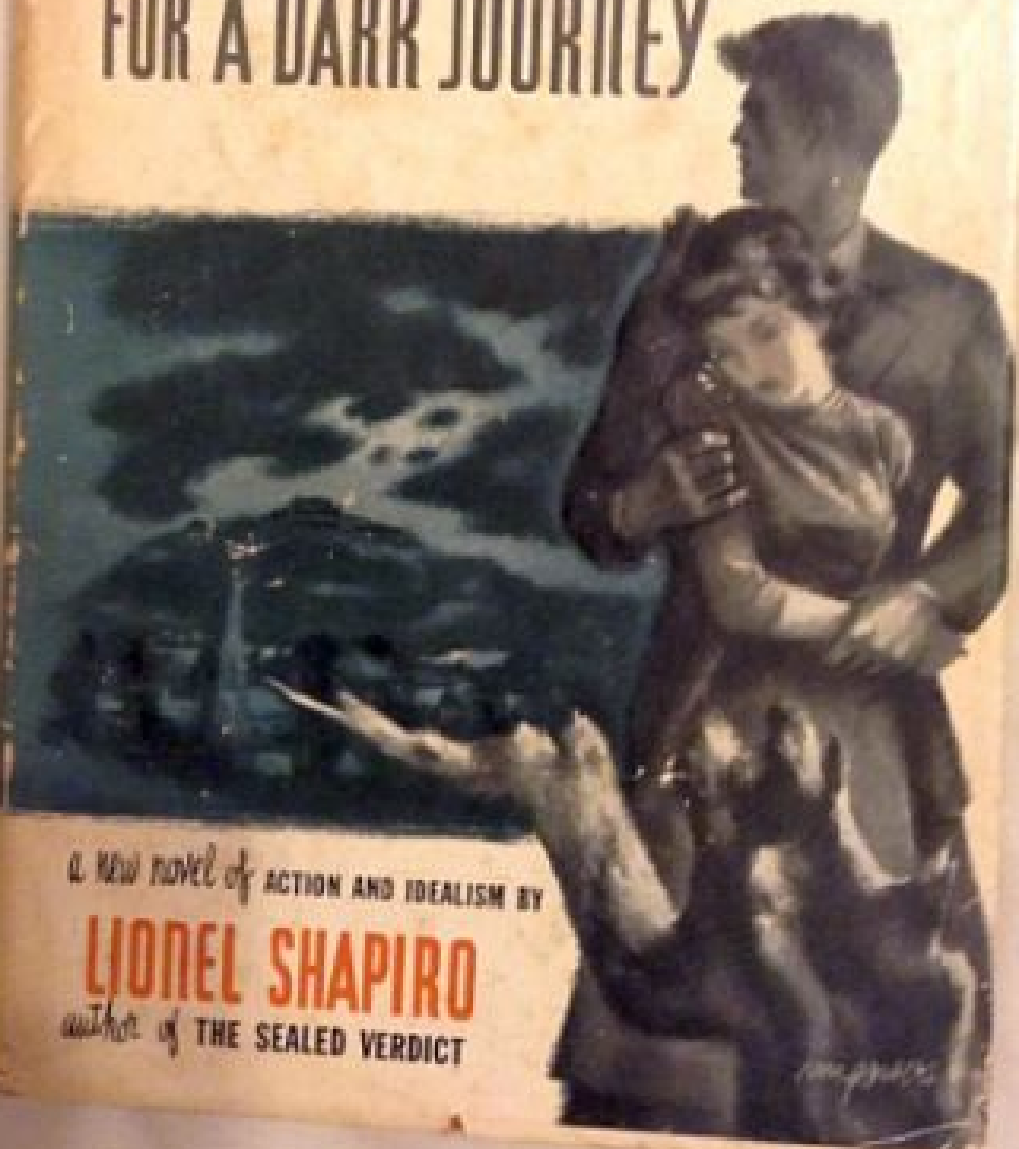


Torch

FOR A DARK JOURNEY



a new novel of ACTION AND IDEALISM BY

LIONEL SHAPIRO

author of THE SEALED VERDICT

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**TORCH
FOR A DARK
JOURNEY**

DOUBLEDAY & COMPANY, INC., GARDEN CITY, N.Y.,

A Novel by Lionel Shapiro

*The characters and the incidents in this book are
entirely the product of the author's imagination and
have no relation to any person or event in real life.*

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A traveler setting out on a journey in the night prayed: 'Provide me a light, O Lord, that I may know deep within me I walk a righteous path; and under the light of heaven I shall not fear.'

This book is dedicated to the spirit of self-examination which is a light of heaven in our passage through this dark and tragic time.

CONTENTS

HOW IT BEGAN [3](#)

BOOK 1. THE DARK JOURNEY [13](#)

BOOK 2. THE TORCH [145](#)

HOW IT ENDED [243](#)

**HOW
IT
BEGAN**

This is the story of a foreign correspondent bent on a mission which promised that rarity among newspaper feats, a genuine scoop. It happened in western Europe during three days of June in 1949. But the newspaperman involved, Philip Channing by name, was not entitled to full credit for the ultimate sensation. He had nothing to do with the discovery of the story. This took place in the Bankers' Club in New York. . . .

James S. Marriner, president of World News Service, was on this day having his regular midyear lunch at the club. Being a meticulous person as to both time and money, it was his habit to meet with his investment banker twice a year, in June and December, which seemed to him frequent enough to hear a personal report on the state of his conservative holdings. His host, Richard Felson, senior partner of the investment house of Chartman, Felson & Company, had telephoned that morning to confirm the date. He seemed unusually anxious about it.

The reason for his anxiety was not immediately apparent. Marriner's bonds scarcely changed from year to year in market value and yield, and the business of the occasion was dull, as usual, and quite completed by the time a waiter removed their dessert plates and put down a fresh pot of coffee. It was a gray June day. From their table by a window atop the Equitable Building at 120 Broadway they contemplated Governors Island, which lay far below, an uninteresting blotch on the dull harbor water.

"How is the market today, Mr. Felson? Up or down?"

"Sideways," the banker replied. "Just sideways."

They had been meeting thus for more than thirty years and still called each other Mr. Marriner and Mr. Felson.

"That's the trouble, Mr. Marriner," Felson continued. "When your business is brisk, mine is bad. You people publish too many scare headlines. Investors won't step into the market."

Marriner said, "We don't make the news, you know." He glanced at his watch. It still lacked ten minutes of two o'clock. He poured a fresh cup of coffee for himself.

At the same time Felson looked at his watch. He had ten minutes remaining to him. Marriner always took his leave at two o'clock.

He said, "You're not interested in a flier, are you, Mr. Marriner?"

"You mean a speculation?"

"More or less."

"No, sir," Marriner said decisively.

Felson flicked his nose and looked wise. "There's something awfully good

going. Clayfield Oil.”

The other gave a rather comfortable shake of his head. “Not for me.”

“The stock’s way down, around 26 today. And yet Justin Clayfield has one of the best-run companies in the business. I know. We handle his personal holdings. It’s going up, Mr. Marriner.”

“Never bother with oil stocks, Mr. Felson.”

Felson said, “I thought you might be interested in this. Everybody knows why Clayfield’s dropped. The company spent fourteen million last year on land leases in northern Texas and they’ve gone for about five million more trying to make the fields pay. Drilling’s expensive, you know, especially when you drill in the wrong spots.”

“I suppose.” Marriner was plainly uninterested.

“Another thing. Clayfield is in Europe. He’s been there for two months and a lot of people wonder why. He’s an old Texas wildcatter, not the kind to run away from trouble.” Felson leaned across the table and dropped his voice to a whisper. “I found out this morning.”

“Why?” It was Marriner’s news instinct, not his cupidity, that impelled the query.

“Just this.” Felson’s fingers rapped lightly on the table to emphasize his hushed words. “He went there to see if he could hire the one man who can pull him out of the hole. A Czech called Gregor Karlene. The name mean anything to you?”

“I’ve heard of him. Scientist, isn’t he?”

“A geophysicist, to be exact. What’s more, he’s a legend in the oil business, although curiously enough he’s never been in it—commercially, that is. He won a Nobel Prize, oh, some twenty years back. Got it for developing the Karlene magnetometer. It’s a well-known thing, practically standard equipment for oil surveying all over the world. Besides that, Karlene himself is a genius in his way, like a doctor who can take one look at your complexion and tell you whether you’ve got gallstones or ulcers. This fellow can examine a field and put his finger literally on the exact spot to drill. He made Ploesti what it is, and the eastern Slovakian fields.”

Marriner was interested but dubious. “Why hasn’t anybody hired him long before this?”

“My God, Standard offered him half a million a year before the war. He just wasn’t interested. Curious fellow. Never accepted anything except a grant from his government. You know the kind—pure scientist. He headed up the geophysics department at the state university or whatever they call it in

Czechoslovakia, until his retirement.”

“Then how can Clayfield get him?”

Felson smiled. He knew he had gained Marriner’s close attention.

He said, “Prague’s been behind the Iron Curtain for over a year now. Clayfield played a hunch. He figured Karlene might not be so damned patriotic with the Communists in charge. So he flew over a couple of months ago to see if he couldn’t get him out. A man like Karlene could make Clayfield’s holdings show a profit overnight.”

“What happened?”

Felson held back enjoyably. It was not often that an investment banker found himself commanding a dramatic situation. Then he whispered, “I got word this morning that Clayfield has succeeded. They’re meeting in France.”

“That’s interesting,” Marriner said in a matter-of-fact way which rather deflated the other.

“It was all very cloak and dagger,” Felson went on. “Bribery at the border, disguise, and all that. The Czechs were watching Karlene like a hawk. But he’s out. And when the news leaks, Clayfield Oil will jump twenty points. I’m convinced of it.”

Marriner said promptly, “I wouldn’t touch an oil stock with a barge pole.”

“That’s your privilege, Mr. Marriner.”

“But I’m interested in the story. Do you think, Mr. Felson, I can put a man on it without—well, I don’t want to break a lunch-table confidence. You know what I mean.”

Felson shrugged. “Clayfield can’t keep it a secret. I don’t suppose he wants to. He doesn’t like his stock dragging its fanny on the ground any more than I would.”

“I suppose you’re buying in on Clayfield Oil.”

“That’s my privilege.”

Marriner said quickly, “If we published the story, I dare say it would help the stock.”

This was Felson’s turn to be matter-of-fact. “Let me put it this way. It would accelerate the rise.”

Marriner glanced at his watch and came abruptly to his feet. “Well, I’ll look into it. If it’s a legitimate news story, that’s all I really care about. By the way, where are they meeting?”

The banker consulted a slip of paper.

“Place called Bonnar in northern France. The Hotel Spa Bonnar.”

When Marriner returned to his office he instructed his secretary to look up the name of Gregor Karlene in the “morgue.” Presently she returned carrying a dusty folder thick with yellowing tear sheets.

The man was indeed a world-famous scientist. There was a picture of him as he received the Nobel award from the King of Sweden. A score of clippings from various Sunday science sections described his research in the field of geophysics. A 1936 copy of *Life* magazine contained a layout on the scientist and a cross-section diagram in color of the Karlene magnetometer. What interested Marriner intensely was a yellowing cut from the *New York Times* which showed Karlene in a pose of intimate friendship with Beneš and Jan Masaryk.

He said to his secretary, “Ask Bendels to come in.”

Jack Bendels was chief of the foreign desk of World News Service. A slight man, still under fifty, with an enormous expanse of forehead under his thinning hair, he had moved up steadily in twenty years from copyreader to the top news executive job. Some said he was lucky. The correspondents who worked under his direction knew better. He was honest, immensely capable, and ruthless. He fired men for ineptitude without a flicker of pity, and when a correspondent received a cable reading OKAY—BENDELS it was almost as good as a Pulitzer Prize though not as profitable.

He came into Marriner’s office with a lethargic step. He always moved in a lazy shift, the legend being that he had developed this mannerism in order to disarm those meeting him for the first time.

“Something important, Chief?”

Marriner pushed the Karlene clippings across his desk and while Bendels studied them he recounted in full detail the story he had heard at the Bankers’ Club.

Bendels was a long time reacting. Finally he said, “Sounds like a plant. Clayfield’s trying to use us.”

“I’m sure of it,” Marriner agreed. “But what about Karlene? Do you see a story?”

“If it’s true.”

“Well, handle it in your own way.” Marriner had a certain fear of interfering with Bendels, a fear born out of respect for his judgment.

Bendels made two or three slow and aimless circles around the office. Then he said, “I’ll put Channing on it. A good tough boy, Channing. He’ll spot the difference between a story and a stock promotion.”

Marriner nodded. "All right. Channing. Where is he?"

"I've got him in Brussels digging material on Leopold's exile. That can wait," Bendels said, and he eased out of the room like a creaky old man.

3

When Felson returned to his office he asked his secretary, "Any cables for me?"

She replied, "Just the one this morning, the one from Mr. Clayfield."

"Good. Then take this for Clayfield. You know the address. Say, HAVE CONTACTED MARRINER OF WORLD NEWS SERVICE STOP BELIEVE SUCCESSFULLY STOP. Uh—better add CONGRATULATIONS. That's all."

He leaned back in his chair, folded his hands over his stomach, and gazed out of the window with a wry, boyish curiosity as harbor tugs far below shouldered their way through the gray water.

BOOK 1
THE DARK
JOURNEY

CHAPTER ONE

THAT stretch of the Meuse Valley where the river flows from the French frontier to Namur offers, on a fine summer day, a joyous view of rural Belgium. For a river so narrow and steeply banked, it is gentle; its movement is like a dog padding happily home. Any number of cottages and small hotels cling to these precipitous banks and teeter over the water. To the casual onlooker it would seem that their owners must have immense confidence in the amiable nature of the river, for a single irascible current might easily collapse the structures. That this doesn't happen attests to its character. In the past houses have indeed tumbled into the stream but these mishaps were brought about by artillery shells, an explanation of which is unnecessary when one considers that the river connects the storied Ardennes with a fateful French town called Sedan.

On this day there was no artillery fire nor prospect of it, a circumstance which made the drive along the river road doubly pleasurable for an American named Philip Channing. Four and a half years before, in December of 1944, he had traveled the same road in an open jeep. Then the sky was dark and burdened with snow, and the threat of artillery fire was ever present because a German spearhead had thrust into the Ardennes as far as the town of Ciney, only ten miles to the east. He remembered that he had thought how beautiful it would be to drive along this road in lush summer when there was no war.

Now he was doing as he had dreamed he might. It was June of 1949, the sky was a luminous blue, the air warm, and to anyone intimate with the tragic history of this valley, peace was an invisible yet ardently living organism which garlanded the scene. His Citroën rolled easily on the road high above the east bank. The cottages and small hotels looked cheerful in new coats of paint, and the midday sun caused the river to sparkle with a brazen beauty like a pretty woman displaying too many diamonds.

It would be nice, he mused, to spend a day or two here, in a room which had the river flowing directly beneath its window. It would be more than nice. The war had never really ended for him as it did for the fighting soldiers. Some died and the rest went back home; for them the pattern was complete. He had been a war correspondent. After the surrender he had remained in Europe like an item of surplus supplies. He had roamed the ruins of Germany in search of stories; he had covered the Nuremberg trials, the stormy political conferences, and the riots in France and Italy. The shooting had stopped but the feel of war

flowed on and he knew no sense of completion. If he could linger here contentedly, by this very river where his teeth had once chattered with cold and fear for his life, the full circle might be joined and the war might end for him.

But in peace no less than war foreign correspondents look at life, or death, and write it; they rarely touch it. Moreover, their editors refuse to recognize degrees of urgency. To Channing's New York office everything was urgent, and an hour's delay in the transmission of a picayune item was looked upon as a scurrilous betrayal of the public trust. He pushed ahead.

Approaching Dinant, he stopped at a roadside tavern. A garden attached to the tavern afforded a fine view of the river, and Channing took possession of a table and spread his road map over it. He sat in lonely grandeur, the only client in this charming place. When the tavern-keeper, a heavy individual whose blood-red countenance denoted a lifetime of good eating, had gone to fetch him a beer, he studied the map. Then he read for the fifth or sixth time the cable which that morning had launched him on his journey.

DROP LEOPOLD STOP PROCEED URGENTLY BONNAR ARGONNE PROVINCE FRANCE
STOP TIPPED FAMED SCIENTIST KARLENE OUTSMUGGLED CZECHOSLOVAKIA
ETCONTACTING UNISTATES OILMAN CLAYFIELD HOTEL SPA BONNAR STOP DOWNPLAY
CLAYFIELD OIL ANGLE STOP OFFER KARLENE UPWARD ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS
REPEAT ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS EXCLUSIVE BYLINE SERIES SCIENTISTS LIFE BEHIND
CURTAIN STOP IF UNWILLING RUSH OWN DEFINITIVE STORY.

BENDELS

He didn't want to drop Leopold; he had spent a full week gathering material on the exiled monarch's claim to the throne. Besides, he liked Brussels; it bubbled with a cozy gaiety which was a welcome change from the blatant night life of Paris. But Bendels was the boss, and if his tip on Karlene was genuine it would make a good story. He thought drearily on the time Bendels had sent him scurrying across the face of Europe to Vienna on a tip that someone knew where Martin Bormann was hidden. The journey ended in the house of an elderly Austrian whose only knowledge of Bormann consisted of the fact that his niece had been a scullery maid in the Nazi's Berchtesgaden home ten years before. On the other hand it was a Bendels cable that had taken him to Messina in 1946 to unearth the best story of that year; it had made the front page of every client paper. One never knew about Bendels. How the man, sitting on the foreign desk in New York, smelled out these tips in odd corners of Europe was a mystery to Channing.

A tray with a glass of beer on it was placed before him by the thick hand of the tavern-keeper. The latter remained standing close to the table, waiting for his money. Channing tossed a ten-franc note on the tray. He did not touch the beer. If the man demanded immediate payment he would demand his change

just as quickly.

The tavern-keeper caught up the note and dropped four francs in change.

He said in French, “You are an American.”

Channing nodded and sipped his beer.

The man said churlishly, “I suppose you are on your way to Bastogne. You want to know the route.”

Channing said, “I’m not going to Bastogne.”

“Then you are the only one. All the Americans go to Bastogne. Business is good there. One would think we didn’t suffer in the war. Only Bastogne.” He made a noise with his lips as if to spit.

“I’m going to Bonnar,” Channing said by way of cutting off the man’s complaint.

“The Spa Bonnar?”

“Yes.”

The other nodded, vastly impressed. “It’s very expensive—very expensive.”

Channing drained his beer. “What is the best road?”

“That is a question.” The tavern-keeper faced toward Dinant and pointed with his massive right arm. “The finest highway is through Beauraing. You enter France near Sedan, then follow the line of the frontier until you reach Bonnar. The shortest way, of course, is through Libramont and you cross the frontier directly at Bonnar. The road is not so good but you save an hour.”

Consulting his map, Channing said, “The *Michelin* doesn’t show a road going directly into Bonnar.”

“It is only a country road, not for tourists. But it is passable.” The man eyed the four francs still lying on the tray. “I wish you a good journey, m’sieu.”

Channing said, “Thank you.” He rose, leaving his change on the tray.

“It is I who thank you, m’sieu.” The tavern-keeper picked up the tray and flipped it so that the coins bounced neatly into his hand. “There’s four francs that won’t reach their greedy fingers in Bastogne.”

Channing drove through the cobbled streets of Dinant and turned away from the river toward Libramont. The wooded terrain of the Ardennes was lush with fresh summer greenery. No sign of war remained. Passing through the towns, he found them sleepy and content. The surrounding fields were neatly fenced and furrowed, as if men had never screamed and died here and made the earth wet with their blood. The urge to forget must be great, he thought;

great and justified and peculiarly obscene.

Beyond Libramont the road became rough and dusty, and was empty of traffic except for an occasional cow. There were no towns in this area, only one or two hamlets to break the monotony of isolated farms and thick woods. He was not stopped at the Belgian border point. He passed into an open stretch of unplowed land and he spied in the distance a substantial building sitting majestically on a commanding height. This must be the Hotel Spa Bonnar, he reckoned. On the roadside well below the height of land he saw the French frontier post, a tiny hut which was distinguished by a flag fluttering limply in the summer breeze.

When he came closer he saw a narrow river flowing beneath the hotel, and on the opposite bank, clustered against the bend of the river, was the town of Bonnar.

2

When he braked his car at the frontier post Channing's attention was sharply arrested by what he saw through the dusty windshield. Two things leaped, as the French would say, to the eye. The first was that the road barrier did not bar the road. It sat on its base, perpendicular like a flagstaff, and it was locked in this position by a strand of heavy wire which was fastened to the thatched roof of the customs hut. The wire was rusted and the post itself was naked of paint. Patently the barrier was not intended to be lowered.

The second item that engaged Channing's attention was a curious relationship between the customs officer and a cow. They stood in the dirt road about fifty meters beyond the frontier line. Of the cow he could see only the bulge of her sides, her rear parts twitching against the summer flies, and an enormous milk sack swinging gently between her legs. The customs officer had his hand on her back and was slapping it decisively as if making a conversational point, and the way his head moved he might have been talking or laughing. Finally he cuffed her flank with the back of his hand and she plodded down the road by herself.

He was indeed laughing as he turned toward the customs hut, but the merriment fled from his face when he spied Channing standing beside his Citroën.

"What is it you want?" he grumbled. He shuffled forward, dragging one foot after the other like a lazy boy on a thankless errand. His pouting attitude was the more noticeable because he was a very old man of bizarre appearance. He was so short and slight that his full white mustaches seemed ridiculously

wide. Beneath the mustaches his mouth was retracted and the skin was tight and brittle on his pointed chin. His cheekbones protruded and were red like a pair of crabapples. White hair flowed generously from under the sides of his uniform cap. The neckband of his blue tunic was unbuttoned.

“Well, what is it you want?” he repeated as he faced up to Channing. “I suppose you want to enter France. What’s wrong with Belgium that you should leave it? One eats well there. One sleeps well, too, if one is young enough and has a full pocket of money. You are not bad-looking, which is also an advantage. Take off your black spectacles. How can I know who you are when your face is covered? Perhaps you are a murderer, an absconder, a spy. How do I know?”

Channing removed his sunglasses and smiled broadly.

He said, “You will pardon me, *m’sieu le douanier*, for interrupting your little *tête-à-tête* with the cow.”

The aged officer jerked up his head, spearing the breeze with his tiny chin.

“Do not call me a *douanier*,” he said derisively. “Here I represent France—like an ambassador. I can keep you out or let you in, just as it pleases me. I can examine every stitch of your clothing or I can be trusting and generous. It depends on my liver. Why do you come here anyway? Why didn’t you pass through Sedan like everyone else?”

“Because I am going to the Spa Bonnar.” Channing indicated the imposing, modern structure which sat on its hill just beyond the frontier line.

“Ach,” the other grunted. “You could have passed through Sedan like all the tourists.”

“Why should I?” Channing argued. “It was easier to come directly through here. Isn’t this a frontier post?”

The old man kicked at a pebble in the road. “Nobody passes through here except the local farmers. I know them all by their first names.”

“But you are an official. You are empowered to pass me through.”

“Empowered?” The officer gave his mustaches a vicious pull. “Of course I am empowered. So far as this little patch of frontier is concerned, I am an absolute monarch. No one comes through here except by my nod. This is France, and this”—he trudged a few steps across the shadow of the barrier—“this is Belgium and I am the king of this line. One could perish waiting to cross until I give the nod. You see?”

Channing was enjoying himself hugely. “Then could you find it in your heart to give me the royal nod?”

The other shook his head dolefully. “Ah, you do not come by my nod so

easily. This is not utopia. You must have papers. Everyone must have papers. If one has the right papers one may roam the earth as if it were a legacy from God Himself. If one has the wrong papers one can be denied the ownership of a single blade of grass. Where are your papers?”

Channing wished he had brought along a camera. He wanted to remember the little man. If he told the story in the seventh-floor bar at 21 Rue de Berri, where the Paris correspondents congregated, they wouldn't believe such a person existed.

“My passport, m'sieu. As you will see, it has all the correct visas.”

The man grabbed the passport and waved it in his hand to emphasize a point. “Now take my friend Caro—she is that cow. She might easily be a problem to me. She does not recognize any frontiers except those made by the good God. Does she care that she is a Belgian cow? It so happens she prefers the herbs on the riverbank, so she comes through here every day after she is milked. Mind you, they are French herbs she eats and it is Belgian milk that she gives. She has no papers. What does one do? I bow to her superior claim as a connoisseur of nature. I assure you if I put it up to the Quai d'Orsay it would have them in a whirl. It is indeed a great problem. But humans? There is no problem. One has the right paper or one has not.”

Channing nodded with mock humility. “I trust, m'sieu, you will find I have the right paper.”

The old man turned the passport in his bony fingers.

“Of course you have the right paper,” he grumbled. “An American passport will give you entrance everywhere except into the kingdom of heaven—and maybe there too if the plumbing is suitable.”

He examined Channing's picture on the second page of the passport, then looked up into his face.

“You have vanity,” he said. “I can tell by the way you posed for this picture. Are you an actor?”

Channing said, “You are reading the wrong page——”

“My dear man,” the other cut in testily, “authority never reads the wrong page. You must be a nihilist.”

When he stopped laughing Channing said, “Almost. I'm a journalist.”

The old man consulted the passport once more.

“Ah yes. Philip Channing. Journalist. Born Erie, Pennsylvania, April 23, 1915. Six feet. Blue eyes. Brown hair . . .” His voice trailed off to a mumble. “And I suppose a black heart. It doesn't say, however.”

Finally he snapped shut the passport and shoved it at the American.

“Go ahead and don’t trouble me,” he said petulantly, and shuffled across the dusty road to his shack, slamming the door decisively behind him.

3

A quarter mile inside France the massive wrought-iron gates of the Hotel Spa Bonnar glowered on the dusty farm road. The hotel itself sat on a height of ground about a hundred feet above the road. So precipitous was the incline that the driveway from the gates to the hotel’s entrance swept around in a wide circle in order to modify the grade. Guests lounging on a flagstoned terrace in front of the canopied entrance had the impression of directly overlooking the Bonnar River. In reality not only the road lay between the terrace and the river, but there was also a grassy bank on which nestled a few small houses which accommodated those of the hotel’s servants who did not live in the town.

The view from the terrace was indeed lordly. A wooden bridge spanned the river well below the hotel’s property so that guests might have an unimpeded view of the stream, of the picturesque old town of Bonnar clustered against the opposite bank, and of the farmlands beyond. It was a feudal setting, designed to give to the new aristocracy of Europe, those willing to pay the spa’s charges (which the old aristocracy would have rejected as outrageous), an assumption of infinite superiority to the inhabitants of the town and to the tiny figures that trudged behind plows in the far fields.

Commanding and substantial as it appeared in its red sandstone façade, the Spa Bonnar was a small hotel. It contained but forty rooms and suites. The architectural motif might be described simply as oval. The principal building, only two stories high, was oval; and connected at both extremities by covered walks were two smaller, one-story structures, also oval. One of these contained the dining salon and the other a gaming casino. The lower floor of the central building consisted entirely of public rooms and was enclosed on all sides by a solid row of french windows. These opened on the terrace in front, and in the rear on a garden which contained an oval swimming pool.

An overwhelmingly rich décor in the main lobby blended great sweeps of copper-tinted, stained mirrors between shafts of polished mahogany. However, the most distinguished feature was a wide, grandly curved staircase which led to the apartments on the upper floor. A small elevator shuttled up and down in a corner of the lobby but this was scarcely run except for the aged and the rheumatic because the staircase lent an exceptional air of elegance to those who used it. Each room on the upper floor boasted a private balcony which no doubt added to the pleasure of the guests but gave the structure a topheavy appearance.

Why the hotel was called the Spa Bonnar had never been explained. There were no mineral springs in the vicinity nor did the management claim that a sojourn would improve the health of its guests. It was likely that the gambling syndicate which built the place in 1936 had so named it for the sake of fashion. The reason for its isolated location was abundantly clear. The syndicate had planned a gaming resort on the Meuse below Namur but failed at the last moment to make satisfactory arrangements with Brussels for a gambling concession and therefore moved the project across the frontier where French government officials were more tractable and the rich Belgian clientele not too far distant.

The hotel operated for three prosperous summer seasons before the war closed it down. It remained shuttered until 1942, when it was requisitioned by the German high command as a rest center for officers of general rank. At that time a small garrison was established in the town to assure protection and peace of mind for the vacationing generals. In August of 1944 the hotel served briefly as Field Marshal von Model's headquarters. A month later the American First Army swept over the area and used the lobby as a temporary command post. A signal section of that army occupied the place during the winter of 1944-45, and although the unit numbered only thirty men it succeeded in delivering the coup de grâce to as much of the luxurious furniture and interior fittings as had been spared by the Germans.

When the fighting ended, the Spa Bonnar sat shabby and desolate on its beautiful hill, a miniscule reflection of the Europe which lay around it. Its lawns were holed by slit trenches and rutted with tank tracks. The swimming pool had become a receptacle for garbage. Not a pane of glass in its three wings remained intact and the snows of succeeding winters swept through its bare public rooms. The furniture that had not been broken for firewood by occupying troops had been looted by numberless bands of refugees. Rusted food tins littered the lobby and made the deserted place a spawning ground for rats which grew to ferocious size.

Early in 1948 the surviving members of the syndicate, those who had not been imprisoned for collaboration with the enemy, commissioned an Alsatian named Henri Gutzmann to restore the Spa Bonnar to its former glory.

Gutzmann, a frail, graying, effeminate man in his fifties, had been a well-known maître d'hôtel on the Côte d'Azur before the war and therefore had a wide acquaintance with the class of clientele the Spa Bonnar might expect to attract. Despite his delicate qualities he drove a shrewd bargain. He assured himself a partnership in the syndicate and the sole direction of the hotel before he accepted the commission.

But once the arrangements had been completed, he applied himself to the

task with a fierce purpose which at first was a matter for scoffing in the neighborhood. There was no idle labor available in the entire district. Furniture was simply unobtainable in nearby Charleville and Reims, even in Paris. Glaziers were out of the question. Linens could not be purchased even if one had gold to offer. Where on earth could one obtain carpets? Paints? Cutlery?

It was midsummer of 1948 before Gutzmann managed to hire a dozen lazy, grumbling men of no particular skill. He cajoled and drove and implored, and did more work himself than the whole of his labor force. He roamed the nearby cities and in the wake of his journeying huge express vans filled with crates rolled up to the hotel. He was carpenter and architect, gardener, painter, black-marketeer, draper, bricklayer.

The work proceeded through the following winter, and soon the villagers of Bonnar developed a new respect for this delicate madman. From their homes on the opposite bank of the river they could see the Spa Bonnar slowly returning to its prewar grandeur.

The spring was long in arriving that year, and not until mid-April did the sun break out warmly on a refurbished Spa Bonnar and an exhausted Henri Gutzmann. Now he was aided in putting the finishing touches to his handiwork by two colleagues. One was the new maître d'hôtel, a slim, wavy-haired young Italian, Gianelli by name, who had been Gutzmann's assistant on the Riviera.

The second was Oscar, a dark, heavy-set Swiss who had spent the war as concierge in a Genoa hotel. To him went the task of gathering up the Spa Bonnar's permanent staff. Having been a servant most of his life, he knew discipline and how to apply it to those beneath him in the rigid caste system of the backstairs world. He recruited most of the staff among old acquaintances in Paris, and a few in the neighborhood of Bonnar, only after he had assured himself that those in a position to make the biggest gratuities would give him a substantial cut of their earnings. He hired the chambermaids and scullery girls with a practiced eye, for he prided himself on his swarthy masculinity and he estimated that at least two or three of them would eventually come to require his personal services.

In the month of May tasteful folders appeared in the travel racks of the Ritz in Paris, La Réserve in Beaulieu, and the Hassler in Rome announcing the grand reopening of the Spa Bonnar on June 1, 1949.

The Spa Bonnar had been in operation three weeks when Channing's Citroën climbed the circuitous driveway to the level of the terrace. It was late

afternoon. The sun, suspended low on the far fields across the river, cast a rich sheen on the red sandstone of the hotel.

The terrace was deserted, an arrant waste of vista and inviting deck chairs; truly, Channing reflected, it bore the air of unemployed luxury which is the hallmark of the hotel distingué. Even a chasseur wearing a white duster, who materialized the moment the automobile appeared, seemed to have been concealing himself lest his visible presence offend the elegant emptiness.

The chasseur came forward, touching his cap, but he had not yet reached the automobile when a young woman darted across his path. She had come out of the hotel swiftly and approached the car with such immense expectation that Channing felt something of her embarrassment when she fell back disappointed.

He said, "I'm sorry I'm not the person you expected to see."

Crimsoning, she echoed, "Yes, I am sorry——"

Even in her discomfiture she was possessed of striking grace. Tall and lithe, she held her head with a fine, almost regal pride. Her dark auburn hair swept back from her forehead in heavy, natural waves and was caught up at the nape in a chignon. She had deep brown eyes, wide-set and intensely alive in a lean, sun-browned face. There was an athletic trimness about her, about the way she wore a cardigan over a high-buttoned blouse, and the neat line of her hips which made it easy to imagine long, hard-fleshed legs beneath her tweed skirt. Yet she was feminine. She had high, Slavic cheekbones, and although she used only a trace of lip rouge, the way her mouth slashed downward at the ends invested her, at least to the onlooker, with interesting capacities.

All this Channing's well-practiced eyes observed in a single glance as she stood framed in the car window. He smiled what he considered his most attractive smile.

He said, "Better luck next car."

She smiled without humor, rejecting the charm he sought to convey. She said, "Again, I am sorry," and turned away as abruptly as she came. The bulky frame of the chasseur took her place.

Channing said, "My baggage is in the back."

The chasseur touched his cap. "*Merci, m'sieu.*"

Channing stepped out of his car and walked across the terrace to the low stone parapet which gave protection against a sheer drop to the road below. Across the narrow, swiftly flowing river, the town of Bonnar lay unwary as a man stretched out asleep in a public park. A single cobblestoned street curved through the town in blind obedience to the bend of the river. The buildings

were old and small, mostly dwellings, but there were two which stood out. One was the parish church, a low frame structure which meekly shouldered a huge belfry; the other, directly facing the terrace across the river, was a modest auberge three stories high. Faded red lettering above its first row of windows identified it as the Lion d'Or. From the single street a series of dirt lanes ran off at right angles until they became wagon tracks and then were lost in the farmlands beyond. The intimate life of the town drifted easily across the view. It was the end of day and men were walking out of the distant fields toward the town, casting long shadows before them; through the open windows of the dwellings one could see their women bustling in the kitchens, or nursing their babies, or simply passing the time in rocking chairs.

Presently Channing was aware that the auburn-haired woman had reappeared. She stood at the parapet, at the corner of it which was nearest the frontier post, and was observing the road which ribboned out of Belgium. The road was empty, but she seemed not to tire of her vigil.

He watched her briefly, wondering about the man she awaited so eagerly. As with all men who have lived alone a long time, a woman's show of loyalty for someone else played on him with an unhappy fascination. Then he walked across the terrace to the hotel.

Henri Gutzmann, already immaculately attired in dinner clothes, met him in the lobby.

"Good evening," the director said. His right hand played nervously with the end of a silk handkerchief thrust in the breast pocket of his jacket. "Have you a reservation?"

"Why? Do I need one?" Channing glanced around the spacious lobby which was deserted except for a reception clerk and a concierge.

Gutzmann said, "We are quite full. We expect a number of guests."

It came to Channing that his clothes were baggy and his face dusty; also that he didn't like this little man who smelled of cologne and fingered his handkerchief.

"This is a public hotel, isn't it? If there's a vacant room I'll take it."

"We do not usually accept overnight guests."

"Very interesting."

"There is an auberge in the town, the Lion d'Or. I would be glad to telephone to see——"

Channing cut in, "I intend to stay here."

"You must understand, we have a rather specialized clientele."

"Well, I'm special." Channing pushed past the little man and asked the

reception clerk, "Is Mr. Clayfield here?"

Mention of Clayfield's name brought the manager trotting to the American's side.

"Are you a friend of Mr. Clayfield?"

"I'm here to see him."

"Then by all means, sir——" Gutzmann rapped sharply on the desk. "Attention for Mr. ——"

"Channing. Philip Channing."

"Thank you, Mr. Channing. I am Henri Gutzmann, the director of the hotel. I welcome you." He made a little bow, then clapped his hands under the clerk's nose. "See that Mr. Channing is accommodated. I believe No. 23 would be suitable."

He turned to the concierge and clapped his hands once more. "Oscar! The key to No. 23. And see to Mr. Channing's baggage. *Vite! Vite!*"

The formalities at the desk were quickly completed. Gutzmann, swinging the key in his delicate fingers, conducted his guest to the great curving staircase, walking sideways with quick short steps as if fearful of turning so much as a shoulder to his guest.

"You understand, Mr. Channing, how careful we must be," he said as they mounted the stairs. "When one caters to guests like Mr. Clayfield and General Perrault, the Duc de Mernot, who is coming next week with his family, when one tries to re-create the atmosphere of before the war, you understand how carefully we must inquire . . ."

Channing did not listen to the rest. His eyes fixed on a woman who stood on the staircase above them, at the point where it made its most graceful curve. She posed there, decorative as an Algerian sunset, watching them come up toward her.

She appeared reasonably young, perhaps thirty, and her face was delicately featured and white, as if not a flicker of sun had ever been allowed to touch her. She had dark, flashing eyes and almost black lip rouge on her full mouth, and her hair was jet and seemed to be lacquered against her head. Her black gown fitted closely around the line of her hips; above the waist it broke daringly, revealing a bold expanse of her white skin and a full half of each of her high, firm breasts. A single diamond intricately mounted in a platinum setting was suspended by a thin black ribbon at the cleavage of her bosom.

She watched Channing come up the stairs, appraising him. Gutzmann bowed and said, "Good evening, madame." She nodded without removing her eyes from the young American, and when they had passed her she took

possession of the center of the staircase and moved down slowly as if this were the grand escalier of the Paris Opera.

Channing said, "Aren't there any men in this hotel?"

"She is Giselle Notta," Gutzmann whispered. "Surely you have heard of her."

"Not me."

Gutzmann said, "She is the companion of Simon Aleksandrow."

This explained a good deal. Channing had heard fabulous legends about Simon Aleksandrow, a Hungarian who had lived in France throughout the war and had somehow come out of it rich.

"They say," continued Gutzmann, "she is the most beautiful woman in Europe. Personally I think it is a little exaggerated."

"You mean she is a little exaggerated."

The director raised his eyebrows and walked silently with mincing little steps along the wide corridor.

No. 23 was a large single room made to look larger by cream-colored walls and cleverly placed mirrors. Gutzmann moved across the room and flung open a pair of french windows, revealing a private balcony which contained a wicker serving table and two matching chairs. He said, "You will find it pleasant to breakfast here. You have the terrace view—*voilà! La belle France.*"

The balcony was of no immediate interest to Channing. He examined the location of the writing desk, noted it drew a proper light from the windows and was of the correct height for his portable typewriter. Then he looked at the bed to see if it was long enough for his lanky frame. He glanced into the bathroom and nodded.

"This will do. What does it cost?"

Gutzmann's eyebrows came up again. "About five thousand a day with service."

"All right." He didn't mind the expense. After all, the assignment was Bendels' idea.

"How long do you expect to remain with us, Mr. Channing?"

The American stood at the balcony doors. A slice of sun winked on the rim of the distant farmlands and threw a red glow over the terrace. It caught up the tawny, auburn-haired woman, still standing vigil at the parapet, and seemed to cast her in bronze.

"I don't know," he said absently. "A day or two. By the way, who is that

woman?”

Gutzmann glanced over the balcony. “She is Moussia Karlene. From Prague. A gazelle, no? Slav women are cows or gazelles. It’s remarkable.”

“Karlene. Mademoiselle?”

“Ah yes.”

Channing observed her with new interest. “Then Gregor Karlene is her father.”

“Exactly.”

“What’s his room number? I’ve got to see him.”

“But, Mr. Channing, he is not here.”

“Well, when he comes back——”

“Professor Karlene has not yet arrived in the hotel.”

“Oh. When do you expect him?”

Gutzmann lifted his hands in that empty French gesture which denotes a great deal, nothing at all, and every point between. “I’m not quite sure. I believe it was yesterday he was due.”

Standing at the window, the newspaperman instinctively reviewed the salient facts of his assignment. Bendels’ cable had clearly indicated that Karlene had already been smuggled out of Czechoslovakia and should have been at the hotel. He stepped back into the room and looked inquiringly at Gutzmann. The director retreated toward the door, fearful that he had spoken too freely.

“Just a minute. You say Clayfield is here.”

“But of course.”

“And who else? I mean in Clayfield’s party.”

Now Gutzmann was sure he had said too much. “I must not be indiscreet ——” he stumbled.

“Never mind.” Channing turned back to the window and watched the girl on the parapet. A hazy picture of a troublesome situation was forming in his mind.

Gutzmann spoke up. “Of course it would not be indiscreet to tell you the names of all our guests. You see, there are only a few. It is so early in the season—the casino does not open until July——”

“All right. Who are they?”

The little man counted them off on his fingers. “There are Mr. Clayfield and his secretary, Mr. Nason. Then Mr. Aleksandrow and Madame Notta. That

is four. Miss Karlene. Ah yes, and General Perrault and his wife—a very fine old gentleman, the general. And yourself.” He held up his middle finger. “Eight in all. Nine when Professor Karlene arrives.”

“Thank you.”

“Shall I tell Mr. Clayfield you are here?”

“Don’t bother. I’ll tell him myself.”

When Gutzmann left him he undressed and bathed quickly. The story had begun to excite him. He couldn’t wait to put on his clothes. He struggled into his trousers, lifted the phone, and asked for Clayfield’s apartment. The voice that answered said, “Who is it wishes to speak to Mr. Clayfield? This is his secretary.”

“Tell him Channing of World News Service.”

“Is this a long-distance call?”

“No, I’m in the hotel.”

There was a pause. Then: “I’ll see if he’s available.”

Channing laced his shoes while he kept the phone pinned between his ear and his shoulder.

Finally a deep, cheerful voice came on the line: “This is Justin Clayfield.” There was a practiced vanity in the way the words were spoken, like a schoolboy chalking his name on stray fences.

“I’m Channing of World News Service.”

“So I understand. How are you?”

“Me, I’m fine. I understand you have a story.”

“Story?”

“About Gregor Karlene.”

A chuckle sounded on the line. “Amazing how you fellows get to find out about these things.”

“Nothing amazing about it, Mr. Clayfield. It was all in a cable I got from New York this morning.”

The chuckling stopped. Clayfield said, “Well, you’re premature.”

“When do you expect Karlene to show up?”

The reply was delayed. “I can’t rightly say. I’d tell you if I knew.”

Channing said, “Let me ask you this. Is he missing?”

Again a silence, longer than before. “I wouldn’t say that, Channing. It’s—it’s a complicated thing. Perhaps you’d better wait until we know more.”

This time Channing paused, groping for an opening. “I’d like to get some

background, Mr. Clayfield. Can I see you for a few minutes?"

"Yes, I suppose."

"Now?"

"If you like."

"Where?"

"Come into No. 34."

"I'll be right there."

5

The president of the Clayfield Oil Corporation and its score of subsidiary companies was, physically as well as financially, a powerful man. He was of middle height and thickly proportioned, and although his muscles had grown soft with the passage of prosperous years, he had not allowed himself to become fat. His iron-gray hair was inclined to be curly and he kept it short. He had a square jaw, a flat nose which twisted as though it had once been broken, and small blue eyes which looked out on the world with an abiding friendliness. He wore expensive suits without achieving a distinguished appearance, mostly because his barrel chest and bulky neck muscles defied the efforts of his tailor.

At forty-eight Justin Clayfield looked like an old all-American who had married the campus heiress and become a successful financier. The fact was he had never gone to school. His education had come from the tutoring of his father, an itinerant preacher in the Southwest. While other men destined to become great industrialists were attending Harvard and Princeton he was out—fighting tough and often lawless prospectors in a desperate scramble for land leases and had already wildcatted his first million. Nor was he married. At an age when he might have been raising a family he was thrusting up derricks in the bleak hills of Oklahoma.

He had long since outgrown the name of Killer Clayfield which had attached itself to him in the middle twenties when he used his fists freely to protect his holdings against occasional raiders. Now his reputation for shrewd, honest dealing was paramount in the board rooms of Wall Street. He was popular with his associates, feared by his rivals, respected by all. He was a success.

When Channing entered the parlor of his corner apartment Clayfield was wearing, with little grace, a well-cut dinner jacket. He came forward, smiling,

and proffered a firm, friendly hand. His small eyes crinkled with pleasure.

“I’m glad to see you.” He waved the newspaperman to a chair. “What’ll you drink?”

“Scotch if you have it.”

“Scotch. Right.”

The oilman went to a serving table. “So you got the tip from New York,” he said, mixing the drinks.

Channing studied the extraordinary width of the man’s back and shoulders. He said, “My office sent me a cable. Somebody must have told them.”

Clayfield turned around with two glasses in his bulky hands. He was smiling easily. “As a matter of fact,” he said, “I arranged it.”

He seemed to be enjoying the newspaperman’s surprise. He said, “You see, Karlene is an important story to me. I didn’t want it tossed off as just another note in the financial columns. I figured if I gave it to one agency exclusive I’d make a lot of front pages. Was I right?”

Channing lifted his glass. “To you, Mr. Clayfield. You’d make a damned good press agent.”

A light knock was heard and a feather-footed young man entered the room and began to walk noiselessly across it.

“Nason,” Clayfield called out, stopping the young man in his tracks. “This is Mr. Channing, one of the newspaper people from back home.” Nason nodded timidly. Clayfield continued: “He doesn’t fool easy. Better remember that.”

Nason said, “Yes, sir,” hovered a moment, then went on to another room.

The oilman turned his full attention on Channing. “Now what would you like to know?”

“It’s a pretty simple thing, Mr. Clayfield. I understand Karlene got across the line. What I want to know first is, where is he now?”

“Somewhere between the Czech border and here.”

“All right. We’ll come back to that. How does he fit into your picture?”

Clayfield looked across with an owlish expression on his rugged face. “You don’t know much about Karlene, do you?”

“I don’t know anything about him except that he’s a top scientist.”

“You know, Channing,” the oilman said, “so far I like you. You don’t throw any curves.” He sat down heavily. “Here’s the works.”

He described in swift, cursory sentences Karlene’s special genius in the field of oil exploration. He tossed off terms which Channing did not clearly

understand, terms like “anticline,” “sincline,” “Devonian limestone,” and “Wilcox sand,” but he left no doubt how much he needed the man’s services. “I’ve taken a lot of gambles in my time,” he said. “These fields are the biggest. I need Karlene to make them pay, need him badly. So I just reached out and grabbed him.”

Channing got up and walked to the open windows. Night had fallen. The terrace lay under soft lights. The woman was still there, now pacing with short, anxious steps along the parapet.

He said, “Not yet, you haven’t.”

Clayfield swung around. “You mean that girl.”

“Yes.”

“I’m not worried. Not yet. It’s a long drive here from the Czech border.”

“You’re sure he got across the line?”

“Do you think I’d be sitting here if I wasn’t sure?” Clayfield said. “Of course he got across the line—early yesterday morning at Hof. We got word from our man who crossed with him.”

“What about the girl? When did she arrive?”

“It was the professor they were watching. She came on ahead by air.”

Channing said, “She’s worried.”

The oilman put down his glass and joined Channing at the windows. He said, “After all, I can’t blame her. He’s her father.” He seemed to be trying to reassure himself. He said, “What is it, ten, twelve hours’ driving? Anything can happen, anything—a blowout, maybe they were tired and laid over somewhere. I’m not worried.”

“She’s a good-looking girl.”

Clayfield nodded. “Nervous as a cat. This afternoon she rushed up to me because she’d seen a car go past the hotel and she was sure her father was in it. She wanted to go chase it. That sort of thing.”

“It’s a pity. Handsome girl. That’s the word for her. Handsome.”

Clayfield said absently, “Yes, she is.” He paced slowly between his chair and the windows, then called out, “Nason!”

The secretary came into the room.

“Nason, what about Nuremberg?”

“Nothing new there, sir. I had a major of the Constabulary on the phone a few minutes ago. All they know is Professor Karlene passed through the guard point at Hof. They haven’t heard anything else.”

Clayfield’s lips worked nervously. “Get Aleksandrow. Ask him to come up

here.”

When the secretary had gone Channing asked, “Is Aleksandrow in this?”

“Why? Do you know him?”

“I’ve heard of him.”

“What have you heard?”

Channing said, “Not so good.”

A smile spread slowly across Clayfield’s big lips. It was an apologetic smile. He said, “He was the only man. When you’re fixing to smuggle someone across a border like the Czech border you’ve got to know your way around. I couldn’t do the job, wouldn’t know where to start. That’s where Aleksandrow comes in. He’s an expert. And damned expensive. You wouldn’t believe it, but it’s costing me sixty thousand dollars just to bring Karlene across the border. Sixty thousand dollars——”

“Have you paid him?”

“I’m trusting you, Channing. This is not for publication. Nothing about the method of escape is for publication. I’ve paid him thirty. He gets the other thirty when Karlene arrives.”

Channing asked, “Is Aleksandrow worried?”

“Not a bit of it. He’s a Hungarian, one of those characters.” The oilman smiled broadly. “How he gets anything done is a mystery to me. He’s always lounging around the Riviera with that woman of his. But he’s effective. You’ll like him.”

The newspaperman still stood at the window, watching the girl below. He said, “How well do you know him?”

A low chuckle preceded Clayfield’s reply. “I did business with him once, right after the war. He bought a couple million dollars’ worth of drill heads from one of my companies for some French outfit working North Africa. Next thing I know the drills show up in Bulgaria and the State Department is raising merry hell with me. That’s Aleksandrow. He’s crooked but he knows his way around. He was the perfect man for a job like this.”

Channing said, “Let’s wait until Karlene shows up.”

“Oh, I’m not worried——Well?”

Nason had come into the room. He said, “Mr. Aleksandrow is in the lounge. He invites you to join him.”

Clayfield seemed pleased. He turned to Channing. “See what I mean? He’s a character, all right. Invites me to join him. Come on along. I want you to meet him.”

As they descended the staircase Clayfield said, "I'm glad you're here, Channing. It's good to have someone to talk to. We're a big family, we Americans, but we're lost here in Europe. I'm glad you're along."

Oscar, the concierge, bowed as they came across the lobby.

The oilman paid him no notice. He said to Channing, "I'll tell you this. When Karlene shows up I'm in the clear. Once I've got my hands on him, he's mine. Nobody fools around with Justin Clayfield."

6

The lounge of the Spa Bonnar, located off the main lobby, was designed to blend with its natural setting. Walls of deep-hued oak paneling looked down on armchairs of cream-colored leather and serving tables topped by copper-tinted mirrors. The outside wall consisted of a semicircle of high french windows which provided a view of the rear garden and the floodlighted swimming pool. Beyond the pool a line of birches stood white and svelte against the night sky like a bevy of earthbound ghosts.

Simon Aleksandrow and his mistress sipped champagne at a table near the windows. They were alone in the room when Clayfield and Channing came through an archway which gave entrance from the lobby.

The Hungarian bounced to his feet, his face beaming, and extended his arms. "Ah, Mr. Clayfield, come along," he sang out. "Do come along, and your friend of course. Indeed yes. I am happy tonight. I cannot tell you why. I am just happy. It is not a sin, eh?"

He was a short, round man, well over fifty. He had a red fleshy face, and when he smiled, which he apparently did each time he spoke, his mouth opened in a large crescent and revealed small, widely spaced teeth. His thinning hair was tinted in order to give the impression it was blond rather than gray. He was fat but not excessively so. He wore his dinner clothes well and, like so many fat men, he moved energetically and with a certain grace.

He bubbled with pleasure at the arrival of the two men. He shook Channing's hand with enthusiasm and chuckled inexplicably as he introduced him to Madame Notta.

"What do you think?" he said. "Gutzmann has produced for me a bottle of Clicquot '29. Beautiful wine! The cork smells like roses. I'm sure you know your wines, Mr. Channing."

Channing said, "No."

"It doesn't matter," Aleksandrow said. He called to a waiter for more glasses. "One must have the palate of a woodchopper not to enjoy this

beautiful wine. Tonight I love everybody. I am happy. What can I do?"

Clayfield caught Channing's eye and winked. He said, "I should warn you, Aleksandrow. Mr. Channing is a newspaper correspondent."

"Fine, fine," the other chuckled. "I was once a newspaperman myself. In Budapest. I used to sell stories to the politicians at regular rates. It was a wonderful business." He nodded vigorously. "Really, Mr. Clayfield. It's quite true. In the old days all the politicians in Budapest had to pay for a good article in the papers. I could tell you a wonderful story about it, but poor Giselle would be bored."

The woman raised her delicate face and sighed, "Don't mind me, Simon. I shall concentrate on the wine."

"And Mr. Channing," Aleksandrow insisted. "Don't forget Mr. Channing. Poor Giselle! She's bored in this lonely hotel."

Channing lifted his glass. "It will be a pleasure."

She smiled. Her great dark eyes peered at him over the rim of her goblet and her lips pouted sensually. As she sat deep in her chair she seemed half naked. It occurred to him that she was fully aware of her nakedness and quite content with it.

They sipped their wine and listened to Aleksandrow. He was incapable of talking without frequent laughter, as if it was mandatory on him to be a source of merriment. With each burst of laughter his tiny gray eyes darted around the company, but they remained principally on Clayfield, for the oilman seemed to enjoy him thoroughly. Giselle fingered her goblet with studied indifference, like one who has witnessed a performance too many times.

Watching them side by side, Channing felt instantly that he knew their relationship. Aleksandrow was one of that small but sharply defined group of Balkan adventurers who had made a great financial success by doing business with the Germans during the occupation and with the Allies after it. He bore the unmistakable caste mark of the group, an air of wealth and worldliness which aped but did not resemble the manner of the gay aristocrats of old Europe. The woman served as a reflection of his vanity, a deft way to display what he owned and could not otherwise advertise. He had picked her up, Channing decided, out of a chorus line, perhaps from an apprenticeship in a luxe call house, and had molded her to his specifications. This must have been years ago, for she had clearly outgrown her role as an adjunct to his personality and was now patently bored with it.

They finished the Clicquot '29 and the waiter brought another bottle. Aleksandrow continued to talk a great deal but now Clayfield seemed less amused and he glanced several times at his watch. Finally he came to the point.

“What about Karlene, Aleksandrow? This is the second night.”

The Hungarian drew up his shoulders around his fleshy neck. “What is there to do, Mr. Clayfield? We wait.”

“We just can’t sit here and wait.”

“Why not?” Aleksandrow chuckled and glanced at the others.

Clayfield failed to appreciate the man’s humor. He said stiffly, “I don’t understand why we’ve had no report since yesterday. A man can’t disappear into thin air.”

“You have said it exactly. It is even more difficult for two men to disappear. Don’t forget, Berlau, my best man, is with him.”

Clayfield said, “I wouldn’t call your best man very good. Any man of mine would report or I’d damned well know the reason why.”

“There is nothing to worry,” the other said. “To report is sometimes difficult.”

“They’re not traveling through the jungle.”

Aleksandrow’s pale eyes opened wide. “One must have a sense of *cospirazione* in these matters. *Cospirazione*,” he chanted. “To travel through a jungle is sometimes simpler than to escape from terrorists.”

“You mean something may have happened to them.” Clayfield’s voice was taut.

“No, no, no. It is only that one must be careful. Berlau knows exactly what to do. He is very clever. I’m sure he cheats me in money all the time.” Aleksandrow chuckled and turned to his mistress. “How do you find Mr. Channing?”

“He is two-faced,” she pouted. “He looks at me but he listens to your weary business.”

“Three-faced,” said Channing. “I’m also getting a little drunk.”

“On two glasses of wine,” she murmured with a certain derision.

He responded, “On two glasses of wine and you, madame.”

“Mr. Channing is a European. Definitely a European! He has the touch,” Aleksandrow cried. He waggled a pudgy finger. “By all means have more wine but not too much of Giselle.” He appeared to draw an uneasy pleasure out of having his mistress admired, like a man turning a light on a prized painting of his collection but wary lest it be handled.

The colloquy escaped Clayfield. He said, “I’ve considered every contingency and I see no reason why they shouldn’t arrive tonight at the very latest.”

Aleksandrow nodded. "It is possible."

"At the very latest," Clayfield repeated in a sharp, executive manner.

The remark had a depressing effect on the Hungarian. He sat solidly in his chair, his fount of exuberance momentarily dry. Clayfield gazed into his wineglass as if intrigued by the perpetual rise of the bubbles through its slender neck.

Presently the sound of a string orchestra playing in the dining room filtered through the open windows. Aleksandrow's hands slowly caught up the beat of the music.

"The '*Wiener Fiakerlied*,'" he said, turning to his mistress. "Remember, Giselle?" His little eyes blinked. She was smiling mischievously on Channing, as if she had just whispered something charming and flirtatious.

"Remember what?" she asked, hardly turning her head.

His reply was lost in a scuff of shoes on the polished floor. Moussia Karlene came through the archway and hurried toward the group. She approached so swiftly that the men had no time to get up before she had perched on the arm of an empty chair and thrust her hands in the pockets of her cardigan.

"You have no news?" she said to Clayfield. She seemed to know the answer, for she shook her head in concert with his.

"Not yet, Moussia," he replied. He saw her lips tremble and he added quickly, "Aleksandrow thinks your father will arrive tonight."

"It is possible, very possible," the Hungarian broke in, but there was no conviction in his voice.

The girl's alert, expressive eyes reviewed the little company with a trace of resentment. Her hands remained deep in her pockets. She was trying hard to retain her composure. She said, "Are you sure my father came across the frontier safely?"

Clayfield said, "You saw the telegram we received from Hof."

"Yes. I saw it."

"It means they're on their way. They've been delayed, that's all."

She thought it over. Then she said, "There's something else."

"What else, Moussia?"

"I'm not sure——" she faltered.

Clayfield glanced knowingly at the others. "Not sure about what, Moussia?"

She said, "Just now I saw a man on the bridge. He stood there watching the

hotel. It frightened me. I think—I think I know him. He is from Prague.”

Clayfield smiled. “Come now, you shouldn’t imagine all these things. You’ve spent too much time out there. Why don’t you stay and have a glass of wine with us?”

“I’d like to be sure,” she said.

“You can be sure, my dear. No one in Prague could possibly know about this place.”

“I don’t swear I recognized him. But—but——”

Clayfield said, “Please understand, Moussia. I am as anxious about the professor as you are. This sort of thing doesn’t do anybody any good.”

She nodded uncertainly, and after a moment of hesitation she got up and walked out of the lounge. They watched her go.

“By God,” Clayfield said, “I’m sorry for that girl.”

From deep in her chair Giselle murmured, “Simon, we need another bottle of wine.”

Aleksandrow snapped his fingers at the waiter and pointed to the empty wine cooler. “It’s understandable,” he said cheerfully. “The poor girl loves her father.”

Giselle said, “I once saw a play about a girl who fell in love with her father. *Mon dieu*, it was sad. I drank for several days.”

“That is the nice thing about you,” Aleksandrow chuckled. “There is no sadness that a good bottle of wine won’t cure.”

“I am lucky that way,” she said. “And you, Mr. Channing. You have a soft heart. I could see how you looked at the girl.”

“I was thinking,” Channing said, “what would happen if the man she saw turned out to be somebody from Prague.”

“Bravo!” Aleksandrow chortled. “Mr. Channing has a sense of *cospirazione*——” He looked up brightly at the two old people who had just entered the lounge. “Ah, *Général Perrault et Madame. Bon soir, mon général!*”

The general creaked into the room with the aid of an ebony-smooth cane and the stout arm of his wife. If he had ever commanded in the field, Channing thought, it must have been in the war of 1870. His withered body trembled as he walked, and his bald head, which bore a few wisps of white hair, might have fallen to his sagging shoulders were it not held aloft by the high, starched collar of his old-fashioned evening costume. His wife, although white-maned, defied the years. Taller than the general and extraordinarily robust, she seemed

capable of carrying him if necessary.

She conducted him to a chair and lowered him into it. He sank down happily, then called out in a frail voice, “*Bon soir, mes amis.*”

Aleksandrow said, “How was the dinner, *mon général?*”

“Excellent—unbelievably good,” the old man replied. “France is France once more. One eats well.”

“Well then,” Aleksandrow said briskly, “shall we go in?”

Clayfield said, “Good idea. I’m hungry. You, Channing?”

The newspaperman got up. “I’ll join you later, if I may. I’ve got work to do.”

Aleksandrow looked up in amazement. “My dear fellow, don’t miss the dinner. The chef is a master.”

“My apologies to the chef.”

As he left the room his last glance was for Giselle. Her eyes pursued him and there was a wry twist on her full mouth.

CHAPTER TWO

CHANNING scanned the terrace, savoring the crisp night air. Moussia was nowhere in sight. Only the chasseur materialized from wherever he lay hidden, touched his cap, and said, “Would you like your car, m’sieu?”

He shook his head and went to the parapet. It was a clear, warm night. Under a half-moon the village lay etched in gleam and shadow, and the river glittered in intimate communion with the sky. Upstream the frail wooden bridge was deserted. A single bulb hung suspended over its center and the space below was like an empty frame, for Channing vividly imagined a man should be standing there.

He leaned over the parapet until he could see the road below. Then he saw her striding toward the bridge. He recognized the anxious step, the shoulders drawn back and the head held proudly aloft.

He came away from the parapet and plunged into the gloom of the circular driveway. The sound of violins reached out to him and reminded him of Giselle, and she of Aleksandrow. Then the story occupied his mind. And inevitably Bendels. He quickened his pursuit.

Somewhere in the village a clock struck nine. Instinctively he translated the lonely chimes into terms of newspaper deadlines across the country. In New York it was four o’clock. He could see Bendels walking aimlessly into the teletype room and asking if Channing had come through. That was the trouble with being the number-one man. They gave you an assignment and sat back listening for the story to come clattering across, as if events moved automatically like tape through a teletype machine.

He had always wanted to be number-one man. Some of his less successful colleagues had a habit of saying he had practically enslaved himself to Bendels to make it. In a way, he supposed, it was true. Since 1940, when he was assigned to London as a junior correspondent, he had let Bendels channel his life, even his character. By cable and letter the man on the New York desk badgered and prodded and ridiculed him, taught him to reach directly for the heart of a story, until he came to subordinate his own fears and feelings to the duty of striving for the prized cable: OKAY—BENDELS. By the time he landed on the Normandy beachhead with the first wave of the 29th Division, neither spitting bullets nor the groans of wounded lying about him could effectively impinge on his anxiety to get the story away for Bendels. The rewards

followed quickly. Soon after the war he was number-two man in the Paris bureau, and less than a year later Bendels dropped the plum in his lap. He became the agency's top roving man in Europe, working out of Paris but taking orders only from the New York desk.

But he remained Bendels' man, with Bendels' cold philosophy about news. There were correspondents who liked to clothe their devotion to journalism in high moral principles. He had no such pretensions. He didn't consider himself a disciple engaged in spreading truth so that the people might know. Once he sensed a story, he went after it like a bird dog. For Bendels.

He came briskly through the lower gateway and padded in the soft dust of the country road. The story worried him. Every story worried him until he sat down at his typewriter and shook out the facts, like a shrewd grocer with a barrel of apples, so that the good salable ones lay on top with a sort of shiny modesty. But this time the facts were eluding him. He was down to chasing wraiths.

Moussia was alone on the bridge. She had paused against the rail and was studying the town on the far bank. She whirled around when his first step on the loose wooden planks reverberated in the quiet night. Then she recognized him and her chin came up and she looked away into the narrow stream.

He leaned an elbow on the rail beside her and said, "Your man seems to have disappeared."

She continued to look into the water. She must have been frightened because she was breathing hard. Finally she said, "Who are you? I suppose you work for Mr. Clayfield."

Her English was precise in the manner of well-educated Europeans.

"Me? No, I don't work for Clayfield."

"Then who are you? Why do you follow me?"

"I'll give you the complete answer, Moussia. My name is Channing. I'm an American newspaperman and I've come here to interview your father."

She thought on his reply a moment, then she said, "Why do you call me Moussia? I am not a servant girl."

"I like it. You can call me anything. Call me Philip or Phil or you can whistle at me if you want."

He offered her a cigarette which she declined. It annoyed him that she didn't face him; it touched his vanity. He lit his own cigarette and studied her face in the flare of the match. It was sullen, resistant.

He said, "Come on, loosen up. You need friends."

To his amazement she turned boldly to him and said, "Yes, I need friends."

“You’re afraid.”

“Of many things.”

He said, “Well, you’ve got a friend.”

“Just like this?”

He snapped his fingers. “In America we say just like *that*.”

She turned back to the water. “Why are you my friend suddenly?”

He said, “Who are you afraid of—Clayfield?”

“No, not Mr. Clayfield.”

“Aleksandrow?”

“Perhaps. I know these professional Hungarians.”

“Laughing Boy? He brought your father across the line.”

A smile flickered at the ends of her mouth and quickly disappeared. “If I could be sure——”

He said, “I wish you’d look at me when you talk to me.”

She turned about slowly. “Are you always so rough with your friends?”

“I’m sorry. Who else are you afraid of? This man you saw on the bridge?”

“Perhaps Mr. Clayfield is right,” she said. “Perhaps I dreamed it, all of it.” Her chin came up angrily.

He had seen it twice now, the way she pulled up her chin with a show of spirit. It was something he noticed. He felt he was beginning to know her. He said quietly, “Who is this man—if he is the man?”

“His name is Endor. He was once a student of my father. Now he is in the Gottwald government.”

“There’s only one way to find out.” He took firm hold of her arm and drew her from the rail. A few paces brought them to the opposite bank.

She said, “I was terrified to go alone.”

“I don’t blame you.” The roadway which led from the bridge to the main street of the village was a dark passage shrouded with the rich foliage of linden trees which blotted out the moonlight. Not a person moved on it. Nor was there a sound save the ripple of the water and the brush of the night wind against the trees.

They turned out of the shadows into Bonnar’s only street, the Rue de la Victoire. Under the bright moonlight they could see the entire length of it spearing through the village. The dull gleam of the cobblestones was like hammered silver. The street, too, was deserted. Even the thick-walled houses which rose from the edge of the cobblestones lacked a sign of life. They

crouched in dark and humble anonymity beneath the fine hotel which towered, ablaze with light, on its commanding hill across the river.

Channing scanned the street. He said, "I guess this man Endor is still in Prague."

"I would be happy."

She seemed lighter in spirit as they walked along the lonely street, pausing to wonder on an ancient stone dwelling which, in the illusory light and shadow, seemed to lean with the weight of years over the cobblestones. A little farther on they came upon a small, well-kept lawn between two houses. In the center of it sat a wide, low headstone which bore the lettering: "To the Heroes of the Resistance—Known and Unknown—Dead at the Hands of the Invaders—1940-44." At the foot of the headstone lay a withered wreath.

The street broadened abruptly to twice its width and they found themselves in a tiny square. On one side stood the parish church; on the other, facing the church from the riverbank, was the auberge Lion d'Or.

Channing said, "We'd better inquire."

An open gate led into a miniature courtyard. The door of the inn was heavily curtained. It seemed the whole village, including the guests of the Lion d'Or, had long since gone to bed, although it was just past nine o'clock.

But when they pushed open the door it was as if they had unwittingly broken into a secret place. The gay life of Bonnar swirled and crackled before them in a long, narrow tavern. Some thirty persons, mostly men in work clothes, filled the banquettes which ranged three sides of the room. They were cheerful, talkative people and they drank freely from *Steinkrugen* and wineglasses. A bar stood next to the entrance, and behind it the innkeeper officiated over several bottles of red wine and two beer spigots. Beside him a fat woman, obviously his wife, sat smugly at the cash register. A shapeless girl wearing a house dress and slippers moved along the tables collecting empty glasses. At the far end of the room a window almost as wide as the wall itself opened on the river and one could see, if one raised one's eyes, the parapet and eaves of the Spa Bonnar.

An accordion hit a single note and died abruptly. The overtones of spirited conversation fell to whispers. All turned to eye the strangers inside the door. The room had become oppressively quiet.

It was broken by a thin voice that sang out from behind the accordion. "*Hola!* It is a great night! The masters have come down from their tower to visit with the people! A glass of wine, André—and, damn you, make it *vin ordinaire*—for the masters!"

Channing could not mistake the voice or the figure of the man as a pair of

great white mustaches rose up against the far window. He smiled with genuine pleasure at the sight of the frontier guard. The old man's uniform was all but hidden by a huge accordion which was strapped across his puny chest; his hard cap sat comfortably on the back of his white head, its straight visor pointing directly to the ceiling.

"Come on, Albert," a heavy voice called out. "Let us have '*Le Petit Vin blanc*.'"

The old man took a swig from his *Steinkrug* and grimaced at the assemblage.

"A little moment," he said. "I would not like our distinguished visitors to think that the frontier of France is left completely unprotected. As you see"—he gestured toward Moussia and Channing—"I sit here by the window where I can look directly on my post. If so much as an alien mosquito tries to get by, it will not escape Albert Bonneval." He reached a bony hand out of the window and slapped at an imaginary insect. "You see?"

A laugh arose from the tipplers. "'*Le Petit Vin blanc*,' Albert!"

Moussia had already looked about the room. "He is not here," she whispered.

Channing said, "We'll ask the proprietor." He led her to an empty table near the door and when they had seated themselves the waitress brought them two glasses of wine. The old man waved at them, then his frail body strained over his accordion and soon the room was filled with a cheerful, rhythmic refrain.

Channing touched his glass to Moussia's. After the Spa Bonnar's champagne, the wine was harsh to the taste. He beckoned to the innkeeper.

The big man came to them and leaned over the table to make himself heard above the music. "Please make yourselves welcome," he said. "I cannot leave my place at the bar."

Channing said, "Tell me, m'sieu. Have any strangers arrived at your inn today?"

"But of course," the other replied. "They come and go all the time."

"I mean tonight."

"Tonight?" The man stroked his chin. "In point of fact, two new guests arrived only this evening."

The music ended on a high note, followed by Albert's laughter. "*Et bien, mes enfants*," he cried, lifting his *Steinkrug*, "the maestro will now have his reward." The tipplers thumped their goblets against the tables.

Channing said to the innkeeper, "Can you tell me their names?"

“Ach,” the other grunted, “who can remember? We have only five rooms. They are always filled.”

Channing said, “Is it possible for you to find out?” He caught the suddenly indignant look that came to the innkeeper’s face and added quickly, “It is just that we are expecting a friend and we wondered if perhaps he has already arrived.”

“That is different,” was the testy response. “If you will tell me the name of your friend—good. But do not ask me who is in my hotel as if you were the Gestapo. The occupation is finished.”

“My friend’s name is Endor.”

The big man mumbled unintelligibly and went out through a glass door marked “*Bureau et Lavabo.*”

The sound of lighthearted conversation frolicked through the room, most of it centering on an Albert Bonneval. The old *douanier* had unstrapped his accordion and was leering about the place, snapping at those who thumped for another song. The more he objected the louder became the demands.

“Baah!” he cried. “You can pray on your knees, you can grovel on the floor. It makes no difference. Albert Bonneval will not play again tonight!”

“*Non, Albert, non!*” The shouts came from all over the tavern.

“*Non, Albert, non!*” he mimicked. “I guard the frontier of France for you all day. At night I entertain you—all the time with a bad liver. And when I put my nose in a glass of beer to pass a little strength to my poor body, do you let me drink in peace? *Hein?*”

A chorus of mock wails greeted his complaint.

“Your tears will not help you.” He glared about the room. “You! The American! Whose wife have you stolen that you come down to hide among the peasants? *Hein?* Is it not enough that you cuckolded all the husbands in Belgium?”

The tipplers howled and Moussia flushed and glanced at Channing.

Albert wagged a pointed finger. “I warn you, ma’amselle, take great care. I know this type. Eyes like a doe, but he is a pure villain, I assure you.”

The old man smirked and pulled at his mustaches. “*Hein?*” he kept repeating. “*Hein?*”

Moussia and Channing laughed in concert with the others. He thought, She must be lovely when she is happy. The corners of her mouth turned upward, her teeth were white and even, and her eyes were deep and clear and opened wide. There was more joy in her than could be expressed in laughter.

Suddenly the innkeeper stood before them, breathing hard and wiping his face with a yellow handkerchief.

“Ah, m’sieu,” he said, “you are correct. Your friend is here—from Czechoslovakia, no?”

She stiffened, as if a blow for which she had been bracing herself had finally struck. Channing took hold of her arm tightly, then addressed himself to the innkeeper. “Is he upstairs?”

“I regret not at the moment. I went to fetch him—he lodges at the very top—but he must have stepped out. Perhaps, m’sieu, he has gone to find you at the Spa.”

“André!” The innkeeper’s wife shouted at him and gestured furiously toward the bar where the waitress had lined up a row of empty glasses. He took Channing’s hundred-franc note, mumbled his thanks, and hurried away.

Channing led the girl to the door. Watching her, he was only faintly conscious of Albert’s crackling voice coming at them from the far end of the tavern.

2

They stood in the quiet square in the moonlight. She had not spoken since they left the tavern, but the way she looked at him with empty eyes made words unnecessary. He had seen such a look on the bereaved when they were beyond tears.

A farmer on a bicycle rode into the square, eyed the two standing in silence, then went on.

Finally she said, “My father—they must have taken my father.” She spoke slowly, without excitement, as if this were the natural outcome of a foredoomed adventure.

He shook his head. “You heard what Clayfield said. He got across the line.”

“It happens often. People are brought back. One way or another, they are brought back.”

A spate of questions came into his mind, but he asked only one. “If they’ve taken your father, why would Endor come here?”

“Perhaps to bring me back. Perhaps merely to gloat over me.”

“That’s nonsense. You’re here. You’re safe.”

She said, “Nicolai knows me well. If my father is arrested, I will go back.”

There was a note of intimacy in the way she spoke the man's name, and it told him how little he knew of the girl. And of Endor. He said, "He's got to be somewhere in the village. We'll find him."

He moved to go and she came up beside him like a disciplined child. Wordlessly they continued along the Rue de la Victoire beyond the square. They passed the Hôtel de Ville and the Bureau des Postes, both small, decrepit structures. There was a shop which displayed boots and hardware in its unlighted window and beyond that only dwellings on both sides of the street.

The quaint village in the moonlight had become an evil place. Each sensed the other's alertness for a sound or a movement. Weird shadows angled across the cobblestones. A light breeze whistled in the eaves of old dwellings. These conspired with the echo of their footsteps to make the night alive with tenuous things.

He said, "How well do you know this Endor?" and the reply came almost exactly as he expected it.

"He was once in love with me."

Presently they came to the town's end. The road curved with the bend of the river, and beyond was farmland, rising gently to a distant height on which a row of willows stood black against the luminous sky.

They looked around, then turned back. Once more they could see the street thrusting through the village and not a person moving on it. They retraced their steps slowly toward the bridge. A long, narrow shadow leaped across the cobblestones. It was an attic shutter being pulled shut by a hand reaching out of a nightshirt. Behind a dwelling a dog barked as they passed.

Moussia said, "I feel he is watching me. Every moment he is watching me." She walked closer against Channing's arm.

He said, "You'd better tell me about this man. Is he with the secret police?"

"Not Nicolai. In the government, he is chief of industrial science. It is an important position."

Channing muttered as if to himself, "God damn it, we've got to find him." He said, "What does he look like?"

She thought a moment. "He is tall, almost like you, and thin. He has an intelligent face, but he is a fanatic. He frightens me."

"How old?"

"Nicolai? About thirty."

"He must be brilliant—to be chief of industrial science at thirty."

She said sadly, "He is brilliant. My father used to spend hours with him for

the pleasure of watching how his mind absorbed the most difficult problems. But his ambition was more powerful than his brilliance. He wanted to take the world in his two hands and shake it——” She looked up poignantly. “He has succeeded, you see. Once he looked up to my father as a god. When he was poor he scraped his pennies to send me flowers—and tonight—tonight he is the master and we are the fugitives.”

A picture came into Channing’s mind. Against the medieval towers of Prague he saw the professor Karlene, his daughter Moussia, and the student Endor. Years ago this would have been a libretto for an operetta by Lehár. In today’s world it was a background for terror. Or was it? A suspicion fell into his mind. He turned to her and said, “Perhaps it’s you he followed. Is he still in love with you?”

She said, “You don’t know Nicolai. When you have seduced a nation, a woman doesn’t count for anything.”

They had come to the end of the street. Channing glanced back along its length, and then they turned into the tree-shrouded lane that led to the bridge. As they padded through the dust a rustle was heard on the verges among the linden trees.

No, no, Channing thought, this is nonsense. The man can’t be skulking behind us. Nevertheless, he turned suddenly to look. There was only a flutter of leaves on the low-hanging branches. Then Moussia uttered a muffled cry and froze against his arm.

Thrown by the light on the bridge, a shadow was rising from the riverbank, a great, awkward shadow, moving from side to side and growing steadily until it lay across the lane.

They stopped, scarcely breathing. This was no trick of the imagination. The shadow broadened, receded, and then broadened again. Now they could hear the approach of whoever it was climbing from the riverbank below the bridge. The sound of a heavy footfall rose sharp above the murmur of the stream.

At first they could make out only a mass of unrecognizable shape, but when it finally climbed to the level of the roadway and struck squarely into the light from the bridge, they saw that it was a man, a cripple, being aided up the steep bank by a woman.

The man was without legs. The circular metal heels of his stumps gleamed below his trouser cuffs. He moved with the aid of a cane and a crutch, pushing forward his stumps, gaining leverage on them, and propelling the upper part of his body to follow suit. The woman had her arm around his waist, and as if by long practice she moved in concert with his wretched, rolling progress. They

came forward slowly, for each step he took was a hard physical effort.

“Who is that?” Channing whispered.

Moussia shook her head.

The man was horribly maimed. Whatever mishap had cost him his legs had also taken part of his face; it was misshapen and shiny with keloid scars. He was young, in his middle twenties. His eyes were large and clear, and, passing the two who watched him, he glared straight ahead in angry rejection of pity. The woman, too, was young, straw-haired and sturdy and amply figured in her thin cotton dress. She had pretty features but as she moved at the man’s side she seemed to share in his exertions and his suffering. They struggled toward the village, oblivious of the two who stood at the side of the road to let them pass.

“The poor woman,” Moussia murmured. “I wonder if she is his wife.”

“She can’t very well be his lover,” Channing said.

They walked across the bridge in silence. As they approached the hotel the sound of violins rode out on the night air and with it spirited conversation and polite laughter. Channing looked at the girl and she at him as though the same thought had fallen simultaneously into their minds. Someone new had arrived in the hotel. They quickened their pace up the steep driveway, neither daring to voice a hope.

An automobile stood at the hotel’s entrance, its rear trunk open and the chasseur unloading baggage from it. Moussia darted ahead.

“No, madame,” the chasseur said in answer to her query. “Three English have arrived, two ladies and a gentleman.”

When Channing reached her he said, “You’d better go in and tell Clayfield about Endor.”

“Why should I? He can’t help me.” She was fiercely disappointed.

“Aleksandrow may have some ideas.”

“I spit on Aleksandrow.”

“Then what are you going to do?”

“What does it matter? I shall stand out here and wait.”

“Wait for what?”

“For Nicolai to show himself.”

“Aren’t you afraid?”

She said, “Not any longer. If they have harmed my father, let Nicolai be afraid——” Her chin came up once more. “Afraid of me.”

As he turned to go she put her hand on his arm and said, “I am grateful for

a friend.” Looking at her, at her tense mouth and clear, determined eyes, he remembered how beguiling she was when she laughed. He put his hand over hers and nodded and then went into the hotel.

3

He went directly to his room and put through a call to Paris. There would be a delay, he was told, and he spent the time pacing. His failure to get his fingers into the story chagrined him. He could grasp nothing; it was a struggle with wraiths. Karlene was missing, Endor in hiding. Even the telephone to Paris seemed to be dead. He paused at his windows and watched the girl standing at the parapet.

Finally the telephone rang. He heard a cacophony of clicks and squeals and then a familiar voice, that of the switchboard girl in the World News Service office, came on the line. He asked for the night desk.

“This is Mittler,” the voice on the line said. Jack Mittler was an ox of a man who had made his reputation as a sports writer in the Chicago bureau. Now that he was a foreign correspondent he had blossomed out with a new by-line, John Sampson Mittler, Jr., a matter he was not allowed to forget.

“Hello, Junior. This is Channing. Got anything for me?”

“Hi, Phil. Let me look at the file.” The line rumbled with the sound of teletype machines in high-speed operation. “Yeah, there’s a message just coming in. Here it is. FOR CHANNING HOTEL SPA BONNAR ARGONNE . . . So that’s where you are, you lucky bastard. How’re the women? Here’s the rest of it. FINANCIAL DESK SAYS WALL STREET BUZZING ABOUT IMPENDING CLAYFIELD COUP. Got it? RUSH STORY QUICKEST STOP THEN RETURN BRUSSELS UPPICK LEOPOLD—BENDELS. That’s it, Phil. I hope you know what it’s all about.”

“Okay, Junior. Will you send this to Bendels? . . . UNEXPECT FILE TONIGHT STOP KARLENE—That’s K-a-r-l-e-n-e—ACROSS LINE BUT INEXPLICABLY UNSHOWED HERE TWO YESTERDAYS. Got it?”

“Sure. K-a-r-l-e-n-e.”

“That’s it. Any mail for me?”

“Just a billet-doux from Erie in dear old Pennsylvania. Want me to forward it?”

“No, hold it. It must be from my mother.”

There was a guffaw on the line. “You got a mother? Hell, I thought Bendels crossed a carbon with a stick o’ type and just naturally hatched you. You really got a mother, eh?”

Channing let it ride. “Anything breaking?”

“Brother, it’s so quiet I swear I can hear my sweetie moaning for me all the way from Chicago.”

“What about Prague? They file anything?”

“I’ll look.” There was a shuffling of paper. “Nothing from Prague. . . . Wait a minute. . . . No, nothing from Prague. Just a squib from our stringer in Nuremberg about some shooting on the Czech border.”

Channing tightened. “What kind of shooting?”

“Same old crap. Border guards at Hof reported rifle fire on the Czech side two nights running. Probably some poor bastards trying to get out. Anyway, the Czechs sealed the border point there. Not letting anybody in or out. It’s only a filler.”

Channing said, “You’d better read me the whole dispatch.”

“That’s all there is, Phil. He only filed a hundred words. Why, is it important?”

“It may be.” He added, “Better message Nuremberg to keep an eye on it.”

“Okay. What goes with the women up there, wolf?”

Channing scarcely heard him. He said, “Look, Junior, if Prague files a story about some Czechs trying to escape, anything on that line, call me on it fast.”

“I got it.”

“And tell the day trick.”

“Yes, yes, yes,” Mittler muttered. “What else? I’m just a God-damned office boy around here.”

“That’s all, Junior. Just take care of yourself.”

“Okay, tootsie, good night.”

For a few moments Channing stood at his window and watched the girl pacing along the parapet. He was tempted to tell her about the shooting on the frontier. Then he decided against it and went down to the dining room to join Clayfield’s party.

Clayfield had not been enjoying his dinner. Bolstered by several glasses of champagne, he had entered the dining room in reasonably good spirits, but he found himself growing edgy as the meal progressed. It was not that he was especially anxious about Karlene; the reason lay rather in a gnawing idleness

enforced on him by the inexplicable delay in the Czech's arrival. During all of his business life he had been a man of action, accustomed to the feel of buttons under his fingers, buttons which summoned men who carried out his instructions promptly and to the letter; and when a major crisis developed he embraced the opportunity of using his own gifts of vigor and shrewdness to resolve it. Now, facing the prime crisis of his career, he could do nothing but listen to Aleksandrow's inexhaustible chatter. And wait.

He tried several times to swing the conversation to the problem at hand. At one point he said, "Seriously, Aleksandrow, what do we do if Karlene is not here by morning? We've got to have a plan of action."

But the Hungarian was elusive as a blob of mercury. "Ha! Tomorrow!" he chuckled. "We'll think about tomorrow in the morning. Who knows what will happen? Be content, Mr. Clayfield, be happy. Look at me. I am happy. My tournedos is beautiful, the wine is beautiful, Giselle is beautiful—even you are beautiful. Really, Mr. Clayfield, you are beautiful as I look at you now. It is a matter of atmosphere. I remember once in Budapest I knew a mezzo-soprano with a face like a cabbage. Uglier than a cabbage! But when she sang in *Die Fledermaus* I always fell in love with her, at least when she was on the stage. It is a matter of atmosphere."

The atmosphere was indeed magnificent. The oval room was almost entirely glass-enclosed, and the mahogany panels between the windows bore pastel-colored inlays which depicted the medieval standards of the provinces of France. From each panel a shaft of light climbed the concave ceiling and all converged like a set of brilliant ribbons on a single, glittering chandelier.

The food matched the décor. Aleksandrow had ordered lavishly after a long, excitable discussion in Italian with Gianelli, the maître d'hôtel, and soon the party had been surrounded by serving tables laden with silver platters, chafing dishes, and wine coolers, and attended by two extremely agile waiters.

But Clayfield merely toyed with his tournedos Rossini. His mood had not been improved by the arrival of three new guests, two women and a man who still wore their traveling tweeds and were being noisy in an alcoholic way. Their talk was shrill and happy in the manner of the fashionable English when they are let loose on the Continent, and they invested the room with a gaiety far beyond their numbers. Absorbing something of their spirit, the string orchestra had discarded Mozart and Strauss and was beating out a samba. Clayfield was fond of Strauss music. South American rhythms irritated him.

Even Giselle's air of unutterable boredom had begun to annoy him. Once or twice she had murmured something about his weary business. It made him bristle. Eight thousand men working in his fields and plants and service

stations. His weary business! What gall from a kept woman!

He was listening to another of Aleksandrow's reminiscences when Channing came briskly into the room and joined them. He was glad to see the newspaperman; there was something straightforward and American about him. These Europeans are all right, he reflected unhappily, but you've got to stick with your own people.

The Hungarian interrupted himself to greet the late arrival. "Ah, Mr. Channing, you are in time. It makes me happy. Have the tournedos Rossini, I implore you. This chef could have been master of the Czar's kitchens."

Channing nodded to the waiter. "All right, the tournedos. Without the foie gras."

Aleksandrow was appalled. "Without the foie gras! Please, Mr. Channing, you cannot have a tournedos Rossini without foie gras. It is impossible, like flowers without scent."

"Perhaps," Giselle suggested tartly, "Mr. Channing has other passions except food." She looked at the newspaperman, her delicate, sensuous face full of inquiry.

Channing winked at her and said to the waiter, "No foie gras."

The Hungarian shrugged. He said, "I was telling Mr. Clayfield an interesting story, about a commission I had from the British. They wanted me to deliver a man who was being held in Codeanu Prison in Bucharest. Do you know the Codeanu Prison, Mr. Channing?"

The newspaperman said, "I've seen it."

"Ha! You must be inside to know it. There is nothing like it in Europe—perhaps Breendonck but I think Codeanu is worse since the Communists have it. Now you ask why the British should come to me. Their embassy wouldn't touch the case. I suppose the man was a spy but I didn't inquire too closely. What did I do?" His fat face lit up as he answered his own question. "In three months I delivered the man to London."

"How?" Clayfield asked conveniently.

The Hungarian took a drink of wine and beamed at his questioner. "I sent my man Berlau to Bucharest. Seven weeks he was silent. Seven weeks! When he came back he told me a fantasy, really a fantasy. He discovered that the governor of Codeanu was keeping a ballerina called Marthe Vaast. This woman had a curious passion—you would not believe it. She loved old Chinese boxes——"

"Chinese boxes!"

"You may laugh, Mr. Clayfield. One never knows what passions women

have, especially ballet dancers. They are a little mad. This woman adored old Chinese boxes. There was only one thing to do. I gathered together the most expensive collection of Chinese boxes I could find in Paris and sent Berlau back to Bucharest. He called on the woman and showed her the boxes. She was almost insane, they were so beautiful. But the prices were high—much too high for her lover, who was after all only a *fonctionnaire*.

“Berlau is clever. He left three of the boxes in her house and a few days later he came to take them back. Ha! You should hear the way Berlau describes it. She begged, she screamed, she offered herself, everything——” He took another drink of wine. “A week later our prisoner managed to escape from Codeanu. You see? The boxes cost us maybe half a million francs. Nothing!”

Clayfield exclaimed, “By God, that’s remarkable. Chinese boxes!”

The Hungarian shook with laughter. “It was wonderful. The woman was happy, the *fonctionnaire* was happy, the British—and also me. Everybody was happy.”

“You don’t always find a foolish woman in these cases,” Channing observed. “That was the exception.”

“My dear Mr. Channing,” Aleksandrow said brightly, “the point of the story is not the foolish woman. All women are foolish. The point is, there are no loyalties that cannot be bought one way or another. At least I have found none.”

Clayfield said, “That seems like a pretty silly statement.”

“On the contrary, it is a very wise statement,” the Hungarian declared. “I tell you, Mr. Clayfield, loyalty went out of style in 1938. The Munich Pact was a moral revolution. I am one of the few people who realize it. That is the secret of my success.”

“Nobody can buy my loyalties,” Clayfield said churlishly.

“Perhaps—and perhaps not. But I refuse to deceive myself. People do not believe any more, they only make the pretense. Really, Mr. Clayfield, you should not be shocked. The Communists, are they loyal to what they preach? Of course not. They want power. And you, are you liberating Professor Karlene because you are a kind man? No, no, no. You need him for your business. Come, Mr. Clayfield, is it not so?”

Having said this, he took a deep drink of wine and sat back expansively in the manner of one who has delivered the last word and expects no rebuttal. There was none. An oppressive quiet fell on the little company. Channing’s food was served along with coffee for the others, and he ate hurriedly. Clayfield sourly turned his attention to the newcomers. Two of them were

dancing a lively samba. They were a handsome couple, loose-limbed and graceful, exceedingly pleasant to watch. Giselle sipped at a Mirabelle and eyed the dancers enviously.

Channing finally broke the silence. "Can you tell me something about the Karlene operation?"

"It was difficult but not interesting," Aleksandrow replied.

"I'd like to know something about it," Channing persisted.

"There is really nothing to know. We bribed the frontier guards. It was expensive."

"For a man like Karlene," Channing said, "I would think you'd be forced to a much higher level—the passport office or perhaps a ministry."

Aleksandrow sighed. "How much simpler it would have been! The regime is new. They are still fanatics. We were forced to take the old man through the forests——" He turned sharply to Giselle, who had suddenly come to her feet. "Where are you going, my dear?"

"To make love with the chasseur," she promptly replied.

Chuckling, he watched her go. "Poor Giselle! She is bored."

"I don't blame her," Clayfield muttered, still watching the dancers. "This waiting around is a damned nuisance. I wish something would happen."

The time had come, Channing decided. He said, "Something *has* happened, Mr. Clayfield."

The oilman turned to him sharply. "What has happened?"

"An agent from Prague is here in Bonnar."

"You mean you've been talking to the Karlene girl."

Channing said, "I inquired in the village. The man arrived tonight at the inn across the river. His name is Nicolai Endor and he's chief of industrial science in the Gottwald government."

"You're—by God, are you sure of this?"

"Positive."

Channing found himself admiring the oilman as he used to admire a good field commander in the war. There was no visible shock, no surrender to excitement, only an almost imperceptible tightening of the muscles around his mouth and a truculent glint playing in his eyes as he swung slowly around to Aleksandrow.

"This is still your operation. What do you make of it?"

Aleksandrow had been looking steadily at the newspaperman. A growing pallor on his wine-flushed face revealed his anxiety. He lifted his hands and

said, "I cannot believe it. It's hardly possible, hardly possible."

"Hardly possible but he's here!" Clayfield's gruff voice carried across the room. He realized too late that the orchestra had stopped playing and the others in the room were glaring at him. He said in a quieter tone: "Where does this put Karlene?"

"If it is true," the Hungarian said carefully, "I cannot see that it changes the situation. We know they got across the frontier."

Clayfield leaned over the table. "All right. We know they got across the frontier," he said, "but they're not here. As far as this man Endor is concerned, I'm not interested except for one thing. How did he find out where to come? That's the key."

Aleksandrow's finely manicured fingers drew nervous circles on the tablecloth. "Are you sure about this?" he asked of Channing.

"I'm absolutely sure."

"How did this man Endor find out?" Clayfield demanded.

The Hungarian countered, "How did Mr. Channing find out?"

"I arranged for Channing's arrival." The oilman's heavy shoulders were projected well over the table. His eyes fixed the Hungarian mercilessly and he repeated, "How did this man Endor find out?"

Aleksandrow was a picture of solemn futility. He looked sadly in the other man's eyes and said, "I can only guess. Remember, we are dealing with Communists. Communists," he mused, "in France today, who can dream where they are? A telephonist, a servant in the hotel——"

The oilman cut him off sharply. "A telephonist, a servant in the hotel—I won't buy that, Aleksandrow. My interest is Professor Karlene and if I don't get him——"

He, too, had no opportunity to finish. A stranger had come up to the table, one of the new arrivals. She was a slim, stylish woman about forty if one judged by the delicate lace that rippled on the flesh of her thin neck. She beamed a loose, ready smile around the table and patted her brown hair against her ears.

"Oh dear," she said, "don't get up. I'm afraid I've interrupted something dreadfully important, but I couldn't help overhearing American spoken and I simply had to come over and say hello. Isn't it wonderful? Way out here in France, a million miles from nowhere and I run up against Americans. By the way, I'm Helen Bartell of New York, Long Island really but it's all the same thing, isn't it? And you are—I know I've seen your face before——"

Clayfield heaved himself to his feet and introduced his two companions,

adding, "I'm Justin Clayfield."

Again the quick, wide smile. "Well, of course. Justin Clayfield, oil and all that. You must have known my father, Britten Hazard—I was Helen Hazard before I was married—he was a director in oil, one of the Standards, I'm not sure which one, and my husband—well, my ex now, I've just had a divorce—Harry Bartell, consulting engineers and all that, they do an awful lot of work for the oil people. You must have known Harry, but then again maybe you didn't. He was in Washington the whole war, you know, and it spoiled him. Lord, how it spoiled him, Washington, we simply couldn't make a go of it after that. I'm not the only one, I suppose, it happened to so many others——

"Oh, please sit down. I can't stay a second. I just wanted to introduce myself. It's so empty, the hotel, isn't it? Aren't they sweet, those two, and don't they dance divinely? You'd never think they'd been married nearly fifteen years. They're the Lermonds, the scotch whisky people, you know . . ."

She was still talking when Channing slipped away, filled with secret admiration for her. As a newspaperman trained to cram as many facts as possible into a paragraph, it came to him that she had covered her life's history and that of her husband without drawing more than one deep breath.

5

Moussia stood alone on the terrace facing across the river. For a time now an awareness of tragedy had crept into her mind, and, nurtured there by the furtive whispers of the night, it had become stark and real. She had reviewed every contingency which might have delayed her father, and, having concluded that he would never arrive, she steeled herself for the decision she must make.

In the years before the war her friends used to say she was raising herself in stages of rehearsal to be a queen. As long as they could remember she had been aware that she was not only the daughter of the nation's most celebrated scientist but also, since the death of her mother, his companion. Though her father sprang from humble people she was inclined to a sense of aristocracy, and the responsibilities that were thrust on her from girlhood had inexorably added their influence. Now in the testing time these years rallied to her support. She could face the decision. Moreover, tragedy was familiar as an old friend. In the ten years since she was a child tragedy had been a constant visitor to her country and therefore to her. She was of a generation that had grown up with misfortune, for it had come earlier to her country than to others and in more varied guises, one darker than the other, and now it remained and there was no end.

Here and there among the trees which ranged the sides of the terrace she thought she heard a footfall, a rustle of leaves, the crack of a twig. She wanted to shout out to him to show himself, to enjoy his triumph and then go away, for she was certain that Nicolai was watching her.

Then she heard a solid step behind her and she turned. It was Channing.

He lifted his foot to the parapet, rested his elbows on his upraised knee, and lit a cigarette. He said, "What are you going to do?"

"What is there to do?"

"I thought these Communists were realists. Why doesn't he come and say what he has to say?"

"He won't come tonight. I know it. I was thinking when he was a student how he used to walk after me, pitiful like a wet dog, pleading with me. He used to say, 'Moussia, let me walk beside you, please let me walk beside you —' " She gave a toss of her head. "Tonight he will have pleasure. He will think I am weeping."

He looked at her out of the corner of his eye. She was handsome, all right; and spirited, and probably intelligent. But she was one of those women who defied penetration. He could usually measure a woman at their first meeting; Giselle, for instance, he could measure her. He knew from the first moment he could have an affair with Giselle if the opportunity presented itself. This girl was different. Though she took him into her confidence, he had no real idea of what went on in her mind; in the village she had been helpless and feminine, but even when she clung to his arm he had the feeling she was aloof, untouchable. She was the kind of challenging woman he would like to know better under other circumstances.

For the present he thought it was smart to elect himself her friend. Inside that finely coiled head of hers she carried the background material he would need. He decided now was the time to begin digging.

He said, "I told Clayfield and Aleksandrow about this man from Prague."

"It doesn't matter."

"Aleksandrow said it makes no difference whether Endor is here or not."

"What does he know?" she scoffed.

Channing flipped his cigarette over the parapet. "All right, you tell me what happened."

"Why haven't we heard from Berlau—at least from Berlau?" she countered. "Perhaps they came across at Hof but they were taken back. It is not unusual."

"We'll know by tomorrow, one way or another."

She said, “I think I knew from the beginning, from the first day Berlau came to our house and pulled down the shades and said he was going to help us escape to freedom. My instinct was to say no. I said to myself, we are not criminals, to escape across the border like criminals is not for my father, nor for me. He came back again and again, and all the time my instinct was to say no——”

“And your father?”

“He did not like Berlau. He hardly spoke to him. He, too, felt the humiliation, the degradation—to escape from his own country, where all his life he has been honored and respected. Put yourself in our position, Philip. Can you understand how we felt?”

“But you agreed.”

“In the end, yes, we agreed. It was the only opportunity we had to escape from—from catastrophe, Philip.” Her deep, beautiful eyes looked earnestly on him. “There were so many things that happened, I—I wish I could tell you.” And then she added sadly, “Yes, we agreed. We hoped we might be lucky, but you see we were not.”

She held out her hand and bade him good night. He had always liked this central European gesture, the touch of hands at each meeting and parting. Hers was a cool, soft hand. He liked the feel of it.

He watched her go through the door. Inside the lobby she hesitated for a moment and her auburn hair was caught up by the bright lights. Then she moved resolutely toward the staircase and disappeared from view.

A night mist had begun to move across the fields. On the shoulder of high ground beyond the village the silhouette made by the willows was diffused and the river below had ceased to dance with highlights. A shaft of chill rode into the mellow air. Channing lit a cigarette and thought about Moussia, about her foreboding.

He recalled Mittler’s report of gunfire on the frontier, and the girl’s fear that her father had been seized and dragged back across the frontier. Such a coup was possible in the bleak, forested terrain where Bavaria touched on the Czech line. Moreover, the Communists would go to any lengths to rob a potential enemy of the services of this brilliant scientist. Countless wars had been fought for less oil than the genius of this man could draw from a reluctant earth. If they had recaptured him it would make a story, a great story. But he lacked confirmation.

A clock in the village tolled eleven. He listened, silently counting each

stroke, and when the last sad echo had died in the fields he moved purposefully across the terrace to the driveway. Endor was the key. He knew he must find the man.

He walked quickly, for he was loath to leave the Spa Bonnar for any length of time in case word arrived of Karlene's fate. The bridge was deserted, and in the lane beyond, the trees made a stealthy sound as if the wind drifted more secretly among the leaves at night than in the day. Then he came into the Rue de la Victoire and, looking down the length of it, past the square, he saw the tortured figure of the cripple and the woman beside him. They were walking through the upper reaches of the village.

The tavern in the Lion d'Or had closed for the night. The proprietor sat in an armchair in the small courtyard of his establishment and placidly rocked himself and smoked a pipe.

In response to Channing's inquiry he said, "Your friend from Czechoslovakia has not yet returned."

"You're sure of this?"

"Certainly I'm sure," the man grumbled. "Do you think I would be waiting up? I like to lock my door at a reasonable time. If your friend had intended to stay out till every hour of the night he should have lodged at the Spa."

"Where do you think he is?"

The man was clearly disinterested. "If he is not at the Spa, I don't know. There is nowhere else," and he returned the pipe to his mouth and contemplated the sky.

Channing went into the square. He walked slowly across it and took up a position in the shadow of the church from which he could see both extremities of the deserted street. He remained there a few minutes and then turned back.

Now he walked swiftly through the lane, across the bridge, and along the river road to the gateway of the Spa Bonnar. He was almost at the top of the driveway when he saw a figure move out from among the trees. He was sure it was Endor. He darted forward, determined to get his hands on the wraithlike figure that had confused his assignment. But it wasn't Endor.

It was Giselle. She waited languorously in the shadow of the trees until he came close to her.

"I see Mr. Channing prefers the Slavic type," she said, smiling. She wore an ermine jacket over her evening gown and her delicate fingers held its collar close around her neck.

He asked, "What are you doing here?"

"Why don't you go after the Slav girl?" she said. "I've heard men say no

woman can make love like a Slav.”

“She’s got other things to worry about.”

“Don’t be silly. A little dry-eyed tragedy is a woman’s best asset.” She added contentedly, “I’ve had great success with it.”

“I’ll bet you have.”

“I saw the little scene on the terrace. It was interesting.”

“You watched us carefully.”

She moved her shoulders cozily. “I was taking the air. The night is beautiful.”

“You’re bored.”

She replied promptly, “Yes.”

He flicked one of her jeweled earrings. “You don’t get things like that for nothing.”

“Simon is generous with me.”

“Then why complain about being bored?”

The way she looked at him was both lecherous and charming. She said, “I’m still a woman.”

“Were you waiting here for me?”

“You’re gauche. Why do you ask questions?”

“Then I’ll stop.”

She moved closer to him. “That is better. Aren’t you bored?”

“Now you’re asking questions.”

“No more questions,” she whispered. She lifted her delicate white face.

The next moment she was in his arms. He felt her lips trembling and then her mouth pressed hard against his. After a time she drew back, her dark eyes gleaming fiercely as though this were part of her private ritual.

“Again,” she whispered.

“You’re a bitch.”

She pushed out her lower lip impishly. “Yes, I’m a bitch.”

“You like to be told.”

“I adore the sound of the word.”

“You’re a little mad.”

“I have always been mad about living.” She passed her finger tips lightly over his mouth.

He said, “Why don’t you find someone younger than Aleksandrow?”

“I prefer to remain with Simon.”

“And make love behind his back.”

“I give him full value,” she said. “I’m nice to look at. That’s all he cares about.” Her fingers lingered on his mouth. Her jacket had fallen open. She watched him closely as he looked at her body. She said, “Why do you ask? Do you want me?”

“I’m not inviting you.”

“You’re gauche but you’re a man. I adore a man.”

He kissed her hard.

“How long have you been with Simon?”

“Since the war. I met him in Estoril.”

“He trusts you?”

She smiled wisely. “You find it exciting. Remember what I said about a little dry-eyed tragedy——”

“And I said you were a bitch.”

“We understand each other.” Inside his arms she moved provocatively.

At least she was honest about herself, he reflected. Honest and consistent. From the first moment he had seen her, when she stood on the staircase, he had guessed what she was. It amazed him that she made no effort to be otherwise; women usually disported themselves boldly in order to prove they are unapproachable. She was mercenary and faithless but by her lights she was honest. And having thus decided, he kissed her again.

She said, “Will I see you later?”

“Perhaps. It depends on what happens tonight.”

“I’ll miss you.”

He said quickly, “I don’t think you will.” A shaft of light reflecting off the hotel’s revolving door had flashed across the trees and the round, comfortable figure of Aleksandrow appeared at the head of the driveway a few yards above them. “Your boy friend is looking for you.”

She drew away from him deftly but without panic and turned to face the man who was strolling amiably down toward them.

“Oh, Simon,” she said plaintively. “I was getting along quite well with Mr. Channing.”

“I have no doubt, my dear.” The Hungarian’s voice was well modulated. Only his customary chuckle was missing and his gray eyes darted sharply between his mistress and the American. “You were out for a walk together. I think that is charming.”

“Let’s not have a dreary scene,” she said curtly.

Aleksandrow murmured, “Not at all.” He turned to Channing and said, “You find her beautiful.”

The American lit a cigarette and drew on it deeply. “Why don’t you say what you want to say?”

“You know she belongs to me?”

“All right. Let’s go on from there.”

Now the Hungarian lit a black, gold-tipped cigarette and blew the smoke into the misty air. He said, “Giselle has had her little flirtations before. It is her weakness. She is a child in this respect——” He seemed to find humor in what he was saying and glanced shrewdly at his mistress. Then his face took on an owlish look and he said, “But, Mr. Channing, I expect an apology.”

“I’m not the type that apologizes easily.”

The other said swiftly, “You take too much advantage of your youth.”

“It has its points.” Towering over the Hungarian, Channing felt like a bully. He enjoyed the role because he instinctively hated the man. He said, “I remember your little speech about loyalty, but I see that you insist on it, at least in your women.”

Aleksandrow smiled a wry smile. “Ah, you are young. It has nothing to do with loyalty. That is for bourgeois marriages. Madame Notta belongs to me, at least during the time she accepts my favors. Do you understand?”

“Of course I understand. You’re in the business of buying and selling.”

Giselle stood equidistant between the men and followed the conversation in a lively but impersonal manner, as though she were watching a tennis match. Channing was forced to admire her poise.

Aleksandrow said, “I would advise you to attend to your own affairs.”

“I handle my affairs quite well.”

“Ah, but you don’t, you see,” the Hungarian said. “You are here to report Professor Karlene’s arrival. Am I correct?”

“You are.”

Aleksandrow chuckled, “Then you are late, my young friend. If you will go to room 28, I think you will find that the professor has already arrived.”

Channing glared at the man, then took a few steps up the driveway until he came to the level of the terrace. A powerful Talbot sedan was parked under the canopy and the chasseur was unloading baggage from its rear compartment. As the newspaperman hurried across to the hotel he could hear Aleksandrow’s quiet chuckle coming up from among the trees.

The door to No. 28 was open. As he hurried along the hall Channing could see a houseman withdraw from the room and a chambermaid laden with towels go in. He entered without knocking.

It was a large bedroom facing the terrace, much like his own. Moussia and Clayfield stood in a far corner of the room looking down on a chaise longue, and when he joined them he studied the old man who reclined on it. Weariness was written in every turn of his lean, slight body as he lay limp on the satin covering.

He was saying, "Yes, Mr. Clayfield, tomorrow. We will talk tomorrow. Tonight I want a little supper and to go to bed. Only a little supper and to go to bed." His voice was gentle but it carried definite authority, like a precise schoolmaster.

Clayfield nodded. "All right. In the morning."

If one knew Gregor Karlene was a world-honored scientist, as those gathered about him knew, the striking architecture of his face quickly confirmed the fact. His brow was massive, and his brown eyes were clear and wonderfully luminous and so deeply imbedded beneath gray, bushy eyebrows that his forehead stood out like an overhanging cliff above his hollow, clean-shaven cheeks and his small, sagging mouth. The effect was to make his head appear enormous for the size of his frame, which was lean and slightly bent with the weariness of carrying so great a weight on its narrow shoulders.

To those who did not know who he was he might offer a different impression, that of an amiable old man who deserved rather better of life than it had given him. His tie was askew under a collar several sizes too large for his loose neck, and his steel-gray hair sprouted undisciplined out of the crown of his head and developed an unruly tuft well down over his brow. As he lay in his loose clothes, his tuft of hair thrusting boyishly almost to his eyebrows, his small mouth open in an almost perfect circle, he was one of whom strangers might say (as Helen Bartell did in fact say): "Poor man, he missed his calling. He would have made a marvelous old circus clown."

Channing looked expectantly to Moussia, but she hadn't noticed his entrance. She was smiling wistfully on her father and holding his limp hand.

He spoke up. "Professor Karlene, was there any trouble coming across the frontier?"

"The frontier? No, no. Everything was arranged——" He turned his eyes to his daughter. "Moussia, I want a little supper and to go to bed."

Moussia nodded and appealed silently to Channing.

“But, Professor, what delayed your arrival?”

The old man’s mouth dropped open as he pondered the question. He was completely exhausted. Finally he said, “I—I do not know. It is something you should ask the man who conducted me. Please—I am very tired.”

“Just one more thing, Professor——”

But Moussia would not let him finish. “Tomorrow,” she pleaded, “wait until tomorrow.”

“Just a statement, Professor,” Channing persisted. “Have you any statement to make——”

Moussia had stepped resolutely in front of him. “Please,” she whispered, “you see how tired he is. Tomorrow.”

It was no use. He walked out of the room, and a moment later Clayfield joined him in the hall. The oilman was grinning. “I didn’t get much more than you, Channing. Sixty thousand dollars and I get a handshake and good night. Not much gratitude there. Well . . .” He shrugged his powerful shoulders but he was patently happy.

Channing said, “What delayed them?”

“It’s simple enough. Seems they stopped all day yesterday and last night in a hotel in some German town. Place called Bayreuth.”

“What for?”

“I don’t know. I guess the old man was tired.”

“Is this man Berlau here?”

“He’s here all right. Over in room 19, I think.”

Channing glanced at his watch. “I’ve just got a couple of minutes.”

They walked quickly along the hall to room 19, Channing moving impatiently ahead of the oilman. He knocked and, without waiting for a response, opened the door and went in. Clayfield followed behind.

Berlau sat on the edge of his bed, a bottle of cognac in one hand and a glass in the other. He was of middle size, still under forty, and gave the impression of being powerful. His face was hard and handsome. A trace of mongoloid in his features gave him a swarthy complexion. His carefully combed hair was black and shiny, and he sported a black, waxed mustache.

He took a swallow of cognac and glared resentfully at Channing. Then he spied Clayfield and nodded, but he did not get up from the bed.

Channing said in French, “I’m a newspaperman.”

The man’s eyebrows rose slightly. He said nothing.

“Did you have any trouble coming across the border?”

Berlau shook his head.

“Why did you stay overnight in Bayreuth?”

The swarthy man thought on it a moment, then he said, “I explained it to Aleksandrow. I smelled something. It was much better to stay off the roads and be quiet for a day.”

Channing said, “You smelled something. Did anybody pursue you? Did anything happen?”

“No.”

“Do you know how it is an official from Prague managed to arrive here before you?”

“No. I have just heard of it.”

“That’s all I want to know,” Channing said, and he brushed quickly past Clayfield and along the hall to his own room.

7

It was a few minutes past midnight, just after 7 P.M. in New York, when Channing got his Paris office on the phone.

“All right, Junior,” he said. “Here’s a flash. Watch the date line. Ready? SOMEWHERE IN NORTHERN FRANCE GREGOR KARLENE TOPRANKING CZECH SCIENTIST ESCAPED ACROSS BORDER ENROUTE UNISTATES. Got it? Stick it on the wire.”

A few seconds later Mittler said, “It’s on the wire.”

“Fine. Now get somebody off rewrite to take the lead. We can just make the New York bulldogs if we grease it. And, Junior, message the desk to watch the date line. I’ve still got to get a by-liner out of this bird and I don’t want any opposition up here in the morning. Okay?”

“Okay, we’re ready to take it.”

“Here it is. CHANNING SOMEWHERE IN NORTHERN FRANCE THURSDAY STOP GREGOR KARLENE CZECHOSLOVAKIAS NOBEL PRIZEWINNING SCIENTIST AND WORLDS RANKING EXPERT ON OIL EXPLORATION HAS ESCAPED FROM HIS NATIVE COUNTRY AND WILL SHORTLY ARRIVE IN UNISTATES WHERE HE EXPECTS MAKE HIS PERMANENT HOME. Shoot that and slug the next first add.”

“I’ve got it.”

“EARLY YESTERDAY MORNING WHILE CZECH BORDER GUARDS PROWLED FRONTIER LINE TOUCHING ON AMERICAN ZONE GERMANY COMMA FIFTYEIGHT YEAR OLD SCIENTIST MADE HIS WAY THROUGH FOREST TO FREEDOM AND FEARING PURSUIT HE HID IN BAYREUTH HOTEL NEAR FRONTIER LINE FOR THIRTY HOURS BEFORE HE RESUMED JOURNEY TO THIS SECRET RENDEZVOUS IN FRANCE TO JOIN DAUGHTER MOUSSIA KARLENE STOP HE IS EXPECTED TO ACCEPT POST AS CHIEF OF RESEARCH

AND DEVELOPMENT WITH AN AMERICAN OIL COMPANY ON ARRIVAL UNISTATES. . . .

All right, second add——”

“Shoot.”

“SUCCESSFUL ESCAPE OF SCIENTIST DESPITE CLOSE WATCH WHICH COMMUNIST SECRET POLICE MAINTAINED ON HIS MOVEMENTS IS CONSIDERED HEAVY BLOW TO CZECHOSLOVAKIAS MILITARY AND INDUSTRIAL POTENTIAL STOP DRAMA ATTENDANT ON KARLENES ARRIVAL HERE WAS HEIGHTENED BY MYSTERIOUS APPEARANCE OF HIGH RANKING OFFICIAL OF CZECH COMMUNIST PARTY . . .”

On the terrace below, the chasseur circled the Talbot admiringly, examining its special body, peering in at its ornate dashboard. Then he got in the car and drove it to a parking space behind the casino. When he came back he folded the deck chairs and placed them upright against the parapet so that the morning dew would run off them. He took a last, careful look about the terrace, then, unbuttoning his duster, he trudged around the corner of the main building to the service entrance. A few moments later the lights over the terrace went out. Encouraged by a diffused moon, the night mist crept over the parapet.

A man emerged from the trees which lined the driveway just below the terrace. He was tall and slim, and he had a pale ascetic face; altogether undistinguished except for his eyes, which were small and dark and intense.

He walked slowly and quietly across the terrace, examining the lighted windows on the upper floor. He could hear a voice coming from one of the lighted windows. He paused. The voice seemed to be talking into a telephone, for it attracted no response. Although he did not understand the language spoken, his sharp hearing caught the name of Karlene frequently reiterated. He moved farther along and paused below another lighted window. His dark eyes opened wide as he examined the shadows which moved across the curtains. He plunged his hands angrily in his jacket pockets and studied the window and its location in respect to the width of the building. After a time he moved to the parapet and watched the hotel. Through the open lobby windows he could see the night clerk eating a midnight snack at the reception desk. He waited until the man had finished his food and disappeared with the tray in the direction of the dining room. Then he went swiftly into the hotel.

He came out a few moments later, breathing hard, and continued across the terrace and down the driveway. At the bridge he paused once more to look at the massive hotel on its mist-shrouded hill. Now only one light gleamed dully on its upper floor. He stared at it malevolently, then continued across to the bridge.

The clatter of his heels on the cobblestones of the Rue de la Victoire

echoed through the sleeping village. When he came to the square he turned into the small courtyard of the Lion d'Or.

CHAPTER THREE

EARLY the next morning, in a frame shack which sat on the riverbank close against a cement foundation block of the bridge, an alarm clock rang. Anny Liesefeldt clamped her hand over the bell and turned it off. It was five-thirty. She looked to see if the man sleeping beside her had been disturbed, then stepped carefully out of bed and tiptoed across the small, barely furnished room to an open window.

The sun was not yet high enough to be seen from the riverbank but at the Spa Bonnar across the stream the treetops glistened. The sky was clear and of diluted blue as if it had just been washed. Anny decided it was going to be another hot day.

She slipped off her nightgown, put on cotton underpants and shoes, and, circling her arms in front of her large, soft breasts, she went out to a small quay which had been built low on the water. Here she washed her face and the upper part of her body, then returned to the shack and put on a cotton dress and did up her long blond hair. She moved quietly and mechanically about the room, scarcely glancing at the sleeping man. She cut a long heel of bread, split it, and scraped jam on both pieces and placed them on a table beside a cup and saucer. She filled a coffeepot with water, poured coffee grains into the filter, and set it on a gas burner but did not light the fire. From a corner of the room she gathered up a crutch, a cane, and two metal stumps and placed them on the bed where she had slept, laying them down carefully so that the steel strips and buckles which were attached to the stumps did not clank. Then she took a last look around the room and went out. It was five minutes before six o'clock.

At six she passed through the service entrance of the Spa Bonnar, nodded to the night watchman, who checked off the time, and went to a locker room where she changed into a chambermaid's uniform, a blue smock and a full white apron and cap. Then she proceeded through a long basement corridor to the kitchens.

A young pantryman was already there. She nodded to him and served herself a cup of coffee and a slice of dark bread. The pantryman eyed her as she moved about, eyed her shape loose beneath her smock, but no word passed between them.

When she had finished her breakfast she brought out a tray and placed on it a pear, two hot croissants, a plate of butter and another of jam, a cup and

saucer and a pot of coffee. The pantryman brushed carelessly against her as he examined the tray, then he said, "Good. You can take it in." She carried the tray along the basement corridor until she came to the quarters of the concierge, Oscar. In the traditional class distinctions of the backstairs world, it was the duty of the apprentice chambermaid to arrive early enough to serve breakfast to the concierge.

Precisely at twenty past six she knocked on his door and went in.

Oscar sat up in bed, blinked at the woman, and pushed back his black hair, which was sticky with yesterday's pomade. "I'll eat in bed," he said, feeling the stubble on his heavy jaw, "bring it here."

She brought the tray to him.

He said, "You *Boches* have no fine qualities. Don't you ever say good morning?"

"If you wish it, M'sieu Oscar."

"If I wish it," he muttered. Then he said, "Go to the window and tell me how many cars there are."

Oscar's room was below ground. Its single window was high on the wall and opened on the hotel's parking lot, which was a gravel enclosure between the main building and the casino. Anny got up on her toes to look out of the window.

She said, "I count five cars, M'sieu Oscar."

"Then somebody arrived during the night. It must be this Professor Karlene they were expecting." He flipped a slice of pear from the knife to his mouth and watched her move toward the door. "Just a moment," he said. "You know the rules. Why are you wearing lip rouge?"

"But I am not wearing lip rouge."

He scowled. "Then you must have been properly kissed last night."

She stood vacantly in the center of the room.

"That cripple you sleep with, is that all he does, kiss you?" Biting on his fruit, he studied her for a reaction. She stared sullenly at the floor. He said, "Well?"

She said, "I must clean up in the lounge now, M'sieu Oscar."

"Then go to work."

He watched her walk quickly to the door and when she had gone he addressed himself to his breakfast, shaking his head in wonderment.

Two more chambermaids had reported for work when Anny reached the

supply room to collect her dustcloth, mop, and pail. They were elderly women. They mumbled good morning to her and she acknowledged the greeting in the same mechanical spirit in which it was offered. When she went out the two exchanged a knowing look.

One said, "She must be sick in the head, that German. She never talks."

The other nodded. "Maybe she's ashamed because she's a *Boche*. And that cripple——"

The first interrupted, "But she's a worker, like a horse. Nothing is too hard for her, like all the accursed Germans."

In the basement corridor Anny passed the second chef. He was on his way to the kitchen to prepare M'sieu Gutzmann's breakfast. It was the inflexible rule that the director's breakfast must be cooked by the second chef and delivered to his upstairs room by a waiter, first class, at seven o'clock.

During the next hour the hotel came to life in precise stages. At a quarter of seven the waiters and full kitchen staff reported in uniform. At seven the chasseur unfolded the deck chairs on the terrace, and the pool attendant, seeing that it was a cloudless day, turned on the pumps to freshen the water and laid out rubber mattresses. A waiter set the tables on the sunny side of the pool where the shadow of the birches did not fall. At seven-fifteen the concierge and reception clerk took their places in the foyer, and at seven-thirty Gutzmann came down the main staircase, his nose tweaking in search of an alien smell. He walked through the foyer as if the staff did not exist, surveyed the terrace and the lounge, then came back and nodded to the concierge, which meant that the Spa Bonnar's day had officially dawned.

Anny had already finished her work in the lounge and proceeded by the back stairs to begin on the apartment floor. She was surprised to find that two of the guests were already about. Clayfield passed her in the upper corridor, cheerfully calling out, "Good morning, miss." He wore a wine-colored dressing gown over a pair of bathing trunks. Nason, neatly clad in a linen suit, followed behind, carrying a portable typewriter and a bulging brief case.

The big man paused at the head of the stairs. "Come on, Nason," he said. "It's a great day and we've got a lot of work, my boy."

Farther along the hall Anny stooped to pick up a piece of paper which lay outside the door of apartment 28. She was about to crumple it when her eye caught something familiar. There was Czech writing on it. Anny knew the language because she had been brought up in the Sudetenland.

She read:

My dear Professor Karlene:

When you are ready to return home, I will be waiting. With full respects

Nicolai Endor

It was a nice note, she thought. She slipped it under the door to apartment 28 where it undoubtedly belonged, and proceeded to her work.

2

When Channing looked at his watch it was eight-thirty. He lay back on the pillows, shielding his eyes against the harsh light which streamed through the windows, and in the gossamer moments before full awakening he wondered where he was. This wasn't the Metropole in Brussels nor the Park in Frankfurt. Was he in France? Or Switzerland? Then the lethargy fell away from his mind and he knew. Mittler has phoned the last query at two-thirty, some Midwest paper asking if Karlene had an opinion on how Masaryk had died. Funny that Bendels hadn't thought up that query; come to think of it, funny that Bendels hadn't sent a message. He could remember the story word for word and he went over it in his mind. To hell with Bendels. It was a good story and it had probably made the front pages, at least in the New York early editions.

Thinking about it, he stretched himself luxuriously. A picture of Moussia dropped into his lazy consciousness and this reminded him of Karlene. He still had to get a by-line story out of the Czech, at least a detailed interview. Maybe this was the reason Bendels hadn't sent a message. He hopped out of bed, ordered breakfast by telephone, then drew a bath.

After breakfast he went downstairs and inquired for Professor Karlene. He was told that none of the guests had yet arisen except Mr. Clayfield and Mr. Nason, who could be found at the pool.

The American oilman, clad in bathing trunks, oversized goggles, and a coat of sun-tan lotion, reclined on a deck chair. His hairy chest was bared to the sun as he dictated to his secretary.

"Good morning, Channing. I see you did right well on the story. Congratulations."

"Me? How do you know?" Channing's mind rarely functioned brightly at this hour of the morning.

"How do I know?" Clayfield beamed. "My New York office phoned me at seven, that's two in the morning back home, don't forget, and they were still going strong. Figured they'd be up all night, getting out releases, tying up the

thing generally——”

“What kind of play did the story get?”

“Fine, first class. Front page in the *Times*, *Tribune*, and the *Washington Post*.”

Channing thought about Bendels. This was a clean beat over the opposition; not by minutes but clean. You could count a year’s supply of this kind of beat on the fingers of one hand. He said, “That’s fair enough.”

“It certainly stirred up Washington,” Clayfield went on. “State and Defense both were on the phone to my office within an hour after the papers came out. They wanted to know when Karlene would arrive.”

Channing said, “By the way, when are you taking him out of here?”

“That reminds me——” Clayfield turned to his secretary. “Get Paris on the phone. Tell them to expect us tonight and to get us on the *Mary* or the *Elizabeth*, whichever leaves next. Better do it now.” When his secretary had gone he said to Channing, “That answer your question?”

“You mean you’re leaving this afternoon.”

“Just as soon as the old man is ready. I’ve had my bellyful of waiting around.”

Channing said, “Then I’ve got to see him this morning. We’re offering a thousand dollars for his by-line story.”

“A thousand——” Clayfield interrupted himself to wave hello to Helen Bartell and the Lermonds, who had appeared in bathing costumes. They waved back and then, joining hands, they jumped feet first into the pool and came up howling with the cold.

Clayfield pulled Nason’s empty chair close to his and said, “Sit down a minute, Channing. Why don’t you make it five thousand and I’ll put up the extra four? I’d like to give old Karlene an idea of how we do things in America.”

Helen Bartell bobbed up in the middle of the pool and shouted, “Come on in, Justin. It’s wonderful!”

The oilman tossed her a smile and shook his head. He said to Channing, “Is it a deal?”

“I’m afraid not. We can’t tie up with a commercial outfit.”

“Pity. It would’ve been nice, give him a start before he comes under our taxes. And speaking of money, my boy, if you’ve got a broker in New York, cable him to buy you some Clayfield common. Better cable him now. It’s good for five points before the day is out, I guarantee it.”

The newspaperman said something about not having any money but Clayfield apparently didn't hear him. The oilman was deep in thought. The lines around his eyes crinkled and he contemplated the water rippling up against the pool's side.

"I don't imagine you know what this means to me," he said feelingly. "It's a great thing—by God, it's a great thing. They thought Justin Clayfield was finished, dead. Up and down the Street they were saying those new fields had killed me off. They were dumping my stock, selling it short, pushing it down, my best friends—just when I needed them. God, the wolves! And now I pull this one like a rabbit out of a hat. Watch 'em come yapping back, jumping on the bandwagon—I'd give my eyeteeth to be on the Street when the market opens this morning so I could cut 'em dead. The bastards."

He came out of it suddenly. "I know what I'll do. I'll give Karlene the five anyway if he does the story for you. Charge it up to publicity. Yes, it's a good idea to let him know what kind of people we are back home."

Channing said, "Okay, but it's got nothing to do with me."

3

At ten o'clock the Karlenes had still not come down from their rooms. Channing paced the lobby and the lounge, then wandered out to the terrace where he found the sights more rewarding.

At this hour the bridge was a cheerful place. Half a dozen young boys were fishing from the structure, their bare legs entwined in the uprights of the railing. None of them had rods—they held the lines in their hands—and each attracted an audience of at least one old man who stood quietly by, sucking a pipe and offering occasional advice. Traffic was sparse; infrequently a villager plodded across on his way to the frontier. On the banks below the bridge every quay held its quota of housewives doing the morning wash. When one of the boys pulled up an eel the women looked up from their washing and smiled at the lucky fellow.

Then Channing saw Nicolai Endor. He was sure it was Endor, for the man did not fit into the frame of this village scene. He was dressed in a dark suit, the brim of his green felt hat was turned down fore and aft, and he leaned against the rail at the far end of the bridge apart from the others. Moreover, he seemed to be studying the hotel with unwavering concentration.

Even from a distance the man exerted a magnetic force. His stance was lazy against the rail, and yet the way he remained utterly motionless, his narrow chin thrust up as if on sticks, invested him with a certain tenseness.

Then Channing was aware that the line of the man's concentration rose above the parapet, and he turned slowly around and saw Moussia and her father. From an upper balcony they, too, were studying the man on the bridge.

They stood easily, unfrightened. An almost benign curiosity played on the professor's wonderful old face. His shaggy head a little askew, his arms folded across his chest, he might have been observing some inexplicable chemical reaction in his own laboratory. After a time he went back into his room and as Moussia turned to follow she spied Channing and smiled briefly.

He was waiting at the foot of the staircase when they came down. Karlene held carefully to the banister as he negotiated each step. His face was tired and there were dark circles under his deep-set eyes.

"Ah, this is the young man who was kind to you," he said after Moussia had introduced them. "He is a nice young man—even I can see that, very nice. You see how the world is for young people. You are here—two days, Moussia?—two days, and already you have a young man who is kind to you. In the old days in Prague it was a very serious thing to be kind to a pretty girl, very serious—what is it, Moussia? I have not said anything wrong."

Moussia had said nothing; she was sharing a smile with Channing. Karlene had imagined his daughter's objection. It was his habit to speak this way in Moussia's presence, a little smile on his face, his eyes dancing off to some faraway point. There was charm in it, and deep affection. Channing began to understand the extent of Moussia's anxiety the night before.

She said, "Yes, Father. He was very kind to me. We went for a walk together last night."

"But I warn you, Mr. Channing," the old man went on as though Moussia had not interposed her remark, "I warn you she will make a man very unhappy. She takes control of everything. You would think I was a child the way she tells me what to do. Of course I am already used to it, but it is proper that I should warn you, Mr. Channing."

"Now you are exaggerating, Father."

Channing said, "I was talking to Mr. Clayfield about your departure——"

"Mr. Clayfield—yes, I must see Mr. Clayfield. I am sure he is waiting. I had forgotten. Go along with Moussia. She is very pretty. At least I—I think she is very pretty."

"So do I, Professor, but I'd like to talk to you first."

"To me?"

The newspaperman outlined quickly the request Bendels had sent for Karlene's personal story. The old man nodded as he listened and continued to

nod long after Channing had finished.

Finally he said, "These newspapers in America, they are very dynamic."

"We try to give the news."

"And you think my news is worth a thousand dollars—how much is it, Moussia, a hundred thousand kronen? What news can I give to be worth a hundred thousand kronen?"

"Anything you like. You might explain why you retired when Beneš resigned, how the change affected you, what you think of the Gottwald government——"

"That is impossible." The old man looked beyond Channing and shook his head. "I—I am sorry. It cannot be done."

Though it was clothed in gentle tones, the refusal was absolute. Channing knew it.

He said, "Then may I have an interview, Professor?"

The old man's eyes grew strangely anguished. "It is much too soon, Mr. Channing. *Much* too soon. We will talk again."

"But you are leaving this afternoon."

Karlene looked about in confusion. "Who said this? Moussia, did you say this, that we are leaving this afternoon?"

Before Moussia could answer, Channing said, "It's Mr. Clayfield's plan."

"Oh, Mr. Clayfield. I always forget Mr. Clayfield. I must correct myself not to forget him. No, we are not leaving today, not today. I cannot run so quickly. I must rest a little, and think——" Once more he looked away, addressing an invisible audience. "Matters are never so urgent that there is not enough time to think, except death of course. No, Mr. Channing, we will talk together. Now I will go to see Mr. Clayfield."

There was no use pushing the matter. Channing had had experience with celebrated figures; he knew that a gentle genius like Karlene was often more difficult to work with than the temperamental kind. He recalled that part of Bendels' cable which read, "If unwilling, rush own definitive story." "Definitive" was a favorite word at the office; it meant: Get everything there is to know and write it under your own by-line. It occurred to him that Moussia was the ideal person to give him the facts he needed.

He said to her, "How would you like a walk?"

A change had come over the girl since her father's safe arrival. It seemed to Channing she had become extraordinarily lovely. He knew nothing about women's clothes except that they were either daring or modest, but the white sun dress she wore fell into neither category. It looked magnificent. At least on her it looked magnificent. He supposed it was the flair with which she wore it, perhaps her fine brown shoulders that set it off, or her auburn hair which made highlights under the sun, or the way she walked with a quick, subtle grace. Then he decided it was simply that she was a beautiful girl who was carefree on a summer's day and he ceased his analysis.

She *was* carefree. He noticed it when they came through the lower gateway. She didn't spare so much as a glance for the bridge. She faced him brightly and said, "Now where? You choose it."

He looked down the road and spied a cow plodding toward the frontier line and Albert Bonneval walking out to meet the animal. He took her arm and said, "Let's walk into Belgium."

"It sounds wonderful, but can we go? I don't carry my passport."

"Neither do I. We can try."

"Suppose we can't come back in?"

"Then we'll have to camp in the fields and just wave at the hotel."

"You shouldn't joke about it. There are people who do that. Women with babies and old men who are sick, camping in a field and not being able to pass a line. It happens everywhere in middle Europe. It makes me cry to see it."

"You can forget all about it. You're going to America."

"One doesn't forget so easily."

A short distance ahead, Albert was standing beside the cow and slapping her neck affectionately. Moussia watched them in amazement. She said, "Isn't that the man we saw in the tavern? What is he doing with that cow?"

"Talking to her. She's the only talking cow in the world."

"He must be mad."

"I wouldn't say that. He's the only border guard I've ever met who makes sense."

Albert watched them come up to the frontier line. He leaned against the cow, which seemed content enough to stand in the road, and eyed them malevolently. His tunic was unbuttoned and his cap perched on the back of his head.

Channing said, "Good morning, M'sieu Bonneval. Can we go through?"

The guard stroked his mustaches and appraised the girl. Finally he said,

“No.”

“Why not?”

Albert gave a single, resolute shake of his head. “It is not necessary to explain my decisions except to the good God and you cannot wait that long. I am not yet ready to die.”

“You mean there is no appeal?”

“Appeal? My dear fellow, forty or fifty wars have been fought in order that this line shall be placed exactly where it is. Millions have died, nations have gone bankrupt, merely that this line shall run from here to there across this field. Appeal? Who are you, the Messiah? Not with that lecherous face, my young friend.”

Moussia listened at Erst in astonishment, then she smiled. “Please, m’sieu, we are only taking a walk,” she said charmingly.

Albert ignored her. He demanded of Channing, “Who is this innocent creature you are trying to smuggle out of France?”

“My apologies,” the newspaperman said. “Mademoiselle Karlene, may I present M’sieu Bonneval.”

Albert bared a set of brown-stained teeth. “Ah, you are the daughter of Gregor Karlene.”

“You know of my father?”

“Nothing escapes me in this part of France. Not that I take credit for it, mind you. I am a modest man. It merely happens that I have a duty to know everything.” He slapped the cow’s neck affectionately. “Eh, Caro?”

“Then perhaps, M’sieu Bonneval——”

“No, no, no. I am not in a generous mood this morning.”

“But surely——”

“My dear good woman, the diplomatists who established this line did not intend that it should be a promenade for lovesick people. Do you wish to make a mockery of their achievement?”

Channing said, “Certainly, M’sieu Bonneval.”

The old man raised his eyebrows slightly and looked off into the distance. His face was blank as the cow’s.

“Go ahead,” he grumbled.

Still leaning on the cow, he watched them move out on the empty, sun-swept road that cut through the fields into Belgium.

It was as if the hand of Nature had marked the line. In contrast with the frugally cultivated acres on the French side, this borderland was unfenced and

unworked. Poppies thrust up their blood-red heads in the tall grass and spilled languorously over the verges of the road. This had once been a fortified area, for at regular intervals along the wayside, cement cupolas, each with a slit wide enough for a rifle barrel, rose above the wild growth. Channing explained how these crumbling relics were used in another era when soldiers fought wars in a gentlemanly way and an invading force marched properly along a road in full view of the defending force, while the contending generals stood on their respective hilltops and exchanged salutes. Moussia listened and laughed in a beguiling manner, as though the opportunity to laugh was a novel and wonderful thing.

Presently the road curved through a wooded area and then they saw in the distance the first Belgian town. It was only a hamlet, a few farm dwellings lying about a manor house, and at the side of the road there was a frontier station with a flag flying from it.

The sun was hot and the hamlet still a distance away. They took possession of a cupola a few yards off the road, and, using it as a backrest, they sat and smoked and watched a flight of starlings make fine, long spirals over the border area.

She said, "I suppose those birds are also Albert's friends."

"I wouldn't be surprised. Anything that doesn't need a piece of paper to cross a border is Albert's friend."

"He must be a religious man."

"Let's call him a heathen with a sense of humor."

She said, "Perhaps so. It must be difficult for a border guard to believe in God, after all the silly rules he must observe."

"That's the nice thing about Albert. He makes his own rules."

"I think I like him."

Channing glanced at his watch. It was nearly eleven, time to get down to business. He said, "Was that Endor on the bridge?"

"Yes."

"Nice, harmless fellow. I wonder what he's doing here."

She said evenly, "He came for my father."

"That doesn't make much sense."

"I assure you Nicolai is not a fool."

He resented her defense of the man. "What can he do? Kidnap the two of you? If so, he's being pretty lazy about it, standing on the bridge all morning."

She said, "He was in the hotel this morning."

“When?”

“I don’t know. He left a note for my father under the door. He wrote, ‘When you are ready to return home, I will be waiting.’ ”

“What does it mean?” he asked.

She shook her head helplessly.

“Look, Moussia. Something happened back in Prague between your father and the Communists. You’re both safe now. Will you tell me what it was?”

She was silent a little time, then she said, “It’s all finished. I will never see Prague again. Why should we go over it? I would much rather talk about America.”

He muttered, “I’d much rather talk about Prague,” but she appeared not to hear him and he knew that his careful approach to the subject had collapsed at the critical point.

After a brief interval he tried again. He said bluntly, “You know your father, Moussia. Why did he refuse to give me that story?”

She leaned against the cupola and faced up into the sky and smiled as if to herself. Her teeth glistened in the sun. She said, “Forgive me, Philip. I am not laughing at you. I was thinking how they would say it in Prague——”

He said acidly, “I can do it that way too. If you will pardon my abruptness, madame, it is a well-known fact that you enjoy the confidence of your illustrious father, and if I may go further, madame——” He glared at her. “Do you want the whole routine?”

“I must already be an American,” she laughed. “I prefer it your way.”

“I’d still like to know why he refused.”

She said earnestly, “My father is a scientist, not a politician.”

“He’s a famous man. He’s got a duty to tell the truth.”

“I wonder if it is his duty,” she countered. “You saw how badly he looked this morning. He paced in his room most of the night, even though he was exhausted. The truth is, he is brokenhearted that he must leave Czechoslovakia, and his heart remains there. Is this what you want him to write for you?”

“He has a duty to describe the conditions that forced him to leave the country.”

“To what purpose, Philip?”

“Because it’s news, for one thing.”

“Are you interested in news—or in people?”

“News is my profession. I don’t apologize for it.”

“He is a sensitive man,” she said, boldly probing the American’s eyes. “Let me tell you something about him and perhaps you will understand what he feels. He is not a patriot as most people are patriots. He loves his country honestly. He knows it is not the finest country or the happiest or the most beautiful. It is a small, ordinary country for ordinary people, but he has lived there all his life and the things that have made it dear to him are ordinary things—his neighbors, his old friends that he knew from childhood, his students, his house on the Moldau, and now his memories. He loves these things because he is a simple man and nothing can change his feeling for them—certainly not Gottwald and his Communists. Can you understand it, Philip?”

“In a way I can.”

“Please try. On the first day of his exile you cannot ask him to write of the evil things. How can he think of anything except of his heartbreak and his love?”

Perhaps it was the deep emotion in her voice that made her point clear for the moment. It was something new in his experience. He had interviewed scores of political refugees fresh from their flight; all of them had been overjoyed to be free and eager to ingratiate themselves with their new compatriots. This man was different. He had come away sad.

He said, “And you? Do you feel the same way?”

“I am still young,” she replied. “In my lifetime there has been more to hate and less to love.” And then she added quietly, “Besides, I am a woman. In central Europe we are still old-fashioned. We say a man belongs to the earth but a woman merely belongs to a man.”

It was his turn to smile. He said, “You’ll get along in America.”

“Do you think so, Philip?”

“I’ll make book on it,” he said and declined, despite her urging, to explain the term.

Most of the way home he found himself telling her about America and watching the way she reacted, especially when she laughed (because she was so beautiful when she laughed), and not until they were close to the Spa Bonnar did it come to him that he had done most of the talking and had found out nothing that would make a story for Bendels.

The midmorning sun beat down mercilessly on the Spa Bonnar’s pool. Clayfield frequently rubbed lotion across his powerful chest and shoulders as he outlined to Gregor Karlene the problem of his new land leases.

It was a subject he knew thoroughly. He had long prided himself on not being what he called a “hothouse executive,” and during the last trying year he had spent much of his time in the field with his engineers and exploration teams. He covered the general problem briefly, then described each area of terrain, its geological column, the texture of its sand, and the gravity meters and seismographs which had been applied to the search for oil. He talked quickly and with enthusiasm, and he seldom had need to refer to the stratification charts and reports which Nason had laid out for his convenience.

Karlene said little. He sat stiffly on the edge of a beach chair and his tired eyes looked out over the birches which lined the garden back of the pool. He pulled incessantly at the loose cords of his neck like a schoolmaster listening to a paper being read to him and when he asked a question it was only to clarify a minor point.

The other guests had foregathered on the opposite side of the pool. Helen Bartell and Daphne Lermond lay on their stomachs, having unfastened the breastbands of their bathing costumes, and Eric Lermond, hairy and thin, sat beside them and served himself whisky sours from a shaker. In the shade of a beach umbrella General Perrault dozed, his mouth agape, while his wife sat upright and crocheted with speed and dexterity.

When he had talked for almost an hour Clayfield handed the charts to Nason and lay back on his chair.

“That’s more or less the layout, Professor. What do you think?”

Karlene said, “It is interesting, Mr. Clayfield. An interesting problem.” He had not changed the rigid position of his narrow body and his eyes still roamed the treetops.

The American sighed secretly. He admitted to himself a certain disappointment. During most of his career in oil he had heard legends about Gregor Karlene, about the miracles he had performed in hopeless and often abandoned fields, and now, face to face with the Czech, he found him lacking an incisive quality. He didn’t have the keen, aggressive look he had expected in a man destined to become chief engineer of all his enterprises. He didn’t even look you straight in the eyes. For someone he had just spent a fortune to rescue from the hell of Czechoslovakia, he was curiously indifferent.

Of course the old man was weary. Clayfield was not insensitive to his ordeal in escaping from Prague, with the Communists on his heels, and he could understand his reluctance to push on to Paris the same day. He had willingly postponed the arrangements. After two months of waiting, another few hours were unimportant.

He said with determined cheerfulness, “It’s going to be fine, Professor. By

God, it's going to be fine. Between the two of us, we'll do a neat job of work."

Karlene nodded thoughtfully. "I have worked before with Americans. At Ploesti."

"I expect you find us a little aggressive for your taste."

"No, I have liked Americans very much."

Clayfield felt better. He said, "By the way, my top people are on a first-name basis with me. I believe in it. Makes it easier all around. They call me Justin."

"Ah, yes."

"I think you'll find I'm not a bad fellow."

"Of that I am sure, Mr. Clayfield—yes."

The American oilman didn't hear Karlene's quiet rejoinder. He went on briskly, "You know, Professor, in a way we'll be making history, you and me. I've been thinking about it. These fields of mine, properly developed, will go a long way toward making us free of Middle East oil in peace and war—these and the Canadian fields up in Alberta. It's always been my idea that a self-sufficient America is the greatest thing that can happen to the world. And oil is the lifeblood of industry and, heaven help us, of war. It's something to think about."

For the first time Karlene brought his eyes to look earnestly on the American. He said, "Yes, it is something to think about."

Clayfield lit a cigarette and drew deeply on it. He felt he was getting somewhere.

He said, "We might as well take it easy while we can, because once we reach New York we've got a heavy schedule. It's not every day we grab a Nobel Prize winner right out from under the noses of the Communists, so I'm going to show you off a little, Professor, if you don't mind——"

"Show me off?"

"Don't worry about it. My public relations people will see that everything is done right—tactfully, you know. They're lining it up already. There'll be a press conference with the ship-news reporters, then another with the science and industrial editors at our home office in New York, and then Washington with the political correspondents. Oh yes, it's a big thing."

Clayfield closed his eyes, imagining it, and rubbed more lotion over his chest.

"As I see it, there's just one more chore after that. The State Department and intelligence people down in Washington will want a day with you.

They've already been on the phone to our office. I understand it's damned hard to get any decent intelligence on uranium workings in Moravia and Silesia. Why, with your special knowledge of the mineral strata in that part of the world, you'd be worth a dozen divisions to the Pentagon. So you see what kind of a schedule we've got. I don't blame you a little bit for wanting an extra day or two here. By God, this sun is wonderful."

When he opened his eyes Helen Bartell was standing by his chair and Karlene had come shakily to his feet.

The woman said, "Oh, Justin, do introduce me to Professor Karlene. It's so seldom that a gadabout like myself gets to meet somebody who is really something in the world. I've really no brains at all. Isn't it dreadful?"

Clayfield introduced them, and then Karlene said, "If you will excuse me, please. I must go to my room."

After he had gone Helen said, "Is he sick, Justin? He looks awfully green to me."

Clayfield said, "I suppose it's the excitement. Everything's new for him. It's not easy to start all over again at his age."

"Eric tells me he's a genius—like Einstein. I've never met one before except some silly little man who conducted an orchestra. But I always thought he just acted like a genius and he wasn't one at all. I've forgotten his name—something Russian. Oh, he was a funny little man. This one doesn't act like a genius at all."

Clayfield grinned. He excused himself and turned to Nason and began dictating another flood of cables to America. One was to a university in Texas of which he was a regent.

"I'm doing this for Karlene," he explained to his secretary. "He's the scholarly type. It might make him feel better if he got some kind of honorary degree right off the bat."

Nason nodded and poised his fingers on the typewriter keys for more cables.

6

It was a few minutes past noon when Channing returned to his room. The place was cool and dark. The chambermaid had closed the balcony doors and drawn the curtains to keep out the day's blistering heat. He flung his jacket on the bed and glanced at his typewriter. The pages of last night's dispatch lay beside it on the table. He ran his eyes over the story. It was dead. Funny how a story could be alive on a piece of copy paper until it hit the newspapers, and

suddenly it was dead.

Then the telephone rang.

“Hello, Phil. This is Mittler.”

“Hello, Junior,” he said. “Working already?”

“Me, sure. I hope the women and the weather’ve both been nice to you _____”

“What is it?”

“—because you can stop enjoying yourself right now. I’ve got a message from old Steelskull, baby.”

“What does he say?”

“You know, Phil, that guy wears a telephone wire for a nightgown. It’s only seven o’clock in New York and he’s in action already. I often wonder what his wife does when——”

“Come on, Junior, let’s have the message.”

“Well, it starts off pretty good. OKAY KARLENE FRONT-PAGE ALL MORNING PAPERS STOP HIS PERSONAL STORY TO LEAD EVENING PAPERS LONG OVERDUE STOP. Now comes the velvet glove. HANDED YOU KARLENE ON SILVER PLATTER STOP HOW LONG YOU EXPECT HAVE HIM EXCLUSIVELY BEFORE OPPOSITION DISCOVERS LOCATION QUERY. And here’s the finger, brother. GET LEAD EXASS BEFORE ITS TOO LATE—BENDELS. My, my, ain’t he the filthy one?”

“Is that all?”

“What else do you want, a bunch of lilies? But he’s right about the opposition. They’re going nuts. Phoned every hotel in Paris and Deauville and they’re moving up around Reims. It’s only a matter of time before you’ll have thirty of ’em sitting right in your lap. What do you want to say?”

“Just say, KARLENE DIFFICULT DOING UTMOST.”

“Okay, brother. Far’s Bendels is concerned, that and a dime will get him into the subway.”

“Anything else?”

“Sure. There was a reaction from Prague and it’s a beaut. Came in this morning. Listen. NEWS OF THE REPORTED ESCAPE OF GREGOR KARLENE FROM CZECHOSLOVAKIA FAILED TO APPEAR IN PRAGUE NEWSPAPERS THIS MORNING. WHEN INFORMED OF DESPATCHES PUBLISHED IN AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS THE GOVERNMENTS FOREIGN PRESS DEPARTMENT ISSUED THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT TO FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS: THE GOVERNMENT IS UNAWARE OF ANY EXTRAORDINARY EVENT WHATSOEVER IN CONNECTION WITH PROFESSOR GREGOR KARLENE. IT IS KNOWN THAT PROFESSOR KARLENE RECENTLY HAS BEEN IN POOR HEALTH AND THE FACT THAT HE AND HIS DAUGHTER HAVE LEFT PRAGUE FOR A SHORT HOLIDAY MOST CERTAINLY ACCOUNTS FOR MALICIOUS RUMORS APPEARING IN THE CAPITALIST-IMPERIALIST PRESS. . . . How do you like those apples?”

“Thanks, Junior. Keep me in touch.”

“That I will, massa, that I will. G’by.”

Channing closed the phone angrily. There was an axiom in the newspaper game that a reporter is only as good as his last story, but Bendels was pushing it a little too far. His scoop was still fresh on the front pages and here was Bendels badgering him for not getting another. To hell with him. And yet Bendels was right; it was uncanny the way Bendels was always right. After spending most of the morning with Moussia in order to get the facts, he had ended up with not much more than a feeling of pity for the old man.

At least he knew why Endor had come to Bonnar. The man’s note and his government’s announcement matched perfectly; both were designed to convince Karlene that he could return to Czechoslovakia without prejudice. It was something to know, but you couldn’t hang a story on it. The notion that Karlene might return to his country after having escaped from it wouldn’t make sense.

He went to the window and pushed back the curtain. Endor was still on the bridge in the dazzling sun, smoking a cigarette and leaning carelessly against the rail. What an idiot the man was! How could he expect to get Karlene back? Not by standing on the bridge all day like a fool, an utter fool.

Then he heard the door open and close and he swung around and saw that Giselle had let herself into his room.

She leaned against the door, smiling mischievously. She looked exceedingly smart and cool in a white tailored suit. She said, “Are you surprised, my timid one?”

He had to laugh. “You couldn’t surprise me.”

She said, “We are leaving this afternoon.”

“Who?”

“Simon and me. We are driving back to Paris.”

“I see. Is his business finished?”

“It will be finished after lunch. And then we go away. Are you sorry? I would like you to be sorry.”

“All right, I’m sorry.” He added, “I really am.”

Still smiling, she came across the room and stood provocatively close to him. She said, “You think I’m a foolish woman. It doesn’t matter. I like stubborn men. I like you.”

“Does Simon know you’re here?”

“It shouldn’t concern you.”

“Don’t you ever think of him?”

“Simon and I, we both take out of life what we want.”

“And what do you want out of life?”

She gave a little movement of her shoulders. “This last day I wanted you. Tomorrow—next week—I may feel different.”

“Then I’ve missed something.”

“You have never met anyone like me, have you? Other women want to be like me, but they’re afraid. I’m not. I’m happy.”

He said, “Perhaps I’ll see you in Paris.”

“It may be too late then,” she said provocatively. “Why did you spend so much time with the Karlene girl?”

He shrugged.

She said, “Let me tell you why. You’re not the type who falls in love. But you think she can be of use to you. Am I right?”

“Before you met Simon you must have made your living as a crystal-gazer.”

Her smile turned wise. “But you are not as clever as you think I could have been of much more use to you.”

The telephone rang. Watching her in a puzzled manner, he reached for the receiver.

The voice on the line said, “This is Aleksandrow. Is Madame Notta there?”

“Madame Notta . . . ?” Channing drew out the query and glanced at the woman. She shook her head calmly. “No, she’s not here.”

“Yes, indeed,” Aleksandrow chuckled. “Only please tell her I am waiting in the lounge. Thank you.” The phone clicked.

“He says he’s waiting in the lounge.”

She smiled brightly and blew him a kiss as she left the room.

7

Precisely at noon Anny Liesefeldt left the apartment floor where she had been washing down the walls, descended by the rear stairs, and deposited her washcloth, mop, and pail in the supply room. She proceeded to the locker room where she changed into her own cotton dress and then hurried through the basement corridor to the service door. Oscar, resplendent in a knee-length coat with gold braid and the insignia of crossed keys on its lapels, smoked a cigarette at the open door. He had been watching her approach along the

corridor, and now he let his cigarette dangle from his heavy lips and stared at her rudely, at the way her breasts moved with each quick step on the cement floor. She did not look at him, but as she passed she inclined her head respectfully.

She made her way down a steep path to the servants' gate and when she came to the road she ran to the bridge. Here she moved more slowly in order not to appear conspicuous to the villagers lounging against the rail, and on the other side she went down a narrow walk to her shack on the riverbank.

The door and window were wide open but inside the heat was intense. The valley of the river permitted no breeze nor did it offer any protection against the noonday sun. The crippled man who sat at the table wore an undershirt and blue trousers. He had a frail body except for his shoulders and the upper part of his arms, which rippled with crutch muscles. He was writing.

He scarcely looked around when Anny came in. She went to the bed and smoothed out the sheet, laid the blanket carefully over it, and thumped the pillows into fullness. Then she went to the other side of the table and set it with two plates. From a cupboard she brought out a bottle of red wine and one of oil, a bowl of lettuce leaves, half a loaf of bread, and a stick of saucisson sec.

As she put the coffeepot on a gas fire she said, "Does it go well today?"

He pushed aside his papers and she gathered them up and placed them on a shelf next to the table. She didn't repeat her query but went about the business of pouring the wine and cutting slices of sausage.

His big, sullen eyes followed her quick movements. He said, "I am writing about fish."

"That is good," she said, sprinkling oil on the lettuce.

He said, "Has it ever occurred to you what goes on in the mind of a fish when it is nuzzling around a worm on a hook?"

She handed him a glass of wine. "It is nice to watch the boys fishing."

"I know what goes on in the mind of a boy who is fishing. I was once a boy. But what goes on in the mind of a fish? That is a question. I am writing an essay on this question. It passes the time."

She nodded amiably and glanced at the clock. "Come, drink your wine. We must eat now."

He gulped his wine in a single, impulsive movement and said no more. Then he began to eat rapidly and did not look at her again.

After she had cleared the table she went to the door. She said, "A little later there will be shade on this side of the house. Do you want me to take your chair out?"

“No!” he cried.

Her face clouded over. She went to where he sat brooding in his chair and stood behind him and passed her hands across his chest. His downcast eyes studied the movement of her hands.

He said, “I curse the day we came together.

“Jacques . . .”

“I should have gone to the military hospital with the others.”

“It is a sin to say it.”

“What happens when you leave me?”

“Never, Jacques . . . never.”

His powerful arms reached up quickly and drew down her head and he kissed her viciously. He said, “You are my life. It is not good for one’s life to be in another’s hands.”

She held her face close against his and her hands on his chest. After a time he shook her off roughly and said, “Take my chair out to the shade.” Before she could go he caught hold of her arms and pulled them back around his neck. “Why do you stay with me?”

She buried her scrubbed, peasant face in his hair. “You ask these questions. I don’t know, Jacques. We are a pair. I am content to be with you.”

Afterward she carried a chair out to a grassy spot beside the shack. She came back to the door and looked inside. Jacques sat staring at the wall. She stood there a little while looking helplessly on him and then she climbed to the bridge and returned to the Spa Bonnar.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE midday hour at the Lion d'Or was an event of social importance in the town, especially on a fine summer's day. The ritual began when André, the proprietor, carried out small tables and chairs and set them up in the public square as far as the steps of the church, leaving a passage only wide enough for a cart to pass through. Then he chalked the details of his "*Menu de 125 francs*" on a blackboard and hung it on the outside gate. This impressed no one, certainly not his wife, who prepared a lunch sufficient only for herself, her husband, the girl who worked for them, and such lodgers as happened to be staying at the inn. Nevertheless, the tables in the square were always filled.

The mayor, a smug little man who was also the postmaster, usually appeared first. He came about half past eleven, occupied a table in the center of the square, and ordered a Cinzano, which was served in a distinctive goblet and set him a cut above those who drank *vin rouge*. He was soon joined by the town's only other civic official, the *garde champêtre*, whose duty it was to protect the farms against poachers. Since poaching had not been reported in the area for several generations, he was, in effect, the town's law-enforcement officer and therefore a man of certain standing. Albert Bonneval invariably came a little later and set himself up at a rival table. Then the men working in the fields filtered into the square on their way home, and by noon the tables were filled and the great and small questions of the day were in process of debate over a glass of wine. By one o'clock the tables were once more empty, and André, his wife, the waitress, and their occasional lodgers sat down to their meal.

On this lazy, sun-swept day attendance in the square was unusually large and the topic which traveled from table to table naturally revolved about Nicolai Endor. The townsfolk were already accustomed to bizarre guests at the Spa Bonnar who sauntered the Rue de la Victoire in ridiculous colored garments (and who spent as much as five thousand francs to sleep one night in a bed, the idiots), but this curious stranger who lodged at the Lion d'Or and stood all morning on the bridge was someone well worth talking about.

Bits of information were freely exchanged, and it required only a few minutes for everyone to know that he was from Czechoslovakia, that he hardly spoke a word even to André, and that his watch on the big hotel was connected in some way with the arrival there of a great scientist from his own country. In the course of conversation the man's mission took on various dark, romantic,

and often nefarious purposes, and many a farmer lingered an extra time at the tables in the hope of seeing the stranger arrive for his midday meal. But he didn't arrive soon enough, and the speculation about him was transferred to the dining tables of the town's dwellings. From those which had a view of the bridge, curious glances were directed at the lone figure in a dark suit and a green felt hat.

Employees of the Spa Bonnar, passing through the square on their way to the late shift, picked up the gossip. Inevitably these dark, romantic, and nefarious stories came to the attention of guests in the hotel.

Clayfield confronted his before-lunch martini in the lounge. He was in buoyant spirits. Gathered about him were those guests who had not yet shared of his hospitality—Helen Bartell, the Lermonds, and General and Madame Perrault. It was typical of the American's friendliness that he should invite them for a drink. There were so few of them that it really became a house party, and besides, they were all such nice people.

It was Helen who pushed the topic of Endor into the midst of this pleasant gathering. She said, "You know, Justin, they say there's a famous Communist, one of these Russians or something, right here in town. The servants are all talking about him. They tell me he just stands on the bridge. Isn't it odd?"

Daphne Lermond, who seldom spoke except on the urging of several cocktails, said, "I think it's dreadfully exciting."

This brought the general out of a stupor and he told a long, rambling story of the time he had an offer to command a corps in General Wrangel's army but couldn't accept because of the Russian weather. He was suffering from lumbago at the time. Eric Lermond was happily reminded that they had once had a talkative Communist called McLachlan working in their distillery at Dumfries, and Helen said she couldn't imagine a Scotsman being a Communist because she thought they all came from Russia like this fellow.

Then Daphne said, "But they say he's a Czech."

"It's all the same thing, Czech or Russian," offered Madame Perrault without looking up from her crochet work.

Clayfield had been listening to the speculation with mounting satisfaction, and finally said, "Well, I know all about this fellow. As a matter of fact I'm sort of responsible for him being here."

Helen said, "Really, Justin. There's no telling all the things you're into."

"I wish I could begin to tell you all the things I've been into before I could get my hands on Professor Karlene," the oilman said. "I'll have plenty of yarns

to spin when I get back home.”

“Do tell us. Does he carry bombs and things?” It was Daphne speaking.

Clayfield laughed comfortably. “You say he’s out there on the bridge?”

“Certainly,” Helen said. “It’s quite a sensation in the village.”

Eric Lermond said, “I say, Clayfield, isn’t it sort of dangerous to have him around loose?”

General Perrault pulled up his chin and muttered, “If I were twenty years younger I would run him through.”

Helen winked at Clayfield. She whispered, “He means if he was fifty years younger. I can’t imagine what holds him together, can you?”

Clayfield said, “By God, let’s go out and have a look at this fellow. If the idiot insists on standing out there in the sun, the least we can do is give him an audience. What?”

“Jolly good idea,” Lermond said.

Clayfield called to a waiter. “The same all around. We’ll be back in a minute.”

He strode out through the lobby and across the terrace to the parapet. The others, including Madame Perrault and the general, who clung to her arm, followed behind, and they formed around the oilman’s commanding figure.

The bridge was almost deserted. Only two persons remained on it. One was a boy who fished from the center of the span and the other was Endor. He leaned against the rail at the far end, his hat well over his eyes and a cigarette in his mouth. He might have been daydreaming. After a time he seemed to notice the appearance of Clayfield’s party, for he raised his head slightly to face the people on the parapet.

Helen said, “He looks like a ski instructor I knew at Sun Valley. At least, he’s the same tall, wiry type. It’s so hard to see in this sun. I wonder if he’s good-looking.”

“He certainly hasn’t got a beard,” Daphne giggled.

The general said, “He should be hurled from the soil of France.”

Eric Lermond said crisply, “I suppose he’s got a visa like anyone else.”

Clayfield said nothing. He leaned forward, his hands anchored on the parapet, his chin thrust out, and tried to study this man from whom he had won a prize beyond measure. Endor met his gaze. The two men stood motionless like this in the warm, shimmering atmosphere.

Suddenly a shrill scream cut across the river and made both men start. The lone youngster fishing from the bridge pulled up a fat, shiny eel, and when he

had it in his hands he displayed it exuberantly, first to Endor and then to the people on the terrace. Still screaming triumphantly, he scampered for home.

Thus distracted, the two men tried but failed to recapture their finely balanced enmity. Finally Endor flung his cigarette into the water and walked away from the bridge toward the village. He paused at the edge of the first trees for one more glance at the American, then continued on his way.

Clayfield mumbled something about having a drink and led his party into the hotel.

2

Channing heard the sound of careless laughter as it rose from the terrace. Giselle had just left him, and he stood at his windows and saw the two adversaries face each other across the valley of the river.

Then he sat at his typewriter and stared at the blank paper in its carriage. His fingers lay alert on the keys but didn't move because he had nothing to write. There was no substitute for hard facts. The hard facts had eluded him. Bendels would never understand it, and of course Bendels would be right. Any cub reporter who had the top news figure of the day all to himself would get a story.

He thought on it cruelly, and he knew where his error lay. Since the day he had become a foreign correspondent, he had sternly followed the principle laid down by Bendels, that you cannot be both chronicler and participant in the European drama. Bendels had said: "You get the news and let the readers enjoy the heartbreak. The backwoods are full of old correspondents who made the mistake of turning into Salvation Army characters."

One way or another, Moussia had broken across the hard line he had always drawn between his emotions and his job. Moussia, and also her father. The old man had a certain humble dignity which commanded respect; and respect for dignity was the enemy of spot-news journalism.

A good, resourceful reporter would have bullied the old man into talking, or would have crawled into Moussia's confidence. He reviewed every angle of the story, and suddenly he realized that he had been mesmerized by the best of them. Angrily he pulled the paper out of his typewriter and went out to see if he could corner Nicolai Endor.

The man was no longer on the bridge. Channing pushed across into the village, scanning each passer-by. He was determined the Czech would not play hide-and-seek with him this time.

In the town square the table tops stood empty and shining in the hot sun.

Channing moved quickly between them and went through the gate into the Lion d'Or's small courtyard. In a shady corner close against the façade of the building he found the proprietor and his wife bending over their lunch.

The big man looked up from his food and eyed Channing with a suspicion which had been totally lacking the night before. He said, "You are looking for your friend—this M'sieu Endor?"

"Yes."

"He has just gone to his room. You will find it at the very top. No. 6."

Channing could hear them whispering excitedly as he went into the auberge.

Two narrow flights of stairs brought him to No. 6, which appeared to be an attic room. There was no answer to his first knock. He knocked again, harder. A sharp, commanding voice called out in accented French, "Who is there?"

Channing replied in French, "A caller."

"I don't want to see anyone. Go away——" But the American had already pushed into the room.

Endor was bent over a washbowl which sat on a marble-topped stand. His face dripped water and he held a towel in his hands. He turned sharply, it seemed more in fright than in anger, wiped the water from his eyes with a quick movement of the towel, and stared intently at the newcomer as if trying to determine whether he should know him.

He was even thinner than he appeared from a distance. His shirt, wet with perspiration, clung to his chest and marked the outlines of his skimpy ribs, and the belt on his trousers made an exceedingly small circle around his waist. His face was long and narrow, forming a thin triangle between his high cheekbones and his chin. He had a sharp, well-formed nose, and his sand-colored hair was wiry and cut short like a Prussian's. Only his eyes and mouth lent a fierce distinction to his appearance. He had no visible upper lip, and the lower one was thin and wide. His eyes were small and intense and the pupils bullet-black.

He was patently unsure whether Channing was friend or intruder. He asked in a quick, confidential whisper, "Who are you?"

Channing, groping for an apt reply, glanced about the room. It was small and roughly furnished in the manner of cheap European hotels. An enameled iron bed took up most of the space. A marble-topped bureau and the washstand with bowl and pitcher completed the amenities. A single window faced the river and looked across to the parapet of the Spa Bonnar. An open suitcase stood on the floor and some articles from it were spread on the bureau, among them a stick of sausage and a revolver.

“You are Endor?”

“I asked who are you.”

“My name is Channing.”

The Czech had not moved from his place at the washstand. He stood, towel in hand, and puzzled over the name. Then he said, “What do you want?”

Channing took a careless step forward and pushed the door shut behind him. He studied the man in relation to the revolver. He asked, “You are the same Endor who is chief of industrial science?”

“The same.”

“Then you are the man I want.”

“Who are you?” Endor was alert now. He tossed the towel on the bed and turned a bold face on the intruder.

“I would like to ask you some questions about Professor Karlene.”

The Czech relaxed. His lower lip, which had been pressed close against his teeth, pushed out a little. A light of recognition came into his eyes. He said, “You are a journalist.”

“Yes.”

“What is your representation?”

“An American journalist.”

Endor smiled. It seemed to Channing like a smile of relief, as if the man had been genuinely frightened. The quality of his voice was calmer as he said, “I do not like American journalists. They are liars.”

Channing was grateful for the opening. He said, “Do the Czech newspapers tell the truth?”

“You know nothing about the people’s republic.”

The American said carefully, “This morning Prague announced that Professor Karlene left the city on a short holiday for his health.’ You know as well as I do that this is a lie.”

“Who says it is a lie? You?” The inflection was clearly sardonic.

“Do you deny it?”

The Czech stepped away from the washstand and sat on the bed. He was within reach of the revolver but it no longer bothered Channing. The man was extremely high-strung, yet he gave no impression of violence. He had assumed an air of intellectual superiority.

He said, “Because you do not know the meaning of truth, you say it is a lie. I am a scientist. I know that the elements that go into a test tube have in

themselves no meaning. It is the reaction that counts.”

Channing said, “Let’s not play with words. You didn’t pursue Professor Karlene because he is on a holiday for his health.”

“You betray your ignorance. There was no pursuit. I arrived here before Professor Karlene.”

“How did you know? Did he tell you where he was going?”

Endor said comfortably, “I am not ready to open my files to an American journalist.”

“Then you still claim he is here on a holiday.”

“I claim nothing. It is you Americans who claim everything—the truth, the world, everything.”

It annoyed Channing that the man had adopted a patronizing attitude. He said sharply, “Then perhaps you will tell me what you are doing here? Are you on a holiday too?”

“I am here merely to see that Professor Karlene enjoys the fullest freedom of his patriotic convictions.”

Channing pointed to the revolver. “You mean with that.”

“I am not an assassin,” Endor said. There were both pride and derision in his statement. He eyed the American pityingly and said, “You have the hired assassins. Men like Berlau and Aleksandrow. Thieves! Murderers! Hired by the Wall Street imperialists to kidnap Professor Karlene! They will not succeed—that I promise you!”

Channing said, “He is in a free country. He needs no protection.”

“I see you also know nothing about France.”

“There are no patrols on the border,” Channing retorted. “People don’t have to crawl through the forests in the middle of the night. If they wish to leave, no one stops them.”

The Czech sprang to his feet. “You know nothing about it! Nothing! They have kidnaped Professor Karlene. But I promise you they will fail in their purpose. He is too intelligent. He knows that gold cannot substitute for the nobility of the individual, which is the highest aim of the people’s republic. But they are still trying with their intrigues and their bribes and their hired assassins!”

Channing said, “There are no assassins across the river—and no revolvers.”

The Czech struggled to contain his anger. His words spilled out shrilly. “I have already informed Professor Karlene that the people’s republic is ready to

stand beside him. Now get out!” His bright eyes rode over the American. “Get out! And tell your masters they will not succeed. I, Nicolai Endor, I promise you that!”

He stood tense and defiant at his door until Channing reached the bottom of the staircase, then he slammed it shut.

In the courtyard the proprietor and his wife were still bent over their food. They spoke quietly to each other but out of the corners of their eyes they studied every detail of the American.

Channing turned back to the Spa Bonnar. He was impressed by the Czech’s confidence and he felt that an unexpected story was developing here. But the facts still eluded him.

3

The midafternoon sun streamed through a series of french windows into Clayfield’s high-ceilinged living room. The oilman sat deep in an armchair. He let the cable he had been reading drop to his lap and a slow, wistful smile passed across his face.

He said, “Nason, someday you’ll find out there are not many real satisfactions in a man’s life. I’ve had some in my time, but damned few. This is one, though—by God, it’s one all right.”

Nason stood at a respectful distance from his employer’s chair. “I’m happy sir. It’s very fine.”

“By God, it is.” Clayfield reached for the cable and read it again. Wrinkles of pleasure skittered about the corners of his little eyes.

CLAYFIELD OIL SENSATION AT MARKET OPENING STOP FIRST BLOCK TRADED SIX AND HALF POINTS HIGHER CONGRATULATIONS.

FELSON

He glanced at his watch. It was nearly four. In New York the market had been open less than an hour. He thought it was nice of Felson to let him know so promptly. Of course Felson would be making a good thing of it; his business was speculation, not oil. Well, more power to Felson. At least he had stood by when the going was bad. There were other friends who hadn’t stood by. It gave him a buoyant sensation to think of their consternation, now, this very minute. He could almost hear them up and down the Street, shaking their heads and saying: “You can’t beat Justin Clayfield; he went out and did it again.” By God, it was a great satisfaction.

He remembered his first gusher, how he had rolled into Dallas that night

and got very drunk in the Starlight Club and written an order on Sanger Brothers to deliver a mink coat to each of the six chorus girls in the line. It was funny; he didn't like any of them particularly, but he got a big kick out of watching their eyes pop. What a young buck he was in those days. Money was a thrill to him. This was different. This was a real triumph; over men, not merely over money.

Then he heard Nason say, "There are one or two other things, sir," and he was back in the Spa Bonnar and the sun was streaming through the windows.

"Yes?"

"Miss Karlene called. She said the professor is not feeling well and she wondered if you would be good enough to go in and see him."

Creases formed across his brow and he said wryly, "It would be a hell of a note if he died on me, wouldn't it? Drop a cable to Jeffreys. Tell him to arrange for the old man to be looked over the day we dock."

"Yes, sir. One other thing."

"What is it?"

"Mr. Aleksandrow, sir. He plans to leave for Paris this afternoon——"

"I suppose he wants a check."

"Well, no, sir. He said that could be sent to his office. He wanted a word with you—I had the impression, sir, just to say good-by."

"Nice of him." Clayfield got up. "I'll go in and see the professor. If Aleksandrow calls, tell him I'll be back in ten or fifteen minutes."

Gregor Karlene did not get up to greet his prospective employer. He remained on a chaise lounge, fully dressed despite the heat, and contented himself with sitting up to shake Clayfield's hand. It was easy to see he was ill. Tiny lines of sleeplessness flecked his fine eyes and the loose flesh under them had turned to a deep shade of purple. But he looked generally alert, Clayfield noted with relief, certainly not like a man who was about to die on him.

Moussia stood at the open doors to the balcony. She had shaken Clayfield's hand and then resumed her position looking out on the lazy vista, as if she was loath to leave her father and yet sought to give the two men a sense of privacy in their conversation.

Clayfield drew up a chair. "I'm sorry about this, Professor," he said, glancing about the room. "I didn't realize we were going to remain. I'll see that Gutzmann moves you into an apartment with a living room."

"Please, Mr. Clayfield——" Karlene held up a protesting hand. "It is not

necessary. I am very comfortable here.”

“Nothing at all,” the oilman said cheerfully. “And what about this illness of yours? Perhaps you’d like a doctor brought in from Paris—Brussels might be a little closer.”

“No, no. You do too much, Mr. Clayfield. In a day I will be quite well.” He nodded reassuringly. “I have what is called a coronary insufficiency.”

The American beamed with a sudden happiness.

“By God, that’s remarkable. Coronary insufficiency! I’ve got the same damned thing, Professor.”

“That is most friendly of you,” Karlene said, and they both laughed.

Clayfield was secretly relieved. He knew a lot about coronary insufficiency, at least enough to understand why Karlene looked purple after his harrowing journey and the worries attending it. He said heartily, “I’ve had it for years. Maximum of fresh air and a minimum of worries—that’s the prescription. My doctor keeps hammering it at me all the time.”

“Exactly. The antidote is oxygen and mental balance. Both very important.”

The American was delighted that they had found a community of interest outside of their business. He always said there was no lodge so close as fellows who had the same sickness.

“You’ll have to meet my doctor when we get to New York. He’s just about the best in the world at this sort of thing.”

Karlene nodded a trifle sadly.

“And as far as fresh air’s concerned,” Clayfield went on eagerly, “I’ve got a house lined up for you just outside of Houston—well, sort of a small ranch, three hundred acres—just what the doctor ordered if you’ll excuse the pun. People come from all over the States for a whiff of that air. Adds years to your life.”

“My health is quite adequate, Mr. Clayfield.”

“Of course! I didn’t mean it in any serious way.” The oilman glanced uncomfortably toward Moussia. He thought he should bring up a more pleasant subject. He said, “By the way, did Channing tell you what I had in mind?”

“Mr. Channing? I don’t believe so.”

“Well, it’s really nothing. He told me his syndicate was giving you a thousand dollars for the story of your experiences. I think it’s worth more, Professor, but you know these newspapers. Pretty cheap, most of them. So I

told him I'd be glad to give you an extra five thousand——” He caught the Czech's quick frown. “Not give you. That's not what I mean. It's worth every penny to our company in terms of publicity.”

Karlene said, “I told Mr. Channing I had no intention of contributing such a story.”

The manner of the old man's disclaimer once more discouraged Clayfield. He said, “Just as you like. It's not the most important thing in the world.”

“But it interests me, Mr. Clayfield,” Karlene said. “Exactly how do you mean it would be worth this money in terms of publicity for your company?”

Clayfield was in a quandary. He wasn't quite sure whether the old man had been insulted by the offer of money or was intrigued by the size of the amount.

“When I say publicity——” He stumbled over his thoughts until the proper line came clear to his mind. “You see, Professor, you are a modest person and I respect you for it. Perhaps you don't realize how well known you are in America and that your escape was—uh—one of the biggest pieces of news in our newspapers this morning.”

“Oh.” The old man's mouth had fallen open.

Clayfield went on. “When a man of your stature turns his back on his country, shakes the dirt of Communism from his shoes so to speak, why it's bound to be front-page stuff. Now this has given the fact that you are joining our company the widest and most favorable kind of publicity. We don't absolutely need it, but it builds good will, and in our business a company can't have too much good will. Anything else you care to contribute to the newspapers will naturally add to this good will, besides being an invaluable object lesson to the people of America on how Communism can drive out of a country one of the most learned scholars and greatest scientists of our century.”

Karlene acknowledged the accolade with a thoughtful nod. He said, “You say the news has already appeared in America.”

“Why of course. It was on the streets last night, I would say, oh, about half an hour after you arrived here.” He smiled at the old man's astonishment. “Our newspapers work pretty fast.”

“Mr. Channing did this?”

“He's the guilty party.”

Karlene sat up suddenly. He said, “I should have been asked before anything was published. Don't you think so, Mr. Clayfield?”

“You can't stop news.”

“Nevertheless, it seems to me I should have been asked.”

It was Clayfield's turn to be indignant. "I am a rich man. Professor Karlene, and I have a certain amount of political power in my own country. But I assure you I cannot influence what goes into a newspaper. You must remember we are a democracy."

The old man bowed.

"Then I apologize. I thought perhaps you had been instrumental in making the news available."

"As a matter of fact I was. But frankly I don't quite understand why you object."

For a time the Czech was silent. His commanding brow furrowed and his eyes looked into themselves and he was deeply troubled. Then his head came up sharply and he said, "There are two reasons and both of them are very difficult to explain. But I shall try. Can you understand, Mr. Clayfield, that it hurts me deeply that I have turned my back on my people?"

"You have turned your back on the Communists. The majority of Czech people are not Communists."

"There are words and bywords and catchwords"—the old man's head rolled with each phrase—"but these do not change the fact. I have turned my back on my people in order to find freedom for myself. It is a sensitive situation. And to have it emblazoned in the newspapers—as you say, it is inevitable—but emblazoned in such a way that I become a hero in America, even a spy against my own people——" The old man's eyes dropped and he asked, "Can you understand it, Mr. Clayfield?"

The American said quietly, "I can see what you mean. But you must also understand that you are helping your people by coming away."

"There was only one way to help my people. That was to have remained among them."

Clayfield said, "I think I understand, Professor," but he admitted to himself he did not understand.

"I felt you would. You are a kind man."

Again they fell into silence, and then Clayfield said, "You mentioned two reasons. What is the other?"

"This one is really difficult, Mr. Clayfield. But again I shall try. I objected to the articles in the newspapers because they were—how shall I say it?—they were premature."

Clayfield stiffened. "I don't understand, Professor."

"It is merely that I have not yet made my decision."

“About what?”

“Whether I shall go to America.”

Clayfield leaned forward as though he hadn't heard aright. He said evenly, “You are not serious, Professor.”

The old man nodded sadly. He observed the American's consternation and said, “Unfortunately, yes. It is possible I shall go with you but I have not yet reached that decision. There are many things to consider. I think it is proper that you should know this, Mr. Clayfield.”

For a moment the American's mind whirled with confusion. Then he drew a checkrein on his panic and sought to face the situation clearly. A series of incisive thoughts occurred to him. He reached for one as a gambler reaches for a critical card.

He looked squarely into Karlene's kindly but immovable face and said, “Professor, we have no contract. I can't force you to do anything. But I brought you out in good faith, and in the same good faith I'll lay the facts before you. I have spent two months of my time and sixty thousand dollars of my shareholders' money to bring you out of Czechoslovakia. I didn't do it out of charity or goodness. I did it because I needed you. These are the hard facts. I'll leave you to make the decision for yourself as a man of honor.”

He felt it was a strong point, the strongest point he could make under the circumstance. He saw the old man's eyes drop, as though wilting under the weight of logic. Then quickly he took his leave.

4

Once in the hall, Clayfield frowned darkly and strode to his apartment.

Aleksandrow was there. The Hungarian had helped himself to a glass of cognac and was smoking a cigarette. He began to chuckle an effusive greeting when Clayfield cut him short.

“You're not leaving.”

Aleksandrow's fat, happy face struck a pose. “But we are ready, Giselle and I. They are bringing down our luggage.”

“They can bring it back up.” The oilman made a quick, troubled passage from one side of the room to the other. “Karlene doesn't want to go to America. What do you think of that?”

“No!”

“Yes, God damn it.”

Aleksandrow looked exceedingly sad. He said, “You understand, my dear

Mr. Clayfield, I am naturally interested—but—but I have carried out your commission. What happens between you and Professor Karlene is not really my affair——”

“I think it is your affair. If you’ll be good enough to have Berlau come up here, perhaps we’ll get to the bottom of this business about Endor.”

“You think Endor is responsible?”

“Who else? You’d better get Berlau.”

The Hungarian sighed. “It is impossible. Berlau left for Paris early this morning.”

“What made him run off so quickly?”

“You know how it is. He has been away from his girl more than a month. *C’est la vie.*”

Clayfield towered fiercely over the man’s chair. “I think it’s damned curious.”

“But surely, Mr. Clayfield——”

“Look, Aleksandrow. I want to know how Endor got here and what he’s doing here. I want the facts before you leave. I’m paying you a lot of money but not one cent for Berlau’s stupidity. Do you understand me clearly?”

The Hungarian understood without question. He put down his glass and snuffed out his cigarette, twisting it hard into an ash tray. He said, “I told you last night we have been spied upon. The Communists have a network, probably right here in the hotel.”

“Then it’s your business to know about it.”

“My dear Mr. Clayfield, you are upset. This Endor has upset you. I don’t like it. It is unpleasant.”

“Unpleasant! It’s a lot more serious than unpleasant.”

Aleksandrow shrugged. He walked to a telephone, jiggled the bar impatiently, and asked the operator for Gutzmann. When the manager came on the line he directed him to come up to Mr. Clayfield’s apartment.

The two men waited in silence. Aleksandrow sat empty-faced near the telephone. Clayfield’s huge back was framed in the glare of the windows. He looked toward the bridge for a glimpse of Endor but the man was not there.

Finally Gutzmann knocked and came in. He gave a little bow and looked appealingly at his glowering guests. Clayfield turned back to the window, clearly leaving Aleksandrow to handle the matter.

The Hungarian said, “Something has happened in the hotel. Mr. Clayfield is very unhappy about it.”

“*Mon Dieu*——” Gutzmann clasped his hands on his chest. “But what? Please tell me what. Immediately it shall be corrected.”

“We have very secret business, Mr. Clayfield and I. Somehow our enemies have discovered it.”

Gutzmann recalled how freely he had talked to Channing the night before. How could he have done such a thing? “Do you think one of the guests——”

Aleksandrow said, “It is obviously none of the guests in the hotel.”

The manager daubed his brow with a silk handkerchief. “Obviously none of the guests.”

“What about the servants?”

“The servants—yes—well——” Gutzmann’s relief at being absolved in connection with Channing was caught up in his responsibility for the servants. “They are trustworthy, I am sure.”

The Hungarian said, “You can vouch for all of them?”

“Not—not all, of course,” Gutzmann stumbled. “We have been open less than a month.” He turned appealingly toward the American. “A man like you, Mr. Clayfield, who has thousands of employees, surely you will appreciate that—that——”

“Yes,” Clayfield said without turning from the windows.

Gutzmann asked, “Has anything been stolen? If so, the thief must be discovered.”

Aleksandrow said, “Nothing has been stolen. But there are Communists among your servants.”

“I would not think so,” Gutzmann said slowly and without conviction. His anxiety to defend the good name of his hotel impinged on his horror of contradicting a guest.

“I think there are,” Aleksandrow sniffed.

The manager’s well-shod feet fashioned a tortured choreography on the carpet. “They shall be punished. I promise you, Mr. Aleksandrow, they shall be punished.”

“Ah, you have notions.”

“Oscar will know,” the manager hedged. “Oscar knows the entire staff. It is his duty.”

“Fine. Then let us have Oscar.”

“Now, Mr. Aleksandrow? Here?”

“Absolutely.”

Gravely troubled, Gutzmann went to the telephone and summoned Oscar. Then he said, "I am desolated, completely desolated. It is not like the old days. I cannot tell you the difficulties one has to find servants. Who knows what villains may be among them? Who knows, Mr. Aleksandrow?"

The Hungarian nodded impassively and gazed at the ceiling.

There was a knock at the door. Gutzmann went to it. "Vite, Oscar!" he hissed, and signaled frantically from his hip for the concierge to enter.

When Oscar had bowed to the two guests Gutzmann said, "Something extremely serious has happened. It is your responsibility." He paused to allow silence to inflict its full torture. Then he added, "There are Communists among the servants."

"At least one," Aleksandrow said.

"Communists?" Oscar's thick black eyebrows swung together like a pair of magnets. "It seems hardly possible."

"Mr. Aleksandrow is positive," Gutzmann pointed out.

"But if I can know what happened, perhaps——"

"It is not necessary to know. Mr. Aleksandrow has said there are Communists—at least one. Now consider carefully, Oscar. You know the servants."

The concierge looked blankly at his employer. "Let me see. There is old Gaetien. He talks a great deal, always complaining, but I know Gaetien. He worked for me in Lausanne. It is his habit to cry."

Aleksandrow said, "Who is Gaetien?"

"The pastry chef, sir."

"It would not be him," the Hungarian said. "It would be someone in contact with the guests—at the telephone, in the halls, in the rooms. Most importantly at the telephone."

Gutzmann said, "Most importantly at the telephone."

The concierge seemed mildly shocked. "It could not be the telephone, M'sieu Gutzmann," he mumbled. "You have known Louise for thirty years. She would die for you."

"Then in the halls, in the rooms," Gutzmann urged. "You must think, Oscar."

The man's thick lips twisted around his teeth. He murmured, "In the halls, in the rooms . . ."

Clayfield turned around. "Is all this necessary?"

"Please, Mr. Clayfield," Gutzmann said. "I cannot allow harm to come to

you in my hotel. Never!" He turned sternly on Oscar. "*Alors?*"

A light came into Oscar's eyes. "Could it be a chambermaid, sir?"

"Indeed yes," Aleksandrow said, "if she makes up my apartment or Mr. Clayfield's. We both have documents."

"Then I know," Oscar said firmly. "Definitely I know."

"Good! Who is it?" Gutzmann cried.

Oscar said in a low voice, "It is Anny, M'sieu Gutzmann. She is the only one."

Aleksandrow said, "Is she a Communist?"

"Now that I think of it—yes, sir."

Clayfield broke in, "How do you know?"

"I cannot prove it at the moment, Mr. Clayfield, but I am sure nevertheless. I have been suspicious from the beginning. She acts very strangely."

Gutzmann said, "Then she must be discharged immediately."

"Now wait a minute. How do you know?" Clayfield persisted.

Gutzmann relayed the query to Oscar. "How do you know?"

The concierge said earnestly, "There are many reasons, Mr. Clayfield. She is German. How does a German come to Bonnar? No one knows. She never speaks with anyone, not even with me. In the village she lives with Jacques Tramont——" He edged closer to where the American stood. "It is difficult to speak of this because Jacques Tramont is a hero of the war. At Bir Hacheim he lost his legs and his face was paralyzed and he was made a prisoner. They say when his legs were blown off that he also lost his manhood."

"Intriguing," Aleksandrow said. "She sleeps with him?"

"It is a shack near the bridge, sir——"

"Near the bridge," the Hungarian echoed, glancing at Clayfield.

"Yes, sir. There is only one room. Also, I am told, only one bed."

Gutzmann gasped. "Outrageous! Is the man a Communist?"

"Everyone in the village says so. He walks only at night. He is never seen in the church. He spends his time scribbling, always scribbling."

"Enough." Gutzmann drew himself up. "She must not remain in the hotel another minute. You will see to it, Oscar."

"No, no," Aleksandrow said. "We cannot let her off so easily. I will question this woman, and if she is the guilty one she must be punished."

Gutzmann said, "By all means. See to it, Oscar."

"And, Oscar, Madame Notta and I will not be leaving this afternoon. Will

you have our luggage brought back.”

“As you wish, M’sieu Aleksandrow.”

The Hungarian got up and prepared to leave with the two others. At the door he turned to the American and said with a certain satisfaction, “We will soon know the truth, Mr. Clayfield.”

5

For a time after Clayfield had left him Professor Karlene lay back exhausted on his chaise longue and stared at the ceiling. From her place at the window Moussia watched him push trembling fingers through his tousled, iron-gray hair. She did not speak to him, for she knew he was wrestling with a problem of loyalties which could be resolved only in consultation with his deepest heart.

As she studied him she began to hate the place, the hotel, the village, even the magnificent sweep of sunlit fields beyond. It had come to represent a halfway house on their dark journey into exile. She remembered her father in other troubled days, how his dry, philosophical humor remained with him and buoyed those around him, even when the Germans came. But he was at home then, by his own river, among his own people, and he seemed to draw defiance out of a sense of belonging where he lived. Now he was without anchor and without direction and there was no end to the journey.

Presently she saw that his eyes were closed and his breathing had become measured. She tiptoed out of the room into her own, and then let herself into the hall. She moved quickly down the stairs and out to the terrace. She looked furtively toward the bridge, then walked down the driveway.

The sun was still high in its descent down the western arc and the bridge was once more thronged with the young and old of the village who basked in the day’s sleepy warmth. Moussia hurried past them. Her face was stern as her gait. She looked neither to right nor left but continued across to the village.

At this hour of day the Rue de la Victoire was not heavily populated. A few housewives were washing down the painted stoops of their gray dwellings. A single horsecart filled with earth-crustured turnips rattled over the cobblestones.

Moussia strode through the square, passing close beside the steps of the church, and she slowed her pace when she came to the Hôtel de Ville. The next building bore a sign: “Bureau des Postes, Télégraphes et Téléphones.” It was a square, two-story structure, neatly painted, and it had two entrances. One was a household entrance which was identified by a homely curtain on its window,

and the other entrance, uncurtained, led directly into a front room which was the post office. Moussia used this latter door.

The place was deserted except for an extremely old woman who sat knitting behind the single wicket. Moussia wrote a telegram, handed it in, and waited an interminable time while the old woman counted and recounted the words. It required several minutes for the woman to calculate how much the telegram would cost, and when she arrived at the amount—435 francs—she announced it sadly as if it were a terrible waste of money to transmit so few words.

Moussia paid it, and when she turned to leave she came face to face with Channing.

“Philip!”

He looked toward the wicket and then at her, waiting for an explanation of her furtive movements.

She said, “I felt I was being followed. I’m so glad it was you, Philip.”

“You could have sent a telegram from the hotel,” he said, and continued to eye her with cold inquiry.

“I didn’t want them to know, not even my father.”

“What is it?”

She said softly, “Walk back with me.”

When they were out on the street she put her arm through his. “I’m glad it was you, Philip,” she repeated. And then she said, “There are some things a woman can’t do as well as a man. She can’t face trouble alone.”

The intimacy with which she said it annoyed him. He had determined to shake off any sense of personal involvement in this affair. All afternoon he had thought about it and had geared himself for the task of getting the story Bendels wanted. Now she was being feminine and trusting, even possessive. It made him feel uncomfortable. He could work better on a strictly professional basis.

“What was the telegram?” he asked.

“I sent it to the Polytechnique in Lille,” she explained. “In the years before the war they used to invite my father to conduct the summer seminar in geophysics. I telegraphed them that my father is in France—if they wish to renew the invitation.”

“I don’t understand. You’re going to America with Clayfield.”

“I’m afraid not, Philip. Everything has changed so suddenly. Remember what I told you about my father this morning. It is worse than I thought. He

doesn't feel he can go to America."

"Does Clayfield know?"

"Yes. He was told this afternoon."

Channing whistled. "That must have been a shocker. What did Clayfield say?"

She told him briefly of the conversation between the two men, and then she said, "You see why I didn't want anyone to know of the telegram, neither Mr. Clayfield nor my father. If the invitation arrives tomorrow it will be easier for my father to make his decision. He will feel that he has a choice. He will not be harnessed as he is now."

Channing said, "If your father didn't want to turn his back on his people why did he leave? He could have stayed. You don't break tyrannies by running from them."

She didn't reply. They had come to the lane which led to the bridge, and they moved along it in silence. As they passed the point where Endor had stood all morning Channing remarked carelessly, "He can always go back. Endor's invitation is still open."

"He can never go back."

"Why shouldn't he?—if he feels this way about his people."

She steered him to the rail at the far end of the bridge, away from the villagers, and disengaged her arm and faced him steadily. For a time she studied his face and seemed to like what she saw. Her eyes were soft and her lips played with a slight, affectionate smile.

"Philip, are you my friend?"

"Yes." There was nothing else he could say.

"There is something I want you to know, so you will understand," she said quietly. "My father could have left the country many times. After Munich, Beneš begged him to leave but he refused. During the Russian occupation it would have been easy to drive to Pilsen where the Americans were. Thousands did, but not my father. This time he decided himself he must leave, and I am going to tell you why, Philip."

Channing tried not to appear interested. His instinct told him he was about to hear what he had been seeking all day.

She said, "Two weeks ago Gottwald himself paid a visit to our house. Endor was with him. They came to ask my father to be of service to the state. A plan had been prepared for the exploration of the northern Moravian mountains for uranium oxide. It is a part of the country my father knows well, and they asked him—no, they commanded him to take charge. In the next few

days we received messages from other scientists, all my father's intimate friends, begging him not to put new weapons in the hands of the regime, begging him to leave before it was too late."

Her face grew brighter as if the sharing of her secret had lifted a weight from her mind.

"Now do you understand why we had to leave with Berlau? It was the only chance, Philip—the only chance to be free."

Channing fought down a rising excitement within him. He could understand now the urgency of Endor's watch on the hotel, the man's deep-seated hysteria, and the meaning of the revolver on his bureau. It was not intended for Karlene. It was the price for failure of his mission. More importantly, the story was his at last. It was all there. He could see it. KARLENE UPSETS CZECH ATOM PLAN; FLED COUNTRY AT BEHEST OF FELLOW SCIENTISTS. . . .

"Now do you understand, Philip?"

His mind came back to her. He said, "I suppose he told Clayfield about this?"

She shook her head. "He would never tell Clayfield, or anyone."

"Why not?"

"It was hard enough for him to leave our country. But to go to America as an informer—no, Philip, that is for opportunists and charlatans. My father will keep this secret as though he never knew it. And if he goes to America—as I pray he will—he will be able to walk, as he has always walked, with honor. He asks merely to be free."

"Freedom is fine," he said sharply, "but you've got to fight on the side of it."

"I cannot believe freedom prefers traitors and informers to honorable men."

As if to break off a conversation she did not care to pursue, she slid her arm under his. They walked off the bridge and along the dusty road to the Spa Bonnar.

He was scarcely conscious of this part of the walk. His mind churned with matters of morality and ethics it had never before encountered, and when they came through the lower gateway he stopped suddenly and faced her.

"Why do you tell me this, Moussia?"

"Why?" She looked up at him. Her lovely face was soft and helpless, and her eyes were deep and brown and so luminous that he felt he could see into the depths of her mind.

“Why, Philip? Because we are alone, my father and I, and I am a woman, and we have only one friend. What else can I say, Philip?”

“You shouldn’t have told me.”

She smiled. “You must have known dreadful women in the past. I feel I can tell you everything. I feel close to you, Philip.”

He turned his face away from her and they continued the rest of the way in silence. When they reached the terrace she touched his hand and went into the hotel.

Clayfield stood alone on the parapet, leaning low over it and staring intently across the river. His mouth was grim. He scarcely turned his head as Channing came up beside him.

“There he is, Channing. Bold as brass. See him?” Endor sat at his window atop the Lion d’Or, a scant hundred yards across the river. He made no effort to hide himself. His gaunt frame was clearly outlined in the open window and he looked implacably toward the luxury hotel.

“Things are not good,” the oilman said without taking his eyes from his adversary. “I suppose you’ve heard.”

Channing said, “Yes, I’ve heard.”

“Karlene is hedging. He’s nervous, the old man, and I’m sure it’s that bastard across the river who’s made him nervous.”

“What are you going to do about it?”

Clayfield said, “I’ve already done it. I know men, Channing, and when they’re wavering they need a strong nudge. I’ve just told Karlene that I’m leaving here at eleven tomorrow morning and I expect him to be ready to come with me. He’ll come all right. I’m sure of it. Besides, I know all about this Endor business, and I’ve cut that connection good and sharp.”

Channing was puzzled. “Connection?”

“Sure. We found out all about it. Endor’s been sending messages through a chambermaid in the hotel, some Communist woman. She must have informed Prague originally. Anyway, we’ve got her, and so far she’s confessed she delivered a note from Endor under Karlene’s door this morning. What the note said I don’t know, but you can guess how these Communists work—hypnosis or drugs or threats or something, like at these fake trials of theirs.”

Channing recalled his impression of Endor, how the man had acted at first as if he expected an accomplice. He said, “So that’s how it happened, a chambermaid in the hotel.”

“Some German woman. They’re clever, these Communists, but not clever enough. We’ve got her under questioning, and if she’s here illegally she’ll be

driven to the immigration station at Sedan and tossed out of the country. It's no more than she deserves——” Clayfield crinkled his eyes against the low-lying sun across the fields and he stared once more at Endor. “I suppose that bastard is waiting to hear from her again. Well, he won't.”

6

Channing sat at his typewriter. He had written the story. It lay on top of the keys, two crisp sheets of paper filled with double-spaced copy. It had an exciting lead: BONNAR ARGONNE PROVINCE FRANCE STOP. (He could let the date line ride now; he had wrapped up the story.) AN EXHAUSTIVE PLAN TO EXPLORE NORTHERN MORAVIAN MOUNTAINS FOR URANIUM OXIDE COMMA SECRETLY DRAWN UP UNDER PERSONAL DIRECTION OF PREMIER KLEMENT GOTTWALD COMMA WAS THE COMPELLING REASON FOR ESCAPE TO FREEDOM OF CZECHOSLOVAKIAS FAMED SCIENTIST GREGOR KARLENE STOP THIS CORRESPONDENT LEARNED SAFTERNOON THAT LESSEN TWO WEEKS AGO GOTTWALD HIMSELF VISITED KARLENES HOME AND INSTRUCTED NOBEL PRIZE SCIENTIST TO ACCEPT LEADERSHIP OF NATIONS SUPREME BID FOR ATOMIC POWER. . . .

His hand pressed down on the cradle telephone. He told himself over and over again that this was a routine assignment, that he had no duties beyond those to his editor. If there was a higher duty it was to his country.

This seemed to him a compelling reason. He picked up the phone quickly, as though he might suddenly change his mind, and called Paris. It seemed an eternity and all the time he kept his mind glued to the story and to Bendels.

Finally he had Mittler on the line and he felt easier. He was in an old familiar groove: a good story, a clear line to Paris, and the clatter of teletypes on the other end.

“Okay, brother,” Mittler was saying. “If you've got the story, spill it.”

“Are you ready, Junior?”

“Ready as a call gal on Saturday night, you lucky man. You can just get under the wire for the New York evenings, and believe me, Bendels is going nuts. He's queried us three times asking if you've come through. All right, let's have it.”

Even now he did not know whether he would send the story. Once more he argued fiercely with himself. The woman was another acquaintance, part of an assignment. If he weakened now it would happen over and over again. Tomorrow he would be back in Brussels. Anything he felt could be neatly drowned in a couple of glasses of pernod. And then a corner of his mind raised a tiny rebellion against its own dispassion, and he saw Moussia and her father in a new light. He saw them clearly. And he saw himself clearly. They were

fugitives fleeing in the night, the hunted, the journeying, the manipulated; and he, by an inscrutable process of history, an equation by time out of war and geography, he was secure because he was an American.

He was wretched.

“Hello! God damn this phone. Hello! Are you there. Phil?”

“I’m here, Junior.”

“What are you waiting for?”

“I haven’t got it, Junior. Just wanted to send a message.”

Mittler groaned. “For Christ’s sake.”

“Will you take the message?”

“Sure, why not?”

“Just Say, KARLENE STILL REFUSES TALK SORRY.”

“It’s your funeral, Phil. The opposition will be up there any time now.”

“I guess so, Junior. It’s my funeral.”

He didn’t wait to say good-by. He closed the phone and sat at his writing table and looked out through the open doors. The sun was low and red on the fields and the shadows of men walking before it were long. It came to him with a start that only twenty-four hours before he had first seen the same sun on the same fields.

BOOK 2

THE TORCH

CHAPTER FIVE

It was not yet dark. In the western sky an orange glow persisted against the encroachment of night and produced a delicate diffusion of colors which gave to the squat old dwellings of Bonnar a certain counterfeit charm. A sensitive mind, viewing the village in this long, purple moment, might have conceded within its walls an intonation of vespers, or, among the less devout, a humble contemplation of time and beauty.

But the narcotic loveliness of this day's twilight did not affect the villagers. They were alert. A score of them sat in the courtyard of the Lion d'Or and kept a watchful eye on the *mairie*, which was next to the church. A few stood on the cobblestones outside the *mairie*, the men thoughtfully smoking their pipes, the women whispering in a conspiratorial huddle. Along the Rue de la Victoire almost every door was open. Whole families crowded the stoops of their dwellings. For the moment supper was forgotten.

A short time earlier the concierge Oscar had marched Anny into the *mairie*. The way he held her was significant, his large, thick hand gripping her arm tightly. The look on his face was significant. Everything about this matter was significant, especially that Oscar and the German woman were seen to walk directly through to the rear of the *mairie* where the office of the *garde champêtre* was situated. Only a handful of villagers had seen them, but after the day's speculation about the mysterious stranger from Czechoslovakia and the famous scientist at the Spa Bonnar, not more than a spark of information was required to set off a blaze of reaction up and down the Rue de la Victoire.

The wives, who usually paid scant attention to whatever excitement beset their men, were this time fully aroused, and not a single complaint was heard about supper which lay cold on the kitchen tables. For months they had whispered about the German woman who lived shamelessly with the cripple Tramont, but even their whispers were frustrated by an aggravating lack of facts. These two had never talked to the villagers nor did they appear on the street except late at night. Moreover, the perversions which undoubtedly took place in the shack could not pass the lips of the good women of Bonnar. Sometimes a coterie of wives, driven by curiosity, discussed the possibility of a petition to the mayor to inquire into the moral basis of this unnatural union, but after all, the cripple was a hero of France and it was difficult to deny him his pleasure with this well-shaped German wench.

Now they stood in the street and peered through the dusk at the lighted windows of the *mairie*. They waited with secret satisfaction. Soon they would know everything.

The mayor emerged from his office and went to the next building, which was the Bureau des Postes, Télégraphes et Téléphones. His face was grave. He was seen to enter the booth which contained the only telephone in the village. When he came out it was noted that his face was even graver. He paused to speak confidentially to a group of men standing in the street and then returned to the *mairie*.

Word passed quickly from the group in the street to those waiting in the courtyard of the Lion d'Or and thence from house to house. The whispering in the village made a crisp sound like a plague of grasshoppers loose on a freshly mown field.

The mayor had merely said that the German woman had violated the hospitality of France and would be deported, but everyone agreed he was understating the case to cover up his own dereliction of duty in not having inquired previously into this shameful liaison. It required only a few minutes of discussion for the villagers to conclude that the woman was nothing but a spy.

The moon edged over the shoulder of high ground beyond the village. Full night had fallen. The people whispered and waited. An occasional wail from a hungry child broke across the quiet street.

Presently Anny emerged from the *mairie*. She was closely flanked by Oscar and the *garde champêtre*, the latter wearing his badges of office, which were a kepi and an old-fashioned horn slung at his hip. The people in the street stood aside as the three began their walk toward the bridge.

Neither man put a hand to the prisoner. Oscar watched the woman grimly. The *garde champêtre*, a dried-out little man no taller than Anny, walked solemnly, his face full of troubled dignity, and he carefully refrained from looking at his friends who lined the street. Anny studied the cobblestones. Her eyes were dry and curiously empty, her arms hung lifeless, and she marched, willingly it seemed, between her captors.

From the Lion d'Or's courtyard a woman's voice was heard to say, "Let her walk barefoot on the stones. Let her know how Gestapo torture feels."

Another voice said bitterly, "My Etienne's feet bled on these stones."

One could not know whether Anny heard these voices. Her face was expressionless, like a child whose mind has failed to grasp anything except that she is deeply in trouble.

They passed through the square and moved along the narrow street.

Families leaned from the stoops of their dwellings and silently eyed the German woman, but their hostility was well controlled and for a time not a voice rose above the clump of shoes on the cobblestones.

Then a fat woman leaned out of a window and cried sharply, “Dirty *Boche!*” The *garde* turned to her and flicked his fingers by way of reprimand, but this sharpened her defiance and she shouted after them, “Dirty *Boche!* . . . Dirty *Boche!*” The epithet rang through the quiet street and was taken up by children, whose small, high voices spoke the words gleefully. “Dirty *Boche,*” they chortled. “Dirty *Boche* . . .”

Anny did not seem to hear. Her eyes remained glued to the cobblestones and her peasant face was a mask devoid of meaning.

The three passed the little clearing on which sat the monument to the dead of the resistance. They had almost reached the lane which led to the bridge. A woman darted out of a nearby house, slipped under Oscar’s restraining arm, and planted herself in front of Anny, bringing the party to a halt. She was a lean, elderly woman, sallow and unhappy of face.

“No, Mady, no,” the *garde* pleaded.

The Frenchwoman glared at Anny. “I must do this,” she said coldly, and slapped the German hard across the face. “It is for my Georges who never came back.”

Anny lifted her head to look on her tormentor. Her lips moved almost imperceptibly but no word passed them.

The Frenchwoman said, “Do you understand? It is for my Georges who never came back from your accursed country!”

The *garde* mumbled, “Please, Mady, it is not the proper thing to do.”

“Why don’t you say something, you German whore!” the Frenchwoman cried. She searched Anny’s empty face for a reaction, and, finding none, she caught hold of the German’s dress at the neck and ripped it with all her strength.

Anny looked at her own nakedness and reached for the panel of cloth which had fallen to her waist and pulled it up over her breast, holding it there. She regarded the other woman emptily and fingered her torn dress.

Suddenly the Frenchwoman clapped her hands over her face and shook with sobs. The *garde* pushed her gently to one side and the three continued on. They turned into the lane and marched undisturbed to the bridge.

From the threshold of his hut on the bank Jacques Tramont saw them. He had been waiting for Anny to return home. He called out to her and began to work his crutches frantically in an attempt to climb the steep bank, but

stumbled before he could reach the top.

Anny did not turn her head. She closed her eyes and walked blindly between her captors the rest of the way across the bridge.

From the softly lighted terrace of the hotel Clayfield watched as Anny and the *garde* climbed into a small delivery van which had been waiting at the gateway below. The oilman thrust his hands angrily in the pockets of his linen dinner jacket and turned to Channing, who stood beside him.

“That woman has been mishandled. I don’t like it.”

Channing said, “This was a garrison town during the occupation. I imagine the Germans did a lot worse.”

“Well, no matter what she’s done, I hate to see a woman shoved around.”

Then the van moved off in a flurry of dust. Clayfield glanced uncomfortably along the parapet to where Aleksandrow stood with Giselle.

The Hungarian was beaming on his magnificently gowned mistress. He said, “Let us go in, my dear. We have time for a bottle of wine before dinner.”

Giselle twisted her pretty mouth but said nothing. The van had disappeared from sight, and she watched the dust settling down on the road.

“Come, Giselle. You’ve seen enough.”

“I’ve seen too much, Simon.”

Aleksandrow chuckled. “Then we’ll have two bottles of wine. Would you like that better?”

She said, “Twenty bottles might not be enough.”

He lit a black, gold-tipped cigarette and studied her morose face in the flare of the match.

“Come along,” he said harshly, and this time she went with him into the hotel.

A moment later Oscar appeared on the terrace and approached the two Americans.

“She will never trouble you again, Mr. Clayfield,” he said in a humble voice which was curiously unfit for his great frame. “And, sir, the authorities are much indebted to you and Mr. Aleksandrow. The mayor himself spoke to Sedan on the telephone.”

Clayfield said, “What happened in the village? Who tore her dress?”

“It was nothing, Mr. Clayfield. A mere incident.”

“Well, I don’t like it. We don’t mishandle women in America, no matter

who they are.”

“It is regrettable, sir.”

“What about this war veteran she lived with?”

“I am sure he will be removed to a military hospital.”

Clayfield took a few troubled steps back and forth in front of the concierge. Then he said, “This is what I want you to do, Oscar. I want you to draw some money from the cashier—say, twenty thousand francs—and give it to this veteran. Don’t tell him where it came from. Just give it to him.”

“As you wish, sir. It is most generous of you.”

“Well, do it as soon as you can.” He looked away rudely as if Oscar’s presence repelled him, then turned back. “One more thing, Oscar. I want you to make sure this Communist, this Endor, doesn’t get near the hotel. He’ll try, now that he’s lost his messenger. Get after him the second he puts one of his God-damned feet on this side of the bridge.”

The concierge nodded with great assurance. “Leave it to me, Mr. Clayfield.”

When Oscar had gone the oilman dourly studied the windows on the apartment floor. He said to Channing, “I’m glad old Karlene stayed up in his room all day. He’d be upset by this sort of thing.”

Channing asked, “Have you seen him since this afternoon?”

“No, I’m letting him stew it out by himself. I’m sure he’ll decide the right way tomorrow morning. The funny thing is, Channing, once he gets to America he’ll be crazy about the place, the job, everything. I know it. He’ll forget about Prague soon enough. It’s just a little sudden for him right now, that’s all.” He clapped his fist into the palm of his other hand and said, “I need a drink. How about you?”

Channing didn’t reply. His attention had been drawn to the customs hut on the frontier, and now he pointed it out and said, “What do you make of that?”

A set of floodlights based in the verges of the road played on the square, ugly shack, causing it to stand out sharply against the dark fields beyond. From its flagstaff a French tricolor fluttered limply in the evening wind. It was at half-mast.

Clayfield said, “That’s strange. The flag shouldn’t be up at all after dark. I wonder what’s happened.”

“I’ve got an idea,” Channing said, “but I’m going to make sure.”

Albert Bonneval sat on a small wine keg, his back reclining against the front wall of his shack. He smoked a pipe. His uniform cap was propped over his forehead so that its peak covered his eyes against the glare of the floodlights. All that could be seen of the man's face were the tip of his nose, his tiny chin, and his prodigious mustaches.

At the sound of Channing's approach he lifted his cap and peeped out. Then he promptly restored it and continued to draw placidly on his pipe.

"Good evening, M'sieu Bonneval."

From under his virtual blindfold the old man grumbled, "It's you again. What do you want now?"

"I would like to talk to you."

Bonneval muttered, "I would advise you to address yourself to the secretariat of the Quai d'Orsay, which concerns itself with the foreign press." He added tartly, "You may mention my name if you wish."

Channing smiled. "I am honored, M'sieu Bonneval. But it is difficult to discuss anything when I can't see your face."

"Ahh! You wish to see my face. It strokes my vanity." Albert shoved his cap to the back of his head, pulled at his mustaches, and grimaced impishly at the American. "I have usually found pride in my intelligence, very seldom my face. Very seldom."

Channing looked around for a place to sit. He finally spied another wine keg at the side of the shack and pulled it out front. Then he lit a cigarette.

"I am curious, M'sieu Bonneval——"

The old man said irritably, "You wish to know why the lights have been turned on and why the flag is at half-mast. No?"

"Exactly."

"You are more intelligent than I thought."

Channing said graciously, "Thank you."

"This flag, it is a code, a signal to the village. In these times one must be prepared for every emergency."

"What does it denote when it is at half-mast?"

Albert bared his stained teeth in a devilish grin. "It denotes, my dear friend, that I will not play my accordion in the tavern tonight."

"I see."

"It is a sign of my displeasure," the old man went on smugly. "Each time I am disturbed I lower the flag this way. They see it well enough," he said, wagging his thumb in the direction of the village. "Now that I have satisfied

your curiosity, go away and let me smoke my pipe in peace.”

Channing ignored the dismissal. He said, “You don’t like what happened to the German woman, Anny.”

“If you know everything,” the other said testily, “why do you bother me?”

Channing asked, “Did you admit her into France?”

“Naturally.”

“Without papers?”

The old man snorted. “Everyone must carry a paper, *hein*? I suppose you would demand papers from an infant as it drops from the womb.”

“She’s an adult and a German.”

“Baah! The Lord Jesus Christ was an adult and an Israelite. If He walked through here with a halo shining about His head and the breath of God on His mouth, would I demand papers? *Hein*? But I have no doubt that the fine people of Bonnar would crucify Him in their own good time.”

He knocked his pipe against the wall of his shack. “Now that I have instructed you beyond your capacity to understand, you may go back to your lechery on the hill.”

Channing sat firm. “Who is this woman?”

The old man snorted, “She is somewhat less than nobody, a Sudeten German wench whose mind is as unblemished as a girl of ten. She knows nothing beyond the instincts that God gave her. She is a fine woman.”

Albert got up from his wine keg and waved his pipe at Channing. “Have you ever considered what a beautiful thing it would be if human life ended, like that of a spaniel, at the age of ten? What a magnificent world we would have! What goodness, what happiness! Have you ever considered it?”

Channing said, “No.”

“I thought not.”

“How did she meet this Jacques Tramont?”

Albert resumed his seat. “Ahh, that is a story. She was a scrubwoman in a prison hospital near Leipzig. You must understand, of course, that, having the simple instincts of a child, she did not know enough to hate the French. She lacked the intelligence to hate anybody. In her childishness she regarded Jacques Tramont as a broken toy, a youth without legs, and when he was given stumps she began to teach him to walk.

“*Voilà!* The war ends, and she is still helping him to walk. Lacking a civilized brain, it does not occur to her to let the man struggle by himself. She goes along with him. Now do you understand? *Hein*? Do you want me to

demand papers from her?”

A picture of the woman marching empty between her captors crossed Channing’s mind. He said, “Then why didn’t you try to stop them tonight?”

The old man said, “Have you never heard of the law?”

He took a large silver watch out of a pocket on the inside of his tunic and contemplated its face. Then he brought himself to his feet, reached through the door of his shack, and pulled a switch. The floodlights went out. Scowling, he shuffled back to the wine keg and resumed his seat.

“*Eh bien*, what more do you want?”

Channing shook his head. He did not need to ask anything further. Questions occurred to him, but they were suddenly irrelevant. He knew Anny was innocent of any wrongdoing, he knew it conclusively as if the old man were God Himself handing down the judgment.

“Then good night, my young friend,” Albert muttered. “Go dance with your particular devil.” He leaned his head against the wall of the shack and drew placidly on his pipe.

The American walked away slowly, guided along the road by a diffused and lovely half-moon. In the presence of this injustice he was angry, bitterly, wretchedly angry; and out of his anger flowed a grave satisfaction that he had not broken faith with Moussia. For the first time since he had closed the phone on Mittler he knew that what he had done was altogether right. He did not try to reason it out, but allowed himself to ponder the change that had come over him since he had arrived in Bonnar, an eager newspaperman on an assignment no different than a thousand others.

As he plodded along the road he saw Clayfield looking down on him from the parapet. When he turned into the driveway he heard violin music spilling over the terrace, and the sound had for him a certain obscene charm.

3

To Clayfield, waiting impatiently at the parapet, the music which rode out on the quiet night, the lilt of polite laughter, and the tinkle of glasses, all were fraught with warnings echoing out of a dimly remembered past. He had never completely shaken off the stern influences of his preacher father who used to travel the cow towns of the Southwest propounding the fearsome gospel that sin must always bring down swift, earthly punishment. It had channeled his behavior as a man and an industrialist, with the result that he had never knowingly committed a dishonesty, never a cold and deliberate cruelty. Though churchgoing had become for him a mark of respectability rather than a

confession of faith, the remnants of belief could not easily be shed. His fear of retribution had over the years deteriorated into a deeply felt superstition.

Now he was troubled. It was the woman's torn dress that troubled him; this and the way she had walked meekly but unbroken to her punishment. If only they had not torn her dress, the fools!

He tried to bring himself to the major problem, and wondered what decision was forming in Karlene's mind. But the spectacle of the woman kept recurring until it became a symbol of his superstition and he came to feel he would need righteousness on his side for the successful outcome of his mission.

When Channing walked up to the terrace he hurried forward to meet him.

"What was it?"

Channing said, "I'm sure that woman had nothing to do with Endor."

"That's absolutely ridiculous!"

"The customs man down there knows her pretty well."

Clayfield frowned. "You'd better tell me about it."

The newspaperman recounted what he had heard. As Clayfield listened his face grew flushed and angry. He retreated to the parapet and leaned wearily against it.

"I don't understand it," he said. "Oscar knows the woman, he knows she's a Communist. Besides, she's confessed. Aleksandrow assured me she confessed to everything . . ." His voice trailed off out of its own lack of conviction. He shrugged and said, "I suppose there's nothing I can do about it."

"Nothing. She was here illegally anyway."

"Then she was breaking the law."

"Sure," Channing said carelessly.

The sardonic note annoyed the oilman. He glowered at Channing. He said challengingly, "There's one thing, by God. This fellow Endor must respect action. He hasn't been so cocky since we nabbed the woman."

"Don't count on it."

"Well, I haven't seen him around in the last hour. I wouldn't be surprised if he's pulled out."

"I'd be surprised."

"God damn it!" Clayfield muttered. "What do you want me to do? I'd give a thousand dollars to get the woman back."

"Maybe Aleksandrow would be interested in the proposition."

“I know, I know. You don’t trust the man. Well, neither do I. He was the first person I thought of last night when I heard about Endor. But it doesn’t make sense, Channing, it just doesn’t make sense. Don’t you understand? He’s got everything to lose by double-crossing me.”

“He railroaded the German woman.”

“No,” Clayfield said firmly. “I won’t believe it for a minute. He may have made an honest mistake but—but—oh hell, it’ll all be over anyway in the morning. Let’s go get a drink.”

“I could use one,” Channing said, but he was not to have it just then. When he came through the lobby Oscar summoned him to the telephone. Paris was on the line.

Mittler’s voice came through against a background of clattering teletypes.

“Another message, Phil. You’ve really got Bendels jumping through hoops on this one. You want to drive the man nuts?”

“Read it, Junior.”

“I hope you’re sitting someplace where you can’t fall over because it starts off real good this time. It’s Bendels at his best——”

“Will you please read it?”

“Okay, brother, here goes. YOU DEAD OR DRUNK QUERY OTHERWISE FAIL UNDERSTAND INABILITY ASK KARLENE FEW SIMPLE QUESTIONS ABOUT CONDITIONS UNDER COMMUNISTS STOP REPLY SPECIFICALLY. BENDELS. That’s it, Phil.”

Channing didn’t reply at once. He stood with the phone held against his ear and wondered on his own lack of reaction to Bendels’ message. It occurred to him that he was involved here as a person rather than as a reporter, that his responsibility to Bendels had suddenly become less urgent than his responsibility to himself. He listened absently to the panting rhythm of the teletypes.

“It’s a shocker, eh, Phil? What’s the reply?” Channing said, “Message him this. UNEXPECTED DEVELOPMENTS MAKE IT INADVISABLE FILE ANYTHING TONIGHT STOP POSSIBILITY FULL STORY BREAKS TOMORROW MORNING. That’s all, Junior.”

Mittler said, “Between you and me, it won’t wash.”

“What do you know about it?” Channing roared into the phone.

“Plenty,” was the prompt reply. “If you’ll hold your horses I’ll tell you something Bendels doesn’t know yet. You’re going to have the opposition up there before morning. They’ve got you located.”

Channing stiffened. “Who spilled it?”

“It’s one of those breaks, Phil.” Mittler’s voice was low and sympathetic. “I thought you were going to get away with it, at least till tomorrow. Happened in the damnedest way. About ten minutes ago a squib came up on the French agency machine. Date-lined from Lille. It said the governing director of the Polytechnique up there has proffered an invitation to Karlene to accept the chair of geophysics. And then at the bottom, just as innocent as a punch in the nose, it said that Professor Karlene is now resting at the Hotel Spa Bonnar in Argonne Province. I wonder how they knew.”

Channing was struck by the irony of it. Seeking to protect her father from those who would pry at his secret, Moussia had unwittingly loosed on him the whole world’s press. He glanced at his watch. It was nearly nine o’clock. He estimated the crowd from Paris would arrive between midnight and morning.

He said, “It can’t be helped, Junior.”

“Yeah, I’ll bet I was thinking the same thing as you. What happens when the squib hits Bendels’ desk?”

Channing said, “Spare me his message. I’ll take it for granted.”

“It’ll be a stinger.”

“I couldn’t care less, Junior.”

Mittler whistled into the phone. “What’s got into you, brother? You must be in the middle of one hell of a situation.”

“Exactly what it is. One hell of a situation.”

“Well, congratulations!” Mittler yelled. “You’re getting human. It sounds like a gal!”

Channing muttered his good-bys and closed the phone. It was difficult to get angry with Mittler.

4

The sound of Aleksandrow’s voice drew Channing into the lounge. “It is like the last night of a stormy voyage,” the Hungarian was saying to the small company assembled around his table. “Who knows if we will ever be together again? I remember so well a voyage to Alexandria I took in 1938. At my table I had a very pleasant German who called himself Rommel. Months later in Paris I was having a drink with a friend I had met on that ship and naturally we reminisced about the voyage. He mentioned a quiet Englishman, a military man, who had sat at his table. The name, I believe, was Montgomery. It is intriguing, no?”

Aleksandrow looked brightly about him. His eyebrows rose and his mouth

fell, and for a moment he resembled a slightly indignant owl. He had not created a ripple of animation.

Giselle sat deep in a chair, her bare shoulders drawn inward as if to shield herself from contact with him. She had been drinking heavily. Her eyes were filmy and locked themselves on the interior of her goblet. By way of reaction to Aleksandrow's gay chatter, she swished the champagne in her goblet, brought it impulsively to her mouth, and drained it. Without looking up, she tapped her fingernail against the goblet. A waiter refilled it.

Clayfield was not drinking. He was balanced on the edge of his chair and stared at the surface of a low table which separated him from Aleksandrow. His rugged face was both solemn and angry, and but for the presence of General and Madame Perrault, it seemed that his temper would have exploded.

The general's hand held a pony of cognac. He sucked at his teeth before he brought the glass tremblingly to his lips. Madame Perrault, smug and aloof in the manner of the comfortably pensioned, wielded a crochet hook with her customary dexterity.

Channing came forward unobtrusively and took a chair which was neither in the group nor far apart from it. He had no desire to sit at Aleksandrow's table but was anxious to hear whatever Clayfield would have to say.

Aleksandrow chose to ignore his arrival. The Hungarian glumly observed the general's systematic sucking of his teeth and said, "I see you have already dined, *mon général*."

The old man grunted and nodded his head.

"Then you will excuse us," the Hungarian said, placing his empty goblet on the table with finality.

Giselle said, "I want another bottle of wine."

"But, my dear——"

"Another bottle of wine, Simon," she said thickly without looking at him.

"Of course," Aleksandrow said icily. He nodded to a waiter who was standing by.

Madame Perrault lifted her eyes from her work long enough to look severely at Giselle. Then all fell silent and listened to bright violin music which came strongly from the dining room.

The general coughed a little and said, "My servant tells me they arrested a dirty German in the town this afternoon. Did you know that?"

Aleksandrow said, "Yes, *mon général*."

"I was having my nap. I didn't see it," the old man complained. He sipped

his cognac and coughed and said in a quaking voice, "My servant tells me they have deported her. It is ridiculous. They should have shot her. . . ." The hand that held the cognac trembled. "That is the trouble with the authorities today. No courage. I was a just commander but very firm. When the extreme penalty was deserved I never hesitated to give the order. One must have courage. Nowadays they have no courage. I tell you——"

"Don't excite yourself, Gaspard," his wife cut in without looking up from her work.

"No courage," the old man muttered, and subsided, sniffing at his cognac.

Channing's glance fell on Clayfield. The oilman's rugged face had grown beet-red as if he might momentarily erupt. He moved to the edge of his chair until he was confidentially close to Aleksandrow, then he said in a low, stern voice, "Exactly what did this woman confess?"

The Hungarian waved his hands loftily. "You heard what Oscar said about her."

"I heard what Oscar said. I want to know what she confessed to you."

"My dear Mr. Clayfield, I am satisfied she is the guilty one." The Hungarian was clearly annoyed.

"You mean she's the one who informed Prague?"

"Yes, I am convinced."

Clayfield projected his face forward. "Can you prove it?"

"You are asking impossible things——"

"Can you prove it?"

The Hungarian looked about him with an expression of feminine pique. He drew no comfort from the others. Madame Perrault redoubled the speed of her crochet hook, the general had closed his eyes to the argument, and Giselle appeared to be concerned only with her wine.

He said, "I already regret that I accepted your commission. You are angry about Karlene, but sometimes one has to accept failure. I respect a good loser in business as well as at the *chemin* tables."

Clayfield refused to be deflected from his point.

"You can't prove it because you know she's not the one," he said bitterly, searching the other's pale eyes.

There was no reply. The two men stared at each other with delicately balanced hatred, and into the silence came the lilting sound of violins.

Then Giselle began to laugh. At first it was a quiet, drunken chuckle in the privacy of the wineglass she held close to her lips, but it drew nourishment

from the silliness of its own sound in the strained atmosphere and it grew in depth and hilarity. She pressed her hands over her mouth. Her eyes teared and her cheeks quivered. But the muffled laughter was uncontrollable, and suddenly she dropped her glass and fled from the lounge. The sound of her liberated laughter echoed back mawkishly from the lobby and then was lost.

Aleksandrow returned his pale, unperturbable eyes to the American. He said quietly, "I undertook a very difficult commission for you, Mr. Clayfield. I have delivered the man. I do not wish to discuss the matter further."

"All right. The matter is out of your hands."

"I shall leave in the morning. Our business can be completed in Paris."

Clayfield said, "I'll pay you for what I get. For what I get—and no more. You understand this clearly."

"I understand no——" The Hungarian didn't finish. The scowl on his fat face faded abruptly and gave way to pleasant inquiry.

Gregor Karlene came forward from the archway which gave entrance to the room. He walked slowly, as if doubtful of his strength. His shaggy head was held a little askew. The lines on his striking face seemed deeper and the curve of his back more pronounced.

A polite smile played on his mouth as he nodded his head to the company. When Clayfield pulled up a chair for him, he lifted a protesting hand.

"Thank you, Mr. Clayfield, I—I can't stay. It is only my daughter——" He looked about. "Have you seen Moussia?"

Clayfield said, "Why no, Professor. Not since this afternoon."

"Ah yes . . . this afternoon. I—I missed her. It is nothing."

"I'll have someone look around, Professor. She's probably out in the grounds——"

"Please," the old man said. "It is really nothing. One is naturally a little upset in strange surroundings. I am sure you understand."

Clayfield studied the scientist's face. His clear pensive eyes and the unruly tuft of hair which came down over his forehead produced a bizarre effect, like a boy suddenly grown ancient. His cheeks sagged deep into their hollows, and his lips played uncertainly with words he failed to utter. The way he stood, his tapering fingers holding to the back of a chair, he was a figure of dejection and yet of authority.

"Are you feeling better tonight, Professor?"

"Quite. I am quite well. I—I am sorry. I must have interrupted a pleasant party."

“Not at all. I wish you would join us,” Clayfield said.

“You are kind.” Karlene inclined his head with an easy graciousness. “I must go back to my room. There is much to be done, much to think about.”

As he turned, his eyes lit on Clayfield’s eager, inquiring face.

“You will excuse me, Mr. Clayfield. There are decisions to be made. The time is growing short.”

Clayfield nodded unhappily.

The old man stood absently a moment, then walked slowly from the room.

Along with the others, Channing watched him go. He wished Bendels could have been there, so he would know why it was impossible even to ask a few simple questions of this gentle, troubled, and curiously frightening old man.

Clayfield shifted in his chair and leaned toward Channing.

“He seems all right to me. I honestly believe he’s coming around to my way of thinking.”

Channing said, “He didn’t announce his decision.”

“Oh, I know that, but he’ll get around to it. He’s not as—well, independent as he was this afternoon. After all, what can he do except come along with me?”

Certain answers occurred to Channing but he had no time to voice them. The lounge was suddenly filled to overflowing with the lighthearted chatter of Helen Bartell and the Lermonds. The three tripped happily into the room, their arms burdened with items of pottery, rope sandals, small, round boxes of foie gras, and an assortment of wood-carved statuettes.

The Lermonds sank into chairs and dropped their loot noisily on the floor about them.

“What a safari!” Eric muttered, snapping his fingers impatiently for a waiter.

“It’s the cutest place, that village,” Helen fluttered, wedging herself into a chair beside Clayfield. “Really, Justin, you must see it. Lord knows what I’ll do with all this junk. I don’t know, I just adore buying things. And what do you think? We’re patrons of the village. Officially, too. We signed in a book and we became patrons. It only cost us a thousand francs each. Silly, isn’t it?”

“We spent hours in the tavern. It’s the cutest, dirtiest little place and the pernod was vile, but we did have four or five each. They were so happy to have us, we just couldn’t get away. Really, Justin, you shouldn’t be such an old stick-in-the-mud——”

Clayfield said, "I've been a little busy, Helen."

"Oh, I know, you big business people. You should be ashamed of yourself on a holiday like this. Wasn't it terrible about that German woman? We heard all about it. Dreadful woman."

Clayfield glanced helplessly about him. He said, "I've got to go into dinner now. I've got some things on my mind."

Eric mumbled, "By the Lord Harry, she is a chatterbox."

"Yes, of course. I am an awful talky creature, aren't I? Well, it's all so quaint but I do feel I need a bath. Oh, how are you, Mr. Aleksandrow. You get to feel a little crawly after sitting with these people. But it's wonderful how they respect us. It makes you feel so powerful or humble or something.

"Oh, and, Justin——" Helen lowered her voice so that it would not carry beyond everyone in the company. "I've a bit of scandal for you. This professor's daughter who's staying here, such a fine face. You wouldn't think *she'd* be like that. I'm sure she didn't see us. Little old eagle eye me, though. Just as quick as a flash, I saw her sneak into that funny old hotel and run by the bar and up the stairs. I could have sworn she was the most innocent creature——well, still waters run deep. Do you think she's having an affair with that Communist? They're both Czechs, you know. Well, it's her own business, after all. I simply must go take a bath. I feel so crawly——"

"Oh, do stop talking, Helen," Eric called out. "What'll you drink? I've nabbed a waiter."

"Pernod," she chirped, gathering up her purchases.

A light came into the Hungarian's face. He leaned confidentially toward Clayfield and said, "Perhaps a drink is in order. It is possible we've both been looking in the wrong direction."

"No," Clayfield said shortly. He turned to consult Channing but the newspaperman was already striding out of the hotel.

5

Channing ran to the parapet and peered across to the upper floor of the Lion d'Or. The shade had been drawn on the window of Endor's room but he saw an edge of light along the sill and shadows moving across it. He turned and ran down the driveway.

He did not know why he was running. Moussia feared Endor, hated him, and yet she had gone to him. This was reason enough; beyond it he would not stop to think. When he reached the bridge an ache of exhaustion ranged across

his chest and he paused, panting, against the rail.

All the things he had scarcely noted crowded suddenly into his mind: the way she called the man Nicolai, always Nicolai; and the bitter, tender little stories of his devotion to her. He remembered the swiftness of her defense when he had said Endor was a fool. He could still hear Aleksandrow's modulated voice saying, "It is possible we've both been looking in the wrong direction. . . ." He didn't trust Aleksandrow, and the question arose in his mind whether he could trust his own judgment in relation to this woman who had so clearly inserted herself between him and the incisive habits of his profession. He looked down into the moon-struck river and tried to balance his thoughts.

There was no need to run. She had gone to Endor's room of her own volition; therefore she was in no danger. He carried on across the bridge, walking slowly at first, but his pace increased with the tempo of his thoughts and soon he was hurrying again.

Several villagers stood in the road before the stone monument erected to the dead of the resistance. A few carried bunches of flowers in their arms. Others had already been there, for the base of the monument was heaped with flowers, and these pious, gnarled folk were searching for a suitable place to lay their offering.

As he passed Channing heard them mutter darkly about the dirty *Boche*. There came into his mind a picture of Albert sitting on his wine keg on the frontier, sitting and pondering in all likelihood on the honors which are heaped on the war dead in order to make noble the sins of the survivors.

Then he came into the square. The courtyard gates of the Lion d'Or were open but he could not bring himself to enter. This affair was her own; he was her friend, not her lover.

The low, wide church facing the inn cast a diagonal shadow across the square. He stood in the shadow, his eyes glued on the courtyard. He waited a long time, lighting one cigarette from the butt of another. Villagers strolled up from the monument and went into the tavern. Each time the door opened a hum of conversation intruded on the placid summer night. Then for a time no one came or went.

The door opened finally and Moussia's auburn hair gleamed momentarily in the light of the threshold. She walked quickly across the courtyard and headed in the direction of the bridge. Her heels struck an angry staccato on the cobblestones. She carried her head high and her hands were thrust deeply in the pockets of a loose red jacket she wore over her white dress.

She paid no attention to the clatter of Channing's pursuit. It was not until he came up beside her and caught her arm that she saw him and halted.

Her mouth was sullenly curved and her eyes wide with excitement. She breathed hard. He searched her face for some signal which would give direction to his inquiry and, finding none, he said, "You were with Endor."

"Yes."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"There was something I had to say to him alone."

"This afternoon you said you could tell me everything."

She looked at him strangely. "I couldn't tell you this."

He asked bitterly, "Was it a success?"

"I don't know." She seemed distracted, and began to walk toward the bridge. "I must get back to my father."

He came after her.

"For God's sake, Moussia, what is it?" he said, and pulled roughly at her arm to swing her around.

In the quick movement her right hand flew out of her pocket and the revolver it had been holding clattered on the cobblestones. Its blue steel jacket gleamed in the moonlight which flooded the deserted street.

She stooped quickly to retrieve it but he reached it first and slipped it into his pocket.

"What have you done, Moussia?"

She studied his tense, tight-lipped face. "No, Philip. It has not yet reached that point."

"Why the revolver?"

"If he follows us tomorrow, wherever we go, I will kill him. I went to warn him." She spoke the words evenly; there could be no doubt that she meant them. She said, "Give me the revolver, Philip."

"Let me keep it."

"Give it to me, Philip. I must protect my father."

Reluctantly he withdrew the revolver and placed it in her pocket. Her cool hand came down quickly over his. They walked this way across the bridge.

He asked, "What hold does he have over your father?"

"Nicolai knows," she said. It was as though she were speaking angrily to herself. "He knows he is torturing my father."

"By standing on the bridge? What difference does that make?"

She said, "It is hard for you to understand, Philip. If they had sent anyone else—anyone, even Gottwald himself—it would be different. But Nicolai

came. He is clever. He knows what he means to my father. A favorite student is to a teacher almost like a son, sometimes closer than a son. Nicolai represents the happiest years, the university, the friendships, the best memories of a lifetime. I could no longer bear to see how his presence tortures my father. I warned Nicolai it must stop.”

Channing said, “It was a mistake. You let him know he is succeeding.”

“I told him he can’t succeed. Whatever happens, we will never return to Prague——” She walked in silence a few steps. Then she said in a cold monotone, “Nicolai knows me well enough. If he follows us I will kill him.”

“Did you show him the gun?”

“Yes.”

“What did he say?”

“He shouted his phrases about the people’s republic. Nothing more. But I am satisfied. It is enough that he knows.”

They continued slowly along the dusty road. Channing felt the pressure of her soft hand on his.

He said, “You shouldn’t have gone alone. It was a man’s job. Why didn’t you ask me, Moussia?”

She stopped and looked at him earnestly. The hard determination had gone out of her and a gleam of tears came to the corners of her eyes.

“It is a nice thing to hear, Philip. But this is my affair. I had to do it alone.”

He was touched by many emotions; by chagrin that he had doubted her, by admiration for her courage, by a sudden physical yearning which came from deep within him, but mostly because he was warmed by her fierce sense of devotion. In the presence of it the life he had chosen for himself, the flight from hurt and responsibility he had treasured as his formula for contentment—this life seemed singularly empty.

He looked at her a long time. She was a new experience—her face, her single-minded devotion, her earnestness. He had made love to a great many women out of pleasure and passion, sometimes to simulate escape from the pressures of his work, often to steal for himself a measure of counterfeit tenderness from anyone who was willing to offer it. She drew out of him an ardor he had not suspected he possessed. It was a troubled thing and yet magnificent. He did not need to kiss her. The touch of her hand was enough.

They walked slowly now, hand in hand, through the Spa Bonnar’s gate.

He said, “Your father was downstairs. He was looking for you.”

“Then I must go quickly.”

When they reached the terrace both looked instinctively across the river to the village. Endor was on the bridge. Alone under the light, he leaned indolently against the rail.

Channing said, "There's the answer to your gun."

She darted to the parapet. "Look at him," she said bitterly. "He is trying to say to me, 'You up there in the great hotel, look at me down here——'" Her chin tightened.

"I know these Communists and their mock humility. I also know their ambition and their hunger for power. He doesn't frighten me and I will see to it he doesn't frighten my father. This I promise."

Then she went into the hotel.

6

The gala dinner planned by Aleksandrow, though it produced all the culinary and aromatic delights of which the Spa Bonnar's chef and sommelier were capable, was not gala. The Hungarian sat alone at a large table. The injured expression on his face, however, did not appear to have dulled his appetite; he ate solidly and was meticulous as ever about the flavor of the sauce and the temperature of the wine.

Across the room, Channing also sat alone. A few minutes before, Nason had come in to express Clayfield's regrets that he would not, after all, dine downstairs. The excitement of the day had exhausted him, and he had decided to take dinner in his apartment and to spend the evening preparing for his departure.

Even Helen Bartell and the Lermonds seemed to have been infected by the somber atmosphere which had descended upon the hotel since the arrest of Anny. They drank steadily; indeed, the wine steward spent much more time over their table than did the waiters, but without visible results. They contemplated one another glumly like honeymooners who have passed from ecstasy into reasonable doubt. When Helen observed, "Champagne again. I really don't like the stuff, but it's wonderful, isn't it?" she drew no more than a grunt of response from the others. The dance rhythms which the musicians were sending pointedly in their direction failed to entice them.

Henri Gutzmann, peering into the dining room on one of his periodic tours of inspection, raised his eyebrows slightly and tiptoed away, fearful for the *joie de vivre* of his establishment.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when Channing strolled out on the terrace. The night was magnificent. No mist came up from the fields to diffuse the

sharp lines of silver and shadow which etched the ancient dwellings against the fields. Endor was no longer on the bridge, nor did the window of his room across the river show a light.

The music in the hotel had stopped, and the only sound was a crisp, humming monotone which rose from the summer fields.

Then Channing heard a thin, distant overtone of laughter. He listened, and after a time his alert ears caught it again. It rode on the night air with a clear timbre; a woman's laughter, shrill, brief, and uninhibited. He was reminded of Giselle.

Guided by the sound, he moved to the side of the parapet closest to the frontier. The moon, low in the sky, threw a deep shadow across the front of the customs hut and he could see nothing of what might be transpiring there. Then he heard the laughter once more. It was Giselle's.

He went down to the road.

When he came close to the frontier he caught sight of her. She was sprawled across the open doorway of the hut, her back resting against the beam of the door and her legs stretched out on the step below. Her white cashmere coat was buttoned high to the neck, setting off the gleaming black of her hair. An almost empty bottle of cognac was on the step, and she held a tumbler loosely in her hand. She was in the last stages of drunkenness. Her eyes wandered in a confused little orbit bounded by the rim of her tumbler, and the way she was draped, almost prostrate, on the dusty threshold bore no relation to the conscious elegance with which she usually carried herself.

Albert Bonneval sat placidly on his wine keg, drawing on his pipe and gazing over the fields. His bizarre, expressionless profile was limned by moonlight. He signaled his awareness of Channing's presence by tweaking his nose, which caused a slight movement of his mustaches.

Giselle did not see Channing, who stood in the road before the hut. Her chin had dropped against her chest and she was mumbling thick, shapeless words. Then she chuckled to herself and drew up her head.

"You're a funny old man," she murmured drowsily.

Albert said, "My wit is only less remarkable than my intelligence."

She twisted her head to look at him. "Has anyone ever told you you're beautiful, old man? Happy I found you."

"It appears I am not to have one moment's peace tonight," Albert observed placidly. "I see someone has found both of us."

Giselle slapped at thin air. "Oh, go away, Simon," she muttered. "Go far away. Go find somebody else. I hate you, Simon. Hate you. Go away."

Channing stepped nearer. He said quietly, "It's me, Giselle."

"Don't know you. Who's you?" She reached for the bottle, splashed a drink into her glass, and pushed it against her mouth. The liquor dribbled off a corner of her chin, and she looked up sheepishly. Her eyes strained to find a suitable focus. It required a little time for her brain to absorb what she saw.

"He's in love with the Slav. You in love with the Slav? . . . Everybody in love with the Slav. . . . The old man makes me laugh. You don't make me laugh."

The old man had settled more cozily on his wine keg and was drawing contentedly on his pipe.

Channing moved forward once more. Now he stood over her.

"Why do you hate Simon?"

"Hate Simon. Finished with Simon. . . . Tonight I could be with you——" She chuckled uncontrollably and then hiccupped. "You love the Slav. . . . She is stuck up, the Slav."

"Tell me, Giselle. Why do you hate Simon?"

"She is stuck up. She is not a bastard child. . . ."

Channing looked at the old man, and the old man looked out on the fields.

"The old man knows," Giselle mumbled. "He's a beautiful old man. He knows. . . . I don't care if he knows. . . . I told him. Didn't I tell you, old man?"

She fell to chuckling again, and then her head moved in various ways as if she were conducting a violent discussion within herself. "I am a bastard child. . . . It doesn't matter. . . . I told the old man."

Channing said, "Of course it doesn't matter. Tell me about Simon. Why do you hate him?"

"They didn't tear her dress. . . . Not the Slav. . . . You love the Slav. . . . It doesn't matter. Wonderful girls, Slavs. Passionate . . ."

She dropped her glass and it rolled off the stair into the dust. Channing pushed it away and went down on his haunches so that his face was close to hers.

She turned to him and her eyes searched his face with wistful curiosity. She said, "Tear my dress and ravish me afterward. . . . Please ravish me afterward. . . . Please . . . No, you love the Slav. Why do you love the Slav? . . ."

He was afraid she would pass out, and he wanted to know about Simon. He said, "You hate Simon."

She nodded mawkishly. "I am beautiful. . . . I am very beautiful. . . . Take

me back with you. Make love . . .” She pouted. “Other men will love me. I am very beautiful. . . .”

“I will love you, Giselle. Why do you hate Simon?”

“Hate Simon . . . They tore her dress. Poor bastard child . . . Like me. They tore my dress. . . .” She closed her eyes. “The old man knows . . . I told him.”

Her hand that had held the glass went to her lips. She laughed awkwardly when she saw her hand was empty.

“Tell me, Giselle, why did they tear her dress?”

“Poor bastard child . . . They tore her dress. . . . Hate Simon. . . . He lost much money. . . . The Czech, he’s a fool. Did you know the Czech is a fool? . . .”

Her eyelids were drooping. Channing rubbed her neck behind her ears. She mumbled, “Love me . . .”

“Which Czech is a fool? Who, Giselle?”

“The Czech . . . A fool . . . Simon lost much money. Good . . . I want to sleep . . . Make love . . . I adore you. . . . Take me back. . . . Please take me back. Please . . . Love me . . . Love me . . .”

She tried to lift herself and her arm upset the bottle. It rolled down the stair and a little stream of cognac spilled out in the dust. Her lips moved without speaking. Her eyes closed and her mouth quivered with the heaviness of her breathing.

Channing shook her. She whimpered and slipped sideways on his shoulder. The limp weight of her told him it was no use. She had passed the last stage of drunkenness.

He turned to the old man.

“What was she telling you?”

Albert said smugly, “You heard her.”

“I mean before I came.”

The old man drew on his pipe and exhaled the smoke with a long, comfortable breath. He said, “It is extraordinary how everything comes to Albert Bonneval. She recounted for me her life’s history.”

“Did she tell you about Simon and the Czech? And money?”

“No.”

Channing looked at the woman’s face. She was sleeping like a feverish child, her mouth open, the rouge on her lips grotesquely untidy.

He said, “She was talking about a torn dress. What was it?”

The old man nodded. “As I say, it is extraordinary how everything comes to me. The poor woman was born out of wedlock. She doesn’t know who her father was, but according to the gossip in her village, he was an Austrian war prisoner. Her mother was the daughter of a landowner in northern Italy——” Albert paused to apply a match to his failing pipe.

“She was well enough brought up, I suppose, but the details of her conception were known to everyone in the village. It is curious how the sin of the parent always fades with the years and is transferred to the growing child. But, as you can well imagine, she became a beautiful girl and I dare say most popular with the young men. And not at all shy, not at all shy.

“Ah yes, the torn dress. I shall tell you about it,” the old man went on contentedly. “On her sixteenth birthday she went walking in a new dress her mother had bought for her in Udine. You are well acquainted with her vanity. One can imagine how proud she was of this dress. The rest is a simple cruelty. The other girls of the village, who were no doubt jealous, taunted her with the facts of her parenthood and tore her new dress from her shoulders. That night she ran off from the village and never went back. *Voilà!* You have the whole history of this poor woman.”

Channing said, “I think I understand.”

“Nonsense! You don’t understand,” the old man said. “Let me explain it. A long time ago in a village near Udine a girl has her pretty dress torn. And tonight in Bonnar a poor distracted widow called Mady Bouchard, whose husband Georges did not return from forced labor, tears the dress of a German woman. Because of these two small, unhappy events so far separated in time and space, the finger of suspicion is pointed at a villainous person called Simon.”

Albert shook his head sadly. “And yet, mark you,” he went on, “people will persist in saying that the ways of God are mysterious. They are not, you see. If one has the simple facts one may understand the ways of God.”

Channing said, “I would like to know more about Simon and the Czech.”

“Eventually we will know,” the old man said. “Of this I am sure. For tonight you have troubled me enough. Go home with your burden.”

Channing cradled the woman in his arms and carried her into the road.

“Good night,” Albert called out tartly, “and handle her gently. Gently, mark you!”

Channing carried her along the dusty, silent road. When he came into the driveway he stood her against a tree and rubbed her neck, trying to bring her to consciousness, but she would not respond and he carried her the rest of the way to the slumbering hotel.

The night clerk, perfectly trained to accept the behavior of the new aristocracy without so much as a flicker of his eyes, took a huge-ringed passkey from under his desk and quietly led the American with his burden up the stairs and unlocked the door of Aleksandrow's parlor.

Channing put her down on a chaise longue and placed a pillow under her head. She breathed heavily, convulsively. Then he heard a stir. Aleksandrow, clad in red silk pajamas, appeared at the door of an adjoining bedroom.

The Hungarian, his arms crossed on the upper bulge of his stomach, contemplated his prostrate mistress.

"It is most unladylike," he said in an injured voice. "I must think about it, whether I shall forgive her or not. Yes, I must think about it."

He turned his pale eyes on the American. "So long as she was in this condition, Mr. Channing, it was rude of you to bring her back. You might have kept her the rest of the night—perhaps indefinitely. I'm not sure I want her back."

Channing did not allow himself time to think of the man's age or of his own size. He had wanted to do this all evening, and now he was suddenly overcome with its compulsion. He walked toward the bedroom door, then cruelly, viciously slapped the Hungarian across the cheek—once, twice, three times!—and stood there, watching the effect.

Aleksandrow did not react. He appeared to be shocked into speechlessness. The imprint of a hand still lay red on his outraged face as Channing strode out of the room.

7

The moon had gone down and the river ran dark beside Tramont's shack. The cripple lay on his back in the grass between his dwelling and the river. His great boyish eyes stared at the glinting sky. He had lain thus inert since evening.

Many of the villagers had viewed him in this preposterous position. The fact that Jacques was lying there had come to them from Rosaire Brisebois, the machinist, whose smart but puny son was the Spa Bonnar's page. The boy had been instructed to stop in at Tramont's shack on his way home and to tell the unfortunate cripple that a generous gift awaited him if he would call at the servants' entrance of the hotel. The lad had done as he was told and (as he related it, panting and frightened, to his eager parents) he came upon Jacques lying in the grass, delivered the message, and then ran all the way home because he was terrified by the manner in which Jacques received the excellent

news. The cripple did not utter a word, not even a grunt. He lay in the grass and stared at the sky.

In a matter of minutes this report was brought to the tavern and set off a new burst of talk. There had not been such a day of sensations since the war. Most of the tipplers, since it was a magnificent evening for a little walk, edged gingerly onto the bridge and looked down on the cripple. They shook their heads sadly, speculated that one could catch a fever in the damp grass, conferred a few *maudits* on the head of the German wench, and went home to sleep.

When a hesitant light in the east pushed a range of stars out of the sky, Tramont stirred. He drew himself up to a sitting position, stared through the open door of the shack, then lay back again on the grass.

Soon the light in the east turned the river gray. Tramont reached for his crutch and cane and struggled upright. He gazed into his shack for a time, and then swung himself up the step. In the dull, uncertain light he regarded the blanket stretched smooth across the bed, then the table, then the shelf where his manuscripts and pencils lay neatly stacked between the dishes and the glassware.

Shifting his weight to the crutch, he flipped up his cane, caught it at its middle balance, and flung it hard at the shelf. Only a single tumbler was dislodged. It made a picayune sound as it smashed. With a wild sweep of his other arm he flung his crutch. It clattered harmlessly against a leg of the table. He swayed on his stumps and fell to the floor, sobbing.

CHAPTER SIX

SHORTLY after seven o'clock in the morning an automobile containing a reporter of the Agence France Presse, a feature writer for *Le Samedi*, and a photographer rolled up to the Spa Bonnar. The three men, boldly confronted by Oscar, who had just taken up his post, ambled sleepily around him, draped themselves over chairs in the lounge, and called weakly for coffee.

Not more than five minutes later a cavalcade of three dusty vehicles roared up the driveway and deposited in the hotel five journalists, two photographers, and a motion picture cameraman, all Americans. They demanded to know the number of Professor Karlene's room, and on being told that guests could not be disturbed at this early hour, they joined their French colleagues in the lounge and shouted for a waiter to bring them breakfast.

Oscar's troubled eyes contemplated the hall clock. It lacked twenty minutes before M'sieu Gutzmann was due to come down, and he debated whether he should disturb the director about this gross intrusion. He was still pondering the point when a small truck arrived, at the front entrance no less, and two surly-visaged youths carried into the lounge an assortment of wires, lamps, reflectors, and microphones, and without the slightest consultation began shoving about the hotel's furniture, pulling electric plugs out of the wall sockets, and arranging their own lamps and wires. Oscar hurried to his counter and called the director's apartment.

As Gutzmann was hastily descending the staircase two more automobiles swung into the driveway. From the first descended a stylish young woman who proclaimed she was from the New York *Herald Tribune*, and from the second appeared a dark little man with a face both furtive and belligerent (who turned out to be from the New York *Times*).

Gutzmann, a prisoner of his self-appointed traditions, walked through the lobby to the terrace, sniffed the warm, faultless morning, then with an extremely pained expression on his face stepped into the lounge. He was appalled.

The room on which he had lavished so much artistry and effort resembled nothing more than a wine *boîte* in Montparnasse. The talk was confusing, the laughter raucous. Two or three of the men drooped in their chairs and dozed. One actually had his feet stretched across a coffee table. The lampshades which decorated each table were covered by an assortment of hats. One section

of the room was completely bare, its furniture having been piled up against the french windows. The polished floor was littered with a network of greasy wires, and two men, each with his hat clinging to the back of his head, were suspending lamps and reflectors from the wall fixtures.

Gutzmann drew himself up and clapped his hands. Having attracted a certain degree of curiosity from most of the intruders, he said, "I am Henri Gutzmann, the director of the hotel——"

"Good! Then get us some breakfast."

"What's the voltage in your current up here?"

"When is Professor Karlene coming down?"

"Look, boss, get us some coffee at least."

"To hell with coffee! Let's get the story and get out of this dump."

"I need coffee the worst way, brother."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" Gutzmann implored. "Please, gentlemen——"

A harsh voice called out, "There's a lady present."

Gutzmann said, "Yes, of course. Now, lady and gentlemen——"

"You can say *ladies* and gentlemen," the same voice observed. "At least two of these photographers are pure lavender."

"Quiet!" the man from the *Times* barked, and a reasonable discipline descended on the room.

"Thank you," Gutzmann said, acknowledging the man from the *Times*. "You will understand that it is impossible for me to disturb any of the guests until they have indicated they are ready to receive—uh—visitors. As soon as possible I will inform Mr. Clayfield and he will arrange whatever he wishes in connection with Professor Karlene."

Somebody shouted, "I'd like to get my hands on Clayfield!"

"Also," the director went on, looking severely at the man who interrupted, "I will see to it that you are served coffee—gratis!"

"You mean for free?"

"How about some eggs?"

"Can we take a swim?"

The man from the *Times* said. "I insist on paying for my coffee."

Gutzmann made a stony withdrawal, and when he reached the lobby he instructed Oscar to stand at the foot of the staircase in order to prevent any of the journalists from making their way to the apartments.

It was a wise and timely move, for a reporter was already wandering

aimlessly in the general direction of the staircase.

2

Channing was aroused out of a restless sleep by a screech of brakes in the driveway below his window. The sheets of his bed were rumpled and damp with perspiration. He had been dreaming wild dreams which, neither forgotten nor fully remembered, merely disturbed his slowly gathering wits. He shut his eyes against the blinding light which streamed through the open windows.

He heard another screech of brakes and he remembered he had been dreaming of a flight through a thick forest, and ruffians coming at him out of the trees, reaching for him and chuckling fiendishly. And he, panting and squirming to avoid their thick hands, and suddenly, exultantly, coming out on a smooth road and stumbling exhausted across it; but somehow not across it, he was lying on it, on the smooth pavement, and unable to move, and a long, shiny automobile bearing down on him, and there was a screech of brakes, too late the screech of brakes, and he was crushed and he woke up in a sweat.

He listened to the churning of his mind as if he could hear it. After a time he could hear voices, and slowly it came to him that the newspapermen had arrived. He listened to their noisy chatter. For a few moments it was fine to lie back and listen, knowing they were sleepy and ill-humored because they had driven all night to reach this place. He didn't care any more about the newspapermen; he was not afraid of their competition. They knew so little about the story, and they didn't realize how little they knew. They thought it was an open-and-shut thing: a famous scientist escapes from Czechoslovakia and they are here to interview him. Only he knew it was not so simple.

He got out of bed and went to the windows. The morning was soft and clear and the sky wonderfully blue.

On the bridge Endor leaned indolently against the rail.

He looked at his watch. It was just after seven.

This was the morning of decision.

In Clayfield's huge corner bedroom there were three sets of french windows. Two of these opened wide to the lovely morning; the third was closed, and behind this one Clayfield stood nervously. He was clad in pajamas and a broadcloth dressing gown. He held aside a corner of the curtain and peered out at the man on the bridge.

He had been watching for Endor since the dawn, wondering on the

hypnosis this man wielded that could sway a brain brilliant as Karlene's. There was black magic in it, or some Transylvanian charm or drug to which these people were susceptible. Otherwise he could not begin to understand any man in his right senses would hesitate to leave a shabby little European country for a post of wealth and prestige in America.

He had not slept much. Just as he was ready for bed a cable had arrived from America, a cable from Felson congratulating him on the performance of Clayfield common, which had closed eight points higher on the day. His personal holdings amounted to slightly more than six hundred thousand shares, and this meant he was richer by something like five million dollars. It struck him as strange—the feeling was akin to religion, beyond understanding—that the safety of this colossal profit, perhaps of his entire fortune, depended on the decision of a stranger from Czechoslovakia who lay sleeping a few rooms removed. Having built his high estate by unrelenting hard work, by luck and the outpouring of a prodigal earth, and by a vast independence of mind and spirit, he had now reached a point where his whole future was balanced on the vote of a foreigner he had never dreamed of knowing. He could not help wondering why he hadn't stopped with his first modest fields and lived a leisurely life on their profits.

A crafty thought came to him. If Karlene refused to go to America he might be able to hold up the news until he could take a profit at the current market price. But he rejected the notion almost as quickly as it had come to him. He was not that kind of man. He would ride out the storm or perish in it.

Of course he hadn't slept. At the first pale light he was pacing the room. And soon he was at the window. He felt helpless. There was no way he could channel the course of his fate.

Presently he heard the sound of slippers feet in the next room and he called out, "Are you up, Nason?"

The secretary came in, binding up the cord of his dressing gown.

"Good morning, sir," he said. "Mr. Gutzmann has just been at my door. It seems that a number of newspapermen have arrived——"

"I heard them. I suppose they want to interview Karlene."

"Yes, sir. Mr. Gutzmann is keeping them downstairs until you make whatever arrangements you wish."

Clayfield said, "You know the problem."

"Roughly, sir."

"Well, I'll get dressed. We've got to keep them away until we know how the wind blows with Karlene."

“I understand, sir.” Nason turned to go. “And good luck, Mr. Clayfield,” he said earnestly.

“Thank you, Nason. But remember,” Clayfield said sternly, “nothing’s changed. We leave at eleven. I’m going to be firm about it.”

Moussia’s eyes fixed on the door which connected her room with her father’s. It was a thin door, so thin she had heard his stirrings in his bed during the dark hours, but in the uneasy light of dawn the door seemed thick and impenetrable as stone.

She and her father had always been of one mind, without secrets, without barriers between them. Through triumph and domestic tragedy, through crisis and war and occupation, they had drawn pride and courage one from the other. Even as a girl in pigtails she had stood at his side when he received his honors from kings and chancellors. He had aged with worry for her when she became a leader of girls in the partisan underground, but he had accepted without discussion that this was her duty and her inclination. And when she impulsively gave the comfort of her body to a harried underground leader in the wild days of the war’s last winter, merely the touch of his hand on her cheek told her he knew and understood.

Now on this fateful morning the devotion remained, but the sensitive, telepathic understanding had snapped, and she could no longer place herself in his mind. Though she suffered an impassioned sympathy for what he felt, she could not intimately share the problem. It was his alone. He was a man with all the sentimental frailties of men who have lived a long time, and she was of a new generation, a generation born to upheaval, conditioned to war, rejecting everything old in a frantic search for new ways and new worlds.

Both had recognized this cleavage. Since yesterday he had not asked her to share the problem, and she had not offered to do so. But she could not help wondering whether Clayfield’s unwitting and insensitive manipulations as the harbinger of her father’s freedom, or Endor’s sullen and persistent reminders of the helplessness of his beloved people, carried the most weight with her father.

She saw the sun gleam on the wet fields beyond the village, and it reminded her of Philip, how they had sat and talked in the sun. It was a pity her father could not know Philip; he was also an American and there was in him a part of Clayfield’s brusqueness but in a pattern intermingled with compassion and charm. Then for a few moments the problem left her and she thought only about Philip.

The village clock struck eight. She did up her hair quickly, took a last,

critical glance at herself in the mirror, and went into her father's room.

As he always did when she came into his presence, he smiled and his head came up as if he were looking through the lower lenses of bifocals, and he said, "Good morning, my daughter," with a certain pride in having nurtured this lovely young woman.

She knew at once that he had neither slept nor made a decision. The lines which ran out of the purple pouches of his eyes were dark and thick and his fingers trembled on the arms of the chair in which he sat near the window.

She bent down and kissed his cheek and, leaning there against his face, she could see the bridge. Endor was on it. She felt a trembling and her impulse was to take her gun and run out to the bridge. But Endor would welcome this. She knew he was willing to sacrifice his life if by doing so he might ruin the Karlenes. And yet, if she let him remain to haunt her father into desperate unhappiness, he would also win. He held all the cards.

She rang for the breakfast waiter, and when the man appeared he handed Karlene a telegram which had arrived during the night. She watched out of the corner of her eye as he read it and then placed it in his pocket without comment.

They ate breakfast in silence. Before the great problem that loomed she could think of nothing small and cheerful to say. When the table had been removed he patted her cheek as if he knew how stubbornly she had been withholding the question she wanted so much to ask. Then he went to the window and stood there looking over the bright, shining countryside. He said, "It is a beautiful country, and highly civilized. One cannot deny it. France is a magnificent country."

She said, "Yes, Father," and a happy suspicion came to her that the telegram he had received had made it easier for him to face the decision he must make before the sun climbed into the center sky.

3

It was a quarter past eight when Clayfield stepped through the archway of the lounge and cast a nervous eye over the scene of confusion and dishevelment before him. His heavy voice rose above the rattle of coffee cups and he announced, "I am Justin Clayfield——"

A bedlam of questions and complaints broke out, and three photographers exploded flashbulbs close to his face. For a time his effort to restore order was fruitless. The newspapermen were in a surly mood. Most of them had attempted to wander upstairs by a variety of dodges, all of which were

thwarted by the stolid, powerful figure of Oscar. Their temper had not been improved by the sight of Channing, freshly shaved and fed, coming down the staircase from the Valhalla which had been denied to them. Some crisp remarks had been directed at him, but he was personally popular with his colleagues, and when they had sufficiently sharpened their tongues on him they swallowed their chagrin out of a grudging admiration for his scoop.

With Clayfield it was another matter. He had been personally responsible for the furious cables each man had received from his editor, and they let him know of their disgust in a cacophony which, though confused, was shot through with anger.

The man from the *Times* finally took the floor and delivered a bitter commentary on the ethics of allowing one agency to enjoy an exclusive run on a story of world-wide interest.

Clayfield accepted the redress with as much penitence as it was possible for his rugged face to indicate. Then he said, "Well, gentlemen——"

A harsh voice called out, "There's a lady present——" but it was drowned by the shouts of the others.

When the disturbance subsided Clayfield said, "I take it, gentlemen, that you came to see Professor Karlene. Then I must ask you for the moment to respect my confidence. The professor had a most difficult journey in his escape from Czechoslovakia, and although he is not seriously ill, he has been confined to his room. It's more or less exhaustion, gentlemen. I might tell you, and I'm sure it will please you to know, that even Channing here has been able to get nothing except the bare fact of his escape. He knows absolutely nothing beyond that. . . ." His eyes spoke appealingly to Channing, who stood in the forefront of the group. The newspaperman nodded confirmation.

"This is what I propose to do," Clayfield went on. "My schedule calls for our departure from here at eleven o'clock. This gives you well over two hours, which, I am sure, will be enough for your purposes. I'll go up to see Professor Karlene and do my best to convince him to submit to your questions. It won't be easy. He's quite old and, as I said, rather exhausted, and, between us, not an easy man to talk to. But rest assured I will do what I can."

Someone called out, "We'll see him all right. Who does he think he is?"

"Please let me try to arrange it in an orderly manner," Clayfield appealed.

He left the room amid an ill-humored murmur.

As he climbed to the head of the staircase Clayfield saw a waiter wheeling a breakfast table out of Karlene's room. His impulse was to hurry along the

corridor and look in, rather accidentally, before the door was closed. Instead he paused in the corridor until the waiter had disappeared. This was no time for subterfuge. He had nothing to be wary about. He had liberated Karlene. This certainly gave him the privilege of asking straight questions and of receiving honest replies. He knocked on the door neither sharply nor timidly but with a proper degree of authority.

The old man's appearance shocked him. In the way he sat in an armchair at the window, facing the spacious interior of the room, he was like an aged actor playing a regal role in a pitifully spurious manner. The smile and nod with which he greeted the American were threadbare. This was a beaten man. Clayfield hated the job he had set for himself. Even Moussia, who stood beside her father's chair, seemed to be appealing to him to be gentle.

Clayfield said, "I'm sorry to break in on you this way." He settled himself in a chair at the writing desk. "I see you haven't slept much."

"I am quite well," the professor said in an absent manner which distinctly indicated that he did not consider his health a matter for discussion.

Clayfield said, "As a matter of fact I didn't intend to come in at this time." He leaned forward in his chair and added gently but precisely, "My plans haven't changed, Professor. I am leaving at eleven o'clock, in about two hours from now, and I expect that you and your daughter will be ready at that time."

The old man's nod bore no reassurance. It was merely sad.

Clayfield went on, "But something unexpected has happened. There are ten or fifteen journalists and photographers downstairs who want to see you." He held out a friendly hand. "You understand why it was necessary for me to see you before the interview."

"Yes, Mr. Clayfield, I understand. You want to know what I have decided."

"Exactly, Professor."

Karlene brushed the unruly lock of gray hair from his forehead. He said, "It is good that you came. I wanted to talk to you——" He paused with his mouth open as if another matter had briefly crossed his mind. "It is easy to talk to you, Mr. Clayfield. You are an honest man. I appreciate this fact."

Clayfield said hopefully, "You will always find me straightforward."

"Of this I am sure." The old man smiled, and it was the more charming because it was unexpected. He reached into his pocket and slowly unfolded a blue-tinted telegraph form. "I have here an invitation from a most distinguished scientist, one I have known for many years, the governing director of the Polytechnique of Lille. He has done me the honor of inviting me

to accept the chair of geophysics in his institute of advanced studies.”

Fingering the telegram, he looked solemnly at the oilman.

Clayfield said stiffly, “You are considering it.”

“I must be honest, Mr. Clayfield. The telegram arrived only a few minutes ago, and since then I have thought about it, I am forced to admit, agreeably. Almost miraculously it provides a welcome halfway house on my journey to America, where, I assure you, I fully intend to go eventually, and it also solves a great many problems for me. Not all, of course, not the most important, but a great many.”

“I see,” Clayfield said blankly.

Karlene said, “My most important problem is my obligation to you, Mr. Clayfield. Therefore I have merely thought about this invitation. I had not seriously considered it until we could speak together.”

In the silence that followed, Clayfield stared at the floor. His brain began to function once more, boldly, quickly. He sensed that the future of his company depended on the shrewdness with which he conducted himself in the next few minutes and he sought to draw on all his experience to meet the challenge.

He faced the old man sternly but not unpleasantly.

He said, “Professor Karlene, your obligation to me is not your most important problem. The age of indenture is long past. There can be no harnessing of ability if there is no willingness to serve. No indeed, Professor. As I see it, your most important problem is your obligation to yourself.”

“That is a generous statement.”

“I don’t think so,” Clayfield said, a certain sharpness rising in his voice. “You are free to go to the Polytechnique or with me to America. The decision is yours, not mine.”

Again there was a silence. Clayfield played nervously with a scrap of paper on the desk at which he was seated. The tick of a small clock sounded loud, inexorable, in the room.

Then Karlene said sighingly, “We are fencing, Mr. Clayfield.”

The American’s head shot up. “I am not fencing. I say to you, Professor Karlene, you are free to go wherever you like. I don’t understand your reluctance to come to America. I am offering you everything a man can ask for. What more can I do? Do you want me to tell you—yes, go to the Polytechnique, it makes no difference to me? That would be a lie. It makes a difference to me, a great difference to me.”

“Then you hold me to my obligation.”

“I have no power to hold you to anything. You are a free man, an absolutely free man today.”

Karlene shut his eyes as if to ward off a blow. He said, “It has cost you a great deal of money to make me a free man. What is the figure? Sixty thousand dollars? That is an obligation.”

“It was a gamble. I took it.”

“As you say, I am free to do what I like. This is precious to me, and it is you who have made it possible, Mr. Clayfield. Therefore I owe you a debt.” The old man’s face was ghostly white beneath his discolored eyes. He said hesitantly, “My salary as a professor would not be large, but if I lived frugally I could begin to repay——”

“That’s nonsense, Professor.”

“You are quite right. It is nonsense. I have not that many years to live.”

Clayfield said quietly, “In America your income would amount to that much in less than a year. Perhaps I haven’t made it clear that you’d be one of the highest-salaried men in the country. And that means, of course, in the world.”

“You touch there at—at a sensitive point. Please try to understand,” the old man appealed. “I am far from a perfect individual. I am weakened by sentiment and vanity. It is poor enough of me to turn my back on my people, but to fly directly to the other side, with all its implications, for great personal rewards—that is too much. You see how much easier it would be to break my journey here in France in the role merely of a scholar.”

“Perhaps it would be easier for you . . .” The American let dangle the unspoken implication.

“Then the only way I can repay you is to come to America.”

“We are talking of two different things, Professor. You don’t owe me this money. I don’t want to be repaid. I want your services and your loyalty, and in return I offer you a handsome career.”

Karlene’s head, nodding wearily, dropped to his chest. “Then I must forget the Polytechnique. . . .” He reached up his hand to touch Moussia. “You will send them a telegram, daughter, expressing my regrets.”

Moussia made no move. She stood beside her father’s chair and fixed her eyes poignantly on Clayfield. It made the American uncomfortable, as if he were an inquisitor, a Shylock.

He said, “Please believe me, Professor. You may consider that I’m forcing your hand. I can see that you do. But a month from now you’ll be a happy man in a free and happy country. If I didn’t believe this with all my heart and soul I

wouldn't be urging you."

"You make it sound fine, Mr. Clayfield. The tragedy is, you cannot share my misgivings and I cannot share your enthusiasms. We have lived in different worlds——"

A dull, violent sound of scuffling and running came from the hallway. The door of Karlene's room creaked as if someone were being pushed hard against it. Then Oscar's voice was heard to bellow, "I told you it is not permitted to come up——"

A surly chorus of other voices broke in.

"No stupid bellhop is going to tell me what to do!"

"Get out of the way!"

"For Christ's sake, go peddle your postcards!"

Clayfield went quickly to the door and opened it a few inches, securing it firmly with his thick body. Oscar stood across the threshold, his arms outstretched. He faced a half-dozen angry newspapermen. Others were racing up from the head of the stairs.

Oscar panted, "I'm sorry, Mr. Clayfield. One of them tried to use the lift and when I went to stop him the others rushed up."

"Gentlemen!" Clayfield pleaded through a crack in the partially opened door. "I ask you to be patient. I am trying to arrange this——"

"We've got deadlines, Mr. Clayfield."

"My paper won't stand for it. I've been held up for two days on this story."

"Please, gentlemen," Clayfield called out, "please be patient. I am arranging it. Remember, Professor Karlene is not well——"

Someone said, "Between his health and my job, I'll worry about my job. I'm funny that way."

The authoritative voice of the *Times* man came through from the back of the group. "It would be better, Mr. Clayfield, if you fixed a definite time for the professor to be downstairs. We'll see that nobody beats the gun."

Clayfield said, "Good." He glanced at his watch. "It's a quarter to nine. Let's say at ten o'clock sharp in the lounge downstairs."

"All right. That's a bargain. Ten o'clock sharp."

Clayfield closed the door and turned apologetically.

"I'm sorry, Professor. You see what a sensation you've made in America."

"Yes, I see."

"The time is short, Professor."

Karlene said, "Will you let me have this short time to myself? At ten o'clock, Mr. Clayfield, I shall come down and announce my plans."

Clayfield sighed a triumphant sigh. "All right, at ten o'clock. And remember, the departure for Paris is set for eleven."

"I know that."

The American walked slowly toward the door, then turned impulsively to face the old man across the room.

"I'm curious about one thing. When you agreed to come away with Berlau, did you have it in your mind that you might not accept my proposition?"

Karlene lifted an anguished face. "When I came away with Berlau, I had it in my mind merely to be free. It was selfish of me, Mr. Clayfield, but then, repression always breeds selfishness. The truth is, I did not think of you at all."

Clayfield nodded and let himself quietly out of the room. After a period of silence the old man reached up for his daughter's hand.

"How foolish I am, Moussia. I have probed the earth's most intimate secrets with an electrical instrument. My equations have touched on wonders which I sometimes believe are a part of God's estate, not ours. And yet how foolish I am that I cannot solve a simple problem which the most ignorant man on earth would solve by instinct."

4

By a continuous flow of coffee and sandwiches and, in a few of the more recalcitrant cases, beer, Gutzmann had managed to seal off the newspapermen in the lounge, thus preserving the rest of his hotel from the contagion of these unwanted visitors. He considered this a cheap price to pay, for a meager complement of his regular guests had already forgathered at the pool.

At a breakfast table on the sunny side, General Perrault gobbled at his food and whimpered belligerently about his usual morning upset to his impassive wife. Helen Bartell and the Lermonds had come down for a swim before breakfast, but the sight of a strange public leering out of the lounge windows discouraged them from removing their bathrobes and they proceeded to eat at once, Helen remarking, "My God, I'd feel like a strip teaser in front of all those men. It's all right in front of your own kind, but they look so common. They haven't even shaved."

She looked about brightly and said, "The Aleksandrows haven't come down yet. I can't wait——"

"They're not married, you know," Daphne said.

Eric observed, "I suppose it's their own business."

"You're so *fair*, Eric, you drive me mad," Daphne said.

"What do you think the maid told me this morning?" Helen went on happily. "This Mrs. Aleksandrow—I insist on calling her Mrs. Aleksandrow—passed out completely last night, and not even in the hotel. Somebody found her somewhere or other and carried her back, actually carried her back."

"Isn't it exciting?" Daphne said.

"Well, it's not even nine o'clock. I suppose she'll be sleeping it off all day," Helen said. "She's not too young, you know. I wonder how she'll look hung over."

Daphne said, "Mr. Aleksandrow must have been awfully angry."

"Don't be silly, my dear. He may be a little old for her, but I think he's a wonderful man. The things he buys her! And to think she can up and leave him at any time, just waltz off with all that jewelry and all those clothes. He must be an awfully kind man. I wonder what they're fixing in the lounge. Look at all those wires they've strung around. They must be electricians or plumbers or something——"

Eric said, "My dear Helen, they're distinguished foreign correspondents. Americans, I believe."

"Not really, Eric."

"Certainly. They've come to interview the old professor."

"I'd never believe it," Helen gasped. "You mean *they* write all those articles in the newspapers that frighten me to death every morning? They look so—well, common. The only newspaper person I know is Cholly Knickerbocker. He's such a dear."

Eric said, "You don't really have to wear striped pants to be bright."

"Oh, don't be so beastly fair about everything, Eric. Please!" Daphne said. "Helen is right. They do look awfully common."

"Well——" Helen smiled sweetly at General Perrault for want of something better to do. Then she spied Clayfield walking aimlessly on the garden side of the pool. "There's Justin. I'll go ask him all about it—oh dear, no. He's in one of those moods. I can tell. Harry used to do the same thing. It made me furious, taking his business worries with him. I *always* say——"

"Always," Eric muttered, reaching for his morning whisky sour.

Clayfield paced in the shadow of the birches. A feeling of triumph played inside him with sullen excitement. He knew with a sure instinct what the old

man's decision would be. Karlene was honorable; he could choose no other course.

Yet he felt restive about it. His margin of victory had been small, too small for him to derive real pleasure from it. Anyone a mite less honorable than Karlene might have disregarded his commitment. All the same, this was no time for false modesty. He had been lucky, but he had also been shrewd. In the critical moment when Karlene was wavering, he had struck just the right note. It was better than shrewd. It stemmed from his long experience in handling men; it was acumen, leadership, the sort of gift that had raised him above other men who started life with nothing.

The clock in the village struck nine. He had another hour of waiting before the matter was settled, finally and definitely. Soon they would be on their way to Paris. It was a lovely day for a drive. He felt better. The anticipation of triumph warmed him and set off a flow of generous instincts.

He had been harsh with Aleksandrow. He was sorry about that. After all, there were a thousand ways in which Prague could have found out about the rendezvous; his cables and phone calls to America, though carefully coded and scrambled, had been handled by many unknown persons all along the line. Even if it was Berlau who had bungled it, still the man had brought Karlene out successfully. And the unfortunate incident of the chambermaid was—well, unfortunate. Besides, she had broken the law.

Yes, he decided, he must remember to have a drink with Aleksandrow before leaving. He had no intention of using the fellow's peculiar talents again, but one never knew. He had vowed exactly that after the business of the drill heads which landed in Bulgaria.

Then he thought of Endor standing on the bridge, and the old man probably brooding at his window. He walked decisively around the pool to where Nason sat awaiting orders.

He said, "Nason, I want you to have my car brought around to the front of the hotel. And have the baggage brought down. Putter around the terrace a bit while the baggage is being stowed. I'll be out there myself in a little while. I want to make it clear that we're preparing to leave on schedule. You understand."

Nason said, "Yes, sir. I understand."

The sun arched higher above the birches. Not a cloud appeared to screen its merciless concentration on the countryside of France and Belgium. It promised

to be a scorching day.

Inside the lounge the waiting newspapermen sat in drowsy groups and muttered the shoptalk of their profession. They disparaged editors, groused about money, described modestly their latest achievements, and at the same time spoke feelingly of fine plans, which they knew would never eventuate, for their divorcement from the business of chasing news. A few squinted through the windows and speculated in detail whether Helen or Daphne would turn out to have the better shape when and if they took off their bathrobes. The current assignment was carefully avoided, for they preferred to forget that one of their number had snatched an exclusive on the original story.

Channing sat with a group close to the exit leading to the lobby and kept an eye on the hall clock. It was just after nine. He wondered what was transpiring in Karlene's room but made no attempt to go upstairs lest he set off another stampede. Abstractedly he listened to the man from the *Times*, who was speaking forcefully and interminably about the Berlin airlift and the need for a clear American policy in Germany. . . .

Then he caught sight of Moussia. She came swiftly into the frame of the archway and paused there as if debating whether to look inside. He saw her in striking profile, tense of face, her auburn hair shining in a shaft of light, her neck long and bare and graceful. He went to her.

The others watched him suspiciously, then relaxed. Channing had been in the hotel two days and here was a damned beautiful girl. It added up.

Wordlessly he slid his arm under hers and they went out to the terrace. After the refreshing shade of the hotel, the heavy windless heat of outdoors struck like fire against their faces.

Clayfield's car, a black Cadillac limousine, filled the driveway at the hotel's entrance. Its baggage compartment lay open and the chasseur was dusting inside it.

When they had walked clear of the car Channing asked quickly, "What's the decision?"

"I don't know. Not yet."

"How much time have you got?"

"Until ten o'clock."

"So have I. Let's get out of here."

"I must go to the post office," she said, and added slowly, "We cannot accept the invitation of the Polytechnique."

"You'd better tell me about it."

As they headed down the driveway she outlined in terse, anguished

sentences what had transpired between Clayfield and her father. Listening carefully, he sensed the intimacy with which she moved beside him, as if he were her only haven of refuge in an angry world. She held his arm pressed tightly against her, and he felt the stir of her warm body beneath her thin, rust-colored dress.

He said, "Then it means America. I'm glad."

It seemed to him he felt a possessive squeeze of his arm and then she said, "I don't know, Philip. I don't know. He is a proud man, my father. Gentle but extremely proud."

"There's nothing else he can do. It's the Polytechnique or America."

They came through the lower gateway and, turning toward the bridge, they saw Endor. They had known he would be there at his accustomed place; nevertheless, they paused unwittingly for a moment. This was not the indolent Endor of early morning. Now his gaunt figure was taut, his chin raised furiously high. He was watching the terrace with unwavering intensity.

They went on toward the bridge.

She said, "You forget one other way of canceling the debt."

"It's mad. He can't go back to Prague."

"It is a way out."

"You wouldn't let him!"

She said, "When he asked me to leave him alone, when he said, 'Go find that nice young man who has been kind to you, go walking with him on this beautiful morning,' I felt this thought was playing in his mind."

"But it can't be, Moussia. If he went back they would put him to work. You know that."

"He would never serve the regime."

"They can force him."

She said, "Perhaps he would prefer to die. I don't know, Philip."

A suspicion of play-acting occurred to him and for a moment he was angry. Then he recalled what he had discovered about the Czechs when he was covering the story in the first months of liberation: their easy familiarity with death and their indifference to it; their fanatic urge for national existence and the impossibility of breaking it. Perhaps Gregor Karlene was of this breed.

They were almost at the bridge. He could see the details of Endor's thin, cruel, intellectual face staring at the terrace.

He said, "It's not the way you imagine, Moussia. Once in Berlin I saw a man do it, a Pole who had fled in a plane. After a year of exile he arranged his

own surrender. I watched him walk through the Brandenburg Gate where the Warsaw agents waited. I remember the look on his face. It was sad, apprehensive, but there was a light in it as if he had decided he could at last live with himself no matter how short a time was allowed him. But when he passed through the Gate and the agents moved in to take him, his knees buckled and he sobbed like a frightened child. At that moment I was sure he cursed himself for doing it.”

They passed silently across the bridge, behind the backs of the boys fishing, of the old men who stood idly by, and of Endor. He ignored them. He clung angrily to the rail and studied the terrace. It was as if he knew the critical hour was in passage, as if the signal was Clayfield’s limousine which stood in the driveway before the hotel.

When they came into the cool of the covered lane which led to the village she said spiritlessly, “I don’t know, Philip. It is a decision only my father can make.”

“You can’t let him do it. You insult America, Moussia! The Clayfields and the crises come and go, but the country is good and sound and one can be proud to serve it. Look at Einstein, Mann—I could name you a hundred who are Americans with all their hearts.”

She said, “It is not the same. When there is a good German, then he has the right to hate Germany. The Czech does not exist who hates his homeland. Remember Beneš—Masaryk—I could also name you a hundred who chose not to abandon Czechoslovakia but to die for it.”

“You can’t let him go back,” he said bitterly, “you can’t be so heartless.”

“Please believe me, Philip. I want him to go to America. I pray he will. But if he decides the other way I shall understand.”

“You shouldn’t have left him.”

“Philip—Philip,” she said desolately, “there are many ways a woman may help a man. But in a matter of honor—no. This is his own problem, his alone.”

“And you? What will you do?”

“I shall not abandon my father.”

He stared at her as though she were someone he had never seen before. The line of her Slavic cheekbones and the downward thrust of her mouth were in themselves dramatic, but she had been born with these as she had been born with her Slavic character, which was different from his own. She looked placidly, steadily ahead. She was not play-acting, he decided. It was merely that she was not an American.

When they came to the post office he went in with her and waited while

she wrote a telegram. She exchanged a pleasantry with the old woman behind the wicket, and while the bill was being estimated she powdered her nose and arranged her chignon. Though the crisis of her life was at hand, Channing reflected, she would not abandon the frailties and vanities of her sex.

Her business completed, she said, "What time is it, Philip?"

"A quarter past nine."

"We have a little time left. I would like to walk. Would you?"

They passed through the village and soon the cobblestones ended and a rutted road followed the bend of the river, ribboning across flat, open farmland. They walked slowly in the hot sun. She held closely to him and looked ahead, saying nothing. He smoked a cigarette, drawing deep nervous puffs. They hardly realized how far they had wandered until an oxcart laden with turnips came out of the fields and they stood aside to let it pass. In the distance the Spa Bonnar was a toy castle and at its foot a toy village.

"What time is it, Philip?"

"Half past nine."

"How long before we must begin to walk back?"

"Five or six minutes."

She smiled sadly. "It's a pity."

"Say what you want to say, Moussia."

"Shall I ever see you again?"

"I go back to Brussels this afternoon."

"And then?"

"I never know. Paris, Berlin, Rome—wherever the news takes me."

"Never to America?"

"I haven't been home since 1940."

"Then this is good-by."

"It depends on where you go."

She said, "Wherever I go, I shall think about you."

He tossed away his cigarette and looked at her. She faced him boldly, earnestly.

He said, "Wherever you go, I'll get there—one way or another."

"How much time have we got?"

"Four or five minutes."

She said, "It's a pity we are people that pass on a journey."

“It’s a great pity.”

“It’s a great pity,” she whispered.

He bent down quickly and kissed her and they clung desperately to each other on the open road in the sun.

6

Clayfield leaned against the parapet, his back to the river, and doggedly watched the loading of his automobile. The sun was merciless. Perspiration skittered down the sides of his heavy face and stained his shirt collar but he remained in the open and supervised the operation like a guard charged with a shipment of gold bullion.

In the shade of the canopy Nason checked each piece of luggage as the chasseur stowed it into the rear compartment.

“Don’t forget my brief case,” Clayfield called out vigorously. “Put it where I can get hold of it on the journey.”

“It’s already on the back seat, sir,” Nason said, and demonstrated the point by pulling open a door and peering inside the car.

The oilman pushed a handkerchief across the back of his neck. It gave him an opportunity to glance carelessly toward the bridge. The Czech hadn’t budged.

“Will there be enough space for—for the other baggage?” Clayfield asked. He hesitated to say the *Karlene* baggage.

“I think so, sir. I can handle at least one suitcase up in front with me.”

“That’s fine—fine.” He consulted his watch. It was nine-twenty. The next forty minutes were going to be long. A bead of perspiration fell from his chin to the lapel of his jacket. Almost directly above the canopy the balcony doors of Karlene’s room were open but he couldn’t see the old man. He wished he could.

Then he looked around to the bridge once more and his head shot forward with amazement. Endor was striding across the structure to the Spa Bonnar’s side, striding with haste and purpose. His lean figure swung off the bridge in the direction of the hotel. The American watched him, transfixed. It was clear that Endor’s destination was the hotel.

Clayfield advanced menacingly across the flagstones to the head of the driveway. His heavy jaw worked angrily as if it were separated from his wet, massive face, and he waited for the Czech to appear. From somewhere behind him Nason’s thin voice called out, “Is anything wrong, sir?”

“Nothing. I’ll handle this myself.”

Panting with the effort of negotiating the last steep curve, Endor came to the level of the terrace. His hat was well over his eyes and he did not see the American who stepped decisively in his path. They almost collided. The Czech looked up, his face twisted with disgust, and he shifted to move around his adversary. Once more Clayfield’s stolid body blocked him.

They stood inches apart, breathing heavily, the one from exhaustion, the other seeking to control the searing indignation which boiled up in him.

Endor’s thin lips pressed against his teeth. He turned his head away with a certain lofty derision and stepped back a few inches. The other stepped forward the same distance.

Clayfield said, “Get out.” His tone was low and hard and disciplined. “Get out before I break you in two.”

He was not sure the Czech understood the words nor did he care. He ranged his arm across the other man’s chest and growled, “Go back where you came from, you God-damned Communist bastard!”

Endor held his ground with an air of forbearance. Then the voice of Karlene came down to them. “Let him come up, Mr. Clayfield.”

The American swung around and glared at the professor, who stood on his balcony.

“Let him come up. I have known him since he was a boy.”

Clayfield shook with exasperation. “Now look, Professor, this has gone far enough——”

“I would like him to come up, Mr. Clayfield.” The voice was gentle but it carried the authority of one who is accustomed to obedience as a right.

“We haven’t got the time,” Clayfield called out fiercely.

Karlene said, “Come up, Nicolai.”

The Communist had already moved nimbly past Clayfield and was almost at the hotel’s entrance. Clayfield stomped after him.

Standing at the foot of the staircase, Oscar bristled with surprise when he saw the Czech stride in, but at the same moment he caught Clayfield’s unhappy nod of permission and he stood aside and watched with disgust as Endor scrambled up the stairs.

Oscar said, “I apologize, Mr. Clayfield, but it was impossible to be here and outside at the same time.”

“It’s not your fault,” Clayfield muttered.

As the two men stared up the empty staircase in silence, a houseman

approached. He bowed to Clayfield and addressed himself to the concierge.

He said, "M'sieu Oscar, Jacques Tramont is at the servants' entrance. He says you sent for him."

"Let him wait. I am occupied now."

The houseman hesitated. He said in a low voice, "He is a cripple, M'sieu Oscar, a cripple of the war."

"Then let him wait in the *salle de débarras*."

"As you wish, M'sieu Oscar."

A recollection of Anny marched across Clayfield's troubled mind. The superstition which had crystallized out of his preacher father's fierce gospel on injustice and punishment hammered at him freshly.

He asked of Oscar, "What is the *salle de débarras*?"

"There are chairs there, Mr. Clayfield. It is the storeroom in the basement."

"All right," the American said. "Make sure he gets the money."

He went slowly up the stairs to the hallway and leaned against a wall, his eyes glued to the door of Karlene's room.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THERE was no knock on the door. It opened and Endor slid in. He closed it firmly behind him. Standing there, he took off his hat and played nervously with its brim.

Karlene sat in an armchair near the open windows. He faced the interior of the room, his massive brow creased, his head a little askew. He was looking at the younger man and yet not seeing him. Endor played with the brim of his hat and waited.

Finally Karlene stirred.

“Good morning, Nicolai,” he said in Czech.

Endor took a quick step forward. “My professor, I saw the preparations. I had to come. Where are they taking you?” The words spilled out of him.

“You may sit down, Nicolai.”

“But, my professor, you must understand——”

“Sit down.”

The younger man glanced about, then sat down on the edge of the chaise longue. He fidgeted. He was eager to speak and angry that he found himself hesitant. Karlene dominated the room as if there had been no passage of years since Endor was a boy of sixteen sitting on the front bench of a crowded lecture hall, his flashing eyes absorbing the wondrous presence of the nation’s most distinguished savant.

“It is good you have come to see me, Nicolai.”

“There are matters of importance to discuss, matters of the greatest urgency _____”

“You will watch your attitude.”

Endor’s perspiring face strained forward. “This is not before the war, Professor Karlene. I am no longer a student.”

“Of this I am quite sure,” the weary old man said.

“You must return to the homeland!”

“Must? *Must*, Nicolai?”

“There is no time for social graces. A great world struggle is in progress!”

“Ah yes. A great world struggle.”

“I have come here to warn you, and you must listen to me!—I beg you, my professor, to listen to me. The warmongers and the imperialists have kidnaped you with their blandishments and their lying politics. If you go with them they will never let you see your homeland again. Never! But there is still time. Come back with me, back to your place of honor and security in the people’s republic. I have come to bring you back, my professor!”

Karlene nodded spiritlessly. Out of their deep, discolored sockets, his eyes stared above and beyond the excited young man.

“Please, my professor, you do not understand what is being done to you.”

“The tragedy is, Nicolai, I understand exactly what is happening to me. I shall do what is proper for me to do.”

“Then you must come back to Prague!”

“If this is the proper thing to do I shall return.”

“Of course, my professor! I remember now so well how you used to lecture to us. It was your favorite word. It is proper to accept this or it is proper to conclude thusly——” Endor trembled with excitement and he said cruelly, “Now that you have met the exploiters and the murderers who have chosen you for their colleague, what is proper? What is proper now, my professor?”

Karlene gazed wearily at the wall behind Endor.

“Why should I return with you, Nicolai?”

Endor leaped at the opportunity. “Because you are a Czech, a patriot, because you know the West is committed to the destruction of our homeland and they seek to enroll you in their legions of death. Come back, my professor, come back to your people!”

“I see. This is the reason.”

“Is it not reason enough?”

The old man shook his head. He might have been a schoolmaster conducting a term-end examination.

Endor bristled. He said, “When you left Prague so suddenly, so heartlessly, we discussed ways and means of dealing with the matter. Methods were suggested. But I begged the government, I begged them to let me come here alone. I promised that only I could bring you back——”

“Why are you so confident, Nicolai?”

“I know you, my professor. I know your genius, your pride, your love for our homeland. I know these things better than anyone else. I also know the imperialists from the West. I said to our government, ‘If I fail, you may punish me. But on condition that Professor Karlene may return with honor to his own

country, I undertake to bring him back.’ This they promised. And I was proud, my professor, to be the instrument of your return. It is a debt I owe you.”

A light of inner amusement came into Karlene’s face.

“You owe me a debt?”

“Everything I am, my position in our republic, I owe to you, to your teachings.” He sprang to his feet. “Let me call him in, my professor! Let me call in this Clayfield. Tell him you are going back to your homeland!”

“Take your seat, Nicolai.”

“Yes, my professor.”

Into the pause that followed, the tick of a clock over the writing table inserted its note. Karlene glanced at it emptily. The time was nine twenty-five.

He said, “Why do you call yourself a Communist?”

“Why? Why do I walk on two feet? Why am I not an animal of the forest? I am a Communist because the world cannot stand still. It is your own teaching, your own lecture on change and movement. The world must go forward and Communism must lead it at any cost.”

“At any cost, Nicolai?”

“At any cost.”

“I saw it in you even as a boy. You have a cruel mind, Nicolai.”

“We are struggling for the world. The methods are not easy. We have powerful enemies. We must be hard.”

“Let me instruct you, Nicolai. You are not a Communist, you are merely a cruel man as well as a shrewd one——”

“I will not listen!”

“Of course you will listen. I know you better than you know yourself. At some time in your life you became twisted inside. You were unhappy. But you did not try to change yourself. You sought to change the world to conform to the twist inside you. You are not a Communist. You worship anarchy and you call it Communism.”

Endor twisted angrily on his seat, but he held down his voice.

“With all respect, my professor, you are a scientist. You know nothing about politics, about Communism.”

“Perhaps not, Nicolai. I had always believed that Communism is in essence a compassionate theory, and in this light I respected it. I find it strange that it has fallen into cruel and vicious hands. But you are right when you say I am not a politician. With me it is a simple matter of ethics. If the organization of our society demands that power be handed over to individuals I prefer that

these individuals be compassionate men.”

Endor rasped, “Czechoslovakia cannot afford your fine sentiment. During the struggle for existence it is a luxury.”

A note of outrage came into the old man’s weary voice.

“Do you dare set yourself in a company with Beneš, with Masaryk? Have you ever loved in your life, deeply, unselfishly? Have you ever known a tear in your eyes except one of pain? I imagine Karl Marx once wept for the people. He would weep again if he could see the nature of those who use his name.”

Endor’s narrow face tweaked with the panic of impending failure. His hands that played with the brim of his hat worked nervously. He was thinking with desperate speed. He was sweating.

“No, Nicolai,” the old man said slowly, “I have not fled from my homeland nor from my people. I have fled from cruel men. I have fled from you.”

“And your new associates,” Endor burst out, “are they kind men?”

The blow struck hard. Karlene closed his eyes. After a time he said, “My new associates, as you put it, are individuals. They are not the nation.”

“Then you force me to tell you about them,” Endor attacked, half rising from his seat. “I will tell you who they are, how much respect they have for you. You, my professor, who were honored by a visit from the President himself! I will tell you about your new associates——”

“You may tell me, Nicolai.”

The younger man glared at his former teacher. “Have you wondered how I came to this place? Have you wondered how I knew the details of this accursed rendezvous? I will tell you, my dear, honored professor. You were offered on the market like a side of beef. You were brought across the frontier by the machine of this Fascist murderer Aleksandrow—we know him well, we do business with him. Do you remember that you were brought to a place in Bayreuth and that you waited there? Have you ever wondered why you waited there?”

Endor’s excitement poured out on his face. He darted across the room and stood over the slight bent figure in the chair.

“You waited there like a piece of merchandise. We had the offer in Prague from your associate Aleksandrow. He accepted Clayfield’s money to smuggle you out and for the payment of a million Swiss francs you would be brought back across the frontier and delivered to us. Aleksandrow’s representative made us the offer while you waited in Bayreuth. Did you know that, my professor?”

The old man’s agonized face dropped in slow stages to his chest. He

breathed hard.

“Did you know that, my proud, honored professor?”

From the depths of his chest Karlene asked wearily, “Tell me, Nicolai, why did you not accept the offer?”

“Because the people’s republic is not the imperialist West!” Endor cried ecstatically. “We have respect for genius, we have respect for the individual, we have respect for you, my professor! We are dedicated to the nobility of the people! We do not buy and sell them like cattle. They—they want only money. Go with them if you want! Let them take you as the prize they have bought because they could not sell it for a higher price!”

He studied the old man’s hard breathing and the deep hurt that spread over the proud, lined face.

“You must come back with me! You cannot do otherwise, my professor! By logic, by intelligence, by emotions, by ties, you are driven to come back with me! Now let me call this Clayfield and tell him of your decision!”

The old man roused himself slowly. He sighed deeply.

“Go where I can look at you, Nicolai.”

Endor stepped back to the center of the room. His small, burning eyes did not leave Karlene.

Once more the tick of the clock intruded into the silence. Karlene’s glance fell on it. The time was nine-forty.

He said, “You do not deceive me, Nicolai.”

“I swear what I say is the truth!”

“I believe you, Nicolai; nevertheless, you do not deceive me. Your people’s republic, as you call it, has no respect for the individual, no more than Aleksandrow. You are of a piece——”

“You are not speaking logic, my professor.”

“I know whereof I speak, Nicolai. I know exactly what went on in your minds. I would have been of no use to you if you had purchased me”—Karlene winced as he spoke the words—“and brought me back across the frontier. You might have had *me*, but without my mind and my spirit, my poor body would have been worthless. You sought to make certain that if I returned I would serve the regime. It is easy enough to enslave a person, but to enslave his mind is much more difficult. Is it not so, Nicolai?”

The younger man stood taut in the center of the room. He glared down at the other. His thin mouth pressed hard against his teeth. He was incapable of speech.

Karlene said, "You see, I know you, Nicolai. I trained your mind. I know its devious passages. You gambled and you lost. You may go now."

"Fine!" Endor cried. "Fine! Then your homeland disowns you! Go to the Fascists! Go to the murderers! Go——"

"You may go now, Nicolai."

Endor backed toward the door. "The people's republic will triumph without you! We who have begun with a few persecuted cells and have spread over Europe and the East, we do not need you!"

He flung open the door. "Go to your accursed Fascists!" he cried from the hall. "Go and perish with them! And you *will* perish with them! This I promise you. I, Nicolai Endor, I promise it!"

Karlene was no longer listening. He slumped deep in his chair and his shaggy head inclined on his chest and within him was a great anguish.

It was Clayfield who listened to Endor's words ringing through the hall. His chest rose with immense relief and satisfaction. He watched Endor, blind with fury, stride past him in the hall and retreat down the staircase.

He followed slowly and when he came to the foot of the staircase he glanced at his watch.

Then he said to Oscar, "I don't want you to keep that crippled veteran waiting. Better go give him the money now because I'll want you back soon. In exactly fourteen minutes the professor is going to hold a press conference in the lounge."

"As you wish, Mr. Clayfield."

The oilman leaned against the banister, weary but happy. It had been an ordeal.

2

Oscar proceeded with alacrity to the cashier's desk and drew twenty thousand francs on Mr. Clayfield's account. He looked carefully into the lounge, found the newspapermen docile enough, then descended by a service stairway which led to the basement. He paused when he was halfway down, counted off ten of the thousand-franc notes, and placed them in his wallet. He continued jauntily to the basement.

It was always a pleasure for him to come downstairs. In the main hall he was a willing servitor to the fancies and whimpers of the guests, most of whom he secretly despised, but here in the basement he held a position of undisputed authority which he felt was his natural bent. Progressing along the corridor, he

unbuttoned his blue coat, expanded his chest with gusto, and, best of all, lit a cigarette.

A houseman stood at the open door of the storeroom.

“He is waiting inside, M’sieu Oscar.”

The concierge scowled. “I didn’t ask you to stand watch. Go back to your work.”

He lingered in the corridor until the houseman had disappeared. Then he went into the storeroom and closed the door behind him.

The place was gloomy, musty, and untidily crammed with castoff material. There were heaps of old mattresses, empty packing cases, parts of bedframes, deck chairs in need of repair, and various items of broken furniture carelessly distributed about the room. A series of square-shaped tin vents ran across the low ceiling, connecting the furnace in the next room with heat registers in all parts of the hotel. A tiny, barred window which looked out on the pool admitted a narrow shaft of light.

Oscar peered into the dim passages between piles of litter and called out, “Where are you, Tramont?”

The reply came in a metallic click of the man’s stumps on the cement floor and the creak of his crutch. Tramont heaved himself from out of a shadow cast by a huge packing case. He moved slowly. The passage was narrow and it was difficult to maneuver his crutch and cane. He concentrated his full attention on the floor, methodically seeking out space to accommodate his wretched, rolling progress.

His cigarette dangling from his lips, Oscar watched him come forward.

“What were you doing back there?” he demanded.

Tramont said nothing. He concerned himself with the mechanics of his crutch and cane. The quiet room was filled with the hardness of his breathing. A shaft of light struck across his face and brought a revolting whiteness to the keloid scars which ran down his cheek. His mouth was tightly compressed.

Oscar said, “I suppose you were looking for something to steal. It would be a fine kind of gratitude.”

The cripple remained silent. He dragged his lifeless legs around a pile of old mattresses and stood small and panting before Oscar’s bulging chest. His large, boyish eyes stared at the floor.

“Here are ten thousand francs,” Oscar said, pushing out a roll of bills. “You are a lucky fellow, Tramont, to be getting ten thousand francs for nothing. It is the generosity of one of our guests. Now take the money and keep silent about it. We don’t want every beggar in the village to know.”

The cripple's left hand came away from the center bar of his crutch and reached for the bills. His eyes lifted, slowly following the line of Oscar's extended arm. Suddenly his right hand let drop his cane, and with a low, fierce groan he flung himself at the throat of the concierge and his thumbs pressed in like steel rods against the big man's windpipe.

Oscar reacted like a trapped animal. Unable to scream, he heaved his great bulk wildly and beat down on his attacker's arms and face. The cripple hung on viciously. His fingers pressed in deeper and his mouth opened in a terrible mimicry of the choking man. Tortured and terror-stricken, Oscar drew on the last vestige of his strength. He straightened up, lifting the cripple from the floor, and wrenched his shoulders from side to side. Tramont swung like a pendulum from his victim's neck and stared into his eyes as if he were beholding a wondrous thing. Oscar's mouth made weird contortions. His fingers scratched at the wide-open eyes which were staring at him. He reached for the cripple's throat, but now his tongue protruded thick and blue. His life was almost spent, and his fingers pawed on Tramont's neck as if he were caressing it. Then he dropped heavily to the floor and the cripple dropped with him and pressed against the throat with unyielding fury. Oscar's legs jerked spasmodically. After a time they ceased to jerk.

Tramont lay on the floor, his fingers locked around Oscar's neck, and looked with childish curiosity on the twisted, blackened face. A wisp of smoke curled across his mouth and made him cough. Slowly he removed his fingers from the swollen neck. It was soft as dough. Now he stared at his fingers and a thin sob broke out of him. He drew away from the body and lay on his back, panting.

He coughed again and again, and suddenly sat up. A cone of black smoke was billowing across the floor from the apex of Oscar's cigarette which burned at the corner of a mattress.

For a moment he was fascinated. He watched for a burst of flame but only smoke rolled out in widening circles. He coughed convulsively and burning tears diffused his vision. Blinded and suddenly panic-stricken, he beat his hands on the floor around him, searching for his crutch. Oscar's body lay on top of it. Choking in agony, he heaved and pulled and finally extricated it. But now it was too late.

Thicker and blacker the smoke escaped, joyously like a supple and powerful creature that had long been imprisoned.

A newspaperman in the lounge consulted his watch. "Nine minutes to go," he said to those around him. Then he sniffed and observed, "Somebody's having fried sawdust for breakfast."

A moment later he got up, muttering, and pushed his chair away from the wall. Acrid smoke rose from the grilled cover of a heat register close to the floor. He said, "Something's burning in this God-damned hotel."

Across the room a gruff, concerned voice called out, "If you ask me, the place is on fire."

The men glanced about uneasily. The smell of smoke was sharp but not oppressive. Each was hesitant to be the first to make a move. Finally a photographer said, "What the hell. It stinks in here," and walked out to the lobby. The others shuffled after him.

At the pool Helen Bartell and the Lermonds basked in the sun and watched with torpid puzzlement as a curl of black smoke rose from a crack in a cellar window.

Daphne said cheerfully, "It must be those plumbers fixing the furnace down there. What on earth for, I wonder?"

Eric said, "They were newspapermen, my dear. Not plumbers. And if I'm not mistaken, there's a nice little fire brewing up in our precious hotel."

General Perrault, who was closer to the cellar window, got to his feet tremblingly and tapped his cane on the tiles of the poolside. "Why doesn't someone do something about this smoke?" he muttered. "I do not like it."

A gardener sprinted around the corner of the building, wielding his rake like an ax, and hacked at the glass in the cellar window. When it shattered, an immense cloud of black smoke rolled out. The gardener covered his eyes and backed away crying, "Fire! Fire in the *salle de débarras*!"

His cries were caught up by others. Inside the hotel a bell was being violently struck, and like an echo, another bell was heard on the village side of the river.

A chambermaid burst out of the service entrance, wailing, "Oscar and the cripple Tramont are in there!"

The chasseur ran to the pool, scooped up a pail of water, and dashed it into the smoking window. A cloud of smoke shot out like a counterblow, driving him back.

"They're dead!" he cried. "They must be dead!"

The chambermaid dropped moaning to her knees and crossed herself.

In a few moments the poolside was alive with servants, newspapermen, guests, and a few nearby villagers, all racing about in ineffectual circles while

more smoke rolled out of the cellar window in black and savage billows.

The village fire pump was already on its way. Under the command of the *garde champêtre*, who had donned a silver-plated *casque d'acier*, some thirty volunteers were straining at the draw ropes of the ancient but highly burnished brass vehicle. It rolled slowly across the cobblestones toward the bridge, and in its wake all the women and children of the village followed excitedly.

The shrill, urgent clang of the fire bell echoed over the far fields. Men who had been trudging behind plows dropped their reins and called out to one another. They pointed to the smoke which rose like a black plume behind the hotel, and as though a telepathic signal had passed among them, they all began to run toward the village.

Moussia and Channing had been strolling reluctantly along the dusty road. Still a distance from the village, they did not hear the bell. In their close concern with each other they failed to notice that men were running frantically across the fields. Then an aged farmer trotted past, wagging his finger at a shaft of smoke which hovered above the hotel.

Moussia stiffened against the American's arm.

"It may be nothing," he said quickly. "A brush fire in the woods."

But she had already broken away from him. Her eyes would not leave the black, rolling cloud rising higher in the sky. She raced along the road with the inexhaustible fleetness of great desperation.

Clayfield was in the parlor of his apartment, idling away the last minutes before ten o'clock, when the sound of the fire bell jerked him out of his pleasant reverie. He looked about in a puzzled manner. The spacious room streamed with sunlight. He sniffed. The air had a fresh and pleasant country smell. Then a small, shrill sound of distant cries came to his ears and he walked out on his balcony.

"What is it, Nason?" he called down to his secretary, who stood on the terrace peering up to the roof of the hotel.

"There's some smoke back of the hotel, sir. I think you'd better come down."

"It can't be serious."

"I don't know, sir——"

The terrace was suddenly alive with newspapermen who came tumbling out of the front door and raced around to the back of the hotel. A few villagers loped up the driveway, paused to take off their caps as if this were a holy

place, and darted away to the poolside.

“This is nonsense,” Clayfield said. “I can’t even smell smoke.”

“It’s coming up pretty heavy now, sir,” Nason warned.

The sound of another bell drew their attention toward the village. The brass fire pump, gleaming in the sun, was being drawn across the bridge, attended fore and aft by a host of excited villagers. Clayfield smiled. It reminded him of a native funeral procession he had witnessed on his last visit to an oil development on the Persian Gulf.

“All right,” he said “I’ll collect Professor Karlene and come down.”

He went into his room, gathered up a few papers from his desk, and stuffed them into his pocket. When he opened his door he smiled again. Aleksandrow and Giselle were shuffling along the corridor toward the staircase. They wore dressing gowns, their hair was disheveled, their eyes half closed with sleep. Giselle, pale and shaky, carried a jewel case and tottered slightly behind the Hungarian. They did not present, Clayfield thought, their usual glamorous appearance.

Gutzmann almost collided with them at the head of the staircase.

“It is nothing, Mr. Aleksandrow,” he gasped. “Absolutely nothing. The fire is in a room in the cellar which is completely of cement. I assure you it cannot spread. It will be finished as soon as these stupid people in the village arrive with the pump.”

“All my beautiful dresses——” Giselle wailed.

“Believe me, Madame Notta,” the director pleaded, “they are perfectly safe. I am only distressed you have been inconvenienced.”

Nevertheless, Aleksandrow and his mistress continued down the stairs. Gutzmann followed after them, his voice cracking with apology.

The smell of acrid smoke came distinctly to Clayfield’s nostrils. He strode along the corridor to Karlene’s room, tried the handle, and went in.

The professor sat deep and disconsolate in the same chair he had occupied all morning. He seemed unaware of the excitement which had gripped the hotel. His haggard eyes stared at the carpet beneath his feet.

“Professor Karlene——”

The old man scarcely stirred.

“Yes, Mr. Clayfield. Is it time?”

“There’ll be a delay, Professor. Some kind of fire has started in the cellar. It’s upset the whole place.”

“I—I seemed to hear a noise.”

“It’s not dangerous, but I wish you’d come down to the terrace with me.”

“I suppose it is wise.”

“The only thing to do, Professor,” the American said briskly. “After all, you’re a pretty valuable property, you know. I’ve got to take good care of you.”

He had spoken out of a spirit of sheer exuberance but he was sorry the moment the words had passed his lips. Karlene winced and nodded with exceeding sadness.

“If you wish it, I shall go down, Mr. Clayfield.”

For some reason, Clayfield reflected, the old man had a genius for making him appear like a slave driver.

“It’s not a matter of wishing it,” he said. “I know smoke, Professor. I’ve been through plenty of oil fires in my day. Smoke is a bad thing to swallow when you’ve got a weak heart.”

A babel of excited voices intruded into the room and drew Clayfield to the window. The pump had been dragged up the driveway and was being maneuvered across the terrace under the confusing advice and direction of what seemed to be a great many more people than could possibly live in the village.

“Are you ready, Professor?”

The old man did not move. He gazed at the floor and said, “There is no urgency. I shall come down in a few moments.”

“I wish you’d come with me now.”

“Mr. Clayfield, I shall come down in a few moments.” A remnant of authority lingered in his discouraged voice.

Clayfield hesitated at the window. A downdraft billowed the curtains and brought with it a slight smell of smoke. He pulled the windows shut, muttering, “These Frenchmen know nothing about fires. A spark can set any of these curtains alight——” He swung around to the old man. “If you’ve got any valuable papers you’d better take them with you. I don’t trust fires even when they’re under control.”

Then he walked angrily across the room to the door.

“I’ll wait downstairs for you, Professor.”

The crowd at the poolside had grown to more than a hundred. Most of the women whimpered about the fate of Oscar and the cripple Tramont. One wept hysterically. The men bustled around the pump, helped to untangle hose lines,

tripped over them frequently, and implored the *garde champêtre* to hurry. The latter was patently confused. He twisted valves one way and then the other, made certain arrangements with switches and handles which protruded from all parts of the ancient apparatus, and shouted angrily at children who darted in under his arms to see what he was doing. Small tongues of flame could be seen shooting out of the cellar window amid great billows of smoke.

At last the pump was ready for operation. Quiet descended on the crowd. The *garde*, his silver helmet shining in the sun, approached within ten feet of the tiny window and carefully aimed a nozzle at it. Then he gave a signal and a stream of water poured into the cellar. The smoke writhed like a tortured creature.

A shout of approval rose from the villagers. “*Formidable!*” they cried.

4

The shout penetrated faintly into Karlene’s room and caused the old man to look about him in a desultory manner. There was neither sign nor smell of fire. The clock above the writing desk drew his attention. It was exactly ten.

As he studied the clock’s face its minute hand moved a notch. He pushed himself slowly to his feet and took a few aimless steps about the room. He gazed into a wall mirror with an awkward curiosity as if the lined, sorrowful face were not his own, as if the bent person were an unwelcome stranger in his presence. He shut his eyes convulsively and moved away from the mirror. Once more he examined the clock. Now it was two minutes after ten.

He sighed and made his way slowly across the room. On a baggage rack sat a small suitcase he had brought with him from Prague. Out of this he drew a framed photograph of a woman. He lingered a moment on the aging print, then put it carefully in his jacket pocket. He reached into the suitcase again and searched about until he found a thin bundle of letters. These, too, he put in his pocket.

He moved reluctantly toward the door. As he paused before the mirror he passed his hand across his haggard face and drew his shoulders back a little. Then, resolutely, he reached for the door handle.

He did not turn it, for something new in the room caught his attention. A brass-ribbed heat register on the wall panel close to the door had emitted a puff of smoke. A moment later another puff, thicker than the first, shot out. Transfixed, he watched it hang suspended in space. Lazily it stretched out into a thin, diaphanous stream and began to travel the slow air current in the room. Another puff shot out of the register, and another. Now they came in quick

succession. He coughed and his hand went to his heart.

He was suddenly alert. He turned quickly and looked at the windows which Clayfield had shut. Then he moved toward the writing desk with such impatient decision that he tottered a little in the effort. He sat down and began writing with feverish haste.

Now he coughed painfully and steadily but his pen did not leave the paper. Once or twice he swung around to watch the register as if he were working in competition with the smoke writhing out of it. His left hand pressed against his heart. He continued to write.

Finally the pen dropped from his quivering fingers and he pressed both hands against his heart. He tried impulsively to rise to his feet. The effort was beyond him. Gasping feebly, he sank down on the desk. Soon only the tick of the clock sounded in the smoke-filled room.

Clayfield paced alone in the deserted lobby, glancing anxiously for a sign of Karlene. Several times he moved toward the staircase as if to mount it, then thought better of it and continued to pace. He could hear encouraging shouts coming clearly from the crowd at the poolside. The thin infusion of smoke in the lobby was receding.

Then Moussia and Channing burst into the hotel. Their anxious faces were wet with perspiration.

Clayfield waved his hand reassuringly.

“It’s all right,” he said. “The fire is almost out. There’s no danger.”

“But where is my father?” Moussia panted.

“He’s still in his room. I asked him to come down——”

Moussia ran for the staircase.

Channing, following behind, heard her short, sharp cry as she entered the room. He found her staring numbly into her father’s face, and even as he flung open the windows he knew it was too late.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A STRANGER arriving at the Spa Bonnar could scarcely know that within the hour fire and death had struck. The hotel sat sedately on its commanding hill, unscarred except for a narrow black stain on its sandstone façade above the cellar window, and the morning sun beamed on it with insouciant brilliance.

Inside the building only a slight odor of smoke persisted in the heavy draperies. Under the implacable direction of Henri Gutzmann the routine of the house had been resumed. Chambermaids aired and dusted the upper apartments, chefs went about their kitchen duties, dining room tables were set in preparation for lunch, and a man recruited from the reception desk had donned a long blue coat decorated with the insignia of crossed keys and had taken up a post behind the concierge's counter. The important thing, as Gutzmann sternly ordered, was that the guests should not be inconvenienced.

The villagers, however, still wandered aimlessly about the grounds. It was to them much like the time the old Vicomte de Maubernon passed away. On that occasion practically the entire adult population of Bonnar had journeyed ten kilometers upstream to file past his coffin in the great hall of the Château de Maubernon. They were not really mourners. The vicomte had been thoroughly hated by his peasant farmers. It was merely that his death had served as an open invitation to walk with the rank of visitor in a place which had always been forbidden to them.

Now they shuffled about the pool and terrace of the Spa Bonnar, peering gravely through the open windows of the public rooms and studying the handful of guests, strange types who sipped their drinks quite unconcernedly in the presence of death. The peasants were respectful. Most of them had passed solemnly into the service entrance to cross themselves over the covered remains of Oscar and the cripple Tramont, and on emerging they continued their diffident tour of the pool, examining this playground of the rich as if it were a museum.

Only one of the villagers remained motionless on the terrace. Albert Bonneval leaned against the parapet and drew slowly on his pipe. His cap was set at a rakish angle and his bizarre face locked in a smug, thoughtful, and not unhappy expression.

To Henri Gutzmann, seeking feverishly to restore the *atmosphere* of his

hotel, the villagers were not so much of a problem as the journalists. Even before the cellar fire had been extinguished these impertinent people had retaken possession of the lounge. They clattered on their typewriters, scuffled for prior use of the telephones in the lobby, and mouthed the most irreverent oaths as if these were necessary to the pursuit of their duties.

Despite their bitter rivalry to be the first with the news on the Paris lines, a strange spirit of co-operation prevailed among them.

A young newspaperman, suspending his fingers over the keys of his portable, shouted to no one in particular, "Was that an official verdict on Karlene?"

The noise of working typewriters lifted for a moment as he was instructed from all parts of the room.

"It's going to be. He's the official doctor, the only one in town."

"Here are his exact quotes: 'A clear case of heart failure encouraged by a draft of smoke.'"

"I'm saying accidental death and to hell with it."

"Look, I got it from Clayfield himself. The old man had coronary insufficiency, whatever that is, and that's what he died of."

The typewriters recaptured their breathless pace and for a time no other word was heard. A French journalist ripped a sheet out of his machine and dashed into the lobby, shouting to the hotel operator to get Paris on the line immediately.

Presently his shrill, excited voice came through over the clatter in the lounge: "*C'est entièrement possible . . .* It is entirely possible that the tragic death of the famous scientist was preceded by a deed of the greatest heroism in the cellar of the Spa Bonnar. The two bodies which were charred beyond all imagination, the bodies which were identified as those of Oscar Smallens, concierge, and Jacques Trarnont, a crippled war veteran, they were found in a position so close together as to indicate that the concierge was in the act of aiding the crippled soldier to escape from the burning room when he himself was overcome by the dense smoke. The villagers of Bonnar will not soon forget the sacrifice of this man who died in an attempt to save the life of a war hero . . ."

Gutzmann appeared in the archway, his face twitching helplessness, and glanced malevolently about the room.

"Hey, boss, can we have lunch here?" a reporter called out.

"Remember, you're getting a lot of free publicity out of this."

From a corner of the room someone observed, "To hell with lunch here."

I'm going to stop at Charleville. There's a swell eating place there."

"What about the inquest?"

"Why wait? It's accidental death. The agencies can handle it."

A few of the typewriters continued to clatter, but by this time most of the newspapermen had completed their stories. They leaned back and smoked and chattered.

"What angle did you take on this Communist, Ralph?"

"Just the facts, pal. Got 'em from Clayfield. He tried to bully the old man into going back to Prague and failed. That's all."

"What happened to him?"

"The Communist?"

"Yes."

"He left town in a hurry."

"Isn't that suspicious? He could have slipped the old man poison or something."

"For Christ's sake, you've got to take the doctor's word for it. He says heart failure."

"Anyway, it's a good angle for an overnight lead."

"Sure. He used a death ray."

Gutzmann stood eying the men. After a time, to his undisguised relief, several began to put their typewriters in their carrying cases. Only one journalist remained at the telephone.

"Slug this fifth add," he was saying. "Almost forgotten in this tragedy of death was the tragedy of the living. Moussia, the vibrant, beautiful, red-haired daughter of Gregor Karlene, is a girl alone without a country. Whether she will continue on to America, the proposed destination of her late father, is not yet known. Benumbed by the sudden tragedy, she fled to a secret place to be alone in her great grief. It was this beautiful girl who was the first to enter the fateful chamber and who found her father slumped over a writing table, serene in the death he so unexpectedly met as he calmly prepared for his press conference, little dreaming that smoke was reaching for his weakened heart like the black hand of fate . . ."

Someone in the lounge muttered, "You got to hand it to Matt. He could make a Greek tragedy out of a crap game."

"I wonder," an agency man said, "what happened to Phil Channing?"

"I can guess, brother. He was probably through to Paris a good ten minutes before the rest of us."

The agency man said, “It doesn’t matter much. It’s only six in the morning in New York.”

One of the men finally got up and stretched himself.

“What say we blow, Ross?”

“I’m ready.”

“You ready, Jerry?”

“Maybe we’d better hang around for a while.”

“For what? Look, the old guy was a big story alive, big story dead. Period. Thirty. No more big story. Now let’s get the hell out of here.”

2

Clayfield stood at the windows of his parlor and watched a village boy fishing alone from the bridge. He stood there a long time. A dull hurt cut across his chest. He remembered how he used to fish from the bank of a stream, any stream near the town where his father happened to be preaching that week or that month. Now of all times he remembered.

Why do men struggle to become rich and powerful? he wondered savagely. It’s fine to be rich and powerful by your own energies, but you don’t stop there. You may be rich enough but you’re never powerful enough. Your brain works on, feverishly dreaming newer and wider schemes, and soon you gather up an organization of people to put the schemes into motion. You become more powerful and *that* isn’t enough. You become even more powerful, never knowing why, never thinking why. And then you reach to pull yourself to still another level of power, and something breaks and you go down, all the way down, and you wind up looking at a boy fishing from a bridge and you wonder why you tried so hard. There is no answer.

He said, “Nason, bring me a drink of whisky—please. A good stiff drink. I’ll take it straight.”

The secretary, gravely troubled, did as he was told. Clayfield drank the whisky slowly, distastefully, until he had drained the glass. He took a deep breath and placed his hands on his expanded chest as if to feel his strength.

“I want you to send a cable to Felson——” He paused and shut his eyes hard, “Tell him to support the stock at 20, tell him to use all my personal funds and all the credit he can pile up for me. Is that clear?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And send a duplicate to the office. There’s going to be a run on the stock and I want them to be prepared.”

“Very well, sir.”

“Better do it now.”

The boy fishing on the bridge had an uncanny attraction for him. He felt pity for the boy. The fishing wouldn't last long enough. He would grow up and try to build his little empire. Sitting there in the sun, he was probably dreaming on it, but he didn't know and would never know until it was too late that it all amounted to nothing.

There was a soft knock on the door and someone came in.

It was Aleksandrow.

The man's round face was a picture of abject grief. He went quickly to the serving table and helped himself to a glass of brandy. Then, extending his arms, he approached Clayfield.

“What can I say, what can I do, Mr. Clayfield? These accidents happen every day.” He sipped morosely at his brandy. “He was a fine old man, a very fine old man.”

The American said, “It was my fault. I'll always feel I was responsible. I should have brought him out of the room with me. He'd be alive if I had.”

The Hungarian put his hand on Clayfield's shoulder.

“It is foolish to think so. These things are fated.”

“You can't argue with God, I suppose——” Clayfield slapped his fist into the palm of his other hand. “By the way, I'm sorry we had words last night. You'll forgive me.”

Aleksandrow's face lit up. “You see I am here.”

“I'm glad you came.”

The Hungarian said carefully, “Giselle and I are leaving for Paris. You will understand the hotel is a little sad for her.”

“I understand.”

“Then I shall hear from you?”

“You'll have my check tomorrow. I certainly can't penalize you for what happened.”

“You are an honorable man, Mr. Clayfield.”

“I pay my debts.”

They shook hands and the Hungarian departed.

From his window Clayfield watched the chasseur bring an Alfa-Romeo convertible into the driveway. Presently Aleksandrow took the wheel and his mistress climbed in beside him. She appeared dejected to the point of anger, as

if she were traveling against her will, but then, Clayfield remembered, she had been terribly drunk last night and was probably feeling wretched.

Nason came softly into the room and said, "I've typed out a draft of the cable to Mr. Felson. Would you like to look it over, sir?"

"Thanks, Nason."

He read the cable thoughtfully and when he had finished he held it in his hand and once more looked out at the boy fishing. By this cable, he reflected bitterly, the full circle of his career would be joined. When the news of Karlene reached Wall Street, he and the boy fishing would be just about equal in terms of worldly goods.

He held out the cable.

"It's all right. Send it."

The secretary hesitated.

"What are you waiting for, Nason?"

"I'm sorry, sir, but—but are you sure you want to send this, Mr. Clayfield?"

The oilman whirled around. "If a lot of people are going to lose their shirts in Justin Clayfield's company, they won't be able to say Justin Clayfield didn't lose his shirt too."

"I see, sir."

"Better send it right away."

The secretary took the cable and walked reluctantly toward the door. He turned once more to look at his employer. They regarded each other with compassion.

Clayfield said, "What went wrong, Nason? I'll never stop wondering. Three men have died and a good woman has been sent into unhappiness and I've failed completely. I don't understand it. I've been honest all my life. I think I've been a fair man. I wished no one harm in this undertaking, only good for them and for myself. Yes, for myself principally, I admit it, but that's no sin. And yet everything has ended in tragedy and failure. Was it just bad luck, Nason?"

"I suppose it's just bad luck, sir."

"I suppose. Get the cable off."

hands folded primly on her lap. For an hour she had been motionless this way, placid as a monument is placid.

Channing studied her.

They were in his room. He had brought her away from her father's bedside, from the confusion and cacophony which beat about the lean, covered figure. He had rescued her from the bark of his colleagues' questions and the flash of camera bulbs, from the overpowering consternation which exploded out of Clayfield, from Gutzmann's flamboyant desolation, and from the cruel brightness of sunlight streaming through the windows. As she stood at the bedside he had taken her arm and said, "Come with me, Moussia." She had gone with him to his room. It was like leading the blind.

He had drawn the curtains and settled in a corner where he could watch her secretly, waiting for her to weep so he might comfort her. Until then he could not bring himself to speak. He feared to stir, to make a sound, for the brittle silence into which she had fallen seemed possible of shattering into a thousand pieces. He watched her and waited.

No sign of grief reflected on her face, no sign of tears deeply hidden. Her eyes were inhumanly soft. After a time he could discern swiftly changing patterns in the delicate structure of her mouth, now of puzzlement, now wistfulness, resignation, bitterness, tension, cold contentment. The drawn curtains fluttered against the open windows and he knew what he had seen was the play of light and shadow on her face.

He wondered when she would weep, why she was not like other middle Europeans who, though they embraced death with a macabre familiarity, made loud and furious anguish in its presence. She was frighteningly calm. It was as if she had expected death, had welcomed it, and was now pondering the logic of its incidence.

A quick, small wind billowed the curtains and admitted a flash of sunlight into the room.

She turned to the window and said, "He admired the countryside. This morning he said it was beautiful. I think I shall bury him here."

Slowly her face contorted and she drew up her hands over it and wept.

Even now he could not go to her. Her weeping was soft and proud and exceedingly private. It rejected sympathy; it was tainted even by the watching it. He turned the other way.

Presently the door opened without benefit of warning and Albert Bonneval let himself into the room. He stopped inside the door. His cap reverently

pressed against his narrow chest, he listened to the weeping of the woman and nodded a great many times as if this were a nostalgic chant.

He addressed himself to Channing in a low voice.

He said, “The villagers would like to convey their grief and their sympathy to Mademoiselle Karlene. They have asked me to do so—naturally, knowing that I have a slight acquaintance with her.”

He pulled thoughtfully at his mustaches. “I assure you, however, their grief is a figure of speech and their sympathy is without meaning. But they wished me to do so and I am always agreeable to harmless gestures.”

He allowed a little time for his words to be digested.

“As for myself,” he went on quietly, “I have no sympathy because the occasion does not call for it. For too many years I have watched people travel back and forth, waving a paper which gives them leave to pass over a few blades of grass or a river. It might be signed by God for its great importance but it is only signed by a *fonctionnaire* to whom we have given the prerogatives of God. I who sit in authority over this foolishness, I have learned a long time ago that it is impossible to affront reason and live in contentment. Do not be deceived, my young friend. It is possible only to die in contentment.

“If you understand this at all,” he concluded tartly, “be good enough to convey it to Mademoiselle Karlene with the compliments of Albert Bonneval.”

He pushed his cap decisively over his white hair and went out.

Channing listened once more to Moussia’s soft weeping. He was sure she had not heard.

The telephone rang. He reached for it angrily and, cupping his hand over the mouthpiece, murmured, “Who is it?”

Mittler’s voice bellowed, “For Christ’s sake, I thought you died in the fire. What’s going on——”

“I can’t talk to you now.”

“Are you drunk?” Mittler screamed. “What do you mean you can’t talk to me? Where’s the story?”

Channing said, “I’ll call you back later,” and closed the phone.

It rang again almost immediately.

“What the hell is going on there?” Mittler bellowed. “The story’s on the street. AFP’s filed two thousand words already. I got it right in front of me in the *Paris-Press*——”

“I can’t help it, Junior.”

“He can’t help it, he says! Are you stiff?”

“I tell you I’ll call you back.”

“Look, brother, don’t give me apoplexy. We’re an hour behind the other agencies. An hour, God damn it! Now begin spilling. I’m ready to take it.”

Channing said, “Please believe me, Junior. I can’t give you anything right now.”

There was a brief silence. Then Mittler said, “Now listen, Phil. I don’t know what’s going on up there but I’ll cover for you. I’ll do a rewrite on the AFP story and slug it with your by-line. Bendels won’t know the difference. Okay?”

“No, wait a minute——”

“It’s not complicated, Phil. The guy died of heart failure after a flash fire. I’ll spread it on a little.”

Channing glanced at Moussia. He murmured into the phone, “Is that what the others say?”

“The whole lot of them. Let’s not yap now. I’ll cover from here. Okay?”

Channing said, “I’m not sure it was heart failure——”

“I’ve got the whole story here. He didn’t jump off the Eiffel Tower. He died of thrombosis brought on by a whiff of smoke that got into his room.”

“Hold it a moment, Junior.”

He called out softly to her.

“Moussia.”

She brought her hands down from her face but did not look at him.

“Moussia, did—did he die by accident?”

She shook her head from side to side in a slow and anguished roll.

“He left you a note. Didn’t he, Moussia?”

Now she turned her quivering face to him.

“Yes.”

He brought himself to ask, “Is it for you alone?”

For answer she drew a crumpled letter from the bosom of her dress and walked to the window and turned a corner of the curtain. She held the document to the light.

Mittler’s voice pleaded on the wire: “Are you there, Phil? For God’s sake, let me get started with this thing——”

“Hold it just a minute more.”

He watched Moussia anxiously. She had read the letter and now she drew herself up as if she had suddenly been invested with hard courage.

She said, “I think, Philip, he would not want it hidden.”

“May I see it?”

“It is written in Czech. I shall read it to you.”

When her eyes returned to the document they streamed with tears. She dried them and began to read in a low voice:

“ ‘Moussia, my child. I cannot go forward with my intention, but such is the way of the world, I cannot turn back. I fled our oppressed country because all that is in me rose in rebellion against the tyranny of cruel men, and I would not lend myself to bring substance to their philosophy of power. And yet, it was neither my dream nor my intention to enlist myself against my own people. Why must one enlist on one side or the other? I reached for freedom and the touching of it withered my fingers. We are living in a time when the requirement for loving deeply is to hate blindly. I cannot go forward and I cannot turn back—and now a last escape has been miraculously offered me.

“ ‘I had a vision of freedom, a wonderful vision which must in essence be true, for my deepest instincts cannot play me so false. It is equally removed from our country and from the commitments in which I find myself entangled. It exists in the West. You are young and—happy thought!—uncommitted. I bid you continue the journey——’ ”

Her voice broke. She brought the paper over her eyes.

On the phone, Mittler was saying, “Come on, Phil, for God’s sake. We haven’t got time——”

Channing muttered, “Hold it, I tell you.”

Slowly Moussia brought the paper down into the light. A note of challenge crept into her voice:

“ ‘Read carefully, my dearest Moussia. It will be said that I was killed by the terror which binds our country. This is not so. And in our country they will scoff and say that I inflicted on myself a traitor’s punishment. This is also not true. Some may claim that mine is a martyr’s death. No, my child. If it must be interpreted, let this be my own small and utterly unimportant protest against a world in which the basic loyalties have been lost, and false loyalties have attained such monstrous powers that they command men and turn them into beasts. I can no longer struggle. Like an old and useless creature that has been caught in an avalanche, I prefer to return to earth.

“ ‘It is a small thing, my child. Death is the most exaggerated of sorrows. Years alone do not determine a span of life. When no road beckons, when a great weariness begins to lie sweetly on the heart, it is a time to die.’ ”

“That is the letter, Philip, the whole letter.”

She let the curtain fall back into place. A shadow passed across her face and in its privacy she wept once more.

Channing muttered angrily into the phone, “All right, Junior, are you ready?”

“Are you asking . . . ?”

“Here it is. . . . CHANNING LEAD-ALL KARLENE BONNAR FRANCE EXCLUSIVE STOP THE GREAT CZECH GEOPHYSICIST GREGOR KARLENE THIS MORNING COMMITTED SUICIDE BECAUSE THE REALITY OF HIS NEWLY FOUND FREEDOM FELL SHORT OF THE MEASURE OF HIS DREAMS——Don’t query me, Junior. I know it’s editorial but that’s the way it’s got to be written. Just keep taking it down. . . .”

**HOW
IT
ENDED**

It is in the nature of our breathless age that an event pulsating enough to break out black headlines in the newspapers should linger an extremely short time in the public memory. Latter-day sensations are like military bands in an endless parade; one shakes you with its martial music as it passes, and before it is beyond earshot your attention has been drawn to the next one which is coming up louder and more thrilling.

In the stately century before the first World War a good story burned a permanent niche in the public awareness of those placid, impersonal years. What gargantuan tragedies have occurred since the neat heroics of San Juan Hill and Mafeking, but how many are so well remembered?

Thus it was not at all extraordinary that, in December, John S. Marriner sat through his semiannual luncheon at the Bankers' Club without so much as recalling the name of Gregor Karlene. He talked with Richard Felson of the weather and investments, and between long, silent minutes, during which they gazed out of the window on the gray harbor waters, they discussed of course the possibility of war.

"More coffee, Mr. Marriner?"

The news executive brought out his watch.

"I think it would be fine."

While waiting they amused themselves by following the progress of a tug trailing a coal barge in a slow circle around Governors Island. The coffee was finally put on the table and both remarked on how good it smelled. Another awkward silence followed, after which Marriner said:

"Well, Mr. Felson, I see the market is looking up."

"By and large, we've had a good year. I can't complain, Mr. Marriner."

"Pretty busy, eh?"

"Not the sort of business we handle in normal years. A lot of speculation. These television stocks are acting in a remarkable way. Have you thought of them at all, Mr. Marriner?"

"I'll hold onto my bonds."

"You may be wise."

A ghost of a smile played across Marriner's face. He said, "The last time we had lunch, I believe you mentioned Clayfield Oil."

Felson appeared hurt.

"It seems to me you did very well with it from a newspaper point of view."

"Yes indeed. Didn't I send you a note about it? I remember dictating one."

"I had it, thank you."

Marriner was enjoying himself. "Whatever happened to that stock?"

"Poor Clayfield," Felson reminisced with a certain restrained emotion. "I'll never forget that day. We were forced to sell him out."

"Oh," Marriner said comfortably.

"The company's been reorganized, you know. The Kelland people took it over. The stock sells at 4 or 5 now but I dare say it will climb up again someday."

"Then I take it Clayfield has retired."

"Not on your life, Mr. Marriner," the banker said with relish. "There's a man I admire. He paid off every dime he owed, and then went on up into Canada, to Alberta, and started all over again, right in the fields. He's brought in two wells already. I tell you, Mr. Marriner, if you've got faith in America you've got to go along with men like Justin Clayfield."

"Interesting, Mr. Felson, damned interesting," Marriner said, and glanced at his watch. It was two o'clock.

2

Late that afternoon Bendels ambled into Marriner's office. It was the hour set aside for a discussion of the day's news budget. The foreign editor planted himself comfortably in a chair and thumbed through the news file, dropping remarks both caustic and complimentary in the same desultory voice.

He paused over one dispatch.

"This story from Munich. Did you read it, Chief?"

"The one about the Czech plane?"

"That's it."

"Well, these planes have been coming down pretty regularly at our airports. What should I have noticed?"

Bendels shrugged. "There were thirty-two people in this morning's plane. One of them was a fellow called Nicolai Endor. Mean anything to you?"

"No."

"Remember the Communist involved in the Karlene story?"

"I do now, faintly. What about him?"

"Down here at the bottom of the dispatch it says, 'According to intelligence officials who took him into custody, Endor expressed complete disillusion with the Gottwald regime and requested the status of a political refugee. The officials refused to comment beyond saying that Endor proved to

be a valuable informant on matters behind the Iron Curtain and expressed the desire to be allowed into the United States. It is understood he proposes to write a book which he has already entitled *Escape to Freedom* and in which he will expose the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia. His request has been forwarded to Washington for final decision.’

”I thought, Chief,” Bendels went on, “we might get after him for a series of articles.”

”A capital idea, Bendels.”

The news editor said, “I cabled Channing about it this morning. He sent back a peculiar reply. Listen: PERSONAL OPINION WE GROSSLY UPPLAYING VIEWS OF INFORMERS OPPORTUNISTS PLEASE INSTRUCT FURTHER—CHANNING. What do you think of that, Chief?”

Marriner said, “Since when are you taking instructions from our men in the field?”

”Oh, it’s not that bad,” Bendels said. “He may be right in a way. But what bothers me is Channing himself. Something’s happened to that fellow and I think I know what it is.”

Marriner said, “He’s your responsibility.”

”I think, Chief, he’s been away too long. Over nine years now. It might be an idea to bring him back for a few months, say on the Washington beat. Hate to take him out of Europe but it might do him some good.”

”You certainly have my approval.”

”All right,” Bendels said lazily. “I’ll suggest it in a cable and get his reaction. He’ll be the best judge of whether he needs a change of atmosphere.”

But of course Channing, reading the cable aloud, didn’t make the decision.

It was Moussia who said, “I would like it, Philip. I would like to go to America.”

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Torch for a Dark Journey* by Lionel Shapiro]