brooder and chicken house are showing great water spots coming up through the cement floors which were considered perfect. I now have to face the difficult problem of how to repair or construct a new seventy by forty-foot cement floor.

Sometimes I think that my way of working in this new situation is very consistent with the characteristic habits of my people. Americans like quick work, turning out as fast as possible a great number of results in the shortest time, taking risks and also chances, trying to produce something cheap in large numbers. It makes for many mistakes, but it also makes for much brilliant new work, like modern music and painting and even modern American writing.

We are still strange to this way. We work slowly and carefully, taking no chances, but trying for a result of high quality. Either we will surprise everyone with the quality of our chickens and eggs, and thus demand unusually good prices as compensation for the loss of time in preparation, or we will be failures.

However, the first baby chicks are already ordered, an electric stove is on its way, and the feed is decided. Yesterday I was sitting on the roof of the brooder house, repairing the chimney pipe of the coal stove, and I couldn't help thinking how many things I have learned to do that I never dreamed I could touch without becoming ridiculous. Moreover, I have learned to say such things as this to you, which is best of all.

. . . I want to visit Philadelphia once again before I become the prisoner of my babies, because I must have a dog and some cats. A dog because I am outside all day long, alone, talking to myself not only because I feel lonely, but because my voice helps to overcome the unpleasant feelings that get hold of me in the barn among mysterious shadows of rat holes and other thrilling secrets. Cats we must have because mice will soon become a menace in the outbuildings where they already hop around me as I work.

Speaking of men and mice, not à la Steinbeck, I offer you evidence to prove that I am the worst softy in the U.S.A., Jan the hardy farmer. Yesterday I worked in the barn carrying out manure as I have been doing for days. Fifty wheelbarrows have already gone on the garden plot. Two mice of unattractive appearance got out of my way, and then the sweetest little mouse came out from the pile, hopped away in a corner some ten feet from me, and stopped there. An hour later the creature was still sitting or walking around at the same distance, watching me and following my work with the greatest interest as I talked to her. Now I am afraid the cats of the future will get her.

I was also bad about the sparrows. They were nesting in one of the chicken

houses and I knew they were a great danger to poultry because they are disease carriers. So I removed the very inefficient nests they had put under the roof inside the house. I was sorry to do it, but the nest construction was so poor and showed such laziness and carelessness in home culture, it was relatively easy for me to act. Next day I saw the whole clan sitting sadly on the fence. There was still ice all over the ground and nothing for them to feed on, so I begged Milada for some bread crumbs, pretending there were some song birds in the garden. Now the sparrows make so much noise under the window every morning until I have passed out their ration, I see only one way to balance the warning of the poultry textbooks (which say that sparrows will visit faraway farms for food and bring diseases back to the place where they roost). I must feed my sparrows so well they will not visit other places, but live clean and stable lives right here.

Poor Milada, to have such a crazy husband. He's very little use to her for company these days. After being alone from morning to night, she sees him sit around in the evening too tired to talk, or else reading bulletins to find out how much they contradict each other.

For one whole week we were iced in and lived on our iron food-and-cigarette reserve. (I may change from our current brand soon because we so dislike the radio announcer's sophisticated and artificial voice on their program.) Now we are rained in, with water all around the house. It will have to be a wonderful spring and summer to compensate for these days, especially . . . when the Riegers receive their four hundred babies in a few weeks by mail.

Forgive the delay in this letter. Last Sunday I could not write at all. After disinfecting the brooder house with a strong acid my eyes were inflamed. But they, as well as my leg and even my fingers, are well again. Our thoughts are always with you . . .

○ ○

March 1, 1941

. . . It was very sad news about Mr. Kline's death. I am always embarrassed when I must write congratulations or condolences, because if they are sincere (and insincere notes I do not write at all) they show my pitiful deficiency in any expression in the English language which is not made of common phrases. To tell of our deep grief about Mr. Kline's end would need some new and unprofaned words.

Often I had the feeling that he represented an image in one of Balzac's stories. Another Mr. Kline was the man who stopped me on the way to your garden to ask me with a faint smile in an otherwise motionless face what I thought about the heroic Greeks, and whether or not I agreed with him that



Great Britain was a fine nation. He didn't have what you call a higher education, and he had no place in the world of big shots and the bla-bla-bla of their after-dinner speeches. He was a simple and unpretentious American who liked flowers and birds and people, and so he had a natural instinct for fairness and real freedom.

. . . Your statement about my inconsistency in asking slower business methods but quicker political decisions has perplexed me. I wrote you one fine answer and then tore it up. In it I agreed with you and admitted that I was wrong this time. I beat my chest for a whole page in the courtyard of your rightness, shivering in my mental shirt. And then suddenly in the midst of this confession of my sins against logic I slid back to my former statement. Why, I started to argue, is it extreme of me to complain that you are too sudden in your business enterprises and too slow in your political decisions? I developed a most successful argument to a point where even Jack could not overthrow it, and to a perfection that would have made Barney smile with satisfaction as he filled his empty pipe with new tobacco, and then I tore the letter up. I decided that with your usual kindness you had been trying to appease my bitterness only. So the precious pearls of my arguments went into the wastebasket. In old times, great spirits of my size had an advantage. Their "torn-in-pieces" letters could be put together a thousand years later from broken stones and still be used for the enlightenment of the world!

Since then your second letter has come, telling me of your understanding of my bitterness since reading Maurice Hindus' fine and true book, *We Shall Live Again*. Now you know why I am so suspicious, so impatient, so uneasy. . . .

Since yesterday we have been snowed in. Twice I had to shovel snow out of the attic. We do not know where it came from. Milada found a dead woodpecker up there. It was lying under some stovepipes with a wound in the throat. We are very sad about this first death on our place.

This morning one side of our house had a snow wall of about eight feet, covering all the windows of the first floor. The brooder house, chicken house and workshop are completely closed in with snow. So is the car in the shed. When it comes out it will probably be a very old-fashioned model of a Chevrolet.

Fortunately Mrs. Bergey sent a horseman from their place to see if we were still alive, and he was so kind as to ride for some milk and eggs. Later another horseman came with more food. Many weeks ago I suggested that Milada had better keep a kind of iron reserve in the house. So far we have plenty of jam, horse radish, and some boxes of cleaning powder.

Should this letter reach you, there is no danger of starvation. Should it not go forward by mail, it means that we are cut off from the outside world and

will be found only when brave men reach this lonely place in the spring, after shoveling out a passage. They will find a very beautiful woman (snow and ice preserve the natural appearance) and an old man (shaved today for such a possibility) arm in arm in the midst of empty boxes and cans of jam and bathroom cleaning powder.

Don't think I've been sitting here without trying to shovel away the wall of snow to meet any possible rescuers halfway. I did try, but when I went two feet forward, new snow came behind me. So I gave up and let nature be nature.

With nothing else to do at the moment, we are trying to decide whether to spend money on the guest room or the kitchen. The idea of buying a refrigerator seems perverse today, and to have a guest room ready but no way of connection with the world is also for the moment uninteresting.

We must be very careful with our money. The farm expenses and the heating costs are very heavy. And I must admit that the nearer I come to the day when the chicks arrive, the less I am able to see how those poor little birds and their future little eggs can balance our investments and our running expenses. I am more and more suspicious that successful poultry farmers are either Five-and-Ten heirs or have in addition to their poultry farm some cute little steel plant or ammunition factory to help them show a profitable chicken business.

It is now March 2 . . .

My letters become less and less satisfactory as answers to yours. Both my mind and my fingers are clumsy after the day's hard work. What are we really, my fingers say in revolt, farmer hands or those of a writer? They still preserve a nice way of qualifying my typewriting.

I think we shall have to name our place *The Dogless Home*. It will express a sad fact and will also give uninformed people an opportunity to pronounce it *The Douglas Home*, which will sound aristocratic and fashionable. According to Pennsylvania's game law, now old and forgotten, but reviewed in 1939, no foreign-born residents of this state who are not FULL citizens may possess a gun or a dog. And such a lovely doghouse was already prepared for our future dog, painted green, and placed just in front of the house so that each morning my dog would have been waiting for me at the door, eager for the coming day of work. Finish.

This morning another horseman brought us a bottle of milk and some eggs and now we feel very much in America, the land of cowboys, Indians, pony express and shootings.

March 26, 1941

. . . Three lovely letters on my desk remind me every night that I have seriously neglected our correspondence. When I tell you the reason, I think you will understand. Our baby chicks arrived on March twelfth, when snow was still on the ground. It was a day of tremendous excitement. The brooder house had been prepared so carefully it looked like a nursery. Milada took them out of the boxes . . . five hundred yellow, feathered creatures, cross Orpington and White Rocks. They filled the brooder house with their chirping and they looked as beautiful and innocent as an Easter card.

All day long Milada sat there on the floor, trying to keep the temperature even in the electric stove. She hasn't had enough to do, keeping the house in perfect condition, cooking, doing our laundry, and all those other hundreds of things which a perfect housewife finds to occupy each day and which nobody can see when they are done. Since March twelfth she has added to her cares the brooder stove, the drinking water for the chicks, and a lot of other outside chores.

Now that the chicks are here, I see that my instinct for postponing their arrival as long as possible was not wrong. They take one's entire day, and the whole program for the next period—preparation of the chicken house, summer shelters and sun porches, soon the start of the vegetable garden, care for the neglected orchard, and so on—has yet to begin. We start the day at six-thirty in the morning and when I finish my outside work with the dark (now about seven) I am sometimes so tired that I fall asleep in my chair. Yet I always try to learn some new things from textbooks and bulletins, and I never finish the day before eleven-thirty.

Please do not think that I am complaining about a life which we both chose voluntarily. It is ourselves of which we complain, our own weakness and inability to fulfill the tasks that someone must do. We often remember an article by E. B. White in *Harper's* about the endless and goalless work of a farmer. Already we live as its evidence.

I know you are expecting some fancy stories about my personal contact with these sweet little creatures, my reactions to them. I am sorry to disappoint you. I can give you stories about mice, sparrows and even a rabbit that walked round and round the house during the cold wave and showed no fear when we took salad leaves and a carrot to its hole in the snow. I have had new and lovely adventures with a half-wild cat which I am trying to tame. There was an ugly little dog which I found dying in the snow and carried to the next farm, according to THE LAW of Pennsylvania. But do not expect any pleasant stories about chicks.

During the entire first week after they arrived you could have seen me sitting among the babies (no wonder poor Milada has to work so hard if her

husband lies around in the brooder house), trying to get acquainted with their manners and habits and ways. They crawled over me, they slept in my hands, they perched on my shoulders and my shoe tips. If someone could have taken a picture of me in such a position, you would have admired it. But no picture would have indicated what that week taught me. Sparrows have plenty of intelligence; a dog has real love in his heart; even a cat has a genuine instinct which makes it pretend affection for the sake of its own comfort. Chickens have nothing. They have neither a heart nor a brain. They are simply stupid. Droppings are their only means of expression.

If a human being will take the trouble, he can learn by what manner different animals communicate with each other. And if he has skill and patience, he can often learn to imitate an animal in such an act, and so establish a closer relationship with his pets. We all know enough to rub the fur of cats, for instance. Chickens, I can report, are unapproachable. These commercialized, artificially raised creatures have no soul whatever, only a stomach and a cruel *egoismus* which is terrible. There will be no danger whatever of making pets of them. Perhaps it is just as well, since we shall have to sell them eventually. But still I am not happy about my discovery. I am eager to spend my energies once again on spinach, carrots and beans.

Milada informs me that there are blooms all over the orchard, that there are lilacs all around our house, and the meadow across the road is completely covered with violets. I must take her word for these wonders; my days are spent looking down at the litter which I have to turn, on the boards which I am cutting, on the stony ground of my ditches. . . .

○ ○

May 6, 1941

. . . It is impossible to conceal from you the great disappointment I felt after you left us, because of the precious hours we had to spend with those stupid and ungrateful birds instead of with you. How many things could have been said, how many thoughts exchanged during your visit, if we had known ahead of time that you were coming and had not been engaged in the silly task of moving those bores from a once perfectly clean house to another clean spot, just to have them dirty the second the way they had done the first.

God bless you for your lovely letters, even though I can answer them so seldom now. At least your visit has made it easier for me to tell you the things you want to know about our current affairs. It is nearly three weeks since you were here. Since then, I have the affair of the pump to report.

On the eve of my birthday, when I came in from outside dirtier and more tired than I had ever been before, ready to take a bath and dine very late, the

electric pump announced with a furious rattle that something was wrong. We were without a drop of water. Milada went in the car to bring some water from the Bergeys, but not enough for a bath . . . only for the chicks and a little for the table.

By the next day the place was crawling with artisans, spoiling the peace and making only temporary arrangements for a small water reserve. Then a firm was sent for, to drill a new well (in the terms of our lease, Fisher is obliged to drill a new one if our old well becomes inadequate) but they refused to do the job. We are looking forward with interest to future complications. Should our reserve supply go before the matter is settled, Fisher will be obliged to carry water to us, a very odd job for him to do.

In the midst of this critical mess, four hundred new chicks arrived three days earlier than I had ordered, with the brooder house still uncleaned and no permanent water supply. Now we have eight hundred birds on the place.

Preliminary calculations indicate that the first flock profit can bring no more than fifty dollars above purchasing price, feed, and fuel for four hundred birds in ten weeks of day and night work. I cannot believe this is possible.

Forgive this letter. As we say in our country, when one's heart is full, his mouth runs over . . . and my heart is full indeed. Milada reminds me that the birds need feed and water. . . .

○ ○

May 12, 1941

. . . Today the feed expert came to see our chicks. He expressed surprise about how well the old flock was doing and how heavy the birds are. He also said that Milada's baby chicks were exceptionally well feathered. We have had no losses since my last letter. . . .

When we heard the announcement of the landing of Hess and the description of his "flight" I stated at once that the whole thing was a swindle. I believe Hess was invited by the still-existing Munich clique in order to arrange a peace. . . .

○ ○

May 28, 1941

. . . Lately we have been entertaining. A couple from Prague; a former employee with her American husband; Mrs. French and her four children. It overwhelms us a little, after the winter of solitude.

The well driller is still on the place, mostly fishing in the well for his tools. It is only fifty-eight feet deep, but he makes a lot of noise as he dynamites and

then takes a rest and dynamites again. So far, still no water. The vegetable garden is in pitiful shape . . . too dry and full of buckwheat. Two hundred and sixty square feet are already seeded and today we hope to plant about sixty tomatoes. . . .

○ ○

June 20, 1941

. . . I have many good things to report at last. The severe winter is nearly forgotten; the outbuildings and the land look so neat it is difficult to convince a visitor of their former state in the days when the smell of the broken waste pipe nearly poisoned us; we now have the perfume of freshly cut hay all around us; and a hundred-foot-deep artesian well has been giving us clean, cold water for three weeks. The old one went out on my birthday, and the new one came in six weeks later on Milada's birthday. And the vegetable garden shows straight and stoneless lines of green, in spite of all the morning-glories that fight desperately against my sore fingers.

And yet . . . there is bad news, too. On June third, and again on June twelfth and once again on June nineteenth, the flock of four hundred birds that were ready for marketing showed the first signs of the most mortal—and still in its cause the most mysterious—disease of chickens, coccidiosis.

With great energy and work we have managed to control the disease so far. The advisor who came to help had nothing to add to what we had already done. It is a disease which can kill a whole flock in a few hours, but with us it has taken, in three outbreaks, only five birds. The flock should still give us a sufficient return to cover the purchase price and feed bill of \$300. . . . IF the birds do not start to be sick again in the very last hour before the auction next Wednesday.

Completely gone for us (not with the wind, but with bloody droppings) is all ambition and all belief in this existence. We are disappointed and disgusted. According to the best experts, coccidiosis strikes some day anyhow, but even if the disease had not appeared this time, the best result we could have managed after two and a half months of back-breaking work would have been only a few dollars above feed and purchasing price, which is poor for so much work and risk. Now even this pitiful sum has gone for medicine and supplement feed to bring the birds back to their former weight. We only hope and pray now that the birds will live until next week.

I have always disliked stupid people, and now it seems that we have joined the group. Only now we are hearing remarks from farm experts to the effect that poultry farming is a gamble. If once you make a profit, the next time a disease will take it away. But we never meant to gamble. Had we done so, we

would never have been such fools as to gamble on little, dirty chicks. I understand the stock exchange far better than I do the unclearly written textbooks on poultry farming. Conclusion: if I gamble, I do not work; if I work, I cannot regard this as gambling.

I didn't think I was a gambler when I started this business, but other people did. All right: a bad gambler is a person who is afraid to throw a bad card away . . . a man who buys stocks or bonds, sees the price drop, but has not the courage to sell with loss in order to be free for another trial. This investment of ours was apparently a mistake, influenced by some idealistic notions of angel songs (see Maurice Hindus' last book) which have turned out to be not even a dog's bark.

Perhaps "to be or not to be" is the actual theme, with the important difference that this Hamlet is not an interesting young prince with lightning rapier, but an old and tired pseudo-farmer in dirty overalls with a scraper in his hand. Shakespeare's immortal question, translated into John Smith American's "So what?" is still difficult for us to answer.

We have discussed our problems for days, with as much realism as we could bring to them. The disease of our birds is only one phase. The war is no better, but only much worse, and I can close my mind to it no longer. An old Czech saying, poorly translated, goes: "I know that I must die, but please do not push me so rashly." Perhaps the summer will bring a clearer picture of what we must do next.

After the sale of the four hundred birds, we still have another flock of four hundred. These we intended as part of our first layer flock. Under the present uncertain circumstances, we have altered our plans to put these birds in summer shelters. It would be a terrific task to carry water and feed about four hundred feet to the range, and why should we work ourselves to death for the feed company, with all good faith in them? We have decided to put the birds in the long chicken house and sell them as soon as possible.

I shall work at a slower tempo to keep the vegetable garden, the lawn and the fixtures in shape. I may even clean some of the summer houses on the range, simply to prove that it was not fear of heavy work which changed our intentions. If I were a writer I might try my hand at some short stories . . . *Death in the Chicken Pen*, or *Aphorisms from a Manure Pile*. Since, according to the way we read in this age, the headline is more important than the contents beneath, the stories might be considered already seventy-five per cent ready for publication.

It will be a pity if we must liquidate our home. So many fine hopes and plans have gone into it. But our newly acquired experience now makes what seemed to be a promising project only dull and senseless. Our investment lies around us in brooder stoves, drinking fountains, chicken wire and other tools

which are only galvanized trash.

○ ○

July 3, 1941

. . . Yes, for awhile the blood-diarrhea of our stupid birds stole the show from Hitler and Stalin. Perhaps the confrontation of such a disease with world history has a very sound meaning for us. Now I have regained my proper sense of events and I feel strong enough to face even such problems as the Nazi attack on their friends, the Russians. . . .

My only prejudice against Russia has been one with my personal refusal to accept regimentation in my private life. Another dislike I once harbored against their system—based on cruel persecution of those who held differing opinions from the men in power—I have lost since Munich. Today my thoughts are probably more cruel than those of any *Redgårdist* when I dream of the day when we can repay every single blow to Nazi criminals and gangsters for the suffering they have caused to millions of people.

There is no doubt now that public opinion in America is on Britain's side, but there are still a very large number of Nazi admirers in this country. Unfortunately, public memory is the most pitiful part of the people's mind. Any change of face will be accepted if only the slogans are loud and attractive. Now the friends of Germany in this country will try to tell us that if Russia wins, Stalin will have a natural right to dictate the terms of peace; so who wants the Reds to win? Should Russia lose the war, it would mean not only the most tremendous success for Germany from the standpoint of economics, geography and military glory, but the German sympathizers can then point out that Nazism is the holy savior of the world.

Take the case of Finland. Always more Fascist than democratic, this state has been well advertised, chiefly by men like Mr. Hoover, who need a public pet in order to remind the world that they are still alive. The Finns have fought bravely, even if you deduct sixty per cent of the advertised results which were concocted not for the glory of the Finns but for the shame of the Russians. Soon we will get the first report of the smashing victory of a Finnish patrol (one sergeant and two men) who have annihilated one Red panzer division (in this case they will not be "Russian"), and after a Finnish steam bath at home, have started at once to encircle the whole Red army, already in flight over the Urals.

Radio commentators are now telling us of some shift in the Nazi government from the party to the military clique. What a clever lie this is, but how worn out! It makes it so much easier for the world to forget the godless Nazi and think instead of some fair, tall, blond German officer fighting against



the Red Pest.

Let us finish the matter for today. I am too tired to look up new words in the dictionary!

○ ○

July 12, 1941

Dear Eddie:

We wait eagerly for definite information about your arrival . . . With the humidity at 92 in New York and heat at 110 in Philadelphia, we will probably have it 90 and 100 here. But we shall do our best to keep you cool. There is one shade tree, the icebox, the bathroom with really cold water, and plenty of discussion about the future of the world . . . a very icy outlook.

In other letters to Shingletown I made the report on our first flock. When the truck with 393 birds left the place, you can imagine how we felt. Even a feeling of sadness about this act of perfidy (raising and nursing for delivery to the butcher) was pushed away by the feeling of relief to be rid of them. Two days later the second flock showed the first symptoms of the same disease, but we checked it once again by inhuman work.

Otherwise we take life a lot easier. It is ironic that nobody could work during this present heat wave, and so our mental picketing of the poultry enterprise by way of two easy garden chairs on the lawn has become a simple and natural escape from the heat. . . .

Funny things happen to people of our kind, those the world calls softies and dreamers. Last night we were both afraid to go to sleep, and so we sat on in the living room without talking but in the sort of mutual understanding that always exists between Milada and me, both feeling that life wasn't very nice. Suddenly, outside the screen door in the kitchen, we heard a noise, something moving in the dark. It was a dog that had left its home for a reason of its own to come and sit down in front of our door and look with big, sad eyes into our room.

All day long this very nice dog has been around the place, following us wherever we move. He made no inquiry about my citizenship papers; he just came and stayed. It is one of those little things in life that is more impressive than a great miracle. He's just an ordinary dog, but he has good, human eyes through which the Lord speaks to us at the right moment in our solitude. . . .

○ ○

July 29, 1941

Dear Eddie:

There is so much friendship, sympathy and kindness in the words that recount your impressions of our home. Yours is the heart of a true poet who does not need to recite the words of somebody else.

Milada is still remembering the old-barn event, when you walked with her over the meadows to get a new view of something we had not appreciated. Through you, she discovered beauty in those ruins, but I can't agree with either of you this time. I avoid my own image in a mirror and I have the same aversion for rotten barns, those dumping places for junk. They remind me too much of myself, except for what you call their preserved beauty "in abstract."

When Milada reads this, as she always does my letters to you, I shall observe her reaction with interest. I know in advance that she will come to my chair, caress my hair, and say that I am a fool. And I shall enjoy the moment in the same way, grievous and grateful, as the old, useless barn probably felt when Milada came across the fields to admire it. . . .

Now that we have no real task in the country we miss more than ever the mental and spiritual contact with friends. When we went to New York last Thursday I promised myself and Milada to get good and drunk. All the way in I repeated my intention. The result: three ice-cream sodas, vanilla with strawberry. I haven't the energy even for such a resolution.

And New York? It's always the same story. Far away from the big town, we think about all the opportunities we are missing in this boom period. Then we go through the Hudson Tunnel and arrive on the island of prosperity; we see first a hundred and later thousands of people walking, running or simply standing on the avenues; and they look exactly the same as they always did. They are still unable to find any meaning in their lives.

The women on Fifth Avenue are more beautiful than ever (or is it only an illusion caused by absence?). There are the same types of successful men: the one who is just off a luxury liner from Bermuda; the well-dressed young fellow who, thanks to his shaving cream, has become an executive in his firm; the serious, older man who prides himself on the huge life insurance policies he carries. They are all old acquaintances through the pages of advertisements in America's magazines.

We saw some of our refugee friends. Even those who appeared to be most successful spent a considerable amount of time asking us how much it would take to establish themselves as farmers. That surprised us. We tried to be honest with them, but it is obvious that they have all been putting on a front for so long they are now unable to accept the simplest facts in a straightforward manner without searching out a hidden meaning, and not believing it when no such ulterior meaning is to be found.

We also had lunch with our Czech consul general and his wife in their home, and an interesting meeting with the Czech military attaché. There is still

nothing definite so far as my being able to take part in a Czech military formation, though I have not yet lost hope. . . .

The dog who came to us, and liked us enough to stay, has gone again. I was sitting beside him on the lawn, telling him a lot of things that human beings wouldn't understand. A farmer came along the road, carrying a gun under his arm. He saw the dog, stopped, and then shouted at me: "That dog is a bad one. He chases rabbits and kills them. I've reported him to the game warden. He's gotta be killed. We need them rabbits ourselves . . . for food."

The farmer went on and the dog put his head in my lap and looked up at me, because he had understood what the farmer meant, if not his words. We got in touch with Bill Hickling and he suggested a dog farm as the place to take him, but they had a hundred dogs already and would promise only to shoot him for us. So we took the poor creature to Harmonville to the S.P.C.A. All the way the dog was happy, enjoying the view of the country as though he were a child. When I took him to the pen and the attendant closed the door of his cell he looked at me as though I were a friend who had betrayed him. And then he stopped looking at me. I put my hand through the wire and touched his nose, but he made no response. He just hung his head and looked in the vicinity of my legs. He was alone before I left him. After all the love he had given us in our unhappy days, he didn't deserve such an end.

When I went out I felt ashamed for the whole human race, for the whole world, and especially for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

○ ○

August 27, 1941

. . . It was not so long ago that we felt extremely sorry for people who wouldn't keep their places in good shape. With a kind of *petit-bourgeois* indignation, we considered their idleness wrong. "Look at the weeds in their garden, look at their broken fence," we would say in our own worthiness. "How can they sit in rocking chairs instead of doing their work?"

During this whole last month we are showing suspicious symptoms ourselves of white-trash disease. Every day I announce loudly and decisively that tomorrow I shall work in the garden, clean out all the wood, dig some ditches along the road, clean the chicken houses of the last reminders of my successful chicken venture. Every day I say it, sitting in an easy chair with some uninteresting book or magazine. But the garden remains untouched. Except for some seventy tomato plants and an enormous crop of self-sufficient cucumbers and carrots, the whole thing is a mess.

I make myself think of the man in the *New Yorker* cartoon who is trying to fight the morning-glories. His wife yells from the window "There it comes

again!” as a branch jerks up from behind the corner of the house ready to strangle him. Or if you prefer *Esquire* cartoons, we are two of their bill-hillies in the flesh. When I planted last spring, I doubled the amounts of every vegetable we would need . . . fifty feet for ourselves, fifty feet for the rabbits. But they have been greedy and eaten more than their share. These charming creatures have taken advantage of me as a free dinner ticket.

I know it is uncertainty about the future, as well as deep disappointment with the past, which lays this physical and mental fatigue over me. But knowing it is no help in overcoming it.

. . . Your description of the state of mind in the Middle West this summer is something which I can understand, even if I do not agree with it. Out there, they think they have a right to live their own life without paying attention to the troubles of a world which seems very far away. Shall I recall all the names of those once independent states in Europe who considered their safety in relation to their distance from the zone of danger? You know them all. When Chamberlain remarked in 1938 that Czechoslovakia was a country “about which we do not know much,” America was amazed at such stupidity. When Belgium and Holland insisted to the last day that they had nothing to do with this struggle, they made on you in America the impression of fools.

And yet now, when finally it looks as though America would realize that no distance can save any state from this danger, when the old silly story of three thousand miles has been dropped and the U.S.A. could reach out and stop this avalanche . . . the Middle West laughs and says, “Yes, they’re scared to death of the Nazis on the east coast and on the west coast they’re jittery about the Japs. That’s what they get for not living where we do . . . safe in the middle.”

For us it has become each day clearer that America will never join this war. The point has been reached at which too much talk about one and the same matter has made it lose its meaning. I should have preferred a plain statement of nonparticipation to all these endless discussions. The whole situation has become ridiculous.

I am growing less and less able to stand this waiting and uncertainty. Last week we went to New York again. The Czech consulate has received no instruction with regard to the many Czechoslovak volunteers in this country. Yet I know that I must find a way to fight the Nazis. I do not care who is fighting next to me if only he fights right. I want to see my native country free, and if I do not fight now I shall have no right to help correct the wrongs which a peace conference may bring. I want to fight for the ideals without which our individual lives are without sense. I don’t need a flag, or a war song, or a famous general, or a slogan to fight for . . . I can fight my battle, my own war, under my own flag . . . my conscience.

After I left the Czech consulate I went straight to the Canadian office of the British consul general, and there I was told that they take volunteers from nineteen to forty-five years of age without regard to whether or not the volunteer is married. We went to Ellis Island and I received permission to cross the Canadian border and return to the United States from Canada. So I shall go to Montreal and ask for a physical examination. Should this be all right, I shall return to settle our affairs and then enter the Canadian army.

○ ○

September 16, 1941

Yesterday I passed the medical examination of the Canadian army with a rating in Category A. Having said that, which is most important, I can go back to give you lesser details.

Two days ago, Milada and I arrived here in Montreal. We were stopped at the border and questioned for several hours and for some time I thought they would not let us across, for they went back in my history to Grandfather, and always stuck when they reached the information that I had only my first citizenship papers for naturalization in the United States. Finally they thought to ask if we knew anyone in Canada. I said no, and then I remembered Arthur Randles. You may remember having heard me speak of him as an old friend in Prague.

They knew his name and let us go at once. As soon as we reached Montreal I called him by phone in Ottawa, where he is now high in whatever department governs the merchant marine. It was good to hear his voice. He told me to go to Major Scott in charge of recruiting in this district.

I left Milada in a small French restaurant on Ste. Catherine Street and presented myself at the recruiting office on St. James Street. To the general question of "What do you want?" I replied that I wanted to join the Canadian army if I could be assured of going overseas. They asked me the usual questions, and when they heard my record in the last war they said, "Do you want a commission?" "No," I said. "I want to go over at once."

So I was given the medical examination, and when I was found to be fit I was assigned to a bridge company in the Army Service Corps of the Royal Canadian army, given four weeks leave, and told to report to the barracks at Longueuil at the end of that time. I will be sworn in (without having to pledge allegiance to the King) and I expect to be on the other side of the Atlantic in a very short while.

There is no need to try to tell you what a load is off my heart and my mind. I have no taste for army life, and the prospect of the future gives me no joy. Yet I know that I am alive again, and I am grateful to Canada for having given

me this opportunity to fight . . .

○ ○

September 22, 1941

. . . We returned last Friday from Montreal and immediately undertook to liquidate our farm. Milada made a great house-cleaning after our absence of eleven days, and I am putting the cellar in shape, the last one of my neglected duties on this place. Today our home looks as clean as though we intended to live here for many happy years.

Mr. Fisher has been good to us. He released us from our lease the moment Milada explained my decision to him. But there is still the problem of our furniture and farm fixtures. We must realize as much as possible on them because Milada will need every cent we can get out of the place. Perhaps it is good that there is so much work to do that we will have no time to think about the coming separation. Milada is brave and wonderful, and I have a strong feeling of certainty that she can make a career for herself without me.

○ ○

October 3, 1941

Now it comes, the matter for which you have all emphasized there can be no excuse. We will be unable to visit you before my departure.

Since our return from Canada I have been working day and night together with Milada in packing our belongings, separating them in different boxes for storage and for Milada's immediate use, putting together the inventories for her insurance, arranging our documents, writing to many persons to introduce her in her future search for an existence . . . in short, doing as much as possible to make her life for the next period at least a little easier. It will be hard enough for her anyhow.

After this practical explanation, which I know you will understand, let me give you another reason which only now, when I see that our trip to Shingletown cannot be effected, can be considered, too. I am afraid of such a moment as it would be for me. It would be a long farewell, and if any leave-taking occupies more than five minutes one must either cry or yell . . . if you insist upon being genuine to the last minute.

People of our kind do not need to say special farewells to each other. No words are necessary to prove the true friendship you have shown us during nearly two and a half years. We have said and we have written what we feel for one another, but even with conversations and correspondence, our true feelings are deep in our hearts, and we know it. It would be good to see you

once again. But do you think my remembrance needs it? Your faces will always be in my memory and your voices will be around me for a lifetime. No last meeting could make this limit longer.

This is not my farewell. It is only one of a long series of future letters I shall write from Canada and from abroad. Consider it simply the last one from America. Before long I hope to welcome you in Prague. . . .

## *A WORD AT THE END*



ONE assumes far too easily that facts are incontrovertible. We tend to believe that if we know what a man has done, we know fully what he is. But this is an oversimplification. Facts can become fairly well what we make them.

What a man believes himself to be, what a man hopes to be, what the world assumes that he is are often three different ideas. For that reason, a biographer takes on a heavy responsibility in presenting any one individual to the world through a single pair of eyes. His skill with words, even the method and taste he employs, shape the portrait he paints. Inevitably, art is selection.

In this story, Jan Rieger has been revealed through a peculiar compromise between the man as he appeared to himself, and the man as he appeared to the writer. It is told in the first-person only to bring about a more direct contact between the subject and the reader. The work is not a direct transcription of related incidents. It could not be. Jan Rieger was too busy living his life through the years to annotate it with the intention of turning it into a book. The interpretation, analysis, synthesis and utilization of the facts involved has necessarily been the part of the writer.

It is only as Jan enters the Canadian army that the method of first-person projection breaks down. During the period of his service he thought so little of himself that its importance rests not on what he believed himself to be, but on what the world knew he was. So I shall tell you how he seemed to us.

We came to know Jan Rieger in Montreal because friends of ours happened also to be friends of his in Shingletown. The first night he came to see us we observed a man with gray, closely cropped hair, who was neat, correct and dignified in his Canadian battle dress. We saw the dominant features in the Roman face and listened to the haunting lilt in his voice, and because he was a private soldier he affected us as he never could have done had he been an officer. He was the cultured man rendered nameless, the man of proved ability turned into a military number by the times in which he lived. And yet without a name, unknown, lonely, he was still an individual. He still

had his dignity and his competence as a human being. What the world had done to him in the past we could only guess at that time. His face showed that it had done a lot. One thing we did know: if this nameless man lost his war we all lost ours with him; if he won it, we could all live again.

In that autumn of 1941 he was carrying coal for fires in the cantonments across the river at Longueuil; he was also sweeping floors and cleaning latrines. The barracks are completely exposed to the icy winds that sweep across the mile-wide St. Lawrence, and they look no part of normal life out there on the flat banks opposite the city. How lonely they must have felt to him, a soldier again after more than twenty years of adult civilian life, we could only guess. Through it all he made no sound of complaint, because he had asked for it and knew only too well how certainly such duties would fall to him when he joined up.

After a time, through a fluke of circumstance, the army discovered that he had a powerful way with him in speaking to large groups of men. It happened when a sergeant came into his hut on the afternoon of Christmas Eve and asked for three volunteers to speak over the radio the next day for an empire broadcast. There was no response.

"Come on, you guys," the sergeant said. "When did you ever get a chance to talk on the radio before? Three of you, now. All you got to do is say something for three minutes."

The men were shy and hesitant, as Canadians usually are if asked to appear in public. Jan had hardly listened as he lay on his bunk. Then he suddenly sat up. "Who will hear these speeches?" he said. "Where will they go?"

"Everywhere." The sergeant was pleased. "That's good, now. You're one. Come on now, two more."

When the three soldiers presented themselves at the radio station on Christmas afternoon they were given brief instructions and handed slips of paper. They were told to study the words on them and be ready when they were given the signal to read.

"But what is this?" Jan said.

"The speech you're going to make. Just read the words carefully. Don't be nervous. You've got nothing to be afraid of."

Jan's face became rigidly correct. "I beg your pardon, sir," he said. "It's a mistake. I don't do this. My speech is already written. Here. You can see it." He pulled his own slip of paper from a pocket. "Why should I say these words that have nothing to do with me?"

The official in charge of the program was taken aback. He had no rules to cover such an emergency. He read Jan's speech and protested, saying that he might as well do as he was told and read the printed paper instead, but Jan stood hard at attention and announced that he would read what he had written



himself or nothing at all. He even explained that his wife was waiting to hear him in New York, and she would not understand why he let himself say these things that someone else wanted to put in his mouth.

They let him have his way because it was too late to find a substitute. The result was such a remarkable number of letters in reply to his three-minute broadcast that the army was forced to take notice. Canadians are not in the habit of responding to radio programs as Americans do. Even a handful of letters is considered a good result from the average program. So the army was convinced it had a powerful speaker on its hands.

They took him off latrine fatigue and sent him around the province of Quebec to talk in some of the toughest towns recruiting officers had tried to crack. Perhaps no one but a Canadian would be able to measure the quality of Jan Rieger's success. It was the result of several elements which happened to fuse.

French Canada has supported the Dominion government in this war because its basic common sense has made it realize that the war was unavoidable. But it resents with all the stubbornness of its Norman soul the slightest attempt at regimentation, and it bitterly resents the tendency of the English Canadian to tell it what it should do. Because Jan had lived his life on a Czech island in the middle of Europe, and these people were living on a French island in North America, they understood each other. This private soldier, a Czech who had been brought up in a self-respecting minority, a man who had refused to be beaten or lose his sense of himself, was able to bring forth an ovation even in a French-Canadian Jesuit seminary when he pleaded for full participation in the war! As a result, the local newspapers began to run stories about him, with his picture, and in the French Canadian press he became known as *le soldat* Rieger.

None of this publicity impressed him. It told him only that he would never be sent overseas to fight so long as he continued to be successful in getting more recruits for the army at home. Periodically he went to his superiors and asked when he would be sent to fight, but he was only a private under orders, and they told him to talk instead.

So for several months longer he continued to make speeches. He spoke in French, and every time he did so the hall, filled with French Canadians, had the war in there with them. He never tried to persuade or argue. He just brought the war to them through his soft Czech voice, and some of it entered their minds, and some of it stayed.

Even in our living room, sitting before the fire with a group of our friends, I have seen this same response. He was honored for his suffering, without anyone hearing him say a word about it. I know that he was completely unaware of the impression of solid, simple strength he created in everyone who

met him then. But I am sure he did realize that in honoring him, we were honoring humanity. He never seemed to be talking about himself in those long evenings we spent together, yet everything that life had done to him was there in his voice. Always he managed to enlarge our world and bring to us the light of a rich mind and the faith of a great soul.

Sometimes his enthusiasms and his passions were apt to seem naïve to stupid people. They misread the paradox of his personality, which was both cultured and primitive at the same time. Coming from a new democracy, he was acutely conscious of countless things we had forgotten. Coming from a minority people, living next to Germany, he never missed what so many of us prefer to forget. His emotions accepted the fact that war means killing, and that permanent peace for the world depends on seeing that millions of Germans die. He was determined to kill as many Germans as he could, not out of cruelty, but because he wanted no one else to do his duty for him. He knew there are many worse things that one man can do to another than killing him. That was how he saw the war. He felt it inside where the rest of us only tried to grasp it with our minds.

As the early months of 1942 wore away it became obvious that army bureaucracy had no idea what to do with him. How could they? The officers he encountered probably saw the face of a Roman consul with a forage cap tipped over one eye, indicative of the man who tried hard to be an unobtrusive and obedient private, and succeeded in remaining a dynamic individual. The men in the ranks were aware only that one of their comrades was a saintly Bacchus who used questionable English grammar. But they all understood that he had mysterious sources of strength. Twice he was ordered to apply for a commission and twice papers were lost or new regulations interfered. I have never seen a man try harder, and with slower results, to get a German in the sights of a Bren gun or within range of a grenade. But after awhile they sent him off to take his basic training. It is no secret that the entire Canadian army has been conceived and trained to act as a spearhead. So the preparation it gets is enough to crumple a trained athlete. Jan was now forty-six, and though he had been hardened a little by his life on the farm, he also bore the marks of desperately hard work and the wounds which the last war had left on him. Yet he got through that training. When youngsters of twenty-two were exhausted, he kept on marching. When they tried to keep him from scaling high walls, he refused to be let off anything, and he went through every phase of the course with the rest.

One night at the end of his basic training, after a day of maneuvers which had begun at dawn and continued without rest until after sunset, he marched under full pack from midnight until two in the morning, out of the camp and on to the station. Younger men who were themselves exhausted tried to carry

his pack for him, but he refused them all. His will kept him going when the rest of his body was senseless. He had been given embarkation leave, and he knew he was on his way at last.

Knowing Jan Rieger has been a responsibility. He has entrusted his life to my words because he feels they may contain some meaning for others. In such a case, a man's faith must be great when the facts are being molded in a language which is not his native tongue. Nothing was extenuated in the telling of his story, nor did he ever take advantage of hindsight. His life, with all its strengths and weaknesses, has always been his own. What he has done and been in the past has flowed mysteriously and by devious channels into what he has now become.

When he finally went overseas, something of the tenacity of all the misunderstood nations Hitler has temporarily crushed was left behind in Canada. He carried more of it with him to the other side. However vague their ideas on the war might have been when they joined up, the men in his unit knew what they were fighting for after they met him. His effect on all the soldiers who loved him proved that while his spirit was uniquely his own, it had come to be something more than the property of a single man.

## 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.

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[The end of *Partner in Three Worlds* by Dorothy Duncan]